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

**52. THE BREAD OF LIFE**

*"Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will not be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I told you that you have seen me, and yet you don't believe. All those whom the Father gives me will come to me. He who comes to me I will in no way throw out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. This is the will of my Father who sent me, that of all he has given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise him up at the last day. This is the will of the one who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down out of heaven." They said, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then does he say, 'I have come down out of heaven?' " Therefore Jesus answered them, "Don't murmur amongst yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'They will all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who hears from the Father and has learnt, comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except he who is from God. He has seen the Father. Most certainly, I tell you, he who believes in me has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that anyone may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. Yes, the bread which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews therefore contended with one another, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus therefore said to them, "Most certainly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you don't have life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father; so he who feeds on me, he will also live because of me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven-not as our fathers ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread will live forever."*

*John 6:35-58*

THE VERSES thirty-five to fifty-one of this chapter in John are really not adequate. At least the first fifty-nine verses (of chapter 6) are required. It is pre-eminently a chapter about bread. The Greek word *artos* occurs some twenty-one times. In verses eleven, thirteen, and twenty-six the rendering "loaves" is a translation of the same word. That is simply a mechanical statement of the fact stamping the nature of the chapter. All the vastness of the teaching given and implied is beyond the purpose or possibility of this study. In our next study we shall return to it, considering the figures of flesh and blood. This subject of bread is related to that, for this is one great discourse.

We are now concerned with the parabolic illustration of bread, of "the bread of life," which Jesus used upon this occasion. Taking our usual method, what was the subject which He illustrated; secondly, what was the figure He employed; and consequently, what is the teaching to be deduced from that meditation?

It is always important to know what our Lord was intending to illustrate or illuminate. We bear in mind that bread had brought the crowd together. The day before they had been supernaturally fed with bread, literal, physical bread. The lad with the five loaves and the two small fishes had been there; and Jesus had taken those five loaves and had blessed them, and broken them, and multiplied them.

" 'T was spring-time when He blessed the bread,

'T was harvest when He brake."

So they had been fed. Because they had been supernaturally fed on the previous day, the crowds had come together. That is what brought them back. We are not unfair to them in saying that, because Jesus said to them, in verse twenty-six, "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled." They ate loaves yesterday, and they had come back to-day. Whereas it does not say so in so many words, they hoped for another manifestation of power. They did not take any cognizance of the sign it was intended to signify.

It was with this attitude Jesus was dealing when He made use of this figure of speech. He said to them (6:27) "Work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him the Father, even God, hath sealed." So He rebuked their materialism of effort. Do not work for the meat which perishes. They had worked, some of them, pretty hard, in the hope of a meal that day. They had gone all round the lake. They had put out a good deal of effort to get there, to find Him. They did not want to understand. They were not seeking for interpretation. The sign did not appeal to them. The thing that brought them there was the fact of their full bellies yesterday. He rebuked that, and called them to another kind of effort, of output, of strength that resulted in the meat that did not perish, that would bring them to the place of meat that endureth to eternal life. That is the subject which our Lord was illustrating.

Now look at the figure in itself, bread, the bread of life. We are not touching the spiritual level yet; though in dealing with the figure, of course, we begin to see into the spiritual significance. Stay, however, with the figure. The bread of life was a common phrase. In verse twenty-seven He referred to "meat." Here He referred to bread, "the bread of life." Meat, of course, was the familiar word, *brosis*, which means food. It does not mean flesh, but all sorts of food. Do not put out your energy to obtain the food that perishes; but put out your energy to obtain the food that sustains the life which is eternal.

What was the meaning of this word bread? In that Eastern country in those times, and very largely to-day in that particular neighbourhood, bread as we understand it, made of meal, is primary food. It is always considered so. All other articles of food were looked upon as accessory; permissible, but unnecessary. Bread was the principal food, and was looked upon then as having a sanctity all its own. Go to the East to-day, and it will be found whether among Arabs, Jews, or other members of that land, they never tread underfoot a piece of bread. However soiled it is, however smirched or contaminated, they never put their foot on it. An Arab walking down one of the highways, seeing a piece of bread would be careful not to put his foot on it. He would be careful to pick it up, and put it in a niche in the wall for the pariahs. The reason is because there is still a great and peculiar sense of the element of sacredness in bread, because it comes from God. That is true of the East, where Jesus was speaking, and of the thinking of the people to whom He was speaking. Bread stood for necessary food.

In Genesis 3:10 we find it said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." That did not merely mean an article of food made out of barley or wheat meal; but it meant food; and from there all the way through the word bread refers to food generally. So it does here. The emphasis is laid upon that peculiar food which was the general source of sustenance in the East. Its sanctity was always remembered, because of its symbolism in the East.

Bread always stood for hospitality and for fellowship; and men in the East broke bread with one another, the one providing it offering hospitality, and those partaking, were united in fellowship. While we are not yet dealing with the spiritual things, they are shining through. Our Lord used a figure of speech. They had referred to the manna, and He had taken it up and dealt with food.

Again, "bread of life " and still staying in the realm of the figure, what is this? What is the word for life there? It is the Greek word *zoe*, not *pneuma*, spirit; not *psuche*, the mind, but *zoe*, that is, the vital principle; life reduced to its simplest terms, and to its simplest fact. We read "eternal life," and the word is always the same, *zoe*. Here is a wonderful fact that in the teaching of our Lord, and that of all His apostles, they took hold of the word *zoe* and lifted it on to a higher plane than it then occupied in the thinking of men. The Greek word meant life, human life, as well as the life of the lion, and of the mouse. That is the word here, "the bread of life"; the vital principle in our human race, which constitutes the race as differentiated from races. We talk about the Anglo-Saxon race. Where did we really come from? Many races are represented here. For the time being we call ourselves British so as to cover all the English, Scotch, Welsh, and Irish. That is a race. Cross the Channel, and we find races, and they are very different; but the differences are all physical or mental, not spiritual. The vital principle is the same, whether Teuton, or Aryan, or Semitic, or what-not! The bread of life is its sustenance, which maintains the life principle.

