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THE MEANING OF THE TERM ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ  
IN THE PARABLES

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of New Testament Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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June 1954

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## CHAPTER I

### THE NEED FOR STUDYING THE Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ON THE BASIS OF THE PARABLES

The term "kingdom of God" plays a prominent part in the Christian vocabulary. Scarcely a sermon is preached without employing this phrase and scarcely a prayer is uttered that does not use this phrase in praise, thanksgiving, or petition. That it is an essential part of the New Testament is not doubted. The term "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of Heaven" occurs 119 times in the New Testament (predominantly in the Synoptics).<sup>1</sup> Lenski says that the kingdom of God is "the supreme concept of the New Testament".<sup>2</sup> John Erigh goes even further and says:

The concept of the kingdom of God involves, in a real sense the total message of the Bible. Not only does it loom large in the teachings of Jesus; it is to be found, in one form or another, through the length and breadth of the Bible--at least if we view it through the eyes of the New Testament faith--from Abraham, who set out to seek "the city . . . whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10; cf. Gen. 12:1 ff.), until the New Testament closes with "the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2). To grasp what is meant by kingdom of

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., 1886), p. 270.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 42.



God is to come very close to the heart of the Bible's gospel of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

Edersheim refers to the Old Testament teaching on the kingdom of God with these glowing words:

This rule of heaven and kingship of Jehovah was the very substance of the Old Testament; the object of the calling and mission of Israel; the meaning of all its ordinances, whether civil or religious; the underlying idea of all its institutions. It explained alike the history of the people, the dealings of God with them, and the prospects opened up by the prophets. Without it the Old Testament could not be understood; it gave perpetuity to its teaching and dignity to its representatives. This constituted alike the real contrast between Israel and the nations of antiquity and Israel's real title to distinction. Thus the whole Old Testament was the preparatory presentation of the rule of heaven and of the kingdom of its Lord.<sup>4</sup>

At the very dawn of the New Testament era, John the Baptist had proclaimed, "The kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2), and that the work of Jesus was incomparably greater than his (John 1:15-34). Now after John was put in prison, Jesus began His public ministry by "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 ff.; cf. Matt. 4:17). Jesus laid upon His disciples the burden of proclaiming the kingdom of God. When the twelve were sent out on their

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<sup>3</sup>John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Edersheim, op. cit., p. 265.



preaching tour, Jesus said: "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of Heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 10:7). When the seventy were sent forth Jesus said: "Say unto them, the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:19). If the proclamation was rejected: "Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:11). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus exhorts His disciples, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). He introduces eleven different parables with such a statement as, "the kingdom of God is like . . .," or with the question, "with what can we compare the Kingdom of God?" Jesus speaks of how one comes to enter the kingdom of God (John 3; Matt. 18:3; etc.). In the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1 ff.), He describes those who are members of His kingdom (cf. Matt. 5:3; Luke 6:20; Mark 10:14,15; Matt. 13:44-46; etc.). The prayer which He taught His disciples has for its second petition: "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). Even to the casual reader of the New Testament it is evident that the central theme of Jesus' teaching and preaching is the kingdom of God. And yet, there are few Biblical concepts which are understood in such a variety of different ways as the kingdom of God. Hunter suggests the odds are that if we ask a dozen men what they mean by the phrase, we



shall get half a dozen different answers.<sup>5</sup>

The kingdom of God is often discussed in Lutheran circles, and even more frequently in Reformed circles. Dr. Reu points out in his excellent article, "Der Biblische Begriff des Reiches Gottes," that building the kingdom is often said to be the solemn obligation of every Christian and the most important duty of Christ's Church on earth. He mentions that Lutherans frequently employ this expression with regard to mission work: to commission missionaries and to support them with our prayers and financial assistance is described as building and expanding the kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>

The American Socialist and labor leader Bouck White, in his book, The Call of the Carpenter, written to claim Jesus as a "proletarian" prophet, says: "The modern reader can perhaps grasp the kingdom of Heaven as Jesus used it by substituting for it in every case another term: the kingdom of self-respect."<sup>7</sup> Thus a person may think that a great advance has been made in the kingdom of God when

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<sup>5</sup>A. M. Hunter, The Work and Words of Jesus (London: S. C. M. Press, 1950), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup>D. M. Reu, "Der Biblische Begriff des Reiches Gottes," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, LV (August, 1931), 449.

<sup>7</sup>Bouck White, as quoted by C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), p. 35.



bonds are issued to clean up a slum area, better working conditions are secured, or a higher standard of living is reached for the working man.

Christopher Dawson, a Roman Catholic philosopher and advocate of Neo-Thomism, says:

To the Catholic the Church was the kingdom of God on earth--in via--the supernatural society through which and in which alone humanity would realize its true end. It was a visible society with its own law and constitution which possessed divine and indefectible authority. It remained through the ages one and the same, like a city set on a hill, plain for all men to see, handing on from generation to generation the same deposit of faith and the same mandate of authority which it had received from its Divine Founder and which it would retain whole and intact until the end of time. . . . The Catholic Church is the bearer of a living tradition which unites the present and the past, the living and the dead, in one great spiritual community which transcends all the limited communities of race and nation and state. Hence it is not enough for the Catholics to believe in the Word as contained in the sacred Scriptures, it is not even enough to accept the historic faith as embodied in the creeds and interpreted by Catholic theology, it is necessary for him to be incorporated as a cell in the living organism of the Divine society and to enter into communion with the historic reality of the sacred tradition.<sup>8</sup>

For the Catholic, the kingdom of God is to be identified with "the Church," and we need not ask which Church.

Regnum Dei est Ecclesia Romana. The sincere Catholic sees

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<sup>8</sup>Christopher Dawson, as quoted by F. E. Mayer, "The Kingdom of God According to the New Testament," Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Convention of the Texas District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), p. 21.



in the extending of the Pope's Supremacy, in the establishment of the Vatican States, and in the appointment of a United States Ambassador to the Papal See, a great victory for the kingdom of God.<sup>9</sup>

The kingdom of God is construed in many different ways. The social reformer speaks of it in terms of a renovated social order to be built on the principles of Jesus; the philosopher thinks of it as some ideal polity; the adventist depicts in terms of some cataclysmic coming of Christ;<sup>10</sup> the Roman Catholic theologian pictures it as the Roman Catholic Church; and Lutherans pray that the Lord may see fit to use their missionaries, prayers, and financial assistance in the building of His kingdom. And yet most of these groups voice the same petition: "Thy kingdom come."

In the midst of this variety of definitions, we begin to ask ourselves, "Just what did Jesus mean when He spoke of the kingdom of God?" The kingdom of God is most strikingly presented by Jesus in the parables. "The parables of Jesus may be generally described as parables of the kingdom of God."<sup>11</sup> "Inhaltlich bringen die Gleichnisse

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<sup>9</sup>D. M. Reu, op. cit., p. 449.

<sup>10</sup>A. M. Hunter, op. cit., pp. 68, 69.

<sup>11</sup>Alan Richardson, "Kingdom of God," Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 120.



Jesus Verdeutlichungen über die grossen Themata seiner Verkündigung von Gottes Reich, von Gottes Art und Handeln, von Sein und Sollen des Menschen."<sup>12</sup> So that we may more fully understand the nature of the kingdom of God as our Lord taught it, let us turn to the parables of the kingdom where we hear, "without any doubt, the very voice of Jesus Christ, teaching the mysteries of the kingdom to those who have ears to hear."<sup>13</sup>

As we glance at the parables in which the term kingdom of God is used we find our Savior asking: "What can we say the kingdom of God is like? or with what parable shall we illustrate it? It is like a tiny grain of mustard-seed which . . . " (Mark 4:30). Or we hear Him saying, "So is the kingdom of God as a man scattering seed on the ground and . . . " (Mark 4:26); "The kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and . . . " (Matt. 13:33); "The kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field, which . . . " (Matt. 13:44); "For the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers . . . " (Matt. 20:1);

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<sup>12</sup>Hauck, "παραβολή," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag vom W. Kohlhammer, 1952), V, 755.

<sup>13</sup>H. B. Swete, The Parables of the Kingdom (Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 160.



"Again the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls . . . " (Matt. 13:45);

"Again the kingdom of Heaven is like unto a drag-net that was cast into the sea and gathered . . . " (Matt. 13:47);

"The kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain king who wished to settle accounts . . . " (Matt. 18:23); "The kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain king which made a marriage feast for his Son . . . " (Matt. 22:2); "And then shall the kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins which . . . " (Matt. 25:1); etc.

How strange! The kingdom of God is not described in <sup>T</sup> the spectacular pictures which we would expect to be used in depicting a kingly rule or reign. Rather Jesus uses many pictures from the daily life of the Galilian. In fact, five of the kingdom parables are taken from the vegetable world. What can such similitudes tell us of the *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*? In this paper we shall attempt to determine the meaning of the term *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* in the parables of the kingdom. Our prayer is that, through the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we may be led to see and more fully understand the true meaning of *ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* as we on the basis of the parables study the *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*: (1) In terms of origin; (2) in terms of growth; (3) in terms of responsibility; and (4) in terms of judgment.



## CHAPTER II

### IN TERMS OF ORIGIN

#### It Is God's Creation

To determine the origin of the *συστήσις τοῦ θείου* as described in the parables, we turn first of all to Jesus' excellent parable "The Seed Growing Secretly." In Mark 4:26-29, the Evangelist writes: "And He," that is Jesus, "said":

The kingdom of God is like a man scattering seed on the ground and then going to bed each night and getting up every morning, while the seed sprouts and grows up, though he has no idea how it happens. Spontaneously the earth produces a crop: first a blade, then an ear of corn, then the full-grown grain in the ear. And as soon as the crop is ready, he at once begins harvesting for the harvest time has come.

Two processes are here compared: the one ordinary, well-known, its familiar features repeated every year; the other a spiritual and incomprehensible process. The former was to be an analogy to make the latter known, understood, and vivid for the disciples, and to attract those from the multitude who had not yet rejected Him.

#### It Is not the Product of Human Effort or Achievement

One of the things that was to be made clear is that in the second case just as in the first, growth was a thing which resulted "of itself," *αὐτομάτη*, of its own power



of growth, and was thereby independent of the willing, causing or doing of man. Μηκύνεται (v. 27) can be either middle or passive; the idea is that it "lengthens itself."<sup>1</sup> Μηκύνεται emphasizes that the activity of growth is internal to the plant; into this mystery of growth the sower (ἄνθρωπος --indefinite) cannot penetrate: it takes place ὡς οὐκ οἶσεν αὐτός (v. 27), after a manner which baffles his understanding.

Αὐτομάτη (v. 28) describes the life-giving power and growth characteristic of the seed. The weight of meaning rests on what the seed does when it gets to the earth. The earth "bears fruit" only as the medium for the living powers of the seed. It has no life and can produce no life; all the life is in the seed. "Spontaneously," αὐτομάτη, the seed puts forth first the blade, then the ear, and finally the full-grown grain in the ear. The fate of the seed does not depend upon the waking or sleeping, or the working or not working of man. Through the hours of the night and day, while men sleep and while they work, the silent mystery of growth goes forward. Man may watch

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, "The Gospel According to St. Mark," The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 117.



it "wie ein neugieriges Kind"<sup>2</sup> but "he knows not how" (v. 27) it happens. "Nichts anderes als ein bares Wunder geschieht vor unserm Augen, wenn ohne unser Zutun, ja ohne unser Verstehen aus dem kleinsten Samenkorn die fruchttragende Staude geworden ist."<sup>3</sup>

Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, "the kingdom of God is like this." It has a power behind it like the elemental power which forces the blades of grass through the earth; it, like the seed, grows and develops "of itself," but he, man, knows not how.

The Jews considered the malkuth of Heaven as something which man must take upon himself if it is ever to be established.<sup>4</sup> When a Jew submitted himself unquestionably to the Torah, he took upon himself the kingdom of heaven.<sup>5</sup> The same was true when a pious Jew recited the Shema twice daily, put on phylacteries, washed his hands, etc.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup>K. L. Schmidt, "Βασιλεία," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag vom W. Kohhammer, 1935), I, 586.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Kingdom of God," The Jewish Encyclopedia, edited by Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1907), VII, 502 f.

<sup>5</sup>G. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), p. 36.

<sup>6</sup>Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., 1886), I, 260.



rabbis believed that God's rule would be established in its complete form when all the nations would submit to the Torah as they explained it.<sup>7</sup> There was actually a group of Pharisees who taught that if Israel would keep two sabbaths perfectly, God would send His kingdom.<sup>8</sup> By keeping every jot and tittle of the law the Pharisees sought to compel the coming of the kingdom; they sought "to do so by a system of conduct refined and methodically regulated to the least detail, a regime which as such was a work of one's own decision, will, doing, and capability."<sup>9</sup> And the adherents of the "fourth philosophy" (later called "Zealots") even believed that by active revolt they could force the hand of God to establish His kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

One of the reasons Jesus spoke the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly was to correct these false notions

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<sup>7</sup>F. E. Mayer, "The Kingdom of God According to the New Testament," Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Convention of the Texas District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>C. T. Craig, "The Teaching of Jesus," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), VII, 146.

<sup>9</sup>Rudolf Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, translated from the revised German edition by F. V. Filson and B. Lee-Woolf (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), p. 120.

<sup>10</sup>Craig, op. cit., p. 146.



which Judaism had acquired concerning the kingdom of God. Just as the seed grows of itself, so also the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ will grow "of itself" (αὐτομάτη), "völlig unabhängig von dem Menschen."<sup>11</sup> The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is not the work of man or of any Pharisaic system of human righteousness. Luther says: "Non propriis viribus, meritis, aut operibus" (not by our own powers merits, or works).<sup>12</sup> Jesus says, "It grows 'of itself.'" It is not the production of human effort or achievement; it cannot be established through the efforts of the United Nations or the diplomatic strategy of the present world powers.

#### It Is Not the Product of Natural Development

Wendland points out that the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly cannot be used to show that the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is the result of an evolutionary process as some have attempted to do.<sup>13</sup> That the kingdom grows from an infinitesimally small beginning to an impressively great close, shows that the βασιλεία which Jesus here describes

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<sup>11</sup>Heinz Dietrich Wendland, Die Eschatologie des Reiches Gottes bei Jesus (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1931), p. 36.

<sup>12</sup>Otto, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>13</sup>Wendland, op. cit., p. 36.



constitutes nothing short of a divine miracle. The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is not the product of human achievement; it is also not the product of natural development.

#### It Has Its Origin Outside of the Order of This World

In His interpretation of the parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:36-39), Jesus "answered and said, He that soweth the 'good seed' is the Son of Man; and the field is the world" (Matt. 13:37, 38a). The Son of Man comes and sows the "good seed" on earth out of which the kingdom grows. Jesus here infers what he specifically told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The phrase ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου denotes that which has a mundane character.<sup>14</sup> The kingdom of God οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

Es stammt nicht von der Erde, am wenigsten aus der durch die Sünde gottfeindlich gewordenen Welt, sondern es stammt vom Himmel her und ist nur durch ein besonderes Eingreifen Gottes in den Gang dieser Welt auf Erden gegründet.<sup>15</sup>

That the βασιλεία τοῦ θνῦ did not have its origin in the order of this sin-stricken world becomes evident

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<sup>14</sup>A. Osiander, as quoted by F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), II, 388.

<sup>15</sup>D. M. Reu, "Der Biblische Begriff des Reiches Gottes," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, LV (August, 1931), 460.



when we look at the parables. There is, for instance, the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-45). No earthly owner of a vineyard would, after his servant was killed, send other servants to be killed and on top of that his own beloved son, only to have Him killed also. He would get the police and have the murderers cleaned out immediately. The hearers might well exclaim: "Why, we never heard of an owner doing anything like that, not stopping till his own son was killed!"<sup>16</sup> The length to which God goes to establish His rule on earth, is so foreign to this world that for men without faith it is foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18).

