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

**22. THE TWO SONS AND HUSBANDMEN**

*"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.' He answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind, and went. He came to the second, and said the same thing. He answered, 'I'm going, sir,' but he didn't go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into God's Kingdom before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. When you saw it, you didn't even repent afterward, that you might believe him. "Hear another parable. There was a man who was a master of a household, who planted a vineyard, set a hedge about it, dug a wine press in it, built a tower, leased it out to farmers, and went into another country. When the season for the fruit came near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit. The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they treated them the same way. But afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But the farmers, when they saw the son, said amongst themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and seize his inheritance.' So they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?" They told him, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season." Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord. It is marvellous in our eyes?' "Therefore I tell you, God's Kingdom will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation producing its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust."*

*Matthew 21:28-44*

WE HAVE seen that the parabolic miracle of the cursing of the fig-tree was judicial and denunciatory. This paragraph contains two parables which were uttered on the day of the third entry of Jesus to Jerusalem. He had entered the city as the King, and had looked round about on all things, and turned His back upon them. He had entered as Priest, and cleansed the Temple, for a brief period restoring it to its true place in the economy of God. He now came as the great Prophet, with the message of God, and this time the message was judicial. That was His purpose in coming.

These things should be stressed, because we need to be delivered from any false thinking about the final things in the life of our Lord. We might be apt to think, and perhaps naturally, of Him as being hemmed in by His enemies, caught, and by them put to death. That is an entirely false view of the situation. Never in all human history was anyone less hemmed in by His enemies than was Jesus.

The story beginning in this passage is a remarkable revelation of this. In all literature there is no more dramatic passage than this. From the standpoint of the watching angels, and heaven's observation, we see a most amazing thing. He is seen coming up, gathering round about Him the rulers who had utterly failed in the economy of God; and compelling them to find a verdict upon their own conduct, and to pass a sentence commensurate with the verdict they themselves had found. He did this by the simple method of telling them stories, and asking their opinion on them.

He began first, "What think ye?" He told them a story, asked their opinion, and the opinion they gave was perfectly accurate. Then He told them another story, and again He asked their opinion, and they gave it, and it was quite correct. Thus, with a master hand, and by the use of simple illustrations of parabolic nature, He reached down into the deepest things in the lives of these men, and they pleaded guilty, and chose their own punishment, without knowing what they were doing, until He had finished. Then they saw He was speaking about them.

There are two parables here, that of the two sons, and that of the husbandmen. What was the subject illustrated in both of them? The verse preceding the parables says, "And when He was come into the Temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto Him as He was teaching, and said, By what authority doest Thou these things? and who gave Thee this authority?"

That was the challenge of the rulers. Their opposition to Him had been growing. It began at the beginning of His ministry. It had grown more and more intense, and things had happened on the previous day. He had cleansed the Temple, driven out the traffickers, interfered with vested interests which were permitted by these very rulers; and they now came to Him. This time it was not a casual question, asked by one of their number. It was a question asked officially. They asked Him two questions. What were they? "By what authority doest Thou these things? and Who gave Thee this authority?" Literally the first question was, In what authority doest Thou these things? and the second, Who gave Thee this authority? It was a direct challenge on the part of the authorities to Jesus concerning His authority.

While this is not our subject, we need the background to see to what it led. Our Lord now asked them a question. "I also will ask you one question." They had asked Him two. "I also will ask you one question, which if ye tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?"

Look at that question. They had asked Him for His authority. He took them back to that mighty ministry, with the effects of which they were all familiar, the ministry of John. They knew as well as He that John's ministry had culminated in the prediction of the Messiah. Vast multitudes had heard, and they had heard John as he had identified this very Jesus, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Now, said Jesus, Was John's baptism and mission authorized from heaven or not? Or was it of men?

They were on the horns of a dilemma. If they said, Of heaven, then their question about Jesus was answered. If John was right in declaring He was the Messiah, the authority of Jesus was from heaven, then why ask Jesus for His authority? Notice what they said. They did not yet see the implication of the question. They began talking, and reasoning among themselves, saying, If we say, From heaven, He will say, Why do you not believe Me? If we say, From men, we fear the multitude, for all hold John a prophet. Their reasoning was false. They missed the point of His question. Their whole concern was to set themselves in a right light with general opinion. If they admitted the authority of John was derived from heaven, then Jesus would ask them why they did not believe Him. We see the contention. They had not believed, and they knew He would ask them why. If, however, they said what they wanted to say, His authority was from men, then they would have all the multitudes up in arms. So we see them halting between expediency and convenience; and whenever a man halts there, he is doomed and damned, unless he repent.

Our Lord then gave them two parables, each based upon the song of Isaiah, in the fifth chapter. "Let me sing for my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill." They all knew that song of Isaiah. They were all familiar with that writing, and Jesus based His two parables upon that Old-time song, and that in a remarkable way.

Take the first parable. The story told to them was that of two sons, and their opinion was asked concerning it. The story of the two sons, carefully considered, is seen to be the condemnation of their methods. The second parable, that of the husbandmen, is a condemnation of their motives.

The figure employed is that of two sons, both receiving a command to work in the vineyard. One said, I will not go, but afterward he repented, and went. The other said, as we render it, "I go, Sir." There is no word "go" there in the Greek. It would be awkward without it, but really it is an emphatic "I." "*I*, Sir." The picture Jesus drew was that of two sons in front of the master of the vineyard, and he said to the one, Go and work in my vineyard, and he said, I will not go; to the other he said the same thing, and the other said, "I, Sir." He was putting him into contrast with the man who said he would not go. That was his decision. Certainly I will go, Sir. "I, Sir."

