**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 13 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**BUT! by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*I will follow Thee, Lord; but …*

*Luke 9:65-62*

WHEN THE EVENTS TOOK PLACE WHICH ARE RECORDED IN the paragraph from which the text is taken, the face of Jesus was set toward Jerusalem, and the days were days of crisis and testing in the matter of all human relationships to Himself.

While He was a boy, a youth, and a young man in Nazareth, He was beloved, for Luke tells us that He grew in favour, not with God only, but with men also. In the early days of His public ministry. He was the center of attraction, and men of all grades and all classes crowded after Him to see and hear Him. In the process of that ministry, as He began to make clear to those who listened that His mission was a mission of right and truth and purity, the essential things of the Kingdom of God, men gradually fell away from Him; and in these last weeks or months prior to the cross there were great crises in many lives, and all human relationships passed through a time of severe testing.

His own disciples were busy reasoning among themselves as to their relative greatness, and He rebuked and corrected them by putting the child in the midst. John was disturbed because someone had been seen working in the name of Christ, who was not following with the disciples. Mark carefully what John complained about. He was not able to say that the man was not following Christ, but he was not following with the disciples. Jesus quietly and firmly rebuked his exclusivism. The Samaritans refused to receive Him into one of their villages because His face was set evidently toward Jerusalem. Boanerges, sons of thunder, would have called down fire upon them, but Jesus rebuked them, and passed on to another village.

Somewhere on those journeys toward Jerusalem, while His face was set toward the city which He knew and which He loved - the city which He well knew at this time was so hostile to Him that it was only waiting for His arrival to arrest Him and kill Him; somewhere on these journeyings toward the city, the things happened which are chronicled in this brief paragraph.

One man, for some reason unexplained by the story, in the fullness of his heart, under sudden impulse as it would seem, said, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." Another man, perchance a little farther on the way, Christ looked at, and called him to follow, saying, "Follow Me." Yet a third, with less impulsiveness than the first, and with more of hesitation, said: "I will follow thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house."

Before the first of these men, who declared himself willing to follow the Lord wherever He went, He set a difficulty. It is as though He said to him: You say you are prepared to follow Me whithersoever I go. Do you really know what My lot in life is? "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" - that is, does not possess as His own a resting-place for His head.

The second man, whom the Lord called to follow Him, declined on the plea of filial duty; for when he said "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," his father in all probability was still living. It was not a case of asking to attend a funeral. I never understood that, until in conversation with Dr. George Adam Smith, he told me of what happened to himself when endeavouring to persuade a young Arab to accompany him into the interior. At last the Arab looked at him, and said, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," in the very words of Scripture; and the old man was sitting by his side when he uttered them. What he meant was, I have a filial obligation that prevents my coming. To the man who raised that difficulty Christ said: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God." That is the supreme matter, and its demands are more imperative even than such filial obligation.

Before the third, the man who suggested that he desired to follow, but would like first to bid farewell to those who were at his own house, Christ affirmed the superlativeness of His own claim: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Now, let me at once say to you, I do not propose to follow the incidents that are given here in any further detail. They constitute a background, I am far more anxious to discover the principles involved, and make application of them to the present hour and present congregation. Whether any of these men ultimately followed the Lord, we do not know. There is no reason to suppose they did not, although that has been very generally taken for granted. It has been our habit to consign all these doubtful cases to perdition. We have no right to do so. We know nothing about them. It may be that these men followed Christ at last. We do not know. It is not intended that we should know. The things of value are the revelations in this passage; first, of the call of Christ and of the supremacy of Christ as He calls men; second, of the fact that difficulties present themselves to the minds of many, which are very real and very definite; third and finally, the passage teaches us the urgency of immediate decision, that when we come to deal with Christ, counting the cost is out of place. He calls us to follow, to follow immediately, to follow whatever the cost may be.

Let us first spend two or three minutes with this word of Christ, this call of Christ to follow. On two occasions in the course of this paragraph men made use of the word. In the central one, Christ used it. The first man said, "I will follow Thee." The third man said, "I will follow Thee, Lord, but ... " To the other man Christ said, "Follow Me."

I think it is quite fair to suppose that the word of the first man and of the third prove that they had heard Christ utter that call to someone. It was His favourite method of calling men after Himself, "Follow Me." There are other things that He said to other men when He dealt with them as to their spiritual needs, but all His other methods were incidental, and are not often repeated. For instance, He said "Ye must be born again" only to one man, never repeating it. Over and over again, to men when He would first attract them, to the disciples when He would call them into the fellowship of His work, to the apostles when He would call them to higher service, He made use of the same simple words, "Follow Me."

