**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 16 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE FOURFOLD GLORY OF THE CHURCH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,*

*Fair as the moon,*

*Clear as the sun,*

*Terrible as an army with banners?*

*Song of Solomon 6:10*

THERE HAVE BEEN THREE METHODS OF INTERPRETING THE SONG of Songs, which, for the sake of brevity, I may describe as the material, the ethical, and the allegorical. There are those who treat it as being merely an Eastern love song. There are those who believe it was written in order to make a protest against polygamy, and to show the true ideal of marriage. There are those who believe that in the writing of it there were mystical intentions, that it was intended to convey spiritual truth.

My own view is that to lay undue emphasis on either of these is to miss the full value of the whole. It is an Eastern love song, but I think not finally. Even in that way it is the song of songs, for never was there a more wonderful unveiling of all the mystic wonder and beauty of love as the basis of marriage than is to be found in this song. In that sense, therefore, it has ethical values. I hold, however, that its chief value is spiritual.

It is an interesting fact, and a very suggestive one, that the Chaldee Targum contains a Jewish commentary on this Song of Songs, of which this is the title: "The Songs and Hymns which Solomon the Prophet King of Israel delivered by the spirit of prophecy before Jehovah, the Lord of the whole earth." That title at once reveals the fact that the Jewish commentator looked on it as being spiritual and mystic in application.

I think, moreover, that this view is warranted by the harmony of Old Testament literature, for the final relationship between Israel and Jehovah was repeatedly described by those who saw most deeply into the great truth under the figure of the marriage relationship. That creates the infinite pathos and beauty of the whole of the prophecy of Hosea. It is found also in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. When we turn from the Old Testament literature to the New, we find that the same figure obtained in the clearest thinking of New Testament writers concerning the relationship between Christ and His Church. If we think of the attitude of the Christian Church toward this Song in the past, we shall find that Hippolytus was its first Christian commentator, and he treated it throughout as allegorical. He was followed by Origen, who taught us that it was intended here to set forth the relationship between Christ and His Church, or between the soul and the Logos, between an individual and Christ. He was followed by Athanasius, Gregory of Nyasa, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, all of them treating the Song in the same way. In the Middle Ages, those dark ages in which shone some of the brighest and most wonderful light that ever has shone in the history of the Christian Church concerning Christian experience, this Song of Solomon became the very textbook of the mystics. Bernard of Clairvaux preached eighty sermons on the first two chapters alone, and Aquinas made it perpetually the medium of teaching concerning the mystic relationship between Christ and His people.

I propose to employ the text in the allegorical sense. The Song of Solomon is not dramatic literature, but idyllic. There is not one consistent story running through, but certain phases of relationship are described. The opening chapters celebrate the marriage feast. At the center we have the matchless story of the betrothal. At the close we have pictures of the united state. If the writer was intending to suggest truth concerning the ideal relationship of Israel to God, then we have every right to take the Song and consider it as setting forth the relationship between Christ and His Church. Christ was the Revelation of Jehovah, the Church is the realization of the ideal of the Hebrew people. In that sense, therefore, I take this particular text, constituting as it does one of a series of interpolations running through the Song.

For the most part, the Song is made up of monologues and soliloquies by Solomon and the Shulamite, in which expression is given to all the deepest senses of the love and fellowship and communion existing between them. Ever and anon, between these soliloquies or monologues, the chorus is heard breaking out into inquiry. In the third chapter, sixth verse, we hear the inquiry of the chorus:

Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke,

Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,

With all powders of the merchant?

Again, in the fifth chapter, ninth verse:

What is thy beloved more than another beloved,

O thou fairest among women?

What is thy beloved more than another beloved,

That thou dost so adjure us?

Again, in the sixth chapter, first verse:

Whither is thy beloved gone,

O thou fairest among women?

Whither hath thy beloved turned him,

That we may seek him with thee?

And then we come to our text, in the tenth verse of the chapter:

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,

Fair as the moon,

Clear as the sun,

Terrible as an army with banners?

