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

**03. CHRIST, GREATER THAN SOLOMON by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*"Behold a greater than Solomon is here."*

*Matthew 12:42*

IN ORDER to understand how startling a claim this was it is necessary to put oneself back into the midst of the conditions and circumstances in which Jesus uttered the words. There were certain names in Hebrew history fraught with signification to Hebrew ears. Indeed, I think it may be said that in the time of our Lord they were living upon the names of the past. Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God. Moses, the lawgiver. Samuel, the first of the great prophetic judges. David, the man after God's own heart. While these all made their appeal to the Hebrew heart along certain lines and with certain values; for glamour, for material majesty, for splendor, none of them made such an appeal as did the name of Solomon. Solomon the peaceful, the wise, the magnificent. If that be understood then we see at once how grotesque a claim this must have seemed to the men who heard it. "A greater than Solomon is here."

Put them into comparison as those men saw them. Solomon, to begin on the lowest level of all, was wealthy. This Man was homeless, and so far as the work of His public ministry was concerned, lived on the charity of a few wealthy women. Solomon was born in the purple, but this Man was one of the common people. Solomon was the centre and companion of kings. This Man was the friend of publicans and sinners. Solomon was learned, a sage, a philosopher, a poet, a naturalist. This Man had never learned. Solomon as a teacher had a fame so far spread that the queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth with her problems, her questions, her difficulties, and he answered them all. This Man was from Nazareth, and "Can any good come out of Nazareth?"

Immediately we see what the contrast meant to these men. The Galilean Peasant, the Carpenter from despised Nazareth, never having been to the schools, not having wherewith to support Himself upon His own self-imposed ministry, yet stood in the midst of the men of light and leading and said in effect, I have delivered to you a message of infinite wisdom, I have revealed to you the meaning of kingship, I have unveiled before you the very face of God, and "the queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here." Nineteen centuries have passed since He spoke, and there is neither man, woman, nor child in this house who questions what He said.

This subject is a very wide one, and might be treated from many standpoints. We shall confine ourselves to a comparison of the aspects suggested by the visit of the queen of Sheba.

What were the things in Solomon which impressed her? They were three in number. First his wisdom. He patiently listened to all her problems and questions, and answered them. Secondly, his kingship. "Happy are thy men," thy ministers, the people that sit around thy table; happy is the kingdom over which thou rulest, it is the supreme proof of God's love to this nation that He has made thee king finally, she was impressed by the greatness of the God Who had appointed him. The last outcome of her observation, the last expression of her surprise was not surprise at his wealth, at his wisdom, at the greatness of himself as king, but worship of the God Whom she had seen revealed in and through his wisdom, in and through his kingship. We shall first notice the threefold superiority of Christ, in wisdom, in kingship, and in the revelation of God; and then make a threefold deduction from our study.

Christ was greater than Solomon in His wisdom. This greatness is revealed in the case of Solomon and in the case of Christ in two ways, in definite and positive teaching; and in the ability to solve problems and answer questions. Take the teaching of Solomon as we have it in the Bible. There are three books. The Song of Songs; the Book of Proverbs; and the Book of Ecclesiastes. What have we of the teaching of Jesus? A manifesto of laws, and a series of discourses to His disciples as He was about to leave them, constitute the main body of His teaching. Then scattered all through the stories of His life are the things He said in argument, and in teaching; incidental things, things of tenderness, of passion, of thunder, of fire. If you gather them all out they are less in bulk than the Book of Proverbs.

Now put the teaching of Jesus into comparison with the teaching of Solomon, and it is evident that Solomon only touched the fringe of things. Gather up the meaning of his song at its highest, the ethic of his Proverbs at its best, the teaching of his Ecclesiastes at its greatest value, and it will be found that the teaching of Christ fulfilled and surpassed the whole. Christ covered the whole fact of human life so perfectly that there is no phase of it, whether emotional, intellectual, or volitional, that the words of Jesus did not qualify, correct, purify, ennoble, lift!

