

The Message of John

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Gospel of John reveals the truth about God, and Jesus is the exegesis of God, the manifestation of God.

Topics: "Revelation Of God", "Grace and Truth"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the profound message of the Gospel of John, which reveals God as both full of grace and truth. He illustrates how Jesus' miracles and teachings unveil the divine nature, showcasing love as the essence of God's consciousness and activity. Morgan argues that the Gospel serves as the ultimate revelation of God, inviting both worship and service, and calls the Church to recognize Jesus' true place in their lives. He highlights that through Jesus, humanity can find a true understanding of God, satisfying the intellect, conscience, and heart. The sermon concludes with a call to respond to this revelation by coming to Jesus for life.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. The Central Teaching--God

i. Full of Grace.

a. The Fact.

1. Love the Divine Consciousness.
2. Love the Inspiration of the Divine Activity.
3. Love the Law of the Divine Government.

b. The Illustrations. Works.

1. Water to Wine. The Joy of Life. Marriage.
2. Nobleman's Son. Family Life.
3. Bethesda Man. Sin and Suffering.
4. Feeding Five Thousand. The Support of Life.

5. Walking on Sea. The Succour of Life.

6. Blind Man. The Light of Life.

7. Lazarus. Redemption.

c. The equal Fullness of Truth.

Passion governed by Principle.

ii. Full of Truth.

a. The Fact.

1. Light the Divine Consciousness.

2. Light the Inspiration of the Divine Activity.

3. Light the Law of the Divine Government.

b. The Illustrations. Words.

1. "I am the Bread of Life." Sustenance by Holiness.

2. "I am the Light of the World." Illumination by Holiness.

3. "I am the Door." Safety by Holiness.

4. "I am the Good Shepherd." Supply by Holiness.

5. "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Triumph by Holiness.

6. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Progress by Holiness.

7. "I am the Vine." Fellowship by Holiness.

c. The equal Fullness of Grace.

Principle suffused with Passion.

II. The Abiding Appeal

i. The Call to Worship.

a. The Tabernacle--the Flesh.

b. The Glory. Full of Grace and Truth.

ii. The Call to Service.

"As the Father hath sent Me . . ."

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

i. Intellectual.

Give the Lord Jesus Christ His true Place.

ii. Spiritual.

Believing ye have Life.

Grace.

Love the Motive.

Truth.

Light the Method.

II. To the World

i. No man hath seen God.

ii. The Only-born hath declared Him.

To the satisfaction of The Intellect.

The Conscience.

The Heart.

It is sometimes affirmed that the synoptic Gospels are simple and easy of understanding, and that the Gospel according to John is profound, full of mystery, and difficult of interpretation. There is a sense in which all this is true. There is another sense in which the first three are books of mystery, while the last is the book of revelation, of unveiling. In John we find the solution of the mysteries of which we are inevitably conscious in studying Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The Gospel according to Matthew presents Jesus as King, and it is impossible to read it without being brought to consciousness of His authority, even though we may not yield thereto. We are convinced of His kingliness, but are unable to account for that tone of authority which distinguishes His teaching from that of all others. In the Gospel according to Mark we find the picture of the Servant of God, eager, full of ceaseless activity, accomplishing His service and crowning it by sacrifice. We cannot read it, however, without feeling that there are depths to the consecration, and sublimities in the sacrifice, for which we cannot account. In the Gospel according to Luke we find a Man of our own humanity, but are conscious that while He is in many senses near, in others He is far away, and the contemplation fills us with awe and wonder.

