**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 26 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE FAITH THAT CANCELS FEAR by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*The eternal God is thy dwelling place,*

*And underneath are the everlasting arms.*

*Deuteronomy 33:27*

THERE ARE TWO REALMS OF MYSTERY WHICH PERSISTENTLY assault the soul of man and produce in it a sense of fear. They are the unknown future, and the unfathomable present. It is a little difficult to know which of these is more provocative of fear. We look ahead; we think of tomorrow with fear. We look on to the inevitable days which will multiply into years. Sometimes, when we dare, we think of the persistent years which are running relentlessly on and completing the period of our earthly sojourn. For all of these we have our hopes, we have our ideals; but we see the perils, and the question that perpetually comes to us concerns what will happen tomorrow, in the coming years, and how life will end and how it will be rounded out; whether at eventide there shall be light, or whether the end shall be darkness.

Or at other times we stand still and think, attempting to grasp the present, the present of life itself, of suffering, of weakness, and of that which is always present with us, death. In all these things, life and suffering and weakness and death, there are profound and unfathomable mysteries. We have grappled with the surface of them all; but ever and anon we have become sensible of the deeps, the deeps of life itself at its highest and its best. We are related to these things, and cannot escape them. We lift our eyes and look to tomorrow and say, What will happen? We look within, and attempt to fathom the infinite mystery of the moment, and cry out, What shall we do?

Now, the answer to both, these inquiries is found in the text. Of the first, the fear of the future, the text declares, "The eternal God is thy dwelling place." Of the present, with its sense of depth and profundity and unfathomable mystery, the declaration of the text is, "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Let us, then, consider the declaration, and then take counsel with our fears in the light of our faith.

First, then, as to the declaration in itself. It occurs in the blessing which Moses pronounced ere he left the people whom he had led for forty years. This was almost the last thing he said:

The eternal God is thy dwelling place,

And underneath are the everlasting arms.

Here we have that great name of God by which He is introduced to us in the Biblical revelation, and which we so constantly find: this name Elohim, standing, as it does, for the unfathomable and immeasurable might of the Most High. That is the one thought suggested by the word. In this particular name of God there is really no revelation of His character, nothing that tells us of the motive that inspires Him in His activity, nothing that reveals to us the purpose of all His doings. It is the intensive Hebrew plural, Elohim, speaking of might, and consequently of majesty.

The arresting word in the text is not the name of God, though, of course, that is necessary to our understanding of the declaration. The arresting word is the word which we have translated eternal. It does not mean, for instance, what the word "everlasting" means: "Underneath are the everlasting arms." That word "everlasting" is the greatest of all the words that attempt to express for us what is beyond our calendars and our almanacs - the timelessness of Deity. But the word here translated eternal has another meaning and another thought. Let me say quite simply that the word really has no reference to tomorrow. It has to do with yesterday. It is a word that bids us look on. It is a word that compels us to look back.

Now, immediately we may say, What comfort, then, can there be in that declaration in the presence of the fear of tomorrow? That is the very genius of the text. The word means literally the front, whether of place or of time. Absolutely, it means the forepart. Relatively, it means the east, the place of the sunrise, the place where the day began. The great thought concerning God which this particular word suggests is that He is the God of the beginning. We would do no violence to the Hebrew if we translated the passage, The God of old is thy dwelling place. That would lack the poetry of the word eternal, but it would come nearer to the thought of the singer. The God of old, the God of the beginning, is thy dwelling place. All that was involved in the beginning is persistent through processes to the consummation. The eternal God, the God of the morning, the God of the morning when the stars sang together over the initiation of a new mystery in the universe on which they had never looked before - that God of the beginning is thy dwelling place.

