

Concerning Himself

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon explores the profound implications of Christ's self-revelation and His relationship to God and humanity.

Scripture: Matthew 9:13, Matthew 11:27, Matthew 26:38, Mark 10:45, Mark 13:32, Luke 4:43, Luke 9:58, Luke 19:10, John 3:13-14, John 10:30

Topics: "The Identity of Christ", "The Purpose of Christ"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the significance of Christ's self-revelation, exploring how Jesus taught about His own identity and purpose without systematic declarations. He highlights that Jesus' existence transcends human understanding, revealing both His divine nature and His intimate connection to humanity. Morgan discusses key biblical passages that illustrate Christ's eternal consciousness, His relationship with God, and His mission to save sinners. The sermon underscores the importance of recognizing who Christ is, as this understanding is central to the Christian faith. Ultimately, Morgan concludes that Christ's life and teachings reveal the profound mystery of godliness.

Transcript

"But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13).

"All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matthew 11:27).

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Matthew 26:38).

"Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Matthew 26:45).

"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32).

"And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43).

"And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:13-14).

"But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17).

"For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will" (John 5:21).

"Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me" (John 8:42).

"Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

"I and my Father are one" (John 10:30).

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

"Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:9)

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28).

WE must all recognize the supreme importance of the teaching of CHRIST concerning Himself. In an address delivered from the Chair of the Congregational Union in 1909, Mr. J. D. Jones of Bournemouth said, "The Question, 'What think ye of Christ?' is critical for the future of Christianity. It is around the question of the Person of CHRIST that the battle wages . . . Is He simply the first Christian, or is He the sum and substance of Christianity?"

The enquiry is a pertinent one, and the declaration that we are in the midst of a conflict around the question of the Person of CHRIST cannot be denied.

In the midst then of such conflict, we turn with keen and reverent interest to the consideration of His teaching concerning Himself.

It is necessary at the outset that we recognize the limitations of our present meditation. We are limited first by the fact that He gave no systematic teaching concerning Himself. He never, upon any occasion, so far as the records reveal - and we have no other means of knowing - addressed the multitudes by way of

explanation of His own Person and Being.

Neither have we any record of His gathering His disciples about Him, in order that He might tell them all the truth about Himself. On the other hand, it is quite evident that the supreme problem of the men of His age was created by Himself. His enemies and His critics over and over again asked Him for some clear and specific teaching concerning Himself, "Who art Thou?"

His disciples were evidently equally perplexed. Both foes and friends were conscious in His presence of more than they could account for; and were eager to hear His own declaration concerning the mystery of His Being; but He never, by direct and systematic teaching, answered the enquiry either of friends or foes.

Indeed, I think it would not be too strong a statement to make were I to say that, according to His own declaration recorded by John (5:30-38), He avoided all such teaching. On the other hand, it is impossible to read the words of JESUS, as they are recorded for us in these four narratives, without seeing quite clearly that the implications of His teaching constitute a revelation of His Person.

We are also limited in this study by the fact that from His references to Himself we shall select, for our present use, only those which are essential and inclusive.

I propose therefore, first, to group certain of His statements concerning Himself, in which statements He made use of revealing terms; and secondly, therefrom to make a deduction of values.

First then, let us gather from the mass of material at our disposal in the four Gospels certain outstanding statements of our Lord. These we shall group under three headings:

First, passages containing terms of existence;

Secondly, passages containing terms of relation; and

Thirdly, passages containing terms of purpose.

In the light of these passages we shall see something of what our Lord taught concerning Himself; as to the mystery of His Being, as to His relationship both to GOD and man, and as to the meaning or purpose of His presence in our world.

We then take first the Scriptures which contain terms dealing with the fact of His existence.

Certain things CHRIST said of Himself, either in formal declaration, or incidentally, reveal His self-consciousness, as apart from His relationship, either to GOD or to man. These again may be grouped under two headings. In certain passages He spoke out of an eternal consciousness; or I should prefer to change the word eternal, and adopt that which is its equivalent, but which far better conveys the real meaning of the New Testament word; He spoke out of an age-abiding consciousness.

In other passages there are terms which reveal His temporal consciousness; or terms which show that He was speaking, as of the age in which He lived, and as conscious of its limitations.

I have selected, rather by way of illustration than in any attempt to exhaust the theme, three passages in which I find the terms of eternity, the age-abiding terms. Let us first read them. I shall quite deliberately lift these passages out of their context, in order that we may consider them in their loneliness. This is not to do any violence to them, because the context in no way modifies their meaning in this application.

