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

**47. THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY**

*"The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting. He made a whip of cords, and threw all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money and overthrew their tables. To those who sold the doves, he said, "Take these things out of here! Don't make my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will eat me up." The Jews therefore answered him, "What sign do you show us, seeing that you do these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple! Will you raise it up in three days?" But he spoke of the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he said this, and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said."*

*John 2:13-22*

THIS parabolic illustration was brief in utterance and yet so pregnant in its meaning that it demands careful and close attention. It is found in a few words in the nineteenth verse, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The occasion was that of our Lord's first visit to Jerusalem at the commencement of His ministry. He had come down from Cana where the great sign had been wrought. He had travelled down with His Mother and His brethren to Capernaum, and He had stayed there "not many days." The Passover feast was about to be observed in Jerusalem. He travelled up there, and it would seem that He went directly to the Temple, for that is the first thing we read.

We are told what He found when He arrived there, the desecration of His Father's house, that desecration taking place in the Gentile courts. It is well to remember that, because those who bought and sold and changed money, would not have allowed that in the courts strictly set apart to the Jew. It was a sign of the times that they felt the Gentile courts were only of value as they might help the Jew as he came up to his worship.

Notice our Lord included everything in His description, "My Father's house." That included the Gentile courts where this business was being carried on. We know what He did. He cleansed those courts. It is a graphic picture, told in simple yet sublime language by John. He did the same thing again at the close of His ministry. Here He made a whip, a scourge of small cords. It is futile to discuss whether He struck anyone. It is so foolish. Do you think He did, says someone? I do not know, and I do not want to know. Personally I believe that with that symbolic scourge in His hands, He advanced upon that crowd, and there was a majesty in His mien that they saw something of His might. If He hit anyone, I am sure it hurt them, but I am not careful about that. This anemic view of Jesus that He would not hit a man, is not true. That, however, is the background. He cleansed the Temple, and drove out the animals, and overturned the tables of the money-changers, and sent the whole crowd out. He said to those in charge of the doors, "Take these things hence; make not My Father's house a house of merchandise." Do you suppose He spoke with any other voice than anger, when He said that? If you imagine so, you have a different view of our Lord from my own. He cleansed the Temple.

It was that occasion that led up to the word we are to consider. We are told that the Jews, the rulers, those in authority, representing the Hebrew people, came to Him, and demanded a sign, and they did it in this way. "What sign shewest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things?" What things? The things He had been doing, driving out the animals, setting loose the birds, rolling over the coins, and sending the traffickers out of His Father's house. They said, Give us a sign.

Now the demand for a sign was one that He would give them evidence of what right He had to do the things that He was then doing. It was a challenge as to His authority. Wherein was His authority? In what was it vital? He had come without apology, apparently only a Peasant, garbed in home-made garments, and He had gone into the sacred precincts, and had destroyed for the nonce at least, the vested interests permitted by all the hierarchy of the priestly caste; indeed from those traffickers, Annas and others were making vast profits. He came and swept it all out. They wanted to know what was His right to do this. It was a challenge as to His authority, although they did not, on that occasion, according to the record, use the word, authority. Later, however, in the same Temple, they used the word. Matthew records it in his twenty-first chapter, Mark in his eleventh, and Luke in his twentieth. They all record the fact that the rulers came to Him, and asked, "By what authority doest Thou these things?" In the fifth chapter of John's Gospel (5:27), when our Lord was dealing with these rulers, said of His relationship to God, "He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man."

That was the whole question that was raised here. He did these things by some power that was irresistible. What right had He to do them? What was His authority? What they asked for was a sign of His authority. That was the background. Following our habit, we first consider a little more particularly the subject illustrated when our Lord made use of these words; then look at the figure employed when He said, "Destroy this temple", and finally, necessarily, the teaching deduced.

What was the subject under consideration on the day that our Lord said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."? He had been challenged concerning His right to exercise authority, that was evidently kingly, that was also priestly, to say nothing of the prophetic office. He had been challenged as to what right He had to usurp the position of a king, and of a priest, and to interfere with the orderly and permitted arrangements of the Temple. That was the subject.

The parabolic illustration that we are taking does not declare His authority, does not declare its nature, but as a sign it reveals it. That is what they wanted, and that is what He gave them. In those mystic words He intended to illustrate His authority, and the supreme proof of that authority. It is a great question, that of the authority of our Lord. Take the thought and watch it through. These men were challenging Him there. They doubted that He had any adequate authority, and in order to find out, as they thought, they wanted something to prove it. If an adequate proof of authority could be found, the nature of the authority would be revealed. That is what our Lord was doing.

What was the figure He employed? He said, "Destroy this temple." He used a word that everyone sees, and that men then saw, referred to the place where He was. He had gone up to the Temple. He was in the Temple, and their minds instinctively went out to the Temple. It was the centre of national and religious life. They had not forgotten the deep things of their own history. The Temple was the very dwelling-place and Throne of God. In that place He used that figure, "Destroy this temple." The marginal reading here is sanctuary, and that is an attempt to show a distinction. What was the sanctuary?