If we consider quietly the suggestiveness of the call of Christ, we shall discover in it a demand made for confidence and submission. Confronting a man sitting in the midst of his daily avocation, let us say, at the receipt of custom, He looked into his eyes and said, "Follow Me," and we at once see that He meant: trust Me, trust yourself to Me, put confidence in Me, and obey Me. It is His claim of supremacy and His call to submission to that supremacy.

There is more in it than the claim of supremacy and the call to submission; there is inferentially the promise of guidance and of victory. The assumptions of this word of Jesus are very great and gracious. He assumes His own knowledge of the way, His own ability to direct those who come after Him, His own ability so to guide and direct them that they shall come to the fulfilment of all that is highest and noblest in life.

"Follow Me" is still Christ's word to men. I say this out of my heart. I believe it is the one thing He would say to every man and woman in this house. A thousand things to a thousand of us, all different when dealing with particular and definite individual need, but one thing to all, "Follow Me."

It is His universal call to men, a call in which He claims authority, and assumes ability to guide, and lead, and deliver; a call in which He insists that those who come after Him must believe in Him and demonstrate their belief by obedience. Its simplicity is its sublimity. The very fact that the words are brief, and so natural that any little child can understand them, still does indicate the fact that when they are uttered there is nothing more to be said, "Follow Me." The first step in the Christian life is that of obedience to that word. The whole pathway of Christian experience is trodden in obedience to that ideal. The final triumph of the Christian life will be won when the trusting soul, in final confidence in Christ, passes over the threshold into the "other room" - to quote George Meredith's description of death. It will be but following Him.

But, there are difficulties in the way. There are those who positively and definitely refuse to obey Him, those who reject His claim of Kingship. There are those who hear Him, but are not attracted; they neglect the wooing winsomeness of His call. To neither of these classes is my message tonight addressed. There is yet another class, made up of those who are attracted by Jesus Christ, who admire all they know concerning Him, who are supremely conscious of their own need of just that which He claims to be able to supply, who, in their deepest heart intend to follow Him, but ... "I will follow Thee, Lord; but … " men and women who can make use of the exact language of the last man in our paragraph. "I will follow Thee, Lord"; I recognize Thy supremacy; Thou art Lord; I confess my desire and determination to follow Thee; but … And the following never begins, the discipleship never commences. To such I desire to speak to- night.

I am constrained to do so by the fact that in my correspondence, and quite recently especially, I have heard from numbers, who perchance are sitting in this house tonight, who virtually have said that. Two weeks ago, in our after-meeting, God gave us great and gracious evidences of His power and His willingness to save, and since then message after message has reached me from someone who was present, saying: I want to be right with God; I fain would give myself to Him; but … And they have halted at that point. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but … "

My message tonight, if I may state it broadly before I proceed to deal with it and to illustrate it, is that the claims of Christ are such, and the power of Christ is such that everything which comes after the "but" needs to be resolutely put out of the life. There can be nothing after such a "but" as that, which warrants the halting of a soul. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but …!" You cannot add to that "but" anything which is justifiable in the light of the claims of Christ, in the light of your own deep need, in the light of the ability of Christ. Yet, how many and how varied are the things that are thus dealt with.

Many years ago I heard Margaret Bottome, the founder of the King's Daughters in America, speaking to a great gathering in Northfield, and her address consisted of a simple story in her own experience in travel, and of illustrations from it, in application to the young life which she was then confronting. She told us that when she first traveled in the Far East, there came an hour when the guide came to take possession of the party, and lead them through all their journeys. Three simple things happened which revealed to her the meaning of a guide. In the first place, the guide came to them and said: "Will you be good enough to give everything to me? I will take charge of everything." They handed over to him all their main articles of baggage - or luggage, whichever you choose - but they were retaining, she among the rest, those small handbags which ladies carry. The guide said: "You must give everything to me." They made their protest, saying there were in those bags things that would be necessary on the journey. Said the guide: "They will be far safer with me, and you will be far safer without them."

After a little while, they were waiting at a railway station for a train; the guide was attending to the baggage. A train came in, they selected a carriage, and the whole party entered it. As soon as they were seated, the guide returned, and said: "Will you be good enough to come out?" They came out, and then asked why he had required them to do so. He replied: "That is the wrong train. Will you be kind enough not to go before me, but after me?" She had learned her second lesson as to the necessity for a guide. In the course of the next day or two, on a long train journey, they were wondering what provision would be made for them on their arrival at their destination. Some stranger, coming from the place at which they were to stay, had told them there was no accommodation, and the guide was strangely silent. When they arrived everything was ready, and the guide said quietly: "Perhaps you will trust me to prepare for you ahead." Three things: Give everything to me. Follow me; but do not go before me. Trust me about the hidden things of the future.

