**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 12 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**JESUS AND SINNERS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*This man receiveth sinners.*

*Luke 15:2*

THESE WORDS WERE UTTERED IN CONDEMNATION OF JESUS of Nazareth, and yet to us they contain an inclusive statement of the truth concerning Him as the Saviour of men. It is a very interesting thing to notice in the reading of the Gospel stories how the wonderful personality of Jesus transmuted things spoken in condemnation into declarations of commendation. Indeed, it may fairly be said that one might gather from these Gospel narratives a selection of passages which would constitute a fifth Gospel, and we might call that the Gospel according to the enemies of Jesus Christ. They said of Him, with disdain in every tone of their question, "Is not this the carpenter?" By which they meant, "We know all about Him. He is one of us. Who is He that He should set Himself up as a teacher in the Synagogue at Nazareth, where He has wrought at the carpenter's shop?" Today we are asking the same question about Him, in another tone, knowing that by the lowliness of the long years in the carpenter's shop He came into close comradeship with all toilers forevermore. They said of Him upon one occasion, "By Beelzebub the prince of the devils casteth He out devils," and thus came very near to the confines of unpardonable sin. Yet even that has come to be in some senses a truth, for He has overcome the prince of ill, and compels him into the service of perfecting the saints by testing. Said they of Him in that dark and overwhelming hour of His supreme agony, flinging the cruel taunt into His face when He was all alone in His sorrow, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." In that sentence, all unknowingly, they uttered the deepest truth about that death. Had He saved Himself He never could have saved others; but because He could not save Himself He is able still to save all who come unto God by Him. Among all these statements none is more wonderful, because none is more simple, than this statement of my text, "This Man receiveth sinners."

Let us endeavour to understand this criticism. First of all, I pray you mark that it is a criticism. The first word of this chapter links it, and indeed the great and glorious threefold parable which follows, with all that immediately preceded. Jesus had been saying some strange and hard things in the listening ears of the multitude. I do not hesitate to say that they were strange and hard things. I do not hesitate to declare that many of you who are children of God never read these words without somehow, in the deepest of you, half wishing He had never said them. I do not defend the wish. I know that when my heart rises in half rebellion against some of the words I have read tonight it is because of some evil thing that abides in my life. Even today, though nineteen centuries have demonstrated the imperial dignity of the Christ, and though this whole worshiping congregation is prepared to acknowledge His Lordship, still, when He stands confronting us and says to us that unless we hate father, mother, wife, brethren, sisters, and our own lives, we cannot be His disciples, we are startled, we are afraid, we are half inclined to draw back from every attempt at discipleship. Yet Luke tells us of that strange thing, which has been repeated ever since, and is being repeated still, that when Christ said His severest things the greatest sinners crowded to Him. Severity which on other lips would have repelled, attracted, for there was something besides severity in the tone of His voice, something in Himself which, in spite of the fierce scorching fire of His severest word, drew men to Him. "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto Him for to hear Him." The Pharisees observed that when these people came to Him He received them, He received them in friendliness, He received them in the very spirit of comradeship. He did not stand aloof from them notwithstanding that He had said such severe things. He was even prepared to sit at the table and eat with them. "And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." This exclamation of criticism was a revelation of their sense that His action was not in keeping with His teaching. The severity of His ethic did not seem to harmonize, as they looked at Him, with the looseness of His friendship for these men.

I go one step further, and ask you to notice that what they said of Him was perfectly true, had He been such as they were. They meant to say that no man can take fire into his bosom and not be burned. They meant what some of you remember being told when you were children, You cannot touch pitch without being defiled. They meant, if this man becomes the friend, the comrade, the companion of sinners, he will be contaminated. I think there was a tone of genuine disappointment in their voices. They had hoped great things of Jesus - and that is no piece of imagination, for you cannot read these stories without seeing that at the commencement of His public ministry the rulers, the men in authority, the teachers, were interested in Him, followed Him, listened to Him, invited Him to their houses. As they watched Him receiving sinners they said to themselves, This man is going to spoil His career. He is going to cut the nerve of His influence. They were quite right, if He had been such as they were. There is a young man in this house, perchance, who quite recently came up to the great city. Show me his friends and I will tell you what he will be in half a dozen years. If he is making his first friendships with sinful men, he will be spoiled, ruined by his comradeships. He cannot escape it. I should say with keen and bitter disappointment of some young man, full of promise, who made his companionships among sinful men, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Yet nineteen centuries have passed away and a Christian congregation gathered together in the heart of this city hears this text, and to all such as know Christ it sings the one anthem that is worth singing. "This Man receiveth sinners." How are we to account for this fact?

