**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 17 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**FOLLOW ME by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Follow Me.*

*John 1:43*

I HAVE SELECTED THESE TWO WORDS FOR OUR PRESENT meditation because they seem to have been the favorite form of invitation on the lips of our Master, and I have selected them from this particular verse because it gives us the earliest recorded use of them.

Other occasions of their use we read as lesson. A little later on one of his disciples expressed a desire to remain with his father, saying, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father," which, by the way, did not at all mean that his father was then dead; in the Eastern idiom he was expressing the fact that he was devoted to his father, and desired to abide with him until the hour of his death. To such a one Jesus said, "Follow Me … leave the dead to bury their own dead." A little further on, passing on His way, He saw Levi (Matthew) sitting at the receipt of custom; looking at him, He said, "Follow Me," and immediately Matthew left the seat of custom and went after Christ. The words next occur, so far as we are able to arrange them chronologically, in that memorable scene at Caesarea Philippi, when Peter came to the hour of his great and glorious confession concerning Christ and thus made possible the great and glorious confession of the Christ concerning His Church, which was immediately followed by the Master's declaration of His coming suffering and triumph as He spoke of going to Jerusalem to be buffetted and bruised, and killed, and on the third day to be raised from the dead. Against that word as to His coming suffering, blind but intense affection made this protest, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee," and was sternly rebuked by Jesus, "Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art a stumblingblock unto Me; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." Immediately, in that atmosphere and in those circumstances, Jesus uttered these words again, making them most emphatic in application to His own disciples, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Yet a little later in that period of public ministry when the Lord was even nearer to His Cross, there came the young ruler, clean, upright, straightforward, yet conscious of a lack in life, as his question gives evidence, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" To him the Lord ultimately replied, "Follow Me." Then again, beyond the Cross and the resurrection, in the flush of that wonderful morning by the shore of the lake as He restored Peter after his deflection from faith, the Lord's last word to him in that connection was, "Follow Me"; and again beyond it, Peter, still the same in temperament, inquired what John was to do, and in words that have in them an ultimate rebuke thrilling with tenderness Jesus said to him, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me." There is a most illuminative sequence in our Lord's use of this particular term, "Follow Me."

Let us first inquire the simplest meaning of this call which Jesus uttered in so many different circumstances, and with such varied application, "Follow Me." Let us first carefully observe that there is a marked difference between this word and another which our Lord made use of in other circumstances. Subsequently to the initial call of Peter and Andrew, James and John, Jesus found them fishing and He called them, no longer to Himself as disciples, but to definite co-operation in service. Our old version reads thus, "He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"; the Revised Version has drawn attention to the difference as it translates, "Come ye after Me, and I will make you fishers of men." In one of the passages which we have read the two ideas are present, the one containing the word spoken by our Lord at Caesarea Philippi, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"; there are two ideas, to come after, and to follow. If we were dealing simply with English words, this might be spoken of as a distinction without a difference; to come after is to follow, to follow is to come after; but we are dealing with the words which our Lord used, and in them there is a very distinct difference. He did not say, Come after Me, to Philip when He first found him. He did not say, Come after Me, to Peter when He last left him. What, then, did He say? The word He employed is one, but it is constituted of two parts, the first of which I shall speak of as a particle of union, and the second as a simple word which means a way. What, then, did Jesus say? Come in the way with Me. This is My way; I am walking this way, Come after Me. The thought involved in following is included, but there is more in it than that. I shall make no attempt to minimize the imperial call of Christ, I will attempt to emphasize it presently; but let us at first emphasize the sweetness and tenderness and grace of it. I shall attempt to interpret it thus - this is not translation, this is interpretation - "He findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Join Me in the way." He said to Peter by the shore of the Sea of Galilee; "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee, whither thou wouldest not. … Join Me in the way." Presently, when Peter said "Lord, what shall this man do?" Jesus answered, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Join Me in the way."

I go back to the ancient prophecy of Isaiah and I read this, "We have turned every one to his own way," and in the same prophecy, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." It is that One Who spoke to Philip and said, This is My way, join Me in this way. It is an imperial call, an unequivocal demand for surrender, but thrilling with infinite grace, calling men at once to subjection to Him, and to comradeship with Him, in the way.

This is perhaps the simplest and the sublimest formula of the Christian life to be found in the pages of the New Testament.

It is the simplest. It is Christ's word at the wicket, and it is simple enough for the tiniest child. It presupposes nothing as necessary but need and trust, and trust acting itself out. Do not forget that, I pray you, when you are dealing with children. Do not ask your child to accept a doctrine in order to be a Christian. Do not demand of your child some experience through which you have passed. Say what Jesus would have said to the little one, and try to say it, so far as you can, in our Anglo-Saxon speech, with the same thought there was in His speech. Jesus says to the little one, Come along with Me, walk My way, come with Me.