Margaret Bottome has entered into rest, but I bring you that simple message tonight. Whatever your philosophy of life may be, whatever your intellectual difficulties, the whole suggestiveness of that simple story illuminates the thought in the word of Christ, "Follow Me."

"I will follow Thee, Lord; but … " Surely there is no need to give everything up to Thee; there are so many things I shall need on the way. Is it not enough to give myself to Thee and keep as for myself and under my own control some of these things that are so necessary - my money, my occupation, my affectional interests? May I not keep these things?

The answer of Christ to the soul that makes such inquiry is: "You will be far safer when I have charge of them, and they will be infinitely safer with Me." In other words, there are those who are holding back from Jesus Christ because they are not prepared to give to Him all - themselves and everything they have. They are not prepared to recognize that the moment in which they become the possession of Christ, their business belongs to Him, and must be under His control. They are not prepared to recognize that in the moment in which they hand themselves over to the Lord, all they have, as well as all they are, must be handed to Him; that in all things He may direct, control, suggest and master. Is that the way with you, my brother? Would you have given yourself to Christ, but that, in the handing over of your life to the Kingship of the Lord Christ, He claims, and must have, authority over everything you possess?

If that be recognized, something else grows out of it. Perhaps you are saying, That is not quite the trouble, though you are approaching it. If I consent to hand over to Him all I possess, I know what will happen. There are things I possess which He will immediately destroy, and permit me to carry no further. In the case of some, there are actual evils in the life, evil habits, practices, friendships; in the case of others there are forces which are mere impedimenta, hindering progress - "weights," as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews calls them. These must be left, dropped, lost. It is all quite true. Let there be no mistake about it. There can be no discipleship, as the Lord Himself said, save as a man renounceth all that he hath. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but … "

How shall we answer? I answer in the exact words of the guide. You will be much safer without them. You will be much safer when you have handed them over to Christ, and they, so far as they are right, true, pure things - your possessions, your occupation, your affectional interests - will be far safer in His keeping and under His direction. The things which ruin apart from His control become the things which make and glorify when He guides and governs.

Again, "I will follow Thee, Lord; but … " I do not desire to give up entirely my own independence. My aim is to be right, but I rebel against being refused permission to think or plan, or initiate or arrange. There are so many things in which the way seems quite plain, and I cannot understand why I am asked to remit every decision to Christ. I am not imagining a case. Sitting in my vestry not long ago was a young lady of position and culture, who said to me: "I have never learnt to submit, and I do not think I can." It is the story of hundreds of people.

I am afraid the trouble is that some of us lead men to suppose that it is not necessary. I am here to affirm that it is absolutely necessary. I can undertake nothing concerning which I have not consulted Him. Discipleship means I cannot choose my own calling, or friends, or place of residence. I must consult. I am compelled to prayer. Everything must be remitted to Christ. Jesus Christ is not asking for that kind of submission to Him which means sentimental acquiescence in the glory of His ideal, or in the accuracy of His ethic, or in the beauty of His own person. He says, "Follow Me." He demands submission of the whole being, and, that from the moment when we begin to follow Him we shall consult Him. Again, to return to the simple figure of the guide, Christ says: "Come after Me; do not go before Me."

There are others who are saying: "All these things are not my difficulties. 'I will follow Thee, Lord; but … ' I desire to follow. I desire to be a Christian, but there are difficulties ahead of me. There are great uncertainties in the future, and if I give myself to the Christ of Whom you speak, Whose call I have heard, I do not know what will happen. I am afraid to follow in the direction He indicates. "Discipleship with me," says such an one, "means in all probability absolute change in my vocation, the passing out of my life of things essential to my material being. I am afraid to follow because I cannot see how the way is to be made clear, or what I am going to do." I hope I am not stating this too indefinitely. Someone says: "l shall have to resign the position I hold in life, and face possible beggary." I do not think that is so very often, but it certainly is so sometimes. I have seen, in the course of the ministry here, more than once, cession to Christ, which meant loss of all the living. It may mean it to someone else. We halt for fear of the uncertain tomorrow. We see the immediate, and the immediate is that of obedience and sacrifice. What lies beyond it?

