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

**28. SHEEP AND GOATS**

*"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?' "The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' "Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?' "Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, because you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

*Matthew 25:31-46*

IN THESE parabolic illustrations of the sheep and the goats we shall principally be concerned with all that our Lord was intending to illustrate by those figures. They occur in this third and last section of the Olivet prophecy. In order to correct interpretation we must first remember the relationships between the sections, and to the whole message of the Gospel in which it is found. Secondly, we must be careful not to read into this part of our Lord's prophecy, and especially into His parabolic illustration, any of the things which are not truly found in it. We are in danger of doing this, especially with regard to this story and illustration. When those safeguards are observed, we shall be free to catch the true meaning of the remarkable passage, and to examine the process which it so vividly describes.

The parabolic figure of sheep and goats here is used in application to finality. Finality of what? That question will be answered as we look carefully. Consider the relation of this section (chapter, 25:31-46), to the whole of this Olivet prophecy. In answering His enquiring disciples He had first looked down the coming age and uttered a prophecy specially dealing with the Hebrew people, which found its culmination in the destruction of Jerusalem, fulfilled within a little more than a generation after He had uttered the words. Then in the second section (chapter, 24:45 - chapter, 25:30) our Lord was specially dealing with the responsibilities of His Church between the first and second advents. We have seen these responsibilities, communal, personal, and imperial. Now in the last part of the prophecy He deals with the nations. It is not the Hebrew people as a nation. That nation He had rejected from its place in the economy of God. It is not now the spiritual nation, the Church, with which He had been dealing as to responsibility. It is now the nations of the world. In this last section He is looking on to the consummation, and the things that will happen then with regard to the kingdoms of the world.

In each of these sections of the prophecy His second advent was evidently in His mind. It is always there, recurring. The first section ended with the charge, "Be ye also ready, for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh." The second, in three pictures, deals with the return of the absent Lord. The Lord of the household comes to enquire into communal responsibility; the bridegroom arrives to meet those who have expected him; and the owner of the goods comes for a reckoning with those who have received talents.

Now this section commences with the reference with which the others close. "But when the Son of man shall come in His glory." He is dealing now with the second advent as the starting-point, and giving the happenings immediately connected with that advent. He describes the effect of His second advent on national affairs in this world.

Notice how Matthew, this remarkable chronicler of the King, has proceeded, and here reaches a great climax. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom, and of the Kingdom of heaven. The opening movement presents the King. From that there follows the description of the King's propaganda. His enunciation of an ethic, the sermon on the mount; the exhibition of the benefits of the Kingdom, as He moved amid derelict humanity, healing need, whether physical, moral, or mental; and then enforcing His claims in opposition to those of His foes. The hour was coming when He was moving towards rejection, but He was moving towards an ultimate victory. It is that ultimate victory that is here revealed in this final section of the Olivet prophecy. In Matthew, the ultimate victory is not seen in heaven, but on earth. That does not mean the ultimate things are not the heavenly things, and things in the ages to come. They certainly are, but that is not the theme here, and it is not the theme in this particular discourse.

The laws of the Kingdom, in the sermon on the mount, are for earthly conditions, not for heavenly. They do not apply to a heavenly state, and condition of a life after this. They all apply to the present life. As we watch the King moving in Kingly power and compassion and majesty amid derelict humanity, that does not mean an exhibition of the powers of the Kingship of Jehovah in the heavenly realms that lie beyond. It is an exhibition of His power on this earthly level. So as He enforced His claims all the way, they consisted of His claims upon the earth. That prayer which we designate the Lord's prayer moved on two realms. The first had to do with man's relationship to God, and the second, man's necessities on the earth level, and man's interrelationship on the earth. He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father, which art in the heaven, Thy name be hallowed, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven." The passion of that prayer does not ask that men may find their way to heaven one day, but that God may win the earth, and that the earth may find itself in the Kingdom of God. The earth is in view.

In this gospel of Matthew (chapter, 26 - chapter, 28) we have the final mission and commission, and again I take a slightly altered translation, which is more accurate. Mark the voice of the King. "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and on earth; go ye therefore and disciple the nations." Disciple whom? All the nations. As they come under the influence, and obey it, then "baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit." But it is "all the nations." It is on the earth level. Do not imagine that takes any dignity and glory from this. It does not interfere with the larger meaning of the work of Christ, as it includes the ages to come, to use Paul's poetic language, "unto the generation of the age of the ages." Have you ever sat down in front of that, and tried to measure it? The first concern of our King is the establishment in this world of the order harmonizing with the heavenly order.

All this is of supreme importance to our understanding of the events to which this prophecy refers. Certain events must be excluded from our thinking. This is not a picture of the Great Assize, not of the great white Throne. That account is given in Revelation. "I saw a great white Throne, and Him that sat upon it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away," Then the dead are raised, and stand before Him. There is nothing here about a great white Throne. The Son of man is here, not so much as the final Judge, but as the King in authority. Earth and heaven are not fled away here. The earth level is in our view. There is no resurrection of the dead. The nations referred to are living nations. Our Lord was looking on, as He had done all through His Olivet prophecy, to the consummation of the age, showing what it will mean in the case of the nations.

