

The Parable of the Householder

by G. Campbell Morgan

Jesus teaches His disciples that their responsibility in this age is to understand His teaching concerning the Kingdom and to bring forth things new and old from the treasure-house, making application of the eternal verity to the age in which we live.

Scripture: Psalm 119:89, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 13:52, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 12:42, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 9:22, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 13:8, James 1:17

Topics: "Discipleship", "Kingdom Of God"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the significance of the Parable of the Householder, which encapsulates the responsibilities of disciples in the Kingdom of God during the current age. He explains that understanding Jesus' teachings is crucial for disciples to fulfill their roles as interpreters of God's law, akin to householders who generously share the treasures of truth. Morgan highlights the importance of bringing forth both 'things new and old,' indicating that while the principles of God's Kingdom are eternal, their applications must evolve to meet contemporary challenges. He warns against the misconception that the Church should adopt worldly methods, asserting that true success lies in correcting the spirit of the age through the timeless truths of the Kingdom. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the foundational teachings of God's sovereignty and grace, urging disciples to be faithful stewards of the truth.

Transcript

The parable of the householder is the completion of the octave. We have considered seven parables. This is the eighth and last. The others have set forth the truth concerning the history of the Kingdom of God in the present age. This parable teaches the responsibility of the disciples during the same period.

There are two statements which have been almost monotonously repeated in this series, but they need to be made again and again. These parables do not deal with the deepest facts concerning the Kingdom of God, neither are they parables which tell the whole story of that Kingdom. They have no application to the age which preceded the first advent of our Lord, neither have they application to the age which shall succeed His second advent. They are simply His setting forth of truth concerning the process and history of the Kingdom during the period commencing with His first advent and ending with His second.

So these verses, with the brief parable which they contain, reveal the responsibility of such as have been made disciples of the Kingdom in an age when Kingdom principles are not wholly and absolutely victorious.

The parable follows a question and description, and must be considered in the light thereof. First the question, "Have ye understood all these things?" When they answered Yes, He said, "Therefore every scribe who hath been instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven." These two sayings of Jesus, question and description, are mutually explanatory. To understand the things which He has taught is to be instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven. To be a scribe instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven is to have received His teaching, and to have understood it.

Let us examine this requirement. In the question, "Have ye understood all these things?" the emphasis is most certainly upon the word "understood." They had heard them all, they had been interested in them all. They had heard the first four parables spoken to the listening multitudes. They had heard His explanation of the first two of them. They had heard the three parables spoken to themselves privately within the house, and they had heard His explanation of the last of the three. They had heard everything, and their interest had been manifested in the questions they had asked.

Now He asks, "Have ye understood all these things?" and the word translated "understood" means quite literally to put together. That is, have you comprehended the main drift of this teaching? Have you put together these things so that you see what I have been attempting to teach you? Notice very carefully that our Lord says, "All these things." There has been a balance and proportion in the teaching. He has been moving steadily forward, unveiling different phases of Kingdom history and process during the period. Now He says, "Have ye understood all these things?" What He asks is whether they have recognized the system of His teaching, for this is what is necessary in order to fulfil responsibility in the age. When they answered Him, "Yea," upon the basis of that answer He proceeded to declare their responsibility. In doing so He first described their position in the words, "a scribe, instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven."

Our Lord's use of the word "scribe" at this point necessitates an inquiry as to its real significance, for we know that the scribes of His day were bitterly opposed to Him. As a class the scribes began to exist in the time of Ezra. The word is used before the time of Ezra, and yet a careful examination will show that it was never used before that time in the sense in which it was used then and subsequently. The scribes originally were chroniclers, and were closely associated with the military movements of the ancient people. But with the advent of Ezra the scribe filled a new office. He became, as in the case of Ezra himself, a reader and an expounder of the law of God. Ezra is the most conspicuous example of the true scribe, he who stood in the midst of the people and read the words of the law, indicating the meaning of them, not merely by elocutionary perfection, but by comment, annotation, exposition. That was the real office of the scribe. In the days of Jesus they were still the professed exponents of the law; but they then proceeded upon two principles, that first of oral tradition, and that secondly of the interpretation of the letter with an almost painful accuracy.

