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

**15. THE HOUSEHOLDER**

*"Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They answered him, "Yes, Lord." He said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out of his treasure new and old things."*

*Matthew 13:51,52*

THIS PARABLE is the completion of the octave found in this thirteenth chapter. "He spake to them many things in parables." So the movement began. At the fifty-third verse, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, He departed thence." Those are the boundaries of this parabolic day in the teaching of Jesus. He spoke many things in parables, and when He had finished His teaching, He departed.

This last parable is not concerned with the history of the Kingdom in the age, but with the responsibility of His disciples during that period. The parable in itself is very brief, and yet full of revealing suggestiveness. It followed a question and an answer. That question and answer must be borne in mind. The question was one which our Lord asked of these men who had listened to Him, and the answer was their reply.

After the delivery of the four parables in public, and the three in private, in that same privacy Jesus said to His disciples, "Have ye understood all these things?" And they answered, "Yea." I believe they were quite honest in their answer, but I do not think they had fully understood. Events proved they had not grasped the real significance of all He had said. But they had gone so far; and however much we may say about their limited understanding, our Lord took them at their own valuation. Immediately He proceeded to utter this parable. That "therefore" is most significant. It leans back upon the question and the answer. Have you understood? Yes, "Therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the Kingdom of heaven," that is who has received his instruction, and has understood all these things, "is like a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

That preliminary setting of the revealing parable marks the method of treatment. First of all note the preliminary requirement as revealed; and then that which is taught in the parable, the perpetual responsibility. If we have understood these things, something must happen, something will result, because every scribe instructed to the Kingdom of heaven, or made a disciple of the Kingdom of heaven, who has been listening to the teaching, and is instructed, is like a householder.

"Have ye understood all these things?" Notice carefully, "*all* these things." In the very way in which our Lord asked the question there is revealed the fact that the parables are mutually explanatory, that we are not prepared for whatever is to follow as to responsibility until we have grasped the significance of all these things, the sower, the darnel, and so all through the seven. They merge, they belong to each other, all are necessary to an unveiling of truth concerning this Kingdom of heaven. Have we understood all of them? Not one of them, but all these things in their interrelationship.

That is the preliminary question, and it is no use going on until we have faced it. He compelled the disciples to face it, and they were honest as far as they went in their reply. But our Lord's emphasis is on the word "understood." To understand is to put together, to comprehend. In the question there is a recognition of the whole drift of the teaching as necessary to the fulfilment of the obligation, whatever that obligation is. "Have ye understood all these things?" In an arresting aside, because He was going straight on to an illuminative word, He said to them "Therefore." Wherefore? Because you have heard the things, and understood them, "therefore every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man."

Here are two synonymous terms, a disciple to the Kingdom of heaven is therefore a scribe. Here our Lord did an arresting thing, though it is possible we may not at first be arrested by it, or notice it. It is that of His use of the word "scribe" at that point. From the commencement of His ministry, and growingly, there was an order of men called scribes, and they were opposed to Him, "the scribes and Pharisees." Who were these men? When our Lord foretold His suffering at Caesarea Philippi, He said He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things at the hands of chief priests, elders, and scribes. That was no mere piece of rhetoric. He was describing the three orders actually then existing in Jerusalem, and among the Hebrew people; the priests, the spiritual rulers; elders, the civil rulers; and scribes, the moral rulers. The moral rulers had been opposed to our Lord throughout His ministry.

As a class the scribes arose in the time of Ezra. There was no order of scribes in Moses' time. The scribes in Old Testament history were the historians, and principally military historians. But in the time of Ezra there arose a new order of scribes, and Ezra was the outstanding figure of that order. He made a pulpit of wood, and stood on it, from which he read the law, giving the sense. That does not merely mean he read correctly, and with clear articulation, though that undoubtedly is inferred. It simply means that he read the law and explained it. There was a great Bible movement, a Scriptural movement at that time under Ezra. So this order of scribes arose. They were men who read the law, and explained it; consequently they became the moral interpreters.