These then are the three passages:

"I Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me" (John 8:42).

"Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28).

Almost all the great declarations of CHRIST revealing His eternal consciousness, and concerning His relationship to GOD, are found in the Gospel according to John. Westcott said of this Gospel, "the Gospel of St. John from first to last is a record of the conflict between men's thoughts of CHRIST, and CHRIST's revelation of Himself."

The first of these statements, "I came forth from the Father," is a most remarkable word, not describing a fellowship of nearness with GOD, but one which is essential. The real suggestion of the declaration, "I came forth from the Father," is not that He came from the side of GOD, from companionship with GOD, as an angel might; but that He came out of the essential mystery of the Being of GOD.

The declaration, "Before Abraham was, I am," was introduced by that formula of which He occasionally made use when desiring to fasten attention upon a subject: "Verily, verily."

This moreover was a direct and intended contrast on His part between the temporal and the eternal.

"Abraham was"; that is a term of the temporal; but before that, "I am," which in that contrast becomes distinctly a term of the eternal.

In the last of these three passages we have a perfect summary of the whole mission of CHRIST as recorded in the Gospels, ". . . from the Father . . . into the world . . . leave the world . . . to the Father" (John 16:28).

It is impossible, and unnecessary for us to consider fully the value of these words separately. The fact to be observed is that our Lord referred to Himself in such a way that the implication of His references is that of an age-abiding existence.

It is important that we notice the persistence of the Ego, of the "I," of the Person, through these passages: "I came forth from the Father"; "Before Abraham was I am"; "I came out . . . am come into . . . I leave . . . and go to."

Herein is no definite or systematic declaration or claim of preexistence; and yet herein is the consciousness of a persistent existence; or the vapourings of a diseased mind; or the false claims of an impostor. The Ego is persistent; existing before the coming, or there could have been no coming; present in the world, and evidently set forth before the eyes of men in guise suited to their ability to appreciate; and about to leave the world, but not to cease to be. These are the eternal terms, the age-abiding terms, in which He spoke of Himself; and the inevitable implication is that of an eternal, or an age-abiding consciousness.

Turning next to those terms of existence which were purely temporal; those references to Himself which indicated His relation to the conditions of the age in which He spoke; and which mark His sense of the

limitations of time and locality, and His sense of the common experiences of humanity, we will group seven such passages, indicating in each case the particular sense suggested.

The first two indicate His sense of the limitations of time and locality:

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). That was the sense of time.

"And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43). That was the sense of locality.

The next five reveal His sense of the common experience of men:

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32). That was the sense of limited knowledge.

"And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). That was the sense of poverty.

"No man knoweth the Son, but the Father" (Matthew 11:27). That was the sense of loneliness.

"Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Matthew 26:38). That was the sense of sorrow.

From these illustrations, which can easily be changed or multiplied, we may recognize that His common speech concerning Himself was that of One sharing in every way in the conditions of His age, and the experiences of humanity. Thus we find declarations, formally made, or incidentally falling from His lips, which reveal the consciousness of a Being both superior to His own age, and subsisting in an ages; and therefore ageless, timeless, age-abiding, eternal.

And we find that He was conscious also of the limitations of time and space; that He did not know the day or the hour; that He knew poverty, that He knew loneliness, that He knew sorrow, that He knew weakness; all the things of one age, its limitations and its human experiences.

Passing now to the Scriptures which contain the terms revealing the fact of His relationships, these may also be grouped under two heads: those revealing His relation to GOD, and those showing His relation to men.

Those revealing His relation to GOD are found in the Gospel according to John. His consciousness of relation to GOD is revealed as twofold:

A consciousness of relation as to nature, and

A consciousness of relation as to activity.

There are two great words revealing His consciousness as to nature: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 5:17).

There are also two words revealing His consciousness as to activity: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). "For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will" (John 5:21).

Our present interest centers not in the connection of these words, important though it is, but in the actual declarations.

Notice the two affirmations concerning His conscious relationship to GOD as to nature. "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30).

That is a solemn and separate claim in which every single word, properly considered, is full of value and suggestiveness; and it is well that we should notice the effect produced by these words upon the Jews who first heard them, for as we observe that effect, we shall discover their understanding of His meaning. "The Jews took up stones again to stone Him;" and that, as they said, "because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God" (John 10:31, 33).

