**VOLUME 6; CHAPTER 21 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**GOD'S THOUGHT OF THE KING by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.*

*Matthew 3:17*

THESE WORDS CONSTITUTE THE INSCRIPTION STAMPED around the Image imprinted on this gospel according to Matthew. The Image is that of the King. We have the book of His genealogy, the story of His birth, the record of the ministry of His herald. Then we see Him as lawgiver, Administrator of the affairs of a disorganized and chaotic Kingdom, a Warrior proceeding against the foes of the Kingdom and entering into conflict with them. Finally, He appears as the Conqueror of all His enemies, and we listen to words of sublime dignity as standing in the midst of a handful of men He says, "All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth."

This King impresses us with a sense of mystery. No man can take up this gospel of Matthew and read it naturally as human document, free from all prejudice, without being compelled to say that it presents a Person Who baffles all attempts to understand Him on the human plane. His words are of the simplest and of the sublimest. His deeds touch human life in all its departments, and yet to such effect that human life is seen with a glow of glory on it which we do not detect when others approach it. Who, then, is the King Whose image is stamped on the page? The inscription round about the mystic majestic head of the King is that of my text, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." The voice that uttered the words was a voice out of the heavens, the voice of God Himself.

These words therefore constitute both introduction and conclusion to the study of this gospel according to Matthew. In them we hear the voice of God introducing us to the King, challenging our attention; we are invited by this introductory declaration to follow Him in the light of the claim, and to discover whether it is probable that the claim is justified by the life He lived, by the words He uttered, by the work He accomplished. Those who follow the story through will find how fitting is this inscription around the image of the King.

Even if it be a work of imagination then he who wrote wrought well, beating his music out in perfect harmony with the chord of the dominant; for apart from this inscription and revelation there is no explanation of the One Who is revealed in the story.

In this declaration therefore we have the secrets of the Kingly authority of Christ laid bare, and in that sense we approach it. On the declaration flash the lights of the anticipations of the people who stood round about Him on this occasion, of the immediate circumstances in which the words are recorded to have been uttered, and of those subsequent demonstrations to which I have already made reference.

All Old Testament hopes had centered in the coming of One of Whom the prophets, psalmists and seers alike spoke as Messiah, the Servant of God, the Messenger of God. These aspirations of the past are explicit in the Second Psalm, and implicit in all the prophetic writings. In that psalm emerge into clear and definite statement the underlying hope and aspiration of all the singers and seers of the Hebrew economy. There are different opinions about the psalm. It is said that the reference is to David as the anointed King of Israel. It is suggested that the reference is to Hezekiah. While there may be elements of truth in these contentions, it is impossible to read the psalm and imagine that all its values were fulfilled in the case of David or of Hezekiah. If the psalm is of David, it is of David as God's messenger, His Messiah in a limited sense. If the psalm concerns Hezekiah, it concerns Hezekiah as God's messenger, God's servant, God's Messiah in a limited sense. But there are values beyond these. In the case of either of these men, there were local, immediate, incidental applications of value, but shining through are larger meanings than the man understood who wrote the psalm, and fuller harmonies than the singers detected who sang the songs. This psalm has its fulfilment in Christ and in Him alone, so that when we hear this word spoken in the listening ear of the Hebrews, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," we recognize at once that they would understand it to mean that all the hopes implicit in their ancient prophecies, and focused in this declaration,

I have set my king

Upon my holy hill of Zion.

I will tell of the decree:

The Lord said unto me, Thou art my son;

This day have I begotten thee.

were fulfilled in the One of Whom this word was spoken.

The light of the immediate circumstances is, in some senses, more wonderful. I pray you look at the scene. John has been baptizing with the baptism of repentance, calling men back from their wanderings toward the reign of God. He has been pre-eminently the prophet of righteousness, stern, hard, ascetic, tremendous in his denunciation of sin and his insistence on righteousness. Suddenly he, a man of fine moral character and of intense spiritual insight, is cone fronted by another Man, Who asks his baptism. The Man Who asks his baptism is a Man of such apparent moral perfection to the man of spiritual insight as to make this very prophet of righteousness immediately feel convinced that he needs to be baptized of Him. While I listen to this word of John, and understand it and yet am amazed at it, I see a yet more strange and wonderful thing. This Man Jesus, of the high and awful purity, which so impressed the prophet of righteousness that he felt his need of cleansing in His presence, identifies Himself with the baptism of repentance, numbers Himself with sinning men; the One Whose purity had appalled the prophet of purity demands that He shall be plunged beneath the waters of the river with men impure and sinning. It is a strange and arresting picture. Immediately following thereupon that Man emerging from those waters of baptism is anointed by the Spirit of God, and with a visible symbol, for His own eyes and perchance for the eyes of the prophet, such as had never before been employed and never since has been employed for the Spirit of God - the symbol of a dove. It was a symbol that suggested harmlessness and sacrifice.

