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

**27. THE TALENTS**

*"For it is like a man, going into another country, who called his own servants, and entrusted his goods to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. Immediately he who received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. In the same way, he also who got the two gained another two. But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money. "Now after a long time the lord of those servants came, and reconciled accounts with them. He who received the five talents came and brought another five talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents. Behold, I have gained another five talents in addition to them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "He also who got the two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents. Behold, I have gained another two talents in addition to them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "He also who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you didn't sow, and gathering where you didn't scatter. I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the earth. Behold, you have what is yours.' "But his lord answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I didn't sow, and gather where I didn't scatter. You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "*

*Matthew 25:14-30*

THIS parable of the talents is the third of the triptych of related parables concerning the responsibility of His own through the age between the fall of Jerusalem and His second advent. We have already considered the parable of the household and that of the virgins. One fact, however, is in view in all. All those constituting the Kingdom of God are under His supreme control. The first parable had to do with the household, the Church within itself. It was communal, and revealed the responsibilities of individual members towards each other, of care and love, with an absence of all differences and quarrelling, and biting one another. The next parable, that of the virgins, revealed personal responsibility, of having not merely an outward form, but of having life. It teaches not merely a general expectation of the coming of the Lord, but of having oil, so that the light is burning.

We come now to the parable dealing with responsibilities of the widest nature, the imperial responsibilities of the Church. That at once reveals the subject which our Lord was intending to illustrate when He used the parable of the talents. The word imperial is used resolutely, though in some ways I do not like it, because in history it has bad connotations. The word has come to us from that act in the history of Rome when one man seized absolute authority by military power, and became imperator of the whole of the Roman empire. Things imperial meant the mastery of a people by autocratic and military power. Yet because of its true use it has its own and rightful place in this connection. Jesus is the only Imperator; not Caesar, nor the kings of time, but Jesus alone. The word connotes a King and a Kingdom; and the idea contained in the parable, which our Lord was illustrating, the truth He was enforcing was that of the prosecution of the interests of the King by the subjects of the Kingdom, during the period of His absence, as to bodily presence.

He is not absent in the sense of spiritual power. We know what it is to walk and talk with Him, and to hear Him talk to us. We know the real presence of the living Lord. Yet in historic sequence this is the period of His absence. He was in the world for one brief generation of a little more than three and thirty years, the great period in human history to which everything else led up, and from which everything else of value had proceeded, and is proceeding, and will proceed. But He is coming again. No one who believes in the New Testament can deny that. The statement is clear that He Who came is coming again to the world. All through this Olivet prophecy our Lord was looking at the world, and His Church from that standpoint of their being in the world, when He, as to bodily presence, was absent, going into a far country, and after a long time, coming again.

This parable must not be confused with that of the Pounds in Luke's Gospel. The emphasis in the two parables is entirely different. What then was the figure used here? One characterized by the uttermost simplicity. The fourteenth verse opens, "For it is as when a man, going into another country." In the Revised Version the words "it is" and "when" are italicized, which means they are not in the Greek, but have been put in by translators to give smoothness to the statement. Leave them out for a moment, "For as a man, going into another country, called his own servants." That links the parable closely with what had preceded it. Our Lord did not tarry between the parables. We look back then at the parable of the virgins, and the whole impact and value is found in the final charge of Jesus in verse thirteen. "Watch! therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour. For as a man, going into another country, calleth his own servants, and delivereth unto them his goods." He now illustrated the necessity for watchfulness, but in another regard. So He takes this simple figure; "a man," He says. With all justness we may say, a king. It is the picture of a man who has a country of his own, under his own control. He is the lord, the master, the king. In that country this man has servants. The word He used all through here was bond-servants, slaves. Paul always spoke of himself as *doulos*, the bond-servant of Jesus Christ, that is, the absolute property of his Lord, all his life forces belonging to his Lord, himself at the disposal of his Lord. That is the picture here.

