

The Message of Mark

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Gospel of Mark presents Jesus as the Servant of God, who came to provide salvation for humanity through His service, suffering, and sacrifice.

Scripture: Mark 1:14

Topics: "Servanthood", "Gospel of Salvation"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the central message of the Gospel of Mark, portraying Jesus as the Servant of God who came to create a gospel of salvation through sympathy, suffering, and sacrifice. He highlights the importance of repentance and belief as the foundational responses to the gospel, urging the Church to maintain confidence in this message for both life and service. Morgan illustrates that the essence of Jesus' mission is to provide salvation, culminating in His resurrection, which serves as the ultimate good news for humanity. The sermon calls believers to recognize their role in sharing this message of hope and restoration with the world, emphasizing the need for personal and communal faith in the gospel. Ultimately, the message is one of transformation through the perfect Servant's work.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. The Central Teaching. i. 14, 15.

i. The Nature of the Service.

Creation of a Gospel.

ii. The Law of the Service.

a. Sympathy.

b. Suffering.

c. Sacrifice.

ii. The Result of the Service.

a. The Gospel.

Cf. i. 1, The Person.

xvi. 15, The Resurrection.

b. The Opportunity of Salvation.

II. The Abiding Appeal

i. The Perpetual Preliminary.

"Repent."

ii. The Essential Call.

"Believe in."

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Church

i. The Law of its Life.

Abiding Confidence in the Servant of God.

ii. The Law of its Service.

Abiding Confidence in the Gospel.

II. To the World

i. The Gospel.

a. A perfect Servant.

b. A perfected Service.

c. A perfecting Salvation.

ii. The Condition.

a. Repent.

Activity of the Mind in the Presence of Sin.

b. Believe.

Activity of the Mind in the Presence of the Saviour.

The Gospel according to Mark presents Jesus as the Servant of God. Whereas in Matthew He is seen in the purple of His royalty, in Mark He appears girded for service.

The inclusive message of the book is found in chapter i.14,15

"Now after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel."

As in the first Gospel the inclusive message is contained in the words which record the message which Jesus delivered as He commenced His preaching, so in the same place, in the same relation, we find the message of this Gospel of Mark.

Another verse, central to the Gospel, gives its content in brief outline

"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

That covers the whole Gospel: the first division, Sanctification, "The Son of Man came" ; the second division, Service, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister" ; the last division, Sacrifice, "and to give His life a ransom for many."

What then, is the message of that life, of that service, and of that sacrifice?

We shall follow exactly the same method as we adopted in dealing with the message of Matthew; inquiring first what is the essential message, and then noticing the application of that message.

In dealing with the essential message we shall attempt first to state the central teaching, and then to consider its abiding appeal.

We have said that this Gospel presents the Servant of God. When we turn from the study of its content in order to listen to its message, we must pause first to inquire in what sense it is true that Jesus was Servant of God. There are senses in which He never can be described in that way. Indeed, there is only one sense in which the Son of God can be spoken of as the Servant of God. By nature He is Son of God. By nature He is equal with God; but for certain purposes, and in certain relationships, He became Servant of God.

This Gospel, standing as it does in the midst of revelation, is intimately related to the prophecies of the past, and has close relationship to the apostolic writings which follow. Isaiah was the prophet of the Servant of God; and Paul was the apostle who most clearly wrote of the Kenosis, or self-emptying, whereby the Son of God became the Servant of God. We have in this Gospel the real portraiture of that Servant. It reveals first, the nature of His service; secondly, the law of His service; and finally, the result of His service.

First then, as to the nature of His service. The introductory word of the Gospel is, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The final command of the Servant of God is, "Go ye into all the kosmos, and herald the gospel to the whole creation."

The Son of God became the Servant of God in order to create a gospel, to provide good news for men. The Servant of God is the Saviour of men. In order to provide salvation for them, He, Who was equal with God, became Servant; and in no other relationship can He be thus described. Wherever in the ancient prophetic writings, or in this Gospel, or in the subsequent apostolic writings, our Lord is referred to under this title of Servant of God, the subject under consideration is that of salvation. Mark commences with citation from the prophecy of Isaiah which is preeminently the prophecy of the Servant of God. The prophet's picture of that Servant was that of One Who comes to accomplish the Divine purpose of salvation. As we study the book we see the growing portrait of Him, line added to line, beauty to beauty, until we reach the mystic teaching of the fifty-third chapter, in which the Servant of God is seen, wounded

for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace laid upon Him. Thus He is seen fulfilling His service and accomplishing the purpose of God, that of providing a way whereby it is possible, immediately after the record of suffering, to sing the song of redemption, and to tell the story of great and gracious restoration.

