**VOLUME 10; CHAPTER 25 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**THE SHOCK WHICH THE SPELL OF JESUS BRINGS TO THE SOUL 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*

OUR TEXT FOR THE MORNING CONSISTS OF THE FOUR WORDS AT the heart of that saying of Jesus, "Let him deny himself." That presupposes our previous meditation on the assumption of the first words of the text: "If any man will, or would, or should desire, to come after Me," namely, our meditation on the attractiveness of our Lord. That attractiveness is as powerful today as ever. Whenever men really come face to face with Him they feel the spell of His Person and character. In these central words, then, we have our Lord's statement of the condition on which those desiring to follow Him may do so: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself."

I want to remark, in the first place, that these words of our Lord express the sense of the soul concerning itself in His presence. When our Lord said these words in His time on earth, when He still says them, He but voices what the soul itself feels.

The sense of the glory and beauty of His character is inevitably also that of the meanness and deformity of self. Really to get near to this Christ of the Gospels is to be conscious of the most staggering, shattering shock that has ever been experienced. Of course, we may hear a great deal about Jesus and never have this sense of shock. It may be that we are made familiar with facts concerning. Him from our childhood, and yet it may be a long while before we arrive at this sense. I am referring to the sense of the soul when it really meets Him, apprehends anything of the glory of His Person. Really to know this Man Jesus, to see Him as One Who has the secret of life, and is living a full life while lacking all the things on which men ordinarily depend, to listen to Him, and to be assured that He is speaking the word of truth by the appeal that what He says makes to our deepest souls, to come face to face with Him, and to pass under that matchless influence of the keen, quick sympathy of His heart, is to come to the sense of His perfection; and then invariably that sense reacts on the soul as a revelation of its own imperfection and failure. I see Him, I listen to Him, I follow Him, I become more and more acquainted with Him, and as I do so I am more and more convinced of the beauty and the glory of His character and of his Person, and I start after Him, desiring to be like Him. In that very hour of starting I am halted, because I become conscious of my own unlikeness and of my inability to be what He is. He lived, and I have not the secret of living. He knew, and I lack certainty about anything. He cared, and so gathered to Himself all human souls in the comradeship of a great fellowship, and I find myself excluded from it, and the poverty of my isolation surges on my soul. I behold Him, and I say already to myself, Yea, verily, this is glory, this is beauty, this is life, this is perfection! But I am not that, I cannot be that. Therefore am I filled with fear, and the fear is generated by the apprehension of the glory and the beauty of Christ.

Now, this is exactly what Christ says. He recognizes that fear. If you desire to come after Me, you must recognize that you are not what I am. Would you be, you must deny self. All the ideals of the past, the purposes of the past, and the passions of the past are to be denied. You are to be at the end of everything if you are coming after Me.

Let us observe very carefully that these words reveal in a flash the difference between the Lord and all others. He was supremely the One Who denied Himself. That is the whole story of His human life. Therefore He says to men, If you will come after Me, you must do what I have done. You must deny yourself. That is the story of Jesus. He was the most self-emptied soul that ever trod the earth, and therefore the most self-possessed. Of other men, the story of life is that of being self-centered, and therefore self-destroyed.

This very spell which Jesus casts on men, then, is a revelation of the malady which affects humanity, and it is a procIamation of the only way by which that malady may be cured. The spell of Jesus is the dawning sense of sickness in the soul, and the word of Jesus is the indication of the way of cure. Let us think, then, along these two lines, the human malady, and its cure, dealing first with the malady.

What is the matter with humanity? The hour in which we live makes the question very vital, very pertinent. The hour is characterized by a vastness altogether too great to be apprehended. I need not stay to argue that. Is not that the difficulty in all our thinking? Is not that the difficulty that statesmen have to confront today? I shall carry you with me, however, when I say that we may sum up the story in a very blunt and brutal word by declaring that humanity today is tossed with a raging and destructive fever. What is the nature of the malady? How are we to diagnose this sickness which, at the moment, has its expression in blood, brutality, and death?

