**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 24 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE VERDICT by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*What then shall I do unto Jesus which is called Christ?*

*Matthew 27:22*

THIS QUESTION OCCURS IN THE STORY OF THE APPEARANCE of Jesus before the Roman Governor Pilate. If we read the story superficially, we shall declare that Jesus was arraigned before Pilate. If we read the story carefully, determining to see its true inwardness, to discover its profoundest meanings, we shall say that Pilate was arraigned before Jesus. In the facts which were merely local and incidental and historical, Jesus was a prisoner at the bar of Pilate, waiting for verdict and sentence. In all the values which were essential and spiritual and age-abiding, Pilate the Roman Governor stood at the bar of Jesus waiting for verdict and sentence.

The Governor asked, "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" as though the disposal of Jesus were in his hands. By the answering of that question, Pilate was deciding what it would be necessary, in the fullness of time and in the perfecting of the Divine economy, for Jesus to do with him. I do not mean by that to affirm that Pilate was lost because of his action upon that occasion. It is perfectly certain, that if Pilate never repented of his vacillation, never repented of that moment in which he seared his conscience to save his position, then his destiny was sealed. But who shall dare to affirm that this was so? It may be that in after years, when he had lost the position he had purchased at the price of disloyalty to conscience, the haunting memory of the face and regal mien of the Man Who troubled him that day, may have followed him until in penitence he turned to Him in submission; and if he did, then he found His grace sufficient to meet his need.

From this moment, I have nothing more to do with that old scene or with the local setting of my text, save for purpose of illustration, I am interested in the abiding principles, in the spiritual values, in the immediate and persistent application of this old-time story.

This is the final question of the Gospel according to Matthew, which is the Gospel of Jesus as King. He is presented to us here in the purple robes of His sovereign royalty. He is presented to us in the early chapters, first, in His relation to our own world; while Jesus was of our human nature He did not enter upon our human life by the Will or act of humanity, but by the mysterious and direct intervention of God: second, in relation to the world above; after the Kingliness of work well done the wreath of Divine attestation was set upon His brow, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased"; and the holy chrism, the anointing of the Spirit fell upon Him, fitting Him for specific Kingly work; finally, in relation to the under-world of evil; passing into the wilderness as King He met the enemy of the race and mastered him at every onslaught

There follows the story of the Kingly Propaganda. First, the great Manifesto which we speak of as the Sermon on the Mount. Then the toil amid all the limitation of human life; the King is supreme in all spheres; master of material things; victorious in the presence of mental disorder as He flung the devils out and restored men to their right mind; triumphant in the moral realm, as He forgave sins and gave men power to sin no more. The King is next seen in conflict with the false rulers of the people, the shepherds who fed themselves instead of the people, the shepherds who sought their own safety instead of that of the people; defeating them, and rising superior to them on every occasion. At Caesarea Philippi He challenged His disciples, and Peter made his confession "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." From that moment He began to talk about His cross, and with calm and Kingly dignity He trod the Via Dolorosa that culminated in the tragedy of Calvary. The dead body of the King was laid by tender and loving hands in the grave.

On the first day of a new week the message came, the King is alive, and finally His authoritative voice is heard saying, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and disciple the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age."

In that rapid survey of the gospel, the King is again presented, In the midst of the tragedy at the end, just before the flaming glory of the ultimate victory of resurrection, this question was asked, "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" To answer that question I call you in the name of God, in the name of the King, in the name of your humanity. In the presence of the far-flung splendors of the unseen world, and the vast spaciousness of human life in the economy of God, I bring you this question and I ask you to make it your own and to answer it ere the day have passed, "What then shall I do unto Jesus which is called Christ?"

My business at this hour is to appeal for a verdict. I would fain bring you, my comrades in this human life, my fellow travelers to all the mystery and wonder of the life that lies beyond, face to face with the King and I would ask your verdict, "What then shall I do unto Jesus which is called Christ? "

In order that we may be helped, in order that we may be aided in our hour of decision, I propose to ask a series of questions, all of them leading up to, and culminating in the question of Pilate.

