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

**33. THE RICH FOOL**

*"One of the multitude said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" He said to them, "Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses." He spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man produced abundantly. He reasoned within himself, saying, 'What will I do, because I don't have room to store my crops?' He said, 'This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns, build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will tell my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." "But God said to him, 'You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared-whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."*

*Luke 12:13-21*

THIS parable also is peculiar to Luke, and in common with others peculiar to his record, this familiar story has made a profound impression. It is almost startling in its clarity, and supreme in the light it throws upon life. Those two men seen in the background of the story must be considered, for they were both involved when our Lord spoke the parable. We must also remember its supreme note, that it has to do with life.

Immediately preceding the parable itself, our Lord was speaking to a man, and said, "Who made Me a Judge or a Divider over you?" Then Luke says, "And He said unto them," not to the man who had spoken to Him, but "unto them." What does that mean? To whom? It may be said, to the disciples, and we should not be wrong, for undoubtedly they heard what He said. Or it may be He was addressing Himself to the large crowds surrounding Him at the moment, for there were such. The commencement of the chapter reads, "In the meantime, when the many thousands of the multitude were gathered together insomuch that they trode one upon another, He began to say unto His disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees." So He was surrounded by multitudes, and His disciples were there; and He was in the midst of giving them definite and specific instruction in view of the hostility which was growingly manifest against Him, and He knew would be manifest against them as His representatives and followers in the days to come. He was charging His disciples not to be afraid of hostility, of them that kill the body, and after that had no more that they could do. Taking the whole of His teaching, we find He spoke of God's care of sparrows, and arguing from that His care of them.

In the midst of this teaching a man interrupted Him. To that interruption He replied, and then "He said unto them." The disciples certainly heard, and unquestionably the greater crowd heard what He said, but I believe "them" referred specially to the man who had spoken to Him, and the brother about whom he spoke. "Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." That is the theme, life. It was to illustrate life, and its application to the case before Him, and to His disciples, and to the multitudes listening that He uttered this parable.

This man asked Him to intervene between himself and his brother in the matter of the division of an inheritance. We do not know all lying behind that request according to the law and custom of the time; but it was certainly possible that a man would wrong another, and in all probability that was the case here. We are not to suppose the man was wholly in the wrong, so far as the division of an inheritance was concerned. While Jesus was talking to His disciples, He had talked about God's wonderful care of sparrows and His children, this man suddenly broke in. It was quite evidently an interruption, almost a rude one. The man was evidently not thinking about what Jesus was saying. There was no relation between his request and the teaching of Jesus at this point; indeed the request was quite alien from it. If this man had been listening to His teaching, and had accepted it in any sense, he would not have spoken. There was a fretting and fuming against the wrong as he spoke, and perhaps on the human level it was a wrong. At any rate he appealed to Jesus to bid his brother to divide the inheritance with him.

Our Lord's refusal was a sharp one, and was in the form of a question, in which He revealed the fact that He was not in the world on the business of judging and dividing inheritances, which were wholly of the earth, and human, on the material level. Then to the listening multitudes He made that tremendous declaration, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," and then He spoke the parable. He was illustrating the meaning of life, what it really is, to people who were largely thinking of life in the terms of the material, and the earthly, as evidenced by that interjection. They were thinking in the terms of things. Keep His word in mind, "Things." How largely our life is conditioned by things. What things? Just things, that is all. Half the trouble in life is that we think there are things we do not possess which we would like to possess. No, said Jesus, that is not life. A man's life consisteth not, is not held together, is not made entire and complete by things, even though there is an abundance of them.

So we reach the parable itself. It is very simple. Look at the figure Jesus employed. "A certain man." The first thing that impresses us is that he was, on the material level, a fortunate man. He was rich, and he was successful through diligence. There is no hint here of fraud. There is no suggestion this man added wealth to wealth by fraudulent procedure. One can always expect wealth to bring more. Moreover, he was a thoughtful man. He was sagacious. Jesus portrays him, " He reasoned within himself." In the presence of his multiplied prosperity, when his land was bringing forth more and more, and wealth was piling up, he took time to sit down and think. A sagacious man withal. What is this I hear him saying? "My fruit, my barns, my corn, my goods, my soul." He has listed them, and he has prefaced every reference to that possessive pronoun "my." "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." " My fruits … my barns … my corn … my goods," and of course the appalling and arresting thing is "my soul."

Look at him again. There is nothing vulgar about this man according to our common standards of vulgarity. What is he thinking about? What is his goal, his aim? "My soul, Soul, thou hast much goods," material possessions. What will be the outcome of having goods? Oh, the tragedy of it, "Eat, drink, and be merry." That is the most vulgar thing that can be said about life; goods the possession of the soul, in order that the personality may eat and drink and be merry. One cannot read this story without feeling how appallingly revealing it is of life as it is being lived to-day in multitudes of cases. Here is the picture of an entirely sensual man who imagines his soul can be fed with goods, and that the one object of everything else is to eat and drink and be merry.