The individual is always microcosmic. If we can understand the human soul, we understand humanity. Our Lord here addresses Himself to the human soul, to one man. If any man, seeing the glory and the beauty of the ideal, feels moving within him some desire to realize it, let that man deny himself. The malady in its vastness is thus diagnosed in a human soul. Yet for a few moments let us take the general outlook as we press this question.

I begin with some negative considerations. Man's intellect is not at fault. Man's emotional nature is not at fault. Man's will power is not at fault. Never in the history of the world were these things more manifestly strong and mighty than they are today. Never have we seen the manifestation of the strength of intellect, the strength of emotion, and the strength of will, as we are seeing it today. These are all essential faculties of human personality, and the essential faculties of humanity as God created it; and today they are all mighty in their operations, and yet we are in this terrible fever.

I say that man's intellect is not at fault. His scientific achievements prove this. Never was the intellect of man so successful along every line as it is today. Man's capacity for visualizing a better order was never keener than it is today. Is there anything more interesting, more arresting, to the thoughtful soul today than this fact, that wherever we turn, whatever newspaper, or magazine, or new book we read, we find that men are seeing through the darkness to a new order? As to what it is to be, there are different opinions; as to how it is to be brought about, there are varied and conflicting opinions; but man is everywhere talking about the new order. Man is visualizing for himself some order of life from which this dire and disastrous fever shall be shut out. The intellect of man was never more active, never stronger.

Man's emotional nature is not at fault. Man still loves unto death; and, thank God, man still hates with the fierceness of the wrath of God everything that is unholy and unlovely. The emotional nature of humanity today is being stirred and is manifesting its power as it never has before.

Man's will power is not at fault, and that is being proved in both camps of this great strife. Whether will power, and the will to power, are the same things I not now discussing; or, at least, I may say, in passing, they are by no means the same thing. I am not now speaking of the will to power, but of the power of will. The war did not end before Christmas, 1914, and it is not over yet! The will power of our enemy is still strong, and our own is mighty. Moreover, that will power will not be broken by material defeat, however unpalatable a truth that may be. That is one of the truths we have to face. If we look back through the history of mankind we shall find that it is the defeated nation that is often victorious in the long issue. One of the greatest perils that threatens a nation is the peril that is born in the hours of its victory. Unless the victory be consecrated to useful and holy purpose, the very victory generates the evil thing that undermines the life of a nation.

If, then, these things are still stronger, what is the matter with humanity? The malady lies deeper. The malady is something the effect of which, whatever the something may be, is to make all the God-given and God-like powers of intellect, emotion, and will, forces of destruction instead of forces of construction. Now, there is some reason for it. What is the matter with humanity?

Now I return to the text and I say that here we have a perfect diagnosis of the disease. Let us get back to one soul, and not to the soul of the one man to whom Christ spoke, but to the soul of Christ Himself. The very charm of His personality, the very spell He has cast on me, demands that I should understand the profound secret of that life that lived, that knew, that cared, the life that lures me by its beauty. What is the secret of life? When I have discovered that, I have discovered the nature of man's malady.