As time wore on these men became more and more concerned with the letter of the law, and they attempted to safeguard it by building a fence around it. That fence consisted of the traditions that were supposed to interpret the law. In process of time it not only shut out the law, but shut men out from it, and men came to misunderstand the law through the traditions and teaching and interpreters, those men whose whole business was to interpret it. So in the time of Jesus He flung Himself in anger oftentimes against these traditions and these false teachers, the scribes, the official interpreters of the law.

Again another reference. Upon one occasion in remarkable language our Lord quoted from them, calling them the interpreters of the law, He said they sat in Moses' seat. Their business was to interpret the law of Moses, and Jesus set the seal of His authority upon the idea, never upon the men, but upon the idea. Going on, He said Therefore, because they sit in Moses' seat, whatsoever they say unto you do it, only do not ye as they do. Thus He set His seal upon the authority of that order.

Christ had now been instructing His men, His disciples, those representative men who were to interpret the Kingdom of heaven to the world, and He named them by that same name; and in so doing, He transferred the fulfilment of an office from men who had failed to men who were to succeed them. In order to achieve the fulfilment of responsibility, therefore there must be understanding of the King's teaching concerning the Kingdom in this age.

Once again go back to these parables. According to Jesus, this age is to be one of conflict from beginning to end, characterized largely by human break-down and failure. But it is to be an age in which God accomplishes definite purpose both in the world and in human history, and in the creation of an instrument for the ages to come. Said Jesus, Have you understood these things, have you grasped My teaching? If you have a sense of what this age is to be like, you are to go out into it as scribes.

Come now to the parable. Every such scribe, made a disciple himself to the Kingdom of heaven by the teaching of Christ, standing for it, every such one is like a householder.

What is a householder? One cannot interpret this parable by thinking of a householder in London. We use the phrase properly, but it was an Eastern figure which our Lord employed. The word is *Oikodespotes*, to translate that literally, a house-despot. We do not like the word despot. We have no reason to dislike it save when despotism is evil. Then we have not only the right to dislike it, but we have the right to fight it to the end. It is a word that marks tremendous authority, the house-despot. It is a picture of a shepherd, father and king, all which phases are merged into one personality, one at the head of affairs. To illustrate and illuminate, Jesus one day said to these men, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." To the Western mind particularly it may look as though our Lord were mixing His metaphors. A merely literary critic might say, This Teacher is confused. He begins His statement with a shepherd and a flock. He forgets it before He has gone far, and it is the man and his family. Then He forgets that, and the picture is of a nation and a king and Kingdom. But we know perfectly well that if the figures merge they do not mix. They reveal the threefold aspect of a head of a clan, or a nation and people. The Arab shiek to-day at once is the shepherd of his people, the father of the family, and king of the nation; and all these are involved in "the house-holder." The disciple to the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder. That word "householder" was on the lips of Jesus some ten or twelve times, and almost invariably He used it of Himself. It is the word that marks authority. The disciples were to be scribes, authoritative interpreters of moral law.

What then does the householder do? He brings forth from his treasure house. He brings forth treasure. There are two words for treasure in the New Testament. One means that which is laid up, layer on layer, and kept. The other means that which is spent. The difference between a miser and a spendthrift is that a miser says sovereigns are flat that he can hoard them; and the spendthrift says they are round, so that he can roll them, and get rid of them! These two ideas are in the two words for treasure. We find them both in the Sermon on the Mount. Here it is the word which means laid up. The householder is seen as having vast resources. What does he do with them? He brings them forth, and here the Greek word is scatters them lavishly. It is a suggestion of bountifulness. He has them heaped up, but he is bringing them out, and scattering them everywhere.