These three stories demand another, or else they remain full of beauty, but inexplicable, for the Person presented as King, as Servant, as Man, possesses in all these aspects some qualities or quantities which lack explanation. In the Gospel according to John we find the answer to the riddle, the solution of the enigma, the unveiling of the mystery. This Gospel is as certainly an apocalypse as is the book which bears that name. This is unveiling. Here we meet exactly the same King we met and crowned in Matthew; the

same Servant we saw and trusted in Mark ; the same Man we observed and longed to be like in Luke. It is indeed the same Person; the same face, the same love-lit eyes and awful purity; the same regal authority; the same inobtrusive humility. Sometimes I think in reading this Gospel that I feel the touch of the flesh of Jesus more really than in Matthew, Mark, or Luke; yet from the first and sublime words with which it opens, to the simple and wonderful declarations with which it closes, I know that I am in the presence of an unveiled Person. The mystery of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is solved for me when I read John. This Gospel accounts for that note of authority which sounded in the Manifesto, and which breathed in power through the invitation, "Come unto Me all ye that labour . . . and I will give you rest." When I see Him in the Gospel of John I understand the secret of His sublime service. Here I have the explanation of the spaciousness and wonder of His humanity. In this Gospel the Person comes not from Abraham through the royal line of David; not from Nazareth; without genealogy; not from Adam, without a father; but from eternity and from God, as the Only-born of God.

The essential message of this Gospel is found in the closing declaration of the prologue. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." First, a recognition of limitation and need, "No man hath seen God at any time" ; then the essential affirmation, "God only-born which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." There is diversity of opinion concerning the actual form of the phrase translated in our English versions, "only begotten Son," resulting from the fact that the manuscripts are not in agreement. It is difficult, therefore, to be dogmatic. I do not think the meaning is materially changed whichever form we take, as either phrase suggests the same thought of relationship between the Son and the Father.

This "only begotten Son," or "God only-born of the Father," has declared God. The Greek word translated declared is that from which we have obtained our word exegesis, and means the leading-out of something that is hidden, in order that it may be seen. The Son, therefore, is declared to be-I use the word, knowing the difficulty of it-the exegesis of God; that is, the interpretation of God, the explanation of God. That is also the teaching of the principal statement of the prologue. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." That is the value of this book. It presents the Person Who is the exegesis of God, that is the manifestation of God.

Consequently the central teaching of the book is that it reveals the truth about God. If we would know the truth concerning His nature, we must study this Gospel. If we would know the laws which govern His activity, we discover them here. All that man needs to know about God is contained in this Gospel according to John. It is the final document of revealed religion concerning God. It is the story of the Son as the Revealer of the Father; the presentation of the One Who unveiled the face of God, Who told us the deepest secrets about His nature, Who revealed to men the laws of His activity.

"Would we see God's brightest glory,

We must look in Jesus's face."

Man is forever attempting to represent God in some way. That is the meaning of all idolatry, and of every idol. In the intention of those who made it, the golden calf was a likeness of God; for when they erected it they worshipped Jehovah. The golden calf was the golden ox, the symbol of service and sacrifice, and these people were attempting to express certain truths in some way which would appeal to the senses. Their action was the result of hunger for manifestation. God had said, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a

graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them," because that which man makes as a likeness of God can only libel God. The highest forms of man's attempts to give expression to the facts concerning the nature of God consist in the projection of human personality into immensity. The trouble with all false religion is that man has projected himself into immensity with all his faults and failure, and the deity so imagined is a magnified sinner, and men worshipping that, become more and more like that which they have made.

Man is ever seeking a manifestation, and the incarnation was God's answer to that need of humanity. He came into human nature, and through the Manhood of Jesus manifested Himself, in order that men seeking for manifestation which should enable them to know Him might find it. He was of our humanity, not by will or act of humanity, as we have seen in Matthew, and in Luke; but by the overshadowing and mystery of the Divine power, and by the activity of His own Holy Spirit, grasping our humanity, grafting Himself upon it in order that man seeking for manifestation might find One Who is at once of his own nature and of the nature of God. In the Gospel of John we look at Jesus, but at the same moment we see God. In the tears of Jesus we see the tears of God. In the pain of Jesus we see the passion of God. That is the value of this book, and that is why it is not easy to deal with. We touch and handle a Man; He is the Word of life ; a word cannot be touched, and life cannot be handled ; yet through this Man we do touch and handle life, age-abiding life, for in Him the Word is become flesh. To use the daring declaration of Charles Wesley, "God is contracted to a span" in order that men may see Him.

