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

**36. THE GREAT SUPPER**

*"When one of those who sat at the table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is he who will feast in God's Kingdom!" But he said to him, "A certain man made a great supper, and he invited many people. He sent out his servant at supper time to tell those who were invited, 'Come, for everything is ready now.' They all as one began to make excuses. "The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please have me excused.' "Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go try them out. Please have me excused.' "Another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I can't come.' "That servant came, and told his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, maimed, blind, and lame.' "The servant said, 'Lord, it is done as you commanded, and there is still room.' "The lord said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you that none of those men who were invited will taste of my supper.'"*

*Luke 14:15-24*

THIS parable was uttered in the house of a ruler. Luke has recorded a remarkable section (chapters, 14 - 17:10), telling of happenings on one Sunday afternoon in the life of our Lord. I think it was the last Sunday in His public ministry, of which we have any record. This parable was given on that afternoon.

Our Lord had been invited into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread, and "they were watching Him." The first thing then suggested is that it was an occasion of hospitality, a Sabbath afternoon reception. At that time one mark of the degeneracy of the Hebrew people was that they encroached upon the Sabbath day for social reception. It is a mark of degeneracy to-day very often, in the Christian Church. Our Lord went to this house. We can go to such gatherings too if we do what He did there. Guests and host were there, and it is evident that the hospitality offered to Jesus, which He accepted when He went into the house, was of a sinister nature; because there was a man there whom no ruler would have asked, except for an ulterior reason - a man with dropsy. Luke tells us that they watched Jesus to see what He would do with that man. He healed him, and let him go.

Then in that house, which was for the moment a house of hospitality, where guests were assembled, Jesus did the most unconventional thing on record. He first criticized the guests for their bad manners, and then His host for the false principle upon which he had issued his invitations.

As He talked to them, He had spoken about a marriage feast, about dinner, and about supper. It was all in the realm of hospitality. He was there in the house, with a sinister motive in the invitation; and the other guests were there, seating themselves round those three-sided tables of those homes, where there was one place of pre-eminence. We are told Jesus marked how they chose the chief seats. The word "marked" is a good translation, though it does not merely mean He saw. He watched them. They watched Him, but He watched them; and everything was in the realm of hospitality.

As He criticized the guests and the host, He revealed two principles of social order. He revealed first that self-emptying is the true secret of exaltation. Office seekers were excluded; those wanting the chief places were dismissed. Those not seeking were to have the chief places in social life. Self-emptying is the secret of exaltation.

Then when He turned to the host, He showed that self-emptying is the secret of hospitality. In that story there is one little word, twice repeated, "*Lest* a more honourable man than thou be bidden." That is the danger. When He came to the host He said, Do not call your friends and brethren, or your rich neighbours, "*lest* haply they also bid thee again." But that is generally why we do ask people. We expect them to ask us again. Said Christ, If people act on that basis, they cut the nerve of hospitality.

It was at that moment someone at that feast, said, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." There are different opinions what that exclamation really meant. Some look upon it as a satirical exclamation. Personally I believe strongly that it was a genuine exclamation of admiration. Some person in that company listened to Him, and saw through the things He had said, things of the simplest, and yet most searching; an order of life quite different to the one with which people were familiar; a new social order altogether, in which the places of honour went only to honourable people, an order of life in which hospitality was completely self-emptied, and never self-seeking. I think somebody saw it, and cried out, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." It was an intelligent remark. A man saw that the order revealed was the order of the Kingship of God, and the Kingdom of God. Someone saw the beauty of the ideal, of a social order mastered by these principles.

We come now to the parable. "But He said unto him." The parable was an answer to that exclamation, and becomes a most searching and revealing one. Our Lord took His story from the realm in which He found Himself, that of hospitality. There in the house the guests were gathered, bad-mannered; and a host who did not understand hospitality. It was a social occasion, a feast. So our Lord said, in effect, Let Me tell you a story. This story was an answer to that exclamation.

What was the figure employed? It was purely Eastern. A host prepares a supper, and issues his invitations to that supper. All the guests decline, making various excuses. Surely there was humour in the heart of our Lord, as seen in the illustrations. The host was angry, and sent his servants with invitations to new guests, the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame. Notice these were the people whom He had told His host he should ask, when he made a feast. The report was made to him, This is done as thou commanded, and yet there is room. Then the last words of the host, "Constrain them to come in that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."

