

'Why Callest Thou Me Good? None Is Good Save One, God'- Mar 10:18

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of following Jesus Christ in order to find eternal life and experience true happiness and fulfillment.

Scripture: Mark 10:17

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Following Christ"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the significance of Jesus' response to the young ruler's inquiry about eternal life, focusing on the nature of goodness and the relationship between humanity and God. He argues that Jesus' statement, 'None is good save one, God,' challenges the young man's understanding of goodness and reveals the necessity of following Christ to enter the Kingdom of God. Morgan highlights that true eternal life is found in a right relationship with God through Jesus, who calls individuals to abandon worldly attachments and follow Him. The sermon illustrates the struggle of the rich young ruler and the impossibility of salvation through human effort alone, affirming that with God, all things are possible. Ultimately, the quest for eternal life is fulfilled in knowing God and Jesus Christ, leading to a transformative experience of life.

Transcript

Mar 10:17-31.

THE selection of the text is intended as an indication of the purpose of the meditation. It is that of fastening attention upon the Lord Himself, rather than upon the young ruler. Of course we must see him also, and indeed, observe the whole movement of this story; but we shall do that in order to consider as carefully as possible these arresting and remarkable words of Jesus.

It is almost certain that this incident occurred immediately after those in which the Lord revealed the true ideal of marriage and uttered the word of inclusive truth concerning the children. As we saw in our last meditation, Matthew and Mark place these two incidents in close connection. Luke omits the story of the enquiry of the Pharisees, also the teaching of Jesus on the subject of marriage in that particular connection. Matthew, Mark, and Luke place this story of the young ruler in immediate connection with the reception of the children by our Lord. This connection is at least interesting and suggestive, as it may help us to understand what this young man heard Jesus say, and saw Him do, which made him come to Christ

in the way he did.

His coming was due to a noble impulse, resulting from a true passion, and a deep sense of lack. Witness his quest, as expressed in his enquiry, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Witness also his manner. He, a young ruler, wealthy withal, did nevertheless in the presence of the Galilean peasant, kneel and address Him with profound respect; and by that very attitude and speech he showed the fineness of his natural spirit.

The words of our text constitute the first part of the answer of Jesus to the question: "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit age-abiding life?" This answer has caused very much trouble to expositors. The words have created serious difficulty in the minds of some who, believing in the Deity of our Lord, have understood them as constituting a repudiation of personal goodness on His part. On the other hand, there have been those who, at once accepting that interpretation and meaning of the words, have used them as evidence that our Lord laid no claim to Deity. In his weird article in the "Encyclopaedia Biblica," dealing with the person of Jesus Christ, Schmiedel admitted the authenticity of five fragments of the four Gospels, because in those fragments Jesus seemed to renounce all which we now associate with His name. Among the five, this was one of the passages that Schmiedel allowed to remain as genuine. Let us at once admit that if Jesus did here mean to repudiate goodness, the deduction is inevitable, that He also repudiated Deity.

Let us then consider His statement, endeavouring to discover what our Lord really meant, when He spoke to the young ruler; and that, not merely for the purpose of intellectual illumination, but in order that we may consider in the second place, the bearing of the statement on this great quest for eternal life.

First, then, the statement itself. "Why callest thou Me good? None is good save one, God." The plain meaning of the passage is that which we first attempt to gather. There are three records of the event in the Gospels. Matthew's record of the first words of Jesus differs from those found in Mark and Luke. Jesus is recorded in Matthew's account as having said to the young man, "Why askest thou Me concerning that which is good? One there is that is good." The words in Mark and Luke are identical.

