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

**48. THE WIND AND THE SPIRIT**

*"The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don't know where it comes from and where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

*John 3:8*

OUR LORD was still in Jerusalem on His first visit there according the records, during the period of His public ministry. It was on that occasion that Nicodemus, a ruler, and the teacher in Israel sought an interview with Him. There is significance in the phrase that he was "the teacher of Israel." To use a phrase of these times, he was the popular teacher, a man greatly sought after, as I believe because of the eminence of his intellect and his acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures. I think that is what our Lord meant when He said, "Art thou *the teacher* of Israel, and understandeth not these things?" Be that as it may, he certainly was a teacher and ruler. This was the man who sought an interview with Jesus.

The first twenty-one verses of this chapter give us the story of that interview. Some believe that the words of our Lord recorded in this chapter ceased at the fifteenth verse, and that the paragraph commencing, "For God so loved the world," constituted John's interpretation of what our Lord was saying. Without arguing about it, I reject that view, and am convinced the words in verse sixteen fell from the lips of our Lord Himself. In the midst, however, of the story of the interview with Nicodemus, our Lord used two illustrations, one from Nature, and the other from the history of the nation of Israel. The one from Nature was, "The wind bloweth where it listeth"; other from the history of Israel, with which Nicodemus would be familiar, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness." We are now concerned with the first of these, considering the second in our next study.

The wind and the Spirit. Following our usual custom, we first ask What was the subject illustrated? - an important matter; then look at the figure employed, that of the wind; finally, necessarily, the teaching to be deduced for Nicodemus, for us, and for all time.

What was our Lord illustrating when He said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth?" It was the illustrative part of His answer to a question of Nicodemus. Nicodemus had said, "How can a man be born when he is old?" The declaration that Jesus had just made, and gave rise to the question of Nicodemus was this. Christ had declared to him that the Kingdom of God demands a new personality. He told him that no man could see it unless he was born *anothen*, from above; a new personality. In the second part, just after this illustration He said that except a man were born anew, from above, he could not enter into the Kingdom of God.

Those are the two declarations. Christ said that the Kingdom of God, in order to its apprehension and its experience, demanded a new personality. Nicodemus had come up, as I think with great honesty, for I hold a brief for Nicodemus. I always dislike those who say he was cowardly, because he came to Jesus by night. Not at all. He was no fool, He wanted to have Jesus all to himself, and that was the time to find Him, when the crowds were not there. He was a man of great intellectual ability; and he came up with that assertion, which was a great assertion, "We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God; for no man can do these signs that Thou doest, except God be with Him." In spite of the clear understanding that characterized his outlook, and his conception of truth concerning Christ, Christ crashed across it the word that discounted all his cleverness, though it was on a high level as He said, "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Later on, to trespass upon the next part of the story, He said, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." Two things are necessary: first of all, understanding, and in order to understanding there must be a new birth and a new personality; and secondly, experience, entering into it, and in order to that there must be a new birth, a new personality.

If there is anything that the world needs to hear anew to-day it is that one thing, that all human cleverness is of no use in giving a man to see or understand the Kingdom of God; and certainly apart from a new birth, which results in a new personality, he cannot experience the Kingship of God, and know the deep meaning of it all.

It was because our Lord had said that, that Nicodemus replied, and it was a great thing he said, "How can a man be born when he is old?" Then he illustrated what was in his mind in the realm of the physical. Nicodemus did not consider the physical as being the whole of personality; when he spoke of a man he did not merely think of his body. He was a Pharisee. He believed in the spiritual side of man's nature. How can a man, an entire man, be born when he is old? To show the incredulity of it, the impossibility of it, as it seemed to Nicodemus, he used the physical as an illustration. "Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" When he first said, "How can a man be born when he is old?" he was thinking in the realm of personality in its entirety. He was thinking unquestionably of all the past thinking of it in his own personality, that he was the result of all the years that had gone. All the processes of the past were merging in the I am of the present. How can a man undo the past? How can a man be born, begin, start, when he is old? With great force he illustrated from his standpoint, Can a man "enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Can the physical be taken and pulped back into embryonic stage, and be born again? If that cannot be done with the physical, how can it be done with the whole of personality? That was the question. Do not go away and speak of the ignorance of Nicodemus. It was an important question. It was a tremendous question.