Taking that as a story, without thinking of any application for the moment, it is a most unusual one, and our Lord intended it to be such. Common experience would contradict it, that any host who had a supper, and sent out invitations, everyone invited should decline the invitation. Did a thing like that ever happen? Immediately we are face to face with this fact, that implicated in the story is a recognition of hostility toward the host on the part of those who were bidden. They began to make excuses. They were only excuses, but they made them. They declined. They would not come. Why not? There is only one answer, that they did not like their host. One cannot argue anything else. The neglect lies deeper than that of a supper table. There is some objection to the one who sent out the invitation.

Jesus told this unusual story when someone really admired the ideal of the Kingdom of God. He did not deny what this person has said as to the blessedness of the Kingdom of God. In His great Manifesto He struck the key-note in the word "Blessed," happy, prosperous, as the Greek word means. That is the purpose, the meaning of the Kingdom of God, blessedness. Here in two social illustrations some man saw the new order, and said, There is the secret of happiness; blessed is he who shall live under those conditions. Our Lord was not denying this. What was He doing? He was revealing the human heart, and was saying to them in effect, Yes, men admire the ideal, but they will not enter into that Kingdom; in spite of their admiration, they are refusing to enter into it. To admire the ideal is one thing. To accept it, submit to it, enter into its laws, is quite another. He was preaching that very Kingdom of God. That was the great burden of His preaching from the beginning of His ministry, as it had been of His great predecessor, John the Baptist.

Take the story as a suggested revelation, bearing the Eastern atmosphere. "A certain man made a great supper." The nature of the Kingdom of God is that it is a gift, offered to man, an invitation to enter into the true order of life, as a gift. Keep the simplicity of the story. In the back of the mind of our Lord He thought of God as a Host, and He has provided, as a gift of His love and grace, the feast of the Kingdom. It is a gift of grace.

What is the right of entry? What right had anyone at the feast? None other than the invitation of the host. The whole thing being of grace, no one had any right there, and gate-crashers in the supper are put out. While the invitation constitutes a perfect right to the Kingdom of God, yet at last the host says, None of those that were bidden shall eat of my supper. Why not? Because they refused. Their own refusal was the reason of their exclusion.

Our Lord in a marvellous way gave illustrations of excuses, not reasons. There is no reason amongst them. "They all with one consent began to make excuse." "I pray thee," literally, I pray you have me begged off. What does the first man say? He has bought land, possessions, real estate. We are bound to say that these people, on the level of human common-sense, were either liars or fools, every last one of them. Fancy a man buying land, and then going to see it. Still that is what he said, He had to see his possession, real estate.

The next man said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them. Imagine it! I know it is said we must not look a gift horse in the mouth, but one does so before buying one! This man said he had bought oxen, and now was going to look at them.

Then came that last man. He felt the matter was quite settled. "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."

What have we here? Possession, or wealth; commerce, or labour; emotion, or human affection; and those are the three things that to-day are keeping thousands out of the Kingdom of God. It was a simple story Jesus told, one that could have been translated into history all over that countryside; and He knew it. He said, These men all began to beg off. Why? The man who said he was going to see land, was not truthful. The man who said he was going to look at the oxen he had bought, was lying. The man who said he had married a wife was a fool. Why did he not take her with him? There was some reason behind it all, and so there always is. God's Kingdom is a great feast,

"Come, for the feast is spread";

and the right of entry is His invitation, without money, without price. If we are excluded, it is because we refuse ourselves, and for no other reason; and if we refuse, why do we do so? Get behind the excuses, and whether it is the passion for wealth, or consecration to commerce, or mastery by human affection, there is something else behind that in every case. The underlying reason of refusing to enter the Kingdom is hostility against God. The carnal mind is enmity against God. The carnal mind is the mind mastered by carnalities, by the flesh, by material things. It is wonderful how much can be shut out with an apparently small thing. A man can so put a golden sovereign before his eyes, as that he cannot see the sun or the world; and when men have put other things between themselves and God, the result is they become hostile to God, because they do not know Him, or understand Him.

"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." Who is there who would not be prepared to say that. Who is there who does not admire the ideal, illustrated here by our Lord in its entirety, that Kingdom wherein dwelleth righteousness and peace and joy? Who does not admit it? If we admit it, have we entered? Are we in it? That is what Jesus meant. We admire the ideal, but the story shows what men are doing.

Of course the story had immediate application to the nation, to the fact that when those bidden ones of high privilege through the running centuries were refusing Him, He was opening the door to the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame; and compelling or constraining men everywhere to come in. But the supreme value of it is, Where am I? Am I in the Kingdom? If not, what is the excuse? When next you are alone, and everyone else is shut out, find out the reason beneath the excuse.