Moreover this man has goods. They belong to him. Change the word, wealth, or substance, but not substance stored, but something to be dealt with, to be offered for sale. It is a commercial figure connected with a king, the man who owned a country, and who had servants in it, he possessing goods in the country, substance. The picture our Lord gives here is of that man leaving behind in the country which is his own, these very servants to whom he has distributed talents, according to their ability, and leaving them there to trade for him, to carry on his business in his absence, to represent his goods to those who were left behind, and to put his goods at the disposal of others. That is the very simple picture which our Lord used. After a long time he comes back, and has a reckoning with the responsible servants he has left behind, and three illustrations are given: to one, five; to one, two; and to one, one talent.

Look at the picture again. What is the teaching of it? That in the absence of the Lord He has delivered to His servants His goods. He called them His own servants. Mark the emphasis on authority and possession, "His own servants," and He "delivered unto them His goods." The implication is perfectly clear. The goods were left that they might be used for the glory and enrichment of their absent Lord. He had goods. The servants were responsible for their use in order to bring wealth to Him. Really the relation and suggestiveness of these pictures are full of appeal. Goods, our absent Lord, and His goods. What are we to sell in this world? Do not quarrel about the word "goods." We may say God's gifts are without money and price. But the figure stands good. The apostle used the same figure in a great passage in which he told us, not to redeem the time, but to buy up the opportunity; and in that little word the apostle used of buying is the figure of the market-place, and merchant-men sitting by their wares, watching for the opportunity, and buying it up. That is the idea here.

What are the goods? The whole fact of the mission of Jesus in the world, the Gospel; and not merely the fact historically, but the fact in all its vital power, of the manifestation of God to men in Christ, the fact of a ministry full of the revelation of the possibilities of humanity in Jesus, the fact that He went to His Cross, and bore the sin of the world, the fact that He proved His victory in His dying, by His resurrection, the fact that He ascended on high, and received gifts for the rebellious, the fact that He is the living Lord, and waiting to come in and take possession of human souls, and change them and remake them after His own image and likeness. The goods! The great merchandise of the Church of God is concerned with things that belong to the Lord Himself, not with their own things, not with their own enterprises, not with their own merchandise; not with their own organizations; but with the goods, the wealth of Jesus, purchased at infinite cost, and now offered to the sons of men, offered to the whole human race. He has left these goods with His servants while He is away.

That leads one to an equally careful though brief consideration of this word "talents." He gave one five talents. He gave another, two talents. He gave one, one talent. What does "talent" mean? The popular use of the word suggests ability. We say of someone, That is a talented man, or a talented woman; and we are describing someone who has some gift, some ability. That is not the meaning of the word here. It is not a question of whether we have something to teach the world in our own personality. The word means something quite other. This word *talantos*, which we translate "talent" is a noun rather of quantity, not a revelation of quality. It is a noun of quantity, representing the Lord's possession alone. The five talents were His, part of His goods, and so with the two and the one. They did not belong to these servants at all. It is not a question of the fitness of His people, but one of the riches of His grace, provided for humanity in quantity.

One man was given five talents, another two, and another one. Why did one man have five, and the other two, and yet a third, one? Why the division? We are told, "To each according to his several ability." We now come to the question of ability. Talents were given according to ability. There is a tremendous principle involved in that. This does not mean that the man with the five talents had a bigger opportunity than the man with the two; or the man with the two than the man with the one. The personal possession of responsibility of some part of the King's wealth depended upon the ability of that particular person to use it. God will give one man, Christ will give, the king will give a man so many talents, because he has the ability to use that particular amount of the wealth that is committed to him. It means this, He will never call a man to preach who has no natural ability for preaching. I am afraid we often do. He never does. Behind that wonderful little expression, according as each man had ability, is a revelation of natural fitness, the ability of the personality as preparation for the reception of a supernatural gift, and that is always so. If a business man has that ability, he will receive responsibility according to that ability, which is his natural ability, the natural baptized, empowered, by the supernatural. Do not be led astray by the five, and the two, and the one, as though the first marks some element of greatness, and a kind of inferiority in the next case, and a greater inferiority in the third. Not at all. The man is taken into account.

