**VOLUME 1; CHAPTER 24 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE PURPOSE OF THE ADVENT: To Take Away Sins by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Ye know that He was manifested to take away sins; and in Him is no sin.*

*1 John 3:5*

LAST SUNDAY EVENING WE SPOKE ON A VERSE IN THIS SAME chapter, "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." If the works of the devil are death, darkness, hatred and lawlessness, the one word "sin" expresses all these things for us. Sin is due to death and issues in death, that is, death as separation from the life of God, Sin is due to darkness - the carnal mind which cannot see the things of God - issues in yet denser darkness. Sin is due to hatred - the man continuing in sin continues a carnal man, not knowing God, is at enmity with God - and issues in yet profounder hatred. Or, comprehensively, it may be stated that sin - is due to lawlessness as a principle expressing itself in lawlessness as an activity. Thus in our text we get nearer to an understanding of the purpose of the Advent as it touches our human need.

The simple and all inclusive theme which the text suggests is, first, that the purpose of the Advent was the taking away of sins, and secondly, that the process of accomplishment is that of the Advent.

Let us first, then, take the purpose as declared. "He was manifested to take away sins." In order to understand it we must take the terms in all their simplicity, and be very careful to find what they really mean. "To take away sins." What is intended by this word "sins"? The sum total of all lawless acts - the thought is incomprehensible as to numbers. I think I shall carry you with me when I say that there is no human being here who would care to have the task allotted to him of counting up his own lawless acts. If the thought is indeed incomprehensible as to numbers let us remember that in the midst of that which overwhelms us in our thinking are our own actual sins. The actual sins which we cannot enumerate are nevertheless included in this declaration of purpose. For a moment postpone the activity of your mind which suggests difficulties as to how anyone can do such a thing as this; leave out of the question the whole thought of process and simply face the avowed declaration of purpose "manifested to take away sins." "Sins," missings of the mark, whether wilful missings of the mark or missings of the mark through ignorance, does not at present matter. The word includes all those thoughts and words and deeds in which we have missed the mark of the Divine purpose and the Divine ideal: those things which stand between man and God, so that man becomes afraid of God because he recognizes that in his sins he has violated the Divine purpose and broken the Divine law; those things which stand between man and his fellow man, so that man becomes afraid of his fellow man, knowing that he has wronged him in some direction; those things which stand between man and his own success. Call them failures if you will, call them by any name you please, so that you understand the intention of the word.

When John the Baptist looked upon Jesus, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." There he used the same word but in the singular. There he referred to the principle manifesting itself in lawless acts. He used a word which includes all sins, and therefore is, in some senses, the profounder word, and yet in our text we understand the writer to mean that the Advent was in order to the taking away of all acts of lawlessness springing out of the attitude of lawlessness, of all practice of wrong-doing issuing from the principle of wrong life.

Let us now examine the phrase "to take away." This is a statement of result, not a declaration of process. There is a marginal reading which says "to bear sins," and in the Gospel of John there is also a marginal reading, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away," or "beareth the sin of the world." These words are not incorrect if we are very careful to understand what they really mean. The Hebrew equivalent of the word "taketh away" is found in that familiar story of the scapegoat. It was provided that this animal should be driven away to the wilderness, "unto a solitary land." This suggested that sins should be lifted from one and placed upon another, and by that one carried away out of experience, out of consciousness. That is the simple signification of this declaration, "He was manifested to bear sins." If you take this word and track it back - not always a safe process, but here, I think, a helpful one - to its root meaning, it is, "He was manifested to lift sins." He was manifested in order that He might come into relationship with human life, and passing underneath the load of human sins lift them, take them away.

Either this is the most glorious Gospel that man has ever heard, or the greatest delusion to which man has ever listened. I care nothing, for the moment, about your theological tendencies, or convictions, or prejudices - you may choose your own word! What I do care about is that there is in the heart of every man and woman in this house a consciousness of sin. No one of us would be prepared to say, "I have never deliberately done the thing I knew I ought not to do." That is consciousness of sin. You may attempt to excuse it. You may even say that it does not much matter, that the sin was the result of some infirmity of the flesh. You may even go so far as to say that the fact that you have repeatedly done the thing you knew was not the right thing was simply part of a process in which you were learning not to do it. So ingenious is the human heart that it will attempt to excuse itself by all kinds of fallacies. I do not believe there is a single person here who will deny the charge - if you deny the arguments I care nothing.