Take the Song of Solomon. Its chief beauty lies in its allegorical character. Tell me that there is no spiritual value, no mystic meaning, no suggestion of things that soar above the plane of ordinary human love, and it is still beautiful. It is an Eastern love song, if you so like - I am sure it is to begin with - rich in Eastern colouring, throbbing with Eastern passion, flaming with an Eastern glory. But it is more. It is perfectly certain that all the great Hebrew expositors believed it was more. I do not mean to say that the Hebrew expositors saw in it what the Christian expositors have found. I do not say that to them it indicated the relation between the Christ of God and that marvelous mystery, the Church, which is the bride, for that vision never dawned upon the sight of Hebrew seers. The Church was never seen by Hebrew writers. It was a mystery hidden from the ages, and never revealed until after Pentecost. The Hebrew writers did, however, know something of that symbolic language which suggested the relationship between God and His people as being that of husband and wife. I need only quote one great passage from the prophecy of Hosea, in which God says, "I will betroth thee unto Me forever." Surely while this Song of Solomon is an Eastern love song it was incorporated in the Hebrew Bible because it was understood to have a spiritual and mystic value. Let that be granted, and it becomes at once a thing full of beauty, full of suggestiveness; an attempt to sing out in the symbols of human thought the infinite meaning of God's fellowship and co-operation with all such as put their trust in Him. The song never rises to the sublimest height, never flames into all the majesty of its most radiant glory until it becomes the love song of Christ and His Church, and we hear the Church saying "My beloved is mine, and I am His: He feedeth His flock among the lilies;" or "I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys" (for that is not the language of the bridegroom but of the bride), and we hear the bridegroom answering, "As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters." That is the ultimate height of the Song of Solomon. It is my conviction that Solomon never dreamed that it meant that, he had no conception of the height of his own singing, did not see into the far distances of love suggested by the symbolism of his own song. Yet the experience of the Church has properly appropriated it.

Take the Book of Proverbs. It is full of sanctified common sense. It thrills with intense love of purity. It is scathing in its denunciation of meanness. It is a collection of wise sayings which touch the heart of life today. All these things I freely admit concerning it. It is a wonderful book, but as an ethic how does it compare with the manifesto of the King, which we call the sermon on the mount? Take the writing of Proverbs on social and personal purity. It is a wonderful writing. Note carefully the description of the house of sin and the way that leads to it, and the allurement. It is as alive in London as it was in Jerusalem! Then come to the Manifesto. In the Manifesto Christ has no long teaching on purity, no long description of the flowery path that leads to evil and to death, but He gathers all up, and crystallises it into one hot flaming word, "Everyone that looketh ... to desire ... hath committed." If a man live in the power of that statement he will never try the path that leads to death. He will have learned this deep philosophy of life, that a man does not prove his courage by seeing how near he can come to sin, but by hasting him from it directly it looms upon his vision. That is the greatness of the ethic of Jesus. There is more vital, practical force in that than in anything and everything Solomon wrote. It is only one illustration. You may pass through the whole of that wonderful Manifesto and you will find that every sentence as it fell from the lips of the King lifts life above the snow line, into the unsullied and unspotted region of essential purity.

And what of Ecclesiastes? Christ could never have written it! I know you will qualify that, and qualify it correctly. What I mean is that Ecclesiastes was Solomon's experience, and Christ never had such an experience. Ecclesiastes is a wail of pessimism, and Christ was the one magnificent optimist of all the centuries. Ecclesiastes opens, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." That is not true. Christ never said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." You say to me, Well, we are rather surprised to hear you say that. We thought you believed in the inspiration of the Bible. So I do. I believe that Ecclesiastes ought to be where it is! But what is Ecclesiastes? The mirror of a diseased mind held up that men who live "under the sun" may see the result of so doing. It is the man who lives "under the sun" who says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." If you are living under the sun, and some of you still are, God grant you may get above it before this service is over. If you are living under the sun, in the dust, with no vision of Deity, no conception of the infinite and eternal, you have never heard the rumbling music of the spheres. You may try all the experiences Solomon tried and you will share all his thinking. He tried getting wealth. He turned to pleasure, but all was vanity. Christ could not have written Ecclesiastes. Nothing was vanity to Him. He had joy as over against Solomon's pleasure, and it was so sweet and gracious and infinite a thing that He bequeathed it as His tenderest legacy to the disciples He was leaving behind Him, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you ... These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may be in you." He had delight, but it was not the delight to be found amid things of the material world; His delight was to do the will of His Father.

There came into my hand yesterday - and this is not censorious criticism — an announcement of a convention shortly to be held at Mildmay, and men and women are invited to come solemnly, and this text is printed, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God."

I want Mildmay to issue another invitation, and print on it "Cry out and shout thou inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee," I am weary of this perpetual attempt to silence men. We have been silent too long. It is time the stones began to cry out. Solomon's religion was one of fear, "Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God." Christ took singing children into Jerusalem and into the house of God. That is His religion. He could not have written Ecclesiastes.