These two principles had become the means of obscuring rather than expounding the law. The scribes themselves declared that the oral tradition for which they stood was a fence around it. They had superadded to the actual law of God the traditions of the elders, and according to their own philosophy they had done this to maintain the law in stricter integrity. But their tradition had become a fence around the law in another sense than that intended, for, being a misinterpretation of the law, it had become that which shut men out from the law. In the days of Jesus, therefore, the scribes were in constant antagonism to Him Who ruthlessly swept aside all their traditions, and yet religiously lived within the sphere of the law.

Moreover, these scribes were men who had indulged in literal interpretation to such an extent as to absolutely change the meaning of the law. Devoid of any understanding of its deeper spirit, they had

slavishly given themselves over to the letter.

Jesus now chose the word which had been used to define the office of the men who had led the opposition to Him in His kingly propaganda, and He said, "Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the Kingdom of Heaven," and by so doing, He suggested that His disciples were to take hold of the old idea and fulfil it. They were to become in their age the interpreters of the law of God. He said in effect, You are to become the new scribes, the interpreters of the Kingdom, those through whom the age will know the facts concerning the government of God.

In order to fulfilment of this responsibility there must be understanding of the King's teaching concerning the Kingdom in this age. A wrong conception of its true meaning and value may not interfere with our enthusiasm in its cause, or with our devotion to the King; but it will interfere with the intelligence of our service, and thus limit the sphere of its action. What, then, is the teaching of these parables in broad outline? That this age is one of conflict from beginning to end; that it is characterized to a large extent by human failure; that it is an age in which God accomplishes definite purposes; that, as to the heavenly side, it is an age from which a people is gathered out to serve God throughout the countless ages that are to come as the revealers of His grace and His love; that, as to the earthly value, it is an age that prepares for the next and makes possible all that the King will do therein. These truths must be understood. If we fail to perceive them, then our service may be sustained, but it will surely be defective. I pity from the depth of my heart the man who is labouring to-day in the hope that this age is to be consummated by the conversion of the world. I cannot personally understand where he gathers his comfort when he sees how heathendom is increasing proportionately with every decade as it passes, as he sees that even in so-called Christian countries, notwithstanding all the light that has come, and is still coming, notwithstanding all the undoubted progress that is being made, there is also along with the progress, retrogression; along with the increasing light, increasing darkness; side by side with a new sense of the Christ spirit in the age, an ever new revolt against that spirit. For my own heart, at least, service would be impossible if I believed that this age were all. But I realize through the teaching of Jesus in these parables that this is an age of conflict, of conflict stern and necessary, when the enemy sows his darnel by the wheat, and that I have no right to attempt to uproot the darnel until the end of the age. Then as I understand this to be an age in which God is gathering out for Himself a people for heavenly service, and is preparing by all the processes of the years for that larger age of the Kingdom on earth that is to follow, I can take up my day's work, and do it with full purpose of heart, knowing that the world's great hope is the advent of the King, with the rule of the rod of iron, when the opportunity of righteousness will come in His own personal government of the affairs of men.

Jesus declared that it is the scribe instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven, according to the teaching which He had Himself given, who is to fulfil the responsibility which is then described.

Now let us turn to that responsibility. The picture is a very simple one, and yet again, wholly eastern. We pause and look at it in its separation from the teaching. It is the picture of a householder--an eastern householder, I pray you remember. You cannot interpret this parable by anything you know of the householder in this country, or in any western land. One must go back to the East. The word translated "householder" might be translated with a bluntness that perhaps is unfair, and yet perfectly accurate, as the house-despot. All our western mind is in revolt at the very use of the word, but despotism is not necessarily cruel; it may be gracious, tender, kind, beneficent. In the East the householder was one in absolute authority, a king, a shepherd, a father. And so the figure employed is that of a despot apart from the undesirable significance of the term. In this word "householder," then, there is present the thought of

loving yet absolute authority. Christ often used the word, and almost invariably concerning Himself.

Then pass to another word in the picture. "Which bringeth forth out of his treasure." Here we have the same word for "treasure" that occurred in the manifesto of the King. There are two distinct Greek words for treasure--each indicating a certain value. This is the word that indicates treasure laid horizontally. It is wealth, treasure laid up, possessed. The treasure possessed is that of the truth concerning the Kingdom.