Men had pronounced Christ guilty of death and worthy of the most ignominious form of execution (Matt. 26:66). Cicero said that crucifixion was something which a Roman citizen should not even think of. It was only fit for a slave.<sup>17</sup> But the stone which the builders rejected was made the chief cornerstone of the kingdom (Matt. 21:42). This is a complete reversal of man's judgment. What was considered despised and accursed in the eyes of the Jewish

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<sup>16</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1932), p. 813.

<sup>17</sup>H. A. A. Kennedy, "The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians," The Expositor's Greek Testament, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 438.



leaders is made the foundation-stone of a kingdom far greater than the world could ever dream of.

In the parable of the Two Sons (Matt. 21:28-32), Jesus points out that the Scribes and Pharisees who were generally considered the most certain of entering the kingdom were not entering the kingdom at all, while the harlots and publicans whose prospects of entering the kingdom were considered to be most infinitesimal, were entering.<sup>18</sup> This shows that the order of the *Βουλὴ τῷ Θεῷ* is the exact opposite of the world's estimate.

At the very beginning of the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 19:30-20:16), Jesus points out that in the kingdom the first shall be last and the last shall be first; all the faithful laborers in the Lord's kingdom shall receive the same gift of eternal life no matter whether they labored a day or a century. We, as human beings, instinctively agree with the laborers who had borne the burden and heat of the day.<sup>19</sup> But "the love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind."<sup>20</sup> The order of the *Βουλὴ τῷ Θεῷ* is much different from what the world

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<sup>18</sup>Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing Co., 1953), p. 295.

<sup>19</sup>G. E. P. Cox, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: S C M Press, 1952), p. 126.

<sup>20</sup>F. W. Faber, as quoted by Cox, Ibid.



is accustomed to.

In the parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:24,25), the nobleman "said to those who were standing by, 'Take from him the pound and give it to the one who has ten.' But they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten pounds (already).'" The bystanders thought this would be a great injustice. Jesus answers their objection by stating the law of the kingdom: "To everyone who has more will be given, but as for him who has nothing even what he has will be taken away" (Luke 19:26). These parables, as also the parable of the Ten Virgins, the parable of the Wedding Feast, the parable of the Leaven, and others, show that the order of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is radically different from men's order. It has its origin outside of the framework of the world in which we live. It is established in the world but it does not partake of the nature of the world. It is not built and ruled after the manner of an earthly kingdom.

Wendland thinks that possibly Matthew used the phrase kingdom of Heaven (*ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*) rather than *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* for this very reason: to emphasize the supramundane character of the kingdom of God.<sup>21</sup> In most of the parables, Matthew has Jesus using the term *ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*; though in the interpretation of the parable

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<sup>21</sup>Wendland, op. cit., p. 15.



of the Two Sons and in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, Matthew has Jesus using the term ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Dr. Arndt feels that since in Matthew's Gospel there is no tendency otherwise to avoid mentioning the name of God, Matthew's frequent use of the term ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν should not be explained as dictated by the wish to avoid the uttering of God's holy name, but rather due to the beautiful, transcendent meaning which τῶν οὐρανῶν attaches to the term.<sup>22</sup>

Most commentators, however, seem agreed that Matthew used the term kingdom of Heaven because, as Strack-Billerbeck has so well shown,<sup>23</sup> this term was in common usage among the Jews. (The rabbis refrained from using the word lest they might misuse God's name and systematically substituted the word οὐρανός for the word Θεός.) Schmidt points out that there is absolutely no difference between βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν and βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ.<sup>24</sup> Both terms indicate the transcendent origin and character of this βασιλεία. With the use of either term, Jesus

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<sup>22</sup>W. Arndt, "The New Testament Teaching on the Kingdom of God," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXI (January, 1950), 8.

<sup>23</sup>Strack-Billerbeck, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), I, 172.

<sup>24</sup>K. L. Schmidt, op. cit., p. 583.



indicates that the βασιλεία of the parables is not the result of human achievement or natural development; but that it is a kingdom which has its origin entirely outside of the order of this world. It is the βασιλεία which Daniel describes as set up by God and made by no human hands; a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, but shall break in pieces all earthly kingdoms and bring them to an end (Dan. 2:44, 45).

#### It Is God's Production

The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is like unto a certain man who prepared a great feast and invited many; and at the time of the banquet He sent His servants to say to those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is ready now" (Luke 14:15-24); or it is like a certain King who prepared a wedding and sent out His invitation to the guests, announcing to them: "Everything is ready, my oxen and my fatling are killed, even the wedding dress has been prepared" (Matt. 22:2-15).

Jesus' mention of "the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14) aroused such a yearning for the kingdom of God within one of the distinguished supper-guests at the house of a leader of the Pharisees that this guest exclaimed: "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."

Φάγεται ἄρτον points to the Jewish idea that the Messianic age will be inaugurated by a banquet and will be a prolonged



feast (Is. 25:6; Ps. 22:27 ff.; Enoch 62:13 ff.). The symbol of the heavenly banquet was a traditional one for the bliss of the good time coming when the kingdom of God would be revealed.<sup>25</sup> Jesus Himself used similar symbolism in Matt. 8:11 (cf. Luke 13:28,29) when speaking of the kingdom of God. The terms *δειπνον μέγα* (Luke 14:16) and *γάμος* (Matt. 22:2) were points of contact with which the Lord sought to convey to His contemporaries the fact that God had now inaugurated the Messianic kingdom.

The parable of the Great Supper and the parable of the Marriage Feast clearly illustrate that the *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* is God's creation. God is the certain man (*ὄνθρωπος*) who prepares the Great Supper (Luke 14:16); God is the King (*ἄρχων βασιλεῖ*) who prepares the banquet for His Son (Matt. 22:2). The *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* is God's banquet, God's Supper. He has prepared (*ἡτοιμάσθη* --perfect, Matt. 22:4) for men a feast of good vitals (all things are now prepared, *ἤδη ἑτοιμάσθη ἔστιν* Luke 14:17), and He invites them to come at once and partake of these heavenly blessings. We do not bring our lunch-buckets, God has prepared everything, even the garment of Christ's righteousness wherewith He clothes us (Matt. 22:11; cf. Is. 61:10; Rev. 19:8; also Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27).

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<sup>25</sup>Dodd, op. cit., p. 121.



In Matt. 25:34, our Savior reveals that the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* was prepared from the foundation of the world.

In eternity already God decided to establish a kingdom, to gather a people in which He would rule as King (Matt. 25:34). When God now in time inaugurates His kingdom, He sends out His messengers with the summons, "Come, for all things are now ready." Dodd rightly equates the call, "Come, for all things are now ready" with the call, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."<sup>26</sup>

It Is Primarily God's Gracious Activity for the Salvation of Men

In the parables of the Great Supper and the Marriage Feast, Jesus illustrates that the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is God's Production. But He teaches more. In all the parables of the kingdom, Jesus compares the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* with activity rather than a static picture. There is always something doing, something going on, or some living power at work: a seed growing secretly, but irresistibly on (Mark 4:26-29); a dragnet at work (Matt. 13:47-50); a man sowing seed (Mark 4:1-9,26); leaven with its vital force penetrating dough (Matt. 13:33); etc. Here it is God calling men; God sending His messengers to announce the "good news" of the kingdom to men "captive

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.



under the power of the devil condemned to die, enmeshed in sin and blindness."<sup>27</sup> And though men shamefully mishandled His servants, beating some and killing others, this did not stop God, He had yet one a Beloved Son and He sent Him (parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, Mark 12:1-11). God sent His Only-Begotten Son to us while we were yet His enemies (Rom. 5:8), so that we might share in His reign. And in spite of the fact that men rejected and killed His Son, God raised up the Stone which the builders rejected and made it "the head of the corner" (Matt. 21:42). He made it a precious stone for those who believe on Christ (1 Pet. 2:7);<sup>28</sup> the cause of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:9). This was from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Mark 12:11).

By nature we are unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness unto us, and we cannot experience them, for they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). But God in His unlimited grace projects His kingdom before us as the costly pearl appeared before the eyes of the merchant, who though he was looking for good pearls, nevertheless one day unexpectedly discovered before

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<sup>27</sup>Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 685.

<sup>28</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, The First Epistle of Peter (London: S C M Press, 1950), p. 48.



his eyes a pearl more costly than he could ever dream of finding (Matt. 13:45,46). The Lord makes His kingdom loom up before our eyes as the hidden treasure flashed forth unearthed before the amazed eyes of a laborer tilling a field (Matt. 13:44).

It is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32). Left to ourselves we would never enter the kingdom. For except a man be born anew of the Spirit, he shall not see the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:28; John 3:3). The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is God in action letting His light shine into our hearts, opening our dull eyes, so that we might behold the wonder and possess the priceless treasure of His kingdom.

By nature all men are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:10) and therefore unable to inherit the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21). Nothing but destruction and misery are in their path (Rom. 3:16). But God is not like the Pharisees who tried to lock men out of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* (Matt. 23:13); instead the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is God in action, coming not only to the religious leaders of the Jews, but also to despised (those who are found in the *πρωτιᾶς καὶ ῥύμας* Luke 14:21; the publicans and sinners), and to the Gentiles (*Ἔξελθε εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς καὶ ἄγρους* Luke 14:23, is the command to



bring the invitation to the Gentiles),<sup>29</sup> urging them to come and accept the *δικαιοσύνη καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ χαρὰ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ* which He bestows upon those who come under His rule (Rom. 14:17).

The *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* is like a certain King who out of unspeakable love forgave the enormous debt of the unfaithful servant (Matt. 18:25). It is God's gracious activity forgiving men their sins and restoring His "lost sons" to His household (parable of the Prodigal Son Luke 15:10-32).

Vergebung ist immer Geschenk, sie kann nie erworben werden. . . . Sie ist immer ein Wunder der Gnade Gottes am Menschen. . . . Diese Vergebung bestand für Jesus . . . in der Wiederherstellung der persönlichen Gemeinschaft mit Gott. Diese neue Gemeinschaft zwischen Gott und dem Menschen, ist Gottes Geschenk an den Menschen. Des Menschen Umkehr kommt nicht durch seine Leistung zustande. Gott ruft ihn. Gott ermöglicht sie ihm. Bei den Menschen ist's unmöglich, dass einer ins Himmelreich kommt, nur Gott macht es möglich.<sup>30</sup>

The *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* is God's gracious activity through which "is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of God, and the power of His Christ" (Rev. 12:10). It is God's creation for the salvation of men. We don't call it into being; in fact, the very opposite is the case, it calls

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<sup>29</sup>William Manson, "The Gospel of Luke," The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1930), p. 174.

<sup>30</sup>Friedrich Büchsel, Jesus (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1947), pp. 32-34.



us into a new existence.

Leslie Newbigin defines the term βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as indicating "primarily the presence and action of the kingly power of God."<sup>31</sup> This is especially true in the parables. In loose speech the word βασιλεία has often been used alone as though it divided some sphere or order of things which could be thought of in itself. But as Newbigin says, "The operative word so to say is τοῦ θεοῦ,"<sup>32</sup> indicating that the activity which Jesus describes in these parables cannot be thought of apart from God. The very phrase βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ declares that the βασιλεία depicted in the parables is specifically God's rule, God's activity, God's creation;<sup>33</sup> it does not originate on earth with man, but with God in heaven.

When it is remembered that the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ cannot be the result of man's achievement, or the product of natural development, but that its origin is entirely outside of the order of this world, that it is God's gracious activity for the salvation of men, and that the phrase βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ indicates primarily the presence and activity of the kingly power of God, then the Christian

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<sup>31</sup>Leslie Newbigin, The Household of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1953), p. 22.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Dana & Mantley, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947), p. 73.



should not be tempted to think that he must or can join in bringing in the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*. Christ never speaks of men as builders of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*. Only God can build it. We can and should, indeed, pray for the coming of His *Βασιλεία* as we do in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer; but we can not usher it in. The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is solely and alone God's creation. To establish the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*, God must act and begin His rule.

#### It Breaks into History with the Advent of Christ

God had already manifested His gracious rule amongst Israel of old. He chose Israel as His first born son before all other sons and people (Ex. 4:22), to be His possession, His people, His kingdom in which He would actually reign as King before the face of all other nations. At Mount Sinai God gave Israel a destiny as His people. They should be a mamleketh kohanim, a kingdom of priests, in whom God would reign as King (Ex. 19:3-8). But it became especially evident after the time of David and Solomon, when the king of Judah and a great number of the people fell away from God, that the kingdom of God was not the original Israelite kingdom, but that the real kingdom of God lay in the future, to be expected first in the last times.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Reu, op. cit., p. 453.



In fact, Bright<sup>35</sup> points out that for Israel who was called to live under God's rule, there was from the very beginning the concomitant hope for the coming kingdom of God. If Israel would obey His voice, there was the assurance of the promised land for an inheritance (Ex. 15:13) and the promise that God would defend them from all their foes (Num. 23:21-24; 24:8 ff.) and make them a great nation (Num. 23:9 f.; 24:5-7; cf. Gen. 12:2; 18:18; etc.). They would live in unimagined peace and plenty (Gen. 49:25 ff.; Deut. 33:13-17), until the divinely sent leader appears (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17-19). God had chosen Israel in history and summoned her to a destiny as His people. God's purpose in history, towards which history tends, is "the establishment of His kingdom over His people."<sup>36</sup>

The righteous among Israel realized that God's reign was not yet complete. Sin was constantly frustrating God's rule (Is. 65:6-7; Hos. 11:2,7; Micah 3:9b-12). God's faithful often suffered injustice and God's will was ignored by many (Matt. 23:30,35). The righteous were themselves often weighed down with the burden of sin (Ps. 38:4; Neh. 1:6-9; cf. 5:19). They longed for the day when "the Lord shall be king over all the earth" (Zech. 14:19) and

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<sup>35</sup>John Bright, "Faith and Destiny," Interpretation, V (January, 1951), 11.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-11.



His righteous rule established.

When Israel fell into grievous sin, Isaiah cried out, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down" (Is. 64:1); and Micah said: "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation"

(Micah 7:7; see also Is. 8:17). When Israel was in captivity in Babylon, Jeremiah prophesied:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel . . . not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the days that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them saith the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their heart and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer. 31:31-33).

Isaiah had promised that the acceptable year of the Lord would be proclaimed; the "good tidings" preached, the broken-hearted comforted, the captives set free, and all who mourn would be comforted (Is. 61:1,2).

Hundreds of years before "the fulness of time" (Gal. 4:4), Isaiah foretold the coming of God into the midst of His people and a herald going before them with an *εὐαγγέλιον*. Three times in Is. 40-55 there is the promise of "one that bringeth good tidings," and all Jerusalem is pictured on the wall waiting when, suddenly, on the hill the herald appears: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth



salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth" (Is. 52:7). So Isaiah foresaw the coming of the reign of God.<sup>37</sup> It came during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, when a young man from Nazareth appeared in Galilee, saying by means of parables (as also by other means): "The time which Isaiah foresaw is here. The kingdom of which David's was merely a foretaste is being inaugurated."

In ten parables Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like . . ." or "The kingdom of God is likened unto . . ." or "With what can we compare the kingdom of God? . . . It is like unto . . ." In only one parable, The parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), does Jesus say, "The kingdom of God shall be likened unto . . ." indicating that the kingdom of God was in a sense already present.

