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

**61. THE FATHER'S HOUSE AND MANY MANSIONS**

*"In my Father's house are many homes. If it weren't so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also. You know where I go, and you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me."*

*John 14:2-6*

THIS PARABOLIC illustration our Lord employed while still in conversation with His own, in those final and intimate hours before He passed to His Cross. Immediately after the parabolic action of the washing of the disciples' feet Judas was excluded. He then referred to His going once more, and told them quite plainly, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." That statement of our Lord led to discussion. Only four men spoke, and our Lord answered them; Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Jude. In the course of His replies occurs this symbolic illustration.

This is a very familiar passage. I have said these words are parabolic, and they were intended to illustrate; "In My Father's house are many mansions." Following our custom in these studies we consider first the subject He was illustrating, which is of importance; then we look particularly at the figure He employed, in order that we may deduce the teaching from the utterance itself.

The background here is so necessary. We saw that when dealing with the washing of the disciples' feet. Again it is important here. We must bear in mind that strangely perplexing hour for the disciples. Evidence of it comes out in the things they said to Him when He told them He was going. They could not understand "Whither I go, ye cannot come." We are familiar with what happened. Peter said, Where art Thou going? Thomas said, We do not know where Thou art going, how can we know the way? Philip said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jude said, "What is come to pass that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Their perplexity is self-evident.

But observe that all these questions or words spoken by these four representative men, were concerned with spiritual matters. Peter knew that Jesus was going to death. He had been told that again and again for six months. Now they knew perfectly well His enemies were waiting for Him, and that He was going to death. When Peter said, Where are You going? "Whither goest Thou?" he was peering out into the unknown mysterious spaces. Jesus answered him, and in the course of that answer He employed the words we are looking at.

Go on to Thomas. If Peter was trying to visualize a destination, Thomas, not knowing the destination, was perplexed about the way. How can we know the way, if we do not know where You are going? Jesus replied to him.

Then Philip, that quiet, unobtrusive soul, who thought great and profound things, and did not talk much about them, blurted out the whole of the agony of humanity, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

Then Jude, facing the practical present, asked his question. He looked round about the world again, and faced the practical issue of it all. Let us recognize that their immediate earthly trouble was earthly. They were losing Him. After three and a half years in His close company, travelling here and there; watching Him, listening to Him; now He is going; they are going to be left. That was their trouble.

Yet it was quite evident from everything that He had been saying to them He was going forward with majesty. There was no cringing. He told them He was going to suffer. He told them He was going to die. He told them He was going to resurrection. They never seem to have grasped the fact of the resurrection.

So we look at them, perplexed and fearful. The earth was so real, it was there; their feet were planted on it. They were living in it. They were breathing its surrounding atmosphere, and seeing its hills and its valleys, its lakes and its rivers. While He was there it was so real, and after all was said and done the beyond was unknown and uncertain. I do not think any of them were Sadducees but Pharisees, prior to their capture by Jesus, and they believed in the Spirit, and the spirit world, and the life beyond. They were not satisfied with a merely moral and ethical code; but they were not clear about the beyond; what did lie beyond, "Whither goest Thou?" They wanted to know the destination, wherever it may be in the far-flung spaces of the universe. How are men going to get there? We do not know the destination. We do not know the route. What is the way? said Thomas, and there seems to have been in the mind of Philip, perhaps in the sense of all of them, whatever the destination, whatever the route that led to it, the ultimate was God. He said "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Then Jude, a little more practical for the moment than the rest, asked how the things they had seen should be manifested to the world.

It was in the midst of His reply to these words of Peter He said, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow afterwards." Peter then replied, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee even now? I will lay down my life for Thee." He never said a finer thing, and he meant it. Our Lord replied, "Wilt thou lay down thy life for Me? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice. Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions." That is where He was going. "If it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself."

