**VOLUME 2; CHAPTER 18 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE WORD BECAME FLESH by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us .. . full of grace and truth.*

*John 1:14*

WHATEVER, IN THE COMPLEXITY OF PRESENT-DAY THOUGHT, may be our view of the method of the advent, it is impossible to deny that nigh two thousand years ago that happened which has absolutely and completely revolutionized human thinking and human life. The student of history is always interested in tracing great streams to their sources. The rise and fall of dynasties, great discoveries, revolutions, all of them are important and interesting, and yet in some senses all these things are related directly or indirectly to the one event described in the mystic language of this text.

In this advent of Jesus there was both a crowning and a comprehension of all that was excellent in the past; and the conception and initiation of all the ideas and movements which are lifting humanity ever nearer to God.

We come to this statement of John the mystic in order to consider what it teaches concerning the fact of the advent, concerning the revelation resulting from that fact, and, finally, concerning the values resulting from the revelation.

In order that we may see the simplicity of the statement, I have omitted the parenthesis. It is important. It states a truth concerning the Person Whom we are to consider from a slightly different standpoint. It lies in the heart of this verse by way of explanation and exposition, and yet it may be omitted without doing any violence to the thought. We consider, then, this simple and sublime statement, "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us ... full of grace and truth."

The statement of fact which this verse contains can be understood only as we remember that in this prologue of the Gospel of John the verse in which the text occurs is intimately connected by way of declaration with the first verse of the chapter. The intervening verses constitute a parenthesis. Consequently we bring these two verses together in order that we may understand the facts declared in our text. I will read them in intimate connection. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us ... full of grace and truth." This is one continuous statement, and the fact that there is a great descent from the first statements to the second demonstrates the wisdom of inserting the parenthesis, for this helps us to see how great is the descent.

While the first and second statements present one complete declaration, they nevertheless constitute a perfect balance. The first three statements must be borne in mind as we consider the second three, for the second three need the first three.

There are three first statements: "In the beginning was the Word"; "the Word was with God"; and "the Word was God." There are three second statements: "The Word became flesh"; "and dwelt, pitched His tent among us"; and "full of grace and truth." Now, if we take these two series and bring them together, not exactly as one continued statement, but part to part, we shall see that the whole declaration tells how infinite and hidden mysteries came into the realm of finite and revealed things. "In the beginning was the Word" ... "The Word became flesh." "The Word was with God" ... "and pitched His tent among us." "The Word was God" ... "full of grace and truth." Let us at-tempt an examination of these three couplets.

Taking the first half of the first, every phrase defies us. Every word is beyond our comprehension. "In the beginning"! We may at once reverently declare that the thought transcends the possibility of our understanding. It is one of those matchless sweeps of inspiration that go beyond all the thinking of man. "In the beginning." I lay my hand on anything in this world, and I begin to ask questions concerning its origin. I begin to track it through long and tedious processes back to the point of its initiation. No man has ever been able to do this successfully. We have never been able to say the final thing concerning origins by the processes of investigation and discovery, but we are always attempting to find them, and rightly so. Man has more than once formulated a philosophy, has more than once suggested a solution, but as surely as he has done so, within a decade, or quarter of a century, his philosophy has passed away, and his solution is found to be false. This phrase takes us behind all the processes, behind the fact of the initiation of all things material and mental, behind all the things of which man can be conscious, and we bow in the presence of the statement, and reverently declare that it transcends us.

Or if I take the other expression, "the Word," I am equally conscious of disability to comprehend its final meaning. I am personally inclined to think we get to the sublimest meaning as we take the simplest, and remember that a word is an expression. A word is that by which one person expresses his thought to another, so that the other may be able to understand it. A word spoken by one person to another is the revelation of something in the mind of the one that the other did not know, and could know only through that word. A word is a revelation made, a thought communicated. "The Word was in the beginning," a method of manifestation, a method of speech, that in and of God by which He made something of Himself known to those without Himself, apart from Himself, beyond Himself.

You inquire whether the Word was a Person, and I reply, What do you mean by a person? Until you have defined your term "person" - which, by the way, never occurs in Scripture - I cannot answer you. If you tell me that man is a person, I say, Yes, undoubtedly he is; but he is finite. Now, a finite person is an incomplete person, and therefore not a perfect revelation of what a person is. A perfect Person must be infinite also.

