**SERIES 01 (PREACHED IN 1907) - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**01. CHRIST, GREATER THAN THE TEMPLE by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*"One greater than the temple is here."*

*Matthew 12:6*

THE MORE careful one is in the study of the life and teaching of Jesus, as revealed in the Gospels, the more one is startled. His sayings are characterized by a marvelous majesty and a strange meekness. This is nowhere more evident than in His declarations concerning Himself. He said that He was meek and lowly of heart and yet made claims for Himself which are simply stupendous. The most startling of these are such as were made incidentally in the course of His dealing with other subjects. Some of these I am proposing to consider.

We begin this series of studies with this word, "One greater than the temple is here." There is a strange word recorded in the closing part of the previous chapter and those of our text. "I am meek and lowly in heart"; "One greater than the temple is here." I am perfectly aware of the fact that this does not startle us, because we know Him, and know the double truth concerning Him. If, in imagination, we put ourselves back into the place of the men who heard Him say this, I think we shall understand how startling a thing it was. Look at the Speaker as the Pharisees saw Him. A Galilean peasant, standing in the cornfields surrounded by a little group of His own disciples, who have been plucking the ears of corn and eating them, and so in the opinion of the Pharisees breaking the Sabbath! In answer to the Pharisees He vindicated His disciples by declaring that David "did eat the shewbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat;" and that in the very exercise of his sacred office the priest profanes the Sabbath; finally declaring that He, Whose disciples they were, was greater than the temple. Could anything be more absurd - I am speaking from the Pharisees' standpoint - than for a Galilean peasant, a carpenter for at least eighteen years of His life, to stand in the midst of the teachers of the day - the guardians of religious morality forsooth - and to declare that He exonerated His disciples from all blame, because He was Himself greater than the temple. To those men whose whole life was conditioned within all that the temple meant and all that the temple suggested, He quietly and deliberately said, "One greater than the temple is here."

You misinterpret my motive if you imagine I am proposing to defend that claim. We know He was greater than the temple. I am going to examine it. In order that we may gather some of the spiritual significations of Christ's superiority to the temple I propose two lines of consideration. First, how was Christ greater than the temple? Secondly, What was the issue of the fact that Christ was greater than the temple? Three ways in which He was greater than the temple, and three results of this superiority.

I submit to you that Christ was greater than the temple first as a Man. Strip Him of all that essential dignity which we forever must associate with His name if we are to receive and believe the New Testament testimony. Forget the veiled splendor of His absolute Deity, and look upon Him first from the Pharisees' standpoint, as a Man, not a ruler, not a Levite, not a priest, but one of the common people, one of the ordinary crowd, one of the rank and file, the Galilean peasant, the carpenter from little Nazareth. If He were no more than that, what He said was true. He was greater than the temple. What was the temple? The temple was a symbol, a means to an end. The temple consisted of a beautiful series of suggestions as to what worship really meant. The temple was not a link between man and God. It was the symbol of the things that linked man to God. There was no virtue in the temple itself. A man might stand in its outer court and be as far from God as though he dwelt in the most distant place of the earth. A man might pass into the holy place itself, nay, a man might pass into the holiest of all, by virtue of his priestly office, once a year and never get near to God. The temple never made man near to God I am not undervaluing the temple. The temple was constructed at the command and according to the pattern given by God. I personally think that the temple was in some senses a deviation from the Divine intention. I am inclined to think that if you would know what is the pattern of the heavenly things you need to study the tabernacle. Be that as it may, temple or tabernacle, remember this, they never linked a soul to God. No man ever came near to God because he was in the temple. The temple suggested spiritual truth. The temple was intended to speak to the senses concerning spiritual things. The temple was sensual, a thing for eye to look upon, for ear to hear, for hand to handle, for the material life to be conscious of, in order that the spiritual life might pass through to that which lay beyond. By all its construction and all its ritual, all its sacrifices, all its worship, all its light and sound, its glory and beauty, God was endeavoring to lead men to understand spiritual things. The moment you begin to study the significance of the temple in the light of New Testament truth you will see how the temple was the outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. It had its place. It had its value. Why the sign? Why the symbol? Why the necessity for a temple? In order that man, offspring of God, the creation of God, of the very nature of God, might find his way to God and hold communion with Him. Therefore, it is at once seen that the man who is to be brought to the consciousness of God is greater than the means adopted to bring him to that consciousness. I think perhaps in this day and age, I may dismiss the whole thing in the simplest sentence by saying that the whole of the Mosaic ritual and ceremony was Kindergarten, pictures, and toys, and simplicities, and ceremonies for humanity in its religious childhood never intended that His people should imagine that the temple was greater than themselves. God never intended that man should imagine that by the temple he could be made near to God. God's intention was that the symbol should lead to the fact, that the shadow should bring men to the substance, and that beyond the thing of time and sense, above the fabric and the texture, man should find his way to the impalpable and eternal, to the spiritual and the infinite. Through the thing material to the thing spiritual, through the temporal to the eternal, through dust to Deity. That was the Divine intention.