What then is the central teaching of this book concerning God? What do we know of God through Jesus? In the prologue we have a comprehensive answer which is dealt with more particularly, subsequently by illustration, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." When we have uttered those two words, grace and truth, we have uttered all the truth about God. In the subsequent part of the book these words are illustrated; but the inclusive fact of grace may be revealed in a threefold affirmation concerning love. Love is the Divine consciousness. Love is the inspiration of the Divine activity. Love is the law of the Divine government. The result is grace.

Love is the Divine consciousness. When we speak of our own mind we speak of consciousness and subconsciousness. The fact of subconsciousness results from our finite and limited nature. With God there is no subconsciousness. He has perfect consciousness, and that is love. If it would be right to speak of God in the terms which we use about ourselves we might ask, What is the experience, the consciousness of God underlying all His action? There can be but one answer, and that is Love. That is the profoundest truth.

Therefore all the activity of God is love inspired, and the law of His government is love. That is the truth which is revealed concerning God through His Son.

For illustration of that we may take out of the mass of material the great signs. Sign is John's word for the wonders of Jesus. He never speaks of a parable. The word parable as we find it in the other Gospels does not occur in this one. We do find it in our English versions, but the margin suggests proverb, which is perhaps a more insufficient translation than parable. The Greek word of which John makes use would be better translated in our language, allegory, for it has a much wider meaning than parable. The miracles which John records are chosen with evident intention of teaching larger truths; they are signs. Every one is an activity of love. The first was that of turning the water into wine. Right on the threshold of the revelation of God, this Man went to a marriage feast and ministered to the joy of life. The next sign was the

restoration of the nobleman's son to health. Love recognized the sorrow in the family circle through sickness, and the fact that death was threatening; and acted to end the sorrow by healing the sickness, and defeating death. The next sign was that of the healing of the man in the Bethesda porches. Love suffering in the presence of sin, as seen in its result, acted for the sake of the sinner. Love entered into suffering, and breaking the power of sin ended it, and so gave deliverance to the sinner. The next sign was that of the feeding of the five thousand. Love, recognizing man's need of actual support, provided it. The next sign was that of the walking on the sea. Love, coming to troubled souls, tempest-tossed, bewildered, walking in infinite dignity over the waters that threatened to engulf them, and through the wind which impeded their progress, coming on board produced a great calm. The next sign was that of the blind man. Love opened his eyes and, claiming to be the Light of the world, gave spiritual teaching. Love is the illumination of all life. The last sign was the raising of Lazarus. Love groaned in spirit and was troubled and wept ; and in that groaning we hear the distress of God, in those tears we behold the grief of Deity. Love was troubled in the presence of death, and through the mystery of its own trouble and pain broke the bands of death.

There is equal fullness of truth wherever we look upon the fullness of grace. Love breathes through every one of the signs, but light shines also. Grace is there, but so also is truth. There was no shadow, no duplicity, no turning aside from the master principle of holiness which rests at the heart of the universe, no deflection from , the straight line of righteousness. Love and light, grace and truth, passion governed by principle.

What we have said of grace when interpreting it as love, we can with equal accuracy affirm of truth when interpreting it as light. Light is the Divine consciousness. Light is the inspiration of the Divine activity. Light is the law of the Divine government. As we took the great works to illustrate grace we may take the outstanding words to illustrate truth.

"I am the Bread of life" ; sustenance by holiness.

"I am the Light of the world" ; illumination by holiness.

"I am the Door" ; safety by holiness.

"I am the good Shepherd" ; supply by holiness.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life" ; triumph by holiness.

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" ; progress by holiness.

"I am the Vine" ; fellowship and identity with holiness.

From out of the resplendent glory of the revelation of God in the bush, burnt but not consumed, Moses heard the Divine affirmation, "I AM" ; and then, as though there could be no unveiling, the declaration turned back upon itself in majestic mystery, and ended with the affirmation "THAT I AM."