This at least is declared, that in the beginning there was an expression of Deity. But that is not helpful to us, for it was beyond our finite comprehension. "The Word became flesh," that is where the help begins. When the infinite Person - and I do not quite know what that means - becomes a finite Person Whom I can understand, I do pass into some new appreciation of the character and the value, and the fact of the infinite that transcends me, "In the beginning was the Word. ... And the Word became flesh."

A few words only are necessary concerning the second of these couplets, "And the Word was with God." That which was the method of Divine speech and manifestation was with God, and again I freely confess to you here are terms, finite terms struggling to express infinite meaning, and failing even though they be the words of inspiration. Then I read, "He pitched His tent among men"; and the thing that has baffled me and perplexed me, and overwhelmed me in the realm of Deity, which is beyond my comprehension, becomes something I can look at within the realm of human life: "He tabernacled among men."

And then, finally, when I read in the great introductory word, "the Word was God," both with God, and God; both method of Divine expression, and that which expresses itself, again I am overwhelmed, I cannot understand. Again I feel that I have read a simple sentence that is so full of mystery as absolutely to defy my explanation. Then I read "full of grace and truth," and I have an unveiling of the nature of God, though perhaps no explanation of the method. I have seen One Who is flesh, and pitches His tent by my side in the valleys where I dwell, upon the mountains to which I climb, in the midst of the life I live; and in the life of this One grace and truth flash and flame in glory. I am told that that is God, and I feel, not that I have been able to encompass all the mystery of Deity by revelation, but that I have been taken through a wicket gate, and my eyes are gazing out upon light such as I had never seen. I have at least been able to look through a veil at that which unveiled would have blinded me: "In the beginning was the Word," and I do not understand it. "The Word became flesh," and it has come within the reach of my hand. "The Word was with God," and I cannot comprehend the meaning of the statement, but the Word "tabernacled among us," pitched His tent near us, and I at least may draw near and behold. "And the Word was God," and there is no more in the statement than there was in all the other things that men had said long before. But "full of grace and truth," and here are two essential facts concerning God which will help me.

Pass over this ground with me again. "In the beginning was the Word" ... "the Word became flesh." What does this signify? Eternity, the ageless age, coming into time; expressing itself in the language of time, manifesting itself in the method of time. "In the beginning was the Word," the utterance of God; not letters, or syllables or words merely; not a literature which I can commence here, and finish presently, but the Word of God. Not only that which fills the whole fact of space so far as I can imagine it; but "the Word became flesh," that is, came to a locality; it came to a place to which I can travel; it came to a place to which coming, I can see.

"The Word was in the beginning," the infinite, but it became flesh, the finite. "In the beginning was the Word," the infinite Wisdom, the all-encompassing Wisdom, the Wisdom that lies at the back of all manifestation, the Wisdom of which the preacher sang long ago in the Proverbs. But "the Word became flesh," that is, Wisdom began to spell itself out in an alphabet. We sometimes quote the words of Jesus uttered to John in Patmos as though they were full of dignity. So they were, but they have another tone also. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last." There is some sense in which in God there is no first, no last; and, consequently, that is not a figure of completeness intended only to create amazement and wonder. It is the symbol of simplicity, it is the figure of the alphabet. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," the alphabet which the little child may learn. Yet remember that all literature lies within the compass of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Do not talk to your children about a thing being as easy as A B C. It is the hardest thing we have to learn. You have forgotten the task, but it was such. You did not know it, but in that task you were beginning to climb up to that literature which you love, and all its vast reaches lay before you. So when the Word became flesh infinite Wisdom expressed itself in an alphabet. That began nineteen centuries ago. There had been attempts before, hieroglyphics before, but at last the mysterious hieroglyphics of the past found the key of interpretation in Alpha and Omega - the Alphabet. We must be little children to begin; but we never arrive at the infinite literature to which it introduces us until we have learned it. The Word, the infinite Wisdom, dwelt with God, and was the mighty Work-man at His right hand when He created, by whatever process I care nothing. That Wisdom became an alphabet when a baby Boy lay upon His mother's breast in the Judean country.

