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

**56. THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP**

*"Most certainly, I tell you, one who doesn't enter by the door into the sheep fold, but climbs up some other way, is a thief and a robber. But one who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don't know the voice of strangers." Jesus spoke this parable to them, but they didn't understand what he was telling them. Jesus therefore said to them again, "Most certainly, I tell you, I am the sheep's door. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters in by me, he will be saved, and will go in and go out, and will find pasture. The thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."*

*John 10:1-10*

IT WILL be remembered that John has recorded eight occasions upon which our Lord employed the Divine name, "I am," in making claims for Himself. Of these three are essential, plain declarations, "Before Abraham was, I am." "I am the resurrection and the life, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." With these we are not dealing in this present series, which is concerned with the parabolic illustrations.

Of the eight, five were such of the essential claim as it was uttered in the words "I am." This is the third of these, "I am the door" and it is closely linked to the next study on the good Shepherd.

Yet the phases are so different so that we take them necessarily as separate studies. We consider then this illustration, "I am the door"; following the usual method of enquiring the subject our Lord was intending to illustrate; then considering the figure He employed; deducing from these two things teaching for ourselves.

What was it that our Lord was illustrating? We may take these parables of Jesus, and apply them in ways that are really not appropriate, and so miss the real value of them, unless we know what our Lord was talking about at the time. His friends and His critics were round about Him when He said, "I am the door," Looking carefully at the passage in verse seven we read this, "Jesus therefore said unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep." Whenever we read "therefore" we ask, Wherefore? What does the *therefore* lean back upon? Go back to the previous verse. "This parable spake Jesus unto them; but they understood not what things they were which He spake unto them. Jesus therefore said unto them again." He repeated the parable in a new form, and with a new emphasis, "I am the door of the sheep." The word "parable" in verse six should not be there, for John never uses the word parable, though we sometimes render it so. That is inadequate. For our understanding, it would be better if we used the word allegory. That is the word of John. This allegory spake Jesus to them, and they did not understand. Now we find out why He said again, "I am the door."

But what was the parable? It is the parable of a door; it is the parable of a way into a fold through the door; the only way into the fold through the door. So the word "therefore" drives us back to verse six, which explains the "therefore." The reason was that those who heard Him speaking did not understand what He had said, the allegory He had employed of a sheepfold, and a door of entrance.

What then was it all about? Why did He use that parable? It was a remarkable thing Jesus said. In the background we have the story of His giving of sight to a man born blind. Everything grew out of that. It is the only record we have of Jesus dealing with what we call now congenital disease, a man born blind. We remember the story. When He had given that man his sight, it aroused a great deal of interest and attention among the people, and they were very much puzzled by it. What did they do? Arrested, perplexed, they took this man to the constituted religious authorities. The Hebrew background of authority is seen in this story. The Pharisees were those who, as Jesus said upon another occasion, sat in Moses' seat. They were the interpreters of the law; but they had become far more than that. They had become those who claimed full and final authority to interpret the order of life. The people brought this blind man to them.

Without going into the wonderful story of what happened, I come to the consummation where I find this statement (9:34), "They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out." Be particular when you read that. Do not imagine they were in some room of the temple courts, and that they went to the door and put him out. It is far more than that. They pronounced upon him the word of excommunication. They put him out of the order in which they themselves officiated. They resented any interference. As we look back, we see a strange thing happen. The man born blind, who has received his sight, - and he is quite certain of that, - who is in controversy with these very rulers, is approaching a larger understanding of the fact of Jesus Himself. "Whether He be a sinner, I know not," he said at one point. Then he went further and said, How has a man who is a sinner done this thing? They replied, "Dost thou teach us?" and they put him out. They would brook no such interference with their religious, legal, or civic authority. Consequently they put him out. He was cut off by their action from relationship with that whole order of life in which he had been born, and to which they all belonged.

What happened? Jesus heard that they had excommunicated him, that they had cast him out, and finding him, He said, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" And the man answered, "And who is He, Lord, that I may believe on Him?" There is a recognition of superiority expressed in terms of courtesy, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe?" And Jesus said, "Thou hast both seen Him, and He it is that speaketh with thee." And the man said, "Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him."

Two scenes. A man excommunicated by the religious authorities. Jesus found him, challenged him on one central point, that of His own personality, and the man did not understand; and yet there was something in the very tones of Jesus, so that the man said, I believe, and he worshipped Him. Excommunicated, put outside, the door shut against him by the religious authority; and Jesus stands in front of him, and opens a door into a new order, receives him to Himself, accepts his worship.

Then Jesus turning to those who were round about Him, Pharisees and others, said, "He that entereth not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."

They did not understand Him; therefore He said again, "I am the door of the sheep," and presently, "I am the good Shepherd." The two statements are linked. However, we are dealing with the first. We see something not fanciful, but something very real, though at this distance we may forget the surroundings, the people round. The disciples saw what He was doing. The man had been excommunicated. Then He went to him, He received him. Now He says, What I did was to present Myself to that soul as the Door, entry through which he found himself in a new order, an entirely new economy.

