

Concerning His Saving Mission

by G. Campbell Morgan

Jesus' mission is to establish righteousness, redeem the sinner, and create a new society through the separation of men and the carrying out of God's enterprises.

Scripture: Matthew 5:17, Matthew 9:13, Matthew 10:34, Matthew 20:28, Luke 12:49-50, Luke 19:10, John 5:43, John 10:10, John 12:27-28, John 12:31-32

Topics: "Christ's Mission", "Redemption and Righteousness"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the multifaceted mission of Christ, asserting that Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, and to call sinners to repentance rather than the righteous. He highlights the necessity of loyalty to Christ, which may lead to conflict rather than peace, as true discipleship requires total commitment. Morgan explains that Jesus' mission involved healing moral maladies through His sacrificial death, establishing righteousness, and ultimately glorifying God. The preacher underscores that the purpose of Christ's coming was both ethical and redemptive, aiming to create a new society through the transformative power of His love and sacrifice.

Transcript

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17).

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (Matthew 10:40).

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him" (John 12:48).

"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).

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

"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not" (John 5:43)

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

"For this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name" (John 12:27-28).

BEARING in mind the general conception and claim of CHRIST touching salvation, we proceed to consider His teaching concerning His saving mission. We start with the claim itself, uttered in relation to the moral miracle wrought in the case of Zacchaeus; and there are one or two preliminary matters important to the correct apprehension of its value.

First, the title "the Son of Man" was our Lord's favorite title for Himself. It must be recognized also that His use of it was personal, and not generic. Even though it be a mathematical way of stating it, there is suggestiveness in the fact that the title occurs two-and-thirty times in the Gospel of Matthew, fifteen times in the Gospel of Mark, twenty-six in Luke, and twelve in John; and that, with two exceptions, it is always used by CHRIST Himself, of Himself.

In the Gospel of John, at the twelfth chapter, we find that men once said to Him, "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).

Evidently they took the phrase from His own lips, impressed by His continual use of it, and challenged Him as to what He meant when He described Himself as the Son of Man. In every other case, all through the Gospels, this descriptive phrase was used by CHRIST Himself. A careful comparison of these passages will show that our Lord never used the phrase in a generic sense, or with reference to any other than Himself.

Notice also the claim made in the general terms of this text.

We have found that when CHRIST used the word save of material miracle, He described the complete restoration to health of the person who had been afflicted; and that when He used the phrase in the moral realm, He described the complete restoration to holiness of character and rectitude of conduct of such as had been spiritually and morally disabled.

But the central word of value for the present consideration is the word "came." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

In referring to His mission our Lord made use of two methods of speech.

He spoke of Himself constantly as the Sent of the Father, and

He spoke of Himself as coming for the doing of a work.

The first method is so full of interest and value that I cannot wholly pass over it. In my Testament I have marked out the occasions upon which He claimed to be sent of GOD, and it is remarkable how constantly this thought was present to His own mind. Each of the synoptists chronicles at least one instance, and in each case an important one, in which He referred to the fact that He was the Sent of GOD: "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (Matthew 10:40).

John chronicles the negative statement also, ""He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him" (John 12:48).

But this claim of the Lord is most remarkably manifest in the Gospel of John. It is the very warp of His teaching as there set forth.

The first instance occurs in His dealing with an individual seeker, when in conversation with Nicodemus He claimed that He had been sent by GOD, and then in every successive chapter in the Gospel of John up to and including the seventeenth, the chapter of the great intercessory prayer, He is perpetually recorded as alluding to the fact that He was the Sent of the Father. In chapters eighteen and nineteen, which deal with His sorrows, and are characterized by comparative silence, that fact is not mentioned; and the last occurrence is in chapter twenty.

This brings clearly before the mind the fact that in the common speech of CHRIST we have a revelation of the fact, both definitely declared, and incidentally referred to, that He wrought and spoke as One claiming to have been sent into the world by GOD Himself.

In each case, both in these references to the fact of His having been sent, and in His references to the fact that He came into the world, the implication is that of His preexistence. All His speech has in it that tone and that emphasis. Whereas in certain matters He spoke, as we have seen in an earlier study, in terms which must be described as temporal, or of an age, He far more often spoke in terms which were eternal, or of all the ages; and in these He either described Himself as the Sent of GOD, or as coming into the world, thereby claiming a prior existence.

All these declarations reveal a definite purpose, as the explanation of His advent.

He was here for a purpose, sent of GOD for a definite mission. He came for the fulfillment of that mission. We shall confine ourselves here to certain outstanding words in which He spoke of Himself as having come, and in which He declared the purpose of His coming, and revealed the method by which He would accomplish that purpose.

There are four outstanding declarations as to purpose; all made before Caesarea Philippi, the place of Peter's confession, after which our Lord turned to a new and distinct part of His work. There are also four equally definite statements concerning method; all of which were made after Caesarea Philippi, beyond the hour of Peter's confession, beyond the hour in which CHRIST unveiled to His disciples two great secrets, First of the Church as the instrument through which He would prepare for the Kingdom, and the Cross as the one and only method by which it would be possible for Him to build His Church, or to establish His Kingdom.

The first outstanding declaration of JESUS concerning the purpose of His mission is to be found in the Manifesto: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17).

The second is to be found in the same Gospel: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13).

That saying is also recorded by Mark and Luke.

The third is also found in Matthew: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34).

And the final reference is found in John's Gospel:

"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not" (John 5:43).

In the first claim our Lord declared the ultimate ethical purpose of His presence in the world. This statement is found at the commencement of a brief paragraph, which closes with these words, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

It is of supreme importance that we should recognize that this is CHRIST's first word as to the purpose of His mission in the world.

The evangelical presentation of the Gospel has led some astray from this, or has made them unmindful of it.

The first purpose, the ultimate purpose, the passion of His heart, was the establishment of the law of GOD, and the creation in men of a character of holiness which should issue in a conduct of righteousness. The ultimate purpose of the mission of CHRIST is thus revealed to be ethical; and that according to this word of JESUS, and the whole of His teaching harmonizes with it, He did not come into this world to persuade GOD to excuse men who are moral failures. He came into the world to establish the law, to make it honourable; to stand in the midst of human history as the severest of all moral teachers, embodying the highest ideal of law, and at all costs insisting upon obedience thereto.

In that ultimate triumph of CHRIST, when He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, and in those who have been ransomed and redeemed shall find the fulfillment of His highest purpose, He will not lead into the larger life a great host of men and women crippled and incapable, without spiritual power, and defective in moral character. When His work is done in His own, He will present them to His Father without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, absolutely perfect, with the perfection of His own holiness of character and righteousness of conduct. I came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfill. The master-passion of the heart of CHRIST was ethical, holy, righteous; and the very first word in which He made any statement concerning His mission in the world was a word in which He insisted upon this fact.

But had He said nothing else I should have had no Gospel. That is not the Gospel. It is preliminary to the Gospel. It is a revelation of the ultimate value of the Gospel; but it is not the Gospel. He came and He gave the world His ethic in that great Manifesto, which so many men are admiring, but which so few men will dare try to obey; that Manifesto from which it is the fashion of the hour to deduce certain social values, in order that we may attempt to realize them, but which men seem to forget is introduced by words thrilling with tenderness, and yet vibrant with the thunder of an awful holiness, as the great moral Teacher, - if you speak of JESUS as being such - puts at the forefront of His Manifesto the absolute necessity for character. But that is not the Gospel. If I have nothing other than the Sermon on the Mount I have no Gospel to preach.

The second of these words, in the light of this high declaration concerning ultimate ethical purpose, is the more amazing and the more arresting. "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13).

They declare His Immediate redeeming purpose.

JESUS was upon this occasion defending Himself against the criticism of those who did not understand His attitude towards sinning men. He sat down and ate with publicans and sinners; and He violated tradition as He did so with unwashed hands. He made Himself, most evidently, the personal, near, close companion of sinning men; and the moralists of His day, whose only conception of morality was that it must be maintained by absolute separation from all sinning men, in habits and in social life, looked with amazement at Him, and they criticized Him; and He answered their criticism by saying, "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick . . . I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

In that statement He explained the meaning of His companionship with sinning men.

He revealed the fact that the passion of His heart for them was that of the physician. Now there are two things that the illustration connotes. The physician is needed when there is disease; but the passion of the physician is for health. So that the first principle is not violated in the second. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill. I have come to take hold of the morally and spiritually sick, and make them well; that is the immediate purpose of My presence in the world; and if there are men who are righteous, and have no moral malady, no spiritual sickness, I have no message for them.

Now that is a very astonishing thing, but it is our Lord's; own teaching.

If you are righteous, having no spiritual malady, no spiritual sickness, CHRIST has no message for you. I leave that matter for application in the loneliness of the inner life of every man and woman; only before we decide as to whether we have moral malady, or spiritual sickness, let this Physician examine us, and He will do it with that selfsame Manifesto, that ethical standard that is not satisfied with an external uprightness unless there be an absolute heart purity. When He has examined the life, if we can stand erect and say, we have no malady, then He will say to us; I have no message for you.

Few of us will escape the conviction of need if we let Him deal with us. But here is the Gospel, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"; I came, - whatever that may include of self-emptying, and stooping in humility, and a long pathway of suffering and sorrow, - to call sinners.

The next words are, ""Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword!" (Matthew 10:34).

Here we specially need all the context or we shall surely be mistaken as to our Lord's meaning.

He was insisting upon the absolute necessity of loyalty to Him. Remember He came with an ultimate ethical purpose in His heart. He came also with an immediate redeeming purpose.

Now if the incompetent man, the broken man, the man who has failed morally, is to receive healing, health, holiness, to realize the Divine purpose; that man must unreservedly and absolutely put himself under the guidance and direction and rule of JESUS. There must be no affection allowed to interfere, no earthly tie must restrain, no passion or pride of the self-life must be permitted to hinder. The right hand must be cut off, and cast away; the right eye must be plucked out; neither father, mother, nor child must be loved more than He, or we are not worthy of Him.

These are the severest terms that it is possible for us to imagine; and therefore there must be a separating process; not peace, but a sword.

This is merely a description of a process, a declaration of what must inevitably happen if men will follow Him absolutely, in order that He may heal them perfectly, and fulfill His high purpose within them; and so at the commencement, that there may be no mistake, He said, "not peace, but a sword."

If we are conscious of moral malady, of spiritual sickness, and come to this great Physician, Whose ultimate purpose is our health of soul, and Whose immediate purpose is the redemption that shall produce that health, then we must give ourselves to Him entirely, absolutely; and to do this will divide households, will separate between parents and children, between brothers and sisters. Our Lord was simply stating the fact, and there is no need for me to argue it. He came to send a sword; and He has done it through all the centuries, He is doing it still. There are those who know the keenness of it; instead of peace, there is indeed a sword. His mission was one of separation in order to the creation of the new, pure, strong, ransomed society, for the accomplishment of His purposes in the economy of GOD.

The last of these four outstanding declarations taken alone is full of beauty, but we miss the true light unless we consider it in its relation to the story of the man who had lain for so long in the porches of the Bethesda pool.

CHRIST healed him, and when the rulers criticized JESUS for making the man break Sabbath, our Lord answered, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17); and the discussion ran to an argument, a defense, an explanation; and in that connection this word occurred, "I am come in my Father's name" (John 5:43).

For the meaning of this word then, we need the story itself, and His interpretation of what He did when He healed the man; and we need that interpretation in the light of the criticism which was offered.

This man, for eight and thirty years, had been in the grip of an infirmity, until he had lost heart and lost hope, and had become despondently contented, - if that be not a contradiction of terms - with his condition. JESUS, passing through, looked at him, and said, Do you wish to be made whole? And the man replied, Sir, - and I never can read it without feeling there was a touch of protest in it, as though he had said, Sir, why do you ask me a question like that? - When the water is troubled, and I try to reach it, some man is in front of me, and I have no man that can put me in. What did that answer mean? It surely was as if he had said, Of course I wish to be made whole, but I never can be made whole. Why do you mock my impotence?

It is too late, and I have to be content to live upon the almsgiving of others, with no hope of healing. Then came the word of CHRIST to him, "Take up thy bed, and walk."

And he arose and took up his bed and walked; a material miracle with a moral value; but the blind men about Him could not interpret the moral value, and they charged CHRIST with violating GOD's law by making that man break the Sabbath. CHRIST said in effect: You charge Me with breaking Sabbath, but GOD's Sabbath was broken by man's sin, and GOD can have no Sabbath while men lie like this one, broken and bruised.

"My Father worketh," was His answer to the charge that He had broken Sabbath; "My Father worketh" was an unveiling of the Divine discontent in the presence of all human limitation and suffering; of the

restlessness of GOD until man gets his rest; "My Father worketh . . . and I work."

Then presently and in direct connection He said, "I am come in My Father's name."

Thus was the purpose of GOD unveiled in the action of JESUS; GOD's determination to make rest for man, and His willingness to give up His rest in order to do so. I know the figure halts. I know it is imperfect. Incarnation itself is imperfect as a full unveiling of Deity; but it is perfect in that it meets the need of humanity.

There is a sense in which it is unthinkable that GOD can have His rest interfered with; but there is a deeper sense, a profounder sense, in which it is true that GOD is not impassive, or indifferent in the presence of human pain and sorrow and agony. "My Father worketh"; "I am come in My Father's name."

JESUS came in the name of GOD Who will never be able to rest, save as men find rest in health and holiness, and the realization of all the highest purposes of their being.

The central word in each of these declarations is the statement, "I am come," indicating as it does His preexistence; and that, in connection with the affirmations made, reveals that the ultimate purpose of His mission was the establishment of righteousness; the immediate purpose of His mission was the redemption of the man who has failed, who is broken, who has been flung out upon the world's scrap heap; the necessary processional purpose of His mission was the separation between men, in order to the creation of a great society; and the fundamental purpose of His mission was that of the carrying out of the enterprises of GOD.

And now reverently let us turn to the second consideration; the words of JESUS spoken as to the method by which He will establish righteousness; redeem the sinner; creating in the process, not peace but conflict; until at last the heart of GOD shall find rest. All His words on this subject were uttered after Caesarea Philippi. After Peter had made his great confession concerning the person of the Lord, He began to speak to His disciples definitely and plainly about His Cross.

Both Matthew, Mark, and Luke give the account of the confession of Peter, and they all record that immediately following that confession He began this teaching. Matthew and Mark use the actual word "began"; Luke does not use that word, but his placing of the commencement at that point is quite distinct.

When He thus began to talk about His Cross the Lord employed a very significant expression as He declared that He must, - that is the key word; Mark employs it, Matthew uses it, Luke reports it, - they all quote Him as declaring that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and the third day be raised again.

The whole of this statement is necessary to an understanding of the Lord's meaning.

It is not accurate to say that His foretelling of the Cross was merely the result of spiritual intuition, and His must, the expression of a fine heroism by which He yielded to death. His was not the heroism of One consenting to be a victim, for He never spoke of the Cross without speaking of the resurrection which lay beyond; it was rather the heroism of a determined Victor, Who was moving through a dark, and awful process, towards a bright and glorious victory.

He never spoke of the Cross without the resurrection; but when He first spoke of these He used this word must. Thus He declared that it was necessary that He should go to Jerusalem. It was in the economy of His mission that He went. The Cross was no accident.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter, in the First Spirit-taught exposition of the Cross, said, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

Man's guilt was patent, but behind it, around it, overruling it, was something mightier than man's guilt; it was GOD's grace.

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." The must of JESUS was not the outcome of His sense that circumstances were against Him. The must of JESUS was the expression of His sense that He was still working with His Father, and cooperating with the purposes of GOD.

Now in the light of that must at Caesarea Philippi, let us read the four outstanding words in which He declared the method by which He would accomplish His purpose.

The first is to be found in the Gospel according to John: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

The second is in the Gospel according to Luke: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I" - what do I desire - "if," and it is the sigh of desire, not a supposition - "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).

The third is in the Gospel according to Matthew: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

The final one is again found in the Gospel according to John: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:27-28).

In these great words in which He referred to His coming, He also revealed the method by which He will accomplish the great purposes already considered.

In the First of these statements He was speaking of the sheep; fleeced, wounded, harried by wolves; and He said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11) and again, "I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:15).

This was not a repetition, but the revelation of a twofold fact.

The first was figurative; the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep; that is,

He dies for them;

He grapples with the wolf in order that He may protect the sheep; and

He dies in the struggle, but

He slays the wolf.

But in the second affirmation the figure is transcended, the truth emerges into a larger presentation than the figure can contain.

The figure is exhausted when the good Shepherd of human life has fought the wolf and slain it, dying Himself in the struggle. But our good Shepherd says, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:18).

I will not merely slay the wolf in My dying, but I will give My life to the sheep in order that they may be able to overcome all the wolves that may attack them.

What exposition can there be of such poetry as this? It is poetry itself transcended by the fact of the infinite grace and glory which it attempts to express. The Master came to fulfill law and prophecy, to establish a life in men which shall meet the Divine requirement; but men need a dynamic, and He gives them His life that the forces of His purity may operate in them; but He could only do this through death.

JESUS never attempted to explain the atonement. There is not a single passage in all His teaching that will help us if we are seeking for a theory.

But the fact He declared:

"He death by dying slew,

He hell in hell laid low;

Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so."

By the giving of His life He declared that He would destroy the wolf, and energize the sheep.

Let us turn to the great soliloquy in Luke. I describe it thus because it breaks in upon the continuity of the narrative.

It was a great heart-burst. "I am come to send fire on the earth;" fire, the cleansing agent, superior to, and mightier than water. Water can only cleanse superficial things. Fire will penetrate and cleanse thoroughly. "I am come to send fire on the earth." It will be for the cleansing of sinful natures. How can it be done? "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" I cannot scatter this fire; I cannot fulfill My redeeming purpose in the experience of a man, save by the way of My own passion-baptism! Again here is no explanation of profound secrets, no attempt to unveil the mystery of a method deep as the very nature of GOD; but a clear declaration that only by the way of a passion-baptism could He fulfill His purpose.

The third declaration was: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He was charging His disciples that they were to enter into new social relationships, that they were to minister to one another, that they were to help each other within the economy of His new spiritual Kingdom.

Then He inspired them by His own example as He said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"; and added to the words of inspiration the revealing word, "and to give his life a ransom for many."

Thus He brings the gift of peace into the new family and the new Kingdom, by the giving of His life, and the inspiration of that giving in the lives of other men, as in answer to it they are led to a similar ministry.

The last of these words was uttered in a great triumph of prayer.

JESUS was under the very shadow of His Cross, and the Greek enquirers came, asking to see Him. When Philip brought them to Him our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit . . . Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour" (John 12:24, 27)

He did not say that. What then did He say? "But for this cause came I unto this hour." It was the hour of darkness, the blackness was gathering about His soul, the horror of the coming passion was filling His heart, "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour" No! "Father, glorify Thy name."

It was the triumph of One coming into the ultimate cooperation with His Father.

The last word in the proclamation of purpose was "I am come in My Father's name." The last word in the unveiling of the method was "Father, glorify Thy name." The answer came in thunder, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." And then, the Cross before Him in determination, He uttered the great words of triumph, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:31, 32).

This was His final word concerning the method whereby He will establish righteousness, redeem sinning men, and fulfill the purposes of GOD.

In the correlation of these declarations of purpose, and revelations of method, we have the teaching of CHRIST concerning His saving mission.

The gift of life through death makes possible the fulfillment of ethical purpose.

The gift of fire through death makes possible the redemption of sinners, and the healing of souls spiritually sick.

The gift of peace through death is at once the inspiration and the realization thereof.

The purpose of GOD realized through the sorrows of death is the way by which His glory is ensured.

What, then, are the conclusions to be drawn from this statement of CHRIST's own teaching concerning His mission?

First, that He came to cure moral malady through death.

Secondly, that He came to enable men to live life in harmony with the will of GOD, and in the fulfillment of His purpose by the bestowment of life out of death.

Thirdly, that He came to separate by a sword in order to establish a final peace, through His death.

Finally and inclusively that He came to cooperate with GOD, and to glorify the name of GOD through death.

Thus He interpreted the purpose and method of His mission in the world.

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