**VOLUME 9; CHAPTER 04 - THE PREACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**FOUR MISTAKES ABOUT CHRIST by G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

*Is not this the Carpenter ...?*

*Mark 6:3*

*John the Baptizer is risen from the dead, and therefore do these powers work in him.*

*Mark 6:14*

*Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take Him by force, to make Him King, withdrew again into the mountain Himself alone.*

*John 6:15*

*... they, when they saw Him walking on the sea, supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out.*

*Mark 6:49*

WE ARE OFTEN TROUBLED ABOUT CHRIST, THAT SO MANY different views of Him are held, and yet that is almost the inevitable sequence of the wonder of His Person. The fierce conflicts that have raged around the Christ - as to Who He is, whence He came, what is the real meaning of His mission - all are due to the finite nature of the mind of man in its attempt to grasp the infinite wonder and glory of the Person of the Lord Christ.

We have read these chapters in order that we may see that exactly the same things were true in the time when He was in the world. He was manifested among men, Himself a man, but a perpetual enigma to men. In this one brief chapter, brief by comparison with the whole fact of His ministry, Jesus is described as a carpenter, as a prophet, as a king, and as a phantom. These opinions were all wrong and they were all right. In every one of them there was an element of truth; but in each case, only one truth being recognized and discovered, false deductions were made. The mistake in each case was due to the limiting of Christ which resulted from an attempt to express all the truth concerning Him in the language of one particular manifestation of His presence and His power.

Let us then consider first the opinions that were given here; second, the mistakes that were made here; in order, third, to discover the lessons that are suggested here.

We need not tarry very long in examining the opinions. The story is familiar to all of us. Yet let us take time to recall the surroundings in each particular case. In the first, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, …" we have the opinion of His kinsfolk, the opinion of the people who in all likelihood were most perfectly acquainted with Him within the narrow circle of His human life. Eighteen years of that life had been spent in Nazareth. There He had grown up in the sight of the men and women of that little township just off the great highways, but yet so near to them that the men and women living there were in all probability familiar with the things happening in Jerusalem and the towns adjacent, for these highways between Jerusalem and other great centers lay at the foot of the hill. Nazareth was a small township, so small that we are led to imagine from the actual wording of the criticism, that Jesus of Nazareth was the one carpenter; "Is not this the carpenter …" They knew Him perfectly well. He had grown up in their midst. They had seen the natural and beautiful boy advance to young manhood, until He came to be about thirty years of age. Now, after a brief absence, He had gone back, as a Teacher. It was not at all strange that this young man should begin to speak. The strange fact was the method and the marvel of His teaching. The picture is very striking. In that little synagogue, the men who knew Him best, looking, listening, and amazed, until, interrupting His speech, as the story suggests, they said, "Whence hath this Man these things?" What is the power that lies behind this strange manifestation of wisdom and these strange and wondrous works of which we hear in Nazareth? Then they began to account for Him, "Is not this the carpenter …?" And observe how particular they were to place Him, how particular to show that they knew all about Him. "The son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? …" If we would know the tone and temper in which the question was asked, we must include the next sentence, "And they were offended in Him." They stumbled over Him, because they could not understand Him.

In that criticism they declared a truth that we are always thankful they did declare, that Jesus was a carpenter. They knew Him, as a man who wrought with His hands for the support of His own earthly life, through the larger part thereof. "Is not this the carpenter …?" they were quite right, and they were sadly wrong.

Let us pass to the next scene. The fame of Him was spreading through all the country round about, increased by the mission of His apostles. They had been sent out, and we are told that they cast out devils and anointed many sick with oil and healed them. The fame of Jesus was thus spreading, and it reached the court of Herod, and Herod immediately said, "John the Baptizer is risen from the dead ..." Herod had not seen Him. Herod never did see Him until the final hour, and then he never heard His voice. Christ declined to speak to him. But he heard the story of His power. These words of Herod reveal the impression made by the story of the work of Christ on a man who was immoral. To satisfy the vengeful nature of a wanton, Herod had beheaded John. An evil man can behead a prophet of God, but he cannot bury him. The prophet will follow him and will be with him in the night. If there is blood on your hand, you can say with Lady Macbeth, "Out, damned spot," but you cannot cleanse that hand. Herod heard of a prophet, heard of wonders wrought, and all the superstition in his guilty nature mingling with the moral cowardice of the man, he said, "John the Baptizer is risen from the dead. ..." The first opinion was due to the unfairness of the jealous. The second was due to the cowardice of the immoral.