We know the sequel. The man who said "I will not," repented, and the word means more than a change of mind. It means sorrow. He became sorry. He thought the matter through, and he went, and did his work. The other man who had emphasized it, by putting himself into contrast with the brother who would not go, did not go. Now, said Jesus, there is the story. Which of them is the true son of the father? Which of them did the will of the father? Oh, the first, they said. Oh yes, they knew, they agreed; and they were perfectly right.

Then our Lord made a remarkable application. He took them back to John. He had asked them about the baptism and mission of John, and his authority. I have asked you whether John's ministry was from heaven or of men, and you have said you did not know. That was their final finding, "We know not." Look back and see publicans and sinners, the rebellious crowd, on the one hand; and these very rulers, professing allegiance to God, on the other. Two sons. The publicans and harlots, and the rebellious say, We will not go; we will not yield to God. The rulers say, We will yield to God. We remember the prayer in the Temple, O God, I thank Thee I am not as other men are, or as this publican!

Then said Jesus, Under the preaching of John the publicans and harlots have repented; they have believed. You, the rulers, believe not, yet you refuse the signs of the publicans and harlots who are believing, and are doing the will of God. These outcasts, these publicans, these harlots, these rebellious ones who have defied God, and said they would not obey Him, have repented, and obeyed. You who wear the robes and livery, and recite the confession, and declare your loyalty, are failing to do the will of God. So our Lord compelled them to find a verdict against themselves.

How eternally true we know this to be. The publican, the drunkard, the harlot, the sot, the profligate who repents and turns to God, becomes God's son, God's child, God's instrument. Those men and women who name the Name, and wear the sign, and are disobedient and rebellious in all the deep facts of their life, are not the children of God, are not the sons of God.

But He had not finished. As He had condemned their method, now He turned to their motives, and the figure again is quite familiar. A man who was householder planted a vineyard. Mark the words, how He still quoted from Isaiah. He "set a hedge about it, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower." It was the proprietor's perfect provision made for fruit to be gathered from his vineyard; and the husbandmen were those to whom he gave responsibility for the cultivation of the vines and vineyard, so that fruit should be brought forth to meet the proper requirements of the possessor. That was their responsibility.

Now, He said, in this case, when the time of fruit came, he sent his bond-servants, his servants, his slaves, his messengers to gather up the fruits; and those husbandmen stoned them, and killed them. Then he sent others, with the same result. At last - and is there not mighty power and tremendous force in this, coming from the lips of Jesus? - at last he sent unto them his son. "But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance. And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him." That is the story.

"When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" Again, they were so intrigued by the story, they had forgotten their hostility to Jesus. They saw the truth, and became vehement in their reply. "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their season." They has passed sentence upon themselves. It was they, the rulers of the people, in the long succession, who for centuries had failed to yield the fruit of the vineyard. It is impossible to avoid the sentence

For an interpretation of this, implicated and involved in the words of Jesus, we go back to Isaiah. There the vineyard instead of bringing forth grapes, brought forth wild grapes, and he explained his song, For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant. And He looked for judgment." Change the word, not to improve it, but to interpret it. "He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry."

Isaiah, in the Old Testament, tells us what the fruits were for which God looked in that nation of His. They were to bring forth in the world justice and righteousness, instead of which they had brought forth oppression, and created a cry of the oppressed. That is what these men had been doing; and the culmination of their false rule and government of the people had come in the case of the Son Himself. He knew what they were about to do. They were going to cast Him out, and kill Him.

When they had found their verdict, and passed that sentence, He passed His sentence, That is found in verse forty-three. He first quoted to them the Scripture about the rejected Stone being the Head of the corner. He pronounced the sentence of utter and absolute excommunication upon the whole Hebrew people, "Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust." There is the judgment.

The marvel of this is that He compelled these men to find a verdict, and pass a sentence. They who had failed to till and manage the vineyard of the Lord, so that the fruit for which God was seeking should be brought forth, they who had said, I go, and yet had failed, and they who had stoned the prophets, and such as were sent unto them, and were now preparing to cast out the Son and kill Him - there was only one thing to be done, that they should be miserably destroyed, and the vineyard taken away from them, and given to others. The Lord repeated the verdict as He pronounced the appalling sentence of excommunication.

These parables, and others to follow, reveal the King's authority. That authority is demonstrated by the line of His accomplishment, of the revelation of truth, His recognition of the Divine rights, His restoration of a lost order. That was the purpose of His presence in the world. To these men who were not convinced, there was no argument of any avail. If they were not prepared to be honest enough to face the fact that the baptism of John was from heaven, and consequently his identification of Jesus proved the authority of Jesus, there was nothing else to be said to them. To men who were not honest, there was no argument of any avail, and those who refused the evidences that were so simple and patent and clear were rejected.

As Jesus told these stories to those rulers, and they found out what He was doing, their anger was stirred to yet greater depths. We learn therefore that ancient privilege is always unavailing when it departs from immediate and present responsibility. The King's new teaching here was a return to fundamental intentions, and He showed how the rulers of the people had failed, and declared that there should be another nation that would not fail, but would bring forth the fruits of justice and righteousness, for which God is ever seeking in His vineyard.