The text is a great text, because the Person concerning Whom the statement was made was a great Person. The text has become an Evangel because of the unique personality of the Man at Whom the Pharisees were looking. They did not understand Him. They did not know how He stood at infinite distance from themselves and from all other men. They did not understand how when He received men to Himself, instead of being contaminated by the pollution which He received, the men were uplifted and healed by the purity which He communicated. It is by that distance which is yet nearness, and by that nearness which is yet distance that my text is made a great Evangel.

Let us, then, consider two matters: first, the Person referred to, and then the pronouncement.

Reverently, then, let us attempt first to see "This Man." I am going to speak of four things about Him; of two in which He is in close association with all of us, and of two in which He stands at infinite distance from us. Before naming these, let me say it is not by the things of identification that I am helped or saved, but by the things of separation is it made possible that I may come near to Him and find all the virtue and healing of His life made mine.

First, the two things in which He is identified with me; He was a man of probation, and He was a man of sorrows. Then the two things in which He stands far away from me. He was a man of victory, and He was a Man of atonement. If I find Him near to me as I think of the first two, I shall yet by the contemplation of what He was in these first two respects discover how unlike Him I am; the very likeness will reveal the unlikeness, the very nearness will create a sense of infinite distance. It is when I see Him in the twofold fact of His separation and distance that I shall begin to hope that I may indeed come into a fellowship with Him which is age-abiding.

A Man of probation. He was a Man Who lived His human life upon the same level on which I have to live mine. He was a Man of toil. He was a Man of temptation. He was a Man of trust.

He was a Man of toil. This is an old story, full of beauty, yet it is well for us to think of it for a passing moment. I do not think that in this particular Jesus Christ entered into limitation or suffering. Toil is the proper lot of humanity. God did not intend that any human being should live apart from toil. I know there are very many people who read the Genesis story, and imagine that man commenced to work after the fall. But that is not the Genesis story. The story of Genesis is that God put unfallen man into the garden "to dress it and to keep it." There are some very curious ideas about the garden of Eden. Half the things which men attack in Genesis are not in it. Some people have an idea that the garden of Eden was a garden something like those which we see as we travel through this beautiful land of ours, with flower bed carefully laid out. I do not so read my Bible. I think the garden of Eden was a mass of potentiality, waiting for development. The Lord God planted it, filled it with possibilities, and man was put into it to bring out what God had put in. It was a garden waiting for the touch of man's hand in order that there might come out of its russet commonplace the flaming beauties of all the flowers. Man was made for toil This Man was a toiler. He knew what it was to have to face a day's work in order to win a day's bread. God have mercy upon the man who does not know what that is! I care not whether it be with sweat of brain or brawn, every man should earn his living, or cease to live. I want that some of the comfort of the contemplation should come to you. Some of you are almost sighing as you think of tomorrow morning. Remember this Man is your comrade tomorrow morning, just as much as He is your Lord here and now. When tomorrow morning comes, if your calling is an honourable and holy calling, you are in fellowship with Jesus just as much as you are in the holy place.

A Man of temptation, He felt the force of temptation keenly because of the perfection of His humanity. I think that is a statement with which some of you, at first, will be inclined to join issue. There is a popular conception in the world that the proportion in which a man is morally weak is the proportion in which he feels temptation. Not so. It is the strong man, physically, mentally, spiritually, morally, who feels the full force of temptation. A man weakened in his moral fiber by sin is weakened in his sensitiveness in the presence of temptation. No man has had anything to do with young life as it turns to Jesus Christ without having had this question asked, "How is it that since I gave myself to Christ and began the Christian life I have been more tempted than I was before?" The answer is, You are not more tempted, but the very life of Christ in you, strengthening you, makes you keen, quick, sensitive to the force of temptation. In the perfect man temptation has a larger area of attack. The Perfect Man, "This Man" was a Man Who felt temptation as it came against Him through every vulnerable point of His being. The story of the temptation in the wilderness is not merely the story of one hour, one event, one lonely incident, it is a story which reveals the lines along which temptation always comes. Temptation is first directed against the physical, then against the spiritual, then against the vocational, and it has no other avenue of approach. In proportion as a man is physically strong he feels the force of material temptation. In proportion as a man is strong spiritually he feels the appeal of the spiritual assault. In proportion as a man sees clearly his vocation, and earnestly desires to fulfil it, he feels keenly the suggestion that he should reach it by a short cut and an easy road. He was a Man of temptation, and there is no temptation that assaults my soul but that He felt its force.

