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

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

 *… Matthew Chapters 6 and 7*

AGAIN we take three groupings of illustrations, on three subjects or themes: the first, the birds and the lilies; the second, that of the mote and beam, and dogs and swine; the third, the loaf and stone, the fish and serpent, or scorpion. Our Lord used all these as illustrations in His ethical teaching.

The birds and lilies are very familiar. What then was the subject the Master was illustrating? That of the futility of anxiety about necessary things. In the former illustration of true wealth, the folly of laying up treasure destroyed by moth, rust, and stolen by thieves, He was not looking at necessary things. If His subjects are not to be careful about laying up treasure on earth, there are things that are essential and necessary.

What are the necessary things? They are revealed in His teaching; food, drink, raiment. Here He reduced everything to the last necessity. The word raiment here covers more than the covering of the body. Paul writing to Timothy says, "Having food and covering we shall be therewith content." Covering means not merely the covering of the body, but covering of our personality, shelter, home. That also was surely in the mind of our Lord. Things can be accumulated, without any home. However, keep to the simple ideas, food, drink, and raiment. These are necessities to those in His Kingdom, until the consummation. He insisted upon the futility of being anxious about these necessities in a threefold repetition of a phrase, "Be not anxious." The Authorized Version renders here, "Take no thought" for food and drink and raiment, which is a little misleading. We are to take thought, but we are not to be anxious. That is the important word, the anxiety which is carking care, and that is unfruitful, feverish, and worrying. How constantly His subjects, submitted to His rule, face these problems of food, clothing, and covering, necessary things, until the anxiety reacts upon them, and they become hot and restless, fretful and worried.

There is a threefold movement in the teaching. He shows first that anxiety is unnecessary. The necessity is known to God. "Your Father knoweth that ye have need." Secondly, it is unworthy. We are frittering away great forces that inspire life, on unworthy objects. Direct that driving energy and urge of personality into its true line of action. By seeking the Kingdom and His righteousness, we shall be taking our powers, and spending them in that way. Lastly, with a line touch of satire, He says it is not only unnecessary and unworthy, it is quite unfruitful. Worry does not get us anywhere, nor bring us anything. By taking thought we cannot add one cubit to our stature.

The marginal reading for the word "stature" is "age" in the Revised Version. Either word carries the meaning. By worrying one cannot add a cubit to his stature, or live longer. See the playful irony of the word. Remember the teaching that has preceded this word; the supremacy of character, revealed in the beatitudes, that character as influence, salt, and light, followed by binding laws. We are still in the world, and must have food, drink, and raiment, necessary things. We are not to be anxious about these things.

How shall we avoid anxiety? Jesus looked out upon the common, everyday things, the birds and the lilies, the Huleh lily of Palestine, varying from brilliant scarlet to a fine deep purple, one of the most gorgeous of the flowers, blooming there amid the fields where He was talking. Look at the birds as they nestle there in these trees, and as they fly. They have no intelligence that enables them to make provision. They have no gathering power. They do not lay up in barns; but they are fed, and the Father feedeth them.

These are illustrations by contrast rather than similarity. If our heavenly Father feeds those whom He has not endowed with a capacity for thinking and planning and arranging and laying by in store, how much more likely He will feed those whom He has created with the capacity to lay up, and arrange, and plan. Man is intelligent, is made for forecasting, to arrange. He is created with the intellectual capacity that enables him to do what the birds cannot do. Our Father feeds the birds, notwithstanding their lack. He will feed us on the basis of our possessions. Man will use the faculties, but the greatness of his humanity, and all his cleverness will not feed him, unless God does so. The Lord was driving His listeners back to a recognition of the futility of worry and anxiety, teaching that the beings He has thus endowed and endued, using those powers so given, to such God always responds in supplying need.

Then He looked at the flowers. He said, Look at them. God has garbed them, and all the glory of Solomon's fine twined linen and purple and flashing beauty do not compare with the beauty of those flowers. Is anyone inclined to think that here Jesus used rhetoric? No, it is cold, scientific fact. Some day take a piece of the finest material ever employed in the making of garments of kings, the most beautiful and costly, and most delicately woven in the looms of humanity, and put it under the microscope. Then put under that same microscope a rose, a lily, any flower, a daisy plucked from the common sod. The material will be like sackcloth, its edges frayed. The flower will be wonderful with all the efflorescent beauty of accuracy. God clothes the lilies, and Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. To us He has given power both to toil and to spin. How much more may we expect to be clothed by that God Who clothes the lilies in that manner. To-day they are in the field. To-morrow they for burning, they are gone. We are for the eternities, and He has given us power to toil, and to spin.

