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

**5. PARABOLIC ILLUSTRATIONS**

*… Matthew Chapters 9 and 10*

THE ILLUSTRATIONS in these chapters are found in a section of the Gospel dealing with the servants of our Lord, and of His sending them forth. In the charge which He laid upon them, we find these parabolic illustrations: a marriage, the mending of a garment, and wine skins; the harvest; sheep and wolves, serpents and doves; sparrows; and the sword. The background here is not of ethical teaching, but of His working of wonders in the midst of human dereliction, and of His commanding and calling and commissioning some to go out upon His great business.

The first illustration was of a marriage feast (9:15). What was the subject He was illustrating? The joy of His disciples and the reason for the joy. He used this illustration to account for the absence of an ascetic attitude towards life on the part of those round about Him. Here the disciples of John had come to Him and asked why His disciples did not fast as those of John and the Pharisees. I believe it was a sincere question. They had watched the disciples of Jesus, and had noticed an entire absence of ascetic practices, which they thought were of the essence of religion. Our Lord in reply, used this figure of the marriage, an Oriental figure. The ceremonies lasted for seven days of merriment and festivity.

His application was simple. The sons of the bride-chamber never fast, or lack joy during these festivities. While the bridegroom is there, they do not fast. Applying the illustration directly to Himself, He said that was the reason why His disciples were a happy crowd. These men could not understand why, and Jesus gave them the reason - the Bridegroom was still with them. He then told them that presently He would be taken away, and then they would mourn. He there used a remarkable verb. The Bridegroom will be taken and caught up, a word that marks exaltation. He was looking on to the end when He would be lifted up.

The first part of His illustration has its application to us, but not the second. How can the children of the bride-chamber mourn while the Bridegroom is with them? It cancels for ever anything in the nature of ascetic practices, in order to demonstrate loyalty. The absence of the Bridegroom is the reason for mourning, but He is not absent, and never has been since His victory, His resurrection, and ascension, and return in power by the Spirit to take up His abode with His own people. He was talking to His group of disciples later on in those intimate discourses, and said to them, "And ye therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one taketh away from you." The application here is that the true evidence of our relationship to Christ is our constant joy and rejoicing.

"O happy day that fixed my choice,

On Thee, my Saviour, and my God."

That is the keynote of Christian experience. As we are in fellowship with Christ, we know what it is to rejoice always, and again to rejoice.

In the same connection, and to the same men, He used the figure of the mended garment and wine skins, in order to make His meaning plainer. He was illustrating the nature of His Kingdom. Briefly this is what He meant: He could not crowd into an outworn formula the new things He was teaching men. He had come, not to mend an old garment, but to make a new one. Therefore new methods were necessary; and among them were these that they could not understand, the very happiness, which was the demonstration of the new method. If we put a piece of a new garment on an old, the rent is made greater. The garment cannot be mended in that way. The illustration of the wine skins illuminates and enforces the same truth. The new demands the new. "Wine skins" is a correct translation, skins used as bottles. Wine, when fermentation is complete, can be put into any bottles, whether new or old, without harming bottles or wine skins, and without harm to it. Wine, intended to ferment, would burst any bottles, whether new or old. Those two statements being understood, then unfermented wine must be put into new bottles. To put it into old bottles would produce fermentation, which is always a sign of breakdown.

Thus our Lord was teaching that to put His enterprise into the old formulae would bring about decomposition and ruin. When we have taken the claim and teaching and power and work of Jesus, and have tried to press them into some other form than His, it has deteriorated, as fermented wine. To those who objected to the merriment of His disciples He replied that the very merriment was inevitable while He was with them; and the whole system He was creating, was not something crowded into the old, but was something new.

We come next to that marvellous figure of the harvest (9:37,38). Notice the subject illustrated. He used the figure to His disciples when He was preparing them, appointing them, and charging them. It reveals his own outlook on His work. The figure in itself is suggestive, and needs no elaboration. Harvest is always the result of previous activity, is the victory of that activity, and is also a call to activity. Can there be anything more disastrous than an ungathered harvest? Wherever He clothes the smiling fields with corn, they are asking men to garner them, to bring in the corn.

