

The Message of Matthew

by G. Campbell Morgan

G. Campbell Morgan's sermon emphasizes the urgent call to repentance in light of the Kingdom of Heaven's imminent arrival and its implications for both the Church and the world.

Scripture: Matthew 4:17, Matthew 5:3

Topics: "Repentance", "The Kingdom of Heaven"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the central teaching of Matthew, which is the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven and the call to repentance. He explains that the Kingdom represents God's sovereignty and is characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy, administered by Christ as King, Prophet, and Priest. The message is not only for the Hebrew people but extends to the Church and the world, urging believers to manifest the principles of the Kingdom. Morgan highlights that true repentance involves a reconsideration of one's life in light of God's Kingdom, leading to conviction and conversion. Ultimately, the call to repentance is a vital response to the reality of God's reign and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. The Central Teaching

"The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand."

i. Proclamation of the Kingdom.

a. The Fundamental Conception.

The Kingship of God. Sovereignty.

The Kingdom of God. Sphere.

b. The Special Revelation.

The King revealed.

The Kingdom revealed.

ii. Interpretation of the Kingdom.

a. Its Principle.

Righteousness.

The Words of the King.

b. Its Practice.

Peace.

The Works of the King.

c. Its Purpose.

Joy.

The Will of the King.

iii. Administration of the Kingdom.

a. By the King as King.

His Person.

b. By the King as Prophet.

His Propaganda.

c. By the King as Priest.

His Passion.

II. The Abiding Appeal

"Repent."

i. The Fundamental Meaning.

Consideration.

ii. The Inevitable Sequence.

Conviction.

iii. The Resulting Activity.

Conversion.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

i. She is " The Holy Nation."

a. Submitted to Christ.

b. Realizing the Kingdom

c. Manifesting it to the World.

ii. Repent

a. Submit.

b. Realize.

c. Manifest

II. To the World

i. Under the Sovereignty of God.

Yet in Anarchy.

ii. Repent.

a. Conception.

b. Conduct.

c. Character.

In seeking for the messages of the books of the New Testament it is necessary to remember the difference between these books and those of the Old Testament. In those we sought amid local conditions and colouring for permanent values, which permanent values create the living and abiding message. In every book of the Old Testament we had to do with an incomplete revelation, for the Old Testament itself does not constitute a complete revelation. It is a library of expectation and of hope.

When we turn to the New Testament we still find ourselves amid local conditions, but we have no longer to deal with an incomplete revelation. We have now to consider the literature of that Christ Who is the final speech of God to the world. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews affirms that "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." That message of the Son is God's final message to man. It is for us now to ask what is the essential message of each book, and what is its abiding appeal.

The four gospel narratives constitute the foundation literature of Christianity in that they present the Person of Christ, record His teaching, and give an account of His work on earth in the days of His flesh.

When we turn to the Gospel according to Matthew we find in it the final teaching on the subject with which it deals.

What then is the essential message of Matthew, and what its abiding appeal? Here we are not left to anything in the nature of speculation. The essential message and the abiding appeal are contained in one brief declaration. That declaration is twice uttered. It was first made by the voice of the herald who foretold

the coming of the King; it was repeated by the King Himself when He commenced His ministry; "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." That is the voice of the herald, and the word of the King. The essential message then is "the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" -and the abiding appeal is "Repent ye."

I recognize that there is a sense in which both the message of the herald and that of the King had immediate and local application. This word was spoken by John the Baptist peculiarly to the Hebrew people. When Jesus commenced His ministry He did so as the Jewish Messiah, and His word was consequently peculiarly to the people of the ancient covenant. While that is admitted it must not be forgotten that in the economy of God the Hebrew people existed not for themselves but for the world at large. This cannot be too often repeated if we are to understand that economy of God, in the case of His people Israel, and as to His perpetual method. Consequently the word of the herald and the word of the King constitute the one great message of this Gospel. This is not the final message of Christ; not that He has changed or altered this by a hair's breadth, but He has a great deal more than this to say. The message of Matthew is not the final Christian message, for just as we need the four Gospels for the presentation of Christ, so we need the four messages for the delivery of the Christian message to the world at the present hour.

First then let us examine the essential message, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Both the herald and the King uttered first the words of appeal, "Repent ye," but that appeal gained its force from the declaration which immediately followed it, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." That is the central teaching of the whole Gospel, and in examining it we shall discover three values. It is first the gospel of the proclamation of the Kingdom. It is secondly the gospel of the interpretation of the Kingdom. It is thirdly the gospel of the administration of the Kingdom. It proclaims the fact, explains the meaning, and describes the method of administration.