Then take the next phrase, the householder brings forth out of his treasure "things new and old." "New" does not mean young. "Old" does not mean worn out. The phrase means things fresh and ancient, rather than things young and worn out.

Again, the householder brings forth out of his treasure things fresh, ancient. "Bringeth forth," literally, flingeth forth, scattereth around. There is the thought of prodigality in giving, of great generosity and bountifulness.

The whole picture is one of an eastern householder, the master of a house, an authoritative ruler, lavishly scattering out of his wealth the things which are necessary for the supply and government of his household. Those who are gifted with imagination see the picture. It is full of colour. No neutral tints are in it. The eastern house-master, house-despot, out of his treasure scattering upon his people, upon the children of his family, the sheep of his flock, the subjects of his kingdom, all that they need. It is the attitude of real kingship, and real fatherhood, and real shepherdhood.

Having looked at the picture thus we are filled with astonishment at it, for Jesus said that it represented the position His disciple is to occupy throughout all this period.

What, then, does it mean? First, that His disciples are the householders of this age. Moreover, in proportion as they bring out of their treasure-house, which is His treasure-house, things new and old, they are the rulers of the age.

I am increasingly impressed with the fact that some of the simplest things Jesus said are the most startling and sublime. At the end of the parables of the Kingdom, with stately and kingly dignity the King sweeps aside all the thrones of earth, and all the governments of men, and He says for purposes of God's great and only Kingdom throughout this age, the ruling authority is to be vested in the disciples who are instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven. Every scribe is to be like a householder. He had spoken of Himself as the great Householder. These disciples are now to represent Him, and take His place in the world, and what He has done they are to do. According to the suggestion of this wonderful, brief, final parable, the disciples of the Christ, instructed to the Kingdom, are the ruling class in the centuries as they come and go, until the rejected King Himself appears again and assumes the government. They are to bring out of the treasure-house, out of the wealth that is theirs, "things new and old."

Let us consider a little more closely this expression, one of the most remarkable of the whole paragraph. "Things new and old." Not, if I understand the Lord aright, new things and old things; but "things new and old." The same things, new and old. Not one set of things that are new, and another set of things that are old. That would be opposition, antagonism, mutual destruction. Christ has said that no man puts new wine into old wine-skins. There you have the opposition of a new thing to an old thing, and that is destruction. That is not the thought here. "Things new and old." The principle is old, the application is new. The root is old, the blossom and the fruit are new, and the two are necessary to growth and development. Destroy the old root in your garden, and there will be no new blossoms in spring-time, nor fruit in autumn. But the

absence of the new denies the life of the old. If there be no bud, no blossom, and no fruit, then I take it the tree is dead, and may be destroyed. "Things new and old"--old in their unseen and eternal principles; new in their seen and temporal practice. The interrelation is for evermore a test. The new thing which contradicts the old is always false. The old thing that has no fresh and new production is dead, and the sooner we are rid of it the better. "Things new and old" said Jesus. You are going to represent Me, the great Householder. You are to be the householders of this age. It was as though He had said, I depose kings and rulers and governors. They will sit upon their thrones, and pass their measures, and imagine they are manipulating the age. That is not so. You are to be the householders. You are to be the masters of the age, not with the mastery which is apparent always, but with the mastery which prepares for Me. You are to be My householders, and you are to do your work by bringing out of your treasure-house, out of this infinite wealth that is Mine, and which I make yours, "things new and old."

That is the perpetual responsibility of such as understand the way of His Kingdom. Surely Russell Lowell had this great thought in mind, subconsciously or not, when he wrote:

New occasions teach new duties, Time makes ancient good uncouth;

They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of truth;

Lo before us gleam her camp fires! we ourselves must pilgrims be;

Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate

winter sea,

Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key.

That is a plea for the new; yes, but if you try the future's portal with any other key than the key that hangs upon the girdle of the King, you will never unlock it. If you forget that the new door can only be opened by the old principle, that door will never be opened. We are to come into every successive decade or century with things new and old, living messages to the age in which we live; living application of the truth which God has eternally enthroned. Because the Kingdom of God is old, ancient as God is ancient, it has ever new applications. Methods, manners, men may change; but this underlying principle of Divine government abideth, rooted in the nature of God, and it blossoms fresh in every generation among the sons of men.