It was thus, in the midst of such circumstances, that heaven's silence was broken after long centuries, and the voice of God was heard saying, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

On this inscription flashes also the light of subsequent demonstration. The ministry of three years, compelling loyalty in certain form and fashion, a ministry in which teaching was uttered, the authority of which men were compelled to acknowledge, even though they did not obey it; a ministry in which His ability to deal with all the limitations and sorrows of humanity was demonstrated so that men at least never questioned His power to work the wonders of His will; a ministry which wrought in the lives of all who dared to follow Him such experience of His supremacy that they yielded themselves to Him, and counted it the highest, holiest honor of life that they were reckoned worthy to suffer shame for His name.

In the terms of this inscription blend the accents of the eternal and the temporal. While they are separated from each other, they nevertheless merge. In separation we have, first, the eternal word concerning this King, "This is My beloved Son"; and second, the temporal word concerning Him, having immediate and local value, "in Whom I am well pleased."

But the temporal and eternal merge in each of these separated parts. This Man was visible to the eyes of the prophet, visible to the eyes of the multitude, a Man of our humanity, a Man of our own flesh, a Man so like the rest of men that none noticed Him save the one man whose purity of soul quickened his spiritual intelligence and enabled him to discover Him. Did not John say to the multitudes, "In the midst of you standeth One Whom ye know not"? They had not seen Him, He was so much one of them. Yet the Divine voice drawing attention to this Man of our common humanity said, "This is My Son"; and in that word, as we shall see, declared the eternal and abiding relation, uttered suggestively the mystery of the Person of Christ in His relation to the undying ages.

Or if you take the other part of the declaration, you will find the same merging of the eternal and the temporal. "In Whom I am well pleased," and the reference was to the One on Whom our attention has been fixed in such a way that we are impressed with the majesty of His Person. The Son of God, "in Whom I am well pleased"; and there was an immediate and temporal meaning in the word, having application and value for that hour, and for the things of our temporal and present life.

Thus are we introduced by the inscription around the Image, by the first word of God recorded concerning our Master, to the King Who will pass before us as we take our way through this gospel according to Matthew.

Let us, then, consider the inscription in its two parts. First, the eternal, "This is My Son"; second, the temporal, "In Whom I am well pleased."

As we approach this strangely difficult theme, which cannot be exhausted, about which no final word can be spoken, we must bear in mind that the one fact of relationship here declared is that of the Sonship of Jesus.

If we place this word in Matthew against the word in the Second Psalm, we find a distinction and a difference. The word of the psalm says:

I will tell of the decree:

The Lord said unto me, Thou art my son;

This day have I begotten thee.

I listen for the sound of the voice of God on the banks of the River Jordan, and this is what I hear:

This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.

There is not a word in this declaration by the Father about begetting or beginning. We must have that distinction in mind if we are to approach the subject reverently and intelligently. The two facts are not the same; the first is that of son-ship, the second is that of a begetting, which indicates beginning. That begetting of the psalm has no reference to beginning of being, but to the initiation of a work. If the psalm be Messianic and its first fulfilment was in the case of David, then the begetting had no reference to the day of David's natural birth, but to the day when he was anointed king. If the psalm is Messianic and its first reference was to Hezekiah, then that which the expositors suggest may be true, that the reference was to that day when, rising from sickness and death, he started on a new life which God had granted to him. Of these things I have no certainty. If I take that psalm and find it in my New Testament I immediately discover what the word means in relation to Jesus. It is four times cited, two of them certainly by Paul, two of them in the letter to the Hebrews, probably by Paul. When Paul was delivering his first great message in Antioch in Pisidia he quoted that psalm and placed it in relation to the resurrection of Jesus, and declared that it was in that resurrection hour that He was begotten. You will find in his letter to the Romans when referring to Jesus as being, according to the flesh of the seed of David, but according to the spirit, Son of God, he declared that He was declared, determined - or as I have ventured to say if we dare to anglicize the Greek word, horizoned - Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. In the letter to the Hebrews it is declared that He was begotten Son of God, brought into the realm of manifested Son-ship by the resurrection, and it is certain that the disciples of Jesus never perfectly understood His relationship to God until the morning of the resurrection. The morning of the resurrection was the day of birth for the disciples, because it was to them the day on which He was begotten Son of God to their understanding and to their comprehension. It was Peter himself who declared in his first letter, "We were begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

We may dismiss for the purpose of this meditation all reference to that word in the psalm, "This day have I begotten thee," and take only the declaration of the psalm, "Thou art my Son," and that of God in the hour of the baptism of Jesus concerning His Person, "This is My beloved Son."

