

Concerning Man

by G. Campbell Morgan

This sermon explores Jesus' teaching on man's relation to God, the unity of man's being, the relative values of the physical and spiritual, the continuity of personality, and the perfect law of probationary life.

Scripture: Matthew 4:4-6, John 3:3, John 6:44-45

Topics: "Divine Purpose", "Human Nature"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan explores the nature of man through the teachings of Jesus, emphasizing that true life is sustained not by physical needs but by the Word of God. He highlights the importance of worship and service to God as the ultimate purpose of human existence, while also addressing the duality of human nature--both the ideal and the actual. Morgan discusses the significance of loving God and neighbor as the foundation of life, and the necessity of spiritual rebirth for true fulfillment. He concludes by affirming the potential for restoration through God's grace, urging believers to recognize their divine purpose and the call to live in accordance with God's will.

Transcript

"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

"Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:7).

"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10).

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:22-24).

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11)

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

"Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:11).

"Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man" (Matthew 15:17-20).

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25).

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:32).

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40)

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:44-45)

"And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John 6:65).

"THE Word became flesh" (John 1:14), to declare the Father and to manifest man. These are John's own words. The prologue to his Gospel concludes with this statement: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). The introduction to his First Epistle affirms that "the Life was manifested" (I John 1:2), in that which the disciples saw with their eyes, beheld, and which their hands handled. Thus in the one Person, we hear the full and final declaration of GOD; and see the manifestation of man, according to the will of GOD.

By His persistent use of the title, "Son of Man," for Himself, our Lord marked His identification with humanity, and suggested the truth that the final understanding of human nature must result from a knowledge of Himself.

In considering His teaching about GOD, we declared that the final teaching is not to be found in His words, but in Himself as the Word. So here, also, His final teaching about man is not to be found in the words, but

in Himself, as the Word made flesh.

We sing with perfect accuracy,

"Would we view GOD's brightest glory. We must look in Jesus' face."

We may sing with equal accuracy,

"Would we know man's highest glory, We must look in Jesus' face."

Turning now to the actual words of the Master concerning man, we at once recognize that there is a sense in which everything He said has a bearing on our subject, because His mission in the world as the Sent of the Father had to do with man primarily, and fundamentally; though its ultimate meaning could not be measured. The words of JESUS then, now under consideration, are only those which reveal His conception of human nature, and these fall into two groups:

First, those which reveal man ideally, or essentially, that is, according to a Divine purpose; and

Secondly, those revealing man actually or experimentally, that is, as JESUS found him.

The words of JESUS which reveal His view of the essential facts of human nature are taken from the Gospel of Matthew, and the references in the other Gospels are only indicated in passing.

These passages follow each other in consecutive and chronological order, and throw light upon man in five matters:

First, his relation to GOD;

Secondly, the unity of his being;

Thirdly, the inter-relationship of the physical and the spiritual;

Fourthly, the continuity of personality beyond that which we describe as death; and

Finally, the perfect law of probationary life.

His teaching as to the relation of man to GOD is revealed most remarkably in the story of the temptation. The supreme revelation of man in that story is not to be found in anything JESUS said, but rather in the Man Himself.

We constantly read the story giving our attention to its first and preeminent value, that namely of its revelation of temptation, and of the secret of victory over it. While that is perfectly natural, and accurate, it is true also that through the mists and the darkness of the experience of temptation, forgetting for the moment as far as possible the assault upon the soul or the man, we have a revelation of the essential facts concerning human nature.

There are ways in which man is seen more clearly in that wilderness experience than on any other page in the New Testament. There, while He was under the assault of the foe, the essential truth concerning man was revealed.

The first temptation was directed against the physical life: "Command that these stones become bread" (Matthew 4:3).

The second temptation was directed against the spiritual life: "Cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee" (Matthew 4:6).

The last temptation was directed, not against the instrument in itself, but against the vocation: "All these" - the kingdoms of the world - "will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9).

