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

**62. THE VINE**

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the farmer. Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already pruned clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can't bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man doesn't remain in me, he is thrown out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, you will ask whatever you desire, and it will be done for you. "In this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so you will be my disciples. Even as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and remain in his love. I have spoken these things to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be made full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what his lord does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you will ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you. "I command these things to you, that you may love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, since I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his lord.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you for my name's sake, because they don't know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me, hates my Father also. If I hadn't done amongst them the works which no one else did, they wouldn't have had sin. But now they have seen and also hated both me and my Father. But this happened so that the word may be fulfilled which was written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.' "When the Counsellor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me. You will also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning."*

*John 15:1-27*

THE ALLEGORY of the vine and its application is a complete discourse, occupying the whole of the fifteenth chapter and the first sixteen verses of the sixteenth chapter. This is one complete discourse of Jesus, recorded by John. Throughout the Gospel His teaching had been of the nature of discussions concerning Himself, with His enemies, or with His friends. That does not mean they are of any less value. Through the background of criticism and opposition we have a revelation of how our Lord dealt with it in the days of His flesh.

The circumstances of this particular discourse are familiar. He was still with His own. After the conversation with them, resulting from the difficulties and enquiries of Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Jude, they do seem to have been hushed into silence. Yet directly afterwards, once more discussion arose, that is after this discourse. In chapter 16 verse 17 we have the account of that. "What is that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye behold Me not; and again a little while, and ye shall see Me; and, Because I go unto the Father?" They were puzzled, perplexed. They did not now ask these questions of Him, but they were talking, and He knew they were, and He answered them. Again we find that there fell upon them evidently a very definite silence.

Before the great allegory of the vine there is evidently a gap between the end of the fourteenth chapter and the beginning of the fifteenth, where it is said, He said to the disciples, "Arise, let us go hence." I think there can be no doubt that when He said that, they arose and left the upper room, and it is an interesting though not vital question as to where they went from there. Beyond the great intercessory prayer (chapter 17) that concludes this section in which He had devoted Himself to His own, we read, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Kidron, where was a garden" (18:1), into Gethsemane.

Where then was this allegory uttered? That question cannot be answered finally. There are varied opinions, but two principal ones. Some believe that He took them from the upper room through the streets and into the temple. Passover was at hand, and at that time the great beautiful gates of the temple were left open all night that pilgrims might pass in and out. If He did take them there, as they passed through that gate they would see with the light of the Passover moon quite likely shining upon it, the national emblem. What was it? The golden vine. It has been suggested that He spoke by the side of those gates, "I am the vine, the true." I do not know personally, I think it is poetically beautiful. Others think He started out of the city altogether, and went down towards Kidron, and somewhere there, under God's sky, He uttered this great allegory. If so, wherever they looked, they could see the vines growing all round there.

When we think of these vines we must not think of the vines in this country, trained up a wall and growing and spreading, or in glass houses. We can see them still by acres in California, small vines, little vines growing in the open; self-contained, every one of them, but growing. If He went out there, and looked at those vines, and said, "I am the vine, the true," there was so much in what He said would be illustrated as He spoke. They would see here and there in the night, fires burning, in which branches cut out during the day were being destroyed.

He was using the vine as a figure of speech, a parabolic illustration in the form of this matchless allegory. We consider then, first, the figure of the vine which He employed, that we may deduce the teaching which He intended.

The background is the same as that seen in our last study. His disciples were gathered round Him, perplexed, and fearful of the future without Him. He had made it perfectly evident to them, and they knew it was true, because of the circumstances pointing to it, that they would not have Him with them much longer. He was going away, and Peter was troubled. That was the atmosphere; but He had just made them a remarkable promise. He had said to them, "I will not leave you desolate." I like to translate that literally, "I will not leave you orphans, I come unto you." They had heard Him say that. He was going, and yet He had told them He would not leave them orphans, or desolate, alone, that He would come to them.

Then He showed them how He would come. He would send "Another Comforter." He would send the Holy Spirit, to use the transliteration, the Paraclete, One called to the side of another. We have rendered it in two ways, Comforter and Advocate. He is my Comforter, He disannuls my orphanage; but He is also my Advocate, keeping in mind the things He spoke, keeping me alive to their consciousness, making His presence a real presence. He had told the disciples that.

