**VOLUME 7; CHAPTER 05 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE GREAT CONFESSION by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

*Matthew 16:16,17*

THESE WORDS WERE SPOKEN AT A TIME OF CRISIS IN THE MINISTRY of our Lord and in the experience of Peter. Indeed, they constitute the pivotal words of that particular crisis. The confession of Peter completed the first stage of His work, and prepared for the second and final one. When, in the consciousness of one man, the victory of the Kingdom propaganda was won, the King set His face toward the passion whereby all men might pass into the Kingdom.

Our present theme is that of the confession of Peter, and there are four matters to which I propose to ask your attention. First, the man who made the confession, Simon Peter; second, the confession he made, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"; third, how Peter arrived at that conclusion, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven"; and, finally, what that confession meant to him subsequently.

First, then, the confessor. There is no man in these New Testament stories more fascinating than Peter. Every story about him interests us, and the more the portraiture of him considered in its entirety, the more powerfully does it appeal.

The reason for this persistent fascination is to be found in his essential human greatness, and in his constant failure to realize that greatness, The appeal is twofold. We cannot read stories of his life without feeling how near akin we are to him in certain essential, elemental qualities. We cannot read the story of his life without feeling how near akin we are to him in his blunders and failures.

His human greatness consisted in the fact that the elemental forces of human nature were all strikingly present in him. Other of these New Testament men were in certain senses greater than Peter: Paul in massiveness of intellect, John in mystic intelligence, James in practical ethical convictions; but in this man we find all the elemental forces. In mental power he was a great man, quick of thought, eager of inquiry, swift of conclusion. In emotional power he was equally great, a man of hot affection, burning anger, deep depression. In volitional power he was capable of making courageous ventures, heroic choices, dangerous experiments. All these elemental forces manifest themselves in him, and we are all in touch with him at some point.

We are brought into even closer kinship with him as we observe his failure. He was a man of mental power, yet characterized by strange blindness: to use a phrase of his own, "seeing only the things that are near," and unable to apprehend them in their true spiritual relationships; his was a mind quick, eager, swift, and yet never arriving at any final conclusion in his own unaided strength. He was a man of fine emotional power, yet contradicting the impulses of his love and wounding his lover. He was a man of remarkable volitional capacity, capable of courageous venture, heroic choice, dangerous experiments, and yet suddenly becoming craven in his fear and faltering by the way.

This is the man who at Caesarea Philippi uttered the confession which brought our Lord to the culmination of the first stage of His mission. He was more than a Hebrew, he was a human. He was a type of all men in his elemental forces and experimental failures.

We now turn to the central matter, the confession which Peter made, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." There are very spacious values in these words. I believe that Simon said far more than he understood; in the thing he said there were values far beyond his comprehension, and the context proves it. I shall ask you, then, in considering this confession first to observe its structure, and from that observation to attempt to gather its value.

Evidently there are two parts to the confession. The unifying words are the first, "Thou art." After them the confession divides into two parts. First, "Thou art the Messiah"; second, "Thou art ... the Son of the living God." The first was a confession on the part of Peter, of what he understood concerning the office of Jesus; the second was a confession on the part of Peter as to what he understood concerning the nature of Jesus.

"Thou art the Messiah." I use the Hebrew form of the word in order to interpret the thought of it. It becomes emphatic When we place it in contrast with other things that had just been said to Jesus. He had asked His disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?"; and they had replied, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." Now we are immediately arrested by the fact that our Lord was not satisfied with these confessions, and that He proceeded to discover whether His own immediate disciples had formed the same conclusions - not to discover for Himself, but to discover to them - as He said, "Who say ye that I am?" Then came the answer, "Thou art the Messiah."

The multitudes had detected in the teaching of Jesus the prophetic note, the supernatural note; they imagined that He was a prophet of the olden times returned. Peter confessed that He was the One to Whom all the prophets had given witness. John had only foretold His coming. Elijah had been a prophet of reform; but he was not able to establish the Kingdom. He passed, having failed, having only borne witness to righteousness and truth. Jeremiah had uttered his lamentations over the failure of his own ministry, and in the dungeon had sung the songs of hope that told of Another Who should accomplish that in which he had failed.

But the deeper note of the confession, and the more surprising one, was that in which Peter declared his conviction concerning the nature of the One Who had come to fulfil the prophetic outlook and aspiration: "the Son of the living God."