So it is impossible to misunderstand their interpretation of our Lord's meaning. They knew that it was a word in which He claimed essential and absolute unity and identity of nature with GOD Himself. In other words, it was a claim to absolute Deity; and there can be no escape from it; there is only one way to be rid of it, and that is to blot it out, and to deny that He said it. If we retain it, we must worship Him; or else declare that these were the vapourings of a disordered mind, or the words of the most terrible impostor the world has ever heard. "I and my Father are one." Nothing can be clearer.

Equally clear, and yet slightly different in application, was the word spoken to Philip; but here again it is impossible to mistake the meaning in the light of the context.

"Show us the Father," said Philip, "and it sufficeth us." "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:9).

Some declare that the first words may be used by any man, "I and my Father are one." Is any man prepared to say the same of the second, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"? Linking the two together we have our Lord's definite claim to a relationship with GOD, which is that of identity of nature, and absolute though mysterious unity of Being.

Then notice the declarations in which He revealed His relationship to GOD in activity. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). Once again, ere we suggest any interpretation of the meaning of these words, it is well to observe the effect produced upon the men who listened to them: "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

Our Lord's declaration in these words was that His relationship to GOD as to activity was that of cooperation. GOD was at work in the midst of human suffering and limitation, moving forward towards healing and restoration; and He was cooperating with Him in that very work; and moreover He explained His own claim in the second declaration, "Even so the Son also quickeneth whom He will" (John 5:21).

This, He said in effect, is the teaching contained in the man's healing by the pool; this is GOD's act; He gives life to the dead, renewal to the impotent. Thus CHRIST claimed that in the very works He wrought He was cooperating with GOD, and that His work was the Divine work, of recreation and regeneration.

But now turn to the terms of His relationship to men.

This He expressed through all His ministry by the almost persistent use of one particular title to describe Himself; namely, that of "the Son of Man."

The term, "the Son of Man," occurs in Matthew thirty-two times, in Mark fifteen times, in Luke twenty-six times, and in John twelve times. In the first three Gospels the title is always recorded as having been used by CHRIST of Himself, and never by angel, by man, or by demon. Of the twelve occasions in John, ten are from the lips of CHRIST; twice only was the expression used by men, and then in the spirit of criticism and unbelief: "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?" (John 12:34).

Those are the only two occasions in all the Gospels where the term is found upon the lips of any but CHRIST. The term Son of Man was never used by angel or demon or man except upon this occasion. It is CHRIST's own description of Himself, and it is the term that links Him to humanity, shows His intimate and positive relationship to the human race.

For particular illustration I take the story of the temptation, where the Lord is seen standing entirely upon the level of humanity. He was in the wilderness, being tempted as man, as representative man; and that is not my view merely, it was His own statement.

In answer to the first temptation He said: "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). That is to say, in effect, I am in this wilderness on the human level, as the Son of Man taking the place every other man has to take; and I obey the law of GOD that conditions the life of humanity.

In answer to the second temptation, He said: "Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:8) and thus He put Himself within the Divine limitation of every other human life, and declared that He was living according to the law which every other man must obey if he would come to the fulfillment of his life.

In answer to the third of these temptations, He said: "It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Luke 4:12). Thus He declared that the law which governed Him was exactly the same as that which governed other men.

Therefore the terms that indicate His relationship to men are those that prove His absolute kinship with the human race, His complete identification with human experience.

Finally, let us examine the terms which reveal the meaning and purpose of His presence in manifested form in human history.

These deal with the Mission, and the Method.

In dealing with the Mission we propose to take one central and illuminative statement from each evangelist. It will be understood that these passages are only illustrative. The supreme and almost overwhelming difficulty in this whole study is the mass of material.

In examining these statements we must be very careful to interpret the "I" in each case by the matter we have considered; and we must be careful to understand the declaration, "I came," in the light of that revelation of personal consciousness of Being, which we have also considered.

"But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13).

"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:13-14).

What a grouping of declarations is here! How absolutely they are fitted to the atmosphere in which they are found!

In Matthew, which is the Gospel of the Kingdom, we have the dignity of the eternal King in the "I come," and immediately the picture is that of this King seeking to save sinners.

In Mark, which is the Gospel of the Servant, and in Luke, the Gospel of the Man, we have the term "the Son of Man," identifying Him with humanity, linked with the verb that marks His eternal consciousness, "came."