Now to look at the figure He used, in order to interpret the new relationship with Himself which would be established by the way of the coming of the Comforter, the Advocate, the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. The vine illustrates the result of that new life into which they were to enter, the new experience they were going to have, of a new relationship with Himself. Such then was the subject illustrated.

Look at the figure of the vine. We cannot go far wrong if we stay in the realm of the material vine that bears grapes. But I think there was more in it than that when Jesus said, "I am the vine, the true." In our versions we read, "I am the true vine." That is not inaccurate, but it fails to carry over something which is there. They are exactly the same words in the Greek, but they are arranged thus. Some Greek scholars may think it is Greek idiom, but I think it is more in this case. He said, "I am the vine, the true." He added to the words "I am the vine," "the true"; and that suggests there had been things that were false, that were untrue, that had failed; and I have no doubt that was in His mind when He said, "I am the vine, the true."

Our Lord did not create this figure. He borrowed it, and without any hesitation I say that He borrowed it from the Old Testament. We find the figure of the vine employed in the Book of Psalms. That is the first occurrence (Psalm 80). It is called the psalm of Asaph. It was written in a time when God's people were in trouble as the result of their own disobedience, as so constantly they were in trouble. He says,

"How long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?

Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears,

And given them tears to drink in large measure.

Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours."

That is the first part of the psalm,

"Turn us again, O God of hosts;

And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved."

Then the singer broke out into this language,

"Thou broughtest a vine out of Egypt;

Thou didst drive out the nations, and plantedst it.

Thou preparedst room before it,

And it took deep root, and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with the shadow of it,

And the boughs thereof were like cedars of God.

She sent out her branches unto the sea,

And her shoots unto the River.

Why hast Thou broken down her fences,

So that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?

The boar out of the wood doth ravage it,

And the wild beasts of the field feed on it.

Turn again, we beseech Thee, O God of hosts;

Look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine."

The psalm closes with this remarkable passage,

"Let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand,

Upon the son of man whom Thou madest strong for Thyself.

So shall we not go back from Thee;

Quicken Thou us, and we will call upon Thy name."

Quite evidently the song was born of the failure of the Hebrew people at the time; it shows their failure, and cries to God. The vine is used as the symbol of the nation. That is why they put the golden vine on the beautiful gate, and it became from that time the symbol of the nation; but that is where the figure emerges.

Turn to Isaiah, and we are farther on in the history of the people. In the fifth chapter we have the song of the vineyard. There again we have the vine as the symbol of the nation, which God had created to bring forth certain fruit, and which was failing.

Again in Jeremiah chapter 2 he speaks of the nation as "a degenerate vine." In Ezekiel chapter 15, 17, 18, we find three references to the vine as symbolizing the nation. It was incarnate in the national thought, emblazoned on the gate of the national temple, the symbol of the national life. Jesus had said in that temple that the Kingdom of God was taken from them, and should be given to those bringing forth the fruits thereof. Now, while with His own, He said, "I am the vine, the true"; victory as against failure; realization as against breakdown. "I am the vine, the true." Again, in verse five, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." Is it possible to conceive of any illustration more perfect in setting forth the relationship between Himself and His disciples that would be established when He, as to bodily presence, was gone; and when He would be there in them, and they in Him by the coming of the Paraclete?

Still staying with the figure itself. He said first, "I am the vine." What did He mean? We often quote that, and the statement in verse five, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." How do we think of it? We think of the main stem, and the branches growing out of it as a picture of Christ and the believers, He the main stem, and we the branches. But that is not what He said. He said, "I am the vine," and the vine is not only the main stem. It is part of it, in certain senses it may be the principal part of it; but that is not the vine. In the vine we see diversity: root, main stem, branches, leaves, tendrils, fruit. I am all that, said Christ, I am the vine. In the recognition of diversity there is a declaration of completeness. The completeness of the vine is created by the fact that Christ is all.

Where then do we come in? Does that shut us out? Of course not. I am everything, said Christ, main stem, branches, everything; and you are the branches; that is, you are parts of Me. You are as closely united to Me in the essentials and entirety of life as those branches are in the vine; and the vine is incomplete without the branches. Our Lord said to these men, Apart from Me, literally, severed from Me, cut off from Me, you can do nothing. And He surely also meant to say, Apart from you, I can do nothing in this world. I must have the branches.

