

CHAPTER 10

THE KINGDOM

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Thinking about heaven and longing for it was the moving thought for all the saints and the men of God in every generation and in every place. The mere thought of its glories and what awaits the saints there, gave them a spiritual push and made them belittle their toil here on earth. The Apostle Paul expressed to the Philippians that longing when he was imprisoned in Rome: "Having a desire to depart and be with Christ (in heaven), which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

That was what lead the saints to bear tribulations and troubles - not only with endurance but also with joy: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18). Several centuries before Paul, the Psalmist said: "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Psalm 73:25).

Everyone who lived on earth as a stranger and wanderer and looked forward to everlasting life has already tasted this marvellous eternal joy: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Thinking about heaven helps the soul to labor and achieve its best. Longing to heaven frees the heart, not only from clinging to worldly matters, but also from all earthly and bodily desires.

Before His suffering the Lord Jesus prayed: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). That was the heart's desire of Jesus for His saintly children. **The children of God who sojourn on earth until they reach their heavenly home:** "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8).

A) THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Mark the Evangelist introduced his Gospel by saying: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the **kingdom of God**, and saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God** is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15; Matthew 4:17).

Matthew the Evangelist speaks about the preaching of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea: "Repent, for the **kingdom of heaven** is at hand!" (Matthew 3:1, 2; 9:35)

From the beginning of His public ministry until He was put on the Cross, the Lord Jesus preached about the kingdom of God and spoke about it in His parables and His teachings. We do not exaggerate when we say that the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus concentrated on the subject of the "Kingdom".

In the New Testament we find two expressions about the kingdom: The kingdom of God (in Greek: "Basilea Tou Theou") and the kingdom of heaven (in Greek: "Basilea Toun Oranoun").

The Lord Jesus said to His Disciples: "It has been given to you to know **the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 13:11). In a second place He said to them: "To you it has been given to know **the mysteries of the kingdom of God**" (Luke 8:10) and in a third place He said to them: "To you it has been given to know the **mystery of the kingdom of God**" (Mark 4:11).

We realize from the three Gospels that the "Kingdom of God" and the "Kingdom of Heaven" are two expressions for one name. The "kingdom of heaven" refers to the throne of God in this kingdom: "Heaven is God's throne; and the earth, is His footstool" (Matthew 5:34, 35). The kingdom of God is on earth and the ruling of heaven is over it. **Perhaps this is what the Lord Jesus meant in the first three petitions in the Lord's Prayer: "Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"** (Matthew 6:9, 10).

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew the expression "kingdom of heaven" appears 32 times while the expression "kingdom of God" appears 6 times only. The word "kingdom" by itself appears 5 times. In the two Gospels according to Saints Mark and Luke only the expression "kingdom of God" exists. Also the Gospel of St. John mentions only the "kingdom of God"; in the Lord's talk to Nicodemus (John 3:3, 5). Again in the Book of Acts the "kingdom of God" appears 6 times and the word "kingdom" twice.

In the Epistles of St. Paul, the expression "kingdom of God" appears 8 times. In the first Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul mentions that Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24). In Ephesians he mentions the expression "the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5) and in Colossians he mentions "the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). Paul mentions the word "His (Christ's) kingdom" twice in 2 Timothy 4:1, 18. In Hebrews he mentions the kingdom related to the Son (Hebrews 1:8) and the "kingdom" alone in Hebrews 12:28.

The Apostle James mentions the "kingdom of God" once (James 2:5). St. Peter mentions the expression "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

In the Book of Revelation the expression "kingdom of Jesus Christ" appears in Revelation 1:9, and in Revelation 11:15 it says: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!". Lastly it says: "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come" (Revelation 12:10).

We now pose the question: "Why did St. Matthew in his Gospel use the expression "kingdom of heaven", not only more than the other Evangelists, but also more than all the Books of the New Testament?"

It is known that Matthew wrote his Gospel to the Jews. The scholars of the Holy Bible say that the Jews in their later times before the coming of Christ, as a gesture of honoring God, were accustomed not to use the word "God". They went to the extreme in their understanding to the third command: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). They went even further and excluded God totally from worldly matters. They denied that He related to anything material and replaced His name with other names which they used when they wanted to refer to Him.

In His testimony in front of the Chief Priests of the Jews, the Lord Jesus accepted from the Jews the word "Blessed" instead of the word "God". They asked Him: "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61, 62). The Lord Jesus might have followed the same pattern in "the Parable of the Prodigal Son", when He said that the son said to his father: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight" (Luke 15:21). The word "heaven" was used to replace the word "God".

