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

**45. ROCK PERSONALITY**

*"One of the two who heard John and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother, Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah!" (which is, being interpreted, Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is by interpretation, Peter)."*

*John 1:40-42*

IN THE course of our studies of the parables and parabolic illustrations of our Lord, we come now to the Gospel according to John. Apart from the great allegory of the vine, John has recorded no set and formal discourse of Jesus. While we have more of the words of Jesus recorded by John than by the other evangelists, they are rather of the nature of discussions than set discourses. Even in the Paschal discourses, He was answering questions which were asked by His own.

Nevertheless, in the course of these discussions we find some remarkable and revealing illustrations. It is arresting also that John never used the word miracle. Where the other evangelists used that word, John used the word "signs" that indicated the value of the miracle. It is equally interesting, though not of particular importance, that John never used the word *parable*. In the Authorized Version it is said (10:6) "This parable spake Jesus unto them." In the margin the Revised has changed that to "proverb." There are two other instances (16:25 and 16:29) where the Authorized has rendered the same word "proverb," which is correct. The difference between the two words parable and proverb is slight. The word parable, *parabola*, commonly used in the other Gospels simply means to set by the side of, or literally drawn together, the similarity shown by an illustration placed by its side. The word rendered "proverb" in the Revised Version, *paroimis* means to make something like something else. The idea is similar, that of similitude, whether of a picture, a story, or a saying matters nothing.

Had we taken a chronological sequence in the teaching of Jesus, this study would have been the first, for it is the first recorded occasion of our Lord's use of a figurative expression. In the first five chapters of this Gospel we have some account of events that happened in the first year of His ministry. Here we are at the very beginning of that ministry.

Taking our usual method, we consider three things. What was it our Lord was illustrating when He used this figure of speech: secondly, we look at the figure itself, and what it was intended to convey: attempting then to gather up from such consideration, the teaching for all time.

What was the subject He was illustrating? His words were extremely few. He said, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jonah; thou shalt be called Cephas," and John added " which is by interpretation, Peter." The marginal reading is "rock" or "stone." Again we remind ourselves that our Lord was now facing His public ministry. The waiting years were over, and He was commencing His work. He began, as this first chapter of John shows, by gathering around Himself a little group of individuals. Five of them are named: Andrew and another, who unquestionably was John, Simon, Philip and Nathanael. Here was the occasion, and the story proceeds with perfect naturalness. There was nothing in the nature of our Lord's work, either here or at any time, of organized propaganda. My mind goes back to a sermon I heard preached by my old friend who has now gone Home, Dr. Len Broughton. He took as his text the words, "As He went," and he gathered up in a remarkable way the occasions when that, or a similar phrase, occurred in the story of Jesus. He was doing things "as He went." I think that was the trouble with John the Baptist when he thought Jesus was doing nothing very definite. That still troubles a good many people who think if things are not being done to plan, nothing is being done! Here He proceeded naturally. John saw Him and pointed Him out to Andrew and the one with him; and the two went after Him, and spent some hours with Him in private. One of the two, Andrew, went and found his brother Simon, and Simon was brought to Jesus.

There is no question that of those first five men, Simon, son of Jonah, was supremely a representative human being. Perhaps a statement like that needs qualification. All the elements of human nature were present in this man's personality in a remarkable degree. Andrew was perhaps a representative man. John was not. He was a mystic, a dreamer, a poet; a man looking for things not seen, and seeing them; listening, for things not heard, and hearing them; feeling after the intangible, and touching then. Philip was a quiet and unimpressive man, always willing to be on the edge of the crowd, and showing others in; but this man Simon was just a human.

When he came to Jesus, He said to him "Thou shalt be called Rock." What was the value of that? What was the subject our Lord was illustrating? Without any hesitation I say that He was illustrating there and then prophetically, for the sake of those listening, for Philip and Nathanael, for Andrew and John, and Andrew's brother, the possibility of human nature under His Messiahship. Simon had come at his brother's invitation to see the Messiah. After his interview with Jesus, Andrew had found his brother Peter, and has hastened to find him, to tell him one thing only, that was on Andrew's heart, the thing that obsessed his mind and had already constrained his will; "We have found the Messiah."

