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

**2. PARABOLIC ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE MANIFESTO (1)**

 *… Matthew Chapters 5 and 6*

THE FIRST parabolic illustration is found in the fourth chapter of this Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus spoke of His disciples as "fishers of men." This is postponed now, to be returned to at a later chapter, where again the figure is more particularly used.

The Manifesto is radiant in its wealth of parabolic illustrations. Salt, light, a city on a hill, lamp, bushel, lampstand, house, Gehenna, adversary, judge, officer, prison, throne, footstool, feet, inner chamber, door, moth, rust, thieves, eye, darkness, birds, lilies, oven, mote, beam, dogs, pearls, swine, loaf, stone, fish, serpent, gate, way, sheep, wolves, fruits, grapes, thorns, figs, thistles, tree, fire, rock, floods, winds, sand. There are forty-nine, and these are not all. They are all common things, and familiar to everybody.

Here we shall look at those illustrations of definite statement, rather than those of incidental reference. These illustrations, moreover, are all within the moral realm, ethical. The Manifesto is the ultimate code of laws for the Kingdom of God, established upon earth. We shall endeavour in each case to find the subject our Lord was intending to illustrate when He used the particular parabolic illustration, or parable.

In these first two chapters we shall look first at the parabolic illustration of salt and light; secondly, those of moth, rust, and thieves; and, thirdly, the illustration of the eye.

Salt and light. What was the subject with which our Lord was dealing, and which He intended to illustrate? The influence that was to be exerted by the subjects of His Kingdom. He had begun with those wonderful beatitudes; and then had enunciated certain laws, and showed that in His Kingdom character was supreme. He had proceeded to show that the reasons of such character is not so much of personal value, but of the influence such character exerts. Oh, the marvel of these illustrations, their choosing, the brilliance of them, the finality of them. Whenever He spoke He did so with authority, the authority not of dogmatism, but of inherent, necessary, and inevitable truth.

The influence then is twofold, salt and light. There is a distinction and a difference, and yet the figures merge into one thought, "salt of the earth," "light of the world."

"Salt of the earth." What is the value of salt? It is not antiseptic, but aseptic. Antiseptic is something which is against poison, and which tends to its cure. Aseptic is something which is devoid of poison in itself. Salt never cures corruption. It prevents the spread of corruption. If meat is tainted and corrupt, salt will not make it untainted and pure. But salt in its neighbourhood will prevent the spread of corruption to that which otherwise would become tainted. The figure is that of a moral quality operating on the earth level, amongst men living in the midst of material things, preventing the spread of corruption. The impurity of an evil man cannot be cured by a good man, working at his side in an office; but the things the good man will not do, and the things he will not say will give the boy in the same office a chance, because it will check the evil man. Salt is aseptic.

The function of the subjects of His Kingdom is to live in the midst of humanity in the terrible condition of sin, and by living there according to the ethic of the Kingdom of God, to prevent the spread of evil. It is the Lord's work to cure it, thank God. However impure and corrupt the heart may be, He can cleanse it, and make it purer than the driven snow. The subjects of His Kingdom are so to live that they give goodness its opportunity, and hold in check the forces of corruption. Our Lord emphasized this with those words of satire, gentle, but clear and sharp as the lightning. "If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" I like the Scotch rendering of that, "If the salt has lost its tang." That is a great word, tang, the pungent power of salt. Jesus says His people are to exercise that influence in the world. That is our responsibility, though men may not be pleased.

But again, not only the salt of the earth, referring to a moral quality of things; but, " Ye are the light of the world." That refers to a spiritual revelation which is to radiate from these subjects of the Kingdom. We are the light of the cosmos, of all the order, not merely of the earth, but of the universe. We remember another occasion when the Master said, "I am the Light of the world." Linking this up with that great full word concerning Himself, we understand when we are yielded to Him, subjects of His Kingdom, obeying Him, then we too become the light of the world. The quality of light is not that it desires to be looked at! Light enables other things to be seen by its shining. The sun is in the heaven, not to be looked at, but the sunshine enables us to see other things clearly. "Ye are the light of the world." Let your light so shine that men may glorify your Father. The light of the Christian shining in the world illuminates all the worldly order, so that men see the true way.

In this connection two figures are employed by our Lord, "a city set on a hill," and " a lamp … on the stand." The city set on a hill is for the illumination of vast distances. No Christian can fulfil that ideal alone. That demands fellowship, a corporate relationship. That demands the whole Church. Every church should be a city set on a hill, illuminating the far expanses of life.