We return to the word "Kingdom" and say that **the linguists affirm that in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages the word which is translated "kingdom" means the "ruling of God and His dominion".** With this meaning such a word appeared in some places in the Old Testament. In other places it appeared to refer to the dominion of God and His ruling over a special group of people which belonged to Him and with whom He entered into a holy covenant, apart from the rest of the nations.

WHEN DID THE KINGDOM OF GOD START ON EARTH?

This kingdom appeared in an obvious manner **in the call of God to Abram (Abraham)** to leave Ur of the Chaldeans to become a father of many nations. **The kingdom of God took its official form in the nation of Israel** when God brought them out of the land of Egypt to become for Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Hence when the Lord Jesus spoke about the kingdom, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, His hearers from the Jews understood Him. **But the Jews understood the kingdom in a worldly manner, while the Lord Jesus meant a pure spiritual kingdom.**

As well, **the Jews restricted the kingdom to the descendants of Abraham, deprived the Gentiles by closing the door in front of them.** They were badly shocked when the Lord Jesus praised the faith of the Gentile centurion whose servant the Lord healed: "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness" (Matthew 8:10-12).

B) THE IDEA OF THE KINGDOM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word "kingdom" is the word "Malekuth" as it is pronounced in the Hebrew language, which means kingdom or nation. The word kingdom appears 91 times in the Old Testament. It appears first in Numbers 24:7. **The word "kingdom" or "nation" however has more than one meaning in the Old Testament. What concerns us here is that it means Israel as a nation of God or kingdom of God:** "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). **God ruled His chosen people by David:** "And your house and **your kingdom shall be established forever before you**" (2 Samuel 7:16), and David said: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth

is Yours; **yours is the kingdom**, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11).

The Jews understood "Yahweh" as He Who rules over Israel: "But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; **the Lord shall rule over you**" (Judges 8:23). **The Lord said to the Prophet Samuel:** "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; **for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them**" (1 Samuel 8:7).

The mind of the Jews was saturated with the idea of the coming of the Messiah. The daily prayer of a Jew included a phrase which said "Let Your kingdom reign, Your redemption be extolled, let the Messiah come and save His people". The majority of the Jews believed that the era of the Messiah would be an era of satisfaction and material blessings.

According to the scholar Alfred Edersheim (a Jew who became a Christian) in his book about the life of the Messiah: "The land will produce by itself the best and most beautiful clothes, the most desired and delicious food. The wheat will grow to the height of the palm tree, even to the top of the hills. Then the wind will convert it to flour and it will be tossed in the valley to be well baked and delicious bread. In that era every tree will carry its fruits, and drop them daily in order to carry new fruits".

They waited for a Messiah or a King Saviour to free them from Roman bondage, to reign as an earthly king, bring back the kingdom of David, and to make the people of Israel the greatest nation on earth. They were disappointed when they found Jesus meek and humble. He did not quarrel nor cry out, nor did anyone hear His voice in the streets (Matthew 12:19). **His teachings appeared to promote weakness - in their view - such as when He said: "But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also"** (Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:29).

The Old Testament is full of prophecies about the Messiah the King. An example is the second Psalm: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You". Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Psalm 2:2-8).

C) THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST IS SPIRITUAL NOT MATERIAL

We mentioned that the Jews were waiting for the Messiah (Christ) as an worldly King Who

would establish an earthly kingdom. Perhaps this understanding was behind the fear of Herod the Jewish King who knew from the Wise Men about the birth of the King of the Jews: "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him". When Herod the King heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:2).

The Holy Bible mentions two events where the Jews saw Jesus as an earthly king and they wanted to make Him a king over them: the first one is the feeding of the multitudes from the five loaves and two fishes. St. John says: "Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world". Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone" (John 6:14, 15). **The second event was on Palm Sunday when Jesus entered Jerusalem like a victorious king.** The crowds were crying out: "**Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord!** Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:10; Luke 19:38).

But the Lord Jesus refused that earthly kingdom. Hence as He drew near the city of Jerusalem He saw it and wept over it saying: "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

Because the Lord Jesus refused the worldly kingdom, and disappointed the Jews when He did not fulfil their worldly dreams at the material level, they cried out in front of Pilate the atheist Roman ruler: "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15). They stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on Him, which was the royal dress. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, as if a crown of a king and a reed in His right hand, and they mocked Him (Matthew 27:28, 29, 31).

