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

**32. PARABOLIC ILLUSTRATIONS**

*… Luke Chapter 11*

IN this chapter there are three parabolic illustrations demanding attention. Whereas they are separate illustrations, they are concerned with the same subject. The first concerned the friend at midnight, the second concerned the father and his child; while the third, that of the strong man and the Stronger than he, is in some senses separated from the first two. Studied carefully, however, it will be found there is a close connection between all three.

The parable of the friend at midnight is peculiar to Luke. The illustration of the father and the child is also found in Matthew, but must be glanced at again, even though previously considered, because of its association with the parable of the friend at midnight. The illustration of-the strong man and the Stronger is also to be found in Matthew, but we omitted it when surveying that book, because the account of Luke is more detailed.

Take the first two together; that of the friend at midnight, and that of the father and his child. What was the subject our Lord was intending to illustrate? The answer can be given in a word - Prayer. This chapter in Luke opens, "It came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, that when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples." It was out of that request that the Lord's teaching came, and in that connection these two illustrations were used.

Why did these men ask to be taught to pray? Notice they did not ask to be taught how to pray. That is rather arresting. It is often quoted as though they asked to be taught how to pray. That is not what this man asked. He said, "Lord, teach us to pray." He knew how to pray. The Lord had given special instructions concerning prayer in His Manifesto. This disciple had heard it unquestionably, and had received instructions how to pray. This man wanted to know, not the method, but to find the secret of praying; two very different things. There are many people who know how to pray, but they do not pray. I cannot say they listened to Him at prayer. We have no means of knowing whether He was praying aloud, or in silence. They were round about Him. They came to Him as He was praying in a certain place. Here in all probability He was praying alone. Alone does not necessarily mean they were not with Him, because they were with Him, and yet His prayer was alone. On an earlier occasion in Luke's record it is said that when He was praying He was alone, and His disciples were with Him. We might change the word "alone" and say, apart, but His disciples were with Him.

It has been affirmed, and I agree with the general statement, that Jesus never did pray with His disciples as though He were on a level with them. He always prayed alone. It is certainly well to remember that the word employed for His praying was never the word that indicated their prayer. It was a word that indicated fellowship and familiarity. He never came as an empty-handed pauper to pray. These disciples had watched Him praying, and when He had ceased, one of them, unquestionably affected by what he had seen, and perhaps heard, asked, "Lord, teach us to pray." Then there was a flashing side-light upon John, even as John also taught his disciples." There is a suggested contrast. John had taught his disciples to pray. It is quite evident he had devoted himself to the prayer-life, and he had taken time with those disciples of his early and mighty ministry to teach them to pray. Yet these men saw in Jesus something different. They were not content with what they knew as the result of John's teaching. "Lord, teach us to pray."

Out of that request, that searching desire, Jesus answered, and in two ways. He first gave them a model of prayer with which we are all familiar, an abbreviated model, but a full one in another way. Then He turned to the illustrations of the friend at midnight, and of the father and his child.

First there came the model. He began by saying, "When ye pray, say, Father." Everything is there. We must keep that in mind when we come to the illustration of the father and the child. "When ye pray, say, Father."

Having given this abbreviated model of prayer He then proceeded to His illustrations. The first moved in the realm of human friendship. Notice the recurrence of that word *friend*. It is an account of friendship. A request was preferred by a friend to a friend, on behalf of a friend. A man had come to call on him at midnight-a very awkward hour it may be admitted at once-and he had nothing to set before him. He had a friend in some dwelling nearby, and so he made his way to the house of his friend, to ask him for help for this other friend. The awkwardness of the hour may be some excuse for the action of the man in bed with his children. Notice what he objected to. He objected to being troubled. Keep the emphasis there. Therefore on the basis of friendship he made a refusal. The house was locked up, he was in bed, and did not want to be troubled. That is the story.

But evidently this man who went for a loaf meant to get it. He kept on. Said Jesus, This man would not be troubled on the basis of friendship, but was disturbed, and so rose and acted because of the importunity of the man who was asking. That is the word. That word importunity is very interesting. It is the only place in the Greek New Testament where it occurs. Importunity means impudence. That is the real meaning of the word. It comes from the Latin *importunas*, which means troublesome. Because the man was importunate enough, this man who would not be troubled on the basis of friendship, was troubled in another way, by impudence. What for? To make the troubling cease. He only gave him the loaf to get rid of him, to save himself further trouble. He who would not be troubled on the basis of friendship, got up and found the loaf and gave it to the man, so that he went back home with something for his friend. That is our Lord's illustration.

Then He went on to the second illustration, "Of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone? or a fish, and he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion?" A father and child. Take the figure of speech first. A father never mocks a child's request. Our Lord here very remarkably recognized that one element in human nature that abides, in spite of all human nature's failure and breakdown. It is instinctive care of the father for the child. There may be some fathers who do not care. That I admit. But take the general outlook on life, and how marvellously that is evidenced. Even though men themselves may be depraved, they have not lost the father heart in relation to the child. That is the picture. Jesus took it for granted, and He only asked a question. Can we imagine if a child asks for bread, the father gives a stone, or for a fish, a serpent, or for an egg, a scorpion? We need not change the figures to-day in this country. They were all familiar things then and there, bread, fish, and eggs, the very things children needed, and were likely to ask for. Our Lord took these familiar things, and the one thing He was impressing upon those who listened was that the father never mocks the child's request.