In the four parables of growth--in the parable of the Sower, in the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly, in the parable of the Mustard Seed, and in the parable of the Leaven--Jesus directly implies that the kingdom of God is present. "It is present" (*ὁμοίᾳ ἐστίν* Matt. 13:31), Jesus says, "like a tiny grain of mustard seed in the soil"; its beginning is scarcely noticeable; but no matter how infinitesimally small its beginning may seem, it is present (Mark 4:30-32; cf. Matt. 13:31 ff; Luke 13:18 ff.). "Again,

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<sup>37</sup>A. M. Hunter, The Work and Words of Jesus (London: S C M Press, 1950), pp. 71 f.



it is present" (ὁμοία ἔστιν Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:21,21), Jesus says, "like a small lump of leaven in a pan of dough." Though the kingdom of God is at work silently, invisibly, unseen by the human eye, so that men like the Pharisees may look their eyes out and yet not see it; nevertheless Jesus indicates: "It is present now, today, in My day."

With regard to the parable of the Sower, the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly, the parable of the Mustard Seed, and the parable of the Leaven, Bacon says:

All four comparisons have a common object, to confirm the glad tidings of the coming kingdom as a power of God already at work. . . . Note, then, how in this group of parables of the kingdom the chief lesson is the present, inward working of God's Spirit, unseen by dull or hostile eyes, a kingdom of God which is already in the midst, silent, omnipotent, overtaking unawares those whose spiritual eyes are closed . . . (as the prophet says) "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."<sup>38</sup>

All four parables emphasize what Jesus proclaimed at the very beginning of His ministry (Mark 1:15a): "the time has been fulfilled [πληρώται perf. pass. of πληρῶ] the kingdom of God has come [ἤγγικεν perf. of ἕγγίζω]." (The perfect tense implies that the season is now fulfilled. The Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is present.) "The law and the prophets were till John, since that time the kingdom of God is preached [lit., the Reign of God is being gosselled] and

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<sup>38</sup>B. W. Bacon, The Story of Jesus and the Beginnings of the Church (New York: MacMillan Co., 1929), p. 212.



every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is so close to His hearers that they may enter it at that very moment by repentance and faith (Mark 1:15b).

Elsewhere the same truth is implied. The kingdom of God is like (ὁμοία ἐστίν Matt. 13:47-50) a Dragnet which is gathering into its fold all sorts of people, men who are both good and bad. Already in Jesus' early ministry the kingdom of God had gathered into its fold a Judas Iscariot on the one hand, and John the Beloved Disciple on the other. Soon there would be an Ananias and Sapphira and a couple like Aquila and Priscilla. The kingdom of God is like a Great Supper for which the invitation goes out, "Come for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:16-24). The invitation had already gone out in Jesus' day. The religious leaders of the Jews had rejected Jesus as their king, saying in effect, "We will not that this man reign over us" (Luke 19:14). The invitation was being offered to the despised, to the man in the street and to the man in the byways of the slums (Luke 14:21). The publicans and harlots were actually, at that very moment (προάγουσιν --pres.), entering the kingdom of God (Matt. 21:31). Certainly Otto is right when he says that the new and arresting thing of Jesus' preaching and teaching was that the kingdom of God "had come."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Otto, op. cit., p. 47.



One of the reasons Jesus used parables was to enforce and illustrate the fact that the day had now dawned.<sup>40</sup> The new era was here. The things which many prophets, kings, and righteous men had long desired to see and hear are now present before the eyes and in the ears of Jesus' disciples (Luke 10:73 ff; Matt. 13:16 ff.). God was now beginning to rule in a new, direct way.

Otto was right when he said that the new thing of Jesus' preaching was that the kingdom is present.<sup>41</sup> But that was only half of it. The other half and most important part is "dass in Jesus Wort und Tat, dass in ihm selbst die zukünftige Herrschaft Gottes schon erschienen ist."<sup>42</sup>

In the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. 21:33-45), Jesus pointed out that the servants had already come.

Δουλοὶ (vv. 34,35) is the word which commonly designated the prophets of the Lord in the LXX (Zech. 1:6; Jer. 7:25, etc.). The Jews had not had a true prophet for over four hundred years. Strach-Billerbeck points out that the Jews of Jesus' day commonly held that the next prophet who would

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<sup>40</sup>Dodd, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>41</sup>Otto, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>42</sup>Julius Schniewind, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus," Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1950), p. 23.



authenticate himself would be either the Messiah or the forerunner of the Messiah.<sup>43</sup> John the Baptist had already appeared. He was recognized by all as a prophet (Matt. 21:26). Now the Beloved Son of whom John the Baptist testified: "He is preferred before me; for He was before me" (John 1:30), appeared. He spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes (Matt. 7:29). He would at the end of time send his holy angels to separate the good from the evil (Matt. 13:41). He had authority to take the wise into the eternal kingdom and lock out the foolish (Matt. 25:10-12). He had authenticated himself; He was recognized as a "great prophet"; the people said, "God hath visited His people" (Luke 7:16). He was then the long awaited Messiah. Furthermore, the term *λίθος* was almost a technical term for the Messiah in Jesus' day.<sup>44</sup> By authenticating Himself as a prophet, and by pointing out that He was not on the same level with the prophets, a *σοφιστής*, but that He was the *υἱός*, the heir, *κληρονόμος*, of the kingdom (Matt. 21:38), and by referring to Himself as the *λίθος* (technical term for the Messiah), Jesus emphasized that He was the Messiah. He was sent by God to establish the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*.

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<sup>43</sup>Strack-Billerbeck, Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928), IV, Part 1, 779.

<sup>44</sup>Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," Opera, edited by J. Schrey and H. Meyer (Cologne: Schrey and Meyerum, 1686), p. 254.



That the Jews understood that the Messiah would establish the kingdom of God is evident. When John the Baptist proclaimed: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2), the people were wondering if he was the Messiah (Luke 3:15), indicating that they had correctly connected the coming of the kingdom with the advent of the Messiah.<sup>45</sup> Some of the Jews also understood that Jesus was the Messiah through whom God would establish His kingdom. John tells us that when Andrew had spent some time with Jesus and soon afterward met His brother Simon, Andrew told him: "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:35 ff.). Philip is called by Jesus the next day (John 1:44), and Philip says to his friend Nathanael: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth the Son of Joseph" (John 1:45). And when Nathanael met Jesus, and Jesus revealed His omniscience, Nathanael exclaimed: "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel" (John 1:49).

Jesus says in His interpretation of the parable of the Tares that it is the "Son of Man" who sows the Good Seed out of which the kingdom grows (Matt. 13:41). The Greek term *υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* occurs eighty-one times in the

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<sup>45</sup>Arndt, op. cit., p. 16.



Gospels and always as a self-designation of Jesus.<sup>46</sup> The dominant idea in the title seems to be that of sovereignty.<sup>47</sup> Thus in Dan. 7:14, "the one like unto a son of man" receives a kingdom from God. Jesus is accordingly the bearer of the divine rule. He is the King; the rule of God incarnate (αὐτοβασιλεία).<sup>48</sup> He brings the kingdom. He sowed the seed out of which the βασιλεία τοῦ θιού grew. He inaugurated the βασιλεία τοῦ θιού on earth. Where He was there the kingdom was (Luke 17:21). Where He spoke the saving rule of God was mightily present and actively creating its sphere of rule, forming the little company of those who live under God's Rule, the people of God. This finds its confirmation in the fact that in the Gospels to be a disciple of Jesus is to be in the βασιλεία τοῦ θιού.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, that Jesus taught in the parables that the kingdom was established through His coming is unmistakably brought out in His parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt. 22:1-14). "Jesus," so Matthew tells us, "answered and spoke unto them again by parables, saying, 'the kingdom

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<sup>46</sup>J. Y. Campbell, "Son of Man," Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 231.

<sup>47</sup>Hunter, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>48</sup>Origen, as quoted by Schmidt, op. cit., p. 591.

<sup>49</sup>T. W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 206 ff.



of Heaven has become like a king who gave a marriage feast for his son. . . . " God the Father has prepared a blessed feast in honor of His Beloved Son (Matt. 22:1). We are told that many of the guests who were invited to come to the marriage feast would not come; so others are brought in who had not originally received an invitation (Matt. 23:3,4). This is the way God brings the kingdom into existence: He sends His Only-Begotten Son into the world and issues a gracious invitation to men to accept the rich treasures which His Son offers (Gal. 4:4,5). The Son by His perfect sacrifice revealed to mankind the full glory of God's reign of grace (Gal. 1:4; Titus 2:14).<sup>50</sup> And with such gracious words as, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28 ff.), Jesus invited all men to participate in the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ and share the blessings which it brings.

In the parables Jesus makes it clear that the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ "has come" within the present world-order in His person. He was the Messiah, the "Son of Man" come into the world to bring into being in history the kingdom of God (to create the saints of the Most High to whom the kingdom would be given, Dan. 7:27).<sup>51</sup> With His advent, God's

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<sup>50</sup>James Moffatt, Grace in the New Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), p. 83.

<sup>51</sup>A. M. Hunter, The Message of the New Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944), p. 58.



decisive intervention is no longer a shining hope on the far horizon but a fait accompli;<sup>52</sup> the only question was whether the Jews would accept God's gracious invitation to participate in His Reign or not.<sup>53</sup>

Yet Jesus not only pictured Himself as the Sower Par Excellence (cf. parable of the Tares and the Sower), but He also described Himself as the Reaper who "when the fruit is ripe, straightway He putteth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:29; cf. Matt. 13:40-43, 49, 50). St. Luke tells us (21:29-31):

He spake to them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass know ye that the kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

The whole context here dealt with the liquidation of the present world. When this is accomplished the kingdom appears.

Mark tells us that we shall see this same "Son of Man," who according to the parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:41) inaugurated the *Βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ* on earth, sitting on the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:62). Then shall He say unto them

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<sup>52</sup>A. M. Hunter, The Work and Words of Jesus (London: S C M Press, 1950), p. 72.

<sup>53</sup>Craig, op. cit., p. 147.



on the right, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ still lies in the future according to these statements (Jesus' illustration, Luke 21:29-31, and the description of the coming of the Son of Man).

Somebody might reach the conclusion, that speaking as we have, we have been contradicting ourselves. We pictured the kingdom as present in Jesus' ministry, as established in history with His first advent, and now we see it pictured as a thing of the future, as coming again with His second advent. E. F. Scott bluntly says that it is evident that the evangelists had only a confused idea of the kingdom.<sup>54</sup> But surely the Gospel writers that we have quoted did not believe they were presenting conflicting views, else they would not have written as they did. We believe that all that we have said of the kingdom of God as present in the Word and work of Jesus is true. The kingdom of God broke into history with the advent of Jesus and is present today. But that is not all our Lord says about the kingdom in the parables. The kingdom of God is like a nobleman who went abroad to receive a kingdom (Luke 19:11 ff.). "After a long

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<sup>54</sup>E. F. Scott, The Kingdom of God in the New Testament (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931), p. 48.



time," *πολύν χρόνον*, the master came back (Matt. 25:19).  
 "Then the kingdom of God shall be likened unto. . . ."  
 (Matt. 25:1).

The kingdom of God was indeed present as Jesus emphatically and assuredly taught in so many of His parables (as also many other statements: i.e., Matt. 11:12; 12:28, etc.), but the complete consummation and visible presentation of the rule of God and the final definite establishment of the communion of the kingdom (Reichsgemeinde) is a matter of the last times (Matt. 13:39 f; 13:49 f; 25:10; etc.).<sup>55</sup> With the advent of Jesus the *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* was inaugurated in its germinal form, it is present in that form today. The visible presentation of the rule of God will take place when Christ comes back from receiving the kingdom (Luke 19:15); when the midnight cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," wakes the virgins (Matt. 25:6); "when the Son of man shall send forth His holy angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (Matt. 13:39-43, 49 ff.).

The *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* is a reign of God which broke into history with Christ's advent, but it awaits consummation at the end of this present age, when the Son of Man will again return sitting at the right hand of power (cf. 1 Peter 4:7 *τὸ τέλος ἔρχεται*).

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<sup>55</sup>Zahn, as quoted by Arndt, op. cit., p. 15.



## It Is Established through the Word

When Jesus wanted to demonstrate how the reign of God is brought to men, He spoke a parable saying,

Hear ye! Behold the sower went forth to sow. And as he sowed, some fell by the road side and the birds came and gobbled it up. Some of the seed fell among the rocks where there was not much soil, and sprang up immediately because the soil lacked depth. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and withered away because it had no root. And some of the seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it out, and it yielded no grain. And some seed fell on good soil and produced grain, increasing and multiplying itself, and yielded up to thirty or sixty, or even a hundred-fold (Mark 4:3-8).

It is evident from such things as the question of the disciples in Acts 1:6, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?", and the statement of St. Luke introducing the parable of the Pounds, "Jesus proceeded to tell them a parable, because He was nearing Jerusalem and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately" (Luke 19:11), that the followers of Jesus did not really understand the nature and coming of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* at least until the coming of Pentecost.<sup>55</sup> They had apparently so imbibed the Jewish notion that the kingdom of God would come with a sudden manifestation of power to

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<sup>55</sup>M. H. Scharlemann, "The Parable of the Sower" (Unpublished notes in the files of Dr. M. H. Scharlemann, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), p. 1.



punish the Gentiles and with glory to exalt Israel<sup>56</sup> that it took them until Pentecost to grasp Jesus' own description of the kingdom. The common Jewish opinion seems to have been that the kingdom would immediately inaugurate a period of continual ease and lavish feasting for Israel.<sup>57</sup> In the parable of the Sower, Jesus takes to task this wrong point of view.

In His interpretation of the parable of the Sower, Jesus says:

Do you not understand this parable? Then how are you going to understand all the other parables? The sower sows the word. Now those along the roadside are they, where the word is sown, as soon as they hear it Satan comes and takes away what has been sown into them. Similarly the seed sown among the rocks represents those who hear the word and receive it immediately with joy; but they have no root within themselves and last for a little while; then, when suffering or persecution arises because of the word, they at once give up their faith in disgust. Then there are the seeds which were sown among thorns. They are such as have heard the word but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth, and the passions for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and welcome it and produce fruit: thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundred fold.

The sower sows the "Word" (Mark 4:14); the seed sown in the heart is the "Word of God" (Matt. 2:2; 4:33; 7:13); "My Word" (Matt. 8:33; 13:31); it is the "Word of the kingdom" according to Matthew's account of the interpretation of the

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<sup>56</sup>"Assumption of Moses," as quoted by Dodd, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>57</sup>Manson, op. cit., p. 173.



parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:19). All four terms are synonymous. The sower sows the "Word" of the kingdom.

In the following parable, the parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:26-29), Jesus said:

The kingdom of God is like a man scattering seed on the ground and then going to bed each night and getting up every morning, while the seed sprouts and grows up, though he has no idea how it happens. Spontaneously the earth produces a crop. . . .

The point of comparison lies between the "Word" (the Word of the kingdom, the Word of God) and the "seed." The sower only sows the seed and does no more. A seed is "a thing of life, inward and invisible life, self-propagating life."<sup>58</sup> The seed germinates and grows "of itself" (αὐτομάτη, v. 27). The Word which Jesus spoke had life in itself and power to produce life. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:63). St. Peter says that we are born again by incorruptible seed, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever (1 Pet. 1:23). God has put His power into the Word so that it is living, active, life-producing like the seed of the field.

The great Son of Man was during His ministry a Sower of seed (Matt. 13:37); in fact, He was the Sower Par Excellence. He said, "I must preach the kingdom to other

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<sup>58</sup>H. B. Swete, The Parables of the Kingdom (Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 12.



cities also, for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:43); "He went through every city and village preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1). He spoke to the people that followed Him of the kingdom of God (Luke 9:11). He sent out His disciples to proclaim, *κηρυσσεν*, the kingdom of God (Luke 9:2). When the seventy disciples returned from preaching the "Word of the kingdom" they said, "even the devils are subject to us" (Luke 10:17); and Jesus said unto them, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Through the preaching of the "Word of the kingdom" the strong man's house was being despoiled (Luke 11:21 f.); the ruler of this world overthrown (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Through the preaching of the Gospel, God's reign was being established.