There are many Christians who want the Church to use worldly arguments and fight in its dealings with others. Yet Christ said to Pilate who was passing a verdict on Him: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

Christ came to the world to establish in it a spiritual kingdom which He called the "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of heaven", and He is the spiritual King of this spiritual kingdom. Pilate asked Jesus: "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). The kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of the truth in the heart. He came to reign in the hearts of the people, and He rules by love not by violence. He does not raise

a sword or declare war. He was a King without weapons, except the spiritual weapons, and a King without might except the might of love!

Once one said: "The Jews cried out : "If He (Christ) was the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe in Him" (Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:32). But we say: "We believe in Him and we worship Him because He refused to come down from the Cross because by doing so He redeemed us and showed that He loved us!"

D) WHAT IS MEANT BY THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

What did Christ mean by the "Kingdom of God"? Christ cared about the state of holiness and righteousness which qualifies man to enjoy the eternal paradise of God as a result of Him ruling over his life. Man receives the pledge of the kingdom while he is still living in the world. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus explained to the Pharisees when they asked Him: "When would the kingdom of God come", He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20, 21).

Jesus answered the Pharisees the same way He answered Nicodemus: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5, 6).

These answers are summarized in that the kingdom of God is spiritual and does not come with observations, meaning that it is not a material thing which is bound by geographic limits, nor it is within the range of sight, because it is too large to be contained in a place "nor will they say, "See here!" or "See there!" (Luke 17:21, 23).

We mentioned that the "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven" is the dominion of God on earth or the dominion of heaven on earth. **In fact heaven did not dominate on earth up till now. It is the devil with his might, influence and sway who dominates on earth "the ruler of this world"** (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

We live in a strange world full of upside down predicaments. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous are punished, the worshippers of God are ridiculed and the worshippers of Baal are honored. How many innocent people are thrown in prisons and how many wicked people are committing evil freely. This is not the dominion of heaven on earth, but the dominion of the devil on earth, though what occurs is by the permission of God, Who permits evil to happen according to His wisdom. Nevertheless, this will last for a while. **Heaven has dominion on earth through the righteous, the saints and the pious people who submit their lives to God.**

We notice through the verses in the New Testament about the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven", that they form three domains linked with each other. The first one describes the kingdom of heaven as a seed in the heart of the believer. The Lord said "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). **The second domain** describes the kingdom as a tree - after it was like a seed of mustard. It is a large tree, and many people and nations are shaded by it. **The third domain** describes the "kingdom of heaven" in the stage of perfection like a ripe fruit for the believers to enjoy in the eternal glory, as it is written in the concluding chapters of the Book of Revelation about the New Jerusalem.

The first domain - the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven - as a seed, is a spiritual state in the heart; it is not seen or felt. It is not a material thing "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

In the second domain, the kingdom of God is like a tree which takes patience to grow: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

In the third domain - the kingdom of God is like a fruit - God will take us to this kingdom when we move to His eternal glory and the centre of joy in heaven. After all, the joy of heaven has entered our hearts here on earth.

The expression of the Lord: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) describes completely and accurately the whereabouts of His spiritual kingdom. **This kingdom started in a stable in Bethlehem, neither any of the great people, the rich nor the wise of that generation detected Him. Then He appeared suddenly in the Temple in Jerusalem. No one recognized Him except Simeon the Elder and Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel** (Luke 2:25, 36).

Thirty years after His birth, a few fishermen and some of the tax collectors in Galilee recognized Him. The Jewish Priests, their chiefs, the Scribes and the Pharisees had no eyes to see Him. The King came to His own, and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). This happened when the Jews claimed that they were waiting for the kingdom. Their mistake was in looking in the opposite direction. They waited for signs when the kingdom was amidst them. They did not recognize Him because of their ignorance and stupidity.

We here mention another point. St. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:5 the expression "the kingdom of Christ and God" and in Colossians 1:13 "the kingdom of the Son of His love". What did Paul mean by the kingdom of Christ?

The kingdom of Christ is the spiritual dominion of Christ over the hearts of the believers. This dominion materialized when the Lord paid the price for our souls on the Cross. In order for some one to own something, he has to pay its price "for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20),

"You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Corinthians 7:23). St. Peter also said: "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

E) THE PARABLES OF CHRIST AND THEIR CONNOTATIONS

The Lord Jesus told many parables which described some of the attributes of the kingdom of God. He told 7 parables about the kingdom in Chapter 13 of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Namely, **the Sower, the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price and the dragnet.** In Chapter 20, Matthew presented the **parable of the workers in the vineyard,** in Chapter 21 he presented the **parable of the wicked vinedressers,** and in Chapter 22 **the parable of the wedding feast** and finally **the parable of the Virgins** in Chapter 25.