Out of that interpretation arise suggestions, which, in some senses, are paradoxical and startling. We are ever prone in our thinking of tomorrow to think of it as being in front of us. Tomorrow is not in front of us. Tomorrow is behind us. These are the later days. The earlier days are gone. Tomorrow is still later. In other words, the whole underlying suggestion is that of a great procession. Fasten your attention for a moment on some great procession you have seen pass along the highway. The beginning of the procession is always in front; the end of it is always behind. Yesterday is in front; tomorrow is behind. The whole history of humanity is a procession, and in the beginning is God, leading the procession. We are not moving away from those who went before us, as though we dropped them somewhere behind, and left them. We are moving after them, we are following them. The generation that shall be born will not be in advance of us. They will be behind us. God leads, and accompanies; He is the God of the morning, of the beginning, and He is thy dwelling place.

The description of God, the eternal God, thus interpreted may seem to suggest that every succeeding generation is further away from Him than the first. We may gather the comfort of the fact that He leads, that all those early movements were closely associated with His power and His wisdom and His love, as the Biblical revelation declares to us; but they are far away from us; and even though we follow in their train, we are far distant. But the text answers the inquiry at once. The God Who was at the beginning is our refuge, our dwelling place. God is no further removed from me than He was from the first man in the procession. God is no further distant from His creation after the long ages of its development and continuation than He was from the first propulsion from the night. The eternal God, the God of the beginning, the God of old time, the God of the morning is our dwelling place.

Then immediately the deduction is patent. The future which is behind us is not our care. We have nothing to do with that which follows. We have two things about which we must forever be concerned; those, namely, of yesterdays which are in front of us, and of the today in which we set our faces toward the things that have gone before. We follow God, in company with God, "The eternal God is thy dwelling place."

All that prepares for, and leads to, the second part of the declaration, "And underneath are the everlasting arms," which really is a large interpretation of the truth declared in the first. The great suggestion is made to us that God is the God of the beginning. It is declared that He is our dwelling place on all the march, and then we are told what that really means: "Underneath are the everlasting arms." That is the only place in the English Bible where we find that word underneath. The Hebrew word is found in other places. If we would understand it, we cannot be too absolute in our simplicity. The Hebrew word means the bottom. The root idea is that of depressing, and humbling, and beating down. Underneath is the uttermost limit of the depressing and the humbling and the beating down. How far down can your imagination or your experience carry you? Those depths, those profundities of life are suffering and weakness and death - how far do you know them? How deep have you been into life? How profound has been your experience of sorrow? How far have you sunk in some hour of weakness? How nigh have you come unto death? When you have reminded yourselves of that lowest level - and some soul may say, I was never deeper down than now - then listen, "Underneath," lower than that, "are the everlasting arms."

"Everlasting arms." Arms in the Bible always constitute the figure of strength, and the idea is always qualified by the root meaning of sowing, fructifying, bearing. Motherhood lies in the figurative use of this word in the Bible, as well as Fatherhood. "Everlasting" is the word to which I have already made reference. The Hebrew word is full of poetic suggestion. It means the vanishing point, the ultimate reach of imagination and thought, and that which lies beyond the ultimate reach of imagination and thought, the concealed. There is no exact equivalent in the Bible really for all we mean when we say eternal or everlasting. We are attempting to grasp the infinite, and to express it in a word. The Bible never makes that attempt. The Hebrew and the Greek, by figures of speech, pile suggestion upon suggestion, and leave us with a sense of mystery, of the unfathomable and unreachable, and of the fact that we have not said the last thing. So it is with this great word "everlasting." The everlasting is the vanishing point, the concealed, that which lies behind and beyond the uttermost effort of imagination and thinking. The everlasting arms are arms that reach to, and exist in, that realm of darkling mystery that baffles the soul and assaults it with fear. All the mysteries of the deeps have beneath them the strength, the enclosing power, the infinite tenderness of God. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Whatever the abyss, however much it seems to be a darkling void, dare it, dive into it deeply enough, and you will find you are falling on the arms of God. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Now, let us consult our fears in the presence of this declaration of our faith, fears for the future, and fears in the presence of present mysteries. What fears for the future we have today! Am I not rightly interpreting the mood of all our minds today, when I say that they are ever with us, fears about the future, fears for the world at large, fears for the Church of God, fears for the very Christ of God, and fears for our own souls?