Then we come to the story of that wonderful feeding of the five thousand, a kingly act in the true and full sense of the word kingly. It is said here of Christ, a thing so often repeated of Him, that He saw the multitudes, and He was moved with compassion for them. Why? Because they were as sheep without a shepherd, and it would be quite as accurate to say, a nation without a king; for God's kings are all shepherds. The true qualification for kingship in the economy of God, as the Bible reveals from beginning to end, is the shepherd qualification. They were as sheep without a shepherd, and "He taught them many things"; and then He fed them. There had been no movement towards His crowning while He taught them, but the moment He fed them they wanted to crown Him. They said, "this is the King we have been looking for"; and they would fain take Him by force and make Him a King. Mark only gives us the picture of Jesus suddenly dismissing His disciples and returning to the mountain, but John tells the reason; "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him King, withdrew again." They desired to make Him a King upon the basis of His ability to satisfy their material hunger. They reasoned, He is a King, He is kingly, He can feed, and so they would crown Him. That view was that of the desire of the selfish.

We come to the last scene, the most difficult to deal with in some ways. We will look at it in its simplicity and naturalness. He retired to the mountain to pray, and the disciples, in obedience to His command, pointed the prow of their boat to the other side. The wind was contrary, and they were distressed in rowing. Then He went after them from the height to meet them by appointment on the other side of the sea. He walked across the waters, with no intention whatever of coming to them in the boat. He would have passed them by, which distinctly means that it was His purpose, that it was His intention to pass them. They saw this figure moving over the waters, and they cried out for fear and said, "It is an apparition, a phantom." This was the dread of the perplexed.

He is a carpenter. That opinion was due to the unfairness of the jealous. He is a prophet. That dread was the outcome of the cowardice of the immoral. He is a king. That view was based upon the desire of the selfish. It is an apparition. That was language resulting from the dread of perplexed hearts.

Let us turn, in the second place, from this brief glance at the circumstances and the opinions, to consider the mistakes. But just let it be recognized that there were elements of truth in all these opinions. When these men of Nazareth said, "He is one of us," they said a true thing. He is One of us. They were perfectly correct as to His relationship to Mary and as to the relationship borne to Him by the men and women they knew. He was one of them, so much one of them that they had never dreamed that there was anything beyond immediate kinship in His nature. I think that we might take out of the old prophetic writings one word and inscribe it in imagination over the door of the shop in which Jesus had wrought and used the tools off His craft for eighteen years; "There was the hiding of His power." There was no halo round His brow, no peculiar flash in His eye that suggested Deity, nothing in His appearance to make these men think for one single moment that He was other than a peasant. He was One of us. It was perfectly true. There was nothing in His appearance to make men imagine that He was anything other than they were.

When King Herod said, "John … is risen from the dead," there was an element of truth, not in that supposition of John's resurrection, but in the thing that made Herod quake, the consciousness that there was still a voice bringing him face to face with moral standards. John had made Herod tremble in olden days when he had listened to him. Herod had been almost persuaded to righteousness by John. There is one little phrase that indicates this. Herod "heard him gladly." Herod was now merely the wreck of a man, wholly sensual. John was dead and buried, but a voice was sounding. Herod had not escaped the law, he had not escaped that prophetic note that makes men tremble. He was perfectly right in thinking of Jesus as a prophet, stern indeed, enunciating the severest of all ethics.

The people who desired to make Him King were perfectly right. He is King, and He is King upon the basis of His shepherd character; and as King He will provide for all the necessities of those over whom He reigns if they do but obey His teaching. That, however, is the order. He taught them and then fed them. He is the one King Who really provides for the material needs of men, Who will feed them and feed them perfectly.

I watch the disciples as looking at the strange figure moving over the waters through the darkness of the night they say, "It is an apparition!" Here was something coming toward them that they could not fully apprehend, something upon which they could not put their measurement. They forgot the tossing waves and howling wind, the material and present difficulties, in the presence of this new and mystic difficulty, the difficulty of a personality that they could not apprehend, could not measure, could not weigh. There was an element of truth in what they said. Christ is still an enigma. We cannot say the final thing concerning Him. He still moves over the rough waters, surprising and startling men; and men see Him as He passes, but not clearly, and catching some mystic going of the Christ, they are still filled with perplexity.