There is man, physical, spiritual; the supreme glory and meaning of his existence being the fact that he is created for a purpose.

Looking then upon that remarkable unveiling of truth concerning humanity, the words that fell from the lips of this Man, as He answered temptation, constitute a clear revelation of His conception of the relation of man to GOD within the Divine purpose and economy.

The first word "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4), reveals the true sustenance of human life.

The second word "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy GOD" (Matthew 4:7), while a negative one, reveals positively the true principle of human life.

The final word, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10), reveals the true object of human life.

The word as to the sustenance of life was spoken in answer to the temptation against the physical. The suggestion of evil is that all a man needs for the sustenance of his life is bread; that a man is material only; that if there be physical hunger unmet and unsatisfied, the man will perish. The answer of the perfect man is that in these matters also the spiritual is supreme. If, in obedience to the Word of GOD, the material must suffer hunger, then the true sustenance of life is that of the spiritual by obedience to the word or will of GOD.

What a revolution would be wrought in our lives if we once grasped that tremendous conception of our humanity; that a man is to live by the Word of GOD, obey the Word of GOD, conform his life to the Divine purpose, recognize that in essence he is not dust but spirit; and that the supreme fact in life is the spiritual.

In the second word "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," we have a revelation of the true principle of human life. It is that of such perfect confidence in GOD as declines to make experiments to see whether He will take care of a man or not. The temptation, which appeared to be an appeal to the highest instinct of trust, was really an appeal to doubt, as it suggested that He should prove His faith by an unwarranted, unordained experiment.

The answer of CHRIST in effect was, The quiet calm of My confidence in GOD is such that; have no need to make an experiment to prove the thing; know to be true. That is the master principle of life; the continuous and active relationship of confidence in GOD which enables a man to abide quietly in the place of the Divine appointment.

The final word, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve," is so wonderful that if there could be full exposition of it, it would be seen to flame with glory, and flash with splendor, making

the soul burn with all high enthusiasm, and capturing the imagination of young and old alike. It is a description of the true fulfillment of the meaning of every human life.

As the first speaks of the immediate and central relation; and the second speaks of the continuous and active relation; this describes the ultimate and glorious relation of every human life to GOD: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

This does not merely mean, - and these negative expositions seem sometimes out of place, and yet perhaps are important, - that on the first day of the week we are to assemble together, and sing His praise, and bow before Him in prayer; but rather that the whole life shall become worship, and the whole life shall be service. The whole life is worship only when every power GOD created is, at its fullest and best, open to Him; and pouring itself out in service to His name.

Flowers worship GOD in being what He meant them to be, in the unfolding of their possibilities of life; in all the splendor and delicate perfection of their being they utter forth His praise, and serve Him by ministering to the sense of beauty which He has placed within the heart of humanity.

How then is man to worship GOD and serve Him? By the full realization of life, by the discovery of all the powers of the being as He has placed them within man's personality; and by the development of them through processes of training and exercise, with the will always set in the direction of the Divine glory. When this is done, what beauty and what glory result!

The song that is in us will find expression;

The vision that we have seen will be reproduced upon the canvas;

The music that we hear will be repeated that other men may hear it;

The word that burns like fire will be uttered that other men may be ennobled by it.

I worship when I preach. You worship when you paint, when you follow your profession, and in it abide with GOD. It is the fulfillment of life to glorify GOD by the realization of all His great and gracious purposes. What a vision of man! The immediate and central relationship, living by the word of GOD; the continuous and active relationship, confidence and perfect peace; the ultimate and glorious relationship, worshipping Him by being what He made him to be, and doing what He meant him to do!

From that first glance, through the simplest and yet sublimest words, we turn to the word in which JESUS revealed the unity of man's being. He said, "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil,

thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23).

All that seems to have very little connection with our theme; but it is important because those are the words that prepare for, and lead up to these: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

In the words, "The light of the body is the eye," the eye is used figuratively for man's outlook upon life; for the way in which a man sees things affects the way in which he acts, and affects therefore the very nature

and character of the man. Closely connected with that, our Lord referred to the response that a man makes to his outlook; he serves, and he serves either GOD or mammon. Now turning from the direct teaching of these words, it is evident that our Lord looked upon man as unified within his own personality.

