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

**54. RIVERS**

*"Now on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, from within him will flow rivers of living water." But he said this about the Spirit, which those believing in him were to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus wasn't yet glorified."*

*John 7:37-39*

THE PARABOLIC illustration upon which our attention is fixed now I is that of "rivers." Those of "thirst" and "living water" have already come under review in the story of the Samaritan woman in the fourth chapter. Necessarily, however, we must bear these in mind as they recur in this passage, for they have distinct bearing upon the present study of "rivers." For the quenching of thirst by living water, the supply is referred to here by our Lord under the figure of rivers. It will at once be recognized that rivers suggest plentifulness; not a running brook, not even a river, but rivers. Such was the figure which our Lord employed.

Following our regular custom, we ask first, what was the subject our Lord was intending to illustrate when He used the figure? Secondly, what is this figure? How are we to understand it as a figure? Necessarily from those two lines of preliminary thought, we consider the great teaching.

Here we are face to face with something perhaps a little unusual, and yet full of value. In other considerations we have had to enquire what was our Lord intending to illustrate by the use of that particular figure. In this case we have no need to ask that question. We are in no doubt in this case, because this figure of speech was immediately followed in the narrative of John by exposition. This is stated in verse thirty-nine, "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified."

This is an arresting fact. Here we find our Lord saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." There we have our figure of rivers of living water. Well, what did He mean? "This spake He of the Spirit … for the Spirit was not yet given." In the MSS. there is no word following "yet." Nothing perhaps can be better than the word that has been supplied by our translators; for the word "given" is for our English understanding. But the text says, "The Spirit was not yet," and evidently the reference was to the Spirit in all His fulness. So the added word helps us. "The Spirit was not yet given"; because Jesus was not yet glorified. That was His subject, in the light of that inspired interpretation of the purpose of the illustration. He was speaking of the Holy Spirit. He was looking forward to a new giving of the Spirit, which undoubtedly at the moment had not been granted, neither was it granted until Pentecost.

Later on in His life He spoke to His disciples of the coming of the Spirit, and spoke of it as the promise of the Father, which said He, He will send unto you. Here He was looking on in His own work, looking on to the ultimate in His own work, the coming of the Spirit in a new way, and in new measure. We cannot read the Old Testament without coming into the presence of the Spirit. We see the Son in the beginning of our Bible, the Word, and the Spirit of God brooding upon the face of the chaos. But His coming to man was spasmodic and occasional. Now there was to be a new sense in which the Spirit was to be given to abide, to remain; as Jesus said later, to be with His own, and in His own.

If we can get back into the mind of the Lord, it is evident from this word of interpretation, He was looking on to that giving of the Spirit; and John has told us why that had not been done, and why that Spirit had not been given in that new sense. Why not? "The Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

We are halted again. What did He mean by His being glorified? Read again the twelfth chapter of John, and then read the seventeenth, words uttered by our Lord to His disciples, and in the other case words uttered by the Lord to His Father. There we find what is meant by the glorification of Jesus. We may summarize it thus. The glorification of Jesus came when He was lifted on the Cross, out of the earth. When He was lifted out of the earth, above it, He triumphed over it. "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up out of the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." The way of His glorification was the way of His Cross, and that which inevitably followed the Cross, the resurrection. If there was no physical resurrection we are the biggest fools in the universe. If the resurrection is going to be left a subject for doubt, then we are in a perilous state. The glorification was the Cross and the uplifting and the ascension. Then He gave the Spirit.

Here we find Him on this occasion, on the last day of the feast. We are led through that word in interpretation to look through His eyes to what was in front of Him, and the end was the giving of the Spirit; and the way was His Cross, His resurrection, His ascension, His glorifying.

With all that in view, He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit." We stay for a few moments with the figure itself, the flowing of the rivers. It is an old story with which every Bible student is familiar. It is important to recognize it was said on the last day of the feast of tabernacles. There is a good deal of local colour concerning the story which it is helpful for us to see.

The feast of tabernacles lasted for eight days, seven days and one other, completing the octave. At the time of our Lord's ministry they had superadded to the ritual observed in connection with that feast; and it was a very symbolic and suggestive thing they had done. Every day during that feast there was a procession of priests who, carrying some of the golden vessels on their shoulders empty, marched through the streets from the Temple, singing parts of the Great Hallel, that is, Psalms 113-118. Then they filled those vessels with water, most probably at the running brook of Kedron. The procession then reformed with the vessels filled, and they marched back, still chanting parts of the Great Hallel, and there in the Temple courts in the presence of the assembled worshippers, they poured the water out of the golden vessels.