I sometimes think graphic contrasts help us best. As the outcome of living under the sun, listen to this, "One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found." He was not likely to, considering the company he had been keeping! Put that into contrast with this. There was a woman in the city who was a sinner. She came into the house where Jesus sat at the table of a Pharisee. She touched Him. She rained tears upon His feet, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and poured precious ointment upon them. A woman who was a sinner, one of the very women that Solomon held in contempt at the end of his own licentious career. Contact with Jesus made her a woman of finer character than His host, Simon, so that Jesus put her into comparison with Simon and said, "I entered into thine house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet." "She" - with a finer sense of hospitality than thine - "hath wetted My feet with her tears." "Thou gayest Me no kiss" - the ordinary oriental salutation - "but she, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss My feet." "My head with oil thou didst not anoint but she hath anointed My feet with ointment," finer and more precious than oil. Christ could never have written Ecclesiastes. His teaching is greater because His life was other than could possibly be expressed in such language as I find there, and teaching is the expression of character. When I read the words of Solomon in the days ere his heart failed in loyalty to God, and then see how he descended to the experiences described in Ecclesiastes, and after that look into the face of the Carpenter of Nazareth, and listen to the words which fell from His lips, and have molded the thinking of the centuries, I see how in wisdom, as a teacher, He was infinitely greater than Solomon.

He was greater also, in His solution of problems. One would like a whole evening for that thought alone. Solomon answered all the questions of the queen of Sheba. He had a wonderful faculty for seeing through a difficulty and understanding it. Put that fact by the side of Christ's dealing with questions. Here is a line of study for those who are Bible students, and are seeking a new series for their Bible Classes. The questions men asked Jesus and the way He answered them. The tribute money. As to marriage in heaven. As to which was the great commandment. You never find Him playing a trick with a man who asked Him a question. You never find Him indulging in smartness in arguing. You find Him perpetually, with quiet dignity and patience, uttering a few sentences - and you can put them all into a brief space - yet when He has spoken in answer to a problem, there is nothing more to be said. He was greater in wisdom.

He was greater as a King. That is the second thing by which the queen of Sheba was impressed. Under this head think first of the kingly character, and then of the kingdom. How shall I summarize the facts concerning Solomon as King? He was born into a perfect environment for the exercise of kingship.

He became its slave, and lost the power to hold the sceptre. How shall I summarize the facts concerning Jesus? He was born into that out of which it seemed impossible to make a king. He ended by mastering His environment and becoming absolute King. Think how everything was prepared for Solomon. Think of his father's consolidation of the kingdom, and gathering of the treasures for the building of the temple. Think of the things that were in his favor. Think of the fine mind that God had given him. He came into the kingdom with everything in his favor, yet all the forces that ought to have lent their aid to him in the exercise of kingliness became a prison house because of his attitude toward them. We have already heard the ultimate, "Vanity of vanities." Look at Jesus. What was there in His favor from a human standpoint? Of despised Nazareth. Poor, despised, when He began His propaganda, gathering to Himself in the inner circle of discipleship only the illiterate and hardworking, despised as He was despised. How did it all end? Standing upon the slopes of the mountain, with that selfsame group of men, all of them mere nonentities, He said, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth." One man starting in the midst of culture, refinement and splendor, said, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." There is nothing worth having. The other Man, starting in the midst of poverty and disadvantage, said, I am master of heaven and earth. I possess it all, and it is all worth having. This is kingliness. Solomon, weak in his moral fibre, became at last an enervated dilettante, seeking for some new sensation. This Man, rising on disadvantage, at last ascended the throne of empire far wider than the earth could contain, from century to century ever widening. Surely as king "a greater than Solomon is here."

Not only in kingly character and qualification but in kingdom, for you may test a king by his kingdom, that is, when he is really king. If he is nothing but a figurehead you cannot test him by anything other than himself. If he is really king, a statesman, a governor, you may test him by his kingdom. What about the kingdom of Solomon? When he left His kingdom it was full of schism and disaffection, and from his death decayed. Within a few years rent in twain, and for ever more breaking up until at last it became a thing lost. When Christ left His Kingdom it was entire, complete, and the only traitor had become his own executioner. That is a revelation of a strong kingdom. When the moral forces of a kingdom are such that the traitor and rebel hangs himself there is strength that will live and last. Christ's Kingdom continued, it has continued until this hour. It is a Kingdom of loyal souls. Are you playing traitor? You cut yourself off from life by your own activity. From then until now the man in His Kingdom who has played traitor to the King of Kings has put himself outside the Kingdom. You are not to measure the Kingdom of Christ by the multitudes who sing about Him, but by those loyal souls who obey Him. The question for you is not, Am I in the crowd that crushes Him in curiosity, but, Am I of the number of those who have taken up the cross to follow Him? In comparing Solomon as king with Jesus, I see how infinitely greater is Christ than he.