Certainly each of these parables explains to us some of the attributes of the kingdom, or some of the spiritual virtues which the Lord wants us to sustain in our lives. Besides, some of these parables are addressed to His holy Church which is also His Dominion and congregates the members of His unseen mystical Body. We review ten of these parables.

(1) The Sower: (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23; Luke 8:4-15; Mark 4:1-9, 13-20).

This parable explains the obligation of man to let God rule over his heart. In it we notice 4 elements: **the sower, the seed, the soil and the result.**

The Sower Who sows the good seed is the Lord Jesus the Son of Man (Matthew 13:37). **The seed** is the word of God, and the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). **The soil refers to the heart of man and it relates to the result.**

In this parable the Lord points to the freedom of man to accept or reject the word of God. He refers to four kinds of soil which resemble: a wayside, a stony place, a land full of thorns and the good soil. The soil symbolises the heart which is man's office. **It is assumed that God created man to be good** "for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). **How did the good soil become a wayside upon which people tread until it became solid, how was the good soil**

neglected that thorns grew in it and how did the good soil become stony? No doubt this is all the responsibility of man.

In this respect we notice that it is possible to change each of the first three kinds of soil to good soil again. In our times we see sandy desert land converted to land good for irrigation. This conversion requires effort and patience. The Lord said: they "bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

No one should despair, no matter how bad his life is, how many stumbling stones it contains or how discouraging the thorns of lust are. It is possible to convert this life and cultivate it to become good soil which brings forth good fruit.

(2, 3) The Wheat and Tares - the Dragnet in the Sea: (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; 13:47-50)

In the parable of the wheat and the tares it is said that the seed of the tares is similar to the mustard seed, and as it grows the plants of the tares look similar to that of the wheat. Thus it is difficult in the early stages of growth to distinguish between the tares and the wheat. The difference between them becomes obvious after their heads develop. Yet in this late stage the roots of the wheat and of the tares are intermingled inside the soil, and it is not possible to dig out the plants of tare without uprooting some of the wheat plants with them.

What do each of the wheat and the tares refer to in this parable? The wheat refers to the righteous and the pious, but what do the tares refer to? The tares refer to evil people. Some of the great Church fathers like John Chrysostom and Augustine said that the tares also symbolize the false teachings concerning faith.

The field in this parable refers to the world, not to the Church, as some understood. The Lord Jesus said openly: "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one" (Matthew 13:38).

The parable conveys that as a matter of fact there is evil in the world, and its existence is by the permission from God. Hence we should realize that we live in the world and deal with people among whom are evil ones (the tares). The Lord Jesus said to the Jews: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:44).

Who planted the tares? The Devil planted them. How and when? while men slept (Matthew 13:25), in a moment of carelessness and spiritual snooze. The kingdom inside us needs vigil. Beware of the devil. He planted and still plants tares among the wheat. This is his job!

What should our attitude be towards the tares? It is not our job to gather up the tares. Our Job is to perpetually grow up. The Lord said: "Let both (the wheat and the tares) grow together to the time of harvest (Matthew 13:30). By "both" He means the good and the bad. **God teaches us that as we gather up the tares we also uproot the wheat with them** (Matthew 13:29).

Over the years many people were occupied in gathering up the tares. While they did that they had no time to build their own lives and they hurt both themselves and the Church! God does not concede to eliminate evil and wicked people, though He hates both. That is because He cares for the good and He loves them. **When we prune the dry branches of a tree we should beware not to kill the tree. There were corrupt priests among the Jews and bad teachers like the Scribes and Pharisees, yet the Lord Jesus criticised their corruption not their religious jobs.**

We notice that **after the enemy came and sowed the tares "he went his way"** (Matthew 13:25), as not to be seen. **The style of the devil in his work is to hide himself or to transform himself.** "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). The devil went his way because the tares do not need any care like the good plants; as they say "devilish plants". You do not require any effort to fall down, just leave oneself to fall down. But to get up and to stand up, requires effort.

The tares and the wheat will always coexist in this world. **The good and the bad will always be together until the end of the world "the time of harvest". The time of harvest is the end of the world:** "And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Revelation 14:15).

