**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 22 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE ACCOMPLISHED MYSTERY by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*It is finished.*

*John 19:30*

WHEN I APPROACH THE CROSS OF OUR LORD I FEEL INCREASINGLY that I am beaten, its mystery is so vast, so wonderful that it is impossible to understand it. With that increased consciousness of its mystery there grows in the heart an increased sense of its necessity, its perfection, and its glory.

"It is finished," was the last but one of the sayings which Jesus uttered on the Cross. The previous saying, "I thirst," was supremely the word of His physical agony, the only such word that escaped Him through all the period of His travail. The next and last word was pre-eminently one of rest and triumph and quietness, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

John does not record for us the fact of the three hours' darkness, and consequently he omits the central cry of the Cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me." In view of the purpose and motive of John's narrative, this is perfectly natural; but for our understanding of these words, "It is finished," we must include the fact of that darkness and the cry that escaped Jesus therein, for it was, indeed, the central word, the word of the darkness, the word of the mystery.

Let us, then, recall the sequence of the seven words. Our Lord uttered three before the noonday darkness: the first, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; the second, to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise"; the third, with infinite tenderness to His mother, "Woman, behold, thy son," and to John, "Behold, thy mother." Then from noon until three o'clock darkness covered the land. At the close of that period of darkness that central cry passed the lips of the Son of God, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Beyond the darkness three other words passed His lips: "I thirst"; "It is finished"; "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

Let us observe carefully, even if rapidly, the relation of the last four of these words. In the darkness, toward its close, Jesus said, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That is translation. In the saying, our Lord fell into His mother speech, crying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" John tells us what followed: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things are now finished, that the Scripture might be accomplished, said, I thirst." They immediately brought the sponge or hyssop dipped in vinegar and put it to His lips, which, having received, He said, "It is finished." Then He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," and, bowing His head, He gave up the ghost.

Thus our text is the record of an exclamation. In the Greek New Testament there is but one word, "finished! " In that exclamation, Jesus openly declared what John tells us He knew before He said, "I thirst."

"Finished" is an arresting word. It means completed, not merely ended, not merely done, but perfectly done, rounded out, absolutely and actually accomplished. Jesus knew, not merely that He was at the end of the process, but that the process was perfect in its operation, its purpose absolutely achieved.

Something was completed. What was it? Let us endeavor to consider that which was then completed, first in itself, and then in its bearings on the whole work of our Lord, and on the experience of human souls.

First, then, the fact in itself. Here, indeed, we must proceed with all reverence and all caution, conscious from the first that the deepest and profoundest meaning must remain a mystery, eluding the grasp of the intellect, but not eluding the confidence of the heart. It is well to remember that no man is made a Christian by intellectual belief. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. While the mystery of the Cross will elude the wisest of us to the end of time, souls, instructed so far as earthly wisdom is concerned, will grasp with the heart the inner message of the Cross, and find life.

What, then, we inquire, was completed when Jesus said, "It is finished"? First, it is evident that what was completed was the work which had been Jesus' set purpose in all His journeyings toward the Cross. That was completed for which He went to the Cross. That was completed which He had declared, against the opinion of His dearest friends, could be completed only by the Cross. For at least three months Jesus' face had been resolutely set toward Jerusalem. Over and over again, He had tried to tell His disciples about His coming sorrows and triumphs, and always they had shrunk from the Cross. It is perfectly evident that what Jesus now declared to be completed was that which He had declared He must go to the Cross to do; that which He could not do in any other way than by going to the Cross.

Again, it is quite evident that when He said, "It is finished," He was referring to the one thing which He was authorized to do in order to complete every part of His doing, and so to fulfil the Divine purpose of His coming. I use the word "authorized" with all carefulness, for in this gospel of John we have the record of the fact that Jesus had declared in the hearing of the people in Jerusalem, "I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from My Father." He persistently spoke of Himself as the Sent of God for a certain purpose. He declared that He was authorized by God to do one specific work; and so definitely was it in the mind of the Lord, that it was the will of God that the work should be done, that in the discourse already referred to He added, "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again. ... I lay down My life for the sheep." It is evident that He was referring to the one thing which He was authorized to do, and the one thing which constituted the perpetual passion of His life. Underneath all His teaching, underneath all His miracles, this one thing was ever present to His mind. He referred to it, not clearly, not definitely, but quite certainly, in the early days of His ministry. Reading things which He said in the light of subsequent events, we see how perpetually it was with Him.

When the disciples came back and found Him talking to the Samaritan woman, and they thought He would be hungry and offered Him food, He said this strangely mystic and wonderful thing to them, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to accomplish His work." Later on in the same connection He referred to "the works which the Father hath given Me to accomplish." At last, in the quiet seclusion and solemnity of the intercessory prayer, He declared to His Father this same passion for the accomplishment and finishing of the work that had been given Him to do. What was this work? The answer is found in the words already recited. It was the work of laying down His life, of dying.