How did our Lord answer that? This leads to the illustration, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God." Then Jesus corrected the mistake that Nicodemus was making in attempting to illustrate the whole of personality from the physical standpoint. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." That verse is constantly used, I think, in an improper way. Some read that and think that Jesus said that the flesh is inherently and entirely evil, and the spirit is other than that; yet what is born of the flesh must be flesh, and what is born really of the Spirit is good. Nothing of the kind. He said in effect, You have asked your question. You have used an illustration in the physical realm. Nicodemus, remember that the laws that govern the flesh and the laws that govern the spirit are not identical. I see your difficulty, as though our blessed Lord had said to him, in the realm of the flesh. No man can enter into the Kingdom until he be born again. That is the law of the flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Nicodemus, when you come into the realm of the Spirit you are coming into another realm. Things which cannot be in the realm of the flesh, perhaps, may be possible in the realm of the spirit. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above." Stand in the presence of the thing you do not understand, but do not marvel. You do not understand it. Your illustration in the realm of the flesh is well taken, and is true - but stay, there is a realm of the Spirit, and things may take place in that realm of the Spirit beyond your understanding. Do not marvel because you do not understand. That was the occasion of the illustration. He has lifted the question of Nicodemus away into another realm, a higher realm of life and personality, which is the realm of the spirit. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit."

Our Lord was illustrating the fact that the operation of the Spirit is not an operation of the flesh. He charged this man not to be surprised for the necessity declared in the realm of the spirit; and then He took this illustration.

Now look at the figure itself, the wind. The margin of the Revised Version suggests we might read there "The spirit breatheth where it listeth." There are those who have taken that view, and seem to think Christ was speaking all through of the operation of the Spirit. While understanding that view, to accept it is to have broken down the analogy. There is no contrast in illustration here. If He is speaking of the Spirit, then He has gone into the realm of statement, and not of illustration. Moreover, to take it in that way, "The spirit breatheth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof," that cannot be said, because we never do hear the sound or voice of the Spirit. It may be quoted that on the day of Pentecost there came a sound from heaven, as of the rushing of a mighty wind. Yes, there was a wind, and the Spirit, but notice, it was like it. There was a sound, but the fact was of value. It was that which attracted the city outside, and the miracle of tongues which needs no repetition to the end of time.

The word "wind" is *pneuma*. I admit this is an unusual use of it. The word occurs in more than one hundred and fifty passages in the New Testament; twenty of which are in this Gospel of John. It is always rendered spirit, except here, and on one other occasion, when in the book of Revelation we read that one beast had power to communicate life, or breath, or spirit to an image. On these two occasions we have a different rendering. It is a word used of God, of man, and of demons. The word in itself means quite literally, apart from its high value, a current of air, a breath, a breeze. The root of it is in that passage in Acts, "a mighty rushing wind." Here there can be no doubt whatever that our Lord used the wind, the breath, the breeze as illustrating the fact of the work of the Spirit. There is no question that our translators were right in rendering it *wind* in the text, not as in the margin.

It is interesting, though not important, that possibly Jesus and Nicodemus were on the house-top together in the night. Possibly they may have been within the house in some upper chamber or room in a house-top. It may have been, as they talked, the wind at that moment was sweeping over the city. If they were in the house, probably they heard the sighing and the soughing of the wind going up the narrow streets of Jerusalem. Whether on the house-top, in the house, or in a garden, as my beloved friend Dr. Jowett believed, the one thing Jesus did here, as He was so constantly doing, was to take hold of something close to Him, the meaning of which the one to whom He was speaking could not but be conscious. "Consider the lilies," He said, and they were there. Wheat and tares, and everything else. So here with the wind. There on the house-top, there was the reality which Nicodemus must have been conscious of. The wind was blowing. The sound demonstrated the fact. Nicodemus heard it, whether sweeping over the house-top, or sweeping through the narrow streets, or in a garden; there was no escape from it. Nicodemus, you know that. Can you hear the wind? Now, Nicodemus, tell Me where it came from, where it began? Where is it going? Nicodemus could not tell Him that. "Thou knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth." Someone said to me some time ago, Of course that story has gone by the board. We do know where the wind has come from, and where it is going! Well, it may look like it, but it is never so. We may read about depressions - and we will - but can we explain perfectly how the depression is caused? Scientists may be sure they know all about it. Are they quite sure? I will use the Scots phrase and say, "I hae ma doots." If we follow the weather reports on the radio, we find they do not know always. Let the pleasantry be forgotten, and take this fact. Nicodemus heard the wind blowing over the house-top. The sound demonstrated the fact of the wind. I will tell you what you do not know, Nicodemus. You do not know whence it came. You do not know whither it is going. You are in the presence of a reality demonstrated. You are in the presence of a mystery inexplicable.

