**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 19 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**TRIBULATION, KINGDOM, AND PATIENCE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*... the tribulation and kingdom in and patience ... in Jesus ...*

*Revelation 1:9*

THE TEXT IS ONLY A PHRASE. BUT WHAT A PHRASE IT IS. TAKEN thus, in separation from its context it is full of suggestiveness. Its opening word, "tribulation," is tremulous with sadness. It speaks of stress and strain and sorrow. Its central word, "kingdom," is pregnant with majesty. It speaks of government and order and strength. Its final word, "patience," is vibrant with heroism. It speaks of courage, and fidelity, and endurance. Final word, did I say? I was wrong. There is yet another, and it is supreme. "In Jesus" are the final words, and they qualify, interpret, glorify, all that have gone before. "… the tribulation and kingdom and patience ... in Jesus. ..."

All this becomes far more arresting and illuminative when the phrase is considered in relation to its context. Therein it is the description of an experience; the experience of the writer; the experience of those to whom, or for whom he was writing; and - as the phrase itself reveals - the experience supremely of Jesus Himself.

The writer thus describes himself and his situation:

I John, your brother and partaker with you ... was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, ...

His writing was addressed to "… the seven churches which are in Asia. …". To Ephesus in danger of false teachers and bearing persecutions; to Smyrna, in tribulation, poor, suffering, some of them imprisoned; to Pergamum, dwelling where Satan had his throne and where Antipas was martyred; to Thyatira, in danger from the false prophetess and patiently enduring; to Sardis, overwhelmed in death, only a few remaining undefiled; to Philadelphia, keeping the word, not denying the name, under the most difficult circumstances; to Laodicea, made tepid by prosperity, that gravest of all perils that ever threatens the holy church.

Moreover, his writing was by the direct command of the One Who, speaking of His own experience said, "… I was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, …"

Our phrase then describes the experience of John, of the church, and of Jesus. It presents two outlooks which qualify each other. The first is the outlook on circumstances, and the whole of that outlook is condensed, compressed, packed into one throbbing word, tribulation. The other is the outlook on life, and the whole of that outlook is expressed in the two words, the kingdom, and the patience.

Let us then consider first this twofold Christian experience; the experience of circumstances and the experience of life. Let us then attempt to consider the mutual relation of these two phases of the Christian experience which cannot be separated in this present time and age and dispensation.

First, then, the twofold experience itself. The first phase is that of the experience of circumstances, expressed in one word, tribulation. What is tribulation? The thought of the word is that of pressure producing actual suffering. I can do no better than illustrate its meaning by reference to our Lord's use of it, when in the Upper Room He was discoursing with His own, prior to His departure. In the course of that conversation He said: "In the world ye have tribulation: …" In the same discourse a few sentences earlier, our Lord employed a most arrestingly suggestive figure which helps us to understand what tribulation is;

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but when she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for the joy that a man is born into the world.

The word there rendered anguish is the same word. We are brought by that flash of intimate understanding and tender grace, to an interpretation of tribulation; it is the pressure that means agony, but it is the travail that issues in life and joy. That is the experience of the church, of John as it was of Jesus, in this world.

Mark the persistence of it, taking first of all that which must be supreme in our thinking, the experience of our Lord Himself. His whole life was a life of tribulation; to quote the prophetic word uttered concerning the Messiah long ere He came, He was "... a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: …" As we observe Him from babyhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to manhood, and through full maturity to the completion of His public ministry, in ever-increasing measure we see Him always feeling the pressure of circumstances.

This was so in material things. He was homeless. "… foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." Mentally it was so. He had no comrades. He had no peers in the realm of thought. There were no great philosophers in His age; philosophy had become decadent before He came into the world. The great philosophers under the influence of whose teaching men were professing to live and act; Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, were not comrades for Him in their thinking. He was alone. Among the men of His own age and of His religion after the flesh, there was none able to enter into His conception of things or to soar to the height of His outlook.

Spiritually, He found no sympathy in the world at all. His spiritual concepts were not accepted by men, not understood of men. He stood alone. Such was His loneliness; materially without home, mentally without comrades, spiritually without sympathy. Life to Him was the bearing of a testimony to the essential and eternal things; the bearing of a testimony that men never apprehended, would not apprehend or receive. From the beginning to the end there crushed and pressed upon Him the false concepts and false ideals of men, which at last found their supreme expression in the words so often quoted and yet so terribly revealing: "… we will not have this man to reign over us." This pressure upon Him of circumstances found its culminating expression and experience in the Cross of Calvary.

The persistence of this experience of tribulation in the history of His people has been equally definite. The story of loyal-hearted discipleship has ever been, and still is, that if a man will live godly in this world he shall suffer persecution. The church forever contradicts the world. That is its business. That is what it is in the world for; to contradict it in its fundamental conceptions, in the conduct that grows out of its fundamental conceptions, and in the character which results from the persistent conception expressing itself in conduct. The church in the world is an eternal negative to the things which are supremely of the world.

