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

**59. A GRAIN OF WHEAT**

*"Now there were certain Greeks amongst those that went up to worship at the feast. These, therefore, came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn, Andrew came with Philip, and they told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Most certainly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life. If anyone serves me, let him follow me. Where I am, there my servant will also be. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him."*

*John 12:20-26*

WE FIND ourselves now in the last hours of our Lord's public ministry. As we follow the records, the incident recorded in this paragraph (12:20-26) is the last of which we have any record in the public work of Jesus. Preceding this incident there had been His entry to Jerusalem, and His conflict with the rulers. At the end of that conflict there had shone upon Him that gleam of light as the poor widow, passing the treasury, had shown her devotion to the God of her fathers as she cast in all her living. Then it was that the Greeks came. We should note that these were Greeks, not Greek Jews. There is a distinction clearly seen by the reader of the Greek New Testament between Hellenes, and Hellenistes. These were Hellenes - Greeks.

Immediately after this incident we have the chapters thirteen to seventeen, in which we see Jesus alone with His own, the world shut out. At the close of that period with His own, He crossed the brook Kidron, and the end came. This is but to remind us of the atmosphere that necessarily demands careful thought and attention.

We are considering now this parabolic illustration that our Lord used in connection with the coming of the Greeks, taking our usual method, enquiring first, what the subject was He intended to illustrate; then looking carefully at the figure He employed to illustrate His subject; in order that we may consider the teaching that is deduced.

What made Jesus use this illustration? John records that He began by that formula, which shows He intended to draw special attention to what He was going to say, "Verily, verily." When Andrew and Philip came and proffered the request to Him, telling Him what the Greeks were saying, He said, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." Patently that was a parabolic illustration, but of what? We start with that question.

We cannot understand this except we notice why the Greeks came. That may be difficult to see, except by general deduction and consideration. I venture therefore to take that general consideration, and make a deduction. These were Greeks, Hellenes. The word marks them as to race and nationality. If they were Greeks, not Hellenistic Jews, they were Greek proselytes to the Jewish faith, because John distinctly tells us they had come up to worship at the feast. We know full well that there were at that time very many who, from other nations and other peoples and races and religions, turned towards the Hebrew religion, and became proselytes of the gate, definitely accepting Jewish ritual and the Jewish law, and the Jewish view of God. There is no doubt these Greeks were of that number, and they had come up to worship at the feast.

What made them ask to see Jesus? The first self-evident answer is, He was being talked about. Men everywhere were talking about Him. The thronging crowds gathering to the feast were all, sooner or later, talking about Him. His fame had gone out everywhere, and the things He had been saying were well known. Many had received what He had said, and had been obedient, and were enrolled among the number of His disciples, who were more than twelve. After His resurrection, five hundred brethren went up to Galilee to meet Him; and there were multitudes who had been so influenced. Everyone knew something about Jesus; and these Greeks, coming up to the feast, would hear about Him.

Now we come to the point where we cannot be definitely dogmatic. It may be their coming was one of curiosity. They had heard about this wonderful Teacher, about the strange supernatural things He had done, of healing all manner of disease, and cleansing the lepers, and all the wonders of His work. They may have thought they would like to look at Him, and to have a conversation with Him. That may all be true; but the whole method of the answer of Jesus makes me believe there was something far more profound in it than that. I see men who had turned from paganism to God, in the Hebrew religion. That is the first thing. There is no doubt about that. Tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue in the religions in which they had been brought up, all the multiplied religions of the land to which they belonged. These Greeks, for very weariness of heart and soul, had gone to the Hebrew religion with its one God, the living God. Here they were, at the feast, keeping the law and observing the ritual, they had come up with the multitudes to worship. I believe they had become not merely disappointed with their pagan religion, but disillusioned in the matter of Judaism. These men seeking after God, seeking after the truth, longing to find it, had turned from idols to the living God. Then they heard about a Teacher, and they felt there was something in what they had heard, something different, something higher, something nobler. They were finding out Judaism was not satisfying the deepest hunger of their souls. So they found their way to the place where Jesus was that day with His disciples all round about Him; and got hold of that delightful man, Philip, who Elvet Lewis long ago said was a man always on the edge of the crowd, never obtrusive, but ready to lead others to his Master. It may be these Greeks were attracted to him because he bore a Greek name. But they proffered their request, and said, Sir, we want to see Jesus. What a world of meaning there was in that. I think they were honest and sincere.

So the human desire lay at the back of what Jesus said. The desire was shared by His disciples. They were a little hesitant about it. They held a splendid committee meeting, splendid because it only consisted of two, that is, Philip and Andrew. They got together. Mark the psychology of this. Philip knew that something was about to happen. He had been with the disciples during these six months in which Jesus had been telling them distinctly that He was going to die. At any rate Philip knew that his Master was occupied with great thinking and great sorrow; and therefore he wondered whether he ought to trouble Him. So he went to Andrew. We are not told of any discussion. It was a good committee meeting, in which they did not waste any time. They both went to Jesus and told Him of the request. I think they were anxious that these Greeks should see Him, men of another religion and nation to see their Lord and Master. They wanted them to hear Him because they were of a wider realm. There is human desire on the part of the enquiring Greeks, and on the part of the disciples. To that Jesus answered, and the figure of speech He used was intended to illuminate and illustrate what He said in reply to that enquiry and request of the Greeks.