We have here a remarkable background. Matthew says that He went about all the cities and villages, teaching, preaching, and healing; and when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion for them, for they were distressed and scattered, as sheep having no shepherd. Why had He compassion on these multitudes? Because He saw them as others did not see them. His vision of the crowd was of a multitude distressed and scattered, without shepherd, a flock of sheep harried by the wolves, and fleeced; fainting, wounded, bleeding, dying. It was our Lord's picture of the condition of the multitudes, in spite of their professions, and supposed orthodoxies to religion.

With that background in mind, He said harvest. Could two more apparently contradictory figures be put together? A flock of sheep, fainting, wounded, dying, and harvest. Here is the deep truth concerning His mission. Human need, distress, and dereliction constitutes harvest for Him and for His workers. Wherever the day is darkest, wherever the need is sorest, wherever human government is at its worst, there the fields are white to harvest for the Christ of God. So He said to His disciples before He called and commissioned them. He the distressed and awful condition of humanity, but He did not say it was a hopeless case; but that it was harvest, and was plenteous.

In the next illustration He spoke of sheep and wolves (9:16). Again to His disciples He said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." Take another figure with that, "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." He was illustrating now the work that lay immediately ahead of His disciples. This tenth chapter needs careful reading. In His commission to the twelve He saw three periods of service ahead, the immediate, then that which should follow His departure; and then beyond. In this first period we see what was before them. "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." The wolves were those preying upon the people, and were producing that state of weariness and weakness, wounding and fleecing. Mark the "therefore." Be ye therefore wise as serpents, harmless as doves." Wise as serpents. Note, it is the wisdom of the serpent, not its poisonous capacity. It is the harmlessness of the dove, not its helplessness. Our Lord chose His words carefully to show what He meant. His disciples were going out to serve the needs of the sheep, into the midst of wolves. His workers are harmless only as they are wise, and wise when they are harmless. Any man going out upon the Master's business who lacks wisdom, is not harmless. Any man going out is not wise unless he is harmless. These are the two great qualifications for going out into a hostile world, facing the wolves that have destroyed the sheep. There are times too when His business demands our fighting with the wolves, as well as shepherding the sheep.

He then used that exquisite figure of the sparrows (9:29-31). Talking to the same men, He was illustrating God's tender care of His messengers. "Not a sparrow falleth on the ground without your Father." Do not spoil that in quoting it, without your Father's knowledge! If the sparrow sickens and dies in winter frost, or summer heat, and it falls to the ground, and with a tremor in its feathers we say it is dead, yes, but God was there. It died upon the bosom of God. "Ye are of more value than many sparrows." As His messengers go out to fight the wolves they may be killed; they go out as sheep in the midst of wolves. They need the wisdom of the serpent, combined with the harmlessness of the dove. As they go, however, the Father Who cares is with them, He Who is with the dying sparrow will be with them, even if their service leads them to the place of death.

"Think not that I came to send peace on the earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword " (10:34). At that point our Lord was illustrating the effect produced by His enterprise and work. His work, and theirs through Him, would be divisive. It would mean the break-up of households. The sword here means that His work would be divisive; but loyalty to Him and to His enterprises must be the supreme thing, calling for complete devotion.

Our Lord's references to a sword are very interesting. Of course the ultimate meaning of His mission is peace. But here He was speaking of the importance of the effect of the process of His work. "I came not to send peace, but a sword." He used the figure again when predicting the coming judgment of Jerusalem (Luke 21:24). Again at the end He used it a remarkable way (Luke 22:36). When His disciples said, "Lord, behold, here are two swords," He said, "It is enough," so dismissing the subject. They had failed to understand that He was emphasizing that which He had already said, that they would go out on their mission, a divisive mission. When they now said,"Here are two swords," He was not telling them that two were enough, but He was dismissing the subject. Again in the Garden Peter was sternly rebuked, Put up thy sword into its sheath, that material sword of thine, for they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. He came to send a sword in that sense, of the breaking up of households; yet He came also to make households, and to gather them together. But because His teaching would be contrary to all the impulses of the human soul, inevitably there would be division. That has gone on ever since. All His workers have found the sword, dividing and setting into different camps.

All these illustrations have moved in the realm of humanity's need, and of His conception of what that work really means; and of His call to those who follow Him, to follow according to His own purpose.