When Jesus stood among the cornfields, if He only spoke as the Galilean peasant, He was correct, "One greater than the temple is here." It is true of you, my brother. You may have wandered far away and lost your vision. You may have turned yourself to weak and beggarly things until they have made you weak and beggarly, but you are greater than any temple that men ever reared on this earth. All the temples of men rightly have been the working out into visibility by symbol and sign of spiritual things, and man, being essentially spiritual, is always greater than the temple.

That does not exhaust the meaning of Christ's great word. Christ was greater than the temple not merely as man is greater than the ritual, but as the anti-type is greater than the type. If His saying first links him to common humanity, when examined again it is seen that He rises above the level of this first suggested comparison. There is a sense in which we may take this word as peculiarly applicable to Christ, a sense in which it does not apply to me - as the anti-type is greater than the type. No man, I think, is more aware than I am that you may deal with types and shadows until you lose yourself amongst them. I am quite sure that mistakes have been made in dealing with all the typology of the Old Testament. The first is that of neglecting it. The second is that of attempting to explain it in such detail as to make it grotesque and ridiculous. If we may find the middle way, and ask ourselves in the briefest way, and answer in the broadest outline, What did the temple really mean? I think we shall see at once how Christ was the anti-type of that of which it was the type, the fulfilment of the things which it promised, the substance of all of which it was the shadow I am not going to speak in detail of its outer court and its holy place, its veil, its ritual and sacrifices and ceremonies, all of which things are full of interest. In the Old Testament the tabernacle is described in two ways, as "the tabernacle of the congregation," and "the tabernacle of witness." A changed phrasing will help us to understand the meaning of these descriptions. Instead of "tabernacle of congregation," read "tent of meeting." Instead of witness: read "tent of testimony." I am attempting to get to the heart of what the temple really suggested and what the stood for. Two things, the tent of meeting, and the tent of testimony. The first does not mean a place where a congregation assembled together, but a place where God and man met. It was a tent of meeting between God and man. That was the meaning of the whole ceremony and ritual. Everything was intended to demonstrate to these people that God was at the centre of their national life, governing it religiously, socially, politically, nationally, and internationally. In order that these men might hold communion with Him the tabernacle was erected, not to bring Him nigh, but to show that He was nigh; not to make possible their coming, but to reveal to them the possibility of their coming and the way of that possibility. The tabernacle was a place where God met with His people in sign and symbol. He ever dwelt with His people in actual, mysterious, hidden fact.

The second phrase, "tent of testimony," did not mean a place where men spoke to men. It was a place where God spoke to men in testimony. The tabernacle was the symbol of the fact that God speaks to men and does not leave them to discover the truth or to find their own way through the mazes and mysteries of this perplexing life. There is a great deal more which might be said. I believe that every sacrifice and every offering, all the veil of blue and purple, and the fine twined linen, were suggestive and full of beauty; but we have dismissed the fringes of things and have attempted to get to the heart of what that tabernacle, that temple meant. It was a revelation of the possibility of meeting between God and man, of the fact that God spoke to menthe thing they could not discover for themselves, that they might know His way and His will, His purpose and His love. Such was the temple.

