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

**16. PARABOLIC ILLUSTRATIONS**

*… Matthew Chapter 15*

*"That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."*

*Matthew 15:11*

*"Don't you understand that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly, and then out of the body? But the things which proceed out of the mouth come out of the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands doesn't defile the man."*

*Matthew 15:17-20*

*"But he answered, "It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."*

*Matthew 15:26*

IN THIS fifteenth chapter we find a parable, and a parabolic illustration. The parable is in the eleventh verse, and our Lord's explanation occurs in verses seventeen to twenty. Then in connection with another incident in His ministry we have a parabolic illustration in verse twenty-six.

It is necessary that we understand the subject which He was illustrating, when He uttered a parable. To do that we must go back to see the occasion upon which our Lord used these words and this illustration.

There had come to Him a deputation from Jerusalem. By this time He was approaching the end of His third year of ministry. That third year culminated at Caesarea Philippi, which account is in the next chapter. So He was approaching the end of the central period of public propaganda, so full of interest. Hostility to Him on the part of the rulers, spiritual, moral, and civil, which had manifested itself from the beginning, had grown with the passing of the years. Here they sent down to Him a deputation from Jerusalem with the explicit purpose undoubtedly, of somehow entangling Him, or asking for some explanation of things they did not understand, and to which they had most strongly objected in His teaching, and finally as that teaching had manifested itself in the conduct of His disciples.

The whole Hebrew religion at that time was suffering under the intolerable burden of tradition. Indeed, tradition had so covered over, submerged, the law of God that men were not familiar with the law. They were far more familiar with the tradition. How constantly our Lord in speech and action flung Himself against prevailing traditionalism. Here that is what manifested itself. We can hardly realize what that meant then. The whole system of religion had passed under its yoke and incubus, and was in slavery to it. In a previous chapter we have dealt fully with this subject. To give two actual quotations from the rabbis of the time. "The words of the elders are weightier than the words of the prophets." Or another, "Some of the words of the law and the prophets are weighty, others are not weighty. All the words of tradition are weighty words."

It is impossible to go into all the meticulous divisions of these traditions, and how on every hand what was legal by tradition, was supposed to interpret the law of God. Take this case in point. These men had come down from Jerusalem to Jesus, and they had asked Him, Why do Thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders when they eat bread? They owned they were thinking about the tradition of the elders. They had seen the disciples of Jesus transgress that tradition, ignore it, fail to observe it.

The disciples were eating bread with unwashed hands. There was no tradition that a man should wash his hands before food in order to cleanliness. It was not cleanliness that was in view, but ritual. All these traditions had become impregnated by superstition, and the rabbis were declaring that Shibta, a demon, sat upon the hands of men as they slept, and ceremonial washing was necessary, or food would be contaminated by the presence of that demon upon their hands, while they were asleep! We are inclined to smile at it. But there are people doing things to-day quite as foolish as that.

That was the hour and atmosphere that drew forth this reply from Jesus. He flung back upon them their own tradition. They had charged the disciples with transgression of the traditions of the fathers. He said, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" Then He gave them another tradition which they had transgressed. God had said, "Honour thy father and thy mother , and, He that speaketh evil of father or mother, let him die the death." They were saying, "Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given to God," or "Corban" as in the Old Version. The mystic word can be pronounced upon anything, as "do wrong!" But our Lord uttered this tremendous word.."Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition." "Ye hypocrites."

Having answered the deputation, He uttered this parable to the multitudes. It was a parable characterized by the greatest simplicity, that could not be misunderstood. He led them to face the fact of the physical organism. He showed them that physical organism deals with physical aliment, that it has no reference to moral cleanness or defilement. Notice carefully, "Not that which entereth into the mouth defileth the man." Then at once linking the thought with that other word, words proceeding out of the mouth, coming up out of the thoughts, they defile the man, because when thoughts are evil, words are evil, and acts are evil. So by the false thinking and heart, the very flesh may be defiled. The sustenance of the flesh can have in it no defiling element. It is not that which enters into a man that defiles him, but that which comes out of the deeper fact of his nature, out of his heart, out of the realm of mind and spirit, mastering the activities of the flesh, thoughts producing acts, reacting in defilement.

The teaching here is important. The flesh in itself is not evil. It does not defile. Paul, and other New Testament writers constantly refer to the flesh as being that against which we have to watch and battle, which is true in certain ways. But the flesh inherently is not evil. That is an old Gnostic heresy which cursed the early Church, and against which the writings of Paul were directed. There is nothing inherently evil in flesh, and therefore that which sustains flesh could not defile. If we take food, it strengthens us in physical powers, because the flesh in itself is not inherently evil, and therefore it is not defiled.

But a man pondering in his heart evil thoughts, may be led by so doing to the expression of words which presently will find further expression in deeds, and those very deeds will defile the flesh. The flesh which is not inherently evil may become contaminated, harmed, and may become the very instrument of destruction and death. But that is not the result of the food eaten. Consequently to believe contamination resulted was stupid, to use no stronger word. The observance of external rules has no power to touch the inward spring of action. We may observe all the rules, we may sign all the pledges, and we may not eat that food, nor drink that drink, nor go to that place; but the inner, spiritual life is not touched by these things.

Paul warned some to whom he wrote against worship of the will, when he wrote of being subject to ordinances, "Handle not, nor taste, nor touch." It is a curious thing that these words are often quoted as giving good advice. Paul said it was bad advice. All that is of no value to the purifying of our flesh. That is what our Lord was teaching here.