But if it is the simplest, it is also the sublimest. If it is the King's word at the wicket gate, so simple that every child can hear and understand it, it is the King's perpetual demand. He never changes it from the wicket to the homeland. If it is so wooing and winsome that the little one can hear it and obey it, it is severe enough for the most highly developed man, demanding renunciation of all that hinders, surrender of all that a man is, and absolute, unquestioning loyalty to the Lord. If it presupposes nothing other than trust and need as necessary on the part of the one to whom it is addressed, it assumes the wisdom, power, and right of the One Who utters the word; for we must interpret this word of Jesus in the atmosphere of His ministry and revelation. We must remember that He came to reveal, and to reveal God; that He claimed it as His supreme business to speak to men in the realm of the spiritual and eternal. When He said to Philip, "Join Me in the way," He was not thinking merely of a journey from Galilee to Judaea, He was thinking of that pathway that a pilgrim must take ere he find his way to the everlasting habitations. Consequently, when He said, "Follow Me," there was on His part the assumption of infinite wisdom, absolute right, and perfect power. So that whether I think of the little child unable to appreciate high doctrines of grace or of the man fully equipped intellectually for facing the final problems of life, the King has the same thing to say and He says it with wooing winsomeness to the little one, "Follow Me," Join Me in the way; and He says it with superlative, unequivocal authority to the proudest intellect that has ever faced life's problems, "Follow Me," I will solve the mystery and fulfil thy life.

Let us turn now to examine some of our Lord's uses of the words. As hurriedly as we may we will glance at the passages I have read to you, and see what He meant when He said, "Follow Me."

The first occurrence of the word arrested and guided the slow man. Some of you will remember that three years and nine months ago I preached on the same text dealing wholly with Philip and tracing his story. He was always the slow man, the quiet, unobtrusive man. As Mr. Elvet Lewis beautifully says, he was the man who was always on the fringe of the crowd, and was therefore able to help people whom others might have missed. He was a man who did not seek Christ, not I think because there was no longing in his heart for the things that are high and holy; but because of his slowness. He was the man whom Christ went and found, knowing perfectly the secret in his heart though no one else knew it. He was the man, the slow man, who made no impression on his fellow disciples, or so little that Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us nothing about him except that he was one of the twelve. It was only John who could appreciate all the silent, subtle forces that did not impress others in that man on the fringe of the crowd. All the stories about Philip are in John. To that slow man Jesus came and said, "Follow Me," Join Me in the way, Philip was arrested, and from that moment found his Guide.

The next incident in chronological order is of a strange and startling nature, a contrast to the first. As I have already said, a disciple of Jesus asked to be permitted to return to his father and take care of him. It may be interesting - I say this especially for young people - that I should remind you again of the light on this passage that came to me from a conversation with Dr. George Adam Smith. He told me how on one occasion he was in the byways of Syria and was anxious to secure a certain young Arab to be his guide. The young man sat in the door of his tent, and there by his side sat his father, hale, hearty, patriarchal. Dr. George Adam Smith was trying to persuade the young man to accompany him on a somewhat perilous adventure, and he refused, saying: "Suffer me first to bury my father," thus using the actual words we have in the gospel story. Here, then, was a man who asked to be permitted to bury his father, to stay by him and care for him until his earthly life was run. Jesus said to him, "Follow Me … Leave the dead to bury their own dead." Mark this, I pray you, this call of Jesus brooks no burying of the dead if that interferes with loyalty to the Lord. If the first illustration shows us the infinite tenderness of this call, the second arrests us and shows the absolute severity of this word of Jesus.

Take the next in order. Matthew was sitting at the receipt of custom. We must be Hebrews to understand this picture, or at least we must get back into the Hebrew atmosphere. What was he doing? Matthew's calling was the degradation of a high ideal. Matthew had bent to the Roman yoke, in order to collect from his brethren the taxes of the oppressor. You say, Why do you call that the degradation of a high ideal? Read his gospel. Mark his quotations of the ancient prophetic writings. Watch very carefully the whole method of the gospel of Matthew. Matthew's ideal was that of kingship, empire, authority. He was a man molded on imperial lines. I believe that was the reason why he had hired himself to Rome. The glamor of Rome had possessed his soul, and he had lent himself to Rome - a Levite to collect taxes from his brethren. It was the degradation of a high ideal. It was an attempt to come into touch with the great conception of authority and empire. Jesus Christ, passing, saw him, knew him, understood him; knew his devotion to this high ideal of empire, knew that the prophecies which had charmed him in his youth were such as foretold the coming of a great King Messiah; and He said to him, "Follow Me." He took him with Him, led him through the years and revealed to him the Kingdom and the King, and fitted him for the writing of the gospel which stands out in the Bible as the gospel of the Kingdom of God and of God's anointed King. If the ideal was a high and noble one, and if it had been degraded in an attempt to realize it, when this Christ passed by the man He took hold of him, redeemed his ideal, and enabled him to fulfil it on the highest possible level.