In the parable of the Sower Jesus indicates that it is through the process of sowing this living, life-producing Word that the *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is built. Where the Word is proclaimed there the kingdom is present (Luke 10:11). Men come under God's reign by rightly hearing God's Word; by welcoming the Word, *παραδέχομαι* (Mark 4:20); by understanding the Word, *συνίμι* (Matt. 13:23; spiritual discernment cf. Mark 4:21,22); by clinging to it, *κατέχω* (Luke 8:15); by accepting the invitation which comes through the Word. Therefore Jesus exhorts: "He that hath ears to hear, i.e., who has not yet completely and finally rejected



or frustrated the sowing of the Word in His heart , let him hear!"<sup>59</sup> "Right hearing" is, of course, the result of the Spirit's preparing the hearts for sowing (1 Cor. 2:14,15) and enabling men to receive the Word of the kingdom (Mark 4:11).

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is brought to all who hear the Word, regardless of whether they reject it or not (Matt. 13:19; Luke 10:11), and it is established in the hearts of all those who hear aright (Luke 8:18). The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is in its present form not established by a sudden display of power as the disciples had anticipated (Acts 1:6); rather it is a reign of God which is established among men by the slow and humble task of sowing the seed into men's hearts. No other means is to be used to build the kingdom but the "Word" (parable of the Tares cf. Matt. 13:28-30).

Man's task is to properly scatter this Seed of the kingdom on earth (2 Tim. 4:2). But its success does not depend on our feeble abilities. The seed itself does all the work. "Paul may plant, Apollos water, but it is God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6). When it falls on the sinners' hearts, it sends out rootlets, shoots up a blade and produces an ear. It regenerates, renews and

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<sup>59</sup>Scharlemann, op. cit., p. 4.



sanctifies men. "The sower soweth the Word" (v. 14) and the sinner finds himself "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which abideth forever. . . . And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23,25; 1 John 5:1).

The kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed in the ground or like leaven hidden in dough (Luke 13:18,19), one cannot see the living power active in it. But just as the mustard seed has a vital power within that produces the crop, so the Gospel is such a power (Rom. 1:16,17) that the kingdom must bring forth new spiritual life; it must grow and expand; the net will be filled (13:48). Through the power inherent in the Word, the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* which broke into history with the advent of Christ is today, in a silent but omnipotent manner, extending its sphere over the earth, and is acquiring rule in history and life, over people of almost every race, color, and nationality. This is not the work of man any more than man can cause seed to grow and grain to ripen. This is surely the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes, and beyond the realm of human comprehension and endeavor.



### CHAPTER III

#### IN TERMS OF GROWTH

In the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-8 and 13-20), Jesus pointed out to His disciples that the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is a reign of God which is established in men's hearts by the humble task of sowing the seed of the Word. But He also pointed out that there would be predatory birds (spirits of the air; cf. Eph. 2:9), thorns, and stony places; many would reject the Word of the kingdom and thereby exclude themselves from the kingdom. In the parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30), Jesus pointed out that, when the good seed is sown, the devil would come along and sow tares (Matt. 13:25) right next to it, indicating the difficulties with which His kingdom would have to contend. But already these two parables indicate that although the visible result might seem meager, the Word of God will have success. There will be those who will hear the Word of God and welcome it and bear fruit: thirty-fold, sixty-fold, and an hundred-fold (Mark 4:20); there will be a crop; there will be sons of the kingdom in this world (Matt. 13:36-39).

So that His disciples of every age might more fully understand the nature of the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as it is present in the world, Jesus, in a number of parables, depicts the growth of the kingdom in history. They are



especially: the parable of the Mustard Seed; the parable of the Leaven; and the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly.

Its Beginning Will Seem Small and Insignificant

In the parable of the Mustard Seed Jesus said:

What can we say the kingdom of God (the reign of God) is like: To what shall we compare it? It is like a tiny grain of mustard seed which, when it is sown, is smaller than any seed that is ever sown. But after it is sown, it comes up and grows to be larger than any other plant, it produces branches so large that the birds can come and roost under its shelter (Mark 4:30-32).

The kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed, κόκκῳ σιναπίτου. A mustard seed is the smallest seed planted by the Palestinian farmers and gardeners.<sup>1</sup> It is also a proverbial Jewish expression for a very small thing (to indicate the least drop of blood, the least defilement, etc.)<sup>2</sup> The beginning of the kingdom of God is small like a tiny grain of mustard seed. St. Paul tells us (1 Cor. 1:27 ff.) this is typical of the way God works. He begins with things that are small: the foolish things, the weak things, the base things that are despised, τὰ κωφά, τὰ ὑποβρυχία, τὰ ἄγενη, τὰ ἰσοθυμήματα, the things that are not,

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<sup>1</sup>N. Geldenhuys, "Commentary on the Gospel of Luke," The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952), p. 377.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



τὰ μὴ ὄντα, the things which are regarded by men as having no significance, no substantial existence, and uses them to do things far more comprehensive in power and scope than men could ever dream.

This was especially the case when God decided to establish the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ on earth. He sent the King in the form of a servant (δούλος, Phil. 2:7). This King was despised and rejected by men (Matt. 21:42; cf. 26:66). The foxes had holes and the birds had nests but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). There was only His tiny band of disciples when His work seemed to end at His death. (How insignificant in comparison with the mighty legions of the Roman Empire.) A few Galilean peasants; what a contrast with the great doctors of law at Jerusalem, or with Augustus and his mighty Roman Empire!

The Pharisees and the masses daily scanned the current scene for some sign, some portent that would show that the glorious Jewish Messiah would soon be revealed who would with a great display of noise and power drive out the Romans, conquer the world, make all men subservient to Jerusalem, and introduce a millennium.<sup>3</sup> Here is an account of what the Jews were awaiting (taken from the Psalms of

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<sup>3</sup>A. T. Robertson, Keywords in the Teaching of Jesus (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1906), pp. 60 f.



Solomon, a Pharisaic book written about half century before the birth of our Lord):

Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their King, the son of David . . . that He may reign over Israel Thy servant; and gird Him with strength that He may break in pieces them that rule unjustly. Purge Jerusalem from the heathen that trample her down to destroy her. . . . He shall destroy the ungodly nations with the word of His mouth, and He shall gather together a holy people, and shall judge the tribes of the people that hath been sanctified by the Lord His God . . . and the sojourner and the stranger (παροικος και αλλογενής) shall dwell with them no more. He shall judge the nations and the people with the wisdom of His righteousness; and He shall possess the nations of the heathen to serve Him beneath His yoke, . . . and He shall purge Jerusalem and make it holy, even as it was in the days of old, so that the nations may come from the ends of the earth to see His glory.<sup>4</sup>

Greedy they pounced upon every crumb of an indication, crying, "'Lo here' you may see it! 'Lo there' is proof that it cannot be long!" (Luke 17:21). But always they were wrong.<sup>5</sup> Jesus frankly told them the kingdom of God is present εντος υμων, "in your midst" right now (Luke 17:21).

"The σπουδια του θρου is like yeast, which a woman took and put (buried, really "hid") in three measures (Goodspeed: in a bushel) of flour until the whole lot had risen" (Luke 13:21). Its beginning is like a small amount of yeast hidden in a large mass of leavened dough. The

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<sup>4</sup>Psalms of Solomon, as quoted by H. B. Swete, Parables of the Kingdom (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 164.

<sup>5</sup>John Bright, The Kingdom of God (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 192.



yeast (ἐνεήρυσεν εἰς, Matt. 13:33) disappeared completely out of sight.<sup>6</sup> The leaven begins to work secretly, invisible, like a power wholly hidden from view. The beginning of the kingdom was like that: silent, invisible, imperceptible to the human mind. It, too, like yeast had a vital power which worked invisibly, entirely hidden from view. All that was visible was a Man going from town to town with a small band of disciples preaching the Word.

The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ did not come with a spectacular display of dazzling power and resplendent glory as the Jews had expected. There was no coup d'etat, no summoning of legions of angels. In fact, it did not even come "with observation" (παρατηρήσιμος--in such manner that it could be watched with human eyes).<sup>7</sup> Its beginning; its slow growth could not be seen; "behold here" or "lo, there" (Luke 17:20,21). To see the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ one must be born again by water and the Spirit (John 3:3). It is something far removed from earthly greatness. All that could be seen to human eyes was a carpenter from Nazareth preaching and teaching, eating with publicans and speaking with harlots. Nothing but a "winebibber" (Luke 7:34). But

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<sup>6</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1932), p. 515.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Bauer, Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1952), p. 1134.



one could not really expect anything different from Nazareth of Galilee. The careless scoff:

"Only one more of these religious enthusiasts. We know them: there was John, but he was mad; and now there is Jesus, and he is not even respectable"--like peevish children said Jesus; but all the same, "the kingdom of God has come upon you."<sup>8</sup>

It came in the same quiet way as the still, small voice came to Elijah (1 Kings 19:12).

The very fact that Jesus was casting out demons was proof that the kingdom was already present (Matt. 12:28). But its beginning was small; it was present like a tiny grain of mustard seed in the ground; like a small piece of yeast hidden in a mass of dough.

#### Its Growth Will Be Gradual

Jesus went to great pains to try to put across the point that the growth of the kingdom would be gradual. He emphasized it in a number of His parables. St. Luke especially mentions that the Savior told the parable of the Pounds because the Passover pilgrims (including His disciples) thought that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately since Jesus was approaching Jerusalem (Luke 19:11). Somewhere the idea had gotten started that the Messiah would establish the kingdom of Glory at one of the Passover

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<sup>8</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), pp. 198 f.



Festivals. Josephus tells us that the Roman governors took extra precautionary measures at the Passover Festivals lest the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem would attempt to establish the long hoped-for kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

Twice the Jews tried to make Christ their King at the season of the Passover Festival; the first time when Christ had fed the five thousand near Bethsaida, Judea (John 6:15); the second time on Palm Sunday of Holy Week. In fact, men around Jesus were always clamoring for a kingdom of God to appear. The devil had tempted Him with the thought of a kingdom by the display of power (Matt. 4:8). The people in a frenzy of enthusiasm beside the sea of Galilee tried to make him go to Jerusalem and set up such a kingdom. We will "make" him king, they cried (John 6:15). At the feast of the Dedication at Jerusalem, the Jews gathered round Him and said, "How long will you keep us in suspense?" (John 10:24). Even the Pharisees tried to force His hand upon the kingdom when they asked: "When is the kingdom of God coming?" (Luke 17:20).<sup>10</sup> The Eleven, on the very day of our Lord's ascension, asked, "Lord, wilt Thou at this

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<sup>9</sup>Josephus, as quoted by F. E. Mayer, "The Kingdom of God According to the New Testament," Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Convention of the Texas District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup>Robertson, op. cit., p. 64.



time restore the kingdom of Israel?" (Acts 1:6). But Jesus listened to God rather than to the fascinating temptation of Satan and the people about Him.

In the parable of the Sower Jesus pointed out that He had come to establish His power by the slow process of sowing the seed of the Word in the hearts of men (cf. parable of the Sower). By inference the disciples would continue this task.<sup>11</sup> Thus instead of sitting at the right hand of power and glory, His disciples were to continue the humble task of sowing the seed of the Word (Matt. 10:7; 11-15; 22:40). There would be no glory kingdom at once.

In the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26-29), Jesus points out that the growth of the *βουκεία τοῦ θεοῦ* resembles the process of growth pictured there. When a seed is sown, it germinates, sprouts out, and grows up: first there comes the blade (v. 28). *χορτόν* is properly herbage suitable for pasture (Mark 4:39; John 6:10); here it is the green blade of corn as in Matt. 13:26. The next stage is that of *στάχυς* (v. 28; cf. 2:23; Gen. 41:6 ff.) "the ear of the corn"; to which finally succeeds the *πλήρης σίτος ἐν τῷ στάχυϊ* (v. 29; cf. 5:26) "the full-grown grain in the ear." Growth is a gradual process which cannot

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<sup>11</sup>M. H. Scharlemann, "The Parable of the Sower" (Unpublished notes in the files of Dr. M. H. Scharlemann, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), p. 1.



be hurried. In the same, apparently slow manner the kingdom of God will grow.

According to the exponents of "realized eschatology," however, the growth of the kingdom was already completed by the time Jesus appeared in history. The ministry of Jesus is the time of harvest. Dodd interprets the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly as saying (in effect),

Can you see that the long history of God's dealing with His people has reached its climax? After the work of the Baptist only one thing remains: "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe."<sup>12</sup>

Dodd would say Jesus pointed His hearers to the fact that with His ministry the time has come when the crop is already ripe; only the laborers are lacking.<sup>13</sup> Hunter goes so far as to say we should call the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly the parable of the Reaper. It says, "the long period of growth (blade, ear, and the full corn in the ear) is over and the harvest is over."<sup>14</sup> But the picture of the harvest (v. 29) is certainly a re-echo of Joel 3:13 (LXX) and like Rev. 14:15. In Joel 3:13 and Rev. 14:15 the harvest is the symbol of the final Day of the Lord and the time of the world judgment. In the parable of the Tares

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<sup>12</sup>Dodd, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 182 f.

<sup>14</sup>A. M. Hunter, "The Gospel According to Saint Mark," The Torch Bible Commentaries (London: S C M Press, 1951), p. 58.



the Lord Himself interprets the picture of the harvest as referring to the "end of the world" *συντελεία αἰώνος* (Matt. 13:39). It is the day when the reapers gather up first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them and gather the wheat into my barn (Matt. 13:30); when His angels shall remove all things out of His kingdom that cause stumbling and do iniquity (Matt. 13:41). In the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly, the picture of the harvest after a long period of growth refers to the "last day" rather than to the time of our Lord's ministry.

The Lord pictures Himself as the Great Sower during the time of His earthly ministry (parable of the Sower and the Tares), He sowed the "good seed" out of which the kingdom of God would grow. With His earthly ministry the long period of growth was inaugurated rather than consummated. The ministry of Jesus corresponds to the sowing time not the time of harvest. "All His teaching in Galilee and Jerusalem was this and no more."<sup>15</sup> At the present the kingdom of God is germinal rather than finished or complete. The consummation is as sure as the harvest, but the consummation is not yet (cf. the parable of the Sower, Mark 4:1 ff.).

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<sup>15</sup>H. B. Swete, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 18.



Luther points out that the parable of the Leaven also indicates a slow process: "Die Durchsäuerung des Teiges durch den Sauerteig ist ein langsamer Prozess . . . es ist noch nicht getan und geschehen; es ist aber im Gange und Schwange."<sup>16</sup> The leaven is at work, but how quietly, how unobtrusively, and how gradually it does work. One generation has succeeded another, one has fallen asleep and another has risen to take its place time and time again for over nineteen centuries. But through this long period (from the human point of view) the kingdom of God moves forward. We can, to some extent, trace the stages of its growth and its progress, but we cannot hasten the end. Christ waits and we must wait. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain" (James 5:7). Had the disciples learned the lesson of the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly, the lesson of the cornfield, they would have been ready to wait; indeed, they would have seen that the sowing was in fact the coming of the kingdom.

The blade is gradually advancing to the ear, and the

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<sup>16</sup>Martin Luther, as quoted by W. H. L. Dau, "Die Gleichnisreden des Herrn von dem Anfang, der Entwicklung und Vollendung des Reiches Gottes auf Erden," Neunzehnter Synodal-Bericht des Nebraska-Distrikts der Deutschen Ev.-Lutherischen Synode (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1909), p. 77.



corn in the ear is getting fuller as the centuries roll by; the harvest time is drawing nearer by the moment, but it is not yet. Its growth is gradual, but if you sow a field with seed you have set in motion forces which will one day inevitably produce the harvest. The kingdom of God is like that; its growth is gradual but it has direction (Matt. 13:31).