There was profound significance in that word of Jesus to Nicodemus. I take it reverently beyond the application He made of it. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." There is a clear distinction. That which is born of the flesh is not inherently evil. That which is born of the spirit may become so, and may react even upon the flesh, upon the physical being.

Read again His own explanation. "Whatsoever goeth into the mouth passeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught." That cannot defile the man. "For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts." He then gave a list of the things by which even the flesh becomes defiled; but "to eat with unwashen hands defileth not the man."

The parable was for the listening multitudes, in the presence of those rulers who were hiding the commandment of God, and making it of none effect by their tradition. It also stands for evermore as a warning against adding anything as a final authority in life to the law of God itself. That is the consummate wrong that is being done by the Roman theologians. Our Roman friends tell us we can read the Bible, but we must not interpret it. We must accept the interpretation of those in authority, the Church, as they say. That is what these men of old said. We have the law of God, but it cannot be interpreted save through tradition; and whenever tradition, whether of a priest, or a prophet, or a Bible teacher, is put in the place of authority over life, we are violating our own spiritual need, and wronging the Word of God. Only as priest, prophet, or teacher can lead men into the living presence of the Word is there any value in his work. Everything else is mere tradition, which ultimately hides the value of the truth of God.

A brief reference to the parabolic illustration. There is no connection between the parable spoken to this deputation, or to the multitudes after the deputation came, and this story, except that directly after this, our Lord "went out from thence, and withdrew into the parts of Tyre and Sidon" (v. 21). It was a significant action of our Lord. He crossed the border line between strictly Jewish and Gentile territory. Tyre and Sidon were outside Jewish territory. So was Decapolis. Our Lord first went up to Tyre and Sidon, and then went down to Decapolis. In Tyre and Sidon this woman met Him, outside Jewish territory, outside the ritual of the Jewish covenant. Here, and in Decapolis He was among those not of the Jewish faith, but among the Gentiles. He had turned from Israel which, for the moment through its rulers, was manifesting hostility to Him. He had gone away, and had entered into a house, and would have no man know it. He had gone for quietness.

Then that wonderful statement is made which flames with light. "He could not be hid." We read elsewhere that upon occasion He hid Himself, and they could not find Him when He was in the middle of a crowd. Why could He not be hid here? Because there was a woman outside the house in trouble. It was to that woman He used that curious parabolic illustration, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs." This is not strictly a parable, but a parabolic illustration. Jesus had crossed the border line into foreign territory. He was in the parts of Tyre and Sidon, which means the environs. The woman came out from thence. The attitude of Jesus towards her was the attitude of the Messiah towards an outsider.

When she cried first of all He did not answer. First He had come out to see her. He could not be hid, and in that first sentence we have a wonderful illumination of everything that followed. He then maintained silence when she cried, and His disciples besought Him to give her what she wanted, and let her go. Then He said, "I am not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He was the Messiah of Israel.

Notice carefully here in the outcome of the story how that phrase finds a remarkable interpretation; and in the use of it in all that followed, He turned from the flesh to the spirit. We read it, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and we think, as these men did, in the realm of the flesh. He had said He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then she addressed Him, not as the Hebrew Messiah, but with the universal title, "Lord, have mercy on me." Then He said this strange thing to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs."

Our Lord used an uncommon word for dogs. As a matter of fact it is the only place in the New Testament where it occurs, and it is a diminutive, "little dogs." Behind that lies the whole Eastern picture. The dogs that were an abomination at that time were the wild, half-wolfish, marauding dogs, those in the mind of Paul when he wrote, "Without are dogs." In those Jewish homes there were little dogs, domestic dogs, pets of the children, who gathered round the board. Our Lord did not use the word referring to the prowling, fierce, marauding dogs, held in horror. He used the word that denoted the little dogs, when He said, It is not meet to take the children's loaf, and cast it to the little dogs.

Then the woman answered, Yea, Lord, but these little dogs eat of the crumbs. Whatever we may think of that answer, notice what Jesus thought. "O woman, great is thy faith." What a wonderful process is seen here. When He used this figure, He softened it by the term He employed for dogs. He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The loaf is not to be flung to little dogs. But when the woman said, They eat the crumbs, by that word she confessed her complete faith. It was the woman's victory. An old Puritan father has said that in that last word she manifested the perfect wit of a woman. Yes, it was wit, but it was faith-inspired wit, for Jesus said so, "O woman, great is thy faith."

Yet by that last parabolic illustration our Lord reached the climax in a process from the beginning. Outside the covenant He had been feeling after faith, knowing that it was there in the heart of that woman. That is why He had come out to see her. She did not know much about Him, but His fame had spread; but her agony was there, and the germ of faith. He took the method of manifesting it, and in such wise as to say, "So great faith." It was the Lord's victory.

And mark this. He did not go outside His commission. She was one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. She proved herself by her faith to be the child of Abraham. Those who were of Abraham after the flesh were not all children of Abraham, but those who were of Abraham by faith. Here that illustration is brought into visibility by that apparently harsh answer of Jesus, which was not unkind. It was an opportunity for such a confession of faith, and the demonstration of the fact that the woman had her place, not in the fleshly covenant, but in the covenant of God with His Israel after the spirit, and the children who are of faith.