**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 07 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE MADNESS OF JESUS by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And When His friends heard it, they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself.*

*Mark 3:21*

THE FIRST MATTERS THAT ARREST OUR ATTENTION ARE THAT this was said by the friends of Jesus, and that it was intended to be a friendly saying. These friends of Jesus meant exactly what we sometimes mean when we say of some person in certain circumstances and for certain reasons, "Well, the kindest thing you can say of him is that he is insane!" It was the mother and the brethren of Jesus who thus went out to lay hold on Him and bring Him home, because they had come to the deliberate conclusion that He was beside Himself. Thus it was those who knew Him most intimately, as men and women know each other in this world by the light of ordinary observation, who said this thing. They had lived with Him through all those wonderful years as He advanced from babyhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to young manhood, and had wrought as a carpenter in the little workshop in Nazareth; and I venture to suggest that their criticism was in itself an assumption of His previous sanity. This was something new which caused them to say: "… He is beside Himself"; and so they went after Him to bring Him home. When our Lord commenced His public ministry, these people accompanied Him in that first year in which He traveled up and down between Galilee and Jerusalem and exercised His ministry for the most part in Judaea. When at the death of John the Baptist, He set His face toward the Tetrarchy over which Herod reigned, His brethren journeyed with Him. They were with Him in Capernaum and saw His first sign, that of the turning of the water into wine. There is no proof anywhere in the New Testament that they had any hostility to Him personally. I think it is proven that they were a long time before they became His disciples, and in the account of that very journey to Capernaum to which I have made reference, the evangelist is careful to tell us that He went with His disciples, His mother, and His brethren, thus separating the groups; but there is no evidence of hostility to Him. Later on in His ministry, His brethren endeavored to hurry Him to Jerusalem for manifestation and claim of Messianic authority, but even then there is no proof that there was any real hostility to Him in their hearts. So far as these records reveal, for a year prior to this event, they had not been with Him very much, if at all. As a matter of fact we have no record of their having been in close association with Him from the time of the sign at Cana. Now, the reports of His more recent doings had reached them, and this was the decision to which they had come as they heard about Him; they said, "… He is beside Himself"; and prompted by love for Him and friendship for Him, they traveled, as I think, from Nazareth to Capernaum, to bring Him home. In the Gospel of Mark the sequence is quite plain. He tells us in my text of the fact of this attitude toward Him, then goes back to give an account of what the Lord was doing in the house in Capernaum, and presently resumes the narrative and says that His mother and His brethren arrived seeking Him and sent Him a message; and the people told Him, "… Behold, Thy mother and brethren without seek for Thee." They had come because they thought He was beside Himself and in great love for Him to try to persuade Him to go home and rest. It was then that He said, "Who is My mother, and My brethren," and looking at the little group of disciples added, "… whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." So much for the setting of the criticism.

I am going to ask you to follow me along two lines of consideration. First, let us consider the reasonableness of their suggestion, that He was beside Himself, and second, let us consider the reasonableness of what they counted His madness.

We must endeavor to put ourselves into their place and hear what they heard, in order to know what they meant when they said, "… He is beside Himself." Let us remind ourselves, therefore, of some recent events. When He left Judaea and set His face resolutely to Galilee, He first went to Nazareth, traveling from Judaea toward Capernaum, which henceforth was to be, for a period at any rate, His headquarters. In Nazareth He went into the synagogue, and I think we are justified in imagining that they were present that day, that they saw Him, and knew what He did. There in the little synagogue in Nazareth so familiar to Him, in which He had been brought up and which it had been His custom to attend, He read from the roll of the prophet Isaiah the Messianic prediction and then deliberately declared that that Messianic prediction was fulfilled that day in their experience because He was there in their midst. Then He taught them and in such fashion that they wondered at the grace of His words. Then, suddenly, the tones of His teaching changed, and He said to them: "You will say to Me, Physician, heal Thyself; do here in Nazareth the things that we have heard Thou hast done in Capernaum." In answer to that supposed criticism He said: "… No prophet is acceptable in his own country." Then he began a discourse characterized by rebuke with the result that the attitude of the men of the synagogue changed toward Him. They passed from admiration to anger and took Him to the brow of the hill deliberately determining to murder Him. He passed quietly through them unharmed and left Nazareth.

Then there came news to them that one day in a house in Capernaum He had done a strange new thing. He had positively claimed the right to forgive sins. He had said to a sick man whom they had brought to Him, "… thy sins are forgiven"; and the rulers had objected: "Why doth this man thus speak? … he blasphemeth; who can forgive sins but one, even God?" Then the news reached them of His rupture with the rulers. That had occurred, and doubtless they knew it, in Jerusalem in some measure, but now it was repeated in this Galilean district. This rupture was due to two or three things. He seemed to be setting Himself to violate the Sabbath. He never violated the true sanctions of the Sabbath but those false sanctions that were destroying the true sanctions. Then He was neglecting ordinances; neglecting in company with His disciples the fast-days that were appointed; He was not fasting; and most appalling of all, He was consorting with sinners. All this was resulting in rupture with the rulers.