The Dragnet:

The parable of the dragnet in the sea gives the same meaning: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire" (Matthew 13:47-50).

Again the sense here is the existence of good and bad people together till the end of the ages (the two are in one net). Evil will not be eliminated from the world until the last day. Bad people will mix with good people in the kingdom of God on earth until the last day.

(4, 5) The Mustard Seed - the Leaven: (Matthew 13:31, 32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18, 19); (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20, 21).

In the parable of the mustard seed the Lord says: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches" (Matthew 13:31, 32).

St. Jerome says that the kingdom of heaven in this parable is preaching the Gospel. This parable refers to the growth of the kingdom and its expansion. Christianity started in a modest way by small groups. But soon: "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalm 19:3, 4).

Daniel prophesied about that saying: "I was looking, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong; its height reached to the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it" (Daniel 4:10-12). **The birds of heaven here refer to the atheist nations.** This analogy was common and known in the Jewish books of literature at that time.

Thus the parable of the mustard seed refers to the spread of Christianity. The mustard seed which became a big tree still extends its branches in spite of the material and heretic currants which oppose it all over the world. In this parable the Lord Jesus may have been encouraging the little flock, for it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom (Luke 12:33).

The Leaven:

If the parable of the mustard seed refers to the expansion and the spread of Christianity, the parable of the Leaven refers to the work of Christianity and its effectiveness by Grace inside man. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened" (Matthew 13:33). The leaven works inside the dough without us seeing what is happening. All we notice is that the dough rises and its volume increases by the leaven.

"Leaven" referred to evil in the Holy Bible (1 Corinthians 5:7; Luke 12:1; Galatians 5:9) **and the Law of Moses forbade using it in the offerings, except in one case mentioned in Leviticus 23:17. In the feast of the Passover, the Jews used to empty their homes from the leaven for seven days. In spite of that "Leaven" could be used to refer to "good" as in this parable.** That is, the same word can refer to the good or the bad, each from a special angle.

The Lord Jesus was described in the Bible as a lion: "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals" (Revelation 5:5), and the devil was described as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Again Christ was symbolized by the bronze serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness (John 3:14). Meanwhile it was the serpent which tempted Eve in the beginning. At the same time the Lord asked His followers to be wise as serpents (Matthew 10:16).

St. Augustine said that the three measures of meal in which the woman hid the leaven refer to the three sons of Noah who inhabited the earth after the flood. Other fathers said that they refer to the three known continents in the old world at that time. Accordingly the three measures of meal refer to the whole world. The Lord Jesus said to His Disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The whole world was the three known continents at that time (Asia, Africa and Europe) and all men are the descendants of the three sons of Noah.

St. Jerome however said that the three measures of meal refer to the three substances which form man, the spirit, the body and the soul. When Grace works in them, it works in harmony. **Jerome also said** that the woman here refers to the Church and the three measures refer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **St. Augustine said** that the three measures refer to man's heart, his soul, and his mind (Matthew 22:37).

The above different explanations mean that the message of the Gospel and the work of Grace are a changing force which work in the world and it is sufficient to renew it.

(6) The Workers in the Vineyard: (Matthew 20:1-16)

The summary of this parable is: A landowner went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. He had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day and sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he hired them and sent them into the vineyard. **Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.** And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one hired us" and he hired them.

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first. And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day". But he answered one of them and said, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?" The Lord concluded the parable by saying: "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen".

In explaining this parable the scholar Origen said that the world is like a long day. Early morning refers to the period from Adam to Noah, the third hour to the period from Noah to Abraham, the sixth hour to the period from Abraham to Moses and the ninth hour

to the period from Moses to the coming of Christ. We notice that the Lord combined the sixth and the ninth hours together: "And he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour"; in these two hours He was calling the Jews and visiting mankind to establish His covenants, as time was advancing for the salvation of man. The eleventh hour refers to the period from the coming of the Lord to the end of the world".

Origen also said that the period from early morning to the ninth hour refers to the Jewish nation. But in the eleventh hour, the Gentiles were called (because Christ died on the Cross on the ninth hour). The workers of the eleventh hour said to the landowner: "No one hired us". That is no one came to us like the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and the prophets; no one has preached to us the way of salvation.

The vineyard is the Catholic Church from the time of Abel the righteous to the last of the chosen born in the world. In this long period, God did not stop sending workers for His vineyard to teach His people righteousness. This was done first by the Patriarch fathers then by the Law teachers and the Prophets and finally by the Disciples.