What did they mean by it? We have rabbinical interpretation. The carrying of the water was symbolical of two things. First, the fact that they had been in the wilderness, and God had miraculously supplied them with water over a period of years; and then, the fact that when they came into the land, they no longer needed the supernatural supply, because there were springs and rivers everywhere in the land. The feast of tabernacles celebrated the entry into the land, and rejoiced that water had been provided in the wilderness, now no longer necessary. But, said the rabbis, the ritual signified more. It intimated the recognition of promises made to the people of a day that should come when there should be new fertilizing powers sweeping over the nation and the land, and for seven days they repeated this ceremony.

Now on the eighth day there was no procession of priests. The absence, said the rabbis, signified first there was no need for the supernatural supply of water as they had had in the wilderness, but it was also intended to signify that the long hoped for promise of the new dispensation of fruitfulness and rededication had not dawned.

On the last day, the great day, when there was no procession and carrying of the water, Jesus stood and He said, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me … out of his inner life shall flow rivers of living water." This He spoke of the Spirit, and He employed this figure of living waters in that connection. He said, "As the scripture hath said." A great deal has been written about that. Follow all through the Old Testament the figure of rivers. The first occasion is in the second chapter of Genesis, where we are told God planted a garden, and there went forth rivers. That is a figure of speech? No, it is a historical fact, rivers to water the garden.

We go on, all through the literature, and we find that psalmists and prophets are constantly using the figures of rivers illustratively. These rivers proceeded forth, somehow, and in some way from God. We find, too, that the supreme Old Testament passage concerning the rivers is in Ezekiel, chapter forty-seven, that marvelous passage, out of which I take one sentence only. "Everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh." "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, out of his inner life shall flow the rivers." Everything shall live where those rivers come.

Rivers therefore are always suggestive of life, and in life in two ways, the satisfaction of life in its thirst; and secondly, the fructifying of all life, that it may bring forth a harvest. That cannot be repeated too often. There He stood. John particularly said He stood. On another occasion He did not stand, but sat. While that does not mean very much to us to-day, it meant much in an Eastern land. When teaching He always sat, as the teachers all did. But when He was proclaiming as a herald He stood; and on this occasion, as the feast of tabernacles was drawing to its conclusion, and its ritual was ceasing, and all its suggestiveness was passing away, He stood. "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink."

Who is he that believes on Him? The man that thirsts, and that thirsting soul who comes to Him and drinks, that is the man who believes.

Have you believed in Jesus? I do not care about the creed just now. Do you believe in Him? That is the first question. How are you to know? How am I to know? Ask yourself this; have I come to Him, and taken Him to quench my thirst? Can I say,

"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."

Can you say that? Very well, that is preliminary. He that does that, he that believes on Him, what will the result be? Out of his inner life shall flow the rivers.

The great teaching here is this, that the life-giving Spirit is to proceed to humanity through humanity. He comes from God. He comes because Jesus has been glorified; but if He is to pass on into human life, if He is to come bringing life wherever He comes, this river of the Spirit of God, renewing, regenerating, reviving, uplifting everything, how is He to come? Through you, through me, through human means. He that believes, out of his inner life shall flow the rivers. The great thing, the master thing is just that the life-giving Spirit which this moribund, if not already dead world needs, that life-giving Spirit which is to pass over - to quote Ezekiel - the marshy places and make them bright and beautiful and fruitful, the world will get that through believers in Jesus. "He that believeth on Me, out of his inner life shall flow the rivers."

That necessarily drives us back where we were. Who are they that believe on Him? Those who have come to Him, and have had their own thirst quenched, those who know what it means to have received the gift of the living water, that has become in them a well of water, springing up, laughing up, bubbling up, forever springing, beautifying, satisfying. Those are the people.

There are two things of supreme importance. No rivers ever flow from the lives of thirsty men and women. I wonder if that ought to be amended, and put thus. The proportion in which the rivers continuously flow is the proportion in which we have ceased to be thirsty.

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

Men and women, is that true? What are you thirsty for? Are you thirsty still? As we reminded ourselves in considering the fourth chapter,

"We tried the broken cisterns, Lord,

And Oh, those waters failed

And as we stooped to drink, they fled,

And mocked us as they wailed."

That applies to all earthly attempts to satisfy the deep thirst of the human soul.

Have we got beyond that? Let us ask our own souls, Are we satisfied? Because unless we are, no rivers are flowing from our lives. We may be good men and women, doing good things, but the running rivers are not there. The influence we are exerting is not that of the Spirit, because the effluence, the incoming of the Spirit, has not been what it ought to be. No rivers run from thirsty souls.

Take the same statement, and turn it round. There is no thirst when the rivers are running. No rivers if we are still thirsty. No thirst? Then the rivers are running.