I will go one step further, and declare that in the deepest of you, in the best of you - again notwithstanding theological opinions, or prejudices, or convictions, as you choose - the one thing you hate most of all in your past is your own sin. You may affect to excuse it. You may be ready to argue with me as to the reason for it and the issue of it, but, if you could, you would undo it. If you could make it not to be, there are some here tonight who would be ready to sacrifice right hand or right eye. You may profess to have turned your back upon these evangelical truths which we declare, and yet you know you have sinned, and you wish you had not.

Passing for a moment from that outer fringe of men and women, who are somewhat careless about the matter, to the souls who are in agony concerning it - to the men and women who know their sin and loathe it, to the men and women who carry the consciousness of wrongs done in past years as a perpetual burden upon their souls - and there are many of them who have never confessed it, who have never spoken to another soul about it, but nevertheless hate the memory of their own sins - I say that to such, a declaration like this is the cruellest word or the kindest that can be uttered. Cruel if it be false, kind indeed with the kindness of the heart of God if it be true. If somewhere, and somewhen, and somehow, in human history One was manifested to lift sins and bear them away; if by some means I can find some just and honourable peace of conscience notwithstanding sins and sin, then have I found blessing greater than any man can give me. I dismiss for the moment for the sake of my argument not only the outer fringe but also the inner circle of burdened souls, and I speak as a witness. Turning aside from advocacy, I bear testimony that if it be true, that He was manifested somehow, in some deep mystery that I shall never perfectly understand, in order to get beneath my sins, my sins, my thought of impurity, my words of bitterness, my unholy deeds, and lift them and bear them away - that is the one Evangel I long for more than all. More valuable to me, a sinner, than anything else that He can do for me is this.

In order that this great purpose of the Advent, as declared, may be more powerfully and better understood, let us reverently turn to the indication of the process which we have in this particular text, for while the supreme value of the text last week was its unveiling of the purpose of the Advent in victory gained over the enemy of the race, I am inclined to think that the supreme value of this declaration of purpose is its indication of process. "He was manifested to take away sins." Notice the Person referred to. "He was manifested." Who was the Person? "Ye know," says John, "that He was manifested." The reference certainly is to some One. If you go back over this chapter you come presently to the statement, "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him." Whom? The same Person is being referred to as in my text. I go back a little further and read, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." Whom? I go yet further back, into the preceding chapter, and trace my way until I come to the twenty-third verse, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." You cannot read the context of this text without seeing that, in the thinking of the man who wrote it, there is identity between God and the Son. It is perfectly evident that John here, as always, has his eye fixed upon the Man of Nazareth, and yet it is equally evident that he is looking through Jesus of Nazareth to God. That is the meaning of his word "manifested" here. It is the Word made flesh. It is flesh, but it is the Word. It is something that John had appreciated by the senses, and yet it is Someone Whom John knew pre-eminently by the Spirit. When he says in this same letter, "Everyone that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure," he means hope set on God finally, on the Son by manifestation. So that the Person who is presented to our view here is that One Who in human life was the manifestation of God Himself. "He was manifested." He was before manifestation. Who was He before manifestation? Because Whosoever He was before manifestation, He was in manifestation; and Whosoever He was before manifestation and in manifestation, He was in the taking away of sins.

Notice that after John makes the affirmation, "He was manifested to take away sins," he adds this great word, "In Him is no sin." Will you let me put that into another form? Let me render the actual word of John in slightly different terms, "Missing of the mark was not in Him." The One in Whom there was no missing of the mark was manifested for the express purpose of lifting, bearing away, making not to be, the missings of the mark of others. Mark that declaration of the eternal and essential sinlessness of the One Who came. We can interpret the language of John only by the teaching of John; so without apology I take you back again to the introductory word in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." No missing of the mark was in Him. He was sinless through all the unmeasured and immeasurable ages. "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" - all created things springing from the energy of that mysterious One in Whom was no sin, in Whom was no missing of the mark in the mystery of creation. "All things have been made by Him"; that is continuity of activity in creation. In Him, the Upholder as well as the Creator, there was no missing of the mark. Presently "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." In Him was no missing of the mark. Presently we see Him yielding Himself to death, and even there, in the hour of His death, there was no missing of the mark. Through resurrection, by way of ascension at this moment at the centre of the universe of God, the same Person, and in Him is no missing of the mark.