With what result? The world is forever opposed to the church. It is against the church. It will bring all its pressure to bear upon the church. It will do everything to silence her voice and destroy her influence and end her propaganda. If this is not so, it is because the church has forgotten her message. If the world now is making friends with the church, then alas for the church. The world has not changed. Its central conception of life, its ideal, is still that of the magnificence of mastery and the glory of the material. The church's ideal is still that of the magnificence of service and sacrifice and the beauty of the spiritual. These things cannot merge and mix without the quality being changed entirely on the one side or the other. The church is in the world to affirm the things of the beginning, the original things of truth, the meaning and the reason of things; to tell man what man has honestly sought to discover for himself but never has been able, the reason, the truth behind everything. The world is still saying: "We will not have these things"; the world is still against the church. The church stands in the center of this pressure, bearing her witness and feeling the agony of her loneliness and her strife with the things against which she is called to protest. This is a persistent experience.

But this is not all the truth about the experience of the church's Lord and of the church. We need the other two words of my text; not only is it an experience of tribulation, it is also an experience of the kingdom and the patience. Two thoughts are suggested by these words, and yet they are so closely related that they describe one supreme fact. In the one case, that of tribulation, we have the experience of circumstances. In the other, that of the kingdom and patience, we have the experience of the church in her very life, that which constitutes her what she is, that which differentiates her from all other societies, that which makes a distinction clear, sharp, between a man of God and a man of the world, What then do these words connote? The word "kingdom" connotes the rule and the realm of a king. Here, of course, the reference is to the Kingdom of God, and not to any dispensational interpretation of the phrase, not to any dispensational application or value, but to the fact of the Kingdom of God. It is the static, unchanged, abiding fact. It is static, that is, it is the one fact that has never altered, never changed, the fact that abides. The Kingship of God, the Divine sovereignty, holds all things in the grasp of its power and within the authority of its management. The whole fact of the universe is included, whether it be heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the depths of the underworld below. Nothing escapes from the operation of that one fact. Satan himself must report in the Divine Presence ere he goes upon any mission of persecuting the sons of God. The arch enemy of mankind cannot touch one single piece of your property, not so much as a hair upon the back of a camel that you possess, until he has asked permission. Satan desires to sift you. Then he must ask before he can do it. Satan desires to plunge a continent in war. Then he cannot act save under a Divine control. If in the Divine control there be a process of judgment, it is judgment proceeding toward the accomplishment of a purpose of mercy. The true experience of the whole church of God in its life is fundamentally an experience of that Kingdom of God.

And closely related, indeed growing out of it as an inevitable sequence, there is the experience of patience. The word literally means, "staying under"; but the staying under always means staying on. If we are to stay under the pressure of circumstances, we must stay on the kingship of God. Patience is the experience of the soul that relates itself to the Kingdom of God and relates all circumstances to that self-same fact. The soul, keen and sensitive to the fact of the Divine Kingship, is able to remain under the pressure of circumstances, tribulation, affliction, persecution, as it relates them all to the underlying fact. In use the word always connotes cheerful, hopeful endurance. It is never used of that state of mind that says things are as they are and cannot be helped. That is not patience, that is stupidity. Patience will feel the agony, shudder at its appearance, and be conscious of its pain; but patience will hear the undertone of the eternal music and express it in song even when circumstances press and grind upon the soul.

In the experience of our Lord the persistence of this sense of the Kingdom and of patience is most clearly marked. The whole truth was expressed in His own words in this same discourse to which I have already referred. When He said: "… In the world ye have tribulation, …" He also said: "… but be of good cheer. I have overcome the said: world." The victory of His life was gained by submission to the static fact of the Divine Kingship and by consequent sovereignty over all circumstances.

He gave us the supreme exemplification of the experiences of life. His life was homed in the centrality of the Divine government and expressed itself in infinite patience and so mastered all tribulation.

And that was not only the experience of our Lord Himself. By His grace and through the ministry of His Spirit, it is the experience of the Christian church. If her experience is that of fellowship with His sufferings, it is also that of fellowship in His triumph. There was one man who knew perhaps more of these things than any other man who appears upon the pages of the New Testament. I refer to Paul. When he was writing his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, he spoke twice of his own experience in this regard.

We are pressed on every side … - that is the same word, tribulation - "… yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body."

And again;

… in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, - (that same word) - in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; - (that is the experience of tribulation) - in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left - (this is the experience of the Kingdom) - by glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things - (this is the experience of patience).

