**WESTMINSTER BIBLE SCHOOL; THE PARABLES AND METAPHORS OF OUR LORD - THE TEACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**37. TWO PARABOLIC ILLUSTRATIONS**

*"Now great multitudes were going with him. He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me, and doesn't disregard his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he can't be my disciple. Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me, can't be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Or perhaps, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, everyone who sees begins to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and wasn't able to finish.' Or what king, as he goes to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an envoy, and asks for conditions of peace. So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple. Salt is good, but if the salt becomes flat and tasteless, with what do you season it? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile. It is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'"*

*Luke 14:25-35*

TWO PARABOLIC illustrations are found in this paragraph. It is important again that we briefly review the circumstances. The twenty-fifth verse reads, "There went with Him great multitudes." Our Lord had left the house of the Pharisee where strange things had happened, and where He had found no congenial atmosphere. The hostility of the host was manifested in the presence there of the man with the dropsy. The behaviour of the guests was at fault, and the principle of the hospitality of the host was wrong, as Jesus had shown. Then in answer to that exclamation of one of the guests, Jesus had spoken that parable of the great supper, the intention of which was to show the reluctance of the human heart. Admiring the ideal, men were not prepared to submit to the conditions. That all happened in the house.

Having left the house, our Lord now used two parabolic illustrations. He had moved away, and started on His journeyings. While He had been in that house, there were multitudes of people outside, who had been waiting for Him. These were the last months of our Lord's public ministry, and by this time, wherever He went, the crowds went after Him, following Him from town to town, and village to village, eager, keen, interested, loving to hear Him, and to watch Him, and wanting to be near Him. In many cases, perhaps the majority, they felt they would like to be connected with Him, enrolled as His followers. They were all waiting for Him, and "there went with Him great multitudes." The moment He came out of the house these waiting people outside were alert; and as He moved away, they went after Him. That is the significance of the next phrase, "And He turned, and said unto them." Upon this occasion He declared the terms of discipleship. It is almost like a fierce wind that blew across that crowd, unquestionably winnowing them. Yes, Jesus was winsome, but there was another aspect to His ministry, as well as winning. He was winnowing, and while He won those crowds, and they were interested, and were coming after Him, just as crowds do to-day, and are still doing, He turned round, and not this time only, superlatively, but constantly, He said things that blew like a wind of God across that crowd, thinning out those who wanted to be His followers. He gave them the terms of discipleship.

There is a phrase here from the lips of Jesus thrice repeated in this paragraph. "Cannot be My disciple" (verse, 26). "Cannot be My disciple" (verse, 27). "Cannot be My disciple " (verse, 33). He was telling them that there were people who, however much they were interested in Him, were like the man left in the house, admiring His ideals, but could not be His disciple. Who were they? I can never read these words without trembling, and wondering whether I am a disciple. If any man were coming after Him, he could not do this unless he put loyalty to Him above the highest and finest and noblest loyalties of earthly love. It was a tremendous saying. He said unless a man do that, he could not be His disciple. Then to interpret what He meant by that saying, He declared, "Yea, and his own life also." Not only earthly loves, high, affectional loves, but the love of self, and the love of life. Then He interpreted that. "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross" - that is failing to love self - "and come after Me, cannot be cross My disciple." Then finally, to summarize everything, Unless a man "renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple."

Then something happened. This passage is only understood as we can see that crowd imaginatively. We need not travel to Palestine where He was at the time, nor need we go back nineteen hundred years to see it. Take any massed company of men and women gathered together to-day, in an evangelistic service, interested in Jesus, attracted towards Him, and having a feeling that they would like, in some measure, to be associated with Him. Then let the preacher, as the mouthpiece of the Master, declare these terms of discipleship, and then look at that crowd. They will be more attentive than ever for the moment; but if one is keen enough to discern the fact, there is a puzzled, almost restless look, and at last a protesting look, as though they would say, But surely those terms are severe; cannot it be made easier than that? Cannot we be His followers, and listen to Him and admire Him, and rejoice in His Power without such drastic measures? Humanity is just the same to-day as then. Jesus would say to them to-day, without any reservation, what He said to them in the olden days. That is the background of these illustrations.

What then is the subject He was illustrating? Without any question He was showing the reason why His terms were severe. Men and women were looking into His face and saying, Why be so severe? He used two parabolic illustrations to show them the reason why.

Look again at the illustrations. He said, "Which of you, desiring to build a tower, doth not first sit down and count the cost, whether he have wherewith to complete it? Lest haply, when he hath laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all that behold begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." The second illustration, "Or what king, as he goeth to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassage, and asketh conditions of peace."

To come now to a technicality. The next verse in the Authorized Version begins, "So likewise whosoever he be." That is an unfortunate translation, one that has misled the thinking of men generally as to the meaning of these two illustrations. The Revised Version has correctly translated the Greek phrase, which never meant "likewise," but " So therefore." What is the difference? If we read "So likewise," then Jesus meant that just as the man going to build a tower, and the king going to war, must both count the cost; so must we if we are coming after Him. But out Lord said, "So therefore." He never told men to count the cost. They were to come at all cost, at the cost of earthly love, and the cost of renouncing everything.