"He was manifested" - and in the name of God I charge you do not read into the "He" anything small or narrow. If you do you will at once be driven into the place of having to deny the declaration that He can take away sins. If He was man as I am man merely, then though He be perfect and sinless He cannot take away sins. If into the "He" you will read all that John evidently meant according to the testimony of his own writing, from which alone I have been making my quotations - if you will read into it all John meant, "He," the Word made flesh, in Whom was no missing of the mark before or after He was manifested to take away sins, you begin to see something of the stupendous idea, and something of the possibility at least of believing the declaration that "He was manifested to take away sins."

Consider the manifestation and sins, as to man. The terms of the promise of the Advent were, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins." From hell? Certainly, but I pray you remember, only by saving them from their sins. From the punishment of sin, because from sin itself. That was the great word, "He shall save His people from their sins." When the songs to which the shepherds listened were heard, what said they? "There is born to you this day ... a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The promise of the Advent was that of the coming of One to lift sins.

During the probation of the long years this Person was meeting all the forces of human temptation and overcoming them. I think we may accurately and reverently speak of the long years of probation as testing years, years in which there was being wrought out into human visibility the fact of the sinlessness of the Son of God.

During His life and ministry what were the words of Jesus? Words revealing the meaning of sin. Words calculated to rebuke sin and to bring men away from sin. What were the works of Jesus? By works I mean miracles and signs and wonders. They were chiefly works overtaking the results of sin. You tell me that the miracles of Jesus were supernatural. I tell you they were always restorations of the unnatural to natural positions. When He cured disease it was not a supernatural thing, but the restoration of man to the normal physical condition. He was taking away the results of sin. So all along the line of His miracles of healing and His calling back out of death He manifested His power. I see Him forevermore in grips with sin, showing men tentatively, not yet finally, how He had power to lift sins. Once, in the course of a miraculous revelation of that wonderful power, He said to a man, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and He was immediately criticized. What was His answer to the criticism? "What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins are for-given thee; or to say, Arise and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch." You will sadly misread that story if you think He did some piece of jugglery in the physical to convince them of His power in the moral. There was most intimate connection between the man's palsy and his sin, and Jesus demonstrated His power to lift sin by setting the man free from the result of sin and sending him on his way in sight of the men who had heard Him. These men who criticized had no more to say. They criticized Him for pretending to forgive sins, but when they saw the man raised they had enough simple mental intelligence to see the connection between the thing said and the thing done.

I come now to the final thing in this manifestation, the process of the death, for in that solemn and lonely and unapproachable hour of the cross I come to the final fulfilment of the word of the herald on the banks of the Jordan, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." It is not open for us in these days to attempt to interpret that word of John by the day in which we live, or by the conditions in which we live. We can interpret that word of John only by the simple facts in the midst of which he stood when he uttered it. Remember that phrase, "the Lamb of God," could have but one significance in the ears of the men who heard it. This was the voice of a Hebrew prophet speaking to Hebrews, and when he spoke of the Lamb taking away sins, they had no alternative other than to think of the long line of symbolical sacrifices which had been offered, and which they had been taught shadowed forth some great mystery of Divine purpose whereby sin might be dealt with. When John stood there in the midst of the great ethical revival which came under his preaching, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," we must explain his language, not by any poetical license of this age, but by the deep religious intention of the man who uttered it, and by the religious understanding of the people who listened to it. In all probability, when John uttered that word there were men from all parts crowding up to the Passover Feast, taking with them lambs of sacrifice in great numbers. In the midst of all the ritual, these men were arrested by the voice of John crying, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." So in the hour of death you have the ultimate meaning of that great word. Whereas by manifestation, from first to last, He is forevermore dealing with sins and with sin, lifting, correcting, arresting, by gleams of light suggesting to men the deepest meaning of His mission, it is when I come to the hour of His unutterable loneliness and deep darkness and passion baptism that I have that part of the manifestation in which I see as nowhere else and as never before the meaning of my text, "He was manifested to take away sins."