Then they heard that He had now, for some strange purpose which they could not understand, taken twelve of His disciples and appointed them to some close relationship with Himself; they were to leave all ordinary work, and they were now always to be with Him, and presently, He said He was going to send them out to preach and to do what He was doing, cast out demons. They heard all these things.

Look over the whole ground again from another stand- point, and mark the unusual elements in the things He was doing and saying. His teaching was characterized by the strangest sort of other-worldliness. He was always talking as though the other world were the supreme world, of the spiritual life as the supreme life. He had given the great Manifesto and men were talking about it, but He had said such strange things. In that Manifesto there were visions and pictures of a great social order; but then in the Manifesto He had talked about praying for things and getting things by praying for them. A most curious thing about the present hour is that thousands of men are glorifying the Manifesto of Jesus, as it describes a social order, who, nevertheless, ignore it when it speaks about obtaining things by prayer, about knocking at the gates of God.

Then they heard the stories about Him and were amazed at His lack of diplomacy. He was no diplomatist or He never would have broken with the rulers. If He really is the Messiah come to establish the Divine Kingdom, what is the meaning of this lack of diplomacy? Look at Him again, and see the strange disinterestedness of everything He did. What was he getting out of it all? Nothing! He was not even conserving His work, apparently. Then there was the fact of His ceaseless activity and His restlessness; He was never long at one place. Within the last two months, eminent Christian scholars - I will not deny their Christianity though for the life of me I cannot understand it - have been discussing this very question, the sanity of Jesus; and they are basing their discussion upon these very things. They say, "See how restless Christ was, crossing the sea and coming back again; one day filled with joy, the next day filled with sadness." Positively men are saying again in this day what these friends of the olden days were saying of Him, He was beside Himself! It is a suggestive fact and an interesting one, and it helps us to understand them. Then they heard of His carelessness about Himself. He had no time to eat, He was always giving Himself to others. They said, "… He is beside Himself."

The phrase itself is a very suggestive one. The English phrase suggests personal eccentricity. "Beside himself" suggests a person standing by the side of himself; that the man who ought to be at a given place is not there; he is beside himself, by the side of himself. That little English phrase carries exactly the sense of the Greek word meaning a person standing outside himself. The paradox is illuminative and suggestive. It describes a man eccentric instead of concentric; a man not quite responsible; the central inspirations of conduct are out of place somehow; there is something wrong with Him; He is beside Himself.

Now let me ask a question. Do we wonder at their conclusion? Much as I object in some ways to the form of my next question, I am going to employ it: If He came to England in bodily form, and did in England exactly what He did in Judaea, what would you say about Him? I do not ask you to answer, because I know; that is, unless you have the vision He had, unless you have been admitted to His deep secret. If you are living according to the spirit of this age, if you are mastered by the maxims of the hour and are swept by the wisdom of the day, you would say of Him, and you would think in the saying of it you were speaking in the most kindly way possible, He is beside Himself, He has lost His balance, He is eccentric, He is fanatical.

Let us now take our second line of inquiry. In contradistinction to everything I have suggested to you, I want to declare first of all the reasonableness of the life and ministry of Jesus. I shall ask you to observe first of all the worldliness of Jesus. I have spoken of His other-worldliness, now think of His worldliness. Remember His worldliness was manifested in such ways that the men of that age said of Him, "A gluttonous man and a wine-bibber; the friend of publicans and sinners!" No one will imagine that I am saying that He was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber; that was but the superlative way in which hostility spoke of the fact that He was not an ascetic, that He lived an ordinary human life, that He entered into home interests, that He was pre-eminently worldly; of course, not in our modern theological sense. He loved this world, its flowers, its birds, its children, its mountains, its desert places; He was so worldly, so near to the heart of nature, that He was not afraid of loneliness. He was a Man Who walked amongst men, one of their own number, and so free from anything that marked Him as spiritually aloof, that sinning men and women crowded after Him; and they never crowd after Pharisees, even today. It is the human touch that arrests the human race.

In the second place, I ask you to observe that His methods were characterized by unceasing beneficence. He went about doing good. Everything He did was good in that sense. His activity was that of ceaseless benevolence and beneficence; the doing of good, not merely the wishing of good. Wherever He went He was doing good, helping someone always. All His signs were signs which brought blessing to men. I have made reference already to John's question, "… Art Thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" Carefully consider His answer: "… Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them." Let me not spoil that by adding anything to it.