It is a little difficult for us to grasp the meaning of that. We are so familiar with the word Christ, which is only the Greek form of Messiah, meaning Anointed. We associate it quite properly with our Lord. But if we put ourselves back into the place of Andrew and Simon, and remember that for hundreds of years the one great hope, sometimes flaming and glowing, and sometimes dying into a faint ember, was the coming of the Messiah. They were all looking for Him. Andrew hurried to find Simon to tell him the amazing thing that he had found the Messiah. I think Andrew's feet were hurried by the greatness of the discovery that had come to him. One old Puritan expositor has said there is no doubt that Andrew hurried after Simon, because Simon had been such a nuisance in the family, and he thought it might help him to get him to Jesus early! I prefer, however, to believe, in spite of the nuisance Simon may have been, Andrew saw the dynamic in that brother of his. While the forces were scattered there were great possibilities in him. That can be dismissed as imagination; but there is no doubt this human was an awkward customer.

Jesus knew the conviction that had come to Andrew that He was the Messiah in that private interview in the house, and He knew that this brother had hastened in obedience to his brother's invitation, to see Him. So He stood in front of him, the Messiah, and to that man He said "Thou shalt be rock," "Thou shalt be called Rock."

That brings us to the figure itself, in that one word Rock, a most significant word. We have touched upon it in other studies, on other occasions. Here we are face to face with the occasion upon which our Lord first used it. What is this figure of rock? Whereas we use the word *kephas*, or *petros*, or our word stone, the idea is the same. We are looking now merely at the material figure of rock. There is a distinction to be found in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, where two words are closely connected, cognate words, petros and petra. Of this same man Jesus there said, "Thou art *petros*," and "on this petra, I will build My Church"; the same general idea is here and a different signification. When Jesus looked at Peter, He did not say, Thou art *petra*, but, Thou art *petros*. The difference is simply this. *Petros* is of the same nature as *petra*, but it is a piece of rock. Petra is essential rock, the whole fact of rock. When Jesus said He was going to build His Church, He did not say on a petros, a piece of rock; but on rock, on *petra*.

What is *petros*? There may be geologists here and other learned men, I have no doubt. I am not going to apologize for telling you what rock is. Rock is the consolidation into one, of varied constituents, resulting in strength and durability. There are of course different kinds of rock. Break off a piece of the rock, and petros is in your hand. You may stand or sit down upon essential rock in all its bulk and majesty, and it is the consolidation into one substance of varied constituents, resulting in strength and durability. The constituents in their separation may not be characterized necessarily by strength and durability, but when welded and compounded into one, rock is the result.

Amid all the varieties, take granite. It will be agreed that there is no more perfect illustration of the strength of rock, than granite. What is granite? What are its varied constituents? Quartz, feldspar, mica. Quartz is never characterized by durability and strength, neither is feldspar nor mica. But when these three are compounded together, the strength of the granite is recognized, and its durability. We are not dealing with the question of how it is done. In the main there are two kinds of rock, igneous and aqueous; in the one the result of fire, and in the other the result of the action of water.

Jesus said to this man, "Thou shalt be called rock." There shall be in thee the consolidation of constituent parts into one compounded whole which shall be characterized by durability and strength. Some of us know experimentally what our Lord meant.

Yes, but that does not exhaust the meaning of it. If He employed the figure, the natural figure of rock, there was a spiritual significance in it. This Jew, Simon, was standing facing his Messiah, and hearing Him speak. Whether at the moment he perfectly apprehended the profound significance of that illustration of rock I am not prepared to say. I am sure he did later. Study his letters and that is found out. The Messiah looked at this man, not so much looking at him as through him, and He adopted the language of the literature of the Hebrew Scriptures, which was that of expectation. He had come to fulfil the expectations of that sacred Literature.

