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

**31. THE GOOD SAMARITAN**

*"Behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." He said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus answered, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell amongst robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain priest was going down that way. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he travelled, came where he was. When he saw him, he was moved with compassion, came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the host, and said to him, 'Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will repay you when I return.' Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbour to him who fell amongst the robbers?" He said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

*Luke 10:25-37*

THIS is commonly known as the parable of the good Samaritan. We cannot entirely ignore all that lies round about it; for our method of dealing with our subject has been that of, first, discovering the subject our Lord was intending to illustrate by the parable, or parabolic illustration He used; secondly, to examine the figure itself; and finally, to gather up the teaching resulting.

We have called this a parable. I wonder if it was. Our Lord did not say so actually. He may have been quoting an incident; something that had actually happened. Unquestionably things like this did often happen on that road from Jericho to Jerusalem, for it was infested with robbers. To what then was Jesus referring when He told that story, whether giving a piece of history, or using a parable? He was showing two things; first, the relation of law to life; and secondly, the responsibility created by law.

The story is a beautiful one, merely as a story. Taken as the writer of a hymn took it, it is typical of the work of our blessed Lord, and it is full of beauty. Exactly what happened, and why did Jesus tell this Story?

Jesus used the parable in answer to two questions asked by one man. The first question was this, "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?" The Lord answered that with a statement. Then the lawyer asked the second question, "Who is my neighbour?" The story was told to answer that question. The lawyer was one whose official business it was to interpret law. He was of the order of Iawyers or scribes. Those are synonymous terms. His whole business in life was that of showing the relation of law to life. In those times, if men had a difficulty, they consulted a scribe, a lawyer, to know what the law said on this matter of behaviour in life. This was the man who came to Jesus. He said, Give me a law that will so condition life that it will be full-orbed, eternal life. Eternal life does not mean long life merely; it is full life. Eternal life is high and deep, broad as well as long; the life of the ages would be an accurate rendering of the great phrase "eternal life," so often occurring. That was the phrase he used. He asked Jesus for a law, "What shall I *do*?" When we ask a man what we shall do, when we ask a teacher what we shall do, we are asking him to state some law, to give us some commandment, to give us some instruction. That is the realm in which the story moves.

This was a request for a law conditioning life, in order to its fulness. What this man wanted was life in its fulness. I think he was perfectly sincere. This is not the only time when Jesus was asked that question. It is the great question that in some form or another comes ever and anon from a human soul. Life, give me life. Give me a law that shall condition my life so that it shall be full-orbed and perfect. "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

Notice the method of the Master at that point. He looked at the man and said, "What is written in the law, how readest thou?" That phrase was a technical term, constantly used by the scribes and teachers and lawyers. They would consult one another about some subject or condition, and one would say to the other, "How readest thou?" Jesus said, You have asked Me for a law conditioning life. What is written in the law? How do you read it, He flung the man back upon himself, and upon the things he already knew, and the things with which he was familiar. He called him to a recognition of those things he knew perfectly well, and he proved he knew them, because he gave Jesus the right answer, the only answer, the complete answer. Jesus told him so, He said, "Thou hast answered right. This do, and thou shalt live." That is the law that conditions life, said Jesus.

Then we come to that which immediately introduces us to the story. It was a question concerning the responsibility created by law. The lawyer asked his second question, "And who is my neighbour?" It is most arresting that he fastened upon that part of his own answer. What had he said? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself." Said Jesus, That is quite right; do it, and you shall live. The man replied, "And who is my neighbour?" He did not ask any question about the first commandment; he only asked about the second. Again I see the manifestation of a remarkable intelligence in this lawyer. There was no question to him as to Who God was; but there was a chance of backing out of a difficulty by trying to find out who his neighbour was. Do not forget that this lawyer belonged to the rulers and teachers who said that no Gentile was a neighbour. There is no need to make any long quotations, but in their writings they distinctly said no Gentile was to be treated as a neighbour. Neighbourliness belonged within the covenant people. That was the distinct teaching and these men knew it. Was there any lurking suspicion in his own soul that something was wrong? "Who is my neighbour?" Luke tells us very carefully he said this to justify himself. To justify himself with whom? With the crowd standing round? I do not believe it. With whom? With his own conscience. He was dodging an issue. Then the Lord told this story, and that is the background which is all important.