This confession reveals three conceptions in the mind of Peter: first, the Messiah; second, the Son; finally, "the living God." We shall appreciate the value of the confession a little more perfectly if we take these three conceptions in the other order, for in the confession Peter moved backwards, from that final fact of which he was then convinced, through that which lay behind it, giving it light and power and glory, to the fundamental truth of his religion. Let us begin where he ended. First, "The living God"; second, "the Son of the living God"; finally, "the Messiah." Thus the whole confession becomes far more glorious and wonderful.

Peter expressed in one brief phrase - which seems to be incidental, which passed his lips at the close of a confession - the central fact and truth of Hebraism, "the living God." That was the fundamental fact in the faith of Abraham, and in the law of Moses. The belief in one God was the very rock foundation of the national life. That this God was living was the message of all the prophets. With fine scorn, one of them had said of the idols which men worshiped, "There is no breath in them"! The God of Israel was "the living God," not a mere abstraction, not a mere force permeating the universe, having no personal consciousness, and therefore of no help to man in his personal life; but God, personal, alive, active - the living God. That was the fundamental religious conception of the Hebrew nation, and the ministry of Christ in the case of Peter had not destroyed it, but had emphasized it, set the seal of authority on it.

We now come to the central matter in the words, "the Son of the living God." Without staying to refer to the general teaching of the Gospel stories and the Epistles in detail, let me ask you to observe that the whole of the New Testament teaching concerning Jesus is that He was, in a lonely, unique, specific sense, the Son of God, not a son, but the Son, not one among a company of sons, but alone, different, separate from all others in the mystic relationship which He bore to God. This confession of Peter harmonizes with the whole teaching and attitude of Jesus toward this subject. He never spoke of Himself as on a level with other men in this respect, but maintained an attitude of separation whenever He approached the subject of His relationship to His Father. Even after resurrection He did not say, Our God and Father, but My God, and your God, My Father, and your Father. He did not identify Himself with men in His relationship to God. We have no account, for example, in any of the gospels that He prayed with His disciples. He prayed in their presence, but when He prayed He prayed on a different level. You will remember one remarkable word that seems contradictory, "As He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him." Have you ever observed that carefully? He was praying alone, away from them, while yet they were present. He never used the words to describe His own praying that He used to describe the praying of His disciples. When He told men to pray the word He used indicated an attitude which He never used of His own praying. When He spoke of His own praying He spoke of inquiring of a Father. When His mother came to him and said, "Thy father and I sought Thee sorrowing," using the word that had been current in Nazareth to describe his relationship to Joseph, He replied, "Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" In the first recorded words that fell from His lips He assumed separate and lonely relationship to God.

At Caesarea Philippi Peter looked into His face and said, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." The confession spoke of the revelation of the Father through the Son, and indicated a conviction of the closest relationship between the Father and the Son. Let us flash on the confession of Peter another confession to be found in the writings of another disciple, whom Peter never understood until after Pentecost, and of whom he then became the close friend. John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, … And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." That is the same thought of identity with the Father, revelation of the Father, co-operation with the Father. Thus in loneliness and separation, unique, special, specific, never repeated and never to be repeated, Jesus was "The Son of the living God."

So we come to the last conception, which was first in order of statement in the confession of Peter. This One was Messiah, the Administrator in human history of the Kingdom of God, the One Who came for the fulfilment of all aspiration, hope, confidence, and, consequently, the One Whose authority over the affairs of men is ultimate and final.

Having thus considered the confessor, and his confession let us inquire what was the value of the confession? Peter had arrived at a conclusion, in harmony with the declaration with which God commenced the propaganda of His Son. As our Lord was setting His face toward His public ministry the Divine Voice declared, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." That was the Divine thought of the King. At Caesarea Philippi Peter had come to the conviction that this was true; he had arrived at a conclusion in harmony with the Divine conception.

There were limits to the meaning of this confession in the case of Peter. Jesus was Messiah, King, Head of the Kingdom; but Peter had no true conception yet of the nature of the Kingdom. Jesus was the Son of God, and therefore was Administrator of the Kingdom of God; but Peter did not comprehend the method by which the King would enter into His Kingdom. Such was the scope, and such were the limits of the confession. Here was a man, human as we are, with all our elemental forces manifest in him, with all our failures also, looking into the face of Jesus of Nazareth and saying, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

How did he arrive at the conclusion? Here we are not left to speculation; we have the clear statement of our Lord. Jesus looked back into the eyes of Peter and said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." In that word of Jesus we have a threefold revelation concerning the method by which Peter had arrived at that conclusion. First, a negative word, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee." Second, a positive word, "My Father which is in heaven" hath revealed it unto thee. Third, a mediatorial word, a word indicating the method by which God had done it, the word revealed.