What then did He mean? That He had to count the cost, and that was why His terms were severe, in the interest of what He was doing. "So therefore." Note the difference carefully between "likewise" and "therefore" in that passage. Notice also the repetition three times over of the phrase, "Cannot be." Behind that "cannot be" were instructions that proved to men that they were to stop bargaining and counting the cost; that they were to trample on personal love and ambition and all possessions. They were to come at all cost. Yet He showed the necessity of His counting the cost.

Take then, the two figures. First, building, the figure of construction. Building is the great symbol of construction. But He used a second figure, war, and battle, and battle is destructive. Building is constructive work; battle is destructive work. He said, If a man wants to do constructive work, to build a tower, he sits down first and counts the cost. If he does not do so, the purpose of his building will be frustrated, and he will never be able to complete it, and men will laugh at him. Some buildings have been called some man's folly. Some man started to build, and he could not finish it, and carry out his purpose. That was the first figure of speech.

Then a king going to battle, before he goes, if he is wise - and this is pure political wisdom - he finds out whether every man in his army is worth two of the enemy. That is a different mathematical formula of expressing the thought of the text, "whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand." He needs his every soldier to be equal to two of the enemy. That is our Lord's estimate. Then that satirical word; if the king do not do that, if his men are not of that quality, presently there will be an embassage sent to the opposing forces, asking for conditions of peace - surrender!

Building. If one does not count the cost, there will be failure and laughter. Battle. If one does not take time to find out the quality of the soldiers, there will be defeat; and conditions of peace will have to be asked from the enemy. Those are the two figures of speech. Our Lord had just uttered the terrifying terms of discipleship, and men were inclined to protest. He said to them in effect, You wonder at the severity of My terms. Let Me tell you why they are severe. He used the two figures of speech, and asked them to think the matter through. What did He mean? That He was in the world to build. If any man were going to build, would he not count the cost, whether he could carry out his purpose? That is what He was doing. That was why His terms were severe. He appealed to their own common-sense, to their own experience, and to their intelligence. They were no warriors or kings, but they knew enough of war. What king does not sit down and calculate, on the basis of the quality of his soldiers?

What were the implications? Here our Lord was declaring His purpose in the world. He was here for building and battle. At Caesarea Philippi, in other language, He had used the same terms in addressing Peter and the rest. "On this rock I will build My Church," - building. What next? "And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it;" - battle. The ultimate purpose of His presence was constructive; but on the way to the completion of the work on which His heart was set, there were battles to be waged and won. He had told His disciples that He would build. He had told them He would conduct the campaign victoriously, that the gates of Hades should not prevail against it. Victory was in His mind. The fulfilment of purpose was there. He would build. Now He used the same figures in a slightly different application.

Thus He was telling them that the purpose of, and the reason of the severity was the greatness of His own emprise; and the fact that in order to complete that building and win that battle, He must have resources and men upon whom He could absolutely depend. He was showing them that following Him meant more than personal advantage only. Personal advantage was secondary, and in the presence of His Cross was smitten out of sight as almost unimportant. Oh, the terror of it that we have so often made our salvation a kind of fire insurance, a way by which we may escape hell! Following Jesus meant far more than that, and this was what He was showing His disciples. To follow Him was to commit oneself to His enterprises, to stand by Him in the battle, to stand with Him in the battle, until the building is done, and the battle is won.

I will use an old illustration. When Charles Haddon Spurgeon was exercising his marvellous ministry, and building up the Pastors' College, he started a magazine, the title of which was *The Sword and the Trowel*. Nehemiah when building the wall of Jerusalem commanded the workers to grasp the sword as well as the trowel, to fight the enemies that would hinder the building. Spurgeon knew that little incident of ancient Hebrew history was symbolic of the action of God through the Jews, and of the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to build; and He came for battle. He had left the house of the Pharisee and found Himself surrounded by thronging multitudes interested in Him. As He started to move away, they came with Him. He turned, and halted them, and said in effect, What are you following Me for? Are you coming after Me? I am in this world to build. I am in this world to battle. You are no good to Me unless you are of the right quality, the right caliber. I do not want followers coming after for their own sake. I want those committed to Me and to My enterprises. That was the meaning of the illustrations. He it was Who had to count the cost, not they.

Thus by these very illustrations, by the use of these terms of severity, our Lord emphasized the importance of quality. Quality is always the thing that counts in the Church of God, and among the disciples of Jesus, not quantity. We have such an unholy passion for quantity. We say, Great crowds go to that Church; it is a scene of success. Not at all. It may be that little chapel down in the valley, or on the hillside, away in the Highlands, or in the valleys of Wales where the two and the three are gathered is of more use to God than the great congregation simply attracted by something less than the highest. It is quality that counts, and He wants quality, men and women on whom He can depend, who are with Him, with sword in hand, and who lay stone upon stone in the mighty building, men and women who will stand there against all opposition.

"The Son of God goes forth to war,

A Kingly crown to gain.

His blood-red banner streams afar,

Who follows in His train?"

Let us get to our knees and ask if we are such upon whom He can depend.

After He had uttered these words, the crowds still listening to Him, He ended with that vibrant challenge, marking the supreme importance of what He had been saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Which words lead us to the fifteenth chapter, and to our next study.