Thus at the heart of the prophetic fore-vision of the Servant of God is the picture of the passion through which He is able to provide pardon, purity, peace, and power for humanity.

In the writings of Paul we may confine our attention to one passage in the Philippian letter. The injunction of that passage is, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." All that follows is argument, but the argument is greater than the injunction. Charging the Philippian Christians to have the mind of Christ, the mind of graciousness, of humility, of love, Paul argued for obedience by showing what that mind really was. In studying the matchless passage we must keep our mind on the Person referred to, Who, in the essential fact of His personality, is the same throughout. This Person is first declared to be One Who, being in the form of God, did not count it a prize to be on an equality with God. It is next affirmed that this same Person emptied Himself. We must remember here that the Person is still the same. He did not empty Himself of Himself. That doctrine of the Kenosis which declares that the Son of God laid aside His Deity is not warranted by New Testament teaching. He emptied Himself as He became Man. That emptying consisted in His taking the form of a Servant. The form chosen was that of Man. Thus He laid aside one form of manifestation and took another, The form laid aside was that of sovereign Deity. The form taken was that of subservient humanity. The form alone changed; the essential Being remained the same.

For what purpose then did He thus empty Himself and take the form of a Servant? In what sense can He be spoken of as Servant?

In order to find the answer to these inquiries let us follow the descending scale. "Being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross." That is why He became a Servant, and that is the sense in which He was a Servant. He is revealed in this passage as one Person, emptying Himself of one form of manifestation and taking another for the purpose of the Cross, and the purpose of the Cross is that of the salvation of man.

Thus Isaiah when he presents the great Servant shows that the central meaning of His mission is that of salvation through sacrifice; and Paul in language still more definite even though more mysterious, language which shows a deeper insight into the infinite mystery, presents this same Son of God, equal with God in His nature, partner of His throne, becoming a Servant for the Cross and for salvation. There is no sense in which the Son of God is Servant of God, save that He became such to create a gospel by providing salvation for man who is without salvation, and fast bound in sin and nature's night.

When Jesus began His ministry in Galilee He struck the key-note thereof in the words "The time is fulfilled." I remember hearing Mr. Johnston Ross say that there are some texts in the Bible of which none but an Eastern can appreciate the full meaning. Such a text is this word of Jesus, full of profound significance. "The time is fulfilled." It is the language of One Who in circumstances of lowliness, about to make His home in despised Galilee of the Gentiles, recognized the fact that the ministry He was about to exercise was the fulfillment of eternal purpose. The hour had struck, the time was filled to the full. The statement referred to all the economy which ended with the prophecy of John the Baptist. The last voice of

prophecy had been heard, and all that the prophet uttered, together with all that the prophets preceding him had said, was fulfilled. Seers had for ages been looking towards the dawn of a new age, the coming of the Servant-Son, the advent of One Who would be Son by nature, and Servant for the accomplishment of the purpose of salvation and restoration.

When Jesus commenced His ministry He said, "The time is fulfilled." The Kingdom of God is near. God Himself is near. He is here in the form of a Servant, bending toward the Cross, in order that in the mystery of that "death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word," He may conquer that which has spoiled, ascend the throne of empire, restore the lost and ruined order, and establish the Kingdom of God in all its grace and glory.

Thus the nature of the service is that of providing a gospel of salvation; and that fact is indicated in the opening words, "The beginning of the Gospel" ; after which the Person is described by names and titles which perfectly reveal Him. Jesus is the familiar name of His humanity; Christ is the title of His Servanthood; the Son of God is the designation of His nature.

In the second place let us observe what this book teaches concerning the law of His service. This may be expressed in three words intimately related to each other; sympathy, suffering, sacrifice.

The Servant of God was in sympathy with man even in his sin; not in sympathy with his sin, but in sympathy with the sinner. If this Gospel be carefully considered-indeed if the four of them be examined-no single word of severity can be found which this Servant of God uttered to sinning men and women. His severity was reserved for hypocrisy, and that because it wrought ruin in the lives of others. For the woman taken in the very act of sin; for men steeped in sin, and held in contempt by the religious teachers of their day; He had nothing but tenderness, sympathy, and infinite compassion.

