**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 24 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE SPELL WHICH JESUS CASTS ON MEN by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*And He called unto Him the multitude with His disciples, and said unto them, If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

*Mark 8:34*

THIS IS A VERY OLD TEXT, BUT IT IS BY NO MEANS EXHAUSTED. It is central to Christianity, being the inclusive message of Christ, having universal as well as individual application. According to Matthew and Mark, these particular words were spoken at that hour of crisis in Christ's own ministry when He inquired of His immediate disciples what the result of His preaching and teaching and living had been. At Caesarea Philippi He asked them: "Who do men say that I am?" One of their number made the great confession that He was infinitely more than a prophet, being the Messiah, the One to Whom all the prophets had given witness. It was then that Christ uttered the words of our text.

It is evident that these words were based on the supposition that some men desired to follow Him. That is the first arresting note of the text.

Immediately following it, we have our Lord's clear enunciation of the condition on which such a man may follow him. "Let him deny himself." He then indicated a program of life to the soul who would fulfil that condition and so follow Him. Let him take up his cross and accompany Me.

Three lines of thought are suggested by these words. The first is of the spell of Jesus. I resolutely use the word "Jesus," because that is where we must begin. That is where these men began. They had no theory of His Deity, did not know anything about it, in the early days of His mission. They began with the Man Jesus, and that is where we begin. There was in Him something which cast a spell on men, which made them want to follow Him, an attraction which created in the souls of men that desire to which He made His appeal when He uttered these words: "If any man would come after Me …" That is the subject of our present consideration.

We shall consider on subsequent occasions the sense which that spell produces in the human soul. It is the sense of surprise, of shock, of upheaval. Directly a man comes face to face with Jesus this is the result. In the days of His flesh, when men really knew Him, really reached Him, it was so; and directly men come face to face with Him today, really get to Him beyond all the things that hinder, they are staggered and shocked and frightened.

When the soul is shuddering with fear in the presence of the infinite glory and beauty of the One Who has thus attracted, He calls that trembling, frightened soul to come with Him. Let him take up his cross and travel My way.

Let us now consider that which is suggested by the words: "If any man would come after Me." Amid the myriad marvels merging in the mystery of the Person of Christ one of the most patent and persistent is His attractiveness. It is safe to say that without exception He casts the spell of His personality on all who come face to face with Him. That is the revelation of these Gospel narratives. They show how irresistibly He attracted men. I am not saying that they yielded to Him, that they obeyed Him, but that they were attracted by Him. There was something about Him which drew men after Him. They could not leave Him alone. Someone once said, and it was at least an illuminative suggestion, that probably more days of work were lost in the three years of Jesus' public ministry by men running after Him from place to place than had ever been lost in that neighborhood before.

The same sense of attractiveness exercises its spell on all those who read these records, if they read the records simply and naturally. They are the records of a Person Who irresistibly drew men after Him. Read them, and the very attractiveness that drew the men of His own age after Jesus comes through the reading and produces exactly the same effect on men today. Of course, the spell of the Lord is not felt if He be veiled or in any wise changed. If this Person of the Gospel narratives passes under the influence of merely ecclesiastical organization, they retire Him behind veils into some realm of mystery, and men are not attracted. Also, over and over again this Person of the Gospels has been hidden from men by discussions of schoolmen who have dissipated Him by theorizing. I am inclined to go further and say that very often the spell of Jesus has been destroyed by systematic theology, which at least tends to harden Him into formulas and rob Him of that vital principle that drew men in the days of His flesh and that draws men still if only they can get near Him. If we would consider Him we must do so directly, through the only medium provided. In these four brief pamphlets (gospels) we find Him, and we find Him nowhere else. Whatever method we may adopt in our attempt to understand this Person, we must correct our method by these pamphlets, or we lose Him. That is in itself a mystic test of every method that men have employed in approaching Christ. Any departure from these pamphlets ends in changing the Person or veiling Him so that He ceases to attract.

