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

**50. LIVING WATER**

*"Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptising more disciples than John (although Jesus himself didn't baptise, but his disciples), he left Judea and departed into Galilee. He needed to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being tired from his journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman therefore said to him, "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. So where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father, Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his children and his livestock?" Jesus answered her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I don't get thirsty, neither come all the way here to draw."*

*John 4:1-15*

OUR LORD used this illustration in circumstances widely different from those we have previously considered. We cannot help being arrested by those differences at the commencement. Jesus was not now in the city, but in the country, when this conversation took place, about a mile from Sychar. He was in Samaria, not in Judaea, and we hear Him talking, not to a ruler, the teacher of Israel, but to a woman, and withal, a sinning woman.

The whole story is full of fascination, because of the remarkable things He said to this woman. The story is full of surprises, because He said to this woman, just as she was, things we could have imagined He would have reserved to say to far more advanced disciples.

During the course of the things He said to this woman, He made use of this parabolic illustration of living water. We take our usual course of consideration; first, the subject which He was intending to illustrate; then, the figure He employed; and finally the teaching to be deduced.

Look at the picture. We are all familiar with it, Jesus was sitting tired, weary, as our beautiful word accurately has it, wearied with His journey, and He sat thus, that is as He was, tired, by the well. The disciples had gone away to buy - as the Old Version had it, and I like the word - victuals. The Revised Version says, food. They had left Him to buy food, and He was there alone when this woman came. That is all we know about her. Jesus is seen sitting in the presence of a woman, and the deepest fact concerning her was perhaps one evident to no one but Jesus. She was conscious of it, and yet hardly understood it. He sat in the presence of a thirsty woman, a woman degraded. She was there carrying water-pots from at least a mile away, coming to Jacob's well from the city of Sychar. The carrying of water-pots marked the fact that she had sunk so low as to be acting as a slave. She was degraded even as to her social position. Whatever it may have been in the past, we know nothing, except some lurid facts which Jesus brought to light presently. We have a revelation on the human side in what she said, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw." Tired, thirsty, degraded - and, as we know, a woman who through her own fault had burned herself out. There was nothing left. "Go, call thy husband." "I have no husband." "Thou saidst well, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands." We know the rest. We see the past of passion, and an attempt to satisfy the deepest cravings of her nature along that line; and she was now there with her water-pots, degraded to the position of slavery, utterly disillusioned, degraded and dissatisfied.

The old days had all gone. Whatever glamour there had been in them had faded out. Whatever excitement of the senses she may have passed through during those previous years of her life, they had burned themselves out, and there was nothing left save the drudgery of a slave. We can take those three words, degraded, disillusioned, and dissatisfied, and express them in the one word with which I started - thirsty.

Jesus knew that. He knew the thirst of that woman's life. Perhaps it was a thirst that never expected to find anything that would quench it. It seems probable that she had gone beyond the region of hope of any satisfaction, and therefore she was cynical. That is seen in the way she talked to Jesus. She was cynical of heart and callous, and yet deep down within her, there were elements that were religious. She knew certain things, and Jesus precipitated all these things from the under-world of her life to the surface as He talked with her. He was talking to a woman outside the covenant of Israel, Samaritan, held in contempt by all the Jews, who were Jews only after the flesh. He was face to face with a thirsty woman, and offered Himself to her, as being able to quench that thirst, and that meant able to lift her from the degradation into which she had fallen, able to give her, who had become disillusioned, an entirely new outlook upon life, able to come to the deep, scorching, burning, restless dissatisfaction, and bring her complete satisfaction. That is what He was doing; and that is the subject illustrated by the living waters. That is the great theme.

Jesus used this illustration of water. Following that method that so characterized His teaching, taking something that was right there, something under observation, something with which she had connection. He began by asking her for a drink of water; and when in surprise she said, How do You come to ask it of me, You a Jew, and I a Samaritan, then He said this amazing thing to her, using the figure of the water. Notice the word water occurs no less than eight times in the course of the conversation.

Water, - a great essential of human life. What are the things necessary to life on the material level, the natural? I will state them in the order of importance, from the least to the greatest. The first is food, that is the least important, but it is essential. We can certainly live forty days without eating. It is interesting the occasions of fasting recorded in the Bible for forty days. But more important than food is water. How long can we live without water? Scientists tell us seven days, and no more. Of course the most important is breath. How long can we live without breathing? I will not attempt an answer! We need to breathe, that is the first thing. We need water, and we need food. But this illustration was taken there, the second in importance as an element of life - water, that is the figure.

Look at the figure. There is more than that in it; only I would remind you that thirst is a beneficent warning of danger. Thirst in its demand, is a search after deliverance from the danger. A man with no consciousness, no thirst for spiritual things, is in dire danger. Thirst is beneficent. It is a warning, and it means a clamant cry for that which will obviate the peril. It was not merely water in this figure of speech; it was the place of water. Notice how the well plays a part all through here. Now for a small technicality, which is worth noting. In the narrative there are two entirely different words, both translated *well*. It is significant. Look at verses eleven and twelve. The woman is talking, and she says, "The well is deep … our father Jacob, which gave us the well." That was her thought and conception, which was perfectly true. That is the word *phear* which means a hole, or cistern. She was thinking of the accumulated water there in the well, in the cistern. Now look at verses six and fourteen. In the sixth verse John says, "Jacob's well was there." That is not the same word, and John says "Jesus sat thus by the well." That is not the word that the woman used on the other occasions. Go on to verse fourteen, Jesus is speaking, and He speaks of "a well of water." That is not the same word *phear*. The difference is this, that the word that John used in writing the narrative, even of the same place of which the woman spoke as a cistern, John did not call it that. He said, By the spring Jesus sat, by Jacob's spring; and Jesus also used that word spring, when He said "a well of water." There are two words here in the figure of speech.