But notice the next couplet of contrast. "The Word was with God." There are those who can explain it to me. I cannot. I make no attempt to do it. But I will attempt the next. He "tabernacled among us." This Person Who defies definition - for I do not know the meaning of "person," as I have already said - this Person "tabernacled among us," and John of the mystic vision had looked at Him, and warm-hearted Peter had gazed upon Him, and all the rest had seen Him. He "tabernacled among us." Now for the parenthesis a moment. "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father." "We beheld," we saw that which was with God, and the statement overwhelms us. I love the other rendering of that, not accurate translation perhaps, but certainly correct interpretation. He pitched His tent by us, and came to live where we lived. He pitched His tent down by the side of my tent. It is the figure of the Arab nation, and of one who is going to take the same journey with me and be under the same rule with me. He "tabernacled among us." We are pilgrims through the world, coming out of darkness, and passing toward the darkness. He "tabernacled among us," put His tent down by the side of our tent.

Yet that is not all, and we must interpret this word "tabernacled" by the religious thinking of the man who wrote the words, by John's religious conviction and upbringing. If you do that you will see that this word "tabernacled" has its explanation in the religious mysteries of the past. I go back again to the kindergarten days of religion, to the hieroglyphics of the past, and I find the Tabernacle. You remember how in the Old Testament that word "Tabernacle" is written descriptively in two ways. Sometimes it is called the Tabernacle of witness, and sometimes it is called the Tabernacle of the congregation, and both are faulty. May I take the same ideas, and express them in other words? The Tent of meeting rather than the Tabernacle of the congregation. The Tent of testimony, rather than the Tabernacle of witness. That is to say, when in your Old Testament you read that the Tabernacle was the Tabernacle of the congregation, it does not mean that it was the place where men congregated for worship, but that it was the place where God and man met for fellowship. The Tabernacle of meeting was the place, God-appointed, where He met with man, and to which man came to meet with Him.

It was the Tent of testimony, which did not mean that it was the place where men proclaimed the truth of God. The Tent of testimony was the place where God spoke to men, and men listened. Now, wrote John, who had been brought up in that religion, and to whom that symbolism was always luminous, the Word pitched His tent among us. That was the Tabernacle for which we had been waiting, toward which we had been looking. He became at once Tent of meeting between God and man, and Tent of testimony through which God spoke to man. And so in this Word, the infinite and incomprehensive mystery of the eternities, Who became finite and comprehensive in time, by becoming flesh, I find my tent of meeting with God. He is all I am, but He is all God is. And when I lay this hand of mine upon His hand, I have touched the hand of a man such as I am; but I have taken hold of the might of God. And when I look into the eyes of the Man Who pitched His tent among Galilean fishermen I have looked into human eyes all brimming with love, but through them I have looked out into the very heart of the Infinite God. He is the Tent of meeting. I find God in Christ, as nowhere else. I cannot find Him in Nature. I see His goings; I hear the thunder of His power; I mark the matchless beauty of the delicate touch of His pencil on the petals of the flowers; but I cannot find Him, I cannot reach Him. But here, as God is my witness, I come to the Christ - warm, sweet, tender, even yet:

A present help is He:

And faith has still its Olivet,

And love its Galilee.

I feel in my spirit the consciousness of the human Christ; but enwrapping me all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And because He pitched His tent by me, and pitches it by me still in all sympathy, I have found God, and if you take that away I have lost God. "He tabernacled among us," He pitched His tent by us. It was the Tent of meeting, and it was the Tent of testimony. Through that life God spoke so that I might hear; and to explain that I must use terms that seem to be contradictory, but the relation of which I am sure you will see. In Christ, the long, long silence became speech. But in Christ the thunder became a whisper. Silence became speech. Men had been waiting and longing and listening, climbing mountains for stillness, getting into loneliness to hear. They had heard, but they had never heard. They had heard the thunder of His power, but they had never heard all that they needed to hear. But in Him Who pitched His tent by the side of the fishermen, they heard. And the long silence and all the loneliness became the sweet speech for which men had waited; and all the thunder that had reverberated around the rocky fastnesses of Sinai became love whispers in the ears of listening individuals when He became flesh. "The Word became flesh, and pitched His tent among us."

"And the Word was God," and again I remit the mystery, "full of grace and truth." All that men saw and heard in Jesus was an unveiling of Deity. The attractiveness of His grace, the awfulness of His truth, were revelations to men of God.