I am not going to attempt to describe Jesus in detail. Realizing the fact of the spell which He evidently cast on the men of His age, and which He still casts on men, I want to speak of the nature of that attraction as I apprehend it. Let us, then, go back and see Him as these men saw Him in order that we may discover what it was in Him that created a spell that irresistibly drew men after Him in the days of His flesh. It seems to me that there were three things about this Man that created that attraction:

First, men felt that He lived, that, somehow, He had the secret of life.

Second, men felt that He knew, that when He spoke it was with authority.

Finally, men felt that He cared, that He was not merely interesting Himself in examining social conditions, that He was not merely occupied in the academic work of collecting specimens, but that He cared.

The men who gathered about Him in Galilee, in Judea, in Perea, in Nazareth, in Jerusalem, in the metropolis and in the village, in the great crowds assembled at the feasts, in the little groups that met Him by the wayside - these men who looked at Him, listened to Him, became familiar with Him, felt, first, that He was a Man Who lived, and a Man knew, and a Man Who cared. In these things I find the secret of the attractiveness of the Lord.

First, they felt that He was a Man Who lived. I am well aware how very commonplace a statement that sounds. It may at once be said that we are all living. That, however, is exactly the point. Were not all these men living who saw Him? It is evident that the impression He produced on them was that they were not living, and that He was living. He had a secret that they lacked. In reading the New Testament, all of us have observed how perpetually that great word "life" was on the lips of our Lord, and I think that nothing is more interesting than the fact that over and over again His use of the word, His reference to it, was in answer to men who asked Him questions. Men constantly broke in on His teaching to ask Him a question about life. The lawyer said to Him: "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The young ruler came to Him and said: "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Peter, in one of those great outbursts of understanding, said to Him: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words (sayings) of eternal life." All these recognized, somehow, that Jesus had the secret of life.

Now, our trouble in reading these stories often is that we read them evangelically. We get our theological values presently. We shall be driven there. But if we take up the story, and see a young man coming to Jesus and saying to Him, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? " and think of this young man as going to a mission service and asking what he must do to be saved, in the full evangelical sense of the inquiry, we are wrong. This young man did not understand things as you and I understand them. It was the question of one man, who saw another Man live. In effect, he said, Tell me how you live. You have the secret I lack. What lack I yet?

Now, the arresting fact was that Jesus lived, apparently without possessing the keys of life. The very keys that men thought were necessary to admit to life He lacked. He had none of them. He was without wealth, He was without possessions, He was without worldly advantage. Nevertheless, the supreme impression He made on men who went after Him and listened to Him was that He was living a full-orbed life, a life that was rich and glorious and satisfying. The rich young ruler had all the supposed keys of life hanging on his girdle. He had wealth. He was a ruler among his people. He had social and worldly advantages. Yet he came to Jesus and said, in effect, You have the key of life and I have not; you are alive, and I am not. Tell me the secret of the life you are living. Through those fields and along those roads of Palestine there walked a Man alive, and as they watched Him men said, What is the secret of it? Here is a Man Who seems to be excluded from everything, Who is limited in every way, but Who is living. I am going to make all this superlative by saying that I think sometimes we are wrong when we speak of the poverty of our Lord as though it was something that we should be sorry for, or that He was sorry about. I do not think Jesus needs pity for being poor in the measure in which He was poor. Do we not sometimes recite great words of the Bible in such a tone as to make them utterly wrong?

"Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

I have quoted these words over and over again with a touch of sorrow in my voice. I do not think now that there was any touch of sorrow in Jesus' voice when He uttered them. It was the declaration of One Who was independent even of those very things which men count to be necessary if they are to live. It is possible to live, without nine hundred and ninety-nine out of the thousand things which we have counted necessary.

Men looked at Jesus, and saw that He was excluded from no realm of life. He lived and talked, always with reverence, but always as One Who was admitted into the very inner secret of the Presence of Deity, and as One Who knew no veil between Himself and God. He spoke of angels as though He knew much about them, and said things about them that we do not understand today, which yet seemed to be commonplaces in His own life and experience. Then remember that in all the illustrations that I have given we find that He answered questions by giving the secret of life. Said the lawyer, How am I going to live? Said Jesus in answer, If you want My secret of life, this is it: Love God and love your neighbor. That is life.