It is wonderful how we can change and reduce some of the things at which we have been looking to-day. Food, what are the things we really need? Protein, carbohydrate, fat. In recent years we have added another - vitamins. We never heard of these when I was young, but they were still there, and they were very important in the forming of bone. The figure our Lord used was the bread of life, food, that sustains vitality.

Our Lord said, "I am the Bread of life," and the claim is very significant, being the first of the great "I ams " that John has recorded for us. There are eight occasions upon which our Lord took the great name of God as revealed to Moses at the burning bush. Then, as though the revelation could not be made, it had recoiled upon itself, and reasserted itself in august and dreadful majesty, "I AM, THAT I AM." So God spake to Moses. He had asked, "Tell me, what is Thy name?" For many years the great declaration was left in all its majestic splendour; and Jesus came and took hold of it, and linked it to simple symbols that men might understand. This is the first, "I am the Bread of life."

The figure, too, is interesting in relation to the necessities of life. When considering the subject of the living water we said that the three essential things to life were breath, water, and food. A man can live forty days without food; and about seven days without water. He cannot live seven minutes without breath. John in bringing the story before us has led us over the ground in which we have seen Him meeting these essentials. In the third chapter, when talking to Nicodemus, He spoke of breath. The wind bloweth where it listeth. So the Spirit. In chapter four He made the promise to the woman of water, living water, springing up. Now here we reach food, absolutely essential to life. We come along the line of illustration by that gradation - breath, water, food.

Necessarily therefore, having looked at the figure, we are bound to face the essential teaching. When Jesus said, "I am the Bread of life," He was facing the hunger of man in his essential life, which is not physical, which is not mental, but which is spiritual. Human life is essentially spiritual. Do not take that word spiritual and make it mean good and holy and true. It does not necessarily mean anything of the kind. It refers to essential nature. It may be false and untrue in its activities; but the essence of human life is spirit. To quote once more. When Paul was on Mars' Hill he said God had made of one every nation to dwell upon the face of the earth. We have the word there, "one blood." That is perfectly true. Submitted to chemical analysis, there is no difference between the blood of the negro and the blood of the white man. But Paul did not say that. The essential oneness of humanity is not in its blood, nor in its mentality, but in its spiritual nature. Get down underneath the physical, the glorious sacramental method of revealing the spirit, and receiving in the spiritual consciousness; and get underneath the mental, the processes of thought; what is it that is thinking, or doing, that looks through the eyes, and listens through the ears? The spiritual thing , and that is what Christ is speaking of. He is addressing the hunger that lies in the human heart.

This great theme cannot be dealt with adequately. It can only be done suggestively. Is man hungry to-day, in his deepest life? He is, and there are three great proofs of that hunger.

The first is the quest for God; the second is the search for man; and the third is the struggle against sin. These things are universal. They are not confined to one race; they are racial.

The quest for God is universal. All idolatries witness to the fact that the human heart is feeling after and knowing God. The human search for man is equally a revelation of human hunger. Man's quest for individuality, personality in its perfection and realization. So many of these eternal truths are sobbing and sighing through the writings of men, and the thinkings of men, without their understanding them. All the struggle we read about, all the attempts, all the high aspirations to make men fit. What do we mean by being fit? Think it through, this quest of men for fitness, and the quest for man in his social relationships and international relationships. First the quest for God, and then the search for man; and always, resultantly, the struggle against sin. We may change the word if we will. Struggle against failure, against imperfection; the consciousness that we have missed the mark; that is the word for sin in the New Testament. Humanity everywhere is missing the mark, and man everywhere is against it. I am not talking about his folly, his foolishness, his wickedness, his rebellion. I am speaking of his hunger, and that hunger proves his quest for God, his search for man, and his struggle against sin.

But hunger is not bread, though it declares the need for it. Therefore hunger never becomes bread. The quest for God never means the finding of God. The search for man never means the realization of the meaning of humanity. The struggle against sin never brings victory over it. Hunger never becomes bread. Unless bread be found, hunger issues in death, inevitably and invariably. Christ stood confronting all this, and He said, "I am the Bread of life," a statement of august majesty; "I am the living bread," I am the bread that has come down out of heaven for men.

Think for a moment, what does He do? Man is engaged in the quest for God, Christ reveals God. Man is engaged in a search after man. He interprets man, and shows man what man really is. Man in rebellion against sin, failure, whatever he calls it, struggling against sin, He comes to save from sin, to break its power, wipe out its pollution, and the profound reason why, He is the bread of life. God is seen confronting humanity, and bringing within its reach that which shall satisfy all its hunger, end its quest in victory; answer its search in a perfect revelation, and deliver it from its paralysis and pollution in sin and power. So Christ says, "I am the Bread of life."

We are Christian man and women. Do we believe that? Have we proved it? Do we know that He is the Bread of life to our souls? Can we truthfully say,

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want."

All hunger satisfied, God found, man interpreted, sin mastered? If we can, then keep the discourse in connection with the physical miracle, and do not forget that when Jesus fed those people, how He had done it. He had asked and had obtained bread from a lad, through His disciples; and He had said to those disciples, in the presence of that hungry crowd, physically, "Give ye them to eat." They brought to Him what they had, which was absolutely inadequate to meet the need of the hungry crowd. He took it. He blessed it. He brake it. They carried it. So the hungry crowds were fed. He is still saying, "I am the Bread of life," "Give ye them to eat."