#### Its Scope Is One of Great Magnitude

In Chapter II, we saw that the kingdom of God was a reign of God which broke into history with the advent of Christ. In this chapter, we have already noted that the beginning of the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ on earth was, however, very small (like a tiny mustard seed). Jesus pictured its initial activity as something quiet, imperceptible like yeast hidden in a mass of dough. But that was its beginning. Listen! The kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed which, when it is sown, is smaller than any seed that is ever sown. But after it is sown Jesus says, "It comes up and grows to be larger than any other plant. It produces branches so large that the birds can come and roost under its shelter" (Mark 4:32).

The main point here is the contrast between the small beginning and the eventual magnitude. This tiny mustard, which is the smallest seed planted by the Palestinian farmers,



becomes greater than all the other herbs or plants that grow from seed (καὶ γίνετο μείζον πάντων τῶν λαχρίων). According to most commentators, the mustard which is but an herb (λαχάριον, cf. Mark and Matthew), grows to be from eight to twelve feet high, and thus actually becomes, as Luke calls it, quite a tree (σεινδροῦν, Luke 13:19) with branches so strong that a bird can perch in it. In fact, when the fruit ripens birds do so in flights, for the sake of the seed.<sup>17</sup> The disproportion between the relatively small seed and the size to which the plant attains provides such a contrast that it actually seems to have been proverbial among the Jews.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of the mustard tree its small beginning was seed. The same is true of the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ: its seemingly infinitesimal beginning in history was seed. It was living, active, powerful, breaking the tyranny of Satan and enabling man to be born anew (1 Pet. 4:23).

The tiny mustard seed in accordance with the laws of nature grows into a tree taller than all other plants. Jesus infers in this parable that it is similarly the nature of the kingdom of God to grow and grow and become greater than

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<sup>17</sup>E. D. Burton, Studies In The Gospel According to Mark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904), p. 57.

<sup>18</sup>H. B. Swete, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan and Co., 1909), p. 86.



all other kingdoms the world has ever known. It will produce branches so large that "birds can come and roost under its shelter." The image of the bush or tree so great that the birds may roost, τὰ πτείνὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατοικήσουσιν (Mark 4:32), is found in Ezek. 17:22-24; Dan. 4:9,18; Ezek. 31:6; cf. 17:23. These references show that this image was a recognized metaphor for a great empire giving protection to many nations. In Dan. 4:12,21, the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar is likened to such a tree. Daniel interprets the tree to signify the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar's dominion which is to reach the ends of the earth. The kingdom of God is destined to become greater; the greatest thing on earth. The βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ is the mere stone of Dan. 2 which becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth (Dan. 2:35,45). It shall endure forever; it will break in pieces all other kingdoms and bring them to an end (Dan. 2:44).

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was described as offering protection to many nations (Dan. 4:12). The kingdom of God will in a much greater sense become the dwelling place for many nations. Both in apocalyptic and Rabbinical literature, "the birds of the heaven" stands for the Gentile nations.<sup>19</sup> The Gentiles will flock into the βουλή τοῦ θεοῦ as

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<sup>19</sup>Hunter, op. cit., p. 59.



birds fly to roost in the branches of a stalwart tree (which in Jesus' ministry was an almost invisible seed). It will afford protection and a dwelling place for all the Gentile nations (cf. Luke 13:29). For to the Son of Man was given dominion and glory and kingdom that all people, nations and languages should serve Him (Dan. 7:13,14).

This will happen because the kingdom of God is like yeast, not only in that its beginning was silent and imperceptible, but also because it like yeast is dynamic, yeasty ferment.<sup>20</sup> As surely as yeast will leaven the entire lot of dough, so surely will the *Βουλυσία τοῦ Θεοῦ* accomplish its purpose. It has the same piercing, penetrating power which is so characteristic of yeast. Leaven placed in unleavened dough goes to work: it pierces, penetrates the dough and causes it to rise. The kingdom of God is like leaven quietly working its way through the entire world.

The beginning of the *Βουλυσία τοῦ Θεοῦ* was unseen and the ignorance of the "good news" of the kingdom was immense. But like leaven the Gospel has a marvelous penetrating power. Rapidly the kingdom of God spread into all classes of society and penetrated the remotest regions. The Gospel permeated the ancient Roman world, until even the Emperor was a Christian.

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<sup>20</sup>G. A. Buttrick, "St. Matthew," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), VII, 417.



As leaven spreads through the dough it gives lightness and wholeness. In like manner, the *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* affects the world. The primary purpose of the *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is the salvation of souls, but as the kingdom of God spreads through the world it not only brings salvation, but it also produces a very wholesome affect on society in general. We are reminded of the wholesome influences which the spread of the *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* had upon the society of the Greek and Roman world: the great unseen interchanges which it brought, removing superstition, social evils, vice, and lifting the society that it touched to a higher level. Hospitals and social institutions were established, life was considered more precious, and a child was no longer something that could be disposed of at random. In the gentle and noiseless Epistle to Philemon we see the yeast of the Gospel subduing the stubborn dough of ancient slavery. In our age, the unceasing spread of the kingdom of God has produced many tangible effects, everyone of them wholesome and beneficial. To mention but a few: the establishment of democracy to provide for the freedom of conscience, the fight for human rights, abolition of slavery, the improved status of woman, the appreciation of the child, the movement to end all racial segregation, better working conditions, and many more. In our own hearts and minds and the customs and institutions of our time, the leaven of God's reign is at work.



Any land to which the kingdom of God spreads is raised to a higher level and everyone benefits from its presence. The influence of the kingdom of God is today so widespread that nearly every man has to reckon with it. Every civilized country dates its calendars according to the year of our Lord (A.D.), the time of the establishment of the kingdom. So nearly everyone has to reckon with the Christian festivals, Christian principles, customs, etc.

Latourette says, "Never has Jesus been so potent in the affairs of men as in the past fourteen decades."<sup>21</sup> The years 1800 to 1940 (or the present) have been the era in which He influenced mankind as never before. And this is not yet the end. The kingdom of God moves on its course, silently penetrating the whole world, and as it spreads it uplifts societies, cultures, and governments; and this influence so potent, so beneficent, so wonderful, shall not cease till the Gospel has been preached as a witness throughout the world. With the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* will be fulfilled what God revealed to Moses around the year 1400 B.C. when He took an oath and said, "But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21). What a great destiny in store for the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*.

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<sup>21</sup>K. S. Latourette, *Anno Domini* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 157.



The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which, when God establishes it in history, has a small beginning. But as in the tiny mustard seed there is living, life-producing power, so in the small beginning of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* the living, life-giving power of God is at work. The growth of the kingdom will be gradual. Its growth, like the growth of the vegetable kingdom, cannot be hurried. But its scope will be one of great magnitude. It will offer protection and a dwelling place to every nation. As leaven pierces dough so the kingdom of God will permeate and uplift society and penetrate the world. It is destined to encircle the globe and shine in glory forever.



## CHAPTER IV

### IN TERMS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is God's creation; it comes freely as a gift of God's grace; it is a reign of God which is extended on earth through the power inherent in the "Word"; its growth comes independent of man's working. It would almost seem that man could not have much responsibility in such a set-up. But while the parables magnify the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ as God's reign, God's activity, we have the seemingly strange paradox that these same parables forcefully emphasize the fact that the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ places a great responsibility on men.

#### It Challenges Men and Calls for a Response

When God establishes His kingdom on earth, He sends out messengers with the invitation, "Come for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17). Where the "good news" of the kingdom is proclaimed there the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is active for the salvation of men (parable of the Sower; Luke 4:13; 8:1; 16:16; Acts 8:12). Then and there God challenges men to accept His gracious offer of forgiveness and enter into the sphere of His reign while there is yet time, before it is too late, even though it may now be the eleventh hour (cf. the Laborers in the Vineyard, Matt. 20:1-16). This provides an unavoidable crisis. God's offer of salvation



demands a response.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not man enters the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* depends on the way in which he responds to God's gracious invitation.

Jesus pictures it this way:

But what is your opinion about this? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Go work in my vineyard today, my boy." He said "I go, sir," but he did not go. Then the father approached the second one with the same request. He answered and said, "I won't." But afterwards he repented and went. "Which of these two did the will of the father?" "The second one," they replied. "Yes, and I tell you that the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God before you!" Jesus retorted. "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after seeing that, you did not afterward repent and believe him."

When God was ready to establish the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*, He sent John the Baptist with the proclamation: "Repent, for the *Βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν* is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). The word "repent" (*μετάνοια*) is there used in its wide meaning to include both faith and contrition (as also in Luke 13:5; 15:7; etc.).<sup>2</sup>

*Μετάνοια* and the verb *μετανοεῖν* are best understood from the Old Testament idea of repent (*גָּחַץ*) which means a complete reversal, a radical change. Sin is a revolt

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<sup>1</sup>E. B. Selwyn, The First Epistle of Peter (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>J. T. Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), pp. 336 ff.



against and apostasy from God (Hos. 1-3; Is. 1:2; Jer. 1:16; 2:13,17,19). Repentance means turning away from evil (Jer. 18:8; Ezek. 3:19; 13:18). Repentance means trusting in God (Hos. 14:3; Jer. 3:22; Is. 30:15; 10:20 ff.). Repentance means obedience to God's will (Hos. 6:1-6; Jer. 34:15; 26:3-50).<sup>3</sup> It signifies the complete change of heart which turns from sin and guilt to cleansing and forgiveness through God's gracious activity. The word *μεταμέλομαι* used in the parable of the Two Sons is closely related to *μετάνοιέω* in its narrow meaning of "contrition." It especially emphasizes sorrow and regret over past sins.<sup>4</sup>

John proclaimed that the long hoped-for kingdom was now coming; but it was coming with judgment and deliverance (*ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρὶ*, Matt. 3:11)--with deliverance for all who accept God's invitation and enter His reign, but judgment on all wickedness and apostasy. God was now breaking into history to establish His reign and overthrow the power of darkness which had for so long held sway over the world. He was first offering to the Jews (His first-born Son, Ex. 4:22) the power to enter His reign

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<sup>3</sup>M. H. Franzmann, "Theology of the New Testament" (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mimeograph Co., 1953), p. 4. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>4</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1932), p. 811.



of grace. They had also sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:28); they were all under God's wrath (Rom. 3:9). But He was now offering to take them back and restore the long-torn communion by means of His forgiveness. Therefore John pleads, "Repent, accept God's gracious invitation." Turn from your carnal desires and hopes. Turn from your evil ways to God through faith in Christ. Accept God's unlimited grace and share in the coming of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*.

The harlots and publicans heeded John's proclamation. They accepted God's gracious invitation and responded with repentance (contrition and faith). Their eyes were opened to behold their guilt, they trusted in the coming Redeemer (John 1:28), and accordingly entered the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*.

The Pharisees and Sadducees also came out to John (Matt. 3:17). They heard John point out the way of righteousness (Mark 12:14). He bore witness to the Light, that all men might through Him believe (John 1:18). (He preached the Gospel, *εὐηγγελίζετο*, Luke 3:18.) He showed them "the way" into the kingdom (Matt. 3:2; 11:11,12; 12:16; cf. John 14:6; 22:6; Acts 9:2; 19:23; etc.) and invited them to accept God's gracious invitation to repent and enter.

But the Scribes and Pharisees did not want to enter the kingdom in this way (Luke 17:20). For them, the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* was primarily a law, a demand, an obligation,



a yoke which a man had to take upon himself.<sup>5</sup> They felt that as they served in the temple, outwardly kept every jot and tittle of the law, as the rabbis interpreted it, and travelled over land and sea (Matt. 23:15) to make proselytes they arrived at perfect obedience and ushered in the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. God would indeed establish the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ; but it would come as something which they had earned and well-deserved.<sup>6</sup> Already because of the very fact that they were Abraham's sons, they felt they possessed the merit which would assure them of a share in the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ (Matt. 3:8-10); so that no matter how poorly they harkened to God's Word, God could not throw them overboard.<sup>7</sup>

With this attitude the Scribes and Pharisees came out to John's baptism. They came with a certain amount of mental reservation. They came toying with God's wrath--in a satanic dodge trying to get out from under God's wrath without the total repentance that God demands (John 8). They would not become like little children totally dependent on God for everything (Mark 10:15); they would not become

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<sup>5</sup>Otto A. Piper, "The Mystery of the Kingdom of God," Interpretation I (April, 1947), 190.

<sup>6</sup>D. M. Reu, "Der Biblische Begriff des Reiches Gottes," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, LV (August, 1931), 457.

<sup>7</sup>Schniewind, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus," Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1950), p. 23.



beggars before God, hungerers and thirsters after God's righteousness (Matt. 5:6). They did not repent (Matt. 21:32). They treated the kingdom violently (*βιάσεται*, Luke 16:16).<sup>8</sup> They continued in their carefree abandon (Matt. 22:5,6). They were children of the devil (Matt. 23:15); sons of the evil one (John 8:41,44). By the way in which they responded to God's gracious invitation they nullified every effort of God to bestow the kingdom upon them and at that moment pronounced judgment upon themselves. "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees."

Like John, Jesus preached repentance as preliminary for entrance into the *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* (Mark 1:14 ff.). He declared, "I am not come to call righteous but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:12,13). In the parable of the Two Sons Jesus makes it clear that the Scribes and Pharisees were not entering the kingdom because of their willful disobedience. The term *προσφοῦν* itself does not definitely indicate that they were not entering the kingdom. The present tense represents a timeless Aramaic participle.<sup>9</sup> It neither implies nor denies that those addressed would finally reach the kingdom of God. But the last sentence

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<sup>8</sup>W. D. Chamberlain, "Till the Son of Man Be Come," Interpretation, VII (January, 1953), 8.

<sup>9</sup>A. H. McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Macmillan Co., 1949), p. 306.



in verse 32 as well as many other passages (Matt. 5:20; 23:13; etc.) indicate that *προσάγουσιν* here means that they are not going in at all. They were not entering the kingdom because they stubbornly disobeyed the Father's call to repent. Those who enter the kingdom are not the proud and self-satisfied Pharisees, but the repentant sinners (Luke 14:16,24; 18:9-14; Matt. 21:31,32). The unrepentant Pharisee had as little chance of getting into the kingdom as a camel to wiggle through the eye of a needle.

Jesus persistently warned the religious leaders of His day not to despise God's invitation to enter the *βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*; not to reject the grace inherent in the call. With God there is no respect of persons (Rom. 2:11); repentance is necessary for all; not only for the notorious sinners (Luke 3:12 f.) and heathen (Matt. 3:14), but also for the pious Jews (Matt. 3:7 ff.). All needed a complete change of life. Therefore He urged them to act quickly like the unjust Steward (Luke 16:18) or the man haled before the magistrate (Luke 12:58); to return to the Father as the Prodigal Son saying, "I have sinned against Thee, my Father in Heaven," for the Father comes running to receive His lost son (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus pictured God as a King who in His unlimited grace freely forgives a million-fold. He gladly takes back His long-lost son. "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).



But the Scribes and Pharisees loved darkness rather than light. In unbelief they stubbornly resisted the invitation and were thus lost by their own fault. Only those who repent "see" and "hear" the mystery of the kingdom of God (Matt. 12:28); only they understand that the kingdom has arrived (Matt. 12:28); only they go to work for the Lord in His vineyard and bring forth fruit worthy of repentance (Matt. 21:28-32).

In the parable of the Sower, Jesus described how the reign of God comes to men (Mark 4:1-9; 14-20). In the parables of the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Seed Growing Secretly, and others, He directly implied that the *Βουκεία τοῦ Που* had come within the framework of history. But for those who had not repented, the *Βουκεία τοῦ Που* remained a mystery. They were still looking their eyes out for it, and they expected it to come in a much different way (Luke 17:20,21).