I wonder if there is any need to say any more. What a marvelous illustration. Keep it against its background. Remember Nicodemus' false question, his false illustration; our Lord's correction of it, and His insistence upon the spiritual fact, a new personality by the birth of the Spirit. Carefully notice one thing in this. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is everyone born of the Spirit." It is of the utmost importance that we get the reality of the terms in their right relationship here. Jesus did not say the wind blows where it will, and so is the Spirit in His action. It was not a comparison in the ultimate between the wind and the Spirit. They are both there. It was a comparison between the man Nicodemus and that other Man. Thou hearest the sound thereof, and by that thou knowest the reality; but thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. Thou standest in the presence of mystery; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus, thy relation for the moment to this natural phenomenon is exactly the same relation a man born of the Spirit bears to that phenomenon. What is the similitude as to the wind? The wind is a demonstrated fact. There is a mystery in its operation. As to the Spirit, to the man born of the Spirit the fact is equally demonstrated by the results. So as thou art listening to the wind, not being sure of it; so he that is born of the Spirit knows it incontrovertibly by its operation. As thou canst not tell whence or whither the wind cometh and goeth; so every man born of the Spirit has to recognize the mystery of the operation. He may not be able to explain whence or whither. He may not be able to unravel the tremendous mystery of the rebirth of personality in the realm of the Spirit; but he knows the fact. The fact is there, and the mystery is there.

Now to summarize. This illustration consisted of a reinforcement and an appeal to employ the same activity in the things of the Spirit as in the things of Nature. In the realm of Nature we recognize the fact. We are conscious of the mystery. Do the same thing in the realm of the Spirit. Act on the fact, and in accordance with it, recognizing all the while the mystery of the method. Our Lord only spoke of one demonstration of the wind. It was that of the sound, of a voice. That was what they were conscious of there in the night time. There are other demonstrations of the wind. One is power. We know the power of the wind; still we do not know whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. The mystery is there, but the fact is there. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. Our Lord is really saying in effect, Nicodemus, if you will act in the realm of the Spirit as you do most honestly in the realm of Nature, where will you find yourself? Take the realm of Nature, and take the wind. Apply the old and familiar formula, Obey the law of the force, and the force will obey you. Obey the law of the wind, and the wind will fill the sails of the vessel and carry it across the waters. If you obey the force, and the force becomes your servant, you still do not understand the mystery. In the realm of Nature no man stands debating a mystery, and neglecting the force. That is what Christ was saying in the realm of the Spirit. Obey the law of the Spirit, and the Spirit will obey you. Obey the law of the spiritual life, and the result will be that all the forces of that life will demonstrate the reality of that birth which is the birth from above, which is the birth of the Spirit.

We can take that tremendous statement and turn it round in another way. Disobey the law of the force, and the force will destroy you. That is always so. Disobey the law of the wind, and the wind will wreck your vessel. Obey the law of, the force, and it will obey you. It is true of electricity. It is always true. Obey the law of electricity and it becomes your servant, lighting your buildings, driving your vehicles, and all the things it is doing to-day. But disobey the law of that force, and it will blast you like the lightning of death.

It was no light thing Jesus said, and it was a tremendous illustration. Nicodemus, you hear the wind. You know the fact of the wind because you heard just now the voice of the wind; but you are standing in the presence of a mystery. Nicodemus, you must be born of water, which is the action of repentance, and the Spirit, which is the action of regeneration. Though you do not understand the mystery, obey the law, and the force will become your servant; and even though physically you cannot enter into your mother's womb and be born again, yet in the great mystery of personality, central to which is spirit always, you can be born again, be born anew, be born from above, and find that new personality through which you shall understand and experience the Kingdom of God.