"The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." He took up the same great revealing name "I am," and linking it to simple symbols, enabled men to understand in fuller measure the being of God. In connection with the communication of the name to Moses the supreme fact insisted upon was that of the holiness of Jehovah, as he had been commanded " Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" ; that same fact of holiness is always present in the use

of the title by Christ, and as we have seen, He revealed the relation of holiness to all the facts of life already suggested.

When we study these words revealing the truth, the light, we must not forget the equal fullness of grace. As when speaking of grace we insisted upon the equal fullness of truth, so while we are conscious of the awful purity of holiness in the shining of the light, we are nevertheless conscious that the light is suffused by a great love. If when considering grace we declared that therein we saw passion governed by principle, in this consideration of truth we may declare with equal accuracy that we have principle suffused with passion. John saw in the Man upon Whom he looked grace and truth, and thus saw the glory of the Father.

The abiding appeal of this is first that of the call to worship. "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us," that is, pitched His tent among us. John, a Hebrew, used language which would be perfectly familiar to his own people. He was thinking of the tabernacle in the wilderness, the tent pitched in the midst of the people, the centre of their life, and the appointed place of their worship, and he said, "The Word . . . pitched His tent among us." His flesh became the tent; but as in the ancient tabernacle the central fact was the glory of the Shekinah, so in this new tent of the flesh of the Man of Nazareth, the central fact was the glory of the Only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. When the tabernacle was finished according to pattern, the glory of the Lord filled it, and it became the place of worship. In the new covenant we find the fulfillment of the olden symbolism. The Word is incarnate and through the eyes of the Son of man we see the light of God; and in His voice we hear the accents of the love of God; in Him we see God full of grace and truth, and the unveiling cries to us, "O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

The appeal is a call to service as well as a call to worship. The tabernacle being erected, the nation was completed by worship, and so prepared for witness. When we stand in the presence of this Man and see through the veil of His flesh Divine "the light that were else too bright for the feebleness of a sinner's sight" we worship, and we are also compelled to serve. When Isaiah beheld the temple full of the glory of the Lord, and cried out because of the uncleanness of his lips, and when the seraph had cleansed those lips with the live coal from off the altar, then the voice of God was heard, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" the answer of the prophet was immediate, "Here am I; send me." When we stand in the presence of this unveiling and see the glory of God in this tabernacle; when we worship in response to that revelation, then we hear out of the tabernacle the word "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you," and we shall be ready individually to respond, "Here am I; send me."

There is intellectual and spiritual application of this message of John to the Church of God. The intellectual application is that the Church must give to the Lord Jesus Christ His true place, and His true place is that which is here revealed. In this Gospel we see Him perfectly, finally. To speak of Him as Jesus of Nazareth only is to degrade Him, and the moment we do so we fail to find God, and sooner or later our conception of God will be false. There will be denial of essential truth, and excuse made for sin. There will be denial of essential grace, and all the springs of service will be dried up. It is only when the Church of God sees this Man at the centre of her life, and He is recognized as being the tabernacle in which essential God is resident for purpose of revelation that she can realize her own life, or fulfill her service.

The spiritual application is that in believing we have life, and that such life will manifest itself in grace and truth. Grace will be the motive, and truth the method of all our acts. The proportion in which we have seen and believed and become what He would make us, is the proportion in which we manifest His life in grace

and truth.

There is an application of this message of John to the wider world. "No man hath seen God at any time," yet man needs God, and subconsciously is aware of his need, and is groping after a god, trying to find a centre for his worship, something to which he can bow himself down. All the result of such groping is deeper darkness and more disastrous failure. Let man take the Person-of this Gospel and consider Him well, and he will find God to the satisfaction of his intellect, to the satisfaction of his conscience, to the satisfaction of his heart.

The final appeal is to the will of man. This God satisfies my intellect, my emotion, and appeals to my will. I can still rebel. This Man stood in the midst of His own age and said, "Ye will not come to Me, that ye may have life." May that lament of Jesus not be true of us, but may we come to Him, and find our life, as we find our God.

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