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard started to give them their wages. Evening refers to the end of the world. He did not say next morning, because it is the eternal rest.

The workers of the eleventh hour took their wages first, pointing to the Gentiles who glorified God for His mercy (Romans 15:9), and mercy relates not to a sequence: "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion" (Romans 9:15).

St. Augustine said that each one took an equal wage because the kingdom is for all. But each one had a different job because "In My Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2) and "one star differs from another star in glory" (1 Corinthians 15:41).

He who serves Christ based on estimating time, wages and the like hoping for a better reward in this life or in the life to come, does not understand the spirit of Christ. **We should understand service to God as paying of a debt. Besides, Christian service is done for the sake of love.**

(7) The Wedding Feast: (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24)

St. Matthew presents this parable as a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, while St. Luke presents it as a certain man gave a great supper and invited many. In both presentations the guests were not willing to come.

The Lord Jesus aimed from this parable to teach us the necessity of accepting the invitation of God without excuses for the reason of being busy or occupied. The invitation cannot be postponed.

In this parable according to St. Matthew, the wedding refers to the Church in the world and according to St. Luke the supper refers to the eternal supper. Many people in our time attend the wedding, that is they attend the Church and then they leave it. But those who attend the last supper will not leave it.

The King sent out his servants who were the prophets. He sent his servants out twice. In the first time they were the prophets and in the second time they were the Disciples. The scholar Origen sees the servants in the second time as another group of prophets. The King refers to the Heavenly Father. The Son for Whom the wedding was arranged is Christ and the bride is the Church.

Again according to St. Matthew "when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. What is the wedding garment?"

They explain the wedding garment as love - and this is the view of Origen who relates it to the words of St. Paul: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12, 14). **They also explain that by the sinner** who does not put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14). That is the sinner who does not change his ways and live the new life.

When the man who did not have on a wedding garment was asked "How did you come in here without a wedding garment?" He was speechless (Matthew 22:12), which means that he had no excuse or an answer to give for his life of sin.

(8, 9) The Hidden Treasure - the Pearl of Great Price: (Matthew 13:44); (Matthew 13:45, 46)

By these two parables the Lord Jesus wanted to tell us that nothing on earth is as valuable as the kingdom of heaven.

In the parable of the treasure hidden in the field the Lord Jesus says: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44).

The Lord starts this parable by the words "is like" because there is nothing like it in the material world. Talking to God, David says: "Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord;

nor are there any works like Your works" (Psalm 86:8).

The hidden treasure in the field - what is this field?

Perhaps the treasure is the Gospel hidden in the world, like milk in the chest, marrow in the bone, manna in the desert, water in the well and honey in the comb! It is not in a garden with walls around it but in an open field in which people go every day. Thus he who wants to get the treasure should dig the field until he finds the treasure. The Lord says: "You search the (Holy) Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

Some one may say that he reads the Holy Bible but does not find this treasure. For such a person we say that the richest mines are found in the most bare lands and in great depth under the ground. Do not expect to find the treasure on the surface or in a shallow depth. **You need to dig deeper. The Lord told Simon Peter: "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). Many people read the Bible in a superficial way and do not value it. As expected they do not find anything on the surface and they pass their judgment on this basis, such as "the words of Christ are not superior to the teachings of Buddha or Confucius"!**

Perhaps the field which hides the treasure is the world in which we live. The Lord Jesus said openly in the parable of the Sower: "The field is the world" (Matthew 13:38). This is confirmed by the words of the Apostle Paul **"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,** even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). **The might of God, His greatness, superiority and many of His attributes may be realised by meditating in His creation:** "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). Even the birds, the animals and the material creation praise God (Psalms 66; 97; 98).

You can find the hidden treasure - the Lord Jesus - embodied as a poor man who deserves alms. You can also find it in an ill person or one in need of a word of comfort, etc. The Lord Jesus said: "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40)!

When the rich young man came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" So Jesus said to him, "Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have **treasure in heaven;** and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark 10:17-21). **On this basis monasticism emerged in Christianity.**

But how is the treasure hidden like that?

Yes, it is hidden! Who would think that the penniless poor is the Lord Jesus? Who would think that the prisoner is the Lord Jesus? Who would think that the sick and crippled is the Lord Jesus? Using the logic of the world, the Magi went searching until they found the

Baby Jesus. They found Him though they did not comprehend His nature and reality. They found the Divine King. Where? Laying down in poor clothes in a stable surrounded by the animals. Yet, with the state like that, with what they saw, they worshipped Him and offered Him their presents. Who would think that the King of kings would be born in a stable? Is He not a hidden treasure?