The abiding appeal of the Gospel is that of its call to repentance in the light of its teaching concerning the Kingdom.

The one theme of the book is that of the Kingdom. The word Kingdom occurs fifty times in the course of the story. There are different phrases of which it forms a part. The one most often recurring is that of "The Kingdom of heaven." This is peculiar to this Gospel according to Matthew, and occurs two-and-thirty times. The phrase "The Kingdom of God" occurs four times. The phrase "The Kingdom," which evidently has reference to the same idea, occurs eight times. The phrase "Thy Kingdom" when the reference is to God Himself is found once, and once when the reference is to Jesus. The phrase "His Kingdom" occurs twice with reference to the Son of Man, and once with reference to God. The last occurrence of the word is in the phrase "My Father's Kingdom."

That is a somewhat mechanical paragraph, but it serves to show that the word Kingdom is stamped upon the page from first to last. As this Gospel presents the King, its message is that of the Kingdom.

This word has two values which are complementary to each other, and both of which we need to recognize. These values may be expressed by the two words Kingship and Kingdom, in the way in which we make use of them to-day in our general conversation. The word Kingship emphasizes the fact that God is King. The word Kingdom refers to the realm over which He reigns. When we speak of the Kingdom of God we most often think only of the latter value, that, namely, of the realm over which He reigns. The fact that He is King is the fundamental message of this book.

Of the phrases to which we have referred "The Kingdom of God" is the greatest, because it at once insists upon the fact that God is King and refers to the realm over which He rules. There are occasions when it is evidently limited by the context, but considered alone it is certainly the greatest of these phrases, being the most spacious in its suggestiveness.

The phrase "The Kingdom of heaven," which as we have said is only used by Matthew, demands our special attention in any consideration of the message of the Gospel. In order to understand it, it is necessary that we should find out what it meant to the men who first heard it. Now it is an interesting fact that Christ never explained the phrase, neither did His forerunner. Simply because all who heard it were perfectly familiar with the one idea for which it stood. In the book of Exodus, which deals with the founding of the nation, we find the declaration "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation," and there we discover the idea which the phrase "the Kingdom of heaven" suggested to the Hebrew. The peculiarity of the nation consisted in the fact that it was a Theocracy, a people with no king other than God Himself. It was a nation under the Kingship of God. It was a holy nation, a kingdom of priests, the Kingdom of heaven. When therefore these people heard John the Baptist and Jesus say "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand " they understood them to mean that they were not living in accord with the underlying principle of their national life, and that it was necessary for them to repent in order to the restoration of the lost ideal.

The simple meaning of the phrase then is that it refers to the establishment in the world of the heavenly order, the submission of every king to God, the overturning of all save that which results from the recognition of the abiding throne of God. The Kingdom of heaven is the establishment of the Divine order on earth, the supremacy of the will of God in the affairs of men. The teaching of this Gospel then is that the only hope of humanity is in the establishment of the Kingdom of heaven, and that this can only be secured by submission to the throne of God. When men talk about the Kingdom of heaven as though it could be set up by human action, by the parliaments of men, or by a godless social propaganda, they are proving their blindness; and when they attempt the enterprise they are attempting to build without a foundation. The Kingdom of heaven is the reign of God over humanity. This Gospel proclaims that fact.

In the second place this Gospel interprets the Kingdom. It does infinitely more than assert the fact of the Divine Kingship, it explains the order of the Divine Kingdom. It contains a proclamation of the principle of the Kingdom, an explanation of the practice of the Kingdom, and a revelation of the ultimate purpose of the Kingdom. These things may be expressed in three words by quotation from the letter to the Romans in which the apostle declares, "The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Righteousness is the principle, peace the practice, and joy the purpose, of the Divine Kingdom. The words of the King constitute the law of the Kingdom, and proclaim the principle of righteousness. The works of the King exhibit the powers of the Kingdom which operate towards the practice of peace. The will of the King is revealed in the opening word of the Manifesto, "Blessed,"-or perhaps Happy, for happiness is the ultimate purpose of the Kingdom.

Thus the interpretation of the Kingdom is best expressed in the words of the apostle to the Gentiles. The master principle is righteousness, the practice is peace, and its purpose is joy.

Finally, this Gospel reveals the method of the administration of the Kingdom. In the key words to the analysis of the book this method is suggested. In the first division we have the presentation of the Person, and it is that of a King. In the second division we have the Propaganda, in which the King is revealed as Prophet. In the third division we have the Passion, in which He is seen as Priest. He is at once King,

Priest, Prophet. The Old Testament asks for this Person. In the law, consisting of the first five books, it demands the Priest. In its historic section it seeks for the King. In its prophetic books it reveals the need of the Prophet. The Gospel of Matthew shows how the whole expectation of the old economy is fulfilled through One Who is Priest and Prophet and King. Through that threefold ministry, the Kingdom of God is to be established, and in no other way. The Gospel presents the One Who as King has all authority; Who as Prophet utters the final words of truth; Who as Priest deals with sin in such a way as to make possible the redemption and renewal of man, and through man of the whole creation. Thus the administration of the Kingdom is accomplished by the King Who is also Prophet and Priest.