The subject, then, our Lord was illustrating was the institution of a new order altogether, a new economy, entry into which was through Him, and through Him alone; the fold, and the way into it. This man had been admitted into the fold by that way.

Stay now with the figure itself, an Eastern fold. Jesus said in the first verse "the door into the fold of the sheep." We must be careful to draw the distinction between the fold and the flock. The fold was a walled or palisaded enclosure, always open to the wind. The very word translated fold implies that, the sweeping wind, not a roof, but an enclosing wall. The sheep did not climb the walls. In that country there was only one entry, one door, never two. The door - apparent paradox - was merely an opening in the wall or palisade. It was never a gateway in those Eastern folds, never a door on hinges. It was merely an opening. That is the picture that was in the mind of Christ, familiar to all who heard Him when He said "I am the door of the sheep."

An illustration had much effect upon me many years ago now, and I have quoted it before, but will repeat it. It was my privilege to cross the Atlantic with Sir George Adam Smith. He told me this story. He was travelling in the East one day, and came up to one of those folds, a wall in this case, and there was an opening in the wall. The shepherd was on hand, so Sir George said to him, "Is that a fold for sheep?" "Oh yes," he replied. Sir George then said, "I only see one way in." "Yes," said the man, "there it is, there is the door," pointing to the opening in the wall. Then Sir George said to him, "But there is no door there"; and to his amazement - for it was naturally said, they were not talking of the New Testament, or of Christianity - this shepherd said to him, "Oh, I am the door." Sir George said his mind went back to John's record. He said to the shepherd, "What do you mean, by calling yourself the door?" To which the shepherd replied, "The sheep go inside, and I come there and lie down across the threshold, and no sheep can get out except over my body, and no wolf can get in except over me."

That illustration is enough. "I am the door of the sheep." We come to the subject of the shepherd in our next study. But what does all this mean? Keep in mind the surroundings, the blind man excommunicated, and admitted, put outside the ancient order, but brought into close fellowship with Jesus. What did He do that day? His parable illustrates what He did. First we see in that act, perhaps the first of its kind in the ministry of Jesus, His supersedure of a failing religious order. That order had excommunicated the man. What did Jesus do? Christ excommunicated the whole order. He put it outside the realm of authority. That is what He meant when He said, "All that came before Me are thieves and robbers." That verse seems to have troubled some people. He was not referring to the prophets and Moses. He was referring to those who were claiming that final authority that these men claimed, when they excommunicated the man. In that sense in which they had claimed authority they were only thieves and robbers. He claimed to be the door, the Superseder of a failing order.

My mind travels away to that parenthesis in the letter to the Hebrews, when the writer said "The law made nothing perfect." There the reference was not to the law of God merely, but to the whole economy supposedly based upon the law of God. But it had perfected nothing. All it had done in the case of this man was to put him outside, excommunicate him. Jesus once said, addressing these very rulers, "Woe unto you lawyers! for ye took away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." They supposed they were putting a man outside the pale of religion. They were really preventing him, and yet preparing him for entering into that realm, as it was now to be administered by the Lord Himself.

It is beautiful here to see what He says in the ninth verse, as the result of entering in through the door. "I am the door; by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture." Three things, ponder them. If any man enters through Me into this new order, into this fold, and becomes a member of the flock, he finds salvation. That is the first thing. "He shall go in and go out," the pathway of service. But he shall also find pasture, he shall have sustenance.

How does it all begin? Go back and look at that blind man face to face with Christ. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Some MSS. render that "Son of man." Whichever rendering is accepted makes no difference at all; for "the Son of man" was the Lord's favourite description of Himself. If He here called Himself the Son of man it does not devalue the thought. Dost thou believe in Me? Yet the title had been used, whether Son of man or Son of God. And the man said, Who is He, that I may believe? Let us try to put ourselves into the soul of the blind man. For the first time he had been able to see, to look upon the shimmer of the waters of Galilee, had seen his mother's face, and was able to see this Being, and He says, Thou hast seen Him, and I am He. At once the man's soul went over to Him in glad surrender, "Lord, I believe," and he offered Him worship. That is how he went into the fold. That is how every man enters the fold. That is how every human being enters, face to face with Christ Who challenges them. He does not ask us if we believe the Apostles' Creed. He does not ask if we have accepted this view or the other, but, Who am I? Do you believe in Me? Yes, I believe; and, believing, I worship. So the fold is entered.

The overwhelming revelation is that Christ is the way of entrance to the fold of the Kingdom of God, with all its privileges and all its responsibilities. If other systems professedly having all authority cast men outside, He confronts them and says, Here is the door, here is the way. All this harmonizes with what He said to the disciples a little later on. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one cometh unto the Father but by Me." The fold is the place of the Kingship of God found, yielded to, acknowledged; and the way in is Christ. He stands in the gap and says, "I am the door." To go back to Sir George Adam Smith's story, He is the door, and we cannot go out except across His body, and no ravening wolf can reach those sheep except across His body. "I am the door."