Then comes the remarkable phrase, "things new and old." Notice, He did not say new things and old things; but the same things which are new and old. These scribes, these disciples of the Kingdom, these who have heard and accepted His interpretation, and have understood, are to go out, and they are to be householders, bringing out of their treasure things new and old. The whole picture is that of an authoritative ruler, lavishly scattering out of his wealth the things which are necessary for the supply and government of his household. That is the picture of all those who are instructed to the Kingdom of heaven.

Disciples of Jesus are those seen as the true rulers of the age, as they correctly interpret the Kingdom, and represent Him in it. They have access to the eternal treasure-house, and in that treasure-house there are things new and old. Mark the arresting picture of these disciples of Jesus in the age. We see the age, on the human side, as it will be seen by men of sight. But we see also the Divine side, as it is seen in the purpose of God, having a far wider application than earth or time stretching out into the ages. That is the Kingdom of God, and therefore there is the treasure-house, and these disciples, made disciples to that Kingdom, by understanding that teaching, and that outlook, are to go forth to exercise the true authority. The scribe was the moral authority. So are we to be.

That has been going on for nineteen hundred years. The Church has been doing that very thing. She has been exercising moral authority in the history of the world from Jesus until to-day. I know how she seems to have failed. Our Lord told us there would be failure. We must, however, think bigly and broadly enough of history. Every great moral sentiment that obtains in the thinking of the world to-day has come to it through the Church of God. Yes, failure again and again, but that thing still remains true. The emancipation of womanhood, the emancipation of slaves, the value of children, the bed-rock basis of marriage, all these things have come because of the scribes of the Kingdom, who have been interpreters of its moral law. Theirs is the final authority, not that of kings, and rulers, and emperors, and presidents, and parliaments; but of those scribes who understand the Kingdom, and are made disciples thereto.

What are they to do? They are to "bring forth things new and old." Jesus did not say to them they should bring forth new things, and old things. That is not two orders of things. It is two facts concerning the same things. They are one in essence. The principle is old, the application is new. The root is old. The blossom and the fruit are new. The old things are the eternal things, the eternal verities. The new things are the applications of those eternal things to the passing phases of changing times. "Things new and old." The two are necessary to growth. If we destroy the old, there will be no new. If we find an absence of new, we shall discover that the life of the old has ceased. Take an illustration from Nature. Go into the garden. If that root be dead, there is no blossom, and no fruit. If the old be dead, the new does not appear. Or look at it from the other side. Come into the garden, and if there is no blossom, no fruitage, we know that the root is dead. "Things new and old." The inter-relationship therefore is a perpetual test. The new which contradicts the old is always false; and the old which has no new is dead and useless. "Things new and old."

Surely Russell Lowell had that great principle in mind when he wrote those lines that have become hackneyed by quotation, but still are so marvellously true,

"New occasions teach new duties, Time makes ancient good uncouth;

They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of truth;

Lo, before us gleam her camp fires, we ourselves must pilgrims be,

Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate Winter sea,

Nor attempt the future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key."

But if we attempt the future's portal with any key except the key that hangs upon the girdle of the King, we cannot unlock its door, but the key is always there. That is the old. The unlocked door is the new, and the Church has been called upon to pass through the centuries, and will, until the age ends, for evermore meeting new conditions with the old principles in new applications. Because the Kingdom of heaven is old, it has ever new applications, new methods, new manners. Men may change, but the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God, remains for ever rooted in the nature of God, and it blossoms fresh in every generation among the sons of men.

So we can summarize. What is meant by the old? The Kingship of God. What is meant by the new? The application of the old, nationally, socially, and individually, at all times. That is the responsibility of all those who are named scribes, those set in authority as the treasure-house is there. The business of such is householders, to bring the treasure forth, and seek its revealing. For evermore our view of the age must be His view of it. Then our influence will be His influence, bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God. All the other phases are there in the other parables, and are manifest throughout the teaching of our Lord; but this is the great final parable in the octave, of application to us, and of our responsibilities.