Now we approach both the mystery and the light. Jesus said, "This commandment received I from My Father" - that I lay down My life. "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again." Now on the Cross, He said, "It is finished!" But physically He was not dead. How, then, could the reference have been to His death? Here let me pause to refer to at least an interesting, and, as I believe, a most suggestive and significant fact. None of the evangelists calls Jesus' physical dissolution His death, not one of them speaks of that ultimate fact or act as death. Matthew says, "He yielded up His spirit"; Mark, "Jesus gave up the ghost"; Luke, "He gave up the spirit"; John, "He gave up His spirit." The death of Christ by which men are saved, the laying down of His life, out of which comes the possibility of our renewed life, was finished before the physical death occurred. That dying whereby we live, that dying or laying down of life in which Christ made possible the taking of it again for its communication, was finished before the physical dying. That dying was experienced when He said, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" That is the experience and the inquiry of the human soul in its lost condition. Whatever hell may be, or wherever hell may be, that is hell - the soul conscious of its lack of God. There are men and women living today, living without God and without hope in the world, who are not yet conscious of the loss, the ultimate unutterable agony of missing God and knowing that He is absent. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Let us pass, so far as we reverently may, into the state of mind that made that question possible. It was a quotation from one of those old Hebrew psalms, which pulsate and throb with the agony of the human soul. In the book of Psalms the human soul sobs or sings itself out in its agony or its joy. In the psalm from which the word is taken, a pilgrim of the night woke to find himself without God, and he cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Word of God incarnate, the One Who was also the incarnation of ideal humanity in all its essential, universal values, entered voluntarily and vicariously into that experience, in its profundity and fulness. The language of the singer of long ago became the language of this One on His Cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Let us place beside that sigh of the dying One another psalm quotation: "The pains of hell gat hold upon me." That is a far more pregnant saying than appears on the surface. The word "pains" might be rendered distress. Sheol was the underworld of departed spirits. The root of the word "sheol" is to request, to demand; Sheol is the land of darkness, where perpetual demands are made and never answered. That is the distress of Sheol, of death, not physical death, but the death of the spirit, the separation of the spirit from God, the inquiry, the request, the demand, the agony of the insatiable longing which has no answer! That is the experience expressed in the cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" There we stand aside. We have come only to the confines of the great sea of sorrow; its waters fill the soul with fear, surging with the horror of the ultimate night. Who shall follow the goings or interpret their sighings of those condemned to this endless night? Presently Jesus said, "I thirst." When did He say it? When He knew that all things were accomplished. Then He said, "It is finished."

We follow Him to the Cross and stand before it in the darkness until He says, "It is finished." After that He died physically, and the physical death of Jesus bore the same relation to the spiritual death by which He redeems as His physical birth bore to the essential fact of His being. He emptied Himself before He was born in time; He died in all spiritual significance before He died in time. But the birth in time was necessary, that we might have some grasp on the eternal mystery. So also the physical death was necessary, that we might have some grasp on the spiritual mystery. These spiritual mysteries are wholly within Deity; it is the passion of God, whereby humanity is redeemed.

Our certainty, as we hear this word of Christ, is that however dark was the night that the Lord passed through ere He found His sheep that were lost, the darkness passed, and the light dawned; however deep was the pit out of which He must dig and lift the souls of men, He fathomed its black profundity, and emerged victorious over sin and death; for He Himself did say, ere He gave up His spirit, that the work was accomplished, that the work was done.

So, passing from the fact itself, let us attempt to see something of the fact in its bearing on the whole of Jesus' work and on human experience.

This whole of His work is so great and so vast that we must find some method of reducing it to simple terms in what must necessarily be a brief meditation. Therefore I shall employ the threefold official designation of the Lord with which we are familiar. I think of Him as Priest, as Prophet, and as King. I think of Him as Priest mediating between God and men. I think of Him as Prophet revealing to men the truth concerning God. I think of Him as King establishing the broad, beneficent Kingdom of God over men. I think of Him as Priest dealing with sin in its relation to the human soul, I think of Him as Prophet dealing with sin in its relation to the knowledge of God. I think of Him as King dealing with sin in its relation to the rule of God. He came to be a Priest. Sin had alienated man from God, divided man from God, shut him off from the very life of God; consequently, sin had destroyed humanity. The Priest must deal with that sin if He is to be a true Mediator. This Christ did by His death. We cannot go beyond the word of Scripture, "Who Himself bear our sins." We may employ figures in attempting to illustrate it, but they all break down. We may endeavor to interpret the Cross from the ethical viewpoint, and there will always be a measure of truth in the interpretation, but the infinite mystery will elude us. If we are inclined to ask, How can this One bear the sin of the race? we must remember that we must not separate between that One on Whom we look and the God He is, "For in Him dwelleth all the pleroma of the Godhead corporeally." The uttermost reaches of that Personality include all the facts of Deity. He bore sin in His own body on the tree, and so He canceled sin; and by this means He restores man to God. His work as Priest could be completed only by that Cross, with its infinite and unfathomable mystery.