I ask you to look at Him once more and to observe not only His worldliness and the beneficence of His activity, but His dignity, His quietness, His unobtrusiveness. He did not strive, nor cry aloud, nor lift up His voice in the streets. The crowds knew Him from north, south, east, and west, but not because He was clamant, and noisy, and ostentatious. They were drawn by the things He was doing, the quiet things. If you journey with Him imaginatively through the fields, and the walled-in towns, and the country towns, and the great cities, you are impressed with the quiet self-possession of this Man; there seems to be no touch of insanity about Him.

Look again, and let us try to see what He saw. Let us inquire, and we may do it at this distance quite reverently, what were His inspirations, what lay behind all His methods. Whether these strange, wonderful things of familiarity with the world, of perpetually doing good to others, of quiet dignity; or those strange things of disinterestedness, or unceasing and restless movement to and fro make Him seem sane or insane. What lay behind them all? I declare to you that the inspiration of all the life of Jesus was threefold. First, His knowledge of God and the real meaning of the Kingdom of God; second, His knowledge of man and of the real meaning of human failure; third, His knowledge of Himself and of the real meaning of His mission in the world.

His knowledge of God and of His Kingdom. His knowledge of God as truth and grace, as the God of infinite holiness and light and the God of infinite compassion and love. His knowledge of the Kingdom of God. He saw through everything to the Divine purpose and the Divine possibility. He saw the Kingdom of God, the empire over which God reigned and ruled and in which all were submitted to Him, and He knew that it would be a Kingdom of righteousness, of peace and of joy, a Kingdom in which there should be no place for oppression nor cry of distress. Wherever He went He saw that Kingdom of God for He saw the God Whose Kingdom He so passionately desired.

That meant that He saw clearly man and his failure. He saw man in his essential relationship to God and in his capacity for God, and, therefore, in his unutterable ruin. There is nothing more remarkable in these stories than the fact that this is what Jesus saw. He saw humanity as no other man of His time or of all time has seen it, save only those who share His life and have His vision. Matthew admits us at one point to the secret. I quote again the old familiar words, "… Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them. .." Why? "… because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." No one else was moved with compassion. Why not? Because no one saw their ruin for no one else saw their possibility. Wherever He looked He saw men and saw them ideally, in their true relationship to His Father, saw them in the breadth and beneficence of the Divine Kingdom, and saw that they were not there and knew what they were missing. Instead of righteousness, He beheld iniquity; instead of peace, He found strife; instead of joy, He saw misery. The inspiration of all the doing of Jesus was His contentment with the perfection of the Kingdom of God and His consequent discontent with everything in the midst of which He found Himself.

Then superadded to that clear vision, that double vision, there was that constant consciousness that mastered Him, to which incidentally He made reference again and again. Every evangelist records the fact, and John becomes rhythmically, monotonously, insistent upon recording the fact that He spoke of Himself as sent by God. He was the Son of God, but He was sent by God into the world for the accomplishment of a mission which He Himself did in varying phrases clearly declare: "… the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many"; "…the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Time and again such speech passed His lips revealing His own inner consciousness. Thus, in a world characterized by failure, He proceeded to His work and resolutely refused to adopt the methods of human wisdom and human strength and human cleverness which had resulted in all the chaos in the midst of which He moved; He walked the ways of men, Himself one Man perfectly responsive to that Kingdom of God which He saw; and He lived perpetually obeying its behests and carrying out its commands and doing the will of God.

Do we wonder at His other-worldliness when we think of Him as holding perpetual communion with His Father, seeing through all the mists the established Kingdom? Do we wonder at His worldliness as we recognize that this earth with all its misery was still Divinely beautiful to Him, so that, as He Himself did say, God clothes the grass of the field, and garbs the lily with more delicate beauty than that in which Solomon in all his glory was arrayed? A sparrow falls and sickens and dies, and has as Comrade in its dying, God. When that man bending to his toil, overwhelmed with it, bearing the burden and heat of the day, wipes from his brow the sweat and dust of toil, and with it some hair of his head, God has numbered that hair! Nothing was little or away from God. Do you wonder at His other-worldliness, that all His speech took on the accents of the eternities, and that His brow was ever so high lifted as to catch the flaming glories of the spiritual? Do you wonder at His love of the world, that all its trees and flowers and birds and children were near and dear to Him? In this world He knew nothing of divorce between the material and the spiritual. For Him every common bush was ablaze with God, and He saw men sitting round plucking blackberries! Do you wonder at His worldliness or at His other-worldliness? Do you wonder at His freedom from diplomacy when diplomacy simply meant arrangements between men who had forgotten God and did not know Him? Do you wonder that once when in the midst of lamentation and complaining at the unreasonableness of His own age, He thundered against the persistent rebellion of the cities in which He had done His work, His lamentation and thunder suddenly merging in the worship of God and His words, "… I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes …"? Do you wonder at His disinterestedness? Are you amazed at the ceaselessness of His activity, its restlessness, and His carelessness of Himself?