These two statements are not alike, and they do not mean the same thing. The statement as found in Matthew: "Why askest thou Me concerning 1 that which is good? One there is Who is good"; is not the same as, "Why callest thou Me good? There is one that is good, even God." The change in Matthew's record in the Revised Version is unquestionably justified, and we need not now enter into the discussion as to the reason of the change. This fact, however, does not call in question the record of Mark or Luke; neither does it mean that Matthew is inaccurate. Here, as so often in the case of these Gospel narratives, the two are needed in order to understand all that Jesus said. Matthew recorded one part of our Lord's reply to the man, Mark and Luke another part of that same reply. As to the order of statement, I shall assume that He first said that which is found in the text, and then added that which is recorded in Matthew, granting that the reverse may be equally correct, and that it would make no material alteration to the deduction which I propose to make, whichever order were followed.

Hear then the answer of Jesus on this wise; first the words recorded in my text, and then the words recorded in Matthew. Said the young man: "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Said Jesus, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good save one, even God. Why askest thou Me concerning that which is good? One there is Who is good." It will immediately be seen that there is no contradiction, and indeed, Matthew's addition makes the other question the more emphatic. First, "Why

dost thou call Me good?" secondly, and therefore, "Why dost thou ask Me concerning goodness?" and each of the questions ending with the affirmation that, "One only is good, that is, God."

When we read this word of Jesus we are driven to one of two conclusions. In that word our Lord either repudiated goodness and Godhead; or else He claimed goodness and Godhead. Simply take the words of Jesus, and listen to them with the fearlessness of a child, and there can be no escape from this alternative. To the young man He said, "Why callest thou Me good? One is good, even God." Did He mean that He was not God? Then He meant that He was not good. Did He mean that He was good? Then He meant that He was God. There is no escape from the alternative, and it is a question of vital importance, as to which He really meant.

I unhesitatingly accept the second interpretation; first of all calling to bear upon the enquiry, the witness of the rest of the record of the life and teaching of Jesus. If there is one thing more noticeable than another in the revelation of this Person in the four Gospels, it is His quiet, insistent, and unhesitating claim to sinlessness. From the beginning to the end, never did there pass His lips, so far as may be gathered from the recorded words, a single sentence in which He seemed to admit sin. He did most definitely and positively challenge those who were His critics, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" He did most continuously and insistently claim that in His own life He was not merely attempting to please God, but that He actually pleased God; as in such sentences as these, "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him," "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.

We must carefully consider the witness of the context, as to what Jesus meant. Here are two lines for us to follow: first, the things that followed in His dealing with this man will help us to understand what He meant by the first thing He said to him; and secondly, the things that followed in His exposition of the incident to His puzzled disciples subsequently, will help us to understand what He meant by these words.

First then, the things that followed in His dealing with the man. Immediately after the words of Jesus, the measurement of certain standards of life was placed upon him. Jesus employed the second table of the Decalogue. There were two tables. On one, four commandments were engraved; and on the other six. Our Lord made no reference at all to the first four. In abbreviated form He used the six, not in the order in which they are found in the Decalogue, but nevertheless including the whole. "Do not kill. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud," thus adopting an inclusive statement of the last commandment, "Honour thy father and mother." The standard of measurement which Jesus placed upon this man for the moment, was that of human inter-relationships, the laws which govern the life of man as to his relationships with his fellow-men.

The answer of the young man was immediate, "All these things have I observed from my youth." This was no empty boast; but the plain statement of honest truth. He was modest and upright, when measured by that standard. Let us emphasize for a moment the standard which Jesus did not employ at first, the standard which measures a man's relationship to God. Call back to mind these first four commandments in their spiritual intention. The first commands that to men there shall be one God, and that He shall be as God: "No other gods before Me," which does not mean having precedence, but, Before My face, in sight, in view anywhere. It is the command for the realization by man, of God directly, immediately; that God shall be to him as God. In the second command man is forbidden to help himself, in the worship of the true God, by creating anything which he supposes is in the likeness of the true God. The second command sweeps out from between the soul of man and God, all intermediaries of every kind. While the first command calls man into direct relationship with God; the second insists upon it that he shall not aid

himself to direct communication, by putting anything between his own soul and God. The third command indicates that which will be the necessary outcome of obedience to the first two; the hallowing of the Name. The name of God is to be held as sacred. Finally and inclusively, the result of such hallowing of the name is revealed in the hallowing of time. The fourth commandment is not one that deals with the Sabbath only; it deals with seven days out of seven days; the requirement, On six days thou shalt work, is as definite as the commandment, On the seventh day thou shalt rest. It is the hallowing of time in work and worship; work and worship alike being related to Him.