A man found this treasure and hid it

A man found it. What man? Any man. Christ came for everyone; whether he is a Jew, Greek, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, illiterate or wise (Colossians 3:11).

Why did the man who found the treasure hid it?

The Pharaoh of Egypt instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill every male born Hebrew child. But when Moses was born, his mother hid him three months and he lived. **The virtue is born from inside the soul. We need to hide it from the spiritual Pharaoh who is the devil.** When coal glows it is covered with a layer of ashes and it appears as if it were not burning. But as you draw near to it you feel the heat and warmth. **Likewise a Christian person should be careful to hide his treasure. That was how the saints lived: "The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace"** (Psalm 45:13).

"And for joy over it he went and sold all that he had and bought that field" (Matthew 13:44).

"For joy" refers to the motive and desire. **The joy of this man over this treasure was more than his joy over all his properties.** After numbering his tribulations in his ministry, St. Paul said: "As dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; **as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:4-10). **Although a man has nothing, at the same time he owns everything because he owns the Real Treasure.** This is what the pious people did. They lived in the deserts and in the desolate places disposing of everything. Yet they carried inside themselves the Real Treasure, our Lord Jesus.

"He sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44)

What does a man sell to buy the treasure? Not necessarily possessions which he sells and gives the proceeds to the needy in order to own the treasure. I may have no riches but I own tears, reverence to God and poverty in the spirit. With all that and with other things I can buy the treasure. I may sell my bodily desires and everything which impede my life with God. That is, I leave them and buy the field where the treasure is.

This man who found the treasure **"went and sold all that he had"**. **This refers to the positive steps which he took in order to own the treasure.** Giving away lusts, freeing oneself

from all the ties of sin: "We have left all and followed You" (Matthew 19:27).

What after that? The man went and bought the field in which he found the treasure. The Apostle said: "**We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**" (Romans 8:17)!

The pearl of great price:

Again the Lord Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:45, 46).

Here the merchant is a model of the person who searches for Christ until he finds Him. We notice four attributes in this man: First: He seeks beautiful pearls, that is he searches for them. Second: He finds one. Third: He goes and sells all that he has it. Fourth: He buys it.

This merchant who seeks and searches for beautiful pearls may differ from the man who found the treasure in a field without searching for it. Maybe this man was looking for something else and he found the treasure instead. In this case he is like the person to whom Jesus declared Himself without him seeking Jesus: "I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me" (Isaiah 65:1; Romans 10:20).

Yet this merchant is a more noble type and has a more superior mind. He searches for beautiful pearls, and as a result of his toil, search and noble desire, he found the pearl of great price. He was busy searching, all his effort was directed to this cause.

This merchant had a defined goal: to seek and to search for beautiful pearls, and to own them. We need to specify the goal and not to waver between God and the world. If the world with all its desires deserves your service and toil, go and be at its service. But if the Lord Jesus Who saved you deserves your service, walk in that ways.

We do not know the value of this pearl. All we know is that its price equals all the possessions of this merchant; he went and sold all that he had to buy it. This is what happens when a person finds Jesus because he finds all his needs in Him. Is there a risk for a man to sell all he has to buy the pearl of great price which refers to Christ. The matter does not afford any hesitation.

When this merchant sold all that he had, he became poor in the eyes of the people, and poverty brings with it misery. But in fact he became the richest and the most joyous man in the Universe.

(10) The Virgins: (Matthew 25:1-13)

This parable is very clear and it concerns the second coming of Christ.

St. Augustine says: "This parable concerns the whole Church - not the clergy alone nor the lay people alone, but all: "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). The Virgins are the souls who have the orthodox faith and do good works in the Church. In spite of that, five of them were wise and five were foolish.

Why five and why Virgins? The human soul is symbolised by the number five because it uses five senses and we can not do anything without at least one of our five bodily senses.

Both groups were virgins and were members of the Church by Baptism and by the other sacraments. Why then were five of them accepted and five were rejected? It is not enough to be virgins and to have lamps. They were virgins because they controlled their senses from prohibited (bad) desires. They had lamps because of their good works.