We shall turn presently to another Scripture in which we shall find that He recognized the dual fact in every man's life; but this is the deeper word. This was spoken, not of a man as one of a fallen race; but of a man according to the Divine ideal. Yes, we shall meet with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde presently; but this is the deeper teaching, and involves the fact that either Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde becomes master; that ultimately no man can be divided within himself; that in the processes of what seem to be conflicting forces there is an underlying unity of personality from which no man can escape.

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." A man may attempt to do so for some time. It may seem as though he were doing so, but all the while, in the deepest secret shrine of sacred and awful individuality, either the service of mammon, or the service of GOD is hypocrisy; that there is a central fact in human personality which dominates everything else, and which presently will express itself through everything else. If thine eye be dark, then the light that is in thee is darkness. If thine eye be single, then the light that is in thee is glorious. Man is not dual, but one; and either this or that, commanding him, realizes itself within him; and he ultimately partakes of the nature of that to which he yields himself, whether GOD or mammon.

Our next word is one revealing His estimate of the relative values of the physical and the spiritual.

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

With the latter part of that statement we are not now dealing; for we are considering, not the full teaching of the text, but its implication.

Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the life.

We at once see how revolutionary that word is! Men live to-day as though the killing of the body were the supreme and most awful matter. CHRIST treats it as an incident merely, something

about which a man need not be careful under certain circumstances. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do" (Luke 12:4).

Thus at once we see His estimate of the relative values of the physical and the spiritual.

There are two other words of our Lord, in which He revealed the same principle in a relative application. The first is that solemn enquiry, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

This clearly reveals the central truth of His conception, that life is not ultimately physical; that there is an essential life to which the whole material world cannot minister. The other word is that which Luke alone chronicled: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

The next word is that containing His teaching concerning the continuity of personality, or the immortality of man. Speaking in answer to the Sadducees, who had asked Him a captious question concerning resurrection, He quoted the word of GOD to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:32).

To the Sadducees the question of the resurrection of a body was of little moment. They denied the immortality of the spirit, and therefore our Lord's answer to them went behind their question as to bodily resurrection, and dealt with the philosophy which prompted it. He said to them in effect, The question you ask about bodily resurrection is a very small one in comparison with the difficulty you raise concerning the spiritual nature of man. He then appealed to their Scriptures. GOD had said to Moses, when commissioning him for his great work, "I am . . . the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6); and at that time, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead, their graves being known.

But, said JESUS, "God is not the God of the dead." They were even then alive. GOD is the GOD of the living. By that word He affirmed the continuity of human personality beyond that which we call death, and affirmed that of which we sometimes speak, with more or less of accuracy, as the immortality of the soul.

The final word in this first group is that in which He uttered the perfect law of probationary life; and this again in answer to a questioner, who asked which was the greater commandment. To him He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

That, CHRIST said, is the law which is absolutely sufficient for man in his probationary life, in that period through which he must pass in order to be perfected and prepared for the larger and more splendid existence that lies beyond the present.

First, he must love GOD; that is, there must be the complete response of all his being to GOD as GOD; and in that, the true recognition of the unity of his own being, and the unification of that being around GOD. The love of GOD is the master-law of life.

In Mark's account of this incident he tells us that CHRIST introduced that word of the commandment by using the word with which it is introduced in the Old Testament Scripture, "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord." Man is one, essentially; and his unity of being is to be realized and maintained by conformity to the unity of Deity. Then man must love GOD.

The second part of this law is the sequence of the first, the proof of the first, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:29, 31).

In the love of GOD there is the unification of self.

In the love of neighbour there is the expression of self at its highest and best.

