**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 21 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**A PROFOUND QUESTION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*What think ye of the Christ?*

*Matthew 22:42*

THIS IS IN SOME WAYS ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING Chapters in the Gospel according to Matthew. It tells the story of a day of questions, of criticism, of opposition, of unbelief. Of the questions the unifying principle was an attempt to entangle Him in His talk: mean and dastardly questions when the spirit of them is recognized. There were questions political, theological, and religious. The political was asked by a coalition of Pharisees and Herodians, two opposing parties, one of them believing that the Hebrew people ought to pay tribute to Caesar, the other believing that they ought not so to do. The theological question was asked by the Sadducees, and had to do with the resurrection. Finally, the religious question was asked by the Pharisees, and inquired as to which among the commandments was the greatest. Jesus answered these questions one after the other with that surpassing and surprising wisdom which was always characteristic of Him. Then quite suddenly, and I think I may say startlingly, He turned upon His questioners and asked them a question. "What think ye of the Christ?" We must under-stand this question. He did not ask it just as we may ask it today. We may still take this question and without any violence to its context make use of it, but we must understand how He asked it. Let me remind you that the word "Christ" is but the Greek form of the Hebrew word "Messiah," and apparently to the group of men who stood about Jesus this was not a question concerning Himself. He did not say to them, at least they would not so understand Him, "What do you think of me?" That is not the point of His question. It was a question about their own Scriptures, about their own religion, about their own hope and outlook. It was to all appearance a purely speculative question. He said to them, in effect, "Now, what is your opinion of your Messiah? Whose Son is He?" And in a moment, without any hesitation, and showing their perfect familiarity with their own Scriptures, and that central hope of their religious thinking, they said, "The son of David." Then immediately He said to them, "How then doth David in the Spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand till I put Thine enemies underneath Thy feet? If David then calleth Him Lord, how is He his son?" They had been bringing problems to Him, this was one for them. It is as though He had said, "You have been questioning Me concerning the payment of tribute. You have brought Me a problem concerning the resurrection. You have attempted to make Me minimize the value of the commandments by overestimating the value of one. Now here is a problem for you out of your own law, about your Messiah. "Whose son is He to be?" "David's," was their reply, and they were perfectly correct so far. "But if He be David's son, how can He be David's Lord?" Yet I should be very sorry to make you feel that Jesus was simply attempting to do with these men what they had been attempting to do with Him. He was not attempting to entrap them. He never played mean tricks with men. He left that wholly and exclusively to His enemies. What, then, is the significance of His question? Here again, as on former occasions, He intended to show them that they did not understand their own Scriptures, that according to them there were wonders concerning the Messiah which they had never comprehended. One thing these men did not understand about their Messiah was that He was to be, not merely man, but God. Because the Messiah was to be after the flesh born of David's line He was son of David, but because He was to be immediately and by the mystery of unfathomable miracle begotten of God, He was also to be David's Lord.

But I have not selected this text that we may follow it in its first application. We are no longer asking a question that has to do with a hope, with an ideal, with an anticipation, with a prophecy. We still ask the question, but it has to do with an achievement, with a history, with a Person. When He said, "What do you think about the Messiah?" they were looking on; but we, as we take our New Testament and read the question which is still a living question - every question He asked has an abiding import in its deepest meaning - we are not looking on, we are looking back. We ask the question tonight, and to us the word "Christ" is not the title of One for Whom the world is waiting. To us the word "Christ" has become the name of One Who has come, and abides, and still is to come! To these men the word "Christ" was the title of some person never seen though long hoped for. To us the word "Christ" is the name and title of a Person seen and known, and with Whose story we are all perfectly familiar.