In the Gospel of John, the Gospel of His essential Deity veiled in flesh, we have the strange merging of the human and the Divine: "no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven"; and then the declaration that the Son of Man must be lifted up "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" - that is, age-abiding life, which is the life of the Son of Man, in the essential fact of His being.

There is no systematic teaching here as to His purpose, but the doctrine is quite clear.

The first declaration, the one chronicled by Matthew, was made in answer to the criticism of the Pharisees, uttered on account of His familiarity with publicans and sinners. He said in effect, I am in the world to seek these very people, and not to seek you if you are righteous men! I came to give these men repentance.

The declaration recorded by Mark was in correction of His own self-seeking disciples, who wanted thrones of power: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The declaration found in Luke was made in answer to criticism because He had accepted the hospitality of Zaccheus, and in order to explain the transformation wrought in the man which made him disgorge his ill-gotten wealth, and return it to the poor. He said the Son of Man came to do that very thing - to seek and to save the lost.

The declaration recorded by John was made to an inquirer who sought Him in the silence and hush of the night, and asked how could any man have new life, and be born again. To him JESUS said that the Son of Man, Who is in Heaven, and descended out of it, and is here, must be lifted up, and so His life will be liberated that others may share it.

Thus, in august and marvellous simplicity, He unfolded the purpose of His presence in the world; the presence in the world of the One Whose consciousness was eternal and temporal, Whose relation was

with GOD and with man, in each case in complete, though mysterious, identity.

In other Scriptures we have a revelation of His method the fulfillment of the mission. His method as to GOD was that of submission and cooperation.

The first was suggested by His recorded words, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49).

The second was declared in the word already used in another application, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17).

His method in regard to men was that of revelation and redemption.

He was in the world for revelation: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

He came for redemption: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:49-50).

Reverently expressing the thought in other words, He said, I am here not merely for revelation of light; I am here for redemption, and that can only be provided by death.

This is a hasty, and, in view of the wonder of the teaching, an unsatisfactory grouping of the recorded statements.

In briefest sentences, therefore, let us attempt a deduction of values from this teaching of CHRIST concerning Himself.

He claimed a supernatural existence - that is, an existence indefinable by the terms applicable to man, considered merely as the crown of creation. Supernatural is an awkward word; it will become obsolete when we have more light. If we could climb to the height where GOD dwells, things we call supernatural would be perfectly natural; but using the word in our ordinary sense, CHRIST claimed to be other than the men by whom He was surrounded.

He claimed prior existence, in that He said He was, before He came.

He claimed infinite existence, in that while He was yet present in the limitations of time and space, He spoke of being in the bosom of the Father, and in heaven itself.

He claimed indestructible existence, in that while He spoke of laying down His life, He declared that He would take it again, and that no man could destroy it.

He also claimed a natural existence - that is, an existence definable by the terms applicable to man as the crown of creation.

He claimed to live as a man; in subjection to GOD; limited in knowledge and in power; finding all-sufficient resource in GOD for the accomplishment of the will of GOD.

He claimed, moreover, that He was in the world for the express purpose of saving men, and restoring a lost order; and

He explicitly declared that this purpose could not be fulfilled save by His death and resurrection; and that in the accomplishment of death and resurrection He was working in the will of GOD and in cooperation with Him.

It will be recognized that this study is intensive rather than extensive. We might consider the teaching of the Lord concerning Himself as the Revealer of the Father in a series of studies based upon His outstanding declarations in the Gospel of John. Or, on the other hand, we might consider the teaching of the Lord concerning Himself as the Redeemer of men, based upon outstanding declarations of His ministry as recorded by all the evangelists.

These, however, do not come within the scope of our present intention. We have simply attempted to grasp the bare outline of His teaching concerning Himself. We desire to find CHRIST according to His own estimate; and we most fittingly close our study and express our conviction in the words of the great apostle when he wrote to Timothy:

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:

[Who was] God was manifest in the flesh,

[Who was] justified in the Spirit,

[Who was] seen of angels,

[Who was] preached unto the Gentiles,

[Who was] believed on in the world,

[Who was] received up into glory"

(1 Timothy 3:16)

Let us also view Rotherham's commentary on this great passage:

"And confessedly great is the sacred secret of Godliness,

Who was made manifest in flesh,

Who was declared righteous in spirit,

Was made visible unto messengers,

Was proclaimed among nations,

Was believed on in the world,

Was taken up in glory"

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