First, the negative statement, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee." Flesh and blood was a common phrase in Hebrew speech, which, in this connection, simply meant that the confession was not the result of human discovery, either his own or that of any other man. In the twentieth verse I read, "Then charged He the disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Christ." Why? Because flesh and blood cannot reveal it; no disciple can carry conviction to another man. Christian workers cannot convince men that Jesus is the Son of God. Our business is to introduce men to Christ, that through Himself they may come to know Him by Divine revelation. The attempt of "flesh and blood" to reveal Him is the secret of all heresy concerning Him. Therefore He said to His disciples: You are not called to prove to men Who I am. They have their opinions; you know me by Divine revelation, and your business is to take Me to men, and to bring men to Me; let Me be the intermediate One between My Father and men; let the Father show them Who I am that I may show them Who the Father is. That is the meaning of the charge to the disciples.

The positive word, "My Father which is in heaven," is a clear declaration that the conviction which resulted in the confession was the result of Divine revelation.

That brings us to the central word, revealed. It is derived from the word apokalupto, which means to disclose, to unveil. My Father hath unveiled this to thee, hath disclosed this to thee. How had God done it? I want to suggest to your most earnest consideration that I do not believe that our Lord meant that in some sudden illumination direct from God, as apart from Himself, the revelation had come. Not in the whisper of the morning, or by the thunder of the noonday, or through the voices of the night, had God told Peter the secret. How, then, am I to understand this word "revealed"?

I turn to another passage of Scripture, not that it has any direct connection with our theme, but that there is light in it which will help us. Take the opening sentence of the book that bears the name, Apocalypse, Revelation, and mark the construction of it carefully, "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show." The unveiling of Jesus Christ - that is the key to the Book of Revelation. However much we may differ in detailed interpretation of the book of Revelation, we shall agree that it contains three great movements: Christ unveiled in His personal glory to John, Christ unveiled in the mysteries of His grace, walking amid the candlesticks, unifying the Church; Christ unveiled in the process of His government by which He will ultimately set up the Kingdom. Now, how was He thus unveiled? God gave Him, Jesus, to show Himself; God, through Jesus, made Jesus known, as Jesus, through Himself, did make God known.

When Jesus at Caesarea Philippi said, My Father hath revealed it unto thee, hath given thee this apocalyptic, inspiring confession, He claimed a victory for Himself. God had revealed to Peter the truth about Jesus through Himself, and so had ratified his fundamental convictions concerning God Himself. "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." How did he arrive at that conclusion? By listening to Jesus, by following Him, by the processes of His ministry, until, at last, everything culminated in the conviction which expressed itself in the confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,"

I repeat, it was not the result of any whisper of the morning, thunder of noontide, or voice of the night, but the victory of the Word of God made flesh, and so revealing the truth about Himself and about God to man, that man through that revelation should come to conviction concerning Jesus, and confess Him as to office, Messiah, and as to nature, Son of the living God.

Let us glance over the whole process. How did it begin? It began in that wonder which John alone tells, of how one day Andrew found Simon and took him to Jesus, and Simon and Jesus stood face to face for the first time. Then Jesus said, "Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Rock." In that moment the living God spoke to Simon through His Son, though Simon did not know it. There was music in the word; there was in it the revelation of a perfect understanding, as though the One had said, I know you, your name, your father, you are Simon, the son of John; and there was in it a prophecy, you shall be Rock. No one had ever said that of Simon before. It was the one thing no one ever expected him to become. What did he do? He surrendered, and went after the Speaker. Now, about two and a half years had passed away. Simon had listened to Jesus teaching, had heard the great ideals He had presented; he had watched His ability, had seen Him Master in every department of human life, material, mental, moral; he had seen all evil forces yielding to Jesus' word and banished from human life. He had watched Him and had come into close personal touch with the supreme facts of the personality of Jesus. What were they? Let John tell us, "Full of grace and truth," that is, full of tenderness and thunder, full of love and light, full of compassion and passion for righteousness. Through the years Peter had followed and observed.

