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

**60. THE WASHING OF FEET**

*"Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his time had come that he would depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came from God, and was going to God, arose from supper, and laid aside his outer garments. He took a towel and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. Then he came to Simon Peter. He said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "You don't know what I am doing now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "Someone who has bathed only needs to have his feet washed, but is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." For he knew him who would betray him, therefore he said, "You are not all clean."*

*John 13:1-11*

WE HAVE no parable, nor parabolic illustration in this paragraph; but we have the record of a parabolic action on the part of our Master. Our Lord's application of what He did shows that He intended it to be an illustration in action, and so a parabolic illustration.

It occurs in this wonderful section of John's record in which our Lord is seen at the end of His public ministry alone with His own disciples. All the public teaching was over, and the works wrought in the sight of the multitudes had ceased. He had gathered around Him that first little band whom He had chosen to be with Him, and that He might send forth in His name. Through these chapters (13 - 17) there was no stranger there. Jesus was alone with His own. There were thirteen men there; our Lord Himself, and twelve others. Very soon the number was reduced. As a matter of fact, this very parabolic action led to the exclusion of Judas.

We give attention then to the action in itself, and proceed first to ask, What was our Lord intending to illustrate in His action on this memorable occasion? Then we will examine the figure revealed in the action, and which He thus employed for teaching His own. Finally we seek to gather for ourselves the teaching that lies within it.

What was the subject He was illustrating? We have a remarkable glimpse here in the beginning, of the mind of the Lord Himself, His consciousness, the matters that were possessing His thought, and having their influence upon all He said, and all He did. That mind is remarkably revealed in the opening words of the chapter, "Now before the feast of the passover, Jesus knowing." That is repeated in verse three, "Jesus knowing." We are told of two things, all He did, and all He said on this occasion. Consequently we are approaching an understanding of what He intended to illustrate, as we recognize His own mind, His own consciousness.

What did He know? First, that His hour was come that He should depart out of the world unto the Father. I am not concerned with what follows, although it is important. John here emphasizes the consciousness of Christ at the time. That was the supreme thing, the first thing, that He knew that His hour was come. What hour? That "He should depart out of this world unto the Father." The consciousness of Christ is marvelously revealed to us, and the merging in it of His knowledge of all that lay before Him, all the terror that was in front of Him, and yet the consciousness of triumph through the terror. He knew His hour was come when the Greeks came. He then said "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." Now the hour was come. The Greeks could only see Him as He went down into death, and came out again in resurrection power, as the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies. Now, He knew that the hour was come that He should depart out of the world. With all reverence, by way of interpretation, He knew how He was to depart out of the world. He had been telling His disciples for six months over and over again of the method of His going. They, dear souls, had been frightened. Now He knew that the hour had come, and He knew the method of it. He knew the issue of it. Yes, He was departing out of the world, but where was He going? To the Father, and the note of perfect assurance and victory is there. That is one thing He knew.

What was the other thing that John says He knew? I am not concerned with the immediate application of it, but with the general stating. He knew that "the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God." There was the consciousness that His hour was come, and there was the certain consciousness of His own authority, which He had received from His Father. "All things were delivered into His hands." We look at Him, and as we look we wonder, All things? Just beyond is the Cross, when He was delivered into the hands of sinful men. That is only the surface outlook. All things were delivered into His hands, and He knew that; and He knew that He had come from God, and was going to God. So the lights and glories as of the Urim and Thummim on the breastplate of the priest in the olden days flash through this; the mind of Christ. That is the background. But what else is here? We have the background of the disciples, those who were round about Him, and of all that had been happening amongst them during the previous six months to which we have referred already. Ponder again carefully those last six months, from Caesarea Philippi, and Peter's confession and the Cross. Do not forget He had never explicitly told them He was going to the Cross till then; but from that moment there was a feeling of estrangement. They could not understand. I am not criticizing them. We should not have understood; and they did not. We find over and over again our Lord told them about His Cross, took them aside to tell them, and to tell them carefully in detail; and in every case we find these two startling facts, that He never told them about His Cross but that He also mentioned His resurrection; and also that in every case, immediately after His emphasizing of His Cross, they were disputing, quarrelling as to who was the greatest. There they were, men thinking about their own pre-eminence, and their own positions of power; and there is a sense in which that was all permissible; and yet it was entirely self-centred. Who is the greatest? In that Kingdom who shall have the position of power, and two men thought they ought to have it, and got their mother to speak for them. It is a way mothers have sometimes! When they had done this, the ten were angry with them for having done it, and the reason was the ten were angry because they wanted the position themselves. That is not being unkind to them. There is the background. Jesus knew what was in their hearts, and by that symbolic action, that parabolic action, the subject illustrated was first the heart of the Lord Himself, that those men might see Him by a simple act, yet so sublime, that it holds us in its thrall to-day. Therefore in order that they might understand what was the true responsibility of their discipleship, the subject illustrated in this parabolic action was the heart of the Lord, and the responsibilities consequent upon discipleship to that Lord.