Go to the epistles, and when Paul dealt with gifts, he says, To some was given thus, and others so; and among the lists, he says, "He gave some helps," not tongues, or preaching, or teaching, or exposition, or actual ability, but just "helps." Thank God for those in the Christian Church who are helps. But it is according to ability; and there is no reflection on the last man because he only received one talent. It was according to his ability. The great principle illustrated is that of his disbursement of his goods to his bond-servants. That they may fulfil the responsibility of carrying out his enterprises during his absence, he gives to each man severally as he will, five, two, one; according as a man was able to use the five, or the two, or the one. According to his several ability; the natural creating fitness for the supernatural.

Then the Lord showed how these men used these things. The one who had five produced other five, a hundred per cent. The one who had the two produced other two. How much is that? Fifty per cent? No, a hundred per cent. The second did as well as the first. The man with the one had a wrong estimate of his master, which was entirely false, as an excuse for inactivity. He took his talent and hid it in a napkin and buried it, and he said he did it because his lord was hard and unjust, reaping where he did not sow. Inactivity! One talent committed to him. If he had traded with it, and that talent had produced one, then it would have been as good as the man with the two, or the man with the five talents. It would have been one hundred per cent. But this man had done nothing with his lord's possession. Nothing was brought to the lord by the use of his talent.

The issue is perfectly simple and plain. Notice carefully two verses. Verse twenty-one "His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Verse twenty-three "His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." There is no difference of a word. They show what Jesus said of the. man with five talents and of the man with two was exactly the same. The approbation of the two men is identical, "Well done." "Well done." My masters! Jesus will never say "Well done" to anyone unless it has been well done.

Then mark it well, "enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Share with Me in the joy that comes from thy use of My goods in the world, the substance that I entrusted to you. So do not be foolish enough to wish we had five talents if He has given us two, or that we had two when He has given us one. Have we got one? Has He entrusted us with one? Have we got some portion of the Master's goods that is our special responsibility for other men, one, two, five? Then see to it we make full use of His goods entrusted to our care. The whole story teaches us this, that the final question is not one of greatness of opportunity, but faithfulness, fidelity to the opportunity that has been granted.

We need not tarry with the man with the one talent, although it is a very tragic story. He lied about his lord, and the lord refuted that lie by repeating it to him. One cannot read the words without catching the note of irony, of satire, as he spoke to him. "Thou wicked and slothful servant." Then come the words of refutation. Is that what you knew, that I reaped where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Is that your estimate? Well, if you think that way, you might have put my money to the bankers, and at least I should have had interest on my return. It is so conclusive, and so revolutionary.

These were all the servants of the lord, and it is possible to have five talents, and bury them, and the two talents, and bury them as did the man who had the one talent. He did not bury it because he only had one. He buried it because in his own soul he had a false thought about his master. Then he lied at the end, and gave it as an excuse , and the lord said, Take it away from him, and give it to the man who has ten talents, and cast him into the darkness outside, the darkness that is outside the Kingdom of responsibility.

It is important that we keep these three parables in connection with each other. They reveal the threefold responsibility of the Church. First, communal responsibility, right behaviour among all its members, the ending of all malice and unkindness; to use the figure-beating one another. Then the personal responsibility, that we have far more than a name, far more than a torch, far more than a wick which can be dim, if it has become encrusted. We must have oil that keeps the light burning. Finally, imperial responsibility, our responsibility for the goods of the Lord, for the enterprises of Christ in the world. In each case the responsibility is defined by our relationship to Him. True to Him, the household is always at peace. Waiting for Him, the lamps are always burning. Working for Him, the Kingdom is hastened, and the glory is brought to His name.