In the eighth chapter, fifth verse, we find two further inquiries:

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness,

Leaning upon her beloved?

And in the end of the eighth verse:

What shall we do for our sister

In the day when she shall be spoken for?

The text is, first, an inquiry, which in itself constitutes a description of the bride in her glory and her beauty:

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,

Fair as the moon,

Clear as the sun,

Terrible as an army with banners?

Lifting the literature on to its highest level of intention and suggestion, the text becomes a question concerning the Church as the Bride of Christ, in which we find a description of the Church. It is a comprehensive description of certain aspects of true Christian life, whether in the individual or in the corporate catholic Church. It is a text in which the glories of the Church are set forth ideally. It may be said, that the Church as we see and know her, never seems completely to have fulfilled the great ideal; nevertheless, there are senses in which these things describe exactly what the Church is, what she has been, and what she must continue to be, in her relationship to her Lord. Let us, therefore, first simply consider the fourfold figure, looking forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners. We shall be aided, I think, if we can put ourselves imaginatively in some Eastern land at the break of day. First, we see the dawn, swift and sudden and beautiful, illuminating every thing. Then, sinking away to rest, we notice the moon, in the suggestive beauty of her whiteness. Then, as the flush of dawn spreads over the Eastern sky and the moon is lost to sight, the sun himself appears, clear as with burning heat. As he gradually rises to meridian glory he becomes "terrible as an army with banners." Inclusively, the idea is of daybreak and of the glory of day. It has night for its background, but night being driven away by light.

Looking forth as the morning. Here, for a moment, let us forget what the figure suggests. Let us see the thing quite naturally. Morning is the time of new life. Sleep and unconsciousness have passed away. There is the sense of renewal, of reinvigoration. It is the time of new light. Darkness is vanishing and hasting away, and in its passing becoming beautiful, for its deep, dense blackness grows to purple, and presently to saffron.

Hail, smiling morn,

That tips the hills with gold,

Whose rosy fingers ope the gates of day.

Who the gay face of nature doth unfold,

At whose bright presence darkness flies away.

Morning suggests freshness. The dawn always comes with the moving of the wind. The night may have been dark, hot, sultry, and oppressive; and, perchance, the day presently will be hot and sultry and oppressive; but just when the first flush of the dawn is on the sky there is always a breath of wind. The dawn is the hour of true enthusiasm. Then the matin of the birds, then the opening petals of the flowers. The sun has not yet appeared, but he is creating the dawn.

"Fair as the moon," or literally, beautiful as the white one. The moon, which is being kissed into obscurity by the dawn, has been fulfilling her function-in the night, reflecting the light of the hidden sun. She is perfectly prepared for the great and gracious ministry of reflection - having no light within herself, but catching on her otherwise darkened surface the glory of the hidden sun; then with gentle white beams she shines over the darkness, so that, while she shone there was no darkness, for the deep, dense darkness itself has been made silver until dead night gives way to living day.

At last, with magnificent willingness, the moon is hidden, for the sun has appeared, and so we get our third figure, "clear as the sun." The word clear is suggestive. It means clarified as with burning heat. The Hebrew word is the same as that occurring in the charge of Isaiah, "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." Be ye clear, clarified as by fire! It is a word never used of ceremonial cleanness, but always of moral and spiritual cleanness. It means that no evil thing remains; it partakes of the nature of fire; things destructible can never live in fire. Then is seen the day emerging under the dominance of the sun. It appears in all its strength, glory, and beauty. The figure is of an army, of hosts armed, and ready for conflict, keeping rank, with banners flying, the great attacking force of God. Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. So at last the vision is of an army, terrible, with its banners flashing in the sun as it moves forward to the destruction of all the enemies of God.

Glancing again over the same line of perfect rhetoric and wonderful unveiling, considering the figures now as revealing truth concerning the Church, I suggest that each figure deals with a separate relationship. Looking forth as the morning, that is the figure which sets forth what the Church is within herself. Fair as the moon, that is the figure which sets forth what the Church is toward the world and its darkness. Clear as the sun, that is the figure which sets forth what the Church is toward her Lord. Terrible as an army with banners, that is the figure which sets forth what the Church is toward all the enemies of God and toward the things that are against the accomplishment of His high purposes.