Now the figure itself. What was this that Jesus did? Verse ten. "Jesus saith to Peter, He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all." I am not now concerned with the last part of the verse. "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet." The Authorized Version renders this, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet." The Revised Version has the word "bathed," "He that is bathed." I think the word "bathed" is better, for there are two Greek verbs there, which give us in a flash the picture behind this, and the thing Jesus was using as an illustration. The first of the Greek verbs rendered "washed" in the Authorized, and now rendered "bathed" in the Revised, is a verb that means just that, to bathe the whole person, the verb *luuo*; whereas the verb *nipto* is to cleanse the hands or feet, that is, wash, and it is distinct from bathing. Jesus said to Peter, He that is bathed only needs to wash his feet; and in a moment the Eastern habits are revealed. To bathe meant complete cleansing, and the picture behind this is that of a man having been to the baths, and completely bathed, taking his way home through the dust of the highway, contracting dust upon his feet, and when he reaches home he will cleanse his feet from defilement contracted after he has bathed. That is an Eastern figure, and all would be familiar with it as Jesus said, "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet." After the complete cleansing of the bath, that does not need to be repeated; but he does need to be cleansed from any defilement as he walks by the way. That is what our Lord was illustrating. So He said to them, You are all clean. You have all been bathed, but you may have contracted defilement in your walk. The figure of speech was an Eastern one of the bath and the foot-washing.

Look at the story once more, and observe what Jesus did. The action must have been very arresting to those men, because it must have been something entirely unusual. To wash the feet of these men sitting round the board was a most unusual procedure. Notice the statement of verse two, which is open to different meanings, two alternatives "during supper." In verse four we are told, knowing these things, He "riseth from supper, and layeth aside His garments." What He did, He did then, "He riseth from supper." The alternative is that during the meal He did this; or at the close He did it, and not at first. It is difficult for the Western mind to see the unusualness of this action. This was not the close of a journey, when they constantly brought water to wash away the dust of the highway. There were constant ceremonial washings of the feet before the meal. Here it was not at the close of a journey, or specifically before a meal. It was either during a meal or at its close. This is important. He suddenly arose, and laying aside His garments, He took a towel and girded Himself, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet. The particular description of that unusual procedure would immediately arrest their special attention. What could it mean that the One Who was practically the Host, suddenly in the midst of the meal, or when it was over, did what men usually did before a meal, or after a journey?

What was He doing? He said to them, Do you know what I have done? They did not understand. Then He explained, and we see to the heart of it. There was the supreme and wonderful revelation of His heart to those men. Two were there, Judas and Jesus, and the heart of Judas was Satan inspired by hatred, as the result of Satanic action, a determination to betray. In the heart of Jesus there was the passion to serve, and to serve in self-emptying action. Watch Him. He riseth, He girdeth Himself, He washeth. What is that? Girding meant far more in the East. The towel was the badge of slavery. It was the slave who was girded about the loins with a towel of homespun or common material. Jesus, taking a towel, laying aside His garments, girded Himself, drew it around Him, and took the attitude of a slave, and did the slave's work. Taking a basin, and pouring water, He carried the basin and knelt in the attitude of a slave. Whether Peter was the first, I will not argue; but supposing he was, He knelt down at Peter's feet, and began, as a slave would do, to wash the feet of the disciples. When Peter protested, Jesus said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." I love to read his answer, after his protest, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

Turn over to one of the letters Peter wrote. "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Yes, Peter came to understand. He came to know that in that hour he saw into the very heart of Jesus. There was the outshining of the grace of God in the marvel of that action. He emptied Himself, He humbled Himself, He bent. He was their Lord and Master. They called Him that. He was their Teacher and their Lord. He said, You are quite right. I am your Teacher, I am your Lord. But what is the Teacher doing now? What is the sovereign Lord of all authority doing now? Behold Him a slave, doing a slave's work to His disciples, and observe the heart of Jesus. So the parabolic action was a revelation of His grace.

It was more. It was the shining of His glory. There is the grace, but there is also the glory. That knotted towel was the badge of slavery; but here is the remarkable fact that the knotted garment was also the insignia of princes; with the very same method of fastening and tying. The difference was in material; for the slave a rough homespun cloth; for princes purple or gold. I think back through the years; and John saw in that girdle not only the badge of slavery, but the girdle of kingship. We do not forget when he was in Patmos, and he had a vision of this Self-same One in all His glory, in that marvelous description he has given, among other things he wrote, "girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle." Yes, he saw that in Patmos, and looking back he saw the sackcloth of the slave transmuted into the glory and purple of sovereignty.

No, said Jesus, you do not understand now, but you will some day. That is what He was showing forth; the transfiguration of service at the lowest to sovereignty at the highest.

Then He applied it in words we have already referred to. "If I then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet." What does it mean? He knew that in the walk of those who were cleansed by the bathing there would be the contraction of defilement; and they would need the washing of the feet. He said, You have seen Me do it; you ought also to be ready to do it for each other. Paul was writing to the Galatian Christians and he said this (6:1), "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in a spirit of meekness, lest thou also be tempted." What our Lord was saying to His fellow-disciples was, I know the way, all along this pilgrimage cleansed men will contract defilement. When your brother does, your business is not to emphasize the defilement, not to turn to your brother the cold shoulder of pride and indifference. Your business is to attempt to wash his feet, to restore such an one, as Paul says, in the spirit of meekness. As we do that, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ shines out, and the glory of the triumph of love is manifested in us and through us.