Now mark the crisis. The circumstances were those of apparent failure. The religious teachers were refusing Him, the political leaders were against Him; yet there came to the soul of this man the overwhelming sense that his Master was superior to all the forces against Him, and all the experiences of the years crystallized into a master conviction and he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." God had been speaking to Simon through the Son, and when Simon came, apparently by this human and utterly natural process to conviction, Jesus said, - let me say it reverently as His holy presence - I have won a victory in one human soul. God through Me has spoken, so that this soul is illuminated concerning Me, and consequently is admitted to an understanding of the Father; My Father hath revealed it.

Finally, what did this mean to Peter subsequently? I observe in the first place that this great confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi constituted an irrevocable committal to Jesus. I know what is in your mind! You are saying, not irrevocable: Peter denied Jesus! I say again, an irrevocable committal. Through all the failing experience that apocalypse remained with him, and that confession held him. He was constantly recalled to it. Almost immediately Christ was rebuking him, and calling him the adversary, "Get thee behind Me, Satan, for thou art an offence unto Me." Then there were six days of silence, in which no disciple seems to have spoken to Jesus at all; they were so amazed because He had spoken of the Cross. Then followed the holy mount and the Lord in a new and mystic glory, and Peter said, It is good to be here, let us build tabernacles! By a voice from heaven he was recalled to Caesarea Philippi, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." Didst thou not say at Caesarea Philippi, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God?" "This is My beloved Son .., hear ye Him." Thus he was recalled to his committal.

Presently in the judgment hall, when in answer to the flippant mocking of a serving maid, Peter denied his Master, the Lord looked at him, and that look recalled the committal, recalled the confession, and Peter went out broken-hearted to weep bitterly.

Then in the days that followed, days of darkness and despair - when he was saying within himself, The last words He heard me utter were words of denial, and my Lord is dead - suddenly, somewhere, no one knows where, somewhen, no one can tell exactly when, the same Son of God met him, and talked to him; and when long afterward he sat down to write a letter he wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." When Jesus came to him and had a private interview with him, he was taken back to his confession that Jesus stood related to God as Son to Father, and the resurrection was the new birth of the old hope that had seemed to perish by the way of the Cross. I repeat, it was in irrevocable committal, and the power of the apocalypse and the consequent confession never departed from him.

Further, that confession resulted in his having to tread a new pathway of teaching and of testing. That confession was followed by the immediate glory of our Lord's confession to him, "l also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." That was the result of his confession.

Then followed the first explicit mention of the Cross. The shadow of the Cross had never fallen on the lives of these men before. Our Lord never told them about the Cross until after that great confession. Having made it, it was necessary that they should know not only the King, but the method by which He must come into His Kingdom.

And yet another result was the appalling discovery to Peter of himself. Jesus took the man who had made so high a confession as that, and showed him himself. You will all forsake Me, you will all deny Me, you will do it even after this crisis! Never, Lord; if all others do, I will not! It was indeed necessary that Peter should discover himself; even by the way of denial he must come to an understanding of his own weakness.

And still once more. There was a new finding of the Lord in resurrection glory. To that we have already referred.

The ultimate confirmation of the confession is found in Peter's letters. Let me read the opening doxology of his first letter, and the closing injunction of his last letter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. … Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Let me close with the word to which I have already drawn your attention. "Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He Was the Christ." That conviction can come only by Divine revelation, and that Divine revelation can come only from the Father through the Christ Himself. What, then, is our business? To bring men to Him, to lead men to consider Him for themselves, to present Him as He is, not affirming thus or so, or attempting to compel men to accept our view, but to let them see the Lord. In proportion as we do that in life and in ministry, in that proportion we are bringing men to the place where they will know Him by the Divine apocalypse.

If there be some man listening to me who asks how he is to arrive at that ultimate conclusion, I say to him, You must begin exactly where Simon began. Where did he begin? He met Jesus. You have done that already. Hear me, I am not talking in a country called heathen, but in this church. You have met Him. You say, I am not sure of the doctrines concerning Him. I reply, you have nothing to do with them yet. He has made appeal to your will, shamed your sin, troubled your conscience, revealed a new ideal of life, suggested to you the possibility of a nobler life. But I want to be quite sure about all the doctrines, you say! No, you do not; and you never will be until you know the Lord!

What did Simon do when he met Jesus? He listened to Jesus, he followed Jesus, and came at last to conviction and confession; and beyond the confession he passed through processes of discipline and of testing, of growth and development, until at last in true communion with his Lord he died for Jesus - as he had said he could in the days of feebleness - and glorified his Lord in that dying. So must we begin if we ourselves at last would make the great confession.

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