What had these illustrations to do with prayer? The first was an illustration in the realm of contrast. Often expositors and preachers have said this teaches importunity in the matter of prayer. It teaches nothing of the kind. It teaches that there is no need when we are dealing with God, to hammer and hammer at a door. God is not asleep, a sleepy man who does not want to be troubled, and therefore refuses; and is only persuaded to get up in order to escape trouble for Himself, by getting rid of the seeker. That is not the picture of God. It is intended to be a contrast. The record reads, "Because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." We do not have to keep on knocking. The door is open. "Teach us to pray." When ye pray, say, Father." Understand that "Father" implicates friendship, and understand that your Father is not as this man who on the human level was a friend of the man asking help. God is quite different from that. He does not need to be importuned.

Again, "Which of you that is a father," You father, and "thy Father." The two illustrations merge, shining upon each other. God understands the need, and directly the soul applies to Him, the answer is given. There is no need for begging and praying and hammering at heaven's gate, as that man did at midnight. I do not believe there is any necessity to persuade God to do something for us, or to keep on asking. We may say, We have asked Him, and He did not give us anything. We should rather say, We wanted something we did not need, and our Father did not give it to us. With all reverence take those words of Jesus surrounding them. Supposing a son does not ask for bread, but asks for a stone, would the father give it to him? A fine old English phrase comes to me - I trow not! Supposing he asks a serpent, will a father give it to him? I think not. Supposing he does not ask for an egg, but for a scorpion. The father will say, No, certainly not. We need not keep on hammering. God knows, and His gift is always based upon His Fatherhood, and upon His love. There is no need for being importunate as the word suggests. This is the only case in the New Testament in which that word is found, and it is rightly rendered. There is no need for importunity with God.

Then comes the story of the father and the child to illustrate what God is. We may rest assured if we ask, it is given. Mark the contrast. In the first illustration the man would not give. He did not want to be troubled, but at last did give to save himself further trouble. You are different, said Jesus. When you ask, having said, "Father," it is given; seeking, you find; knocking, there is no need for hammering, for the door is open. It was a great old Hebrew who said of God in one application, "He is ready to pardon," and He is always ready and waiting. Do not forget what I illustrated, by turning those illustrations round. When I go to Him, and ask for a stone instead of bread, or a serpent instead of a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg, or we have asked Him for something; because He knew we did not need that, later on we find when we asked a stone, He gave us bread; and for a serpent, fish; and for the scorpion, an egg.

Luke here records something that had happened previously, but unquestionably he has recorded it here because of its application to the teaching Jesus was giving on the subject of the relation of the Holy Spirit. He will give the highest gifts. Matthew records Him as saying "good things." Luke records Him as saying "the Holy Spirit," the highest, the best, the one great gift humanity needs for its regeneration, and for all its life.

Then Luke went back, to tell how on one day they charged Jesus with complicity with Beelzebub, the devil. They acknowledged His was supernatural power, but that it was of the devil. It was then that Jesus spoke to them very severely, sternly, solemnly; but He rebutted that argument. He claimed that what He did, was done with the finger of God. There is no contradiction in the two things. The terms are synonymous. Jesus said what He was doing was not done under the power of the underworld of evil, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. In saying that, He used this wonderful illustration. A strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, and his goods are in peace. That is Satan. Satan fully armed, guards his realm, and we cannot interfere with his goods. But when the Stronger than he shall come, that is, the Son of God, the Lord Himself; He shall overcome him, and take from him his whole armour, and divide his spoils. That was His illustration.

Then to those who were diabolically criticizing Him He said, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth." In other words, our Lord there claimed to be the Stronger than the strong man armed, and that He was Master over the strong man. As our beloved friends of the Salvation Army sing oftentimes,

"Jesus is stronger than Satan and sin,

Satan to Jesus must bow.

Therefore I triumph without and within,

For Jesus is saving me now."

That is the whole fact, and that is what He was claiming, that He was mightier than all the forces of evil. It was a remarkable phrase our Lord used there. He takes from him his whole panoply, his whole armour. That Greek word only occurs in one other place in the New Testament, where Paul was writing to the Ephesians, "Take the whole panoply of God." We take that text and preach sermons, and rightly so, to show how we are armed. We are to wear the same panoply, but do not forget it is God's armour. It is the armour that has made Him, is making Him, and will make Him invincible against all attacks. The Stronger than the strong came against the strong man, and took from him his panoply, because His own panoply was stronger. He was claiming authority over all evil forces, and to be stronger than all of them. That Ephesian passage (verses, 6-11) is worth careful study; the armour which God wears is invincible over all the forces of evil.

So in this realm of teaching, in which the thought of the Spirit is found throughout, He was showing that by the Spirit He overcame, and He had just told His disciples that His Father would give the Spirit to those who asked Him, so that we may be more than conquerors, the highest answer to which is not in the initial, but the continuous filling of the Spirit of power.