In the light of that central teaching we turn to the consideration of the abiding appeal of this Gospel which is expressed in the one word "Repent."

It is necessary that we should first consider the fundamental meaning of this word. We are all familiar with the long continued controversy between the Roman and Protestant theologians as to the nature of repentance. This controversy arises out of the fact that two distinct words in the Greek New Testament are translated in our versions "Repent." One of these lays emphasis upon a change of mental attitude; the other is burdened with a sense of sorrow. Into that discussion we need not enter here. The particular word made use of by the forerunner and by the King is the one which quite literally means, Think again. The fundamental meaning then of the appeal of this book is that it calls men to consideration.

Such consideration will have as its inevitable sequence, conviction of sin, and a consequent sense of sorrow. While it is perfectly true that the sense of sin and the sense of sorrow are not suggested by the word, they are involved, for it is impossible for any man honestly to consider his life in the light of what this Gospel reveals without coming to consciousness of his own sin, and sooner or later to the sense of sorrow.

There is, however, yet another and further result involved—that namely of the activity of conversion which will follow. Conversion in itself is not regeneration. Regeneration is the act of God. Conversion is the act of man. Conversion is that turning round from rebellion to submission which results from the conviction of sin which follows repentance as reconsideration. Thus the threefold fact suggested by the word may be expressed as a sequence by the use of these three words, Consideration, Conviction, Conversion.

It must, however, be remembered that this word "Repent" loses its force if it be removed from its immediate connection with the central teaching contained in the words "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." It is possible for a man to think again, and for his second thinking to be as false as the first. Therefore the Gospel says to man, Behold the King, understand the Kingdom, and think again in the light of these facts. Repentance here then means the submission of the life to the standards of the Kingdom and to the throne of the King. It is possible for men to repent without moral or spiritual result. They can think again, and depart from the old secularism to the new theosophy without being any nearer to realization or establishment of the Kingdom of God. This Gospel proclaims the King, interprets the Kingdom as righteousness, peace and joy; shows that the Kingdom is administered by One Who is perfect King, perfect Prophet, perfect Priest. It then appeals to men in the presence of these facts to repent.

To obey its appeal is inevitably to be brought to a consciousness of sin as coming short of the glory of God, and such consciousness invariably results in sorrow for sin. Repentance has its final value in that turning round, from sin and towards God, which Paul described, when writing to the Thessalonian Christians, in the words, "ye turned unto God from idols."

While therefore the great appeal of this Gospel is Repent, it is useless to take that word and preach it save in connection with the central teaching of the Kingship of God revealed to men in Jesus, and of the Kingdom of God opened to men through the work of Jesus.

There is a twofold application of the message of this book to our own age. Its first application is to the Church because the Church is now the holy nation, the Theocracy, whose function it is to realize and to manifest the principles and practice and purpose of the Kingdom of God. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus said to Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom." He also declared to the disciples after instructing them in the mysteries of the Kingdom, that every scribe instructed to the Kingdom of heaven "is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." The world to-day can only understand the meaning of the Kingship and Kingdom of God through the Church. The first application of the message of this Gospel must therefore be to the Church, and this because she is responsible for manifestation.

The measure in which she is failing to reveal these things to the world is the measure in which she should obey its call to repentance. Her membership consists of those who are submitted to Christ, who realize in their own lives the fact of His Kingship and who therefore through their transformed lives manifest to others the grace and glory of His reign. The measure of the failure to reveal is the measure of the failure to obey. To Ephesus, fallen from first love, the word of the King was, "Repent, and do the first works." That is still His word to those who name His name, but fail to reveal Him to others.

The message of Matthew to the world can only be delivered through the Church. Its first note must be that of insistence upon the abiding Kingship of God. No man can escape from that Kingship. It is possible for men to live within the Kingdom of God in such wrong relation to it that it becomes a scorching, destructive fire instead of a beneficent and healing force. God reigns to the uttermost bound of the universe. Nothing escapes His authority. It is our business to proclaim to men the established fact of the Kingdom of God, and the fact that He has anointed His well beloved Son as King over the whole earth.

In the light of that fact, men who are in rebellion against the Divine government are to hear as the first note of the Gospel the word "Repent."

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