How am I to answer that statement of difficulty? I might answer it theoretically. If I did so, I would do it by citation from the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. I would remind you of the one who in olden days spoke of a "covenant ordered in all things and sure." I would remind you of one who, in the New Testament, declared that the saints walk in works foreordained of God. I would remind you of that great song of the leader of Israel, who, looking back over the way, told them that God had ever moved before them, choosing them out a place in which to pitch their tents, even when they marched through what he himself described as that "great and terrible wilderness." God was always ahead of them. When at eventide the moving pillar halted, and they pitched their tents for the night, they pitched them in the place which God had chosen.

Such is the ancient picture. Do you say, It is full of poetry? "Then let me answer you no longer by citation of Scripture, but in the voice of the experience of the saints of God. No man has ever yet committed his way to this Christ and followed Him, but that, although mists hung immediately in front of him, they dispersed. He leads us surely onward, and we have never missed our way, as we have followed Him. Though all those things in which our trust reposes have to be abandoned for the following, He is equal to all the way; and when at eventide we reach the place of our abode, we shall find everything prepared, the bread given and the water sure, and shelter provided and secure, and out of every place of temptation the door of escape provided. Such is our final answer to all objections. It is the universal testimony of trusting souls.

Those are but illustrations. Add to my suggestions other difficulties which suggest themselves to you, Nay, rather put in after the "but" the word you yourselves are saying, the thing you have allowed to hinder your following: "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," but - what?

Christ will halt the impulsive man, not to check him entirely, but to show him what following means, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." What shall we say in answer to that? That it were better to be His companion in the loneliness of the longest night than to be homed and housed without Him. It is such an easy thing to say, yet so absolutely impossible to say it as one knows it to be. Does not your heart agree that it would be better, far better for the sake of the joy of life, of the victory of life, to be the comrade of the poor and lonely Christ, though He never comes to wealth, though He never comes to victory? In other words, the heart of the man who has ever looked into the face of this Christ is compelled to own it, were better to be defeated and die with Him, than being apart from Him to win any passing triumph. "I will follow Thee, Lord! "

Let me urge upon you the importance of definite decision, in view of these very words of Christ. If the following be admittedly costly, then remember this also. The things I have been supposing are not the final things. To follow Him means to go with Him by the way of the Cross, but do you remember the last time He said "Follow Me" to Peter? It was by the shore of the Galilean Lake, in the tender, gracious light of the morning hour, when He Himself, the risen Lord, was bringing Peter face to face with the necessity for his own cross, telling him that at last even he should stretch out his hands and die by the death of the cross. He led Peter to the cross by saying "Follow Me." Being Himself the risen Lord, the light of His resurrection flashed back upon the cross and transfigured it. If it be by the cross, you must follow Him, remember that whoever shares the shame of His cross enters into the glory of His resurrection; and that not merely in God's great tomorrow, not merely in that life which lies beyond; but here and now, in the midst of the present life, the way of the cross is the way of resurrection.

The Lord insisted that the supreme duty of life is to follow him. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God." He thus set up a claim upon human life which is absolutely supreme. Neither father nor mother, husband nor wife, child nor lover, must be permitted to stand between the soul and Himself. He calls us to follow Him with all the heart. Following Christ means finding the highest, truest wealth, whatever it may be that we abandon; the highest service, however sacred, we have to leave in order to follow Him; the fullest, most glorious realization of life, however, for the moment we may seem to be impoverished in obedience to His command.

The Master waits for our answer, "I will follow Thee." Now, can we not be away from all theory to the actual business of this. In the quiet hush of this Sabbath evening, I appeal to you once again. How is it that you are not following Him? I do not ask that answer to be given to me. I ask you to remember that the answer is given. You cannot escape it. You are now making reply to that inquiry in the very presence of God. You have declared the reason already. That is a thing that I say with all confidence and with all earnestness. I find men today are trying to persuade themselves that they are not sure of the reason. If you will be perfectly honest with your own heart and with the God in Whose presence you are in this evening hour, you know why you are not following. "I will follow Thee, Lord; but …" But what?

That which comes after that "but" is that against which you must fling all the force of your resolve; for the ending of it, the putting away of it, you must bring to bear your own will and choice, and henceforth say to Him: "I will follow Thee, Lord," though there be no place where I can rest my head. I will follow Thee though I have to abandon all that seems most dear to me. I will follow Thee in order to find my way into that fellowship with Thee whereby Thy name shall be glorified, my life shall be realized, and I shall be at Thy disposal for helpfulness to others in the publication of the Kingdom of God.