If a man love GOD, he loves his neighbour, and cannot help it. If a man love GOD, he expresses himself in his love to his neighbour, and so fulfills the full and perfect law of life. Our Lord carried out this thought in exposition as He said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." So that if this human being, who is of such Divine relation, and of such unity, and in whom the spiritual is the supreme, and who persists beyond the article of death; if he, during the period of probation, loves GOD, and loves his neighbour; there is no law that he will break, there is no prophetic word to which he will be disobedient.

The references to man according to human experience are briefer.

All those which we have considered may be used of JESUS Himself. But those to which we are now about to refer could not have been spoken of Him. The other references dealt with essential humanity. These

deal with humanity as He found it.

The first to which; refer is that in which He said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children" (Matthew 7:11).

That was a flash of light upon the men in the midst of whom He stood. Notice carefully the two things He said:

First, "being evil"; and

Secondly, "know how to give good gifts unto your children."

The phrase "being evil" described an influence exerted, rather than a condition; but yet it postulated a condition. He looked at these men, and He described them as evil men exerting an evil influence; but that was because they were evil in heart. And yet He said, - and notice this carefully, - that they "knew how to give good gifts unto their children"; thus recognizing that even in these men, whom He described as evil, there persisted a capacity for the highest. They were evil, they were hurtful and harmful in their attitude towards men; but there was a region in their consciousness which was different. Towards their own children they were conscious of another aspect of desire, intention, and influence. They would give good gifts to them. Thus our Lord recognized that in the men who were persecuting Him to the very death, there was this dual fact; evil mastering them, and yet a capacity for goodness that was demonstrated and expressed in the very love they bore to their children, and in the way they knew how to give them good gifts.

This man of evil, watch him with

his children! His goodness to his child does not change the fact of his evil nature and influence; but it does demonstrate a capacity for the highest. Our Lord recognized these two things.

Then we turn to that terrible word, in which He spoke of the defilement of human nature, ""Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man" (Matthew 15:11); and the point of our Lord's teaching is not that a man is defiled by the things that come out therefrom, but that he is proved defiled by the things that come out therefrom, "Evil thoughts, murders, adulteries"; all evil things proceeding from the mouth, demonstrate the defilement of the life at its center and core.

It was in view of these conceptions that He uttered the word to His own disciples about entrance to the Kingdom. When they asked about greatness in His Kingdom, He took them back to the wicket gate, and He said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

In view of these conceptions He declared to Nicodemus the necessity for new birth (John 3:3, 5).

In the one case He indicated a human responsibility, the turning back to childhood; and in the other case He indicated a Divine action, the birth anew into childhood. Standing in the midst of humanity, He declared that man, although of such wonderful capacity in the economy of GOD, was yet of such defilement in the actuality of his life, that there was no hope for his realization of the Divine intention save by the mystic touch of a new birth, and the communication of a new life.

The final word which we quote concerning man was that in which He declared the opportunity for human restoration. He said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44), and was careful to explain that every man is drawn of the Father sooner or later in some way.

He quoted from the ancient prophets, saying, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God" (John 6:45).

When we turn to the prophecies in Isaiah and Jeremiah from which He quoted these words, we find that in each case the declaration was made when the prophet was singing of the restoration of the lost order, "And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isaiah 54:13).

Continuing, our Lord revealed human responsibility in the words "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45)

When men are drawn of the Father, not all who hear will come; but all who hear and learn will come. The movement which issues in the restoration of a man from his degradation must come from GOD, and from Him alone; but every man is so appealed to, every man is so drawn of the Father; and human responsibility is that not of hearing alone, but of learning, and obeying, and answering.

This meditation reveals the splendor of humanity according to the Divine ideal as revealed in the teaching of CHRIST. It also reveals His clear understanding of the calamity of human experience as He faced it. But finally it reveals the glory of the possible restoration as He declared it.

If we set our lives in the light of His teaching, we shall think highly of our own possibility in the economy of GOD; we shall think with sorrow and contrition of all our failure in the light of the high ideal; and we shall think with hope of the possibility of restoration by the way of His great and gracious mission.

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