The first question I would suggest is this. What can I do with Jesus? I reply to that immediately, I can crown Him or crucify Him, and I can do none other than one of these two. Every one of us must give a vote for His crowning or for His crucifixion. There is no middle course because His claims are supreme, and His claims are superlative. He is either all He claims to be and all His followers have claimed for Him, or He is the most stupendous fraud that has ever been foisted upon human credulity. Have you ever really considered the words Jesus uttered as He stood in the midst of the promiscuous multitudes of men and women of all sorts and conditions; as He stood in the midst of men and women, with hearts wrung with sorrow, with spirits dejected by hope deferred; in the midst of men and women in the grip of sin and vice; in the midst of the physical pain and weariness and the dread tiredness of the multitudes? He said "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If that were a lie, it were the most cruel of lies. If it were the truth, it is the truth that we ought to live and die for, and proclaim to men, for this is what the world supremely needs. The Man Who can stand in the midst of human pain and agony and turmoil and temptation and say, "If you will come to Me I will give you rest," ought to be crucified if His claim is untrue or He ought to be crowned if it be true! What will you do with Him? What can you do with Him? Do not take the distant look alone, think of the claim He is making in London today. It is that He is able to take hold of the worst man and the worst woman, and so to touch them with forgiveness and with healing and with life that He will give them rest and make them the best man and the best woman. He is claiming today that He can lay His hand upon the flotsam and jetsam of humanity, upon men and women flung out upon the scrap-heap by the cruel grind of human laws, and that He can make of them such men and women that presently He will present them faultless before God, so that God shall not be ashamed of them, so that they shall not fail to command the respect of God. This is a superlative claim, and the Man Who makes a claim like this is a fraud, or so help me God He is my King. I want to be rid of the voice that makes claim like that if it is mockery; or I want that it shall be multiplied until every weary and broken-hearted man and woman has heard it, if it be true. I must crown Him or crucify Him. One of the most consistent and beautiful figures upon the page of the New Testament is that of Paul. Oh yes, he wrote one day that he was the chief of sinners, but he wrote that when he was standing in the presence of Christ. When a man stands in the presence of Christ he always feels he is the greatest sinner in the world. If you will compare Paul with other men you cannot but admire him. Before he knew Jesus, he was splendidly true, magnificently consistent, tremendously earnest. Mark the difference. Before he knew Jesus, he made havoc of the Church of God. Why? Because he believed that Jesus was an impostor, that He never rose from the dead, that all that His disciples were claiming for Him was untrue; and out of the pure honesty of his heart he was determined to stamp out His name. But there came a moment of illumination, a moment when a new light broke upon him, a moment when the conviction came that the Jesus Whom he thought dead was alive. What then? With an honesty that I would God other men shared, with a splendid intensity that was wholly admirable, he began to labour and suffer toward the hour when that Jesus should be the crowned Lord of all. What can I do with Him? I must crown Him or crucify Him.

Let me ask a second question. What does it matter what I do with Him? What difference does it make whether I crown Him or crucify Him? I will answer the question in the sense in which it is asked. There are a great many men; men I know in my business house, men I meet on the market, on the street, who have not crowned Him, but they seem to be doing very well. There are a great many people, thousands of people who are rejecting Him, but they seem to be doing very well. I put it so because that thing is said to me scores of times in one year in dealing with men about spiritual things. So I ask the question, "What does it matter? "

It makes all the difference first of all, to your character. It makes all the difference in the second place, to your influence. It makes all the difference finally, to your destiny. Character, influence, destiny.

These are the things men will not think of, but they are the supreme things. A man will think of his bank book, of his house, of his diet, of his education, of his amusement. None of these things are wrong, but they are secondary, by comparison they are unimportant. They are not the final things. I do not mean to say that Christ is not interested in these things, for I know He is interested in what a man eats, what he wears, where he lives; only His way of dealing with what a man eats, what he wears, and where he lives, is that of dealing with the man himself, and when He begins to deal with a man, He deals first with character.