Therefore we take up this figure of speech in the Old Testament, and go through it to find the references to rock. There are different Hebrew words translated by that word rock. There is one meaning the same as *petra*, the word *tsur*. Go through the Old Testament, the history, prophets, and psalms, and that word rock is used figuratively, occurring some forty times, beginning in the book of Deuteronomy. It comes out also in the Psalms. The arresting fact is that wherever it is so used figuratively, it is reserved for Deity. I have said Deity, rather than God, and for this reason. There are two occasions only where it is used of false gods, in Deuteronomy 32:31 and 31:37. There false gods are being put into contrast with the true God. In every other case the symbol is used of the living God, when used in a figurative sense.

It may be argued, What about the reference in Isaiah to a man as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land? Who is the Man? We have no right to apply that to ourselves. It is the great prophetic foreshowing of God manifest in the flesh, the Man a shadow of a great rock in a weary land, and it is full of beauty in that way; but it is always a type of God. Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Thou shalt be called rock." Rock is the symbol of His strength, the strength of the Almighty, the durability of God.

What is rock in the natural world? The consolidation into one of varied constituent parts, resulting in strength and durability. When that is applied to God, it suggests that His strength results from the perfect harmony of all the facts of His Being in the unity of His God-head. That is why God is strong, changeless, and even the crumbling rocks that seem to us to speak of permanence on earth level, are imperfect symbols of the strength of God.

Jesus said to this man, "Thou shalt be called rock." He told this man that he should be brought to a position and an experience of life in which he should share the Divine nature. Again a statement like that may sound very daring and startling. Not at all. When Peter wrote his letters, he said that we have become "partakers of the Divine nature." The great thought in the word rock here suggests the partaking of the Divine nature that welds the constituent elements into strength and durability; "thou shalt be called rock." That is an attempt to explain or understand the figure of speech.

In conclusion, what do we learn as we listen to this word of Christ? First, Christ's absolute confidence in Himself. God Almighty deliver us from this age that is trying to account for Him on the human level only. Everything He said was final, and superb. Everything He said was awe-inspiring. The first thing I notice when He looked into the eyes of this man Simon, and said, "Thou shalt be called rock," was His absolute confidence in Himself, in His own office, in His Messiahship, in His own nature. Oh yes, He knew man. That is manifest in that first word, "Thou art Simon the son of Jonah." How much lies behind that, we do not know, but we can imagine. We may be wrong, but from all we know of this man after, he had probably been a difficult character to deal with; a man of tremendous possibilities, of marvelous intelligence, of great emotional nature, and of dogged will; and yet as weak as water. Jesus said to him, I know you; I know your father; and I know you. He knew his weakness. He knew his instability. He knew his potentialities; that in that human personality were resident all things that make for greatness. The strength was there only potentially; the durability was not there; but He knew Himself. He knew what He could do with that shaly, shifting sort of stuff. He could transmute it into rock. No word He used ever revealed more His confidence in Himself, "Thou shalt be called rock."

That is the implication in what Jesus said to this man of processes. He did not say Thou art rock, but "Thou shalt be called rock." When the hour came at Caesarea Philippi when he had passed through three years of partnership with Jesus, and at last had found the Messiah in a new way, he said, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God," and Jesus said, "Thou art rock." He had arrived. There was a great deal to be done with that bit of rock, a good deal of tooling and chiselling before it became a fitting stone for the eternal habitation, but he was rock. At the beginning, "Thou shalt be called rock." Yes, He knew His own ability. He knew His own power. He knew what He could do with a man like that; and upon the basis of that knowledge and His own perfect self-confidence, He made the prediction, "Thou shalt be called rock." Processes, yes, but he arrived.

Of course the one thing that comes to the heart in conclusion is this, the worth of human personality. it can be changed from shale to rock, but only in one way. That is the way of the meeting with Jesus, and the yielding to Him, and the trusting in Him, and the obeying of Him. If any man, however shifty, however much the friends may say they cannot depend on him, come to this Christ, yield to Him; He will never let him go until he is a human being in the likeness of God, and men can build on him.