A Man of trust, He lived a life of dependence upon the highest. He received His messages, His words, and His life from Another. He was a Man Who lived so far the limited life of humanity that He could say, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him. ... I do nothing of Myself, but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things." He was a Man of probation, living upon my level, toiling, tempted, trusting.

Yet in some senses He comes nearer to us when I say that He was a Man of sorrows, entering into all the experiences of human suffering. The sorrow of poverty, the sorrow of loneliness, and that most terrible sorrow of all to sensitive souls, the sorrow born of sympathy.

The sorrow of poverty. I know there are those who very glibly tell us that poverty is a blessing. Who said so? Whoever said so, it is a lie. No one ever said so, it seems to me, save such as live apart from poverty, and contemplate it from a distance. I know perfectly well that there have been many souls who have been poor in this world's goods, who have recognized that God was overruling the pain of poverty for the making of character. That is quite another matter. He transmutes the base into the pure, but poverty is no part of God's provision for the race; it is a part of man's mismanagement of what God has provided for the race. This Man was poor. You can tell all the story of His human poverty in a very few sentences, tragic sentences. Chapter one, There was no room for Him in the inn. Chapter two, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man bath not where to lay His head." Chapter three, What shall we do with Him? He is dead. Bury Him in a charity grave in a rich man's garden. Do not imagine that so keenly sensitive and fine a soul as that of Christ was not conscious of the limitations of poverty.

But there was the sorrow of loneliness. Think how lonely a Man He was. No one ever understood Him. The rulers were interested in Him, but they never understood Him, and at last became His enemies, hunting Him to death, His mother never understood Him. I for one am inclined to pause in the presence of that and think, for if a man's mother does not understand him, he is generally unutterably alone. I think we of the Protestant Church have made a great mistake in our neglect of the virgin mother. I believe that in very deed and truth she is to be held in high and holy honour. We will not worship her. That is sacrilege and blasphemy, but we will hold her in high honour, highly favoured amongst women. Yet she never understood Him. Her misunderstanding was the misunderstanding of love, but it was misunderstanding. The souls who came into closest touch with Him were the souls of such as did the will of God first, last and always. Did they understand Him? "They all forsook Him, and fled." His pathway became more and more lonely, until at last there was no eye to pity, no heart to sympathize. Moreover, He was a Man of sorrows in that final and most terrible way, of the keen sensitiveness of soul and spirit which gathers all the pain of others into its consciousness. I am now saying something in which perhaps you do not follow me or agree with me at once. I make my appeal to the fathers and mothers. Tell me, when do you suffer most, when you yourself are in physical pain, or when your child is in physical pain? If you have ever stood by the side of some suffering loved one, you have felt honestly that you could have sung for joy if you could have gathered that sorrow and pain into your own life and freed your loved one from it. Forgive that low level of illustration, and come into the presence of this Man of spirit so perfectly poised and so full of sensitiveness that every tear fell upon His heart like a storm. Among all the stories there is nothing which so beautifully illustrates this as the story of how He wept in the presence of the tears of Mary. There is something about that story very difficult of interpretation. Commentators - I make my apology to them - have been busy trying to account for the tears of Jesus. Read the story simply, and you will know why He wept. He wept out of sympathy with Mary's tears. But, you say, that can never be. He knew that within an hour he would unlock the tomb and give her brother back to her. There, again, you are measuring Him by yourself, as the Pharisees did. I am not criticizing you. I would say the same thing. If you were in great sorrow and I came to see you in your home, and knew that by some act I could remove the cause of your sorrow, I really do not believe I could weep with you in your sorrow, I should be so eager to bring you the joy. He will give to you, His trusting ones, heaven presently, but He weeps with you today in the midst of your sorrow. He knows perfectly well that out of all the darkness He is bringing light, but in every pang that rends the heart the Man of sorrows has His part. We read that little phrase, "He was moved with compassion," very carelessly. His whole inner life was shaken and swept as by a tempest in the presence of human need and human sorrow. What the ancient prophet said of Him long ago was literally true, "His visage was so marred more than any man." He was a Man of sorrows.

As we have contemplated the things of His nearness to us we have all been conscious that we are away from Him. A Man of toil. How have we failed in our toil! A Man of temptation. How have we yielded thereto! A Man of trust. How have we trembled in trust! A Man of sorrows! Oh, heart of mine, was there ever sorrow like His? He is near to me, and yet away from me in the very facts of His nearness.