Our Lord then used the words that suggest not an accumulation of water in a hole, a well, in that sense, a cistern; but a spring. Take the other word in the figure of speech, as Jesus used it, "living water." What is living water? I am not thinking of the spiritual realm merely. There was living water there in that sense, or that well would not have been in use after the long centuries. Jacob had given it to his sons. There it was, an accumulation of water; someone drew out, and the cistern remained and filled up again, why? Because there was living water there. What then is living water, as distinct from cistern water? It is water always flowing, as distinct from water gathered up, and kept. There is a beautiful phrase in the Old Testament on the material or physical level, where we are told in the Book of Genesis that Isaac's servants digged in the valley "and found there a well of springing water." That is the same thought, living water, water always coming up, always passing on. We shall consider the figure again later on, in another and wider application. Now we are simply looking at the figure.

Living water is water always bubbling up and flowing, always coming. Water in a glass by our side, is excellent, but it is not living water; it is stagnant, it is collected. Water ceases to be living when it is gathered, and stored and kept. Jesus used that as a figure, living water; not the well in which there is an accumulation of water, but a spring that keeps the well full, however much water is drawn from it.

What a wonderful figure of speech, living water. Jesus is confronting a thirsty soul, and is using the illustration that is close at hand. The woman called it a well. He spoke of a spring, of that which had brought the water into the well. She had come far to draw the collected water. Lifting His illustration on to the realm of personality and the spiritual, He said to her that He could give her water that would be living water, water always coming, always springing, living water. The whole thing is so patent, we need not stay long with the teaching. Christ confronts man's deepest need, his thirst. That underlying consciousness of dissatisfaction expresses itself in a thousand ways. All the restless feverishness proves it; the failure of all things material to satisfy the deepest craving of the human soul. That is thirst; and the world is crowded with thirsty souls. How many have tried so many things, but degradation has come, and disillusionment has come, and dissatisfaction is abiding, a perpetual irritant, a burning fever. They hardly know what it is they want. There it is, all the restlessness of the age, of which jazz music is one of the symptoms, restless, shivering of the body, symbolic; all the restless writhing of the spirit; all man's thirst. Man is wanting something that he has not, and the utter failure of all attempts on the earth level to satisfy that craving. The world is thirsty.

Now listen to Christ's claim as made to that woman, and through her as a representative to all humanity. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is that saith to thee." "If thou knewest the gift of God," what did He mean? What is the gift of God? Living water? Oh no. That is not what He meant then. That is His gift. What is the gift of God? The same thought was in the mind of Jesus when He said to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Oh yes, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is"; God gave His Son. "If thou knewest Who was speaking; to thee, the One God has given His very Son, of His own nature and being" "If thou knewest thou wouldest ask of Him, and He would give thee living water."

Keep this on the spiritual level of the necessity of mankind. Our Lord was quoting freely the Jewish Scriptures of the Hebrew people. Jeremiah had said, "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters; and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." And later he said, "O Lord, the Hope of Israel; all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed; they that depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters." And yet one other instance, this time from Zechariah. "It shall come to pass in that day, that living waters shall come out from Jerusalem; half of them towards the eastern sea, and half of them towards the western sea; in summer and in winter shall it be." Living waters! It was an old figure of speech from the Hebrew prophets, and these living waters were waters that proceeded from God, and when men turned their back upon living waters and made cisterns, they found they were broken, and yielded no water.

Jesus said to this woman with that great Hebrew figure of speech, living waters, unquestionably in mind, If you had known the gift of God, you would have asked of Me, and I would have given you living water, that which shall completely quench thirst, so that you would never be thirsty. But those living waters shall be in you, springing within you, springing up, a beautiful word. I am often inclined to change the translation, not to improve it, but to help in understanding it. The word translated springing up means leaping up. The word only occurs here, and twice in Acts (3:8 and 14:10) when it tells of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate leaping. It is a figure of joy and gladness, leaping up. Springing up, yes, bubbling up, perennially full and fresh; laughing up. That is what He is prepared to give to humanity. That is what He can give to the human soul thirsty, parched, feverish, distracted, disappointed; water that will be not outside, stored in a cistern, but in him a spring in himself, leaping up, bubbling up, springing up unto eternal life.

The story goes on. We know how it ends. What has the story to say to us? The challenge of Jesus abides, and the promise of Jesus abides. "If thou knewest Who it is." There is so much there. Half the trouble to-day is half the people do not know Who Jesus is. The moment He is made anything less than what the New Testament reveals Him to be, the Son of God, and God the Son, well, we shall not know Who He is, and we shall not ask Him for living water, and we shall try and satisfy ourselves in other ways, it may be in religious ways. People have gone up to Keswick year after year, to get filled up. Poor souls. Whatever they get will become stagnant before they leave Keswick. Oh no, we cannot get it that way.

"I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,

But ah! the waters failed!

E'en as I stooped to drink, they'd fled,

And mocked me as I wailed!"

Jesus is challenging us, "If thou knewest!" Do we know? Then we ask, and He will give the living water so that we shall be able to say,

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,

Behold, I freely give

The living water, thirsty one,

Stoop down and drink, and live.

I came to Jesus, and I drank

Of that life-giving stream;

My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,

And now I live in Him."