Oh, that all of us who name His name might learn the lesson of this Gospel in that respect! Salvation results from sympathy; sympathy means suffering; and suffering is only dynamic when it becomes sacrifice. If we say to men, Be warmed, and do not clothe them, there is no sympathy in such speech, neither is there any value in it. Let these men be warmed and clothed at cost, that is sacrifice. Whether we make application in the material or spiritual realm the principle is the same. I think that is what the apostle meant in his Galatian letter when he uttered the injunction which seems so commonplace in comparison with the argument which is so profound, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." I do not understand the apostle to mean that we should obey the law that Christ enunciated, but rather that which He Himself obeyed. The law of Christ's life was that of bearing the burdens of others. That is the whole story of the service of the Servant of God. The master law of His life in the presence of human sin and sorrow was that of the bearing of burdens-" Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Himself took our sins and bare them. The law of His service then was that of sympathy, suffering, and sacrifice.

What then was the result of His service? Its nature was the creation of a gospel; its law was the bearing of burdens; its result is found in the gospel created. The Servant is introduced as "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" ; and the last words recorded by Mark as falling from His lips by way of command, are "Go ye into all the kosmos, and herald the gospel to the whole creation."

What did He mean by the Gospel? We have no right to speculate on the matter. The answer is found in the context, which, when we examine, we find that He presented Himself in the midst of His disciples after the resurrection, and they were filled with doubt and fear. He rebuked their unbelief, and then said, Go,

and preach the good news to the whole creation; that is, He commanded them to tell the good news of the resurrection. The good news then is that of the risen Christ. The resurrection is the demonstration of the fact that the Servant has accomplished His work, that He has provided salvation, that He is master over the forces that wreck and ruin and spoil. The result of His service is the provision of that gospel.

If that be the central teaching, what is the abiding appeal? The answer is found in the words of our Lord at the commencement of His ministry, "Repent ye, and believe in the gospel." "Repent ye" is the abiding preliminary. No man is ever ready to believe in the Gospel until he has obeyed the first word. That, however, is not the supreme appeal of this Gospel. The supreme appeal is contained in the words "Believe in the gospel." I know it is unsafe to base a great doctrine on a preposition; but nevertheless there is wonderful value and instruction in the prepositions made use of by the writers of the New Testament. "Believe in the gospel," not into it. Whenever the preposition eis is used with the accusative it suggests motion into. The preposition en used here has quite another significance. It signifies neither motion into, nor nearness to, but rest at the centre of. Jesus said, "Believe in the gospel." The Gospel is the sphere of rest; have confidence in this gospel, put your trust in it, having ventured into it, rest in it. That is the abiding appeal.

What is the application of this message to the Church of God? There is first the application to the life of the Church. This word "Believe" reveals the law of the Church's life. That life is continued and developed as she has abiding confidence in the Gospel of the Servant of God, abiding confidence in its message of pardon and power. Again, the message has yet another emphasis in its application to the Church. Not only is belief in the Gospel the law of the Church's life, it is also the law of her service. When we lose our confidence in this Gospel, then our service becomes weak. If we doubt the Gospel of the Servant of God, then we have no Gospel for the man who is fast bound in sin and nature's night. It is in the proportion that we believe in it, are sure of it, know it, that we are able to help our day and generation. The inter-relation between life and service is of the closest. We cannot believe in this Gospel as the result of intellectual argument. We can only believe in it as the result of experience. It is only as we believe into the One it presents and find His power to save, that we believe in it when we are in the presence of other men.

What does this book say to me personally? It first calls me to believe in this Gospel, to rest in it for my life, for pardon and for power. It also calls me to rest in it for my service. The word gospel occurs eight times in the book, and a study of the passages will show the true relation of the Christian to Christ in the matter of service. It is a study for which we cannot take time here, but I suggest it as full of interest and value.

Once again, what is the message of this book to the world? What is its message to London, East End and West End, to rich and poor, to high and low, to man as man, to humanity as humanity? It tells the story, announces the good news, of the perfect Servant of God, of His perfected service, and of His perfecting salvation. Get men to read this book, help them to understand it, interpret it to them. Sit down by the side of men mastered by sin, and read them this book. Say to them, Behold God's Servant, God's Son become Servant in order to get near to you, to help you, to lift you. Through that perfect Servant's perfected service there is perfecting salvation for you. That is preaching the Gospel.

If that be the essential message of the book to the world, its appeal is first, Repent. That is the necessary activity of the mind in the presence of sin. Its final appeal is, Believe. That is the activity of the mind in the presence of the Saviour.

This Gospel according to Mark begins where that according to Matthew ends. Matthew said, "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." As I read his story I see the King and know my own failure; I become conscious that this personality of mine is territory belonging to the King, but waste, spoiled, wilderness without blossom.

I take up the Gospel according to Mark, and it says, Behold the Servant of God. He is the Saviour of men. I believe into Him. I believe in His Gospel. I risk eternity and my soul upon Him, and thus I am restored to the possibility of the garden, and of all fruitfulness.

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