If that is the fact of the incarnation, what is this inclusive revelation that it has brought to us? "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth." Grace. You may express that in another way, in another phrase, in another sentence, of this selfsame writer. "God is love," "full of grace." Truth. You may express that also in another way. "God is light," "full of truth." Out of the grace came the redemption. Out of the truth was manifest the righteousness. The supreme revelation that Jesus made to men was not a revelation first of grace, or only of grace; not a revelation first of truth, or only of truth; but a revelation of the relation between "grace" and "truth."

Look at them in separation. Do not rob this word "grace" of its beauty by reading into it merely the ideas of a human system of theology. We behold him "full of grace," full of tenderness, full of gentleness, full of pity, full of all that winsomeness and attractiveness that made Him dear to children, and to needy men, and to sinning souls. We behold Him full of grace, full of grace to children, gathering them into His arms, putting them into the midst of His disciples; full of grace toward the afflicted, forevermore moved with compassion in the presence of any limitation. No cripple ever crossed the vision of Christ without Christ feeling the pain of all the cripple's limitation. Full of grace toward sinners. Take the New Testament and read it once more, and see if you can find one harsh thing He said to a sinner. Harsh things to oppressors and to sinners in that particular respect; but to someone taken in an act of sin, overwhelmed with the burden of sin, never an angry word. Full of grace, full of winsomeness, full of beauty. That is human. I am not dealing with all the infinite values of the word "grace," but with the simplicity of it as manifested in the life of this Man.

But "full of truth," capable of anger, capable of severity, capable of cursing as well as of blessing, with lips that could frame a "Woe" of unutterable terror as well as a "Blessed" of unutterable tenderness. Truth, and truth manifesting itself in anger against all selfishness, all tyranny, all sin. Grace acting in truth because it is grace. Truth acting in grace because it is truth. Here is the revelation that surprises. We have put these into two compartments. We often still speak of the grace of God and the righteousness of God as though they were poles asunder. They are never separated. They cannot be separated, and in the moment in which you deny truth, you deny grace. If there be no severity in God He is incapable of tenderness. Because there is love there is light, and it is love that will make no peace with the thing that spoils and harms and ruins. Grace and truth always go together. I have referred to His grace as manifested in His welcoming of the children. I have declared that truth could be manifest in anger, and these two things were operating at the same moment. When He said the most beautiful thing that men ever heard concerning little children, there was the tone of anger in His voice. The voice which was brim-full of tenderness was vibrant with thunder. The disciples would have kept the children away. Why should He be angry for a small thing like that? It is not a small thing to keep a child away from Christ. It is a misunderstanding of God and the child; and the man who misunderstands God and the child is a curse to society, find him where you will. Jesus was angry, and through the tenderness of the welcome to the bairns throbbed the anger of truth against a false idea of dignity that excluded bairns. That is but illustration of grace and truth acting together, as they did from beginning to end. This was the revelation that came to the world.

So, finally, we see the values of this incarnation, truth concerning God and man, and grace joining men to God. In Jesus man found God. In Him man finds himself. These were the two things that men had lost, their knowledge of God and their knowledge of themselves. The great and final word of the teaching of one of the greatest Greek masters, Socrates, was, "Man, know thyself"; but men could not obey him, and Socrates had to say so. He confessed that it was not given to him to do anything but teach humanity to ask questions. He said some other teacher must come and answer the questions, and in that word he revealed how much of heaven's light he had in his own soul. Jesus came to answer the questions, and man found himself again, and realized the meaning of the mystery of his life, when the Word became flesh, and tabernacled, pitched His tent, by the side of him. And that tabernacling meant not merely truth concerning God and man, but triumph for God and man. It was God's highway to accomplish His purposes for man. It was man's highway unto the purposes of God.

Let me say in conclusion that we underrate the infinite value and meaning of this fact of incarnation when we speak of it as something in the past. The incarnation is an abiding fact, not something merely past. At this very hour that same Person is at the centre of the universe of God, the risen, glorified and enthroned Man. And if you tell me that that is to state something that cannot be believed because it transcends the possibility of belief, I tell you that it no more transcends the possibility of belief than does the fact of the historic incarnation. If He came into human flesh, and tabernacled among us, and if while there He could speak of Himself as yet in the bosom of the Father, and as yet being the Word with God, so remember that today He abides for manifestation at the centre of the universe of God, the risen and glorified Man, at once a prophecy and a promise, hearing which we dare believe that at last He also will perfect us, and we shall see Him, and be with Him, and be like Him.