Look at the story itself. There are three things standing out, every one of them demanding attention. As our Lord spoke, the picture grows before us. We see a road along which travellers journey, and certain events happening thereon. That is so simple, every child can understand it. If we have something a child can understand, we have something fit for the philosophers!

Glance at the picture, and do not forget that our Lord was showing this man what the responsibility was, created by the law which conditions life, in order that life may be full. He was illustrating responsibility. Look at the road. Luke is careful as he says it was a road "going down from Jerusalem to Jericho," a geographical accuracy. The road did go down. The boundaries are there, Jerusalem and Jericho. Jerusalem, the city of history and religion, the great centre of privilege. Jericho, beautiful in situation a city of palm trees but a city that had been under a curse of God for centuries. The book of Joshua tells us this. Strangely enough by this time Jericho had become a priestly city where priests dwelt when not fulfilling their courses in Jerusalem. The road lying between these two cities was a rocky and dangerous gorge, a pathway haunted at the time by marauding Bedawin. It is so yet. It was on that very road in 1820 that an Englishman, Sir Frederic Henniker, was stripped and slain by the descendants of these very men who robbed and wounded the man in this story. There was the road, and yet it was used by priests and Levites. I am inclined to think they had an immunity from attack of these brigands because of some superstition surrounding their calling. But they constantly travelled up and down that road.

There we are face to face with the story. A road about fifteen to twenty miles long, connecting the city of privilege with the city of commerce as it was then, unsafe for travellers; and yet traversed by religious people. I present that to all social workers. The road had no business to be unsafe. What had they done? They had done nothing. It may be they had attempted to exterminate these robbers, but had failed; had tried hard to drive them from their lurking places, and had failed. That is the road Jesus showed. It was quite familiar to them all, and perhaps with a great deal of trepidation, used by travellers, except perhaps by priests and Levites, preserved by the superstition of their calling, by the brigands.

Now see the travellers. First, here is an unknown man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. We know no more about him. Whether he had been in Jerusalem for worship, I cannot tell. More likely he had been there for business. Most likely he was a man carrying certain forms of wealth about his person, of which the robbers knew. He travelled down that road.

What else? Robbers, brigands, brutal men, selfish men, devoid of all pity as long as their own ends were served. They travelled along that road.

Who is this other traveller we see going down? A priest. There is nothing to tell us which way he was travelling, whether coming from Jerusalem to Jericho; or going up to Jerusalem from Jericho. By chance, that is, by coincidence, he went by and passed that man lying there. A priest, either going home, having completed his ritual obligations in the temple of God, or else travelling up to Jerusalem, to fulfil his ritualistic observances in the temple of God.

But there is another man going along who is a Levite, shall we say, a secondary priest, one who served the temple, but had no direct function as the priest. He was in the same condition. He was on the way to complete, or had completed, his religious obligations. Two representatives of religion travelled along that road.

Who is this other man? An unknown Samaritan, belonging to another nation. I wonder where he was going, and what he was doing upon that road? I cannot tell. I am permitted to wonder many things I cannot answer. He was on the road. It is possible he was crossing it, to take another road that led up to Mount Gerizim, for his worship. It is even possible he was coming back from Mount Gerizim after worship. He was an unknown man, a Samaritan. That robbed man was a Hebrew, That priest and Levite were Hebrews. The robbers we cannot tell what they were racially, probably Arabs. But this man had no dealings whatever with Jews. We are told Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, and the other thing is equally true, the Samaritans had no dealings with the Jews. This man, travelling along, the robbers in hiding, a priest, a Levite, an unknown Samaritan, all travelling that road.