So we come to the figure itself. He was illuminating that whole thinking of theirs. They were in the presence of ineffable sorrow at His departure. They would be here in the world wondering. They would not be able to talk to Him, and to watch His deeds. He will be gone, whither? It was in answer to that wonder that He used this illustration.

What was the figure He employed? "In My Father's house are many mansions." "House," the simple word for a dwelling-place, a place of abode. Do not dismiss it by the use of the word simple. It is far more than simple. It was the word *oikos*, house. They all lived in houses. The dwelling-place is the simple meaning of it. He said in the house of My Father there are many mansions. "Mansions." The word has unfortunate connotations. Some people think the house is a villa residence. Some people have sung about the mansions over yonder. What is this word "mansions"? It is the word *mone*, which means simply an abode. The verb *meno* is a common word in the New Testament; but the word *mone* is not, only occurring here and in one other place, in verse twenty-three; both times from the lips of Jesus. "In My Father's house are many *mansions*"; "We will come … and make Our *abode* with him." So we have a double idea here, and we see at once that the term "house" is inclusive. I prefer to use for that the word "dwelling-place," and for the word "mansions," "abiding-places." That may not help us very much. Yet I would read it in that way. "In My Father's dwelling-place there are many abiding-places." The dwelling-place is greater than the abiding-places. All the abiding-places are in the dwelling-place. The great word there is "My Father's house," and the secondary, the subsidiary, is the "abiding-place."

What was He talking about? What Was He intending to teach when He used this figure of speech? Let us begin on the level of the evident and commonplace. Twice in the course of the ministry of our Lord He made use of that phrase, "My Father's house." The first is in the second chapter of this Gospel. When He was cleansing the Temple, He said "My Father's house." There He was referring to the temple. He said it here, "In My Father's house are many mansions." The first figure is that of the temple itself. He referred to the temple as "the house of God " on other occasions. He called it the house in God in Matthew (12:4). He spoke of it as His own house, assuming the place of God. At the terrible end He referred to the temple not as My Father's house, or My house, but "your house is left unto you desolate." His references were all to the temple.

Let us be content to spend time with the simplicities of this. Go back and look at the temple. He was familiar with it, and often went into it. We have accounts of His having been in three parts of the temple. At the feast of tabernacles He was in the treasury. At the feast of dedication He was in Solomon's porch. In the case of the widow He was over against the treasury, sitting there.

What was the temple like? It has often been described as it existed then. It was in process of building. It was not finished until ten years after the crucifixion of Jesus. There it was, a wonderful building. A quotation from *Jerusalem* by George Adam Smith may help us to see it.

"Herod's temple consisted of a house divided like its predecessor into the Holy of Holies, and the Holy Place; a porch; an immediate forecourt with an altar of burnt offering; a Court of Israel; in front of this a Court of Women; and round the whole of the preceding a Court of the Gentiles."

Again,

"Chambers for officials, and a meeting-place for the Sanhedrim. Against the walls were built side-chambers, about thirty-eight in all." The temple was a house. There were many abiding-places in it. I believe that that temple, as a figure of speech and symbol, was in the mind of our Lord when He said, "In My Father's house there are many abiding-places."

But it is equally certain that He saw the temple in its true significance, and understood its symbolism. Go back to the first words about the construction of that temple, in Exodus. "And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." He saw it as the house of God. Later, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, referring to the tabernacle, which was the true pattern after all, said, "All things were made according to the pattern that was shewed thee in the mount." Again, all those things were "copies of the things in the heavens." Once more, "made with hands, like in pattern to the true."

So that temple was patterned after things in the heavens. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." When read next do not think merely of that wonderful stretch of sky some night when the moon is at the full, and the stars are out, a more wonderful sight than in the day; but all the ultimate beauty is seen in the heavens. That temple, that tabernacle, and all the account of it is there, is according to the copy of things in the heavens; and it was called the house of God. It had many parts, many sections, many places, all having their value, all having their place. I am not so much concerned with the temple as with the tabernacle of old. It was a copy. "In my Father's house are many mansions." As though He had said, You go up to the temple, and you go into many parts and divisions and rooms. There are many abiding-places in the house.