In the light of that revelation we discover that no man can control himself, and therefore humanity cannot govern itself. All its blunders, all its raging fevers, all the unutterable and unfathomable agony of this hour, all these things are the result of humanity's attempts to govern itself, to manage its own affairs - or bluntly, yet truthfully, let us say it, the result of humanity's attempts to do without God. Look again at the glory of the Man we have been considering. The secret of His greatness was that He denied Himself. I quote from the great passage in Philippians, beginning resolutely right in the middle of it rather than at its commencement: "Being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient." What humanity needs is to understand that the word "obedient" is a very different word from what humanity really has imagined it to be. We had better return to the individual soul again. The human soul has to understand that the word "obedient" is the greatest and most beautiful word that can be used to describe its attitude. Obedient! How we fight against it! How we struggle against it! Account for it as you will, and I am now at the business of accounting for it, from childhood upward it is the one word we have hated most. Obedient! Yet this is the one great word that reveals the secret of the perfection of Jesus. Being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient. I go a little further back in the same passage and I read concerning Him that He was in the form of God, but did not consider that equality with God was a prize to be snatched at and held for Himself, and that therefore He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant. He was the servant of God. All the story of His life as Man is the story of obedience to the one central perfect will, the will of God. Multiply that Man by the new race of newborn souls - I am now speaking in the realm of the ideal - and what have you? A race of souls obedient, mastered, a race of souls who have learned this as the supreme and fundamental thing, that no man can control himself, that he is too big to manage himself, that he was not constructed to run by his own design, his own willing and his own planning, that he must be under the control of the God from Whom he came. Humanity cannot govern itself. The attempt at self-control is the root of the malady. Intellect is there, but it lacks the true light. Emotion is there, but it has not the true inspiration. Will is there, but it is not mastered by the true principle.

In a recent article in The Nation, headed "Minerva at the Cross Roads," a very remarkable article in many ways, the writer describes the present condition of humanity, and speaks of the passion for power prevalent throughout the whole world. Among other things, he writes:

Power over man, over nature, over land and sea and sky; power we seek everywhere in size and speed and treasure, power over everything but ourselves.

I have nothing to do now with the context of the article. That was the writer's diagnosis of the situation. I have quoted the passage for one reason: says this writer, "power over everything but ourselves." That is true, but it is not our fault, it is our nature. That is the exact point that we are trying to see. Humanity cannot have power over itself. Humanity can master the land and the sea; humanity can have power in size and speed and treasure, but it cannot have power over itself. Humanity is not capable of governing itself. This is the lesson that humanity has yet to learn. Whether it will learn it from this war or not, I will not predict. Whether it will even learn it until He shall come, the flaming of Whose advent feet will usher in the final revelation of God's will for men, I will not now pause to argue. When Jesus said that day at Caesarea Philippi to that multitude, mainly of Jewish men, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself," He was uttering no mere superficial words that affected only the passing hour. The final character of them has not yet dawned on humanity, for humanity has been running on its way, trying to manage for itself by its cleverness, by its policies, by its armaments, which it cannot do. The ultimate issue of such attempts is this appalling and wicked waste of human life and the welter of the present war. Humanity cannot manage itself. My God! Are we going to learn it or not? That is where repentance must begin if ever hope is to be possible. The doctrine of self-control is a doctrine of unfathomable nonsense as well as hopelessness.

I pass back once more from the larger outlook to the individual soul. If I tell this young man that he must control himself, I am talking nonsense. He cannot control himself, He is too big, he is too vast for his own apprehension. He may not believe it, that young man! Some of us who are a little older are finding out that the things we thought were so easy are not easy. Where we thought we had controlled ourselves we were mastered by wrong forces which would have destroyed us but for the grace of God. How can anybody control himself in any way? I am sure you are ready to have patience with me if I take a personal illustration. In the days of my youth my favorite athletic sport was wrestling. Now, how can a man wrestle with himself? The whole art of wrestling is to get your opponent down and put him on his back. Try that with yourself. You cannot put yourself on your back and hold yourself there. When you are there, who is on top? That is the whole business. A man says, I will manage myself. He may sign pledges, and give up, or he may decide to give up without any pledge. He is just cutting off here, and lopping off there, and he thinks he is self-controlled. The fact is that he is more self-confident in all the foolish pride of his nature than before he began to lop off his branches.

Humanity thinks it is able to govern itself. Government of the people by the people for the people is a ghastly failure unless you preface your idea with some other word, or follow it up with some other word. Government of the people by the people for the people under God. Yes, verily. But if we attempt it without God, the last and worst tyranny of this world will not be the tyranny of monarchy or the tyranny of wealth - it will be the tyranny of democracy. A democracy is hell unless it be also a theocracy.