Said the young ruler, What shall I do to live? Jesus said, Follow Me. Put your life under control. Human life is altogether too big to manage itself. It must find its master.

Said Peter, speaking for the disciples, To whom shall we go? Thou hast the sayings of eternal life. Later on, in the hearing of the disciples, Jesus gave the ultimate key to life: This is life, age-abiding, to know God. Thus He solved the problem. We, however, are supremely interested for the moment in the experience itself and the effect it produced on men. Jesus lived, and men, rich and poor, went after Him, and said, Tell us the secret. You are alive and we are not. How do You live? That sense abides until this moment. If we could rescue this living Personality from behind the veils of ecclesiastical organization, from the discussions of the schoolmen, from the hardening of theological formulas, so that men could see Him as He is, they would still say: What does this mean? This is life! What is its secret?

Again, men felt that Jesus knew. There are some things in these narratives that really are amusing in a holy sense. One day the Pharisees sent officers to arrest Jesus when He was teaching in Jerusalem. The officers were not prejudiced, but were under orders, and they went. By and by, they came back without their man. The rulers said, Why have you not brought Him? The officers replied, Never man spake like this Man! They forgot all about arresting Him. He had arrested them, and that simply by His teaching, by what He was saying.

Matthew tells us how after the great Manifesto to the multitudes, the people were astonished because Jesus taught them as One having authority. That is not a remarkable statement. So far, the marvel of the statement has not emerged. Jesus taught them as One having authority! Certainly, that is natural. But let us hear the statement to the end. And not as their scribes. That is what makes the story remarkable. The scribes were the men who had authority, but the multitude said, This is not like the teaching to which we have been listening all our lives. We have had authority, official authority, dogmatic authority, but this is different. This is Authority itself! What then was the nature of Jesus' authority? It was not a sense of authority created by anything in the personal appearance of our Lord. Artists never can express all the truth about Him, so they give Him a halo. But He had no halo visible to the men who were impressed with His authority. He had not the insignia of the scribes. There were no signs on Him that spoke of official position. Wherein, then, lay His authority? It was the authority of what He said. It was the authority of the truth. The arresting fact to men was that there was no gainsaying Him, no contradicting Him. Prejudice was ever angry with Him, will was constantly rebellious against Him, but conscience was ever agreeing with Him. I need not speak in the past tense. I can employ the present tense. Take any words that are recorded in either of these Gospels as having fallen from the lips of Jesus, and listen to them carefully. I declare that, finally, you cannot gainsay them. Though prejudice may be against Him, though will may be rebellious, the human soul will always say of His teaching: Yes, that is so; it is authoritative truth. The only criticism of the teaching of Jesus that is at all reasonable, the only thing that can be said, that ever has been said truthfully against the teaching of Jesus, is that His ideals are not practicable. That has been said.