My business tonight is to ask you quietly, not so much as a congregation as in your individual and personal capacity, to answer this question. Here, everything depends, as everywhere else, upon what a man thinks. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," so said the Preacher of old. Your attitude toward Jesus Christ and your relationship to Him are alike based upon what you think of Him. You may turn that round if you will and state it thus, your attitude toward Christ results from what you think of Christ, and therefore reveals what you think of Christ. Consequently, the answer to this question is not an answer that can be made by the recitation of a creed. The answer to this question is not an answer that can be made by an affirmation or declaration of the lips. The answer to this question you are giving every day. There is a sense in which you can answer this question conclusively tonight, but you are answering it every day and every hour. If I stand in this pulpit tonight and say to you what I think of Christ, I may do it with perfect sincerity, but I cannot convince you that what I say I think is the thing I think. How will you find out what I think of Christ? You can find out only if you know me in my everyday life, in my everyday activity, in what is my constant relation to Christ. A man's thought of Christ creates a man's attitude toward Christ, therefore I repeat, a man's attitude toward Christ reveals what the man's thought of Christ really is. Herein is the importance of this question. In the asking of it we pass beyond the externalities to the internal things of life. In asking this question we come into the very deepest of us. As I ask this question of my own heart, or let me put it in this way, as I let Christ Himself ask me, "What do you think of me?" it is not a mere question of speculation. It is in the last analysis a question that gets deeper down than the things which are upon the surface, to the very springs and fountains of my being. It does matter supremely for today and tomorrow, and the great forever of God, what I think of Him, because all my relation to Him depends upon that, and because what I am going to be in my own life depends entirely upon what I think of Christ. I stay here because if only I can fix your thought upon the importance of the question the battle is half won and the work is half done. All activity is the result of thought. A conception always underlies a deed. Everything you do in any relationship of life is the direct outcome of some underlying thought, some conception. To put it in another way, at the back of all activity is reason, behind every choice that a man makes there is an impelling cause, and that impelling cause is a thought, a conception in the particular realm in which the activity is manifest. I watch what you do. I cannot watch what you think, but I can know what you think from what you do. We may be helped to an understanding of this question by a trivial illustration. It is this: I stand upon the great highway and I watch the men and women passing up and down, and I see one man cross over from one side to the other. It is a manifest action, but before he crossed over he thought of crossing, and I know his prior thought by that simple action. It is a trivial illustration as I said, but lift it as high as you will, watch it in all the realms of human activity, from the lowest to the highest the same principle applies. What you think is manifest in what you do.

Christ makes demands upon every man in that inner realm of his thinking. He comes into my inner life and presents Himself. I look at Him and I think something of Him. I cannot tell you what I think, and you cannot read that inner thought, but if you will watch me through the next hour day, week, month, year, you will know what I think of Him by what you see me do with Him. Mark this mystery of human personality as it is taken into account in this question of Jesus. The final glory of a human being is that of volition, that of choice. I can choose. I can elect. I can decide. Or, to put it back into the simplest word of all, I can will. This is the dignity of human life.

What lies behind the will impelling it? The emotion. What lies behind the emotion? The intelligence. When I face a fact, whatever that fact may be, I face it first with my mind. I know it, and upon my conception of it in my mind, depends my attitude, my emotional attitude toward it. I like or dislike it; I love or hate it; I admire or reject it. That is emotion. Then I will, and what I will depends upon the attitude of emotion after the intelligence has looked and seen and understood. The thinking is the deepest thing. The emotion is moved by the thinking, the will is impulsed by the emotion. What do you think of Christ? If you have answered that question in your deepest heart I will tell you what happens. You will say either, "Because I think this of Him I love Him," or "Because I think this of Him I hate Him." Then the 'will' will act in yielding to Him or refusing Him, in putting a crown upon His brow or sending Him to the cross out of the way. While the business of the messenger of the cross of Christ is that of appealing to your will, behind your 'will' will be your emotional attitude toward Christ, and at the back of that, the deepest foundation of all, will be your thinking concerning Him.

Here, then, is the supreme question of this hour for us. "What think ye of the Christ?" I am going to attempt to form your thinking by bringing to you certain witness concerning Him. It may be very old, and I am sure it is, yet I desire to put this witness before you once again, and ask you very honestly to weigh the evidence, because upon the basis of your thinking your emotion will act, and upon the basis of that movement of the emotion your will ought to act.

Remember this, it is possible for a man to think one thing and to be moved emotionally by that conception, and yet, finally, by act of will to refuse to obey the emotion and intelligence. That is the greatest disaster of human life. That is the tragedy which is happening all around us in such congregations as this. You think of Christ the true thing and your heart goes out in admiration and adoration, and then because of the siren voices which are sounding in your ears, because of some fancied advantage of the moment, you contradict your emotion, and belie your intellect, and refuse Him. All that is your own matter. I cannot help you there, no preacher can. I can take the New Testament in my hand tonight and ask you at least to postpone for a few moments the volition and bring your emotional nature once again to the light of your reason.

Let me stop a moment. You are not afraid of your emotional nature, are you? This prevalent idea that the emotional nature and the intellectual nature are in opposition is absurd. This idea that a man's intellect has nothing to do with his fears is to be laughed out of court by high intelligences. Bring your emotional nature, that godliest wonder of you if you did but know it, to the light of your thinking. For two or three minutes I am going to take you back to three opinions about Christ. I bring these opinions to you hoping and praying that they may help you in your thinking of Him I bring them to you in the deeper hope that by true thinking emotional nature may be moved again toward approbation, admiration, and adoration. I bring them to you in the final hope that you will be honest enough to exercise your will in answer to such enlightened emotion when your thinking has been trained by the witness of Scripture.