Fears about the future. When we look out on the world, one word tells the story just now, and that word is the word "chaos." The apparent hopelessness of it all is patent. We cheer our hearts ever and anon because we think we see some gleam of light in the sky, and it goes out again, and storms sweep up, and the darkness is deeper than ever. We are wondering about the future of the world. Is all the history of the running centuries and the world to end in cruelty, and the victory of wrong, and the destruction of ideals, and the plunge back of a race into a barbarism more devilish than has been known, or the world has ever seen, because wrong is better equipped?

Fears for the future of the Church are with us every day. The hopeless confusion of the Church at the present moment, her inability to realize herself, or the unity of her life, and the catholicity of that life; her inability to deal with the present situation, her poverty as an organized institution on the field of battle and among our soldiers - all these things oppress us, and we wonder what is going to happen presently when the war is over.

And right in the heart of all this, fight against it as we will, protest against it as we may in our higher and nobler moments, there is a haunting fear about our Christ. Not that we doubt Him, but we see Him refused, we see Him put to open shame; and the question comes to us again and again, What next?

Then, to narrow the circle, and we cannot omit this, how perpetually, as we look on to tomorrow, fear assaults us about our own souls; our failures yesterday and in the past, in spite of all our highest aspirations and our most ardent desires after the things that are of God, we know too well. There is the dark way we have come, with its failure, its paralysis, and its folly, and there is the growing sense of weakness, and we are afraid. The future is always fearful, and never more so than today.

In the presence of all these fears, I go back to this old song, and I read: "The God of the beginning is thy dwelling place," and in that declaration I find the one and only answer that silences our fears, our fears for the world. That answer is the God of the beginning. He created this world in its present state of order out of chaos. The earth was waste and void. God did not so create it at the beginning, in that remote beginning which is merely named, and of which we have no detail. Catastrophe had somehow overtaken it. It was waste and void, a turmoil; darkness was everywhere. Then the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters, and the voice of God spake, and there came up out of the darkness, light; and out of the chaos, order; and from the desert, roses. The God of the beginning is thy dwelling place. That cannot end worst which began best, though a wide compass first be fetched. The eternal God, the God of the morning, is the God of the advancing hours; the God Who led is accompanying all pilgrims on the march. If there be a repetition of chaos, a recrudescence of evil that threatens to devastate all order, then He is the God of a new beginning. The very last words of prophetic utterance which I find in my Bible are these: "Behold, I make all things new."

And what of the Church? God created it, and He created it a new order and pattern of life out of the old. Make that perfectly simple by thinking of the material with which He dealt at the beginning to constitute His Church. Think of those twelve men, men of like passions with ourselves in very deed; and yet those men constituted the beginning of His Church. Read with great care the book of the Acts of the Apostles, read with great care this little handful of letters that were sent out to the early churches, and mark, not merely the brightness of the glory shining, but the darkness of the shadows gathering. See how right away, at the beginning of the history of the Church, the heresies that are called new were powerfully operating, the schisms that we mourn today rending the body asunder. All the things that fill our hearts with foreboding were there then. Then remember that He Who created that Church has led that Church through all the centuries and the millenniums; and in spite of her failure, in spite of her recurring powerlessness, in spite of the fact that over and over again she has seemed to miss the moment of opportunity, she has been God's witness through the ages, and her testimony has never failed. Again, I go to the end of my New Testament, and I read a prophetic word concerning the Church, and it is this, He, the Son of God, the Christ of God, God manifest, He shall present her faultless "before the presence of His glory."

When I turn to that third realm of fear that I hardly like to mention, our fears concerning the Christ, it is well that we let Him speak to us again, for His own words are the only words we need to hear, the only words that can be powerful: "I am … the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." Does He seem to be dead again? Does it seem as though this age, with all its vaunted progress, has nailed Him to the Cross anew? Does it seem as though we have wrapped Him in grave clothes, and placed Him in a tomb, and rolled a stone to the door? He is saying, I am alive, I am alive forevermore. ... So surely as He came forth from the Syrian tomb in Joseph of Arimathea's garden He will emerge in new light and glory from the hour when we think Him dead.