He was concentric. He was the only Man of the vast multitudes of His day Who was not beside Himself. It was they who were beside themselves; they who, because no longer related to the center, God, were no longer in true relationship as within themselves. That is why He said to them in differing phrases, yet again and again the same thing, "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake, shall find it." He was the lonely concentric; all the rest were eccentric. He was the one Man not beside Himself, and therefore by the standards of all men who were beside themselves, beside Himself. In an eccentric world, a concentric man will ever seem eccentric.

It did not end with Jesus. I most reverently say it did not begin with Him. I read you a strange Psalm. It is one of the finest pieces of satire and irony in Hebrew poetry. Mark the movement of the psalmist as he laughs at the wisdom of the world, amassing wealth and passing to Sheol, and then exults in the wisdom of the simple-hearted, that rest in the wisdom and love of God. I repeat that to an eccentric world, the concentric man ever appears eccentric. It was so before Jesus came. It was so after He came. There was a day when Paul was talking to two kings and a queen, and one of the kings burst in upon the discourse saying, "Paul, thou art mad; thy much learning doth turn thee to madness." Who was mad; Paul or Festus? The Pope of Rome said that Luther ought to be in bedlam. The men of his own church said Xavier was mad. All England laughed at the unutterable folly of John Wesley. Many people thought William Booth was not quite sane! It has run through all the centuries. Men concentric, who have seen God and a vision of His Kingdom and have been mastered by the passion for that Kingdom, are ever considered beside themselves.

So I would commend to all this passion of Jesus, this worthy passion. To be thought eccentric with Him, to be thought fanatical in matters of religion, is a high compliment as angels watch and listen. It is a worthy passion this, for it includes all others that are truly noble; all passion of protest against that which is wrong and oppressive, lies within this passion of our Lord for the Kingdom. All passion of endeavor that constructs and builds and toils and suffers, and has no time to eat, is enfolded within this passion of Jesus for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

It will always bring this charge of madness upon those who share it. The world is still self-centered, and in its eyes God-centered men are still the eccentrics of the world. When Paul reached Thessalonica, he had not been there very long before the men of Thessalonica said of him and of his friends, "… These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." It is exactly the same idea. Let me suggest a sermon on the text; "… These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also." I will give you the divisions. First, the world is down-side up; second, and therefore, the men who are turning it upside down are turning it right side up; but third, and consequently, the men who are living in the world will think they are turning it upside down. That is the whole business.

Hear me as I say, I hope not censoriously, what the church of God supremely lacks today is this kind of passion. It is not the passion of madness, of frenzy; it is the burning passion that enables the church of God to cooperate with God when the wisdom of the world laughs at it. That is the true passion. We are not quite sure today that these methods of Jesus are the best methods. Are we not a little in danger of being over-busy in conferring about the adaptation of religious thought to the modern mind and the adaptation of religious organizations to modern conditions? I am somewhat tired of modern things, and that because the things of the Christ are ancient and modern. Christ told His disciples that they were to bring forth out of their treasure-house things new and old, and in proportion as we walk with Him we shall be compelled to the foolish things of the world wherewith God confounds their wise things.

That little bit of work you did this afternoon does seem rather old-fashioned and out of date; that class of children that fidgeted all the while is just a little behind the times, is it not? A thousand times No! That is building for eternity and hastening the corning of the Kingdom of God. That call you made that no one knows about save you and the sick one, the flowers you took, the word of cheer, the tender approach to a soul that asked how it was between that soul and God; all that is Christly work.

I am not undervaluing other methods. God will send some of His workers into the House of Commons, and the more the better. God will send some of His workers on to Parish Councils and Town Councils, and we need them all. But let us not undervalue the foolish, simple, wandering, restless methods; the method that does things as they come and never draws up a program, That is the whole story of the life and ministry of Jesus. He did things as He went, as He passed by, as He went out, as He was by the sea. In the midst of preaching somebody disturbed Him, and He halted His preaching and went after Jairus; and on the way with Jairus a woman touched Him, and He left Jairus on one side to attend to the woman and then went on again. He did the next thing that came, because to those eyes the Kingdom was ever present. That touch of the hand, that glance of the eye, and that tone of the voice, all spoke of it and brought its power nearer. He was content to wait, as He still is waiting, till His enemies be made the footstool of His feet. That will never be done by the clash of arms, or by human cleveverness; but by Christ and His comrades, of whom, until the last victory is won, the world will say they are beside themselves. So if we know the wisdom that is from above, we shall sing with Wesley:

Fools and madmen let us be,

Yet is our sure trust in Thee.