

Reading the Gospels 2012

8 - Galilee: Jesus' Teaching in Parables

87 - *The Sower*

88 - *The reason for speaking in parables*

89 - *The interpretation of the Sower*

90 - *The Weeds and the Seed growing secretly*

91 - *The Mustard Seed*

92 - *The Leaven [Yeast]*

93 - *Jesus' use of parables*

94 - *Interpretation of the Weeds*

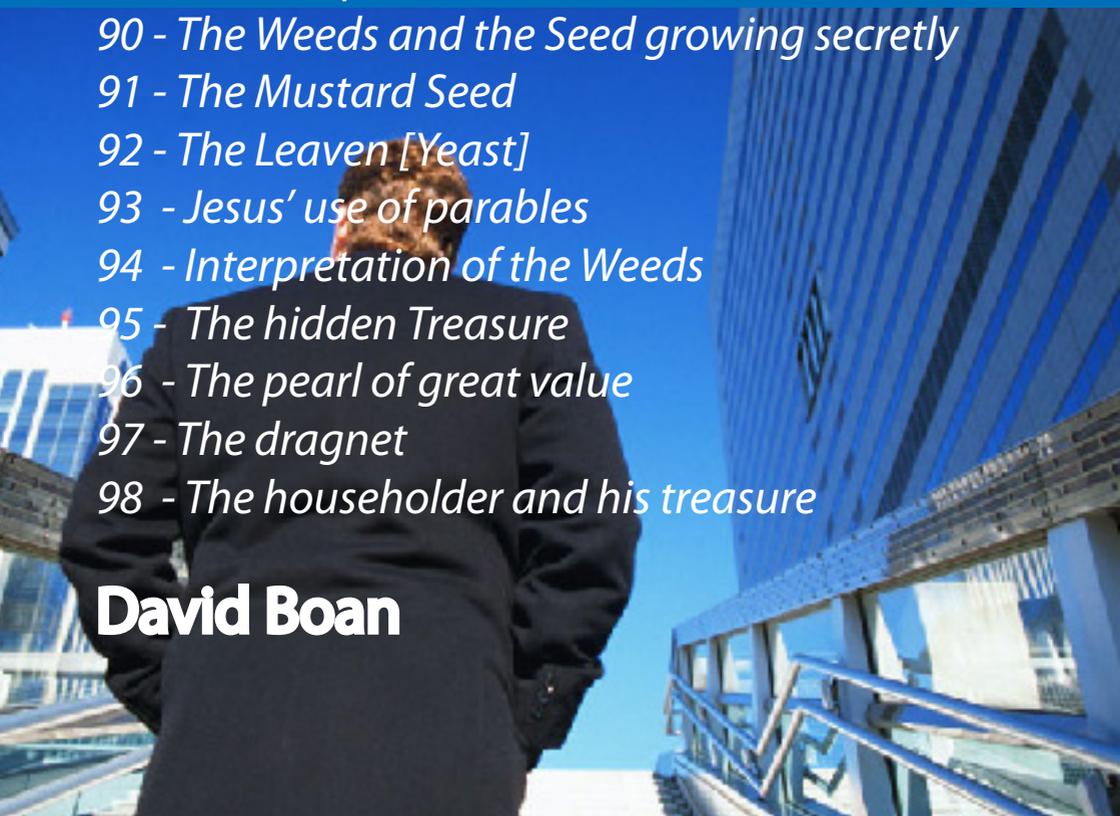
95 - *The hidden Treasure*

96 - *The pearl of great value*

97 - *The dragnet*

98 - *The householder and his treasure*

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nt 87 – Mark 4.3-9; Luke 8.4-10; Matthew 13.1-15 The Sower went out to sow...

Read carefully Isaiah 6; Psalm 78.2; Matthew 13.10-17; Mark 4.3-20; 1 Peter 1.10-12

87-1 Unique place

87-2 Where the seed falls has much to do with its effectiveness.