Understand this, your character will depend, and does depend upon your attitude toward Christ. You cannot reject the Christ of this Gospel of Matthew without suffering deterioration of character. You cannot honestly crown Him without entering upon an ennobled life. Here is a thing I need not labour. There are men and women scattered throughout this house tonight, who if this were the time and place, would rise to testify to the fact that crowning Jesus changed their outlook and conceptions and therefore reacted upon them, so that they are not what they were. Crown Jesus and character becomes characterized by purity and love, and when you have uttered those two words you have said everything. When John looked at Jesus he said he saw Grace and Truth, love and life, compassion and holiness. That is the character that is produced. Not in a moment does it come to fullness of fruitage; oh no, some of us know how long the struggle is, how much He has to bear with, how patiently He has to wait when we turn from the pure to the impure, when we turn from love to the things that contradict it; but that is the pattern of character when Jesus is King, a stern endeavour after rightness and a strong moving toward compassion and tenderness toward other men. Reject this Christ of God, and gradually the standard of your morality is lowered; gradually you depart from the high ideals and accept the lower estimates of things; gradually you descend even from the respectable which you now worship to the vulgarity you now hate. Do you think any man lying drunk in the gutter tonight ever meant to lie there? Of course he did not. He has descended. Do you suppose any man in the grip of some hellish, devilish, dirty habit meant so to be gripped? He at first felt the shame of it, but gradually the shame passed, until today there are men who can sin without a blush. Character deteriorated, ruined, is always the outcome of refusing Christ.

Not character alone, but that which is the outcome of character, influence, is determined by relationship to Christ. Crown Him, obey Him and - I quote from His Manifesto so that there shall be no speculation on my part - then what? "Ye are the salt of the earth;" the influence you exert is an influence that prevents the spread of corruption, and gives the man struggling in weakness his chance. "Ye are the light of the world," you shall live in the office, in the business house, in professional life, wherever you are, and your life shall be a life that helps men toward God and truth. Refuse to crown Him and your influence is the opposite. Instead of salt which prevents corruption, you will corrupt society. God help me, I am always afraid of generalities when I am after a verdict, Let me take one man, a young man in this house tonight. What will you do with Jesus? Crown Him and your character is ennobled, and I care not where you work or where you live, you will help men to noble things. Refuse to crown Him and your character will degenerate and the very stories you tell will help to damn men. Your influence depends upon what you do with Jesus.

Your destiny depends upon what you do with Jesus, for this life is not all. This life is but the place of probation. Life lies beyond, higher, deeper, profounder; and when presently, I shall cross the border-line, that crossing of the border-line will not change my character, will not change the essential facts of my personality. There is destiny. What lies beyond? Who dare say? Who dare invade the stillness and silence of the secrets of eternity? Not I, But I dare affirm that as a man shall choose in these days of opportunity so shall he abide in the days that lie beyond. I am not preaching to men who have never had an opportunity, or I might have another emphasis upon that message. If I were preaching to people who had never been brought face to face with Jesus Christ, and had never heard this evangel, I might have something else to say. I am preaching to men and women who know the name, and know the story, have seen the uplifted Christ, have witnessed the transformation of other lives. What you do with Christ settles not character and influence only, but destiny. It does matter.

Let us ask another question. Who can decide for me? The answer is swift and immediate. No one can decide for you. You must decide. The friends of Jesus cannot decide that you shall crown Him. Blessed be God, the foes of Jesus cannot compel you to crucify Him. Pilate washed his hands in water, and said, I am innocent. Pilate, it will never do! It is a base and hideous mockery. Listen, Pilate, you cannot wash blood out in water! Pilate, you stand at the bar of your own conscience. You are arguing between expedience and obedience, whether you shall do the straight thing though the heavens fall, or by some trick save your own position as Roman Procurator. You are trying to shift the blame upon those priests. God knows they are to blame, those evil inspirers of an evil deed. You are trying to put the blame upon the mob, crying for His crucifixion. You cannot do it, Pilate! You have asked a question more profound than you know, "What then shall I do?" When presently thou hast handed Him over to His cross, and thou hast written the superscription to mock the priests, and dost say "What I have written I have written," then thou sayest more than thou knowest. Thou hast chosen, thou hast written, and the clamour of His foes will not excuse thine action. The persuasion of His friends cannot finally decide thy choice. So it is in this hour. I have sometimes said, If I could, I would come and compel a man to Christ. Thank God I cannot. Every man stands in the awful awe-inspiring, tremendous dignity of his own power to choose, and no man can invade it. The friends of Christ tonight would fain persuade you, we are prepared to go so far as Paul when he said, "We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were intreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God." But, you must decide. Every man chooses for himself. Do not forget that fact when the foes of Christ are trying to prevent you by their laughter and persecution, by their suggestion that you take the glamour and glitter of the things that perish. You must decide. This is a great congregation, but it is composed of lonely men and lonely women who within the next fifteen minutes will have decided each for himself, for herself, to crucify or crown Christ.