The temple was Herod's, and the word temple covered all the precincts, all the courts and buildings of that wonderful and marvelous temple, which as Jesus stood in it then, was not finished. These men said presently, "Forty and six years was this temple in building." No, they said, "Forty and six years has this temple been in building." It was not finished until ten years after the crucifixion. They were still building some parts of it. It is a rather long time, as we build to-day; but they built well in those days. The word temple, *hieron* covered the whole fact. But Jesus did not use that word that covers the whole fact, when He said "Destroy this temple." That is why the revisers have suggested a change, and have put the word sanctuary in the margin, in which they are justified. The word He used was *naos*, which means the Holy of Holies. The real ideal of God was in the tabernacle with its outer court, the holy place, and then the veil, and the Holy of Holies. Broadly that pattern had been adopted in the building of every successive temple, and it was still there. There were the outer courts, and the holy place, and the Holy of Holies, and that was the *naos*, that was the sanctuary, the centre of the whole temple. Jesus at this point used the word that referred not to the whole temple, but to the inner sanctuary.

I know when they replied to Him they said, "Forty and six years hath this temple been in building," and they used the same word He used, but evidently they were referring to the whole structure, because they did not take forty-six years to build the Holy of Holies. He had not said so, He had said the *naos*, the Holy of Holies, the sacred centre of everything; destroy that. We know, because the evangelist has told us, although He used the terminology that referred to the place that He was in, and they understood He was referring to the place; He was not referring to it. "He spake of the temple of His body."

Here then our Lord was using a figure of speech, employing it of His body, the Holy of Holies, the dwelling-place of God, the place of the Divine revealing, the centre where God and man met by His appointment. All that applied to the material temple, but He was thinking of His own body. Of that He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." So the subject illustrated was that of His authority; and the figure He employed was that of His body.

What did He say about it? Mark first of all that He did not say, I will destroy, but He told them that they would. It is an imperative. He challenged them; He dared them. He knew whereunto all their hostility to Him would run, and how it would end. He saw the issue and that unbelieving and questioning rebellion that was manifest in the challenge as to His authority. He saw it all, and He said, Destroy this temple, this body of Mine. It was an imperative. He challenged them; He dared them. He knew what they were doing. "Destroy this temple." That is the first thing.

We pause to remind ourselves how terribly they distorted that saying of Jesus at the end. When on trial, Matthew records that false witness was borne, in that someone said, "This Man said, I am able to destroy the Temple of God, and to build it in three days." He never said anything of the kind. Mark tells us that the false witnesses said, "We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands." Again, He said nothing of the kind. The memory of that saying at the beginning they were not careful to be accurate in what they said then. We only refer to it, to draw attention to what He said. "Destroy this temple," this *naos*, this body in which God is dwelling, and which is His appointed meeting-place between man and Himself, dissolve it; that was the word, "destroy it," then what? "In three days I will raise it up."

What did He mean? There can be but one answer to it. He meant this. You ask Me for a sign, demonstrating My authority. There is one sign, which will demonstrate it absolutely; My death, which you will bring about on the bodily plane. My resurrection I will bring about in the power that is Mine. The sign they asked for was His death and resurrection. They did not understand Him. His disciples did not understand Him. John is honest enough to tell us that after He had risen from the dead they understood what He had said. The secret of His authority is demonstrated by His death and His resurrection.

Later on we have the same thing with other wording. Matthew has told us "certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, Master, we would seek a sign from Thee." Listen to His answer. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Those two great facts of His death and resurrection constitute the sign and the only sign of the authority of the Son of man. In having the sign of authority, He revealed the nature of His authority; His right to cleanse the temple, His right to heal, His right to do whatever He did was vested in the mystery of His death, and the marvel of His resurrection. If it is said to-day, and it is terribly true, there are multitudes of people who are seeking a sign, and questioning His authority, they constitute an evil and adulterous generation. That sign abides.

If any ask for proof of the final authority of Christ as King, and Priest, where is it found? Not in His teaching, great and vital as it was and is; not in those signs that we speak of as His miracles, marvels as they were; not in the example of His perfect life, radiant and beautiful in holiness as it was. No, the thing that proves His authority is His death and His resurrection. Not the death alone. Of course there is no such thing as resurrection if there is no such thing as death. The death was brought about by the evil heart of man. The resurrection was brought about by the almighty power of God. These two things together.

They constitute the abiding sign of our Lord's authority for the world to-day, for this age, for this city, for this nation. What authority has Jesus Christ? Give us a sign of it. Go back to Calvary, and the empty tomb in Joseph of Arimathea's garden and we shall find it. That is the sign of His authority. His system of ethics is not a revelation of His authority. We have laws, and an ethical system, and call it Christianity. It is not Christianity. We can have a psychological approach to the problems of the human mind, but it is not Christianity. Christianity is vested in the absolute final authority of Christ, and the sign of it is His death and resurrection.

We turn to inspiration, and listen to Paul. Read again that fifteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, wherein every word is of infinite value. Out of one paragraph (15:14-15:19) take the threefold movement, beginning, "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain." "If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ have perished." "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable." It is when we have considered the "Ifs," then we pass to the great affirmation, "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead "; and that resurrection being the answer of the power of God to the evil that is in men's hearts that put Him on His Cross, is the sign of His present and eternal authority.