With the happenings there is no need to tarry; the attack of the marauding robbers, the man overwhelmed, robbed, stripped; and in order that there should be no chance of his following, beaten until so far as the robbers knew, there was no life left in him. The priest chanced to pass that way. There is no equivalent for "chance" in the text, except that the word means a coincidence. He passed that way, and he saw, but he did not stop, but at once passed on. The man was a Jew who was lying there bruised. That did not matter. The priest's religious observances were too important, or else, having performed them, he might gather defilement; and he could not do anything, so he passed him.

The Levite, more callous than the priest, went and looked at him, and examined him, and then he too passed on. The man was still left there, half-dead, bleeding, broken, bruised, robbed, helpless.

Then this travelling Samaritan came by, and immediately his heart was touched. He was filled with compassion. But he was a Samaritan, and this was a Jew. What did he care? The man was suffering. He might have said he did not have any dealings with Jews. But it depended upon what condition they were in. This man was suffering. He went to him, leaned over him, and poured into his wounds oil and wine, wonderful remedies of the time and place, bound him up, picked him up, and put him on his beast. I do not know how far away the inn was, but he had to walk, while the man in his feebleness rode. He took him to the inn and gave the host sufficient money to cover expenses for several days at that time and that place; and moreover, gave him an I.O.U. for anything over, "Whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee." He passed on.

We never see him again, but Jesus said to this lawyer, You have asked Me, Who is my neighbour? In effect you have asked what responsibility is created by those laws you have quoted, love to God and man. Tell me, which of these was neighbour to that poor fellow? I do not want to be unfair to this lawyer, but it always seems to me there was a little superciliousness in his answer, but he gave Jesus the right answer. He did not say, the Samaritan. He would not take that name on his lips. He gave the right answer; and quickly, sharply, like the flaming of a lightning's flash of God, Jesus replied, "Go thou and do likewise."

What a picture, what a parable. What does it teach? First, that the purpose of law is always the conditioning of life. It is so with our human laws, faulty as they all are. It is pre-eminently so with the Divine law. If God has given man a law, it is in order that man may know life, and eternal life in all its glory and fulness. The purpose of a law is healing and healthing, to use an old Anglo-Saxon word. There is an Old Testament name for Jehovah, Jehovah-Ropheka. Expositors say that means the Lord Who heals. It really means the Lord that healths, and to health is not to make well, but it means to keep well, so that one is never sick. When we read in Revelation the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations, it is really the healthing of them, the keeping of them from being sick. That is the purpose of law. But supposing we become sick and are bruised and wounded and stricken, then the purpose of law is to heal to health. Those are the functions of law.

What does this story reveal as to the breakers of law - first, the robbers who attack, but secondly and principally, the religionists who neglect? Not those brigands, those bandits, those robbers, were more guilty; but that priest and Levite who left the man to bleed and sob his life out to death, without ministering to him. That is breaking law. It abides so to this time. All robbers who take, or by any means rob humanity of its riches, strip it, and leave it half dead, and broken, and bruised, are breakers of law. That is equally so if we pass by on the other side of that wounded man, that broken woman, that spoiled human nature. That is what our Lord was teaching.

Finally He teaches us what the keeping of law means. Its inspiration is compassion. "He was moved with compassion." That is the first thing said about the Samaritan. What he did came out of his compassion. Take the New Testament and go through it, and look for that word "compassion." It is always used about Jesus, or by Jesus, and never about anyone else, except as He used it in this case. Compassion is the inspiration of keeping law.

What is the activity, if that is the inspiration? Personal service. The binding up of wounds, the pouring in of oil and wine, the lifting of the man to a beast that carries him, or makes provision for him. Those are the responsibilities which law creates. We can spell them in one little word of four letters LOVE. That does not make it easier!