There is another question. When must I answer this? The answer to this is as quick and immediate as to the last. Now. Yesterday, I need not argue. Yesterday does not matter. Yesterday by your life, by your thinking, by your speaking, by your doing, you drove the nails and crucified Christ - for oh, men and women, remember that not the Jewish priests and Roman soldiers crucified Christ, but my sin and your sin. That is the deep mystery of the cross. By the sin of yesterday you crucified Him, so that there can be no further decision about yesterday. Tomorrow - you remember the saying of your childhood, more philosophic than you have thought recently - tomorrow never comes. There is no tomorrow for the activity of the soul. No man decides tomorrow. The soul is so close to God that its one hour of the clock is His now. You decide now and cannot escape it. When presently, the service over, you leave this building and walk through the streets amid the city's babel and noise, you go having given your vote for the crucifixion or the crowning of Christ. It is an immediate transaction.

One other question. What will be the result in the long issues? I have spoken of the near things of character and influence, and of destiny which may be a far thing but which begins here and now. In the long issues, what will be the result? Let me try to answer that question. There is a day coming when this same King shall appear again. He is coming into His Kingdom, blessed be God. That is the comfort of all such as work. That is the battle song that nerves us in the hour of turmoil and strife. He is coming into His Kingdom. It is not an idle song we sing, it is the profoundest thing in our souls: "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journeys run."

If the New Testament be true, He is to appear again. He has appeared, He has had His first advent, epiphany, appearing, which was an Advent of infinite grace. It was an Advent of awful loneliness, and pain and buffeting, of prison and death; but He is coming again. There will be a second Advent as surely as there was the first Advent. There will be another epiphany, another manifestation, but how changed. Son of man shall come in His own glory and the glory of His Father, and all the holy angels with Him. There is an hour coming when the world shall see again the King. Then this question will be reversed. The question is that awful, yet glad hour - and whether awful or glad depends entirely upon our present relationship to Him - will not be What shall I do with Jesus? but What will Jesus do with me?

He came, and they crowned Him with thorns; but He is coming with the diadems of the universe upon His brow. He came, and they put in His hand a reed, in mockery; but He is coming with the scepter of the universe in His strong right hand; He came, and they lifted Him to die on the cross; but He is coming seated upon the throne of empire and dominion. When He comes again, He will do with men what men have done with Him when they had their opportunity to choose. If I have rejected Him, He will reject me, and that not capriciously, but by reason of the very necessity of the case. He will be compelled, in the day of the final establishment of His government in the world and through the universe, to reject those who have rejected Him, for to retain them would be to ruin the new creation and blight and blast the established Kingdom.

Now finally, back again to Pilate's question. We have only attempted to emphasize it and insist upon its importance, and persuade you to personal decision by all the questions we have suggested. This is the last. What shall I do?

Would to God that the preacher could be entirely silent, or would to God that his voice might be heard simply as the voice of heaven. Each one is quite alone with God. I cannot see, neither can I know what takes place at this moment between your soul and God, and your neighbour cannot see or know. Thank God for the sacredness of our loneliness with God. I pray you be conscious of that. In that place of loneliness with God, ask Pilate's question, and answer it. "What then shall I do unto Jesus which is called Christ?"

What shall I do? Oh soul of mine, as though thou hadst never faced Christ before, as though thou hadst never come to this bar of judgment, now soul of mine, What wilt thou do with Christ? Everything depends upon the will. There is intellectual persuasion toward His crowning. He has made the emotional appeal to my heart. The call of my conscience bids me crown Him at all costs. Shall I do it? That is the question.

Courage my soul, dare to do it. And as though never before, in the presence of heaven and eternity, I lay down all the arms of my rebellion and crown Him Lord; He shall be King of my life. It is hardly worth Thy taking oh King! It is bruised, battered; but oh, take it, and if Thou canst make a garden out of this desert, then do so; if Thou canst make any use of what there is of me, take me oh Christ, and make me in order to use me.

Is that what you say? God help you to make this real. Do not be deceived. In two or three minutes the service will be over, and going out of the building and along the streets you will go having voted for His death and crucifixion, or will have found the verdict that compels you to crown Him. Which?

God grant there may be hundreds of us who tonight shall crown Him to the glory of His name, for the saving of our own lives, in order that we may be soldiers of the King, servants of the King, workers together with God, for His name's sake.