What Jesus said on a number of occasions (Matt. 22:14): *πολλοὶ γὰρ ἐκλήθησαν καὶ ὀλίγοι ἐκλεκτοί* "Many are called but few are chosen," was certainly true in the case of the Jews. All received an equal calling, aequitas vocationis.<sup>10</sup> The invitation contained sufficient grace so

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<sup>10</sup>J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, as translated by C. F. Lewis and M. R. Vincent (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1862), I, 250.



that all could accept it (the parable of the Marriage Feast, Matt. 22:1-14). The "Word of the kingdom" which bringeth the reign of God is always constant (the parable of the Sower, Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23); but the reaction of men varies (the parable of the Two Sons; Wedding Feast; Sower). In spite of all the grace inherent in the call, many obdurately refused it and thereby nullified every effort of God to bestow the kingdom upon them. The Lord invited all the Jews, but only a few came. The harlots and publicans did not receive God's grace in vain, but responded with repentance and entered the kingdom. But even after the Scribes and Pharisees saw it they did not afterward repent (Matt. 21:32). They would not repent; "I willed," ἠθέλησα, but you "willed not," οὐκ ἠθέλησατε (Matt. 23:37). They rejected the counsel of God against themselves (Luke 7:30).

The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ confronted the Jews through the preaching of the "good news" of the kingdom. It called forth a response. Those who responded by repentance (contrition over their sins and faith in Christ) entered into the kingdom. Their repentance was entirely God's work. ("Der zu Gott Umkehrende ist Pflanzung Gottes.")<sup>11</sup> Those who, however, did not repent were themselves at fault. The responsibility was theirs. They "would not"; therefore,

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<sup>11</sup>Schniewind, op. cit., p. 22.



they must bear the fatal consequences. Though they were the first heirs of the kingdom (Matt. 8:11 "sons of the kingdom" by physical descent), nevertheless by their unbelief they disavowed their Father Abraham, annulled their birth-right, and forfeited their inheritance in the kingdom.

The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is a reign of God which confronts men in history and calls forth a response. There is sufficient grace inherent in the call so that all may repent and enter the kingdom. Those who reject God's grace and refuse to repent will have to bear the fatal consequences. For "except your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5:20), "except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

#### It Requires a Life of Wisdom and Faithfulness

Merely answering, "I will," to the Father's gracious invitation is not enough for a full life. From all who come under God's reign as it is present in history, the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ requires a life of wisdom and faithfulness (Matt. 24:45). It is the faithful and wise Christian who shall be blessed when His Master comes (Matt. 24:46 ff.).

Then the kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five of them were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps, but did not take any oil with them. But the sensible ones brought their lamps and oil in their flasks as well. Then, as the bridegroom tarried they all grew drowsy and dropped off to sleep. But in the middle of the



night there came a shout, "Wake up, here comes the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!" Then rose all these maidens and trimmed their own lamps. And the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out!" "Oh no" replied the prudent ones, "it will never be enough for you and us. You better go to the oil-shop and buy (some) for yourselves." But while they were on their way to buy (the oil), the bridegroom came, and those who were prepared went in with him for the marriage festivities; and the door was shut (behind them). Later on the rest of the bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, Lord open (the door) for us." But in reply, He said, "Truly, I tell you I don't know you." Be on the alert therefore, for you do not know the day or the hour (Matt. 25:1-13).

"Then" (τότε, v. 1) refers to the time of the parousia when Christ will return to establish His kingdom in its ultimate glory. The Christian should constantly be alert, for he knows that "the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2; cf. 2 Pet. 3:10). The time of the Lord's return is unknown (Matt. 24:50), but this much we know "then shall the kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins which . . ." (Matt. 25:1).

The theme of this parable is the need of wisdom (forethought and prudence). The *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* as it is present in history requires of all who would participate in its consummate glory a life of wisdom.

At the time of the parousia, our Lord (the heavenly Bridegroom, 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 19:17) will come to take His bride, the Church (the communion of true believers), to His heavenly home and celebrate the feast (Rev. 21:1-5), for the kingdom will then be established in its complete form. The



bride, which is the well-known symbol of the church, is not mentioned in this parable, however, as the emphasis is on the individual members rather than on the corporate "society of guests," as Edersheim calls the church.<sup>12</sup>

The virgins, five wise and five foolish, represent the church on earth. They are all outwardly alike; all of them expect the Bridegroom to return; all who make up this group were invited. They were all given the same a priori claims to the kingdom and the divine endowment of grace.<sup>13</sup> They were all members of the church. But our Lord reveals to us here (v. 12) as in the parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (Matt. 22:2-14) that not all who say, "Lord, Lord" (Κύριε, Κύριε) shall enter into the kingdom of glory; not all who are in the visible church will be received by the Lord at the time of His return to establish the kingdom in its complete form. "Many are called but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). Individual differences will at the time of the parousia become evident and the whole body of Christians will be divided into two groups. The one group will be taken (Matt. 25:10) and the other left (Matt. 25:12).

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., 1886), II, 455.

<sup>13</sup> M. H. Scharlemann, "The Parable of the Ten Virgins" (Unpublished notes in the files of Dr. M. H. Scharlemann, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis), p. 2.



The decisive factor is as the Lord points out in the beginning (Matt. 25:2): five of them were foolish, *μωροί*, and five of them were *φρόνιμοι*, wise, prudent. All of them had received the invitation to reign with the Lord in His kingdom of glory, all of them had said, "I will" and yet not all could be taken. The reason was because some of them had been foolish.

The foolish virgins took their lamps, but they brought no oil (Matt. 25:3). Their folly was, therefore, not in this that they slumbered and slept (Matt. 25:5), as Ylvisaker suggests.<sup>14</sup> All, the wise as well as the foolish, slumbered and slept while the bridegroom tarried (Matt. 25:5). Rather the folly of the five foolish virgins consisted in their lack of oil. The oil represents everything necessary for preparedness.<sup>15</sup> The foolish virgins had come unprepared. Though they like the wise virgins sought the resurrection from the dead and the life everlasting, though they brought their lamps and earnestly sought to light them, their lamps caught fire for only a moment. They had brought no oil. They had not prepared themselves properly for the Lord's return. They were as the man who came to the wedding feast without the wedding garment (Matt. 22:11-14). There was a

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<sup>14</sup>J. Ylvisaker, *The Gospels* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932), p. 621.

<sup>15</sup>McNeile, *op. cit.*, p. 362.



lack of forethought, to say the least. Because of their careless attitude they were entirely foreign to the Lord. The Lord turned to them with the words, "I say unto you, I do not know you" (Matt. 25:12). They had shown themselves unworthy of the kingdom from the very start, for they had not properly prepared themselves as the Lord required.

The parable of the Ten Virgins indicates that the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*, as it is present in time, is not something which we can hope to possess haphazardly. Indeed, it comes as a gift of God, but it involves responsibility on our part. We cannot hope to enter into God's kingdom of glory if we do not feel that the gifts which He has bestowed upon us now in His kingdom of grace are worth giving some serious thought. The kingdom of God is an invaluable possession like the treasure in the field or the costly pearl for which we should gladly sacrifice all our possessions if necessary (Matt. 13:44, 45).

The kingdom of God should be the most important thing in our lives; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). We must remember that for the sake of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* many made themselves eunuchs (Matt. 19:12). It demands our most careful attention just as a successful building project requires the careful attention of an architect. The kingdom of God requires intelligent preparation on our part (in view of our Lord's return), just as a successful campaign requires careful



planning on the part of a general (Luke 14:28-32).

Church membership is not enough; the five foolish virgins belonged outwardly to the same group as the wise. It must be supplemented with proper preparation. He who has accepted the Lord's invitation must carefully examine himself to see if he is really answering the Lord's call correctly (2 Cor. 13:5), lest he come without the wedding garment. He must see to it that he does not deceive himself as to what he has taken and build his house on sand (Matt. 7:24-27; 16:47-49).

Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. . . . Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock: and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock (Matt. 7:21, 24, 25).

The storm pictured in Matt. 7:24, 25 is one of cataclysmic importance. In Ezek 13:10 ff. such a storm is a figure of final judgment. So in Matt. 7:21-25, the storm refers to the final test on Judgment Day. A man who has built his life on the Word, and who has Christ (the Word in the Word) dwelling in him, will not fail to meet the test (2 Cor. 13:5), but will be prepared at the Lord's appearance to judge the quick and the dead and will receive a crown in the kingdom of glory.

The kingdom of God, as it is present in history, calls for prudence on our part--prudence in battling every form



of inactivity and slackness, and prudence in preparation for our high calling lest the bridegroom come "suddenly" and find us unprepared. Neglect in preparation or indifference is but to invite the closed door; is but to hear: "Too late! too late! ye cannot enter now."<sup>16</sup> Lack in preparation cannot be corrected on the Last Day (Matt. 25:12 ff.). By carelessness in preparation a person proves himself to be unfit from the very beginning for reigning with the Lord in His kingdom of glory. "Watch therefore!" (Γρηγορήσθε οὖν) "Be wise!" "Be alert!" "Prepare properly!" See to it that you build your house on the Rock, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Lord will come to establish His kingdom in its complete, ultimate glory.

The parable of the Ten Virgins pointed out that the heavenly Bridegroom would tarry (Matt. 25:5), and accordingly there will be a period of waiting, before He returns to establish the kingdom in its consummate form. During this period of waiting, wisdom and alertness is required on the part of all who have accepted God's invitation. Without any interruption, Matthew goes at once from the parable of the Ten Virgins to the parable of the Talents: "It (ἡ βασιλεὺς τῶν οὐρανῶν, refers to v. 1) is as a man traveling into a far country who called his servants and entrusted

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<sup>16</sup>H. B. Swete, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 129.



to them his property" (Matt. 25:14). In this parable and in its twin, the parable of the Pounds Jesus shows that the period of waiting is to be a time for us to show our faithfulness to the King.

The holy Evangelist St. Luke, in recording the parable of the Pounds, writes that while the crowd still listened attentively, Jesus proceeded to tell them a parable, because he was nearing Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.

Once upon a time a nobleman went abroad to accept a kingdom and then to return. Having called ten of his servants he gave them ten pounds with the words, "Use this money to trade with till I come back." But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Then later, having received his kingdom, he returned and commanded the servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, so that he might find out how much profits they had made. The first one came before him, saying, "Lord, your pound has made ten pounds more." "Well done, my good servant," he said, "Because you have proved trustworthy over this small amount, you shall have charge over ten cities." The second came in, saying, "Lord, your pound has made five pounds." And he said to him, "You are to be (appointed governor) over five cities." . . . " (Luke 19:11-19).

The Lord here speaks of a nobleman who is about to go abroad and receive a kingdom; but before he goes, he called together his servants and entrusted them each with an equal amount of money which they were to use while he is gone. The Lord is the nobleman (Luke 19:12). The far country is heaven. Thither He went at His ascension and was endowed by His Father with heavenly glory, honor, power, and dominion (Phil. 2:9) and addressed: "Sit thou at my right



hand. . . ." (Ps. 110:1; cf. Hebr. 1:13; 2:7b,8 f.). From this far country He shall come again to establish His kingdom of glory. We are the servants (Luke 19:13). In ancient times slaves were the property of their master. They were totally dependent on their master's goodness and required to be totally devoted to his cause. Among the Jews the position of a slave was not nearly as disgraceful a status as among the pagans.<sup>17</sup> To be a slave ( *עַבְד* ) of God was a position of honor (Amos 3:7). The New Testament Christians are frequently called servants (Acts. 9:36; Eph. 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:24; etc.) of Christ, and less frequently of God (Luke 2:29; Rom. 2:29; 7:3; 19:2,5; 22:3,6; etc.). He who was free when called is now a slave of Christ (1 Cor. 7:22). The primary significance is that we have been "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Christ has purchased us with His Holy precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18,19). He has liberated us from sin, death, and the power of lawlessness (Rom. 6:1 ff.) so that we might be His own and live under Him and His kingdom and serve Him. We are to be totally devoted to His cause and will.

The Lord went to a far off country, *χώραν μακρὰν* (Luke 19:12); it was a long time before the master came

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<sup>17</sup>C. Cranfield, The First Epistle of Peter (London: S C M Press, 1950), pp. 62 f.



(Matt. 25:19). How long till the Lord will return to establish the kingdom in its absolute form is not stated, except long enough for His slaves to do much business. In the parable of the Pounds each receives an equal amount, one mina (Luke 19:13). The gift which is common to all Christians is the gift of faith. Faith is a gift, but primarily a trust. To each of the servants comes the command of the Master (Luke 19:13): "Trade ye herewith till I come" (Use this gift to trade with till I come back, Luke 19:13).

*πραγματεύομαι* is a common word for designating business negotiations;<sup>18</sup> it denotes what one is to be occupied with.<sup>19</sup> *πραγματεύομαι* does not mean to speculate.<sup>20</sup> We Christians are to use the faith with which we have been entrusted and make it bear interest by spreading the "good news" of redemption, by word, deed, prayer, and offerings, etc., wherever and whatever the opportunity which the Lord gives. We are to use the Word which brings the increases. "We are to do business" till he comes back. The readings vary between aorist imperative (*πραγματεύεσθε*)

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<sup>18</sup>W. F. Arndt, "The Gospel According to St. Luke" (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Mineograph Co., 1948), p. 89. (Mineographed.)

<sup>19</sup>J. H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: American Book Company, 1886), p. 534.

<sup>20</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, "The Gospel According to St. Luke," The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1932), p. 598.



and aorist infinitive (πραγματεύουσα),<sup>21</sup> the former direct, the other indirect discourse. In either case, the aorist denotes a complete job of trading. His absence must be a time to show all fidelity to our Lord and King.

In the parable of the Talents, spoken a few days later to the Twelve, the servants receive gifts of varying amounts. The one receives five talents, another two, and a third receives one talent (Matt. 25:15). This parable shows that not only do all Christians have the same saving faith, but that God also entrusts each individual Christian with spiritual gifts (powers of the world to come, Heb. 6:5) which are nicely proportioned according to ones abilities, opportunities, etc. "There are diversities of gifts" (1 Cor. 12:12 ff.). Life is complex and needs all kinds of service and corresponding gifts. So the Lord apportions the gifts. Each has his place to fill in the kingdom, and receives his talents accordingly. The responsibility to use these gifts accordingly rests upon us. We have the wherewithal to measure up to our responsibilities.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all

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<sup>21</sup>D. E. Nestle, Novum Testamentum Graece (Stuttgart: Verlag und Druck der Privileg. Württ. Bibelanstalt, 1952), p. 207.



things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever" (1 Pet. 4:10,11).

Each one who has come under God's rule has the responsibility of using the gifts entrusted him or her. How each should use his talent or talents differs according to the gifts and the calling. It is not the same for the lay member as for the apostle (1 Cor. 4:11) or the bishop (Tit. 1:7). But whatever we have been entrusted with, it is in origin a gift, χάρισμα, of God's grace, χάρις, to be used in such a way that God may be glorified in all.<sup>22</sup>

In the parable of the Pounds it was stated distinctly, "he said to them, "Trade ye herewith till I come," (Luke 19:13); in the Talents it is implied, for that is why the servants were given sums varying "according to their several abilities." During the Master's absence the man who received five talents immediately worked with them and made five more. Already the fact that the first servant put to use his talents immediately is a sign of his faithfulness (Matt. 25:16). (The promptness of the first slave is obscured by the wrong punctuation of the text followed by the KJV. Between verses 15 and 16 the εὐθὺς belongs to προεὐθείς not to ἀπεδύμησιν.)<sup>23</sup> Likewise he that received

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<sup>22</sup>E. G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), p. 218.