Yet look at him again. He is restless, and his satisfactions which are anticipated, are postponed until tomorrow. Tomorrow he is going to say to his soul, Eat, drink, and be merry. What is wrong with this man? So far there is not a word about God. "My fruits." Where did they come from? "My barns." Where did he get them? "My corn." Whence came it? "My goods," yes, all my possessions, and "my soul." Back of the fruits, the corn, the goods, and back of the soul is God. That is what is the matter with him. He is not recognizing God; he does not know Him.

Then comes the dramatic part of the story that breaks in like a clap of thunder. "But God said unto him." The Revision has softened it in translation, I like the Old Version because it is exactly what it means, "Thou fool," in spite of your wealth, and your diligence and success and sagacity; because you think you can be satisfied with goods! "this night shall thy soul be required of thee." But it is "my soul." No, it is not; and therefore neither fruit nor barns nor corn nor goods belong to you. If you do not possess your own soul, you possess none of these things to which you are looking to satisfy your soul. You do not possess your soul. God shall this night require it of thee "and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?" We can see this man that night going out. His hands cannot handle shekels any more. He cannot go and see to the gathering of the fruits into barns any more. He has passed over, and all these things are still there, and the satire of eternity for the folly of time, "Whose shall they be?" Why are you piling up things for men and women to wrangle over when you are dead? They are still doing it! What a wonderful story this is.

We need not say much about it. Here our Lord was dealing with life. A man's life consisteth not in fruits and barns and corn and goods. He may have them in abundance, but they do not hold life; they do not make it consistent. A man's life does not consist in those things. He can have them and multiply them and store them; but that is not life. Our Lord used a word here for life. The man talked about his soul. They are two different words here. The man's word referred to his personality, and he used the word *Psuche*, soul. That is only mental. Paul writing of personality, gave that full and final analysis of it, "Your whole spirit (pneuma), soul (psyche), and body (soma)." There is the tripartite mystery of human personality. This man did not talk about his spirit, but his soul, the mental side of him. It is a wonderful side through which we have appreciation of all things of mental activity. "My soul," my mind; and he thought that was his essential life. It is not. The psychic is always the mental consciousness. Paul wrote in one of his letters about the "natural man." We should be perfectly correct if we translated that "the psychic man"; that is his word, the man who lives in the mental only. The psychic man can be mastered by the flesh from beneath, and become fleshly; or he can become mastered by the spirit, and become spiritual.

When our Lord spoke of a man's life He did not use either of the man's words. He used the old and familiar word, *zoe*; that is, the simple word for life, any life, the life of the butterfly, or of the beast, the angels, the archangels, or the life of man, and the life of God. In Greek literature they had another word for life, *bios*, and they spoke of *bios* as of higher development; and *zoe* as the animal and lower side of it. We are still doing this. We talk of biology, and mean the higher form; and zoology, and go to the Zoological Gardens to study it. Yet mark this well. The word Christ used was the word that refers to life, essential life, not spirit only, not mind alone, and body; but all, that principle that creates the difference between death and life. Whenever we read the phrase "eternal life" in the New Testament, this is the word used. It is very wonderful how Christianity took a word in Greek literature which had been degraded to something lower, and made it the supreme thing; life that is supreme. That is what our Lord said, "A man's life." This man was talking about his psychic nature, the mental apprehension. Life is more than that. That essential thing cannot be fed with goods. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." *Zoe* is far more than *Psuche*. That is only the mental and psychic side, and any man who is living there, however highly he trains it, however erudite his mentality may be, so that he may have the right to be known as an eminent scholar in the realm of the mental, if he has shut out God, and has no contact with Him in fruits and barns and corns and everything, then he is living on a low level, and is not living at all in the true sense of the word; for "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Then what about life? Life is under the control of God, and its earthly period is marked by God. God will break through somewhere. "But God! " Whether it is to enter upon the fulness of life, or whether it is to pass out into the darkling void, God is always there. He may be unknown, and it is an awful tragedy when He breaks in as He broke in upon the life of this man. Remember possession is never complete. Everything we hold is leasehold, rather than freehold. The lease runs on until God says, "Thy soul is required of thee." The one supreme fact in life is God, and it is a tragedy of all tragedies when He breaks in upon the soul unmindful of Him, with a "but," and declares "Thy soul is required of thee."

The parable applied to both those brothers. They were both characterized by selfishness, the one who gripped and held, and the other who coveted and wanted to grip and hold. So our Lord warned them against the sin of covetousness, and after the parable He said, "So," like that man, "is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."