What then are the facts revealed? First of all we see the Son of man on the Throne of His glory, and it is a regal throne. He is the King. "The King shall say"; He is speaking of Himself as King, when He comes with His angels, at the consummation of the age. He is coming. When He comes, He will sit on the throne of His glory. Watch the movement with sanctified imagination, and draw the picture. He is seen assuming the reins of earthly government, and doing it openly. By doing this He is eliminating all other rulers. No other ruler is in sight. There is no king, president, or dictator in sight; but He is gathering all the nations. It is not a question of multitudes of men and women. It is a great gathering of nations, and He is seen administering the affairs of an earthly kingdom. This is the picture of the initial process of the new administration of earth's affairs. Not the great white Throne, not even the Judgment Seat of Christ, before which all believers must appear. As Paul says, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. When we appear under that glance of fire, then all that is unworthy will be destroyed, and the fire will burnish to beauty everything holy. This is a picture of the King enthroned, laying His pierced hand upon the world affairs, and bringing them to finality, as He moves toward the establishment of the Kingdom of God in this world.

What do we see at the centre of everything? The Son of man on His throne. Here our minds necessarily go back over all the ground. The title "Son of man" was His own familiar designation of Himself in the days of His flesh. That is the first thing we see; the Son of man enthroned, exercising His authority. Then all the nations are gathered around that Throne, which again means, not necessarily that all the people of all the world are so gathered into one spot, although that would not be difficult. All the population of the world could stand together on the Isle of Wight, for instance. That is only a passing reference. When we think about the League of Nations, that does not mean all the nations are gathered together at Geneva. The King is seen calling together every nation, possibly through its representatives. While not stressing it, it is worth noting. All the nations are there, and are gathered. There is the cancellation of differences. Old national lines which have characterized us are obliterated. Whatever the forms of government may have been, and however they may be changed, when the Son of man sits on the Throne of His glory, they will all be arraigned before Him. The very gathering suggests His authority.

Take this parabolic illustration. If the gathering cancels the old lines of division, there immediately follows a new division, a new separation. The nations are not treated on the basis of race, or of political position, or occupation, or achievement, or failure and disaster. They are divided into sheep and goats, a division of the nations, a new separation. The old national lines are obliterated before the King; to His right and left hand, sheep and goats.

Look next particularly at the sentences and the verdicts. To those on the right he says, Come, enter the Kingdom. That is not heaven; that is the new order on earth; when the prayer that we pray that the Kingdom of God may come on earth as in heaven, is answered on the earth level. Enter the Kingdom, not heaven, but the earthly order.

But on what basis? He now comes to that word so full of infinite meaning. "I was an hungered … I was thirsty … I was a stranger … I was sick ... I was in prison." The astonished. people on the right say to Him, When were these things so? Now mark His answer with great care. It is the same answer, by contrast, to those on the right and on the left. They say, "When? … When?" "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it," or " did it not," "unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me," or "ye did it not unto Me." What a marvellously revealing thing to say.

But let us understand it. Some say He was talking about the Jews. That is a strange view. Go back in the Gospel to an earlier period (chapter, 12:46), "While He was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and His brethren stood without, seeking to speak to Him." While He was yet speaking, "But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? and He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold, My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother." We cannot confine this scene of infinite majesty to that small and foolish idea that He was talking about the Jews when He said "My brethren." Who are "My brethren"? He had told us who they were. Those who do the will of His Father. He was including all Jews, all Hebrews who did the will of His Father, but He was including all Gentiles also. He is looking down this whole age from the standpoint of our responsibility; and He sees them going out, His spiritual brethren, His Kin, mother, brother, sister; multitudes of them bringing His strength and comfort and help in every way; and He says at last to the nations, I came when they came, and I came through suffering. I have passed down the age in these My brethren, and if you have failed to receive them, you have failed to receive Me; and in failing to receive them and to receive Me you have proved your unfitness for the newly established Kingdom of God. Thus to those on the left hand He has said exactly the same thing, only from the other side. Thus He was showing that nations will be admitted to the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, established upon the earth, upon the basis of their attitude to Christ Himself, as He has been represented to them through His people during the whole period.

Look at this more particularly. This is how the nations are to be judged. It is Pilate's question asked over again from the national standpoint. Pilate said, What shall I do with Jesus? It is the question for the nations. What are they doing with Jesus? What are they doing with His message? What are they doing with His messengers? What are they doing with all the spiritual forces and moral powers that He has set at liberty, and which are at work through His people in the age? Upon the basis of that, His judgment will be found for or against them. The tremendous thing in that great division is that the righteous shall enter upon age-abiding life, and the wicked upon age-abiding fire. It is a national division.

We must stop there, because there He stopped. We can go beyond it, and try and find out what it means. It is the initiation of that Kingdom in human history. It is not finality. Finality is never reached until this has first taken place. He will be the Dictator. If I am asked to-day, Do you really think this is coming? I answer, Certainly it is coming, If I did not believe it I would lose all heart and hope. I am sure it is coming. When? No, my friend, you must not ask that, because He has told us distinctly-He told these disciples in this prophecy,-we are not to know the When.

This section of the prophecy then describes in broad outline, and as an underlying principle, how the King will personally - to quote words He used in the earlier parables - "gather out of His Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity"; and thus prepare for that new era, in which, again to quote His words, "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of His Father. "

This picture flashes its light back upon the previous section, and reveals part of our responsibility with new force and power. Within the household we are to be obedient to the absent Lord, and love one another. As individuals we are ever to have lamps trimmed and burning, waiting for the Advent. As His representatives in the world we are to prosecute His commerce with the talents He has committed to us. Or in brief, witnessing for Him, and so creating the opportunity of the nations, in the work of the Christian Church, and thus preparing the way for that final discrimination when the Son of man shall come in His glory.