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

**39. THE UNRIGHTEOUS STEWARD**

*"He also said to his disciples, "There was a certain rich man who had a manager. An accusation was made to him that this man was wasting his possessions. He called him, and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' "The manager said within himself, 'What will I do, seeing that my lord is taking away the management position from me? I don't have strength to dig. I am ashamed to beg. I know what I will do, so that when I am removed from management, they may receive me into their houses.' Calling each one of his lord's debtors to him, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe to my lord?' He said, 'A hundred batos of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred cors of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' "His lord commended the dishonest manager because he had done wisely, for the children of this world are, in their own generation, wiser than the children of the light. I tell you, make for yourselves friends by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when you fail, they may receive you into the eternal tents. He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much. He who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If therefore you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? If you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You aren't able to serve God and Mammon."*

*Luke 16:1-13*

THERE is a certain unusualness about this parable which has often-times given pause to interpreters and expositors. A superficial reading of it might leave the impression on the mind that our Lord, by using this figure of speech, was condoning a fraudulent proceeding. That impression is impossible, and incorrect by a careful reading of the whole story. We note first, then, the subject which our Lord was intending to illustrate; secondly, the figure He employed in the story He told; and from that twofold consideration we deduce the teaching for all time.

When our Lord used this parable, what subject was He intending to illustrate? That is an important question, in view of the possible difficulty created by a superficial reading. To see the subject He was intending to illustrate, we must once again go back to the context. We find ourselves still in the last Sabbath afternoon recorded by Luke (chapters 14 - 17:10). Here, then, first notice that the words of this whole paragraph were addressed to His disciples, though not to them alone. That is found in the opening verse of the chapter, "And He said also unto the disciples." He had spoken the parable of the lost things specially to the criticizing scribes and Pharisees, but also to the listening crowd of publicans and sinners. Now continuing, without any break, "He said also unto the disciples." This is the first thing to be noticed. That little word "also" is significant, indicating that He was not leaving out those scribes and Pharisees, and the listening multitudes; but He was specially addressing Himself to those close to Him, His own disciples, in the hearing of the rest.

Glance on to the fourteenth verse of this chapter. We read, "And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things." They were listening, "and they scoffed at Him." He spoke then to His disciples immediately after He had uttered the threefold parable, in answer to the criticism of His attitude towards sinners by the Pharisees and scribes. Why did they scoff at Him after they heard this parable of the unjust steward - and His application of it? We are told the reason, "They were lovers of money." That lay behind all this criticism of Jesus on the part of all these rulers: "lovers of money." Not money, but the love of it. The Bible never says money is the root of evil, but the love of it, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil," is a very profound saying. He was talking in the hearing of these men, to the disciples especially, but to these men also who were lovers of money. That was the motive behind everything, the motive of their criticism of Him, and of their aloofness from the unwashed multitudes and sinning crowd. They were "lovers of money." He talked about money, and began with a story.

We see therefore that the subject illustrated was that of motive, the method in the use of mammon, that is, of material possessions. Our Lord had much in His teaching of the larger life, and the world beyond this, and spiritual verities; but here He was dealing literally with the subject of money; talking to His disciples, but in the presence of men whose master passion was money, wealth, possessions. That is why He told them this story, and applied it as He did.

What a strange story it was. Look at it carefully. It was a story of two rogues. Two? Yes. Who were they? The steward who defrauded his master, and his master who condoned the sin. He was as big a rogue as the steward. If a man condones sin in another he is partner with the rogue, even though the rogue be his servant, if he commends him for his wrong-doing. We must be careful in reading the story. Many have become perplexed when they reach the eighth verse, "His lord commended the unrighteous steward." But it is "his lord," not "the Lord." Our Lord did not commend him, He had no commendation for that action. It is an arresting fact, however, that his lord commended him.

What do we see? First of all cleverness practised. This steward when he discovered that he was found out, was perplexed at first. He said, "What shall I do?" There is really a note of exclamation here, a sudden discovery in what he said, "What shall I do?" "I am resolved what to do." He was in difficulty. He had been defrauding his master, but when he was found out, he looked at the situation. He had lost his job. "I have not strength to dig." The lack of strength was probably disinclination to work. It often is. "To beg I am ashamed." That was pure pride. Then suddenly, - l know what I will do. I will defraud him a little more to my own advantage, in order that the people who will reap the benefit, will take me in, when the lord, my master, has cast me out. So he proceeded, "How much owest thou unto my lord? A hundred measures of oil. Take thy bond … and write fifty." "How much owest thou? A hundred measures of wheat. Take thy bond and write fourscore." I have often wondered why in one case he suggested a fifty per cent. reduction, and only a twenty per cent. in the other. Probably he knew the situation of those people, that some were better off than others. It was extremely clever. His lord commended him for his wisdom, rather, for his prudence, his smartness. Cleverness practised, and admired! There is no record that the lord reinstated him. He simply looked at what he had done. He was clever.

But Jesus told us why he commended him. Mark the word "for" in the middle of verse eight. He commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely, smartly. Why did he do it? "For the sons of this age are for their own generation wiser than the sons of light." There is no word there of approval for the action of the steward or his lord, but there is a declaration that on the earth level, for this age, the sons of this age are wiser than the sons of light. The action of this steward, and that of his lord in admiration were actions influenced by the fact that their thinking was bounded by the age in which they were living, and bounded by their own generation. It was purely selfish; a selfish steward and a selfish lord, both lovers of money, because they were looking at things from the standpoint of the present age, limited by their own generation. The sons of light are those who are not limited in their outlook by the present age, and are not limited in their calculations by the generations in which they live. The sons of light are those who see far more than the near.