<sup>23</sup>Nestle, op. cit., p. 69.



two worked with them and made another two. The faithful servants multiplied their unequal sums in the same proportion; both were equally faithful (Matt. 25:20-24). In the parable of the Pounds, one faithful servant's mina made ten more and another's made five more (Luke 19:16-20). Both were faithful, but the first was faithful to a greater extent. The unfaithful servant went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money (Matt. 25:18); in the parable of the Pounds, he hid it in the napkin (Luke 19:20). In either case we have an apt image for neglect to use divinely entrusted gifts.<sup>24</sup> Here is a man who with money to use will not use it. Now the money belongs to someone else, and was entrusted to him for investment. The very nature of the gift is that it should produce.<sup>25</sup> His neglect to use what was entrusted to him amounts to a breach of trust. He is an unprofitable servant, a barren rascal. He treated his gift as something he did not desire. He kept it in a way which revealed his real attitude toward the gift and the giver--he buried it!

"After a long time" the King arrives (Matt. 25:19). There will be a delay to test our faithfulness, and at the

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<sup>24</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), p. 150.

<sup>25</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1932), p. 954.



same time give the unfaithful a long while to repent and amend their way. "After a long time" the King arrives in His kingdom (Matt. 25:19), not for the purpose of translating His servants at once into glory, but first to reckon with them (cf. Talents) that He might know what they gained by their business. (ὅτι προσματλήσεται -- what business they had done, Luke 19:15).<sup>26</sup> As in the parable of the Ten Virgins, so also in these two parables there will actually be only two classes on the final day of consummation: the faithful who made diligent use of their master's gifts and the unfaithful who would not do anything in the Lord's service. The servants who are found faithful are addressed, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21,23; see also Luke 19:17 ff.). The adverb *ἰὺ* is a verdict on the work "Fine," "Excellent." The vocative is a verdict on the worker: "Servant excellent and reliable." "They enter into the glory of their Lord," (Matt. 25:21,23) the heavenly joy of Christ Himself and the reward of grace.

Then comes the slothful servant; every unfaithful servant will have to come (Matt. 25:24). In the parable of the Pounds, he received the same as all the rest (Luke 19:13). That he should have been negligent was, indeed, an outrageous and unnatural thing (Rom. 12:11). In the parable of

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<sup>26</sup>A. Plummer, "The Gospel According to St. Luke," A Critical and Exegetical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 440.



the Talents, he is the one to whom only one talent had been given (Matt. 25:15,18). He may have felt that since so little had been committed to his charge it was not worthwhile increasing. But the Lord looked for fidelity in little as well as in much (Matt. 25:24). As in the parable of the Ten Virgins the foolish are excluded from the kingdom of glory for neglect and carelessness in preparation, so here the unfaithful is pronounced "wicked and slothful" (Matt. 25:26) and excluded from the "joy of the Lord" (Matt. 25:30) for failure to make use of his Lord's gifts.

The marked feature of the parable of the Pounds and Talents is the unfaithfulness of the slothful servant who deliberately neglects His trust and so incurs the fatal consequences of having the deposit taken from him and being excluded from the "joy of the Lord." This indicates the great responsibility placed upon all those who have come under the *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* as it is present in history.

When we compare these parables, and especially the parable of the Talents, with that of the Ten Virgins which immediately precedes it, we see that they represent the life of all those who answer the Lord's invitation under two complementary aspects.<sup>27</sup> In the parable of the Virgins, we see the need for wisdom and alertness; in the Talents

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<sup>27</sup>Swete, op. cit., pp. 148 f.



and Pounds the need for diligent work and faithful response to our responsibilities. It is the union of these two aspects of Christian life which makes for sure discipleship in the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ in its present form and assures participation in the kingdom of glory when our Lord returns.

The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is a reign which in its present form requires a life of wise preparation and faithful response from all who will enter into the kingdom of glory.

Those Who Come under God's Reign Will Be Rewarded  
according to the Way in Which They Respond  
to Their God-given Responsibilities

Man begins by receiving (Luke 19:13; Matt. 25:14), but the moment he receives the gifts which God bestows in His reign he is called into action: "Go work for me in My Vineyard" (Matt. 21:28). Everything depends on the way in which we respond to the gifts entrusted to us. The Lord makes this very plain in both the parable of the Talents and the parable of the Pounds when He states the law of the kingdom: "To everyone who has will more be given, but as for him who has nothing even what he has will be taken away" (Luke 19:25,26; Matt. 25:28,29).

The repetition of this principle in both parables is designed to make a deep impression upon all those who come under His reign in history. Our Lord vividly illustrates it in the following manner:



Now after a long time the master of these servants came back, and settled accounts with them. The one who had received the five talents came in and brought (him) five more talents, saying, "Master, you gave me five talents, here, I have made five talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a little; I will put you over much; enter into the joy of your master." Then the servant who had received the two talents came forward, and said, "Master you entrusted me with two talents, here are two more talents that I have made (by them)." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, "Master, I (always) knew you were a hard man, reaping where you never sowed, and gathering what you never threshed; so I was scared and went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here is your money (lit. here you have what is yours)." But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! (You say) You knew that I reap where I never sowed and gather what I never threshed? Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and (then) when I came, I should (at any rate) have got back what was my own with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to the one who has more will be given and he will have abundance. But as for the one who has nothing even what he has will be taken from him. And throw this useless servant into the outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:19-30).

This principle is in effect today. If we use the gifts bestowed upon us in our Master's service, we will grow in grace and see even greater things. The Jews had the teaching of Jesus, the call to repentance, the exposition of the law. Those who did not receive God's grace in vain received more: they saw that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:41); to them it was given to see the mysteries of the kingdom (Matt. 13:10); and they saw even greater things: their "eyes were open" to behold the glory of the resurrection



(Luke 24:31). To those who do not receive God's grace in vain more is given (Luke 19:26). Those who made full use of the opportunities for fruitfulness in the Lord's service received even greater opportunities for service. For Paul and the other apostles more doors were opened for the preaching of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12); the Lord gave them new and greater opportunities for service. The same is true today; those who avail themselves of their opportunities become inwardly richer and always receive more opportunities for service, thus laying up for themselves a rich treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20). They are rewarded already in time with the constant addition of gifts and opportunities, but their eternal reward of grace in heaven will be infinitely richer and far more glorious. That which they now have is, by comparison with that which awaits them in the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ (in its consummate form), extremely small (ἐλαχίστῳ, the least, Luke 19:17). They will be rewarded with a most glorious position of honor and authority in accordance with their faithfulness and diligence in the Lord's service (five and ten cities is figurative language in keeping with the picture of the parable, Luke 19:17,19).

He who was diligent and faithful in a lesser degree (whose talent made five more, Luke 19:18) is proportionately rewarded in a smaller measure (five cities, Luke 19:19), indicating that there will be degrees of glory in Heaven



even though "the first shall be last and the last shall be first" (Matt. 19:30; 20:16). All who were faithful will receive the same gift of eternal life (parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, Matt. 19:30-20:16) and share in the kingdom of glory no matter whether they served the Lord but an hour (the thief on the cross) or a life time (John, the Beloved Apostle). But there will also be degrees of glory when the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is established in its consummated form. All those who served the Lord will be rewarded with the gift of eternal life, but there will also be an award of grace in accordance with their labor and diligence (1 Cor. 15:10).

For our warning it is stated that the opposite is also true. If a man refuses to serve the Lord, He loses God's grace and becomes poor. He commits spiritual suicide. His gifts are taken from Him and given to the person who has shown by what he has already done that he will make diligent use of the gift which the slothful person failed to use (Luke 19:19).

The law of the kingdom not only demands preservation, but increase. Swete suggests that this is brought out in all the parables of growth.<sup>28</sup> The seed which is scattered on the good soil brings forth thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold--in every case an increase of the original. So the

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<sup>28</sup>Swete, op. cit., p. 142.



one talent must be increased to at least two, if not more; but to do this the person who possesses it must assume responsibility and lay out his talent so that it is not covered up and hidden away somewhere.

Both the parable of the Pounds and the parable of the Talents suggest that the end of inactivity is the loss of one's faith. The words, "But as for him who has nothing even that what he has will be taken from him" (Matt. 25:29) is the inevitable law of the kingdom which works itself out in many lives before our eyes today. The graver and more extensive results of inactivity will become evident at the end of time when he who did not use the gifts entrusted to him will hear, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness . . ." (Matt. 25:30).

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God in which all those who come under its sphere shall be rewarded in accordance with the way in which they respond to their God-given responsibilities. He who does not receive God's grace in vain, to him more shall be given in time and exceedingly more in eternity. He who receives God's gifts in vain, loses God's grace in time and will be excluded from the kingdom of glory.



Those Who Will Not Accept Christ as Their King  
Will Be Held Responsible for Their Disobedience

The majority of the Jewish people would not accept the Lord's gracious invitation, "Come, for everything is ready now" (Luke 14:17). They all alike began to make excuse:

The first one said, "I have bought some land, I must go and look at it. Please excuse me." And another one said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to examine them. I pray thee, have me excused." And another one said, "I have just gotten married, and therefore I cannot come" (Luke 14:18-21).

The Pharisees stand aloof from Jesus; many of the people bring excuses, empty subterfuge and evasion; and the Scribes have to have official verification, Galilean origin, etc.<sup>29</sup> The truth is they would not come; they despised the Great Supper; there was much more important in their estimation. Their excuses were merely pretexts, false and valueless; one does not first buy land and then go and look at it, or buy oxen and then try them, and marriage was no excuse (Deut. 24:5).

In the parable of the Marriage Feast there is no begging off. Those invited simply οὐκ ἤθελον ἰθδεῖν (Matt. 22:3; cf. ἀμεταμένοιτες ἀγαπῶν, v. 5). They were the "disobedient son" who said: "I go, sir," but did not go (parable of the Two Sons Matt. 21:29). They could say

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<sup>29</sup>Ylvisaker, op. cit., pp. 488 f.



with an unctuous sigh, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ" (Luke 14:14) and all the time they disregarded the Father's will and obstinately resisted God's plea (Matt. 11:34).

Their resistance did not stop with merely refusing the Lord's call. Their perversity led to active violence. They seized the messengers of the Lord, treated them disgracefully and finally butchered them (Matt. 22:6). They even went so far as to kill the Beloved Son (Mark 12:8). They were telling God, as it were, that they refused to have His Son as their King<sup>30</sup> (parable of the Pounds, Luke 19:1).

But God is not mocked (Gal. 6:7 ff.). Their offense was grievous even before they went to the extreme of slaying His Son. God had invited them to partake of the Messianic kingdom (the Wedding Banquet), which He had prepared in Jesus Word and deed (Matt. 12:28). But they refused to hearken to God's call to repent (Matt. 21:32); and rejected the Messiah (Matt. 21:39); therefore God will take the Βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ from them and give it to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43).

When these scoffers even went so far as to contemplate His murder and the murder of His followers, Jesus clearly

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<sup>30</sup>Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 475.



illustrates the guilt of the Jewish leaders and the people whom they led. He reveals to them the doom which they are inviting for themselves and their city by what they are doing. The lord of the vineyard would destroy the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21:41); God would send forth the Roman armies as an instrument of His divine judgment and level the political and religious capital of Israel (Matt. 22:7). Jesus consistently emphasized that they would be held responsible for their violent rejection of the King and his messengers.

The Jewish hatred and violent rejection of the Savior did not affect His exaltation to the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3,4; 2:2b,8); nor did they escape the fatal consequence of their ruthless unbelief. The kingdom was taken from the Israelites and given to those people who would bring forth fruit worthy of repentance (Rom. 1:16; 11:20 ff.; Acts 18:6). None of the disobedient Jews who were invited would taste of the *βασίλειά τοῦ θεοῦ* (Luke 14:24). The stone which they had rejected became the chief-cornerstone (Matt. 21:42); a precious stone for those who believe (1 Pet. 2:7), but for those unbelieving and disobedient Jews it became a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence (1 Pet. 2:7,8; cf. 1 Cor. 1:23). They were shattered by it. Those wicked Jews who killed God's own Son were cut down and their city burned (Matt. 22:7). The Jews by their willful refusal to accept Christ as their King brought about



the complete destruction of their city at the hands of Titus (66-70 A.D.), and finally their national suicide before Hadrian's legions (132-135 A.D.). The even graver consequences of their wickedness will become evident at the end of time when the King will "hew them down" (κατασφάξω, slay utterly, Luke 19:27) in His presence (Luke 19:27).

All opposition to the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* and its King leads to disaster. Hurl yourself against Jesus, and you will be shattered; try to withdraw from Him, and He will fall on you. The violent opponents and those who remain indifferent to the kingdom will come to grief and suffer the fatal consequences of their refusal to enter the kingdom and accept Christ as their King (Luke 20:18).

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which, as it confronts men in history, calls forth a response. The crisis is unavoidable, and neutrality is impossible. The whole direction of man's life, and especially his ultimate destiny, depends on the way in which he responds to God's supreme gift. Those who do not receive God's grace in vain respond to God's call with repentance and enter the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*. Those who reject the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* will reap consequences more severe than those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Outward acceptance of the invitation is not enough. Men must stake their life upon the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*. They must "count the cost," for carelessness in preparation for our Lord's return or unfaithfulness in His service is



to invite the fatal disaster that awaits all Christ's enemies. Yet no sacrifice is too great for the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*. It brings to man God's greatest gift. Faithfulness and diligence in the Lord's service are rewarded with eternal life and an award of grace far more glorious and significant than any a person may now possess. The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which places such a great responsibility on man that the way in which he responds is a matter of life or death for him.



## CHAPTER V

### IN TERMS OF JUDGMENT

The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is present not only with deliverance but also in judgment. Those who do not repent, to them, it is not given to know the mystery of the kingdom (Matt. 21:28-32; Mark 4:11 ff.). Those who wilfully reject the kingdom and make light of the Lord's invitation shall not taste of the Lord's feast (Luke 14:24). The kingdom is taken from the Jews and given to people who will bring forth fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43). Even now the axe is laid to the tree. The tree which will not bring forth fruit is cut down (Luke 13:9). Those who rejected the kingdom and crucified the King were cut down and their city destroyed (Matt. 22:7). Those who do not forgive even as they have been forgiven deny the very grace on which they stand and nullify the forgiveness they received (Matt. 18:23-35). The unfaithful servant loses the gift of grace entrusted to him and becomes poor (Luke 19:26). The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is a reign of God which is present with temporal judgment upon all disobedience and wickedness.

During the Present Period of Growth,  
Good and Evil Exist Side by Side

In spite of God's temporal judgment, disobedience is still rampant. Where the Lord sows the "good seed," the



enemy, *ὁ ἐχθρὸς* (the great enemy of God and man, 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 John 3:8), *ὁ φονηρὸς* (who is called a murderer from the beginning and a liar, the father of lies, John 8:44; cf. 1 John 3:8), the devil, *ὁ διαβόλος* (cf. Rev. 12:9; who walketh about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, 1 Pet. 5:8), comes and sows the noxious, destructive plants among the good seed (parable of the Tares, cf. Matt. 13:37 ff.). The field, *ὁ ἀγρὸς*, described in the parable of the Tares, is the world, *ὁ κόσμος* (v. 38), not the church (this is not an unusual picture; a number of Jewish parables compare the world with a field of grain).<sup>1</sup>

"So when the plants grew up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also" (Matt. 13:26). Both good and evil appear side by side in the world. Satan never sows His seed off in a corner of the world.<sup>2</sup> Where the sons of the kingdom are, there Satan sows the sons of the "evil one" (pre-eminently wicked, disobedient men, also those imbued with a spirit of lying and murder are designated as sons of the devil, John 8:44; 1 John 3:8, 10 etc.). But the Lord is so concerned about the wheat (Matt. 13:29) that He will not risk having any of it uprooted by man-made attempts to

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<sup>1</sup>S. E. Johnson, "St. Matthew," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), VII, 418.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1932), p. 521.



remove these weeds (really darnel).<sup>3</sup> Rather we are to let both grow side by side (Matt. 13:30). He will take care of the evil ones in His own way and time.