"Looking forth as the morning." That is what the Church should be as within herself, not so much as to her effect on the world, to which we come presently - but what her own sense should be. It should ever be the sense of the morning, the sense of the dawning of the day; the sense of fire, the sense of light; the sense of freshness, the sense of enthusiasm, of music, and of motion. Her very consciousness should be a perpetual prophecy of the day that has not yet come, but which surely is coming. Yet, alas, how constantly the Church has sat down in sackcloth and ashes on a dark and dreary day. In the days of Isaiah there was a time when men were calling on God, and were saying to Him: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord," to which God's answer was: "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem." It was as though God said to them: I have never been asleep! It is you that have been asleep! Awake, put on thy beautiful garments! It is a picture of God's people, Israel, sitting in dust and ashes when they ought to have been shining in the darkness, for they were children of the day, even though the day had not yet appeared.

Alas, how constantly and perpetually the Church has sat in sackcloth and ashes, lamenting, crying out for God's help, when she should have been shining. Constantly the word of God to the Church is, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Whenever the Church has realized herself, she has looked forth as the morning. "Watchman, what of the night? The morning cometh, and also the night! " The morning is known when the night is darkest by those whose relationship to God is such that they catch the gleaming hidden glory, and reveal it in what they are themselves, in the freshness of their enthusiasm, in the evidence of their faith, in their determined loyalty to the great beliefs and convictions that have made them. That is the first aspect of the Church; but there can be no dawn save as the Church is conscious of morning within her own soul.

Then take the second of the figures: "fair as the moon. That is the Church toward the world, reflecting the glory of the hidden sun. That is not the final figure, for there is a sense in which the Church is called on to shine in the world, not merely as a reflector, but because, in relationship with her Lord, she herself is light. Yet, while not exhausting the truth, it suggests a matter of great importance concerning the Church. What is the light which shines as the dawn? In the midst of some hour of darkness, in the midst of some circumstance of terrible trial, there is one man, one woman, one youth, one maiden, on whose face there is light, by which other faces are irradiated. That light is the reflected glory of the face of Jesus Christ, of the One Who never fails, and is never discouraged, nor will be until He have set justice in the earth, for Whose law the isles are ever waiting. If we could but see things as they are we should see that amid the sad and awful darkness in Flanders, in Gallipoli, are men on whose faces is the light that never was on land or sea, and these men are helping their comrades. What is the light on the face of that lad as he stands where death stalks round him? It is light reflected from the face of Jesus! That ought to be true of all of us who bear the holy name. If we are a part of the bride of Christ, of the holy catholic Church, we should ever be beautiful as the white one, catching the glory that is otherwise hidden, and reflecting it on the age in which we live. "Fair as the moon."

Again, the poetic figure runs on, and we reach the next stage of exposition: "Clear as the sun." Now I seem to break down in the sequence when I declare that this suggests the Church's aspect toward the Lord rather than toward the world. Yet this is the mystery which only He understands. The Church is as the sun itself, clarified with burning heat, possessed with a passion which sustains her, and enables her to create day. The Church shines most gloriously, not in reflection of her absent Lord toward the world, but in her relationship with the Lord in that deep, mystic, inner life which in some senses never can be revealed to the world; for spiritual things can be discerned only spiritually, and there are essential strengths and glories and perfections within the Church that can be apprehended only of the Lord Himself. So it ever seems to me that the words, "clear as the sun" - clarified as with burning heat, all that is evil burned up by fire - tell the deep and profound secret of the Church's relationship to her Lord and of His understanding of the truth concerning her. Men look on the Church, and even at the best she seems to be beautiful only as the white one, reflecting a glory. They see much of the dark through the white, they see much of her failure; but the Lord Himself looks on His Church, and knows her perfectly, sees all her hidden purity, her aspirations after purity which in themselves are the guarantees of her ultimate victory and glory. There is a sense in which the true catholic Church of Jesus Christ in the world is affecting the world more by what she is in the seeing of Christ than by what she is in the seeing of the world. Involved in that view is the heartening deduction, the solemn declaration of obligation, that the Church's true passion is not to reveal anything to men, but to be true to her Lord, and to reveal herself to Him as answering the fire of His cleansing, and so sharing His enthusiasm and His emotion.