In these illustrations our Lord was not telling us not to think, for He did not say, Take no thought. We were made to think, to gather, put by in barns, to learn how to toil and spin. Use these powers, knowing that they are given by God, and that He will co-operate with us in all our gathering, in our toil, and spinning, It is quite unnecessary therefore that we should have any anxiety about the things of necessity, for the supreme thing here, that flames with beauty, is that "your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

The second group of illustrations concerns one subject again. The mote and the beam, and dogs and swine. It is a curious conjunction, they are together, and are kept together. The mote and the beam illustrated one realm, and dogs and swine another, but they are in the same possibility of action and activity in life. The subject which our Lord was illustrating was that of the principles that are to actuate us in the exercise of judgment. The word "judge" here has many meanings and applications. The Greek word is translated in ten or eleven different ways, every one having some essential thought, but with varied applications When our Lord said here, "Judge not that ye be not judged," the sense in which judgment is forbidden is the judgment that condemns. Discrimination, however, is necessary, and is enjoined. His use of the mote and the beam shows us that we may use judgment wrongfully; and He charges us not to do that thing. His use of the dogs and swine shows how judgment must be exercised, and is somewhat terrible in application. Judgment is necessary. As John records in another connection, He said once, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." That was distinct instruction to exercise the power of distinction and discrimination. That is part of our human nature. But there is a censorious attitude of soul, in which judgment deteriorates into the judgment of unfairness and condemnation, and that is what He forbids. In that connection He used these startling figures of the mote and the beam. The beam is something big, and the mote a tiny thing. The word used for beam means a great massive piece of timber. The beam in the eye becomes almost grotesque by its bigness; and the mote, the little chip off the beam, cannot be seen, although it causes suffering. A man sees the mote in his brother's eye. Jesus does not deny he may see it. He does see it. It is something wrong, that ought not to be there. But Christ says there is a beam in that man's eye who is looking at his brother's mote. The beam is not a vulgar sin. The man guilty of a great sin is never critical of a man who has committed a little sin.

Then what is the beam? That very spirit of censoriousness which is watching for something in his brother, that blinds him to all the facts of the case. Sins of the spirit are always worse than the sins of the flesh; and there is no sin so blasting, so blighting, so damning, as the spirit of censorious judgment of another man. Cast out that beam, said Jesus, get rid of that; then one will see how to take the mote out of the brother's eye. Censoriousness dwells upon the mote, and criticizes the brother. That censoriousness is a beam that is blinding the man. Remove it and approach that same man in love, with the very spirit of Christ, and the brother will be helped to get rid of his mote in his eye. Judge, not in the spirit of censorious condemnation; for we shall be judged in the way we judge; that is the measure of our judgment.

Then sharply, almost suddenly, He insisted upon the necessity for discrimination. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine." That is a tremendous saying, and a terrible one. If there is to be no hindering beam that prevents us from removing the mote, there is to be no blindness that prevents us from seeing corruption that is hopeless and helpless. We are not to take precious things, and give them to dogs, to cast our pearls before the swine. Peter doubtless heard that word, and at the end of his letter he spoke of people like dogs, returning to their vomit, and sows wallowing in the mire. There are such people, and Christ says we have no right to give such our treasure, our pearls.

A tremendous application can be made of that, the necessity that the Church should guard her most holy things. In past history the Church gave over her sacred deposit to dogs, and cast her pearls before swine when she admitted government within her borders by pagan nations. She does it to-day whenever she compromises with the sacred things of her faith.

The final illustrations here, the loaf, the stone; the fish, the serpent. The subject illustrated here was that of prayer, the way in which God gives as compared with the way of men, and men at their highest level, as fathers give. He had just uttered the tremendous word about freedom from censoriousness, and yet the importance of the power of discrimination that prevents handing over of sacred things to dogs and swine. Immediately there He said, " Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." That has a wide and general application, but notice its placing in this ethical Manifesto. As one faces the difficulty of judging, and the fear to form any judgment, He says, The power-house is there, the light is there. "Ask, seek, knock." This is an ethical Manifesto. These are the laws of the Kingdom, and here prayer is enjoined as a necessity. Has any other code of laws included prayer as a necessity? I think none; and that is why they all break down. Jesus here introduced prayer, and shows how God gives. He will give. If they ask, they will receive. If they will seek, they shall find. If they knock, the door will be opened.

Having said that, he went on, "Which of you, being evil …?" The immediate application is that God is not evil, and we are. Evil here means more than sinful. It includes everything of narrowness. All we are, God is not. We, being evil, have the high capacity for giving good things to our children. Then our Lord illuminated it all. Will a father for a loaf give a stone; for a fish, a serpent? How much more shall your Father God give good things to them that ask Him. God gives the best, always the best, as they would give. He will never offer us a stone, even if we ask for a stone. He will give us bread. He will never offer us a serpent or a scorpion, if in foolishness we ask for serpent. He will give good things. "Ask, seek, knock." That is the dynamic centre of all ethics, because God is at the centre. Entering into this we can find the infinite machinery, with its wheels turning, revolving; but at the centre of that wheel there is an axle, that of the heart of our Father. Oh, do not be anxious. Use judgment in accordance with the principles of God, and if we find it difficult, go into the power-house, and ask, and seek, and knock.