Take the next illustration, that at Caesarea Philippi. I go back to the distinction I made at the beginning. In this verse I find the two ideas. "If any man will come after Me," that literally means, If any man will come behind Me, follow Me, in our usual sense of the word, then let him join Me in the way. The text from which we have preached over and over again in order to emphasize the supremacy of Jesus does emphasize His supremacy, but it thrills with His grace. Peter had just said, "Thou art the Messiah," and Jesus had said, "I will build My Church. … I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of heaven." Christ had said to him, In order to enter into that Kingdom and build that Church I must go to Jerusalem and suffer and die and rise again; and Peter had said, That be far from Thee; God have mercy on Thee, not that. That word of Peter was almost profanity. Now the Lord said, "If any man will come after Me"; if you really mean to follow Me, if you, My disciples, desire to come with Me, your coming must be thorough, your coming must be complete, you must come by the Way of the Cross, the way of resurrection, the way by which I am going. But if any man would come after Me, let him join Me in the way; he must come My way, but let him come with Me. You cannot shun the Cross; but share it with Me. You cannot escape the severity of My terms, but let Me be your Comrade as you tramp the via dolorosa. This formula of Jesus in this application insisted on the closest association with Himself in the pathway of obedience; therefore it was a word of severity, yet a word of infinite grace.

I go a little further and see the rich young ruler. Notice in what sense He used the word in speaking to that young man. He asked, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied to him, "Thou knowest the commandments"; and in brief form He repeated the six of the second table of the decalogue, the six which condition human interrelationships. The man looked back into the eyes of incarnate Purity and said - and it was no empty boast but an actual fact - "All these things have I observed from my youth up." What did the King say to this man? "One thing thou lackest yet." What was the one thing? Hear the Lord through before you decide. "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come join Me in the way." What did this man lack? Poverty? Nay verily. The element of control, mastership! When Jesus said, "Follow Me," to that man, it was necessary that He should first point out to him that which, though not evil in itself, was nevertheless destroying all the forces of his humanity, in that while ministering to the self-life, it was shutting him out from all high heroisms and noble motives. Christ would sweep away the forces that destroy in order to realize the heroic dignity of human life. "Follow Me" was the supreme word of command, and it revealed the secret of victory over the forces that destroy. How is this man, nursed in the lap of luxury, of fine temperament, of clean record, but being destroyed for lack of fine heroism, how is he to be saved? He must follow the Christ, and in order to do it in his case there must be the parting with all that which ministers to the self-life. But even here the call was of grace, as He invited this man to comradeship, by saying, "Join Me in the way."

Take the next illustration, "Follow Me," spoken at the seashore to Peter. What did the word do then? It transfigured the Cross. It was to make clear Christ's intention that I omitted the parenthesis in reading this evening. I want you to ponder that passage again at your leisure. I have not suggested that John's parenthesis is out of place or unnecessary; I believe it was inspired by the Spirit of God, and must remain. In order to make impossible any doubt as to what Christ meant when He said to Peter, "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not," John said, "This He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God."

Let us, however, forget for a moment that interpolation of John, and remember that without any break Christ added to that foretelling of the Cross, this word, "Follow Me," What did that mean to Peter? The word was spoken by the side of the lake on a memorable morning. What relation did that morning bear to the past? It was the risen Lord Who spoke. At Caesarea Philippi Peter had shunned the Cross, and had been rebuked. By the side of the lake, Jesus brought him back to the Cross, to his own personal cross, and said to him, if reverently I may change the words of the Lord, Peter, you shunned the Cross for Me, you were afraid of it when you first saw it; you have been afraid of it through all the intervening months; but you must come to it, actually come to it, stretch out your hands and be crucified, die by the cross; follow Me, join Me in the way. And immediately Peter would say to himself, He went to the Cross, but He passed beyond the Cross and is risen from the dead. When Jesus, in that connection, said, "Follow Me," to Peter, it transfigured the coming Cross by revealing to him the fact that whatever man shall follow Jesus by the way of the Cross also shall follow Him beyond the Cross into the light and glory of the Easter morning that lies on the other side.