The church always overcomes the world. In the case of every individual martyr, the victory is with the man slain and not with the men who slay him. In every hour of persecution it is the church that is victorious, not the oppressive power that persecutes. Following in the pathway of her Lord and Master, Who death by dying slew, the church bends to bonds and stripes, is battered and bruised to death, to rise again in life immortal, and to triumph. Tribulation! yea verily, but also the kingdom and the patience that are in Jesus.

The mutual relation of these phases of experience has already been seen in our consideration, yet it is so important, as it seems to me, that it demands separate statement. Let us think of tribulation then in its relation to life, and then of life in its relation to tribulation.

Tribulation is caused by life. The sense of the kingdom and the sense of the patience of the soul makes the world's opposition inevitable. It is impossible to have a man or a society utterly sensible of the Divine government, utterly faithful to the Divine government, living in a world like this, but that man, that society, becomes a center of opposition. Consequently, it is the kingdom and patience that create the tribulation. If we relax our conviction as to the kingship and our patient fidelity to all that kingship inevitably connotes, then the pressure weakens. We shall not feel it so much. If we abandon our attitude and our fidelity toward the kingship of God, the pressure of the world will cease altogether. We need not have persecution if we do not desire it. All we have to do is to abandon our loyalty to the Kingdom of God. The world will not persecute us then.

But not only is it true that tribulation is caused by life; it is also true that tribulation strengthens life. The very forces that are against us are making us stronger. This is the strange and wonderful experience of all Christian souls and of the Christian church. Deepening loyalty increases patience. Growing pressure increases the strength of the life which it strives to destroy until life becomes forever and finally victorious.

From Antioch in Pisidia Paul was driven out. At Iconium they put him outside the gates. At Lystra they stoned him, leaving him for dead. After a while the broken, bruised body revived and he went to Derbe. When he had been there a while he went back to Lystra, the place of the stones; back to Iconium where they drove him out; back to Antioch in Pisidia. He went back to teach the Christians something that it was important they should know, that "Through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God."

The very pressure of the stones had deepened and intensified the sense of the real and the spiritual. He went back to tell those people that by these things we enter the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. The old saying is indeed true, that "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The church hidden in the Roman catacombs overcame the gross and devilish materialism of Rome. The church seated and patronized by Constantine on the Seven Hills, became weak, paralyzed. It has ever been so. It has been by the pressure and agony of tribulation, that the forces of the church's life have been increased and renewed and made powerful. The church persecuted is the church powerful because then she is true to her life and realizes her strength.

Life is surrendered to by tribulation. The sense of agony and the sense of patience in the soul makes opposition contributory to the very life which it is persecuting. Here again I quote from Paul in his letter to the Philippians: "… the things which happened unto me have fallen out … unto the progress of the gospel," as the Revised Version has it.

The things that have happened unto me - the bonds, the imprisonments - have turned out for the beating forward of the gospel.

Life transmutes tribulation, and so (in effect) Paul writes: "Let us also rejoice in our tribulations. Tribulation worketh patience, patience worketh conviction, conviction worketh hope! " Wherever we find life in its strength, we find tribulation in its pressure, but if we watch the process we see life transmuting tribulation.

These are dark days for the church of God. Are they? Think again! What has provoked this world conflict? The opposition of the world to the church. Exchange that for other words if you like and say it is a conflict of ideals. That is but another way of saying that it is a conflict caused by the opposition of the world to the church. This is a testimony to the power of the church. The passion for the mastery of the earth by brute force is the hatred of the world for the ideals of Christ.

What is the issue to be? Let us ask another question. For the moment what is happening? The church is led into a wilderness in which she looks the world squarely in the face and shudders. That is great gain. Too long the church has been playing fast and loose with the world, and now God has permitted a situation when the church is once again compelled to look at the world and see what it really means. As she does it, if she is true to God, she shudders and is ashamed.

But she is not only brought into a wilderness in which she can look the world squarely in the face. The church is brought to the place where she looks God in the face anew. There will happen to the church that which happened to Jacob at Jabbok; she will be able to say, presently, after the night and the darkness have passed: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is healed."

That thing is true individually. Here is a boy back from the war, marvelously preserved from anything more serious than a wound that has incapacitated him for a month or so. This is what he said: "I never really knew God till I was at the front." No, he was not a heathen and a publican. He belonged to the church. But he saw God there. That experience is being multiplied, and the vision will heal. There will come to us a new sense of the powers of our life, a new experience of the agony and of the patience.

Are we in tribulation? are we in Patmos? Let us also be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. So shall we know the kingdom, so shall we know the patience. It may be we shall hear behind us the voice of a trumpet, and being turned to look we also shall see the Son of Man, girt about the paps with a golden girdle, with feet that shine like brass burnished in the furnace, with eyes that flash as with a flame of fire, with hair white as the driven snow. The thing He will say to us amid the carnage and the darkness is this:

"… I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. …"