Wherein, then, lay the mistake in each case? In the limitation of their views placed upon the Christ Himself. If we could gather these four opinions and express them in one statement, I think we might be near the whole truth about the Christ. I put that carefully, because I am not sure that it is correct. Yet, think of it for a moment. What were the things that these men discovered? His nearness, His severity, His authority, and the infinite mystery of His being. That surely is the Christ; near, "One of us"; severe, so that no sinner could escape Him, though He robe Himself in purple and hide Himself in the court. King so that He will enunciate His moral ethic, and to the people who obey it, He will be the Provider of all their material need; and yet, an infinite Mystery, baffling the attempt of the centuries to place Him, breaking the mould of every philosophy that attempts to include Him, forevermore appearing in some new guise, some new wonder, some new marvel of His power. Just as the disciples think that they have understood Him and seen the ultimate of His wonder, He dismisses them across the water, and hies Him to the mountain, and then startles them by walking over the water that baffles them. The element of the mysterious in the fact of the Christ perpetually breaks upon the consciousness, and men come to recognize that they cannot say the final thing concerning Him. Near, One of us, a carpenter; severe, so that immorality is always dragged into light. King, with an ethic the severest that men have ever dreamed of, and a power the most generous that humanity can ever hope for. Yet ever beyond us, a mystery, an apparition.

In either of these cases, the recognition of all would have prevented the false conclusion. If they could have mingled with that conception that He is One of us, the very thing the disciples said, "He is a phantom," and known that beyond the manifest was the mystery of His being, then they would have listened to His teaching and not have been offended. Or if the disciples, when they saw Him only as a phantom and hardly knew Him, could have remembered the One Who in love bade them pass from the sea to the mountain, they would have been delivered from all false fear. If Herod could have known the nearness of this Man to him in all the sympathy of His heart, in all the authority of His kingship, and in all the infinite mystery of His being, then he would have left the court and found his way to this King of kings, not merely to submit to Him but to receive from Him all He could bestow. The mistake was in limiting the Christ. A recognition of the whole truth would have prevented the false conclusion in each case.

What then are the lessons suggested by these things said concerning the Christ in this sixth chapter of Mark? The first is that the opinion a man has of Christ invariably reveals the man. The men who attempted to place Him as a carpenter did so because they were jealous and were not prepared to be honest enough in the presence of the wonders they confessed of word and work to find out the deeper secret. The fear that shook the heart of Herod like a tempest in the night at the rumor of Jesus was the result of his own impurity. The desire to make Him a King as a wholesale food-provider was based upon personal selfishness and the materialization of life. The fear of the phantom in the case of the men who were in the pathway of obedience, with their prow pointed to the shore He had indicated, was the outcome of their own doubt and their own questioning. Every criticism of Christ is a revelation, not of Christ, but of the men who make the criticism. Whenever a man shall attempt to place the Christ and leave Him as One of us, it is a revelation of the fact that he has lost a sense of the spiritual. Whenever a man is afraid of the Christ, and dare not name His name, and endeavors to escape the message of His prophecy and kingship, it is because in that man's heart there is something of impurity; the only man that dreads the Christ is the impure man. When a man shall eliminate from the teaching of the Scripture and the church, all supernatural elements and attempt to make Christ merely the leader of a party that shall feed men on this earth, it is because in that man's heart there is enshrined a selfishness which is wholly and utterly of the dust. When we who name His Name are afraid of Him, the fear is the outcome of our own doubting and our own questioning, and our lack of courage. All criticism of Christ is a revelation of the attitude of those who criticize.

This chapter is a wonderfully living chapter. All these things are still being said about the Christ. We are still being told that He is One of us. Men are still attempting to place Him on the human plane. We are still being told that it is John risen from the dead, an ethical Teacher, with a severer note, and a fuller program, but nothing other. We are still being told that Christ's chief mission is to feed hungry men and women with material bread. We are still being told that Christ is an unreal personality, an apparition, a phantom. Such mistakes arise from imperfect knowledge of the Christ in every case. There is always the element of truth and always the neglect of the whole truth. The truth? Yes, nothing but the truth; but not the whole truth. He is One of us; He is an ethical Teacher; He does care about hungry men and will provide for their need; He is an infinite mystery. But He is not merely One of us, He is more than all, and the very universality of His appeal to humanity is a revelation of His wholeness and His greatness. We can find no other teacher, no other leader that appeals to humanity as such. We cannot take any great leader of whom we may think away from the place in which he lived and see him perfectly fitting and at home in another locality. It is unthinkable to imagine that Oliver Cromwell could have delivered France. He belonged here, and you cannot put him anywhere else. It would be an utterly vain piece of imagination to bring Abraham Lincoln and put him into this country. He belonged to the New Land, and God put him there, and he did his work there, but he was local. But this Man - man of my manhood, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, human of my humanity - you may put down wherever humanity is and men will gather round Him and find in Him their head tribesman, their chief of clan, their great ideal. The universality of His humanity is demonstration of the fact that He is something more, infinitely more than merely one of us. Ethical teacher, He assuredly was, but infinitely more. And if not infinitely more, then nothing to me - I freely say it to you. I speak as a witness; if Jesus has done nothing for me than give me an ethical system, then that appals me, that reveals my paralysis and leaves me helpless. But He is more, oh troubled sinner. Thank God if you have come so far as to tremble in the presence of the Christ. He is more than an ethical Teacher, He is a Saviour. He is One Who, if Herod will but have it so, will purify Herod's polluted soul. He is One Who, if you will but have it so, will break the power of canceled sin. Infinitely than an ethical Teacher, One Who communicates to men the new forces that will remake them and enable them to fulfil the ideals of His teaching. A food Provider? Surely yes, but first a Teacher, and we have no right to claim that the Christ shall fulfil His function of supplying material need save in the order of His own revelation. He must be the crowned King, and He must be crowned, not upon the basis that He will care for the body, but upon the basis that He includes in the grasp of His purpose, eternity, and the spiritual things. Not temporal in His power ultimately, but eternal and therefore temporal. He will not remake the social conditions of today by dealing with the decaying material at His hand. He will remake the social conditions by bringing to bear upon them the regenerating forces of God. Unless men submit at that point, they have no claim upon the fulfilment of the function of His kingship for the feeding of men. The multitudes will make Him King by popular acclaim, and He will escape to the mountains. But for the little group, and the growing number, and the ultimate assembly of souls who crown Him Lord in the spiritual and central and fundamental realm, for them He will build the city and bring in the ultimate triumph of righteousness.