In that word we have, first of all, a revelation as to the nature of the King. He was of the very nature of God. All figurative terms must be used with a recognition of limitation. If we speak of a son we implicate a beginning, but that is because we are using our term in the realm of the finite. Finite son-ship results from finite fatherhood; but we must cancel our limitations when we reach the heights of the Divine. A word which will again defy our finite analysis is the word "eternal," yet it must be remembered that this word cancels the limitations of time. Eternal fatherhood, eternal son-ship, not the beginning of the son-ship of this Son of His love. As the proceeding of the Spirit of God from the Father through the Son is eternal so also Son-ship is eternal. That which is of supreme importance is the revelation of the fact that the King is of the Divine nature. He shares the very nature of His Father, is of the Divine essence. That is the deepest and profoundest truth about the King. He is not merely bone of our bones, flesh of our flesh, humanity of our humanity. He is all that, but infinitely more.

In speaking at Antioch in Pisidia Paul argued from the Son-ship of Jesus which was demonstrated by His resurrection the impossibility of death holding Him ultimately. He passed into death, but He emerged therefrom as none other emerged therefrom or ever will. Death laid no corrupting touch on Him. He did not see corruption. Peter in Pentecostal power declared, "It was not possible that He should be holden of it." The first fact in this identity of nature is that of eternal being. He will bow and bend to death and enter into its profound darkness and know its mystery, but He cannot be held of it. It is not correct to say merely that He triumphed over death by the way of the resurrection. Resurrection was necessary because of His nature. He was not deified by resurrection. He was raised because He was of the nature of God, and could not, holy One as He was, ever ultimately see corruption.

In the passage in Romans the Apostle teaches that His Son-ship connotes His absolute holiness; according to the flesh, He was of the seed of David; according to the spirit of holiness, He is Son of God, and the resurrection did but demonstrate that holiness of character which was part of His essential Deity.

In the opening words of the letter to the Hebrews it is shown that His identity in nature with God by reason of His Son-ship proves His absolute sovereignty. "Unto which of the angels said He at any time,

Thou art My Son;

This day have I begotten thee?

But of the Son He saith,

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,"

In the fifth chapter of Hebrews the writer declares that because Jesus was Son of God He was moved with compassion and became a great High Priest, bearing our infirmities, providing eternal salvation for the sons of men.

The Son of God is of the very nature of God, therefore eternal, therefore holy, therefore sovereign in authority, therefore saving, even at the cost of sacrifice and off death. All the things of Deity were realized in the Kingship of the One manifested in time in such form and fashion that human nature might gaze on Him and be led to understanding of the hidden and profound secrets of God.

The eternal value also reveals the fact that the King has right to the inheritance of God. Again I go back to this Hebrew psalm, and I notice that in the seventh verse I have these words:

Thou art my son;

This day have I begotten thee

And in the twelfth verse,

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way.

Those who may be familiar with these psalms in the original language will at once recognize that we have two different words here. The word translated "son" in the seventh verse is not the word translated "son" in the twelfth verse. There is the same value in both words, the suggestiveness, with which we have attempted to deal, of identity of nature. In our reading of the Bible we have been made familiar with both these words in proper names, as for instance in the names Benjamin, and Bartimaeus. If I may take these prefixes as being the simplest way of illustrating what I am attempting to say, this is it,

Thou art My son - Ben.

Kiss the son - Bar.

There is the same underlying value of identity of nature in each, but there are two applications, two thoughts.

In the first you have the great Hebrew word, peculiarly Eastern, so difficult for us Westerners to understand, the word that speaks of sonship as being that which builds the house and continues it. We know so little of house building in that sense. Ask the man from the East how old he is, and do not be startled if he tells you two thousand years. He is counting all the family, feeling the solidarity of the race, recognizing his responsibility for that which lies behind him; he glories in being Benjamin, son of the right hand, builder of the house, continuer of the history.