Our Lord did not at first apply that test to the young man. When he said to Him: "All these things have I observed from my youth, Jesus looking upon him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest; go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me."

With all care, consider that word of Jesus. Jesus called that young man to an abandonment so complete, that obedience must be the equivalent of worship. We so often quote these tender and gracious words of Jesus, and what wonder that we do! Yet we are in danger of quoting them as though they were simple and gentle; whereas they are imperial, kingly, absolute, autocratic. If Jesus Christ were not a good man, and were not more than man, when He asked the young ruler to do that, He asked him to break the second commandment of the first four. If He be not a good man, and if He be not more than man, then when He asks any man to submit himself so completely to His authority, and to His will, He is asking 1 that man to break the law of God. This is always true. It is true of all men. By the rights of my manhood, by the rights of my soul, by the rights of that spirit-life which is of God, I will submit my soul, my spirit, my will, to no man, if he be man alone. I will call no man master; I will call no man father in that spiritual sense; I will consent to submit my judgment to none. Yet Christ said to this young ruler, "Follow Me." It was an imperial, autocratic demand that he should yield the whole of his manhood to Himself.

What then is this? Christ is seen putting Himself in the place of God to the soul of a man. There are devout souls to-day, who say that they cannot say to Christ, "My God," but that they can say, He is in the place of God to my soul. I am prepared to begin there; only I would remind you that to put any one in the place of God to the soul, who is not God, is to put the soul in the direst peril possible. In that moment Jesus did put Himself in the place of God to the soul of that man. Sell all that thou hast, all that binds thee to the old masteries and sanctions of life, and come to Me, with the endowments of thy glorious manhood. Jesus, beholding him, loved him, saw the splendour of his manhood, and said, Wouldst thou find that for which thou art asking, life? Follow the good, which is to follow God; and to do it, follow Me.

Let us next look at the exposition He gave of the incident to His disciples, and "we shall have further ratification of this interpretation." Jesus looked round about," and He said, "How hardly," that is, "With what difficulty shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!" They were amazed. Then He said: "Children, how difficult is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

From these sentences let us simply take the thrice repeated phrase, "Enter into the Kingdom of God." That was the subject under consideration. It is as though He had said to His disciples: What was that man's difficulty? What did he refuse to do? He refused to enter into the Kingdom of God, when he refused to follow Me. Jesus had set before him, as the door into the Kingdom, Himself, the God of the Kingdom ; and when a man will not respond to the call of God, he refuses to enter into the Kingdom of God.

"Then who can be saved?" said they. Mark His response. With God all things are possible; with man it is impossible. I know the danger oftentimes of attempting to build a doctrine upon a preposition, but there is vast significance in this preposition. Jesus did not say, All things are possible to God, as though He had meant, God can do anything. He said, All things are possible with God, as though He meant that a man with God can do the impossible thing. It is not that God is able to do impossible things, but that man is able to do impossible things with God. With men it is impossible. That young ruler, coming from men, judging life by their ideals, responding to their ordinary sanctions of life, went away sorrowful; he could not enter in. But, it is as though Christ had said: I stood before him, and if he had .but obeyed Me, followed Me, then with Me he would have entered into My Kingdom. With God, he would have been enabled to do the impossible thing, and enter into My Kingdom.