Reverently let us take one step further. The manifestation and sins - as to God. Let me take you back simply to this affirmation that the manifested One was God. If that be once seen then we shall forevermore look back upon that Man of Nazareth in His birth, His life, His cross, as but a manifestation. The whole fact cannot be seen, but the whole fact is brought to the point of visibility by the way of incarnation. If indeed this One be very God manifested, then remember this, the whole measure of humanity is in Him and infinitely more than the whole measure of humanity. Do not forget the last part of my assertion. If you take the first part only - that the whole measure of humanity is in Him, you may imagine that humanity is the measure of Deity. I did not say so. But the whole measure of humanity is in Him. It is true of the whole race, from its beginning to its last, that "in Him we live and move and have our being"; that we are as to first creation and essential meaning of life, "the offspring of God." The whole race is from God and of God, and I repeat, the measure of humanity is in Him, but He is infinitely more; it is also true that the measure of all created things is in Him - and infinitely more. Beyond the utmost bound of creation, God is. All creation, heaven and earth, suns and stars and systems, angels and archangels, principalities and powers, the hierarchies of whom we hear but cannot perfectly explain their nature or their order, all these are in Him; but He is infinitely beyond them all. They are but the dust in the balances which His right hand holds, and it is an arrogant and ignorant assumption to declare that humanity is the sum of God. All humanity is within the compass of His upholding might. No man can escape from God. In some deep sense of the word, no man can live a God-less life. "If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me." Humanity is not the measure of Deity; but the measure of humanity is in Deity. "He," the immeasurable, "was manifested to take away sins."

I begin to wonder. In amazement I begin to believe in the possibility of lifting the burden of my sin. The cross, like everything else, was manifestation. In the cross of Jesus there was the working out into visibility of eternal things. Love and light were wrought out into visibility by the cross. Love and light in the presence of the conditions of sin became sorrow - and became joy! In the cross I see the sorrow of God, and in the cross I see the joy of God, for "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." In the cross I see the love of God working out through passion and power for the redemption of man. In the cross I see the light of God refusing to make any terms with iniquity and sin and evil. The cross is the historic revelation of the abiding facts within the heart of God. The measure of the cross is God. If all the measure of humanity is in God and He is more, and the measure of the cross is God, then the measure of the cross wraps humanity about so that no one individual is outside its meaning and its power. When next you ask, or hear anyone else ask, "How can one man bear the sin of the race?" say, "He cannot, and he never did." One man cannot bear the sin of another man, to say nothing of the sin of the race. He Who was manifested is God. He can gather into His eternal life all the race as to its sorrow and its sin, and bear them.

Yet remember this - I would state this with great carefulness - it was not by the eternal facts that sins were taken away, but by the manifestation of those facts. My text does not affirm, and there is no text that begins to affirm, that He Who was manifested takes away sins. There is a sense in which that is true; but this is the truth, "He was manifested to take away sins." It required the "He," the Person manifested, but it required His manifestation. Most reverently do I declare that the passion revealed in the cross was indeed the passion of God; but the passion of God became dynamic in human life when it became manifest through human form in the perfection of a life and the mystery of a death. Man's will is the factor always to be dealt with, and whereas the sin of man was gathered into the consciousness of God and created the sorrow of God from the very beginning, it is only when that fact of the sorrow of Godhead is wrought out into visibility by manifestation that the will of man can ever be captured - or ever constrained to the position of trust and obedience which is necessary for his practical and effectual restoration to righteousness. Wherever man thus yields himself, trusting - that is the condition - his sins are taken away - lifted.

If it be declared that God might have wrought this selfsame deliverance without suffering, our answer is that the man who says so knows nothing about sin. Sin and suffering are coexistent. The moment there is sin there is suffering. The moment there are sin and suffering in a human being it is in God multiplied. "The Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world." From the moment when man in his sin became a child of sorrow, the sorrow was most keenly felt in heaven.

Yet I would that my last word should be a word specifically and especially to the man who is burdened with a sense of sin. I ask you to contemplate the Person manifested. There is not one of us here of whom it is not true that we live and move and have our being in God. God is infinitely more than I am, infinitely more than this whole congregation, infinitely more than the whole human race, from its beginning to its last. If infinitely more, then all my life is in Him. If in the mystery of incarnation there became manifest the truth that He, God, lifted sin, then I can trust. If that be the cleaving of the rock, then I can say as never before,

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,

Let me hide myself in Thee."

He was manifested and by that manifestation I see wrought out the infinite truth of the passion of God, what we speak of - and whether our language be the best or not, who shall tell? - as the Atonement. All the mystery of Deity was rendered visible by the Advent, the Incarnation, the Manifestation, so I know that here and now, as nineteen centuries ago on the rough Roman gibbet, as surely as God is God, here and now are the living values of the thing of which men sang and of which we still sing. Here and now I trust, and here and now I know that my sins are lifted, carried, borne away.