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

**55. LIGHT**

*"Again, therefore, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life."*

*John 8:12*

THIS the second of the great "I am" claims of our Lord recorded by John. There are eight such found in his Gospel. Three of them are essential. Five of them are illustrative. This is the second such. We have considered the first, "I am the bread of life." This, like the first, centres upon the Lord Himself. Sometimes He took some parabolic illustration from Nature; but here this is a direct claim, "I am the light of the world."

Necessarily we link this claim with the Person, and with the deepest truth concerning Himself. John opens his Gospel, linking verses one and fourteen, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us … full of grace and truth." That is the One. Who is now speaking, "I am the light of the world."

Still by way of introduction, to go farther back, to the book of Exodus, to that wonderful third chapter, in which after forty years in the wilderness Moses was called of God to a very definite position and occupation. Shrinking quite naturally from the tremendous task that was suggested to him, he asked God that question, "Tell me, what is Thy name?" According to the record the answer is in that marvelous passage. The great declaration of God recoiled upon itself, and repeats the affirmation, "I am that I am." That was His name, His memorial name. The centuries passed on, and by that name His people knew Him. Then there came a day when there stood One Who "was made flesh"; and He took the name uttered in the burning bush, and on five occasions He linked it with simple and sublime symbols. "I am the bread of life," and now "I am the light of the world."

Following our usual practice in these studies, we consider first the subject He was illustrating when He said this; secondly, the figure that He employed; finally deducing the permanent teaching resulting from the use of the figure, under those circumstances.

What made Jesus say at that point, "I am the light of the world? Taking it out of its setting, it still stands in the revelation of the New Testament concerning Jesus. Under any circumstance we can imagine Him saying it. It would always have been typically true. But in order to our understanding, it is well to ask ourselves, Why did He say this then? We must see the background in order to understand His claim in itself. In chapter seven we have the account of His presence at the feast of tabernacles, where He made His great claim of ability to quench the thirst of humanity; and His great proclamation that if any should believe on Him, they should become sources of blessing, men and women from whom the rivers of living water should flow. Now immediately following that claim there ensued discussion and division among the people, and among the rulers. It was in the presence of that discussion on the following day that He made use of these words, and it was closely linked with that claim, to that proclamation and discussion.

Note carefully how the eighth chapter opens. The story runs on. There is no break. The Revisers have taken the last verse of the seventh chapter, and have printed it closely connected with the eighth, with a gap between the fifty-second and fifty-third verses. There should be no gap there at all. If a gap is made, it should be at the end of the first verse of chapter eight. The story really runs on. At the end of the discussion, "They answered and said unto him" (that is, Nicodemus), "Art thou also of Galilee?" Mark their contempt. "Search, and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." That ended it for the day publicly. They dispersed. Where did they go? "And they went every man unto his own house; but Jesus went unto the mount of Olives." That is the natural ending of the seventh chapter.

It then begins again, "And early in the morning He came again into the temple." They went home. They had homes to go to. He had none. He went to the mount of Olives. I do not know what He did in the mount of Olives that night. From His habit I think He spent it in communion; but notice that early in the morning He came back into those temple courts, "And all the people came unto Him; and He sat down and taught them." In the twentieth verse we read, "These words spake He in the treasury, as He taught in the temple." That brings the scene back to mind. He had been in the mount of Olives all through the night. They had gone home and gone to rest, the people, but they were back there in the temple precincts in the morning, and He came early to the temple, made His way into the treasury, where He was when He saw the widow casting in the two mites; and He sat down and taught them.

We have no account of what He said. At the feast of tabernacles He had stood and cried. That was the attitude of the herald. Now He took up the position of a teacher. He had come back to carry on among these people His wondrous teaching.

Then follows in the record this little paragraph, the story of the woman. I affirm my conviction that this is a true story, and that it took place here at this time. Probably John did not write that story. Reading the Greek New Testament in Westcott and Hort's text, this is put in at the end of the Gospel. It was so important that it could not be left out altogether. Nestle's text has put it back here, but has put it in within brackets. It might be proven that this little story was put in by Papias, that marvelous extra-illustrator, who later added stories of Jesus, and inserted them. But let that go. He sat down and taught, and I think He was interrupted by the bringing of this woman. We are not dealing with the story now.

At the twelfth verse we read, "Again therefore Jesus spake unto them." It is the resumption of teaching, broken in upon. He had been interrupted by these scribes and this woman. When that was over, and He had dismissed that crowd in a regal way, with august authority, when in the midst of that crowd of accusers and accused had shone a light that was appalling, searching into the deep recesses of the souls of the accusers, and shining into the darkened soul of the woman; then He went on. "Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

This statement is so marvelous from the standpoint of the occasion. The significant word in that statement is "therefore." Why "therefore"? We may read it, and not notice it. We must go back and link it with the darkness that was all round about them, evidenced in the religious rulers and the people concerning God; by the attitude and activity of the accusers of the woman; darkness that was evident in the story of the woman herself. Because of this atmosphere, because of the discussions and the divisions, revealing the darkness in which men were living, therefore He said, "I am the light of the world."

The subject therefore illustrated was that of how the darkness might be banished, and men might see clearly the truth and the way in which to go. "I am the light of the world."