About the good works, the Lord says: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately" (Luke 12:35, 36). **Virginity is in the "girded waists" and good works are in "the shining lamps". Few are virgins in their bodies but the virginity of the heart ought to be for all".**

Augustine also said: "The wise virgins did not differ from the foolish ones except in the oil. The oil refers to love. Why? The Apostle called love: "A more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). Oil symbolises love because oil floats over all liquids. If you pour oil over water, the oil will float and if you pour water over oil, again the oil will float "Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Oil also refers to the Holy Spirit that illuminates the life of man".

"They went out to meet the bridegroom" (Matthew 25:1)

Christ is the Bridegroom of the soul and He is full of sweetness. The bride says: "Your name is ointment poured forth; therefore the virgins love you" (Song 1:3). **What does the bridegroom expect from His bride? He expects her with all her emotions to be for Him:** "Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; So the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him" (Psalm 45:10, 11).

"And at midnight a cry was heard" (Matthew 25:6)

Why at midnight? It is the time when no one anticipates it and there is no warning. The

Lord advised us many times to keep up our guards: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). The Apostle Paul says: "The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2), and the thief does not notify us about his coming. At midnight one would be fast asleep. **If the life of man symbolised by the night, midnight refers to him in the peak of his youth.** In this age, a young man does not expect to die. Yet at that time Christ might come.

"Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out" (Matthew 25:8).

These were the words of the foolish virgins and this request is impossible after death. When the wise virgins reply: "Go to those who sell, and buy for yourselves" (Matthew 25:9), they do not mean that at all.

During the absence of the foolish, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding, **and the door was shut** (Matthew 25:10). It was futile for the foolish virgins to knock on the door after it was shut. It is true that Christ said: "Knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9). These words are only meant for the time of mercy, during the life time of man on earth. But in heaven, there will be justice. The mercy of God on earth does not cancel His justice in heaven.

It was final for the foolish virgins. They lost everything and that was the end. It is a frightening and terrifying matter because it concerns eternity which has no end. For this reason, the Lord concludes this parable by saying: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:13).

The Lord Jesus does not mean that we be watchful with our bodies, though that is useful for spiritual practices. **He especially asks us to be watchful with our hearts, watchful in our faith, in hope, in love and in good deeds. The bride said: "I sleep, but my heart is awake"** (Song 5:2).

We are now in the season of engagement, because we are betrothed to Christ: "I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). **The period of engagement is the time of knowing one another and the time of growth of emotions in preparation for the day of the wedding which will be in heaven** (Luke 14:16-21)

F) JOY OF THE KINGDOM AND

EVERLASTING LIFE

Finally, we do not find words to conclude our subject about the kingdom better than what St. Augustine said:

"In eternal life we know God and live with Jesus. The Lord Jesus Himself said: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). In eternal life people know, watch and realise what they believed in on earth and they get what they could not get here. The mind sees what the eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man (1 Corinthians 2:9). They hear the voice saying: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

We shall see God. This is a great thing beside which every thing is trivial and insignificant. On earth we feel lucky if we live in peace with one another, though it is difficult to achieve that. Yet if we compare our happiness here to our eternal happiness in heaven, we perceive ourselves here as poor and miserable.

Joy in the home of God is eternal and the feast is with the hosts of angels in the presence of God. Such a feast has no beginning nor end.

In Heaven, there is no need to be prudent because there is no evil to avoid, no need for justice because there is no injustice, no moderation because there is no desire to control, and no need for endurance because there is no pain.

Beautiful are the works of mercy, yet they are not needed because there is no misery there. There is no one to feed or to give drink to, no one to clothe because every one is clothed in eternity. No one is a stranger because they all live in their home land. No one to visit because no one is sick or imprisoned. No one to bury because every one is alive. No peace to make because every one is in peace with everyone else. No one to comfort because there is no sadness but eternal joy. No one needs anything or asks for anything. Your great wealth is God Himself.

You will be content because you will not need anything. You will be satisfied by your God, and you will find all you desire.

You ask for food and God is food for you.

You desire to cuddle some one and there "it is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm 73:28). There you look for riches, and you need nothing because there is the maker of everything.

But you say: what shall I do? It seems that there is no work for me: No sight, no love and no praise.

The holy days after the Resurrection of the Lord symbolise our life after our resurrection.

The forty days before the Passover (Resurrection of the Lord) refer to our life of toil in our experience with death. However, the fifty days after the Passover symbolise the other life in the kingdom with the Lord.

Our present life is like the forty days before the Passover. But the fifty days after the Passover will not exist any more. We hope for them and by hope we love them - and praise God with the same love - and He promised us with them".