I bring you, then, three testimonies concerning Jesus the testimony of God, the testimony of a demon, and the testimony of a man - a voice from the upper world, a voice from the underworld, and a voice from the world about us. The voice of God breaking the silence, "Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." The voice of the underworld, "I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God." The voice of man, sinner as I am a sinner, "Thou art the Christ."

Think of the setting of these testimonies. The voice of God. Jesus was here emerging from seclusion into publicity. For eighteen years I have no record of His doings or sayings but the briefest. At twelve years of age He passes out of sight with these wonderful words written concerning Him, "He went down with them, and He was subject unto them." I see no more of Him until He is about thirty years of age. No human eye has been watching Him carefully enough to be able to give any record of Him. God had been watching Him during the hidden years. God had been watching, not merely the activity of the man in the carpenter's shop, but watching deeper, as God ever watches deeper, the methods, the motives, and then the work and the words. All these have been in the light of heaven's unsullied standard, and as He stood there, so much one of the multitude that men did not recognize Him as separate from them in any sense - "In the midst of you standeth One whom ye know not" - God broke the silence and declared, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." He sees there is no fault in this Man. There has been no failure in all those hidden years of commonplace life. There has been no flaw in the absolute perfection of His humanity. At last, God has found a Man Who has realized the divine ideal and perfected the divine conception. What do you think of Christ? God thinks Him perfect.

Next I have the testimony of a demon from the under-world. It is a very remarkable testimony. "I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God." Remember that evil is not indigenous to the human race, it came from without. When next you quote glibly, "To err is human," remember it is not human to err. Erring humanity is outside the original intention and purpose of God, and outside its own fairest capacity. Do not forget, I pray you, that evil came from without, and do not forget that the whole story of the Bible is the story of attack upon humanity by forces external to itself. For the moment, I am not arguing for an original fall involving all the race, though in some senses I profoundly believe that. I take individual cases, and down through the centuries I see man after man tempted and falling, seduced and sinning. But here is a Man standing on the earth about thirty years of age, and an evil spirit looks into His face and speaks through another human voice and says, "I know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God." "Thou art the Man Who having been tempted has never yielded Thou hast been tempted as other men have at every vulnerable point, but Thou hast resisted." This is the devil's testimony, that this Man has beaten him. Once in the history of the race the underworld of seducing evil has been foiled, beaten, and all unexpectedly, even from the lips of an unclean fallen spirit, comes the confession of the unsullied purity of Jesus. What do you think of Christ? The devils reckon Him holy.

Pass to the last of these three words of testimony. This time it is the voice of a man, a sinning man, a hoping man, a man such as thou art, oh, my brother, consciously mastered by the forces of evil yet still aspiring after the unattainable good. This man might have said as truthfully as his co-Apostle Paul, "To me who would do good, evil is present." This man, like every other man, was a strange mixture, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. That is not a lonely story. There is no man who does not know something of the duality of his consciousness, the beast and the angel, the downward pull and the upward attraction. This man is a man as we are men, and this man is a man who has been looking forward with hope, for we can perfectly understand this confession only as we interpret it from the Hebrew standpoint. In all probability his mother had lulled him to sleep in the days of his infancy with the songs of Zion, and the songs of Zion were the songs of a coming Redeemer. I can quite imagine that she had sung to him Zephaniah's infinite music, "The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty One Who will save: He will rejoice over thee with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." That is the great lullaby of the mother heart of God. As he passed from infancy to boyhood, he had begun to read the Scriptures and then to recite them in the synagogue. He had watched the light which burned amid the darkness of the age in which he lived, the light of the coming Deliverer, Emmanuel, "Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace," titles never perfectly understood but constituting the song of the coming Deliverer. Standing amid the rocky fastnesses of Caesarea Philippi, this man looked into the face of Jesus and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Hope of the centuries, the Deliverer for Whom we have been waiting, the One in Whom there merge the majestic might and the meek mercy of the covenant God of Israel." What do you think of Christ? Looking into His face, one of the men who knew Him most intimately, and had followed Him through those three years of discipleship, made this great confession, upon which everything else was based in the coming years, this great conviction which created all subsequent duty: "Thou art the Christ - the One for Whom men have been sighing and longing and waiting, the Opener of the prison, the Setter at liberty of such as are bound, the One for Whom I wait and for Whom I long." "Thou art the Christ." What do you think of Christ?