In His work as Prophet Christ dealt with sin in relation to the knowledge of God. Why is it that men are against God? It is certain that they are against Him. There would have been no war if men had not been against God. That is a broad, brutal illustration that we cannot escape. The human heart is naturally against God. Why? Because men do not know God. There is blindness and consequent ignorance of God. This Prophet of the Most High, this Man Whose work it was to speak to men and to humanity, and to all ages the supreme truth about God, could not say the final thing except by the way of the Cross. It was by the Cross that He said the last thing concerning God. He was the Word of God, the Word of God incarnate; but where and when did the Word incarnate utter the deepest truth? In the Logos of the Cross, the Word of the Cross, by the truth concerning God there uttered. By that unveiling He gave to men knowledge of God. All true knowledge of God must begin in the Cross, and be conditioned by the Cross. Men say that they find God in nature! They cannot! No man ever yet found God in nature. Men have sought the truth in nature, and they have found evidences of a "double-faced somewhat," a strange union of intelligence and power, and that is all that men can find of God in nature. To know God we must begin with the Cross. "The Son Who is in the bosom of the Father hath declared Him" - hath given an exegesis of Him, to be quite literal in our translation. We never find the bosom of the Father in nature. Reverently, but without hesitation, I say that we never find the bosom of the Father ultimately even in the Son until we hear Him speaking by the way of the Cross. He completed the work of uttering His prophetic word concerning God which is to condition all human knowledge of God by the Cross.

Once again, and last, in this connection, Christ's work was the work of the King. Here it was necessary that He should deal with sin in relation to the rule of God. Because of his ignorance of God, man is hostile to the government of God, and will not yield to God's control. By this death, when its mediating quality has restored the soul to knowledge of God, all sense of hostility passes out of the human heart, and the human soul, having come to God through the Cross, then dares to lift itself up and look into God's face, and say,

O God, of good the unfathomed sea,

Who would not give himself to Thee?

This yielding to God's Kingship in love of Him makes possible the establishment of His Kingdom in the heart, and contributes to the final establishment of the Kingdom for the world. This King cannot establish the Kingdom save by the Cross. When Christ said, "It is finished," He spoke of the central mystery of His mission, and included therein His work as Priest, as Prophet, and as King.

What bearing, then, has this fact on human experience? I need do no more than attempt to name in the simplest way the effect produced by this fact in the human soul. First, sin is overcome as pollution, as paralysis, and as penalty. I name penalty last because it seems to me that forgiveness of sins, insofar as it means escape from the penalty for sin, is a poor and paltry thing if there is nothing more in it than that. I believe that when the human soul wakes up to know its own vice, its own unutterable pollution, it would prefer hell to escape from hell with pollution still clinging to it. The first thing is that God overcomes the pollution and poison of sin, that principle in the life which makes the fever rise and masters all capacity. He overcomes the paralysis of sin so that the man who said, I cannot overcome this evil thing, stands with his foot on it, master of it. Here we are getting into the realm where there is very little mystery except as to the method. These are the credentials of our religion: living men emancipated from the power of sin and standing erect who once were in its awful grasp and grip. Sin is overcome by way of the Cross.

The next thing is most marvelous! Shame is transmuted by the Cross. In enduring that Cross Jesus despised the shame, and even the shame of sin and the past becomes the occasion for glorying in the Lord, Who cancels its pollution, paralysis, and power.

Finally, by the Cross sorrow is transfigured. Sorrow becomes the very way of life, the very method of perfecting, the very furnace of purifying. The hour is electric with problems and perplexities. Out of these overwhelming sorrows something finer is yet to come. I try to look out on the world sorrows of today from the height of the green hill. That is the central sorrow, that is the central death. That is at the heart of all our agonies and pains. Because we trust there, we trust everywhere; and we know by that sacred token that it is by sorrow that life is to be perfected and fulfilled at last.

Some troubled heart burdened with sin is saying, What, then, shall I do to inherit eternal life? What, then, shall I do to be saved if the inner purpose which took Jesus to the Cross was that of saving? I will answer that question by repeating a simple hymn of a generation ago:

Nothing either great or small -

Nothing, sinner, no;

Jesus did it, did it all

Long, long ago,

When He from His lofty throne

Stooped to do and die,

Everything was fully done:

Hearken to His cry -

It is finished! Yes, indeed,

Finished every jot;

Sinner, this is all you need -

Tell me, is it not?

Weary, working, burdened one,

Wherefore toil you so?

Cease your doing, all was done

Long, long ago.

Till to Jesu's work you cling

By a simple faith,

"Doing" is a deadly thing,

Doing ends in death.

Cast your deadly doing down,

Down at Jesu's feet;

Stand in Him, in Him alone,

Gloriously complete.

Or let me recite other words yet more familiar, and let the inquiring soul use them meaningly, for as the soul uses them all the infinite values of the Cross are appropriated:

Just as I am, without one plea,

But that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come.