Then of what was He talking to them? What was the meaning of it all? To those men questing after the beyond, and yet earth-bound in their vision and thinking, He was going. They said, When He is gone we have lost Him; and He gave them the universe in a flash, "My Father's house." In that whole universe there are many abiding-places. This earth is one, but it is not the only one. All the symbolism of the tabernacle breaks down in the presence of the vastness of the universe. There are many abiding-places, and He was showing them that He was merely leaving one abiding-place in the house to go to another. They could not go then, but they should go; and He was going to another abiding-place within the house. What for? To prepare a place for them.

What a wonderful expression that is, "To prepare a place for you." Somewhere out in the house of God, that vastness that baffles us, somewhere, that we cannot understand, He is going there to get a place fully furnished for you. How does He do it? By being there. As though He said to them, You will come presently, and when you come you will be at home because you will find Me there, somewhere in the Father's house. He did not tell them the locality. He did not tell them what they wanted to know, some description of locality. He said, It is all in the Father's house. There are many abiding-places. He was going to prepare a place for them, and He would come again and receive them.

What wonderful things are written that have their bearing here. Take one or two quotations. Go back to Solomon's time when he had built his temple, and was offering that marvelous prayer. He said, "But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded." If we would know the meaning of the phrase "My Father's house," we have it there suggestively, "the heaven" and "the heaven of heavens."

In close connection we turn to the prophet Isaiah. He says this, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite spirit; and that trembleth at My word." The house of God, eternity, the whole universe. It is so easy to write, but we cannot grasp it yet, for it transcends us.

Let us take another quotation. Stephen in his great defence said, "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands; as saith the prophet:

The heaven is My Throne.

And the earth the footstool of My feet;

What manner of house will ye build Me? saith the Lord;

Or what is the place of My rest?

Did not My hand make all these things?"

Later on Paul, in that later chapter in the Acts, says, "The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

No, that is not God's ultimate dwelling-place. Where is it? Eternity. The Father's house is the whole of the universe, and in that house there are many abiding-places. Earth is one. Jesus said, I am going to leave it, but I am not going outside the house of My Father. It has many abiding-places, and it is true of you and me, we are in one of the abiding-places, but we are in the Father's house. The whole universe is in that house. The loved ones that have gone from us have simply gone into another abiding-place. We cannot go yet, but He is there preparing the place; but it is the vastness of the universe.

These men on the earth level, earth-bound, questing after the beyond, were shown the beyond is here, for this is part of it. We are in the Father's house. He is there with us. He was going to another abiding-place to prepare for us, and if He went, He would come again and receive us, and we will be there together. Oh the wonder of the whole conception!

Thomas said, We do not know where it is. How do we know the way? He said, "I am the way," and that includes the universe, the part of this universe to which He has been; and more than the way, "I am the truth " concerning it. All secrets have their final solution in Me. I am more, I am the life of the Father's house. I think Philip had got nearer when he said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Then mark the marvel of it, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." He has not only seen the Father, but has seen all the Father's house, and has come to understand that within that house are many abiding-places. We might indulge in many speculations, not profitable. We are all so very clever and talk about these planets and stars. There was a book written by Mark Twain, not only humorous but philosophic, in which he described in his own curious way a man searching in the universe for this world. He came across some supernatural being out in the infinitudes of space, and asked him the way to the world, and the being said, Which world? to which he replied, "The world for which Christ died." Oh, said the man, He died for many worlds. I am not sure he was not right. I know that by His Cross He has reconciled all things to Himself in the heavens and on the earth. How far that Cross reaches out into the infinite distances I do not know; but I know they are within the Father's house, and I know that though He is not here as to bodily presence, He is in the Father's house, and He is getting ready for me.