You may say to me that the testimony I have deduced is old. You may ask, "How may I depend upon the accuracy of the records from which you have read this testimony?" We are being told today that this is all mythical, that God's silence was never broken by Jordan's banks, that the unutterable, deadly silence of the underworld was never broken by a demon, that this man never said these words with any such rich and spacious meaning as I have indicated. Very well, I am not here tonight to argue with you. At this hour the testimony of God and the testimony of Satan, and of man concerning Christ, is the same, and it has accumulated weight, for nineteen centuries have passed on their way, and there is no century in which one voice has ever been lifted to question the testimony of God and the testimony of the devil. I draw my line there for a moment. A great many have doubted Peter's testimony. The whole Hebrew nation, with the exception of such as have turned to Jesus, would deny Peter's testimony. The testimony which says He is the Christ has been denied, is being denied. No voice has been daring enough yet to deny the testimony which is said to be the testimony of heaven, the testimony which is said to be the testimony of hell. What is that testimony? It is absolutely the same. The man standing upon the earth said another thing which included this thing, but the voice of heaven and that of hell merge into one great anthem which is a declaration of the sinless perfection of Jesus. No one has denied it. Men are denying today the accuracy of the records, but who is there can deny the sinlessness of the ideal presented. Here are four little fragments called Gospels, forgeries, if you will have it so, untrue if you will have it so; but forgeries and untrue if they be, they have given the world a portrait of an absolute perfection which no man has dared to call in question. You must not ask me to believe, however, that a few unknown men have given us a portrait of a Person Whose sinlessness no century has been able to question, and that their writing was fraudulent or untrue. It is an unthinkable proposition, and we are driven to the conclusion that this is an actual Man, a sinless Person, a perfect Person. The testimony of God as recorded here is the testimony of God at this hour through the common consciousness of all upright and sincere and honest souls. Once again, the testimony of the devil as recorded here is the testimony of the devil today through all debauched and degraded and depraved souls. God's speech to men today is speech through humanity, and on the highest, noblest, purest level attests the perfection of this One. The speech of evil comes to men also through humanity today, and evil is still saying, "Let us alone, Thou Jesus of Nazareth. Do not interfere with us." Why? Because evil recognizes the perfection of this ideal. The one thing evil does not want is that those who bear His name should interfere with it. Evil is saying to the Church of Jesus Christ, "Let us alone," because it recognizes that wherever the Christ Spirit obtains that spirit lays hands on evil and drags it into the light for its destruction in order that man may be delivered.

The testimony of the New Testament is in perfect harmony with the testimony of this hour. What, then, do you think of Christ? His absolute Deity is the conviction of the children of God. That is the foundation upon which they build. I am quite willing, however, to take you at first upon what seems to be a lower level. The incarnation is flesh which man might touch, and handle, and find the infinite Word. The purpose of incarnation is that man should begin on the level possible to him, the level of his own nature, and through that gate pass to the divine. What do you think of Christ?

In conclusion, I press upon you this word. If in your heart, in the deepest of you, in that inner holy of holies of your inner life, you say what God said and what evil said, "He is the perfect One," then, I pray you, what is your emotional attitude toward that perfect One? Now, will you follow me closely. Do you hate the perfection? Then it is because at this hour you are following courses of sin as was the devil, who said "Let us alone." Do you love the perfect One in the deepest of you? Then it is because already the constraint of the Spirit of God is upon you, leading you toward the thing that is high and noble and true. Never mind for a moment, man, woman, brother, sister, never mind whether you have ever confessed Him or not. What do you think of Him now, at this moment, in your deepest heart? Are you saying, "He is the perfect One"? As you say it, is your whole love drawn out to Him in admiration and approbation? Now, I pray you in the name of God, for your own soul's sake, exercise that majestic function of your personality, your will, and answer the moving of your heart and the conviction of your mind.

There is another question. It was asked a few weeks later by a man who was attempting to juggle with time and eternity in order to save both. In the strenuous hours of his battle between obedience and expedience, Pilate asked, "What then shall I do unto Jesus which is called Christ?" That is my final question for you. What do you think of Him I cannot invade the shrine of your thinking, but now I ask you, What will you do with Him? I plead with you tonight to answer your deepest conviction. For your own soul's sake, and for the sake of other people about you, stand out and let us see where you are. If you believe He is a fraud fight Him in the name of God and of humanity. If you believe this story is a lie, it is so persistent a lie, so persuasive a lie, so powerful a lie that you have no right to sit idly by. But if in your heart you believe this is true, crown Him, man, dare to crown Him. Oh, for five minutes of honesty and courage to place the crown upon His brow! If this is the truth, the truth is so persistent, so persuasive, so powerful, that you ought to help spread it, and you cannot until you yourself have crowned this Christ.

I beseech you, then, tonight, be definite. The claims of this Christ are such that every man ought to be busy fighting Him, or fighting for Him. I love Paul for this reason, he knew there was no middle course. It must either be haling to prison and death the men who professed the heresy, or pressing on forever toward the regions beyond to tell the story of the Christ. There is no middle place for Jesus in heaven, or earth, or hell, or your heart. It must be either the cross or the throne. Which shall it be? I pray God tonight that those of you who know Him to be true may crown Him.