The light then broke anew upon Peter as he said, "Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee"; and Christ said in effect: That is perfectly true; you have left all to follow Me; and having left all to follow Me, you have by that process entered into the Kingdom of God, wherein you have found far more wealth than you left behind when you entered in. There is here a suggestive line of teaching which is often challenged. Do men who give up wealth, and brothers and sisters, for Christ, receive a hundredfold in this time? Yes! How little we know of giving up for Christ, how very little! Yet the measure in which we have known anything of it is the measure in which we have known what it is to possess all things through Christ. One house gone; but a hundred doors are open! One brother in the flesh lost; but a thousand brethren in the spirit, whose love is deeper and whose kinship is profounder, gained. If this is not the final line of application, I believe it is a true one. No man who really enters into the Kingdom, abandoning everything for Christ's sake, but finds within the Kingdom things far more precious and wonderful, in the actualities of present experience, than those he has left.

What then, in the light of this whole story, is the bearing of the statement of Jesus on the quest for eternal life? There is a quest for eternal life far more widespread than we sometimes imagine. We remember the words of the preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes, "He hath set eternity in their heart." What a significant declaration, and yet how true! "He hath set eternity in their heart/" It is true of all the sons of men. The passion for eternal life is present in all human hearts. It may find a thousand means of expression, some of them entirely and absolutely unworthy; but it is there. May I describe it as the panting necessity of the human soul; the great underlying consciousness that the soul belongs not to the limited and the localized and the near and the dust, but to the vast and the eternal. "He hath set eternity in their heart." When that passion rises to its noblest form of expression, it employs the very words of this young man, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Mark him well, a man of fine, natural temperament, a man of wealth and position, and yet conscious when he came to Christ of the very thing Jesus Christ expressed to him in another form and guise, that he lacked something. Life, eternal life, is a quality rather than a quantity, is infinitely more than life without end. It takes in the whole sum of things, and knows within itself that it is master of them all; and the passion for that is everywhere present in the human heart.

But observe another thing. The quest for eternal life when it is followed upon the level of human life alone, and without relation to the larger things, is always hopeless and helpless. If I have quoted from the preacher, the declaration "He hath set eternity in their heart," let me complete the quotation. It is a wail of despair: "He hath set eternity in their heart, yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." There, in a sentence, is at once the passion and the paralysis of the human heart; eternity within the heart, creating a desire to know whence we are, and to interpret the strange mysteries of life; and yet, as the preacher, with his pessimistic soul said, God has put eternity in

the heart, but so that men cannot find it, so that men cannot be at rest. Even in the noblest, that consciousness abides. This young man knew his lack.

Now take the teaching of Jesus in the whole story, and put it in relationship with that quest. What is eternal life? I leave the story that I may use the words of Jesus in another connection. "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God." How can they? "And Him Whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." Our Lord's declaration is that eternal life consists in the proper relation of the soul to God; that a man lives the age-abiding life, when he lives in right relationship with God. In that self-same word, moreover, our Lord revealed the fact that the way of God's approach to the man who is seeking eternal life is through His Son Whom He had sent. Come the Son wheresoever He may; He, the Only Son of the Father, confronts the human soul, standing before that soul in the place of God ; and God contracted, focussed, veiled for unveiling, hidden for revelation, is brought within the compass of the finite mind, that men through the revelation, may encompass that which is infinite. The philosophy becomes the grace of God, as we see Jesus confronting the young ruler, and Saying: "Follow Me"; and, sweep out everything that hinders that following!

The experience of the soul finding and following is the experience of life; so that in the midst of death, man begins to live; in the midst of dirges he begins to sing; and while all the mists and the darkness are round about him, he sees the light, and is able to say:

"I stand upon the mount of God,

With sunlight in my soul;

I hear the storms in vales beneath,

I hear the thunders roll;

"But I am calm with Thee, my God,

Beneath these glorious skies;

And to the height on which I stand

Nor storms, nor clouds can rise."

That is eternal life; and it is found when the soul comes to God through Jesus Christ.

Source:

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