But is He an apparition? Let me answer thus. Every day I live and think and preach, I am more conscious that I cannot say the last word about this Christ. I would be very sorry to attempt to tell anyone exactly what my Christology is. Only this I know, that whenever I come into the presence of this human life, so real, so definite, so warm, so tender, so actual, I have to bow and confess, My Lord and my God. Charles Wesley, you remember, put the whole thing into a daring phrase, "God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly man." Let us not be afraid at the mystery, but touch the manifest. Let us no longer stand away at infinite distance from the Christ, afraid of the things that cannot be encompassed in human thought or expressed in human speech; but let us get near to the Jesus of these Gospels as He appears before us, eyes wet with tears, face often beaming with the smile of a great gladness, touching familiarly and healing in His touch, putting His arms about the children, his heart full of infinite compassion; let us get near to Him and know this, that the One Who moves across the storm-tossed waters with the appearance of an apparition is the One Who will look at us and say, "Be not afraid, it is I."

The last word is this. These mistakes about Jesus limit Him in His power. Observe what is said about the men at Nazareth. "… He could there do no mighty work. …" Why not? "… because of their unbelief." If we make Him only the Carpenter of Nazareth, He can do no more for us than the Carpenter of Nazareth. We put our limitation upon Him, and He is limited by our limited conception. He had no word for Herod, never spoke to Him; one of the most appalling and awful revelations of the New Testament. Herod never met Him until Pilate sent Him to him; and when He came, He uttered never a word. He refused to be crowned because He was limited by their conception. He could not exercise the power of His Kingship upon that desire. Finally, He could not pass the disciples by. We are inclined to say that is full of comfort! It is not. Study the story carefully, He would have passed them by and better for them that He should. Had He passed them by, what then? Then, they would have learned by weathering the storm in His power, some lesson of His power. He is always passing us by. You know the old story of the woman who saw three women at prayer. She dreamed that the Lord passed by, and to the first He came and bent over her with tender caress; to the next He spoke but a word; but the last He passed almost roughly. The dreaming woman thought, "How tenderly the Lord loves the first; the second is not so dear to His heart; and with the third He is evidently angry." Then the Lord, in her dream, came to her, and said "Oh woman of the world, how wrongly hast thou judged? That first woman needs all of My care and tenderness to keep her following at all; that second woman is of stronger faith, and I therefore am hastening her preparation for yet higher service; but the last one I can absolutely depend upon; and by the very processes by which I deny her My voice, I am preparing her for the highest service of all."

He would have passed them! We are not ready for Him to do so! Then in great pity He will stop and come on board. But, ah me! if I could only let Him have all His way. We limit Him in His power when we limit our conceptions of Him. Let us never forget this. Let me give you the whole philosophy by quotation. D. L. Moody said, in this country many years ago, in his own homely, straight, and magnificent way: "Christ is just as great as your faith makes Him."

Then, what shall we do? We will attempt to know Him better. Paul's last great letters thrill with one desire for all his children in the faith; that they might know; and the measure of our knowledge of Him will be the measure in which we are able to put our trust in Him. We come to the fuller knowledge by following the light of the knowledge we have. As we walk in that and obey it, He will appear fairer and fairer, greater and greater, until He fills the whole horizon; and when He does that, then faith in that great Saviour will result in great victories wrought by Him for us and through us to the glory of His name.