And what about my soul? The God of the beginning is thy dwelling place, Oh, soul of mine. He Who began a good work in thee will complete it. He is the God of Jacob. He will perfect that which concerneth me. So my fears are silenced. Let us hear Paul once again, and perhaps with an entirely new sense: "Forgetting the things which are behind" (that is, the future), "and stretching forward to the things which are before" (that is, God and all He has done), "let us press toward the goal." I am to forget my yesterday, and remember tomorrow; but that yesterday is in front, and my back should be on tomorrow.

E'en let the unknown morrow

Bring with it what it may,

Turn your back on tomorrow, face the yesterday, look to the glory of the sunrise, and have no thought for that which is following on, no fear about tomorrow. That is in God's keeping. March, my soul, with strength today, thy face toward the beginning where the glory of God was manifested, knowing that the God of the beginning is with thee now on the pathway.

So we turn to the second realm of fear, fears of the deeps. I said at the beginning that I sometimes wonder which realm of mystery is more provocative of fear, the mystery of the future, or the mystery of the present. I am inclined to think that the present life itself is more terrible, when a man dare face it. And here for the moment I do not mean its weakness, suffering, and death, I mean life, the mystic elements of being, the surprises that come up from within, good and bad and mixed; the sudden breaking out as from within of high aspirations, and sense of ability that I had never dreamed I had, the sudden upspringing from some deep, low level of being of that which is slimy and devilish and hateful. Of these mysteries we become more and more conscious as the years run on. In the dawning, in youth, golden, glorious, beautiful, glad, we are not conscious of life at all. Youth touches only the surface of things.

In later years we are faced also with the mystery of sorrow and of suffering, its reason, and its value; our own suffering, and, principally, the suffering of others. The problem of suffering is created in the human mind in the presence of suffering other than that which is personal. It is not your own pain that causes you so much conflict as the pain of others.

Or, again, there are the depths of weakness, physical, spiritual, moral. So far as I may speak experimentally, I say that there is no experience more poignant in its agony than weakness. In the physical realm I can conceive of nothing more truly hopeless and helpless than the last extremity of utter weakness. As in the spiritual, so in the moral - these deep, deep things of weakness, how they fill the soul with fear!

Finally, there are the depths of death, death which we have observed, but never known. We have watched death, we have seen it, but we have not known it. Death is the admitted enemy. Christianity never calls it a friend. That is Sadducean paganism which affects to call death a friend. Christianity says the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

The answer to all these fears is found in the words: "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Oh for some master of music who shall set that one word underneath to melodies and harmonies that swell and grow, vibrant with tenderness, and mighty with thunder! Underneath life, this mystery of my own life that baffles me, and fills me with fear, and drives me hopelessly along the pathway - underneath it all are the everlasting arms. There is nothing in my life unknown to God. There is nothing in my life outside the compass of that embrace of eternal strength and tenderness. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Underneath all suffering, He encircles our sorrows with His own; but in His sorrows there is nothing of despair, there is nothing of weakness. They are greater than mine by virtue of the strength of God, but there is nothing in them of despair, and nothing of weakness. In the depth of suffering I presently find the arms of God underneath.

Weakness? Oh, yes, that is where some of us found the arms as we had never known them before. In the last reach of the descent we found the arms of God, we fall, and fall, all supports giving way; we sink, sink, sink, until, when no finger can be lifted and no glance of the eye tell the agony of our weakness, we suddenly find we are cradled in the arms of God. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

By these signs and tokens, by these experiences of the soul, we know how it shall be in death. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Death will be the gate of life. Through it we shall find God.

Here, then, is the answer to our fears. We still admit the mystery of tomorrow and of today; but we find our rest in God. He is the beginning. He is always the beginning. He began this day; this very day. This is the day that the Lord hath made. He will begin every tomorrow that shall come, until the cycle of the running days has completed the story of humanity, and it finds itself at the goal, at the destination. He is the God of the everlasting arms. It is impossible to sink beneath them, for they are always underneath. "The God of the morning is thy dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms."