

'Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me; Forbid Them Not: For to Such Belongeth the Kingdom of god.'- Mar 10:6-8

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Christian ideal of the family, the significance of marriage as a sacrament, and the importance of childhood as a representation of the Kingdom of God.

Scripture: Genesis 1:27, Psalm 127:3, Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 18:3, Matthew 19:4-6, Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:6-8, Luke 18:16-17, Ephesians 5:31, James 1:17

Topics: "Marriage", "Children in the Kingdom of God"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the significance of Jesus' teachings on marriage and children in Mark 10:1-16, illustrating the Christian ideal of family. He highlights that Jesus, while addressing the Pharisees' questions on divorce, redirects their focus to the divine intention of marriage, emphasizing unity and the sanctity of the marital bond. Furthermore, Morgan underscores Jesus' inclusive declaration about children, affirming their inherent value in the Kingdom of God and the necessity for adults to embrace childlike faith. The sermon calls for a return to these essential truths in contemporary society, advocating for the protection and nurturing of children within the family structure.

Transcript

Mar 10:1-16.

IN this paragraph we have two stories. The first is that of the coming to Jesus of certain Pharisees, who questioned Him on the subject of divorce; and of the answers He gave them. The second is that of the bringing of children to Him; and of the manner of His reception of them.

Both Matthew and Mark put these stories thus in close relation to each other as to the time of their taking place. This is interesting, in that the teaching of Jesus in the two events constitutes a revelation of the Christian ideal of the family.

Before attempting to consider that ideal as revealed in the paragraphs there are two things which we ought to do. First we should note, with some care, the hour in the life of our Lord in which these things happened. Secondly, we must disentangle the essential from the accidental, in these stories.

As to the first. Between that teaching of His disciples in the house in Capernaum, and the things recorded in these paragraphs, much had transpired in the ministry of Jesus, which Mark passes over in silence. Jesus had probably twice visited Jerusalem in the interval. He had sent out the seventy upon their mission. After they returned, He had Himself been in Persea, accompanied by His apostles. Here we see Him leaving Galilee for Judaea, for the last time prior to His crucifixion. He was now definitely and finally on His way to the Cross. This was the beginning of the last journey. The bearing of this on our subject is that we see the Servant of God bent on redeeming work, but insisting on that ethic of life which is founded on the binding nature of the Divine thought and purpose for humanity, and revealing its true value to society. His face was set toward the Cross; His heart was filled with the passion for redeeming men; but not for a moment did He lower the standard of Divine requirements.

As to the second of these preliminary matters. We must disentangle the accidental from the essential. The whole question of divorce was accidental. The disciples' mistake about the children was accidental. The essential things in these stories were; first our Lord's teaching on the subject of marriage; and secondly, our Lord's inclusive declaration of truth concerning all children. When I use the word "accidental," I do not mean that these things are unimportant. They were things occurring by the way. Incidental things, perhaps, would be a more accurate description. Here, as ever, our Lord brought to bear upon these things, accidental or incidental, the light of essential and eternal truth. The distinction is important, because when the accidental things are once set in the light of the essential, we see them in their true value and proportion.

To those then, which we have described as accidental, we will return in conclusion, giving ourselves first to the essential things.

Here then we find Christ's revelation of the true ideal of the family, as He dealt first of all with the nature of marriage, and secondly with the inclusive truth about children.

His teaching concerning the nature of marriage is found in these words: "From the beginning of the creation, male and female made He them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh: so that they are no more two, but one flesh." This is essential truth, and in the light of it He immediately dealt with the accidental: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

The inclusive truth about the children is contained in the words: "Of such is the Kingdom of God." That inclusive and essential truth being recognized, all the accidental things are dealt with by the preliminary words, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me; forbid them not." So He corrected the accidental mistake of the disciples, in the light of essential truth concerning children.

First then, our Lord's teaching here concerning the nature of marriage. The words were carefully chosen. Here, as so constantly in the teaching of our Lord, He said nothing new; but took these men of His day back to their own sacred Writings, and quoted from them. In these words then, we have a threefold revelation of the truth concerning marriage, according to the Biblical revelation, according to Christ's teaching; and consequently, according to the Christian standard. He first declared the fundamental truth, "From the beginning of the creation, male and female made He them." He then uttered the experimental truth concerning marriage, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." Finally, He spoke words which we may speak of as constituting the functional truth concerning marriage, "The two shall become one flesh."

In answer to the questions of the Pharisees, our Lord directed their thinking from their own view, or from their interpretation of the law of Moses, back to the original intention. There was arresting dignity and authority in the method of Jesus. Moses allowed a bill of divorcement to be written, said they. Said Jesus, This he did for the hardness of your heart; and immediately sweeping back, behind their interpretation, and even behind the word of Moses himself, and the whole Hebrew economy, He took them to original and fundamental things, Divine intentions, and purposes, "From the beginning of the creation." Before that state of society in which they were then living; before that word of Moses which was born of the hardness of man's heart; before that sterner word of Moses which was embodied within the Decalogue; before all the habits of the men of the past; He took them back to the very beginning of things: "From the beginning of the creation."

We turn back with Him to the beginning, and to the story of the beginning with which these men were familiar, and from which story He quoted for their sakes.

"And God said; Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion... And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them."

Such is the declaration of the Hebrew Scriptures, from which Jesus made His selection and quotation.

Quite apart from this accidental subject of divorce, tragic as it was in the hour in which the question was put to Jesus, tragic as it is to-day, let us consider the subject of marriage. Mark with great care what Jesus did. He emphasized the teaching of the old economy on this one point. That teaching is that man is a unity, and not a unit; that man is dual, but not two; that the full ideal of humanity is the union of fatherhood and motherhood; that spiritually and in the last analysis, humanity is not represented in man, or in woman, but in their union. Man is in the Divine likeness and the Divine image partially; woman is in the Divine likeness and the Divine image partially. Not in man is a full and perfect representation of the Divine likeness and the Divine image; not in woman is a full and perfect representation of the Divine likeness and the Divine image. In each there are elements of the Divine likeness and the Divine image; but in the mystic union is the full unveiling of the truth concerning God. God is not Father alone, He is Mother also. In the essential mystery of the Divine Being, there are not only all those quantities and qualities which we associate with man; there are those quantities and qualities which we associate with woman. Consequently, thinking in each case upon the very highest level, in the union of man and woman there is the expression of truth concerning God as there cannot be in the loneliness of the one, or the isolation of the other. When to-day questions are asked about divorce, men do not usually begin here; but this is where Christ began. If the question of divorce is to be discussed, said Jesus in effect, let us get back to the beginning of things, and see what God meant in the creation of humanity. From the beginning of the creation He created them male and female.

In the complexity of modern circumstances this is not always possible of realization. The words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew in this very connection are significant. Do not let us forget, moreover, that Jesus said ere He uttered them: "Not all men can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given." Knowing the difficulty, I quote the words of Jesus: "There are eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs that were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." In that verse Christ recognized the fact that in the complexity of human conditions into the midst of which He came, there might be celibacy through natural causes, or through force of circumstances; or there might be voluntary celibacy in the interest of the Kingdom of God, which is high and holy. Nevertheless in the original purpose of God, humanity is completed in man and in

woman. When I hear of woman's sphere, I am always inclined to remind those who speak of it, that she has no sphere! I will immediately add to that, neither has man a sphere! The sphere of Divine expression is the unity of man and woman, in which she is a hemisphere, and he a hemisphere. "Male and female created He them/' That is the eternal purpose underlying the Divine thought and conception.

Our Lord then proceeded again to quote: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." "For this cause." For what cause? We go back again to Genesis, from which Jesus was quoting: "And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.

By this teaching of the context of the words which Jesus quoted, and by the teaching of the apostolic interpretation of our Lord's meaning, we find that the cause is that of the fundamental unity. Involved, is the great spiritual declaration, that when God created man, He created male and female, and the two aspects of Deity are to be represented in the two. They make the unity of humanity. Because then the woman is the complement of the man; that part of him, apart from which he lacks, and is imperfect as an instrument; he shall, leave father and mother and cleave to his wife. The holy apostle in the paragraph in Ephesians says exactly the same thing; the cause is that of fundamental unity.

What then is the experience in itself? Mark the superlativeness of the ancient word endorsed by Jesus, and endorsed by apostolic interpretation. He shall leave the nearest and the dearest he has ever known, father and mother, for the nearer and the dearer than they. In other words, the experience upon which marriage is to be based according to this Divine ideal, is that of supreme reciprocal, affection. I have simply put into other words that master utterance of Joseph Cook of Boston, in which he declared that the only true foundation for marriage is that of a supreme affection between two. The basis of experience in marriage is the outgoing of love to love consummating a union which is indissoluble. Behind such outgoing of love to love, is the fundamental Divine conception and fact of creation, "Male and female created He them."

Finally our Lord quoted the words, "The two shall become one flesh." In that unity of the flesh there is the sacramental symbol of the spiritual unity which, if it be non-existent, marriage is a disaster, a sham, and the occasion of all misery.

Observe the sanctity of this ideal. The Roman and Greek Churches count marriage a sacrament. I wonder whether they are not right. The Roman Church calls it a sacrament; the Greek Church calls it a mystery. I pray you remember that Paul also called it "a mystery." What is a sacrament? That may raise a great controversial question, and there is nothing further from my mind than a desire for controversy ; but if indeed a sacrament be an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, then I affirm that marriage is supreme among the sacraments.

Marriage is a condition of Divine expression and activity, therefore where its fundamental significances are forgotten, and its fundamental laws are disobeyed, it becomes the most tragic of all experiences. Any nation which forgets the Divine ordinance of marriage, and what it means, will become a ruin, in spite of all its strength in other things! It is for the Church of God to come back to Christ's teaching on this subject, understand it, and stand by it, in face of obloquy if need be. By so doing she will act in the interest of the race.

While Jesus was talking thus to His disciples, people outside were bringing children to Him.

Without dealing with the story, which is so familiar, let us listen to the final words which Jesus uttered about these children: "Of such is the Kingdom of God."

Carefully observe in the first place that this is an inclusive statement, the reference being to children as children, quite apart from privilege or disability. The statement of Christ in the case of a child is not made more true, if the child has been privileged. The statement of Christ in the case of a child is not made less true, if the child has suffered disability. That was a promiscuous gathering; those crowds that came after Jesus everywhere were made up of all sorts and conditions of people; and they brought their children. They were not carefully selected children, but those of the common folk. Of these children He said, "To such belongeth the Kingdom of God."

Mark then the statement, "To such belongeth the Kingdom of God." They were all included, and our Lord further emphasized that declaration by expository words: "Forbid them not"; and "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein." Our Lord thus declared, not only that all the children are included in His Kingdom; but that, in order to be included, all older people must become children. John Ruskin once said that what man needs is not so much to graduate, as to backslide; not to go forward into new cleverness, but to backslide into the simplicity of childhood. Our Lord was thus declaring essential truth.

As I look in wonder and amazement, being influenced as were the apostles by the thought that children must not go to Him, because He was engaged on such important business that He could not be interrupted, I see that He gathered them to Himself, and said, These are in the Kingdom, and if you, apostles, disciples, desire to enter, you must join the children.

All this has many applications. I want to make one. These children, find them where we will, in the tenement house or in your own home, are all spiritual, they are of God in the deepest fact of their being. We have had fathers of our flesh who disciplined us. Shall we not much rather obey the Father of spirits? God is the Father of spirits. In an almost amazing and tremendous mystery, God has united Himself to humanity in the propagation of the race, so that wherever children are conceived and begotten, God cooperates and creates eternal spirits.

When of these little children He said, "To such belongeth the Kingdom," He did not mean that they were perfect, but that they were potential, and plastic; each one separate, no two alike. Out of the ancient Scriptures comes back to us the old word so often misunderstood: "Train up a child in his own way, and even when he is old he will not depart from it." Not, Train up a child in the way it should go, but in the way God meant it should go; in its own way, according to its personal capacity and lonely dignity. There is no boy nor girl, in privileged home or in slumdom, but in that boy, that girl, are resident individual, lonely, magnificent capacities, which belong alone to that boy or girl. I sometimes think in these days when the passion for collectivism is so great,-a perfectly accurate passion,-we need to return to the emphasis of this individual note, lest we become merely a nation of numbers. Let us remember that if God gives a little child its essential spirit life, in that life there are potentialities that are peculiar to it.

Let us also remember, a little child is plastic, capable of realization.

"A child's face is the window of its soul,

That yet untrammelled by the world's control,

Like some still pool upon a summer's day,
Ruffles to every wind that blows that way.
"And it is like a yet wide open door,
That every year Life shuts a little more,
It stands wide-thrown, and to and fro pass free
Of its fresh thoughts the white-robed company.
"And it is like a harp that silent stands,
Waiting the touch of any passing hands
That chance to pluck the clear obedient strings,
Giving the hidden melodies their wings.
"A little pool that ruffles to the winds,
An open door where each one entry finds,
A stringed harp to answer song or hymn,
So is a child's face to his every whim."

That is the Kingdom of God, the plastic possibility. Oh! the tragedy of it, if that child should live in a home where the winds that sweep, are such as nip and blast and destroy, where the guests that enter through the door, are such as harm and defile; where the hand that sweeps is such as does not make music but destroys it. I pray you, look on the sanctity of this ideal, for where it is realized, home is heaven, and the nursery is God's workshop.

We may now return to the accidental or incidental things. First as to the question of divorce. Where the ideal of marriage which our Lord revealed, is realized, divorce is unthinkable and unnamable. The question as it was asked, revealed the laxity of the age in which Jesus lived. He was asked to decide between rival schools on this subject which then existed; the school of Shammai, the strict, and the school of Hillel, the liberal. The latter was the most popular at the moment. Hillel had advocated divorce for trifling causes. When these men asked their question, there was in the background of their thinking, the dark and sinister figure of Herod. In answer Christ first appealed to Moses, and gave interpretation of his permission. Then He gave His inclusive answer, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." Presently, when they were alone, the disciples were so perplexed, that they asked Him further concerning the matter, and He gave them His answer, recorded in Mark, which answer must be interpreted by His manifesto. There is one, and only one reason for divorce. There, I affirm again, the Church of God must stand, for the glory of God, and in the interest of humanity.

As to the incidental things in the second story. What is more natural than that those who are of the Kingdom, should find their way to the King? Mark the mistake of the disciples. We may think we should never make that mistake. I think that we are in danger of making it even yet. We still too often relegate work among children in our corporate thinking within the Church, to some secondary place. We still

imagine that our Lord has business on hand too important, to give very much time and attention to children.

This is one of the very few occasions upon which our Gospel story tells us that Jesus was angry. "He was moved with indignation." When next we recite these words that constitute the magna charta of childhood, "Suffer the children to come unto Me," never let us forget that if they are tremulous with the tenderness of His love, they are vibrant with the thunder of His wrath against the men who hindered the children in their coming.

It is as though our Lord said, If you will only let these children alone, they will come; if they do not come, it will not be their fault, it will be yours! I maintain that this is true. If the children do not find their way to Christ, it is always our fault, either that we did not reveal Him at all; or that revealing Him, we libelled Him. Oh! let the children see Him, and they will be after Him. "Suffer them; forbid them not!"

Then He took them in His arms, and put His hands upon them, and blessed them. From the hour in which He did this; Christianity has become preeminently the religion of the child. There the Church must keep them; for the satisfying of His heart, and for her own wellbeing. Dr. Noah K. Davis of Virginia University some time ago said this remarkable thing, which I leave you to challenge, to agree with, or to correct. "Classical literature knows nothing of children. Christian literature is full of children."

Oh! the glory of the Christian family where this ideal of marriage is realized and where this truth concerning children is accepted. May God multiply such families.

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