I make no apology for repeating an illustration I have used more than once in this pulpit. A generation ago, full thirty years ago, a man said to me, "You know, my quarrel with your Christ is that He is unreasonable." I said, "Tell me what you mean by that." And he gave me this illustration, and it is a perfectly fair one. He said, "Confucius said to his followers, Be just to your enemies. I can do that; it is reasonable. Your Master said, Love your enemies. I cannot do that. That is unreasonable." Don't you agree with that man? Where are you living today? Are you finding it easy to love your enemies today? As I said, I was thirty years younger then. I did not quite know how to answer him. I felt the force of what he said. I shall always believe that I was led and helped. What I did say to him was this: "I see your point, but suppose that men could learn to love their enemies!" His answer came sharp as the crack of a pistol. "Why, then," he said, "there would be no enemies in the world." Exactly. Therein is the greatness of the ideal. Not practicable, we may say of the teaching of Jesus, but we must admit immediately afterward that if it could be done, then we would have solved all our problems, social, political, and economic. Herein was, and is, the marvel of Jesus. He taught, and men were very angry because what He said ran counter to their desires, their prejudices; but they knew He was right. He spake as One having authority. Again, to quote the words of Peter with another emphasis, "Thou hast the words (sayings) of eternal life." Jesus had not only the life itself, but the interpretation of it. He interpreted this authority also. He was perfectly willing to tell men exactly how He knew. He said, My teaching is not Mine but His that sent Me. He claimed to be in direct communication with the eternal Wisdom. He gave men only the Word of God. I think on this point there is almost startling light in something John tells us. On one occasion our Lord said: "If any man hear My sayings, and keep them not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day." This is most arresting, differentiating as it does between personal authority and the eternal authority of truth. Christ said distinctly, a man is to be judged at last by His word. Men knew it, and they went after Him. Here was a Man Who never said: It is reasonable to suppose; a Man Who never said: In all probability it is so; a Man Who talked quietly and simply, and as we ponder the matchless words, so full of simplicity that all the children can understand them up to a point, and we know we are hearing the last wisdom of eternity, and we have no appeal. We are often angry! We will not obey! We will crucify Him, silence His voice! But as we do it, we still know that what He said was the truth.

And last, men not only felt that Jesus lived, and that He knew; they felt also that He cared, and that He cared about them. He proved His interest by all the facts of His life. Some of the little sentences of the Gospel narratives reveal simply the exquisite beauty of the fact. Listen to this: "He could not be hidden." Why not? I put over against it another Scriptural quotation which contradicts it: "He hid Himself." Put them together. "He could not be hidden. ... He hid Himself." They do not contradict. The paradox is the revelation of truth. Why could He not be hidden? Because out there in the street was a woman in trouble about her child, trying to get help. Ah! He could not be hidden then. The agony of that woman drew Him forth from hiding. He cannot be hidden there. He hid Himself. When? When unbelief and the pride of ignorance were refusing His message and were about to do Him harm, then He hid Himself. But men irresistibly drew Him. If I have said that He attracted men, let me now add that was the deep reason that men attracted Him. He could not let them alone. That ultimately is the meaning of the Incarnation. God could not abandon the sinning world. It brought Him out of His heaven. All that found expression in the manner of life of this Man. Men knew that He cared. The appeal that He made to humanity was not due to His curiosity. You may be curious about men, but that will not attract men to you. His interest, I say, was not academic. He was not studying specimens. His interest in men was not artistic merely. What is art? It is the expression of a truth. But He shared human experience rather than sought to express it. He lived in man. His own consciousness was a self-emptied one, and therefore through it He received the consciousness of others. He felt all the agony of the widow of Nain whose boy, her only son, lay dead on the bier. He felt all the withering paralyzing pain of two women who had buried their brother, and He wept. There is a supreme illustration of this very sympathy. I confess that it is to me a most amazing story and I can understand the expositor and the commentator trying to account in some other way for those tears of Jesus. Suppose I came to see you in the presence of your dead and found you in agony and in tears, and suppose, just for the sake of argument, that I knew that in half an hour I could give you your dead back again, I do not think I could weep with you. But He did. My inability is the result of the comparative coarseness of the texture of my personality. The very fineness of His soul was such that although He knew that within half an hour the light would shine on the tears and make the rainbow, yet He wept in keen sympathy with the sorrow of their heart. Men knew that He cared.

So I see Jesus, living, knowing the deep secrets of life, and caring. Now, this is not the Gospel. I am not preaching the Gospel. But this creates the conviction that a Gospel is needed, and that we shall see more clearly in our next consideration. For the present it suffices me to say, and here I end for now, that the man who is not conscious of personal failure either has not seen Jesus, or has deliberately decided to be content with less than the best. To see Jesus is to say before He says it, If this is life, then I must be done with all my ideals, I must deny myself; everything is changed. The spell of Christ brings the soul to the shuddering, staggering sense of its own failure, of its own poverty.