Yet Jesus said - and this is the arresting, the acid thing - that for their own age and generation; the sons of the age are wiser than the sons of light. Note that intended contrast of our Lord. There they are, the sons of the age, of their own generation, with limited outlook, a certain rich man and his steward. They saw nothing before their birth, and they did not see that very clearly, but they knew it was a fact; and they saw nothing beyond the end, and they were not very much concerned about that. They were living in the age, in their generation. That was the limitation.

The sons of light are those who see far more than that. They see far more than the near. Peter, when describing certain people, wrote "seeing only what is near." What a condemnation in one of his letters, that is. I commend to thought the word of the Old Testament, "The eyes of the fool are in the ends of the earth." People say it means that a fool is a man who, instead of attending to things near him, is engaged in things in the ends of the earth. That is not what it means. He is a fool because he sees nothing beyond the ends of the earth. He is bounded by the material. He is acting as though the earth were all, and the generation everything, and the age in which he is living is the only thing that matters. The sons of light see beyond. They see the earth, they see the near; but they walk in the light. The Light is now shining upon men, the One Who said, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness." They see the near, but they always see more. They put upon to-day the measurements of eternity, upon the dust the values of Deity, upon the age the measurement of undying ages, upon the generation, "the generation of the age of the ages." Sons of light! It is a descriptive phrase.

If that contrast is seen, what was our Lord doing? While He had in mind those critical Pharisees who were lovers of money, He also saw the group of disciples round about Him, and His words constituted a rebuke. He was rebuking them because of their absence of acumen in the highest things. Look at this rogue. See the cleverness with which he manipulated things. But said Jesus - and He spoke with infinite knowledge and understanding - on the earth level, within the boundaries of the age and the generation, they are so bounded; but they are more astute, more filled with acumen than the sons of light, who are supposed to be living with the measurements of eternity placed upon all the things of time.

We cannot finish there, because all He said in immediate connection has its bearing. He then gave them instruction on the right use of money, of mammon. Notice first with great care the nature of mammon. The word mammon here signifies material wealth. We are justified in saying money, because that is the symbol of wealth. He said to those listening to Him, Make friends by means of the mammon, or money, of unrighteousness, a phrase that needs careful understanding. Mammon He called the wealth that was possessed by that rich man, the thing that the rogue had been trafficking with to his own advantage, "the mammon of unrighteousness."

What is "the mammon of unrighteousness"? What is the meaning of *unrighteousness* there? Not wickedness, but the absence of wickedness; not goodness, but the absence of goodness. In other words, the mammon of unrighteousness is neither moral nor immoral; it is non-moral. Mammon, or money, is an instrument, an agent for good or for evil. Everything depends on how it is used, and how we use it depends upon how we think in our deepest life. Nothing reveals the thinking of a man more clearly than the use he makes of money. Our Lord had one thing to say. Make friends to yourself by means of it. That is an alteration from the Authorized rendering. He never told men to make friends of mammon, but to make friends by means of it. So use money as to make friends. Friends? Yes. A man may say, I have got some money, but I want it for myself. Is he using it for himself alone? Christ said, Do not use it that way. Make friends by means of it. So use wealth as to gather friends.

Then mark how He swept out beyond the age and the generation. "That when It" -the mammon a man has made use of - "shall fail, they," the friends made by the use of it - "shall receive you into the eternal tabernacles." He is beyond the age and the generation. He is looking at the vastness of the life that lies beyond, and He is saying plainly, So make use of money as to make friends who will greet us on the other side of the line that divides between this life and the eternal ages. Make friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, for it shall fail. It always does. We can use it, and it is still there, but we have used it, whether we have got it, or someone else. We that use it, and the others that get it, will die on the earth level; and then, as Jesus in another parable said of the rich fool, "Then whose shall these things be?" Oh that wonderful list of wills and bequests in our papers. I would fain write that word of Jesus over every such list. Men die, and leave a hundred thousand, twenty thousand, five thousand, ninety pounds! "Leave!" What had they done with it when they were here? Were they so making friends that they were met by them on the other side? Many call the hymn doggerel, but there is a truth in it.

"Will anyone there at the Beautiful Gate,

Be watching and waiting for me?"

Have we done anything with the wealth, the means we have, to get ready for that day that lies beyond?

See how He linked the now with the forever, the present with the eternal. When He had made that direct application to the use of money, and had shown the true use of it, He gave the principle of fidelity; faithful to the much, in order to be faithful in the little. If we want to be faithful in the little things, the mammon, we must be faithful in the big things, the much of eternity and God, and relationship thereto.

Then He gathered everything up in that sentence that stands for ever blazing in light. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." How this comparison of Jesus remains true. How much there is in the world to prove its truth to-day, that the sons of the age are more acute, are more business-like, have more acumen than the sons of light. Many a fine business-man on the earth level, honourable and capable, becomes a fool when he enters into the business of the Christian Church. If all the acumen and business ability of the members of the Christian Church were consecrated in the light as they are dedicated to the earth level, there would be no Missionary Society problems, and no other missionary problems. It remains true, sons of light are failing to walk according to the light, lacking wisdom, and there is no more revealing symbol than money, and the use men make of it.

Many years ago I remember in the home of a very wealthy man, who was a Church member and a Christian, one morning at Family Prayers he was eloquent and tender as he prayed for the salvation of the heathen, and for the missionaries. He was startled beyond measure when the prayer was over, one of his boys, a lad of ten, said to him, "Dad, I like to hear you pray for the missionaries." He answered, "I am glad you do, my boy." And the boy replied, "But do you know what I was thinking when you were praying, if I had your bank book, I would answer half your prayers!"

Two motives. The one, love of money, which is love of self, and forgetfulness of the needs of others. The other, love of man, which is always the outcome of the love of God. How are we using anything God has committed to us? Is the true passion of life, love of self, or love of man, because we love God?