Now I come back to the cornfields. I look upon Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter, the Galilean, man as I am man upon first examination, always that, never removed from me, and yet I know today - even though these Pharisees did not understand, even though perchance His own disciples did not perfectly comprehend it - that He was the meeting place between and man, the One through Whom the deepest and final speech broke upon the listening ear of humanity. I think perhaps I am less and less inclined to criticize any of these men who were near Jesus. I am not surprised the Pharisees did not see and understand it all. Do not be misled, I pray you, by anyone who tells you that you must get back to the language and understanding of the men who lived with Him to understand Him. They were to near Him to see Him. There must be nearness and familiarity to know the detail of the glory, but there must be distance to see the highest height of the splendor of this Christ. As I look back l understand that He - the Man of Galilee, stooping, bending, lowly, meek - was the One of Whom all the ritual of the long and weary days had spoken. In Him God and man met. He is man as I am man. As I come to Him and touch Him I am touching a Brother, but I have felt the thrill of God. I look into His eyes, wondrous eyes, the eyes of a man. Methinks - forgive my dreaming and imagination - there never were such human eyes as His. No artist can mix the pigment that will fling into them the colour of their exquisite beauty. But through them comes the light, the infinite light of the eyes of God which "are in every place," which "run to and fro throughout the whole earth." He looks at me, and He is my Brother, I love Him. He looks through me, and He is my God, and I am afraid. I touch Him, He is flesh, but it is the Word made flesh. I lay my hand upon Him, and He would not resent it, so lowly was He, and He is human; but through my very hand as it touches Him I feel the gentle mightiness of Deity. Yea, verily, He was and is greater than the temple. The temple was a toy, a picture, a symbol, a thing for a child; but l am a wounded child, and you may take all my toys when I find my Mother-Father in Christ. Greater than the temple, the tent of meeting, the One in Whom and man in mystic and marvellous union have met, and felt the fact of their meeting; and I a man, bruised, and wounded, and weary, come to this Man among the cornfields, and find God.

Not merely tent of meeting, but tent of testimony. There God met with men in olden time and spake with them in the flashing glory of the strange and mystic Shekinah light that dwelt between the overshadowing cherubim; but men never saw the light so as to comprehend it, or understood perfectly the voice when it spoke. At last this Man speaks, and it is a Man Who speaks. Take any of the words I have read, it is the word of our common humanity. "Take My yoke upon you," I also am a man. I also wear a yoke. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." You have not learned the true secret of life, learn My secret. "I am meek and lowly in heart." That is what man must be if he would find rest. It is all beautifully human. "I am meek." Learn of Me and you shall find rest. I have a yoke, but I tis easy. I have a burden, but it is a light one. Your yoke does not fit you, and your burden is pressing upon you. Take My yoke, My burden. It is the language of a Man.

Is it? Yes, but listen. Come unto Me and I will rest you. "No one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him. Come unto Me. … and I will rest you." So through the simple speech of men, in such terms as are easy to understand I hear the speech of God, and I come from the restlessness and weariness and friction of disappointed life, into the calm and ample spaces of Deity. I have no need for the Temple any more. Rend the veil in twain. Breakdown the temple till no stone remain. Fling out your ceremony and your ritual. I have Him of Whom they all were prophecy and suggestion. What need have I of the things that pass and perish? "One greater than the temple is here."

That leads to the final one of these three things which can be said quite briefly, for we have already said it inferentially. Not only as man was He greater than the temple. Not only as Mediator between God and man, the One in Whom God and man could meet and through Whom spoke to men; but therefore, by necessary sequence the last thing is that He was greater as Himself is greater than the symbols by which men realize how to worship Him. Not only was He the representative of humanity and the way to God. He was that after which the spirit of man seeks in all its worship, in all its life, not consciously and not wisely, sinfully often, but nevertheless seeks. Philip looked into His face, perplexed, as were all the rest, by the strange things He was saying to them concerning His departure from them, and said, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." How often we say more than we know. Surely Philip then said more than he knew. Surely in that moment the naked soul of Philip uttered itself in its essential speech. Surely in that moment all humanity uttered its deepest cry, "Shew us the Father and it sufficeth us." I do want to emphasize that. It is the sob of London at this moment. It does not understand its own sob, but that is it. It is the cry of the dilettante West End. It is the sob of the despairing East. It is the agony of humanity, though it does not know it. The man with the muckrake is everywhere. When I watch the man with the muckrake hunting amid refuse for a straw while he neglects to lift his eyes to the golden crown that is held above him, I see in his hunt for the straw evidence of his capacity for the crown. What does he want with the straw? Its glitter. As the man for the glittering thing in the refuse heap he is proving, did he but know it, his capacity for the crown. All the agony of the world was gathered up when one simple Jew looked into the face of this Man and said, "Shew us the Father and it sufficeth us," satisfieth, answereth us.