So I come necessarily to other things. He was a Man of victory. There is the difference. I have already hinted at it, now I declare it. Along this way of the probationary life in the midst of these sorrows that have come to me, I have failed. I have failed in my toil and done it meanly, ah me, how often! I have failed in temptation, yielding to the seducing allurements of evil. I have failed in trust. But this Man never failed. This Man never failed in toil. When He made yokes in which the cattle should plough the plains of Bethshan, He made them perfectly. When He, the house-builder, erected a house upon the rock He knew, that which Michael Angelo learned from Him, that angels of God saw the hidden things, and they were perfectly wrought. I have failed: He never. In temptation He refused every seduction of evil and trod the lonely way of truth and uprightness, even though it was a way of suffering and of shame. He was a Man of victory. Victory over circumstances, victory over sin, victory over sorrow, victory over all the forces that were against Him, moving in quiet, kingly dignity against all difficulties, until at last He stood in the midst of a group of men and said to them, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth." Here is the difference between this Man and myself. It is not the ultimate difference. It is not the final distinction, it is only the first. but it is so great as to make me know that I am other than He, and He is other than I. He is the one Man in all the centuries Who by common consent of the Church, and of the world, so far as it has thought, is the sinless, Perfect, victorious Man, climbing to the throne of the mightiest, not upon the policy of cunning, or the force of arms, but upon integrity of character and perfection of ideal in thinking and speaking and doing. How far am I away from Him!

Finally, this Man became the Man of atonement, the One Who was able at last to ransom His brother, the One Who by dying entered into an experience which had no true place in the story of His life save as in it He was dying in the stead of another. This Man, and I cannot so end the story: I feel as you feel that when I approach this final fact I am in the presence of something which demands a new term, a new explanation. A Man, yea, verily, a Man of probation and of sorrow, yet a Man of victory, and of such victory that I am compelled to say that He is infinitely other than Man. A Man through Whose heart it is possible for God to outwork into human vision infinite and eternal things. A Man Who has become the perfect instrument of the Divine speech and of the Divine working, and of the Divine heart of Love. A Man into the presence of Whose death I come, and say with the old Roman centurion who saw more that day than he had ever seen before, "Truly this was the Son of God." This Man, ye Pharisees of old, ye have mis-measured Him, and ye philosophers of today, ye do not know Him. This Man, so near that I can touch His warm flesh and call Him Brother, so far that I cannot see the ultimate height of Him, or encompass the full blaze of His glory. This Man, if we see Him thus, of the race and apart from it; kin of it and King of it, near to it and far away from it, immanent, transcendent, then we shall hear the Gospel. "This Man receiveth sinners."

Now for a closing word concerning the pronouncement. What is this that they said of Him? Let us dismiss them. We have no more to do with the Pharisees. What is this that we are saying of Him? What is this the Spirit of God says of Him? What is this the Bride says of Him? "This Man receiveth sinners." "Receiveth" here means infinitely more than we sometimes mean by the word. I shall do no violence to the thought behind this word "receiveth" if I translate it thus, This man receiveth unto Himself sinners. This Man does not patronize sinners. He takes them into His comradeship, makes familiar friends of them, takes them to His heart. That is the Gospel. He is not high seated on a throne bending down to you and offering you pardon if you will kiss His sceptre. He is by you in the pew, He is close to you in your sin, and He will take you as you are, with the poison and the virus within you, put His arms about you, and press you into comradeship.

These men said, If He does this He will be contaminated. What was the fact? He received them, and never a dimming of His white purity, but rather an ending of their scarlet corruption. He took to Himself Mary of Magdala, possessed of seven devils, embittered, hot, worldly, evil in her temper and disposition, and she became the lone watcher through the night of His burial, the first preacher of the resurrection. Down in the quiet village outside Bedford is a tinker, and he swears and blasphemes so that even the low and the lewd are ashamed of him. "This Man receiveth sinners." He received this tinker, wrapped him to His heart, communicated to him His own purity, opened his eyes, and he became the celestial dreamer.

Those are far distant examples, and if I stay in the Gospel story you feel the distance. You are not sure even about Bunyan. Then there are witnesses here tonight. Here is a man who was a low-down, lost drunkard in New York streets, and was brought into the old Hippodrome in the days when Dwight Lyman Moody was preaching this Gospel there. "This Man" took him to His heart and the passion for drink died and the man was remade. Let the preacher tell his story, at least in such sentences as he may utter. "This Man" has received him also. Not yet is the work all done. Much is there yet to do, but I bear witness in your presence tonight that the tides of His life have quenched fires of passion, stilled tempests of upheaval, and are leading me out toward the ultimate. "This Man receiveth sinners." This is the Evangel. This is the Gospel. There is none other.

You never can be such as He in that respect. You never can be a Saviour, receiving other men, communicating your purity. You can share the fellowship of His sufferings, not as you bring men to yourself to save them, but as you lead them to Him that He may save them. "This Man receiveth sinners."