Now said Jesus to these disciples, Have you understood these things? Have you understood the underlying principle? Have you understood My teaching concerning the age in which you are to serve? Have you put My measurements upon this age? Do you understand what God is doing? Do you understand these things--the things of the Divine purpose, of the Divine programme, of the Divine plan? And upon the basis of the gleam of light that had come to them, upon the basis of the fact that if at least they did not perfectly understand, they yet belonged to Him Who held the key of knowledge as well as the key of power: upon that basis He said, Then go out into this age and be householders, bringing out of your treasure things new and old. Insist wherever you are upon the old and abiding, but make application of it to the new and the transient. "New and old."

That is the work of the people of the Kingdom of God in this age. The old for us is the Kingdom of God. Will not somebody give me another phrase? How shall I find another? There is no better, but we have taken these Bible phrases, and robbed them of their virtue by repetition. What is the Kingdom of God? The Kingship of God. The fact that He is King, and that amid the clash of devilish attack His throne has never

trembled for a moment. That is the old, the Kingship of God. And what is the new? The application of that eternal verity to the age in which we live, to personal life, to social life, to national life. Our business, as we are disciples instructed to the Kingdom, is to make this application.

May I illustrate what I mean by a protest? I am often told to-day--told seriously--that what the Church of God needs in order to succeed is to catch the spirit of the age. I reply that the Church of God only succeeds in proportion as she corrects the spirit of the age. I am told that if I am to succeed in Christian work, I must adopt the methods of the world. Then, by God's help, I will be defeated. We are not in the world to borrow the world's maxims and spirit. The world would crucify Jesus as readily now as nineteen centuries ago. The Cross is no more popular in the world to-day than when men nailed Him to it on the green hill outside the city gate nineteen centuries ago. The Church of Christ is for evermore to stand for Him as King, and for that infinite Kingdom which He represents; and as she does it, as the disciples instructed to the Kingdom bring forth things new and old from the treasure-house, that and only that will save individuals and society and the nation.

Do you not believe that here is great need for such bringing forth of things new and old? Do you not recognize in this hour in which we live, we need to emphasize supremely the Kingdom of God? This is a matter I am almost afraid to put into words lest I should be misunderstood. Sometimes I think we have been a little in danger, not of saying too much about Jesus, but of saying all too little about God. There are times when it seems to me that in our misinterpretation of Jesus as gentle and pitiful and tolerant, we have imagined that all we have to do to make a man a Christian is to sing him some sweet, soft nothing, set to dance music. We need to get back to the sterner teachings of our Puritan fathers, or back to the rugged magnificence of the old Hebrew prophets. If we are householders true to the great Master-Householder, we shall insist upon the Kingdom of God, and we shall never say to men, It does not matter, you are doing your best, you are struggling through. We shall say to men, You will be for ever lost, unless you submit to the throne. Yes, salvation is by the Cross, but the Cross is the place of the throne, and these old eternal truths are the things we need to recognize and preach.

We have been playing with the surf that beats upon the shore. We need to get down to the depths and profundities of faith, the everlasting rock upon which our feet rest. Things old, not worn out, but ancient and honourable things that are grey with the majesty of the eternities. These are the things that we stand in the world for; and in proportion as we stand for these, and make application of them to personal life, and social life, and national life, in that proportion we become for our absent and Hidden King, Who presently is to be revealed in glory, the true householders.

Yet, brethren, what gracious gifts there are in our hands, what treasures we have for this age that none other has, if we but understand our position! Never must we forget the throne. But, thank God, it is also the throne of grace, and when we, in the name of God Almighty, have uttered our fiercest denunciation against the sin of the age, we can come to the man who is scorched with the lightning of denunciation, and bring him to the healing of the Cross, and the cleansing blood, and the power of the Spirit.

We come, we come, the children of salvation,

Treasures all countless in our hands we bring.

We are to bring out of our treasure-house things new and old, and give them to the age. Then we need not be at all anxious about statistics. It does not matter whether one, or a hundred, or a thousand names are taken. The thing that matters is that we have brought out the old thing in its new meaning and new

application. Presently the King will come, and will sever the wicked from the good, and to the old and weary world will come at last its great opportunity.

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