But see the wonder of that. To these men our Lord said, You are going to lose Me, and you are troubled; but I am here, I am with you, I come again. I come with the coming of the Paraclete. I come to you uniting Myself to you so completely that you shall be part of Me, and I part of you; for you abide in Me, and I in you. What a figure it is!

The first teaching is a recognition of the purpose for which the vine exists: fruit, and fruit-bearing. In Ezekiel we find a parable of the vine, in which the prophet tells the men to whom he was talking, who probably were proud of their membership in the national life, that a vine has no value at all except that of bearing fruit. He tells them the wood is no good. They cannot make a clothes-pin out of the wood of the vine. The teaching of Isaiah is in that fifth chapter, in the song of the vineyard, that the fruit for which God looked from that nation for the world, not for self-consumption, was twofold, righteousness and judgment. When Jesus began His ministry, His first recorded words spoken to John, were these, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," At the close, when He was talking, and the Greeks had gathered round about Him, He said, "Now is the judgment of this world." Righteousness and judgment. "I am the vine, the true." Through Me there shall be borne the fruit for which the world waits, and that God expects; righteousness and judgment.

You are the branches, the recognition of the true purpose for which we are members of Christ, sharing His very nature, and His very life, that of fruit-bearing. The figure is that of perfect union. I am the vine, everything; you are the branches, linked with Me. Severed we are useless, only fit for burning; but united, capable of bearing the very fruit that God expects, and for which the world is waiting.

We find the conditions He laid down here. They are two. Take two words; "abide," and "ask." Perhaps one may think that is a curious combination. Every branch in any vine must abide, but what about asking? No, the figure is perfect. Go and look at a vine, whether here or in the East. Get close to it, and listen. You cannot hear anything, but if you could, you would see in every branch movement, a movement of life pressing along, pressing along, towards the grapes. Every branch is not only pressing upward, and growing off the main stem; it is praying; every branch is dependent for sap, life element for maintenance to carry it out, to carry it forward, and press it out into fruit bearing. So Jesus said, If you abide, you can demand, you can ask whatever you are inclined to - a most amazing thing ever said about prayer is that statement. But the condition is that we abide. If we abide there, it is His life in us, our life is for evermore demanding more and more, to press it out to that fruit that God expects, and for which the world is waiting.

There is no need to say a great deal about abiding. Much has been written about it which may confuse some people. What is it to abide? Abiding needs no effort. Effort is made to arrive at a point, not to stay there. Take a homely illustration, a congregation is abiding in Westminster Chapel. They are making no effort to abide; but presently the service being over, they will make an effort to go out of the Chapel. To abide requires no effort. It is being at rest.

Abiding does not mean that we necessarily are always conscious of our position in the upper reaches of our consciousness. A congregation in Westminster Chapel is not saying during the whole hour of the service, I am in Westminster Chapel. But they know they are there. Many years ago now a girl who had given herself to Christ came to see me one day and she said, "I am going to give it all up, I cannot be a Christian." I said to her "Why not?" She said, "I made up my mind this week I would never forget Christ, and I got up in the morning, and thought about Him as I dressed, and I had my breakfast and travelled down to work, and then I got to business, and lunch time came, and I had never given Him a thought." Dear child! I gave her this illustration. I said to her, "Do you know Mrs. Morgan?" Yes, she had seen her. "Well," I said, "she is my wife." I went on, "I am a busy man, but I don't go about all the time saying, I am Annie Morgan's husband. There are hours when I never think of her but do you think I ever forget it?" "No," she said, "I don't think you do." We abide by obedience to the light we have, and walk in the way of His commandments as we know them; that is abiding.

And asking, dependent, and prayer is not confined to words. It is the cry and passion of the life to bear fruit. Oh wonderful, wonderful figure, the disannulment of orphanage in union with Jesus Christ.

"No, never alone. No, never alone,

He promised never to leave me,

Never to leave me alone."

If we are branches in the vine, that means all the redemptive forces that the world needs are in Him, and as the result of His coming. Those resources are all at the world's disposal through those who are branches in the vine.