Finally, "terrible as an army with banners." That describes the Church in her attitude toward all the enemies of God, forever warlike, forever unconquerable, forever a terror. Do not let us soften the first word, for therein lies its force and beauty - terrible: the Church must be a terror to evildoers. The conception is microcosmically revealed in the history of Jesus. There was a day when, proceeding on His way, He found Himself confronted by a demon-possessed being, and the demon spoke, "What have we to do with Thee, Thou Son of God?" Then came the revealing answer of Christ: "Come forth, thou unclean spirit, out of the man." Evil is always saying to the Church of God, Let us alone. When the preacher is told he has nothing to do but to preach the Gospel, and must not interfere with any vested evil, the drink traffic for instance, the answer of the Church is this: We cannot let evil alone; we are bound to speak, and to say to every demon that damns humanity, Come out, thou un- clean spirit! "Terrible as an army with banners." Add to the great poetic figure of this ancient, mystic song the words of Jesus Himself, "I will build My Church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." That is the picture of an army terrible, marching against every form of evil, breaking through the very gates of Hades!

In conclusion, let us dwell on the first figure as expressing our responsibility. We must ever be looking forth as the morning. He Who walks amid the seven golden candlesticks, holding in His own right hand the stars of the seven Churches, said of the Church at Ephesus, "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love." The loss of first love is the loss of the quality of the morning. The freshness has gone, the enthusiasms have died out, the breath of the wind is no longer felt, the song of the birds is silenced, the flowers are not blossoming. For the Church and for the individual there is no tragedy more appalling than the loss of first love, the ending of the first upspringing of enthusiasm that inspired the song and created the light and brought the breath of the wind. Are these things lost? Have we lost them? Are we sighing and sobbing with Cowper,

Where is the blessedness I had

When first I found the Lord?

Then we are failing to reflect light on the world, we are failing to satisfy the heart of Christ in the cleanness of the fire nature, we are failing to be terrible as an army with banners.

What, then, shall the Church do, if she have lost her first love, if she is no longer looking forth as the morning? She must return to the source of her first love, she must go back to face Him Who came as the Dayspring from on high, visiting His people. Or, to utter again the eternal paradox, she must go back to the place of the Cross where the darkness was deepest, and where hatred seemed to have won its victory; there in the place of the Cross she will find light up-springing, and love outrunning, and life beginning. Being thus herself restored to her first love, she will look forth as the morning, and become fair as the white one, be clarified as with burning heat, and become terrible as an army with banners.

As are the units, so is the unity. As are the individual members of the Church, so is the catholic Church. Then let us aim high, individually. Let us attempt in our individual life to get back into the spirit of the Song of Songs. Let us earnestly pray and strive, that in the day of drought and darkness and desolation, and almost of despair, we may be fresh as the morning, fair with the reflection of the hidden light, clear as the fire nature in our intimate relationship with our Lord, and members of the host of God to whom He has given a banner for display, proceeding resolutely against all the enemies of God and the race.

Behold the Bride. She, herald-like precedes

The royal sun, arrayed in dazzling light,

As mild Aurora smiles away the night,

While all in dewy stillness shine the meads.

Behold the Bride, fair as the moon outgleaming,

Melting dim shadows of the midnight skies;

His grace, through her reflected, meets our eyes,

The light which she receives o'er others beaming.

Behold the Bride, a terror to her foes;

As the vanguard of long embattled hosts,

The power of heaven's Eternal King she boasts,

Renown to win, and glory, forth she goes.