Thus we see the human malady. We have been trying to do without God, and without control, and to manage; and there is no ideal we held, high or low, but that at this moment lies in ruins on the plains of Flanders! High or low, the ideal is broken, and the will to power is defeated. The ideal that we can deal with humanity by treaties and conferences at The Hague is broken into a thousand fragments.

Jesus Christ still stands, His head lifted above the smoke of battle, His eyes still lit with the vision of the eternal truth, and He is saying to men: If you will come after Me, deny yourselves, confess your folly, repent, not first of your drunkenness, and your gambling, and your lust: these are symptoms of that deeper wickedness, the underlying imagination of the nation that God is out of date, and that we can do without Him.

And there also is revealed the cure. To see the malady is to know the cure. The cure is radical and revolutionary. I have chosen my words with care.

It is radical. By that I mean it goes to the very root of the business. Let man deny himself, The word "deny," as it is usually translated, means, as many of you at once recognize, to disown, to abdicate, to put self off the throne entirely. To deny self is a great deal more than to practice self-denial in our modern sense of the phrase. We are all being urged to practice self-denial now, and a few people are doing it! But that is not the call of the text. The word of Jesus is a pro-founder word than that. Let man deny himself. Jesus calls men to central readjustment. To deny self is to make room for God. And that is what our governments are afraid to do. It is also to believe in God. It is, therefore, to hand the keys over to God. It is to confess folly, and to confess weakness, and to wait for God.

The call is also revolutionary; it demands the readjustment of every other relationship. Through the denial of self in the individual home is revolutionized. Given a home in which those who constitute it know this principle of denying self, and you have music and harmony and love, and all those subtle but marvelous forces that make Home.

Self being denied, the Christian Church is revolutionized. When we in the Christian Church learn the secret, and submit to it; when self is denied, and the living Lord is enthroned actually, then we shall have done with our conflicts. Not with our differences of opinion. But then we shall be able to sit down, and talk with the men who do not agree with us, and with whom we do not agree, and so we shall feel our way nearer to the truth. It is bitterness of heart that makes schism, and paralyzes power. The Church of Christ itself never has fully realized the importance of the call of Christ to deny self.

It is so also in the national life. It is so in all international relationships. In proportion as man is at the end of himself, and humanity recognizes the necessity for the wisdom from on high, and the strength of God, in that proportion the malady will be healed.

Now let me end by stating that in nothing I have said so far have I been preaching the Gospel. But the Gospel is involved. I have already quoted some words concerning Jesus, and I stopped short. Now is the time to complete the quotation. "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." There was no need for the Cross in the life of One Who was always self-emptied. It was an improper thing for Him, unless there was some larger purpose in it than that of His own Personality. He was always self-emptied. Why, then, the Cross? The Cross created the way of denying self for man who had been self-centered, self-governed, and self-ruined. The Cross is the place where we receive life as a gift of grace. At the Cross of Christ we confess that we cannot lift ourselves or save ourselves out of the depths into which we have fallen, and we take all that is provided in the Cross as His free gift.

That is why the Cross is unpopular, and that is why the Cross is powerful. The real reason in human thinking for attempting to get rid of the Cross is that it denies man; it tells man that he cannot save himself, that he can never govern himself; but that having ruined himself, it can restore that which he has ruined. Christ comes with His Cross to human cleverness, and to human might, and declares the folly of that cleverness and the wickedness of that might. He says to men: You can be made new, you can climb to the height of the ideal; but you must begin here, by the way of the Cross, taking your life from God as a gift of His infinite compassion and His infinite grace. That is where we begin to deny ourselves, not by taking up our own crosses. That comes after. No man takes up his cross in order to be saved. From that other Cross, which is outside us, in the mysterious transactions of which we had no part, there comes to us the gift of life and power and healing. It is a gift of love that keeps us forevermore sensible of our own weakness, a gift of power that keeps us forevermore sensible of our need of control from without, a gift, having received which, we shall walk every foot of the way with the sense of dependence on God.