What then made Him say what He said? Notice the first thing He said, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." There we have a full stop. I wish there was not, because we are inclined to stop there. Because of that it has been suggested by some brilliant expositors that Jesus knew the Hebrew people were rejecting Him, and now He saw the Gentile world opening before Him, and therefore He said, the hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified, because the Gentile world was now enquiring, and were coming to Him. I hold that is utterly wrong, and there is no warrant for it. Go back over the Gospel, and notice the repeated references to the "hour." The first reference is when He was talking to His mother Mary at Cana. She had come to Him, hoping that He would work a wonder by which His glory would be revealed, and He said, the hour had not come. What did He mean then? That He would not perform the miracle? No, for immediately He did what she had asked. He told her that His glory would not be seen through the wonder of the miracle He worked, for His hour was not yet come. That hour was referred to again and again, but always as postponed. When the Greeks came and said, We want to see Jesus; He said, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified; verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone." That is the answer. Do not stop with the full stop at the word "glorified" in your thinking. How is the Son of man glorified? How has the hour come? What is the hour? "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone." Our Lord was speaking out of His own consciousness. He knew that He was not seen, and could not be seen, as He then stood before His disciples and those Greeks. He meant that they would only see Him in one way. He might have said to Philip and Andrew, You have not seen Me. But they had! They had been with Him for three and a half years. No, He said, You have never seen Me.

Turn on to the fourteenth chapter. He is talking to the group, and Philip is there, and says, "Show us the Father" and He said, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know Me, Philip?" He had not known Him, had not seen Him, and none of them had. When He heard the Greeks had asked to see Him, He declared that the hour was come in which the thing would be possible. The hour is come in which the Son of man should be glorified. What is the hour? "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone." That is what He was illustrating. We find as we listen to Him, His clear understanding of the only way by which He could be revealed in all the fulness and meaning of Himself, and the only way in which men could ever see Him truly, and know Him. That is what He intended to illustrate.

This incident moves in exactly the same realm as His great soliloquy recorded by Luke alone. In the midst of all the difficulties of His ministry, one day He burst out in these words: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, would that it were already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The same thing. Now let Me tell you what that hour will be, as though Jesus had said, and let Me show you what that hour will be. I will do it by taking a simple illustration: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit."

Pause now with the figure itself. What is this figure our Lord used? "A corn of wheat " said the Old Version. "A grain of wheat" says the Revised. Either will do to explain the word He made use of. What is a kernel of wheat? One single grain, a seed. Take a seed of wheat, a corn of wheat, a grain of wheat. Jesus said, There are conditions under which any grain of wheat abides alone. But if that grain of wheat is planted, and it dies, and we watch, we shall see first the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. The one lonely grain has been multiplied into full corn in the ear, to borrow His words on another occasion, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty, because that grain of wheat has been dropped into the ground and died.

He is illustrating a tremendous truth concerning Himself. Take hold of the figure in simplicity. Imagine that you hold a grain of wheat in your hand, a little thing; the husk is on it, but inside the husk is the grain, and the scientists can tell you all the things that are in it. But while you look at that grain, you cannot really see it. Oh yes, you say, there it is. Philip and Andrew could see Jesus. There He was. The enquiring Greeks could see Jesus. There He was. The grain of wheat, can I see it? Yes, but I cannot see its meaning. I cannot see its possibilities. I cannot see what really lies potentially within the little grain.

Would I really see it? Very well then; put it in the ground. Then you will have to stand aside. All you can see of it is that it dies. We have to see that. Then presently the blade, the ear, the full corn, thirty - sixty - a hundred-fold in the ear. But they were all in the little grain you looked at, that was sown. It is not done. Husk it. Get those grains out, thirty, sixty, a hundred; and so the process is running on. Whether it is quite permissible or not, I cannot help remembering something in the Old Testament,

"There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains;

The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon."

The harvest from a grain. We cannot see it, when we see the grain. We would see Jesus , and in great wisdom and perfect understanding He saw they could see Him, but they could not see Him. They could only really see Him as He fell and died; that out of that death of His there should spring life, the life that multiplied, life that grew until the harvests should be gathered in. He would be seen in that way, and that way alone.

So we may gather up the general teaching. The Lord applied the principle generally as a philosophy after He had given the illustration, when in the twenty-fifth verse He said, "He that loveth his life loseth it." If he love it, hold it and nurse it and care for it, he is losing it. "He that hateth his life in this world," lays it down in self-denial and abnegation, to death, he shall hold it, "shall keep it unto the life eternal." That is the great principle contained in His illustration.

He went on and applied it immediately to His disciples. "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me." Where was He going? He was going to the Cross. Where was He going? He was going to resurrection and triumph. Where was He going? The grain of wheat was going to fall into the ground and die. Where was He going? Through that death life should spring, and harvests should result. "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me," and accept that principle. Whether by dying or living, "where I am, there shall also My servant be; if any man serve Me, him will the Father honour."

Then He applied it to Himself. "Now is My soul troubled." The hour is come, "and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour?" Shall I ask God to deliver Me from this hour of the death of the grain of wheat? He did not ask that. "Father, glorify Thy name." That was the supreme passion of His heart. Follow through the teaching, and He clearly shows how He was passing through trouble to triumph, through death to life, through suffering to glory. It is Christ seen in glory Who is speaking in life through death, in triumph through trouble that the Christ is seen at all. No, they cannot see Me yet, but they shall see Me; for as the corn of wheat, so I will pass into death, and out of that death will come new life.

So from infinite mystery so profound, all wrapped in the flesh Divine of the Son of man, that men did not see the glory, He came to manifestation through death and through life.