Notice now the figure employed. This is a most fascinating theme. In the old days at school they taught what they called Physics. It had a threefold division, Sound, Light, and Heat. The word here He used for light is common in the New Testament, as common as our word light is; the word *Phos* was common to the people who heard Jesus. Our word light exactly conveys the meaning of that word He used. *Phos* is derived from a word that means to shine, in order to make manifest. *Phao* is the verb.

What is light? Take it and examine it by spectrum analysis, and we discover at once light is a simple thing, and a vastly sublime thing. So the figure He made use of here I do not hesitate to say is very simple, so that every boy who perchance was in the temple courts, or youth nearby, seeing the light all about them in the early morning, would understand and see. But examine it. Some say that light consists of seven primary colours, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Strictly, however, there are only three primary colours, red, blue, and yellow. All the others result from some combination of red, blue, and yellow. I remember the thrill that came to me as a boy with my first box of paints. I discovered one day, quite by accident, that if I took a bit of beautiful blue and glorious yellow, I had the most radiant green. And so on. Light is a composite of all these, and they are brought into one, the red and blue and yellow.

But how is it accounted for? There is an interesting subject, how in the last century the great discovery was made about light. To go back earlier than that, the thinkers were under the mastery of Sir Isaac Newton. He had said that light was minute particles projected at great velocity from luminous bodies; that is that light was caused by the projection into the ether by a vast velocity, terrific force of corpuscles or atoms from the sun and stars. Men believed that for a long time. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century they discovered that the true explanation is that light is undulation. That is to say, it is caused by waves, in an all pervading elastic medium, and the colour depends upon the length of rays. Red is the longest. I have been fascinated in the study of this. Light is a wondrous thing.

Then I sought for some definition of light, and I found two. Light has been defined by one of the great masters as "radiant energy." The undulatory waves are there, beating through the ether; but it is radiant, and it is energy. I found something simpler still, and we see the accuracy of this through what lies behind it. Light is "the agent by which objects are rendered visible." Everybody knows that. Light is energy, and its sublimity is discovered. Movement all round the world. Sound, tone is created when the movement is so subtle that sight could not see or grasp it. But it is the same thing. In a picture gallery we see the tone of that picture. We say, we like the tone of that organ. The tone of the picture and the tone of the music. It is the same thing - undulation. The mystery and the marvel of it, but the simplicity of it. I like the last statement, "the agent by which objects are rendered visible." Wherever we see them there is visibility, and always beauty. Visibility, we see it, but colour is beauty in light. The Son of God never uttered a more marvelous word than when He said, in the midst of all the prevailing darkness, "I am the light of the world." What infinite music of eternal vibration, in order to revelation and visibility and beauty, was contained in His claim, "I am the light of the world."

We have still got our Bible, and I was glad to get back to it from all these other sayings and readings. I did the old-fashioned thing, and said, Where does light emerge in the Bible, and where does it pass out? It is found right at the beginning, "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light" - light became, to translate more literally the Hebrew. That is where it came in.

We go to the other end of the Book, and we look at a city, all bathed in translucent light, and we read this, "There shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever." That is the last place in the Bible where the word is found. We see from the beginning, all through the Literature there are constant allusions to light, and light falling upon human lives.

"Send out Thy light, send out Thy truth that they may lead me." "God is a sun and shield," all the way through light.

"Jesus said therefore, I am the light of the world," the light of the cosmos. That is the word here. Not of the age, but of the cosmos. Immediately we are pulled up. What is meant by the cosmos? That word is used in varied applications. It is used of the whole framework of the universe, the cosmos; and it is sometimes used of man, all men, the sum totality of humanity. It is sometimes used of the way in which man orders his life. The root idea is order, the cosmos is the order. Christ says, "I am the light." "I am the light of," that is, I am the light for, I am the light in the midst of the cosmos. Use the word as you will, the word cosmos; I am the light in the midst of the universe, with all its far-flung distances. I am the light in the sum totality of humanity. I am the light revealing the true order, the way in which man should go. Said Jesus, I am the Revealer and the Interpreter of the cosmos.

A little later on He was talking to His disciples, and He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." So He is the light about the Universe. He is the light about humanity. He is the light about the true order of life. Go back to that first definition of radiant energy, the light that is also pure, shining in the darkness, bringing energy, and revealing the true meaning of all things: the light of the cosmos.

Then the value of the claim is revealed in the immediately following declaration; but mark its sublimity. There is no need to dwell upon it. "I am the light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

We conclude this meditation by reminding ourselves of the challenging word that fell from the lips of Jesus on other occasions, when He said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." In that same connection there He said, "Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." What a challenging word. I love it, and do not desire to interpret it, but apply it. "I am the light of the world." "Ye are the light of the world."

One more reference to the incident at the beginning of the chapter. See the light when He lifted Himself up and said to that group of accusing men, He among you that is sinless, let him first cast a stone at her. Down in the darkened secret of their lives the light flashed, and they could not bear it, and they turned and went out from the eldest of them to the youngest. See the light shed upon that woman, into her heart. He knew her. He knew all the circumstances. "Where are thine accusers? Did no man condemn thee?" "No man, Lord." " Neither do I condemn thee." He showed her the possibilities, "Go thy way, no longer continue in sin." "Again therefore Jesus said, I am the light of the world."