The second word simply means heir. The first word indicates responsibility, contribution; the second indicates blessing, the thing a man receives.

In that psalm we have the suggestion that Messiah should be the Heir of God,

Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

The anointed King is the House Builder, the One who will accomplish the will of the Father, and therefore He will obtain the inheritance which is His right. The Son Who shares His Father's nature being of that nature and therefore being eternal, holy, sovereign, saving, is Heir of all the wealth of God in this world, all the nations, and all the earth.

This eternal Son of the eternal God not only shares His nature, and has a right to His inheritance, He co-operates in His purpose, He is the House Builder. Moses was servant in the house of God, but the Son is Sovereign over the house, for He is the Builder of the House. So the King is seen as co-operative with God, building His House, realizing His purpose, moving toward the goal on which the heart of God is set.

Read the psalm to the end and discover His method - the rule of justice, the rod of iron, the exercise of mercy:

Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way,

For his wrath will soon be kindled.

Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.

We turn, in the second place, and very briefly to the next word, that of the temporal relation: "In Whom I am well pleased." I do not believe that is temporal alone. I think it is the crystallization of all the infinite music of the eighth chapter of Proverbs. The ancient Hebrew wisdom, the Greek Logos, merge and are fulfilled in Jesus, in the Son of God, in that One in Whom God had forever delighted.

Yet the first application was local and temporal. We have no record of the life of Jesus for at least eighteen years, How has He been living, what has He been doing in those strange, mysterious years? That Voice broke the silence, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Being now about thirty years of age He had come to baptism, and these words were uttered. It was a declaration of earthly conformity to a heavenly pattern, of temporal harmony with eternal order. It was the word of God setting His seal on the perfection of the human life of Jesus. It was the confirmation of the personal perfection of the human Christ, of His holiness of character, of the fact that He had reigned in life, suffering nothing to have dominion over Him other than the will of His Father, of the fact that He had exercised a saving, beneficent relationship as He had come into contact with men. These are the things of God, this is the Son of God, and for a generation He had lived in human conditions; now it was over, and God sealed the perfection of His Son as He said, "I am well pleased."

But there is another value and a profounder one in that statement. John had said, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" and the answer of the Son of God to the Hebrew prophet had been, "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." In that baptism He was numbered with the transgressors. The Pure stood side by side with the impure, consented to a whelming that indicated the need for cleansing, entered into personal comradeship with sinning men; and that which bent Him toward that lowliness was His passion for righteousness. "Suffer it now: for thus" by this baptism which is the symbol of death and which is the symbol of another baptism which awaits Me in the days to come, "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," not to observe a rite, but to deal with sin at its fountain head, to master it that so righteousness may be established. A passion for righteousness filled His heart as He consented to John's baptism. It was His consent to a method of identification with sinners that must end in awful death. It was as He emerged from these waters which were the symbol of His identification with sinning men that God said, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

Is there not yet another note here, another value? Is there not in this declaration the note of His power for dominion. "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Man can have only one King, and that is God. No man conscious of his own manhood has ever found, or ever can find in man merely, a king to whom he can and will submit the whole mastery of his being without question. If Jesus of Nazareth be none other than a pure and upright man, I cannot crown Him my king, for I also am a man. There can be no King for a man other than God. There can be no final authority for the dignity of human life other than the authority of God Himself. "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased," satisfied, at rest, because in Him man will find Me as King, and through coming to this Man, the revelation of Myself, man will be enabled to crown God King of the life and thus realize the territory of his own being.

Thus "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Thus at the opening of this great gospel of the King I find the Divinely graven inscription around the image.

Do we agree with God about Jesus? Yonder is a man at prayer beneath the shade of his own fig tree. Disturbed, he follows the disturber, until he stands face to face with this selfsame Man just after this baptism. Nathanael and Jesus are confronting each other. "Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile," said Jesus. This Hebrew looked into the eyes of Jesus and said, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." In that word he agreed with God.

Christ is the test and touchstone of our relation to God. King in very deed is He. Put not upon this King the measurements of earthly kings. That was the mistake of the early disciples until the Spirit illuminated them, and they beheld Him as Son of God, He was the Man of the seamless robe, a homeless Man; but that is God's King. There He is, God's Son, of His very nature, having the right to His inheritance, in Himself having all power and eternal dominion. Then be it ours to hasten to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry. … Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."