Not only do good and evil ones exist side by side in the world but Jesus says:

Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and collected all kinds of fish. When it was full, they drew it ashore and sat down and sorted out the good ones for the barrels, but they threw away the bad. This is how it will be at the end of this world. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from among the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:47-50).

Jesus usually pictures the βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ as a reign of God active in the hearts of men. But there are a number of parables in which the Church clearly comes in view and this is one of them.<sup>4</sup>

As a huge dragnet is hauled through the sea it picks up thousands of fish of many different species.<sup>5</sup> The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is like a dragnet. As it is at work in the world, and as it is cast out farther and farther into the world, it attracts people of many races, attitudes,

<sup>3</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 418.

<sup>4</sup>H. B. Swete, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Macmillan and Co., 1921), p. 56.

<sup>5</sup>A. Carr, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: The University Press, 1916), p. 118.



cultures, and intellectual levels (ἵνα is partitive; some of every kind, παντὸς γένους) into the church, but there are basically only two classes: good (καλῶ); and bad (σαπρῶ, worthless), as the final separation will prove (Matt. 13:49,50). The Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is a reign of God which in its period of growth attracts both good and evil into the visible church. The sons of the evil one are actually mixed together with the good in the outward body of the church.

Christ did not contemplate His visible Church as a perfect communion; but as surely as there was a Ham on the ark, and a Judas among the twelve, so there would be a Babylon even within the bosom of the spiritual Israel.<sup>6</sup> There would be both wise and foolish (the parable of the Ten Virgins); both faithful and unfaithful (the parable of the Pounds and Talents) in the visible church.

. . . we grant that in this life hypocrites and wicked men have been mingled with the Church, and that they are members of the Church according to the outward fellowship of the signs of the Church, i.e., of Word, profession, and Sacraments, especially if they have not been excommunicated.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore "Judgment must begin at the house of God"

(1 Pet. 4:17), when the Lord cometh to execute Judgment upon

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<sup>6</sup>R. C. Trench, "Parable of the Dragnet," Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (Popular edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1950), p. 51.

<sup>7</sup>"Article VII and VIII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 227.



all (Jude 15).

We are not to anticipate the Lord's Judgment by an attempt to eradicate or liquidate the "bad" either from the world or from the Church. The parable of the Tares specifically points out that the sorting belongs to the "Son of Man" (Matt. 13:41). "For the Father . . . hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22) and true and righteous are His judgments (Rev. 16:7). He bids us "judge no one" (John 12:47) and St. Paul exhorts us: "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come" (1 Cor. 4:5). Only the Lord knows what is in man (John 2:25). We dare not judge men (Rom. 14:4). As men, we are all under God's judgment (Rom. 3:9 ff.). It is only by His mercies that we are not consumed.

This does not mean that we cannot exercise church discipline. But it means that excommunication comes under hope (cf. 1 Cor. 5:3-5), not judgment. Thus in 2 Corinthians 2:7 ff., Paul exhorts the church at Corinth to forgive lest the excommunicated brother be swallowed up by Satan. Excommunication is not to condemn but win the brother.

It is sowing time in the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*, the harvest has not come; the tares have not yet been gathered in bundles and burned. The net has not yet been drawn to shore (Matt. 13:47-50), and the fish separated. God's reign is not yet complete. The enemy (Satan) still sows



his noxious seed in the midst of the sons of the kingdom. The Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is a reign of God which in its present form has not yet completely put an end to all wickedness. During its present period of growth, good and evil exist side by side in the world and are even mixed together in the visible church.

The "Son of Man" Will Return  
to Separate the Good from the Evil

"When the fruit is ripe, straightway, He putteth forth the sickle because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:29). Harvest is both ingathering of the crop and the separation of the wheat and tares.<sup>8</sup> Just as surely as the Palestinian farmer culled out the darnel from the wheat when the harvest was ready; just as surely as the fishermen drew the net to shore and gathered the fish into vessels but cast the bad away, so surely there will be a separation of the good from the bad when the harvest time has come for the Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

The "Son of Man" (who is the Lord of Judgment, Matt. 25:31) will send forth His angels to gather out of His kingdom all that cause stumbling (τὰ σκάνδαλα, men are spoken of as "scandals" or causes of sin in Matt. 16:23),

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<sup>8</sup>C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), p. 202.



and them that do iniquity (τοὺς ποιοῦντας τὴν ἀνομίαν -- that live in defiance of God's laws, Matt. 13:41). The "Son of Man" carries out this task of separation with His angels. To say, as Dodd does, that this function of the angels is part of the developed eschatology of the Church<sup>9</sup> is unbelievable. The participation of the angels in the task of separation is the constant teaching of scriptures (cf. Matt. 16:27; 18:10; 22:30; 24:31,36; 25:31,41; 26:53; etc.).

The separation and the ultimate punishment of all disobedience is always connected with the end of the age. The wedding guest who refused the garment is cast into the darkness outside the lighted banquet hall when the house has been filled (Marriage Feast of the King's Son); the unfaithful servant is not cast into outer darkness until the master returned (parable of the Talents); when the harvest is come (at the end of the age, Matt. 13:39), then the Tares are gathered and burned (parable of the Tares); when the net is filled the fish are sorted (parable of the Dragnet); at the end of the age (ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος, Matt. 13:49), the angels shall separate the evil from the righteous (parable of the Dragnet).

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 184.



The separation shall take place at the end of this age, *ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος*. *Συντελεία* means the "full end," the "completion of." It is the word Jesus used in His promise to be with His disciples "to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).<sup>10</sup> *Ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος* means "at the completion of this present world order." Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father (Matt. 25:13; cf. Mark 13:32). But the whole course of history, the entire growth of the kingdom of God from its tiny beginning to its world-embracing destiny has direction toward this goal. When the *ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος* has come, then suddenly (in the middle of the night, Matt. 25:6) the Son of Man shall appear for the harvest time will have come. There will be the reckoning (Luke 19:15), and then the final separation (Matt. 13:49,50).

There will then be only two classes. The faithful and unfaithful (parable of the Pounds and Talents); the tares and the wheat (parable of the Tares); the good and the worthless (parable of the Dragnet); the wise and the foolish (parable of the Ten Virgins); all come under the category

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<sup>10</sup> John Marsh, "Time," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 265.



of either good or bad. There is never a third possibility. The unfaithful servant, the foolish virgins, the guest without the wedding garment, and the disobedient rebels, have all proved themselves unworthy of a share in the kingdom of glory either by their carelessness, indifference, disobedience, or violent opposition to the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*. By their unbelief and disobedience they have consigned themselves to that which is absolutely antagonistic to God<sup>11</sup> and condemned themselves to outer darkness. The separation is carried into effect with the casting of the enemy and the sons of the "evil one" into the furnace of fire (Matt. 13:40-43).

The furnace of fire (Matt. 13:42), is described as a lake of everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41; cf. Jude 6). Our Lord on several occasions connected Gehenna (the opposite of paradise), that part of Sheol reserved for the wicked, with *τοῦ πυρός* (Matt. 5:22; 18:19; etc.). Since the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by the fire of judgment (Gen. 19:24), fire has been the Biblical symbol of destruction, condemnation, and punishment, and so it continues in the parables.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Elert, as quoted by M. H. Franzmann, "Essays in Hermeneutics," Concordia Theological Monthly, XIX (October, 1948), 738.

<sup>12</sup>Alan Richardson, "Hell," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 107.



The intolerable doom of all disobedience is described in the terrible words: "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42b f.; 22:13; 25:30). Those who deny Him as their King or neglect to serve Him will gnash their teeth in the famine and cold of outer darkness and in anger at their now manifest folly. They are confined to "outer darkness," the darkness farthest out, from which none can escape. Eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth is their lot.<sup>13</sup>

Luke 19:27, "And as for those enemies of mine who did not want me to rule over them, bring them here and execute them in my presence," shows the utter severity of God's judgment against all disobedience (ἐχθροί --denotes personal enemies).<sup>14</sup> In the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) and Israel's national suicide (132-35 A.D.) we have the partial fulfillment of these words (Luke 19:27). The final judgment shall completely and finally fulfill these words when all the disobedient will be condemned to eternal destruction.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>G. A. Buttrick, "St. Matthew," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), VII, 419.

<sup>14</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, "St. Luke," The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 604.

<sup>15</sup>Norval Goldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 475.



But the wheat is gathered into the granary where it is kept safe for the master's use (parable of the Tares); the good fish are not cast away, but put into vessels (parable of the Dragnet). The wise guests who wore the wedding garment prepared by the Lord (parable of the Marriage Feast) as well as the virgins who were prepared entered the banquet and there in the presence of the Bridegroom partake of the Heavenly feast.

The faithful servant hears the blessed words: "Well done . . . enter thou into the joy of the Lord" (Matt. 25:23). What gladness in the greeting, "Well done!" The faithful servant enters into heaven, and shares in eternal life (Luke 19:17; cf. Luke 16:10). "Well done" from the lips of Christ is the only real reward. "The joy of the Lord" is the reality itself, the heavenly joy of Christ Himself. Leighton says: "It is but little we can receive here, some drops of joy that enter into us; but there we shall enter into joy, as vessels put into a sea of happiness."<sup>16</sup>

For the faithful the day of separation will be a day of deliverance. With the joyous words, "Come ye, blessed of my Father" (Matt. 25:34), the Lord will invite them to

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<sup>16</sup>Leighton, as quoted by Trench, "The Parable of the Talents," Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (popular edition; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1950), p. 94.



receive the end of their faith: their soul's complete salvation, perfect communion with God (1 Pet. 1:19). But for the wicked the day of separation will be a day of judgment. The Lord will condemn them to the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41b).

In this connection it is well to note that Matt. 25:31-46 is not as The Interpreter's Bible heads it: "A parable on the Basis of the Last Judgment."<sup>17</sup> This is an actual description (not a parable) of the Judgment-scene as it will take place on the Last Day.

The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ is a reign of God which with the return of our Lord at "the end of time" will bring about the complete separation of the good from the evil by the elimination of the disobedient and the establishment of the blessed in the kingdom of glory.

The βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ Will Be  
Consummated through Judgment and Deliverance

God's reign is not yet fully realized. He has not yet asserted His full sovereignty. Wickedness prospers, and the "blessed" often suffer at the hands of the scoffers. Even in our own lives, sin still enters in and mars our service. Our obedience is far from perfect. We find ourselves in the

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<sup>17</sup>S. E. Johnson, "St. Matthew," The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951) VII, 562.



same situation as St. Paul who confessed: "Not as though I had already attained either were already perfect" (Phil. 3:12a). But this will be altered when the Lord returns. Then, at the end of the present world order:

The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father! (Matt. 13:41-43).

The establishment of the *Βουλειά τοῦ Θεοῦ* in its blessed consummation is not brought about through the re-establishment of Israel to its previous position of honor and glory, but through a day of judgment and deliverance. Through Judgment upon sin, God will eliminate the godless. He will put an end to all disobedience and usurpation and remove all resistance to the *Βουλειά τοῦ Θεοῦ* by judgment and condemnation. The saints of the Most High shall be cleansed from all iniquity and shine forth as the sun coming suddenly from behind a cloud (Matt. 13:43). God's will shall then be done universally as it is now done by the hosts in heaven. His kingdom shall have finally and completely come. And the saints of the Most High shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34). The *Βουλειά τοῦ Θεοῦ* in its present form is but a vestibule for the saints into the kingdom of glory.

The establishment of the *Βουλειά τοῦ Θεοῦ* in its



blessed consummation is the harvest toward which the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is today growing. It will be established in this blessed state through God's final, eschatological judgment on sin and all disobedience. When all those who do iniquity have been brought to nought and all things which cause men to stumble have been removed, God will be all in all and His kingdom will have come (for His will will be done perfectly on earth as in heaven).

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which, although it is present today, is not yet fully and completely realized. When the Son of Man shall return at the end of time to judge sin and eliminate all those who do evil, the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* will be established in its blessed consummation and the saints of the Most High will inherit it.

#### CONCLUSION

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* as presented in the parables is God's rule, not ours. It is God's creation, of His doing. It is something in which He gives men a share; not something which is built by men either in America's green and pleasant land or anywhere else. It is entirely supra-mundane; it has its origin outside the framework of this world and our history, and its order is radically different from that of the present world. It is completely independent of earthly governments and men's social programs. It is not to be



identified with any individual, religious denomination, the visible Church, or even the invisible Church. It is more than a mere disposition within men's hearts. The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ means primarily the presence and action of God in His royal power and claims.

The βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is God's rule; God's reign. It is God in action. It is His invasion to break the power of Satan and to establish His own rule. It is God who is eternally regnant, beginning to rule in a new direct way with the coming of Christ. It is God bestowing on men the blessing of His saving reign (righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit) and giving them a share in His rule. It is God creating a people over whom He rules as King and giving to this people the "kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven" (Dan. 7:27).

The parables proclaim the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ to be present. They point out that the signs of God's reign became manifest in Jesus' coming. They enforce and illustrate the fact that ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is a reign of God which broke into history with the advent of Christ. It was confronting them then and there in the Word and work of Jesus.

Admittedly it was a "mystery" to be understood by those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, by those to whom it is revealed "not by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Dodd, op. cit., p. 197.



The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is not established through the advancement of society, by modern technological progress, or military force, but through the power of God inherent in the Word. The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which is brought to men through the preaching of "the Word (the good news) of the kingdom," and is established in the hearts of those who hear the Word "aright." Sowing the "Word" is the only method to be used in extending the reign of God on earth. Through the power of God inherent in the Word, the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is today extending its reign over the earth and establishing God's rule in men of every nation, tongue, and people.

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which as it confronts men in history demands a response. It confronts men with a sharp either/or. There is no neutrality possible. The whole direction of man's life, as well as his ultimate destiny, depends on the way in which he responds to the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ*. Those who do not respond to God's grace with repentance, are excluded from the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* and reap consequences more severe than those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Acceptance of the Lord's invitation must be followed by the fruits of faith. The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which means a life of faithfulness and diligent preparation on the part of all those who will enter the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* in its consummation. It places so much responsibility on man that the way in which he



implements God's grace in his life is a matter of life or death for him; for God will rule, if not in grace, then in judgment.

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a silent, unobtrusive power which penetrates like leaven through dough. Nothing can stop it. The mustard seed becomes a tree; the leaven hidden in the meal works on till the whole mass is leavened; the net which gathers of every kind is filled. Though the growth of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is slow and cannot be hurried anymore than growth in the vegetable kingdom, it is no less sure to prevail. The Gentiles can be seen flocking into the kingdom as birds into the branches of a stalwart tree. The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is offering shelter and protection to people of every nation and tongue. It is destined to encircle the globe and shine in glory forever.

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is a reign of God which broke into history with the advent of Christ, but awaits its consummation at "the end of time." It is still sowing time in the kingdom. Good and evil exist side by side in the world and are mixed together in the visible Church. God's rule is not yet complete, His kingdom has not yet fully come.

The *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* will be established in its absolute rule at "the end of time" when our Lord returns



to judge evil and purify His people. Through judgment and deliverance, the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* will be established in its absolute form and then God's will will be done universally as it is now done by the hosts in heaven. It is toward that goal that the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* has direction.

The blessed consummation of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is no more the work of men's hands than its inauguration. It is the gift of God which we must be prepared to receive when it comes. It will bring the completion of our salvation, perfect communion with God and the elimination of all evil. Then God will be all in all and His kingdom will have finally and completely come. This final establishment of the *Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ* is the supreme end for which we live. It is the subject of our prayer and the object of our hope.

Thy kingdom come!



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