Once again, and briefly on this last point. Greater in His revelation of "the blessed God." It is certainly worthy of note that the ultimate result of the queen's visit to Solomon was that of an act of worship, being the outcome of a new sense of God. We at once ask, what is the sense of God which has come to man through Christ, and of course I need not stay here. The whole Christian, fact is the answer to that question. The supreme work of Jesus was an unveiling of the face of God, a revelation of God to man. I sometimes think that Paul in one of those happiest of his moments described the whole fact when, writing to Timothy, he spoke of the "Gospel of the glory of the blessed God." May I put that into another form, which I personally think is nearer to the real meaning of what Paul wrote, at least it will help us more accurately to understand it, "The gospel of the glory of the happy God." That is the revelation which Christ came to give to us. Do you say, is not that a low estimate? Hear it all. Begin with me at the final words, "the happy God." Interpret that word happy by all your ideals of it and it is a low estimate. Interpret that great word happy by the first word, "the Gospel," the Evangel. What is the Gospel that Paul is referring to? All the infinite passion made visible in the Cross and the blood, whereby a ruined race can be redeemed. That is "the Evangel of the glory of the happy God." What is the glory of God? Not a rainbow round about the throne. Not the electron splendour that Ezekiel saw by Chebar's banks. What is the glory of God? An Evangel for lost and ruined souls. The glory of God is not spectacular. The glory of God is that which comes out of His heart in passion and pain in order that the lost may be found and the ruined redeemed, and the people who are not a people made a people. That is the revelation which Christ came to bring. No longer is God a far-off, distant potentate, surrounded by fire. He is the "happy God" Who sorrows in the presence of human sorrow and human sin; and Who, out of that heart emotionally capable of joy and sorrow, brings at infinite cost the Evangel, the Gospel, to men who need it. The queen of Sheba saw wisdom, wisdom, through Solomon's; but when Jesus stands confronting men, it is not wisdom first, it is not government first, it is not riches first, it is grace, yes, but it is the riches of His grace, and it is the government of His grace, and the wisdom of the word of His grace. This is what Christ has revealed of God to men.

What is the issue of all this? The greater wisdom demands a more diligent discipleship. That was Christ's appeal. The queen of Sheba came from afar and took a long and difficult journey to ask Solomon questions, and in effect Christ said, Here am I, a greater than Solomon in wisdom, at your side, in your midst, and you are not inquiring as you might. I leave that bygone generation to Him. What about this audience? The queen of Sheba came from afar to find Solomon. How far have you ever gone in order to take counsel with this wise One? At how much trouble have you ever been to profit your own life? It is a low level of questioning, but I press it. The infinite wisdom waits. Thank God for the men and women who do ask Him and have His answers of grace, the greatest and wisest. They have been given to me. I cannot pass them on to you. No man can. The thing He says to the individual soul is for the soul alone. Right where you are now, a problem in front of you, a dark mystery awaiting solution, so dark that you are baffled. Ask Him, and you will find "a greater than Solomon is here." It may be that His answer will not be a solution of the mystery, but a declaration "thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter," made in such a tone that you will rest in the mystery and sing in the perplexity.

Again, the greater king demands the greater loyalty. I read the story of the coming of the queen of Sheba to Solomon, and I will take her words and use them now of the men who have come to my King, "Happy are Thy men, happy are these Thy servants which stand continually before Thee, and that hear Thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord Thy God which delighted in Thee, to set Thee on the throne." "Happy are these Thy servants," how true is that of Christ's children. This Greater King asks, not in words, but by His royalty, greater loyalty.

Finally, the clearer revelation of the happy God should demand more costly gifts. Remember the queen of Sheba left great gifts behind her when she returned to her own country. She answered the wisdom and revelation of kingship, and the unveiling of the blessedness of God, with gifts. What are the gifts He asks? Only one from you, dear friend, yourself! Do not imagine I say it as though it were a small gift. It is not. We often sing, and it is a great, and gracious hymn -

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small;

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Notice the real emphasis of that. It is absolutely correct. The whole realm of nature is a present far too small. What then shall I give to Him? "My soul, my life, my all." And that is worth more than the whole realm of nature. Do you doubt my comparison? Let the King Himself decide it. "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" He holds the balances in His right hand of eternal justice and on the one side he puts the world with its pomp and pageantry, and on the other, your life, and He says that the world is light as air compared to the weight of the wealth of a human soul. This King only asks this. Shall I withhold it? Will you answer for yourself? In my heart, so help me God, I am His, spirit, soul, and body, for life and death and that vast forever. This is my King, my Master, my God.