Then He came from the figure of the city on a hill into a house, and there took the figure of a lampstand, illuminating the home, and the near. Inevitably the mind goes back to a word of the psalmist the Old Testament,

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,

And light unto my path."

Keep the figures separate. The light shines from some eminence, indicating the road, the pathway. The light shines on the way to be trodden so that the way may be found along the illuminated path the lamp. Thy word, says the psalmist, is a lamp. Each Christian man and woman has to fulfil a double function in the world. The whole Church in its corporate relationship, in the bonds of love, friendship, and service, is to illuminate the distances; and then in the home, with the shut door, the lamp is to illuminate everything there. Christ said here the lamp is not put under a bushel but on a stand. Many years ago I heard that prince of expositors, Dr. Maclaren, say this illuminative thing: "No man lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel. If he did, what would happen? Either the bushel would put out the light, or the light would set the bushel fire!" We can apply that. That is exactly what our Lord was teaching here.

He then used three illustrations, moth, rust, and thieves. The subject that He was illustrating here was that of the futility of earth-centred life. He was showing the folly of living such a life. He showed what the attitude of His subjects should be towards necessary things, and the superlative things. He was talking to them about amassing treasure, and He used finely sarcastic language about the treasures of earth "moth and rust corrupt," and "thieves break through and steal." These are Eastern figures. At the time the wealth of the East consisted in fine fabrics, fine twined linen, and purple; and of metal, in coinage, or in precious things that rust spoiled. Treasure was kept underground, and there was the possibility of thieves digging and so treasure would be lost. The moth, the rust, make things worthless. Thieves steal, and everything is gone. Remember that thieves steal only things that are moth-eatable, and rust-consumable. There are things of possession, treasures in heaven, "where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." These things moths cannot touch, rust cannot corrode, thieves cannot find. Oh, the foolishness, the stupidity of men and women who think riches consist in treasures on the earth. All the time the swift, silent messengers of destruction are breaking in upon it, and the equally silent corrosive fire of Nature is biting into the metal and destroying it. Presently we hear of burglary - thieves! To repeat the word, mark the fine satire of our Lord on the men who are not rich towards God, and who are proud of their accumulations.

Once again, He took the illustration of the eye. The subject He was illustrating was the necessity for singleness of motive in life, having one aim, purpose, passion. He ended this section by saying, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." He says the eye is the lamp of the body, not the light of the body. Think of the human eye, and of its value. If there be no light the eye is quite useless. The light is not in the eye, but the eye is the means of interpreting the light and applying the light. The eye is that which regulates the motions of the body. It is wonderful how those denied the great blessing of sight have other senses sharpened. But those blind would be the first to admit that the natural order is that the eye is the lamp, in which the light shines, and through which things are seen because light is shining.

Then with marvellous scientific accuracy, Jesus used two words as to the condition of the eye, the "single" eye, and the "evil" eye. The contrast is the more remarkable, in that it is not an exact contrast, which would have been single and double, or good and evil.

The word "single" is *aplous*, which means single-folded, without a fold. If thine eye has no complications within itself. Anyone who has visited an oculist has probably heard him use the word astigmatism. I give the definition of an authority. "An astigmatism is a structural defect of the eye so that rays of light do not converge to a point in the retina." That means there is some fold there, something out of place, something complicated. The eye is not single. The single eye is the opposite of the eye suffering from astigmatism. Jesus said, If the eye is single, not folded over, nothing out of place, what then? Things are seen clearly, in right perspective, and the whole body is illumined, it is full of light. The eye is the lamp, and the light shines through it into the whole body, and there is nothing complicated.

Then He gave the contrast. "If thine eye be evil," and the word is *poneros*, evil in influence. Now, He did not deal with the structure of the eye. That had been indicated in what had already been said. The single eye is never evil, *poneros*. The word now indicates not merely an obliquity of vision, but that there is a squint. Everything is seen double. That eye is evil in its influence upon the one possessing it and upon others. The eye regulates the body, and if the eye is wrong, then all the light of God leaves such an one in darkness.

What is meant by the single eye? "No man can serve two masters. … Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The teaching is the necessity for the unification of life at a centre, from which everything is viewed. So these first parabolic illustrations in the Manifesto all move in the realm of the ethical, and are concerned with the Kingdom, and the Kingship of God; and the responsibility of those who are in that Kingdom for the earth and for the world.