What did Jesus reply? "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Dare you say that? In this week's British Weekly David Smith tells how Bronson Alcott once said to Thomas Carlyle that he was able to say with Christ, "I and My Father are one." Thomas, Carlyle's rough and magnificent answer was this, "Yes, but Jesus got the world to believe Him." I think that is a good story for our age. Dare you say that "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father?" If in your heart and conscience you are honest you say, No, I have debased the vision, I cannot say that. The vision of God that man has today has come to him through the Christ. There are thousands of people who are turning their back's upon the revelation of Jesus which the New Testament gives, who yet are holding a very high and noble conception of God. Where did they learn it? It came to them through His unveiling. He stood that day amid the corn in the cornfield and He said, "One greater than the temple is here." Not merely as man was He greater. Not merely as Mediator was He greater; but as God, the Father, satisfying humanity's need, answering its calls, quenching its thirst, healing its wounds, was He greater than the temple.

Now by way of conclusion. What were and what are the results of this fact of Christ's superiority to the temple? First I look back and watch Him, and I see that He being greater than the temple appropriated the temple. He went to it, but He made all things subservient to Himself, and to those interests which He represented. He was not a creature of the temple. On the contrary, the temple was His creation, and therefore He used it, but He never allowed it to be that which held and cabined and cribbed and confined Him. He made use of it, He never allowed it to be His master. He appropriated it. Forget the word temple and take all that it means. He appropriated ritual, suggestion, ceremony, colours, forms, pictures; but He never allowed these things to be the sum and substance of His religion, or His interpretation of God "The Sabbath was made for man." It is made for man. It is important. Man cannot neglect it, but it was made for man, not man for it He appropriated the temple.

He did more. He superseded the temple. "Ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. ...The hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. ... The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Was a more remarkable thing than this ever said? As He left the temple His disciples drew His attention to its stones and the beauty of its architecture, and He said, "Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." It was a terrible thing to say. Think of the loss of it to the world. Listen till He has finished speaking, and you will find that after He has said the stones of the temple are to be flung down He says, "This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world." When they flung down the temple the world lost nothing. Any man who has looked into the face of the Son of God and heard the mystic music of His message in his inner heart, can stand unperturbed amid the ruins of temples pagan and Christian, and know that the world lost nothing as they crumbled to decay. The old idea of the temple is gone. I pray you remember that it had its place. It had its value. It was prophetic, suggestive, a signpost on the way; but we have arrived at the ultimate, we have into the face of the Son of Gog, and we need the temple no more. Do not be angry with the man who wants ritual. Pity him, and pray for him that he may see the things beyond it. I will not interfere with you if ritual helps you in any degree, if the picture, and the light burning, the candle carried, the vestments, help you, then have them, but may God lead you beyond the pictures and beyond the things which are no longer necessary into the essential, eternal fellowship with Himself. The Church building is not the successor of the temple, neither is it the successor of the synagogue. This building is not successor to the temple. This is not a place where you come for Divine service. This is the place where men come for human service, where you come to get helped yourself. Divine service is out upon the highway, in your office, in the mart, in your home. Your place of worship is no more here than there. Have you seen His face? Have you heard His voice? Have you come into mystic union with the Son of God? Then in your counting house, in your home, upon the highway of your city, there is your altar, there is your priest, there is your gate of heaven, there is your place of worship. I can worship on the mountain or in the valley, upon land or sea, in cathedral or in prison, in cottage or in palace, in railway train or in this place so dear to my heart. I do not need a temple. I beseech you get rid of the idea that you come here to meet God. He is with you everywhere. We only come here that we may remind ourselves of the Presence in which we "live and move and have our being" There is nothing here to aid the soul in worship. The only aid I need is the sacrifice and admission which comes through the One Who was greater than the temple, and Who therefore has superseded the temple. Nothing was lost to the world when the temple was destroyed. The Church has suffered unutterably by attempting to reproduce the temple, and by going back to the pictures and signs, and symbols and vestments, and incense, instead of living in the amplitude and glory of the inner place, the holy of holies of direct and immediate fellowship with the King.

What said the seer of Patmos, not of heaven, but of the city of God which comes down out of heaven, the focused revelation of the perfected earthly order? "I saw no temple therein: the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof." It is for us, the members of His "holy nation," the children of His love, the ransomed of His blood, the made-nigh by His coming, to live forevermore in the holy of holies without need of a temple, or priest, or ceremony, or ritual, unafraid in the light because redeemed by love.