The last illustration seems almost commonplace by the side of some of the others, yet it is wondrously placed. "What shall this man do?" asked Peter concerning John, and Jesus replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me." It revealed in a flash, in which there was light, humor, satire, tenderness, the awful dignity of one man's life, and the fact that in this following every man must follow for himself, and that is enough for a man to do. If I were given to announcing sensational subjects, I think I should take this for a text, and announce as my subject, "Mind your own business." If the phrase sounds commonplace, think it well out. Mind your own business; in this respect it will take thee all thy time and eternity to realize My purpose for thee: "Follow thou Me." It was the individualizing of the man as to his personal relationship to Christ; and at the same time it was a word that declared to Peter that if the Lord demanded all his loyalty, He was not unmindful of John. Leave him to Me, I can care for him also. "Follow thou Me," the emphasis is there.

This hurried survey will enable us to see something of the breadth and glory of this word of Christ.

Hear it again, "Follow Me," Join Me, Come My way. What was His way? How shall I answer my own inquiry. Let me do it for a moment by mentioning certain names which will carry a congregation such as this to associations, which are revelations concerning the Lord. It was the way of Nazareth; long years of the daily round, the common task. It was the way of the wilderness, the short, sharp, fearful struggle of a naked soul with wickedness stripped. It was the way of the crowds and human sorrow, perpetual ministry and virtue going forth. It was the way of Gethsemane. It was the way of Calvary. It was the way of the high places and the outpoured Spirit. "Follow Me," join Me in the way. Set thy soul in the direction of My soul, and relate thy spirit to God, as My spirit is related to God.

Is that it? Then in the name of God I am helpless, I cannot do it. But in the strange, wonderful economy of Christ's dealings with men we begin where He ended, and work backward through the processes of His life. You will find that all through your Bible. I will give you one illustration, without turning to it. Take Exodus and read again the story of the pattern which God gave to Moses in the mount; then read the story of how Moses made the tabernacle, and you will find that it moves in the opposite direction. The pattern given begins at the center and moves outward to the finish; the work done begins where the pattern ended and works in to where the pattern began. It is always so.

Where am I to begin this following? I begin where He ended. I begin with Pentecost. That is the fulfilment of the great word. There were senses in which this word was never fulfilled in the experience of these men until Pentecost. We begin when we receive the Spirit of God, "He hath poured forth this which ye see and hear." When that Spirit comes to me I begin my following. That immediately admits me to the resurrection life which is life indeed, and it is by the way of that resurrection life that I come to personal experience of the Cross, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings." By that identification with Him in the Cross I enter into fellowship with Him in the agony of the garden. Through that and through that alone I pass into fellowship with His ministry amid the crowds of men. It is then the temptation becomes hardest in the normal Christian life; not to the man who never has yielded to Jesus has ever come temptation of the fiercest fury which appalls the trusting soul. Take it as a demonstration of nearness to your Master if the enemy is assailing your soul with fervor. Remember, tried, tempted heart, that temptation is not sin. It is the saint most closely associated with his Lord who knows the power of temptation most keenly. Then what? The most difficult thing of all Christian life, Nazareth and the commonplace.

I do not wish this to be divided into compartments as though I would teach that to those who have been called to public service there will presently come the lonely pathway. There is always a lonely pathway to the Christian soul. There is always a Nazareth for all of us. The teacher who regularly faces a congregation on the Sunday, whose work is largely in the glare of publicity, has a Nazareth, a home, and that is the place where it is most difficult to be true, true in the commonplaces.

Yet that Master says one thing, "Follow Me," join Me in the way. You can never enter it save as you crown Him Lord, and no man can call Him Lord but by the Holy Ghost. Pentecost is the first thing. I cannot be in the resurrection life save as I come there with Him. He says, Follow Me, walk with Me in the way. This intolerable agony of sin mastering humanity, and demanding sacrifice in order that men may be delivered, who can deal with it? The Lord says, You shall indeed drink My cup and be baptized with My baptism; come with Me, join Me in the way.

Leave out these things and come to the last. Oh, you business men who say the preacher has no temptations, do not believe it! To the man who preaches is granted the freedom from observation which is of the essence of opportunity to sin, for indolence, and for incipient blasphemies. How can I be true when my door is locked and I am alone? There comes into the room, though the door be never unlocked, One Who says, "Join Me in the way," "Follow Me! That is the answer.

What is the secret to the great call of Christ? A vision of the Lord Himself. That vision will create the enthusiasm to follow. That enthusiasm constitutes the secret of abandoning all that hinders.

In this evening hour Christ is saying this selfsame thing, "Follow Me." What that means to me today I cannot tell you. What it means to you I do not ask you to tell me. We know, each man, woman, youth, maiden, for himself and for herself, what this means now. Shall we not obey? Shall we not say, Lord Christ, we will follow Thee, only let it be with Thee. Take us by the hand and lead us; we would come after Thee, but it will be easier if, sweet paradox of Thine own words, we may come after Thee by walking with Thee!