87-3 Four composite images, making four similies.

87-4 "...he who has ears to hear, let him hear..."

87-1 Unique place

The parable of the Sower is set within a context in all the Synoptic Gospels. It is first at the head of the grouping of parables that Jesus taught. All three Gospels, place between the parable and its interpretation an explanation as to why it was that Jesus found it necessary to speak in parables.

In the course of that explanation all three Gospel writers make a quotation from Isaiah 6.9-10. Indeed, the placing of the Isaiah text in between the parable and its interpretation makes us ask as to whether the Isaiah reference itself has been responsible for the construction of the parable in the first place.

87-2 Where the seed falls has much to do with its effectiveness.

[1] The sower is going out to sow. The action of the sowing and the one who sows are singly defined as a person who has an intent to carry out an action. Nothing else is in view other than this going out to sow. In this way our minds are focused upon a single actor and a single intent. Of course what he sows is seed, but that is not focused upon yet.

[2] What is focused upon is where it falls. This area where the seed falls is going to be definitive of those who are in these differing vicinities of the falling seed.

[3] The hearers of the parable are invited to follow the seed into the place where it came to fall in the act of sowing. Once there, the surrounds are

to be noticed, for they have a powerful formative effect on the seed's destiny and product.

87-3 Four composite images using four similies.

[1] The seed that falls by the road is not even able to germinate, it is eaten up by the birds.

[2] The seed that fell on the rocky ground didn't have much soil. Germinating quickly it sprang up; but once the heat of the sun came it was scorched, because the shallow depth of soil would not allow it to survive the full transpiration of a plant in the hot sun. It's root was not developed.

[3] The seed among the thorns found its growth overwhelmed by competitors that grew beside it and choked its life.

[4] The seeds that fell in the good soil grew and increased in varying yield, some 30, 60 and 100-fold increase.

87-4 "...he who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Before the parable is explained, we are now introduced to the section from Isaiah sandwiched between the parable and the explanation Jesus gave.

This expression [Mark 4.9] seems to imply that the hearing of the parable has to do with a prior gift – that to the person who has ears to hear, then he is responsible to hear it. The paradox has to do with the fact that ears are for hearing, and surely to have ears at all would imply that one would and can hear?

But here lies the subtle inference that only the Isaiah passage will make clear. Can it be that there are ears around who are not capable of hearing what the parable has to say? And anyway, are we talking about ears or hearts? Is it the fact that people can be deaf to what is said to them from God's Son because of the place in life where they are, with the preoccupations that they are immersed in, at the time that the seed falls into their orbit.

Are parables told that they may conceal so as to also make a revelation? This is where the setting for the understanding of the 'soil' that received the word of Jesus comes into play.

The Isaiah passage will lead us to consider that the people of Israel, at the time when Jesus spoke, were finding that, as the very word of God was being sown among them, they were unable to receive it so that it grew and accomplished what

God intended it to?

nt 88 – Luke 8.9-10; Matthew 13.10-17 Reason for speaking in parables

Read carefully Isaiah 6; Psalm 78.2; Matthew 13.10-17; Mark 4.10-20; 1 Peter 1.10-12

88-1 *To you it has been given to know the mystery...*

88-2 *Isaiah's call to be a prophet began with secure, cleansing forgiveness.*

88-3 *Isaiah's call to speak in such a way that his listeners ears were shut.*

88-4 *"...but blessed are your eyes, because they see..."*

88-1 To you it has been given to know the mystery...

Mark expresses it like this: "To you the secret of the Kingdom of God has been given, but to those outside everything comes by way of parables." [Mark 4.11NEB]

By using the word "secret" NEB 1961 translates μυστήριον, a Greek word from which we derive the English word "mystery". When we say that something is mysterious we are speaking of something which is present, but its meaning is hidden.

Further, the tense of the verb "have been given" indicates that it is already within their compass; they have already in possession of this mystery, this secret.

There are two sets of teaching here and they are presented to levels of comprehension. Those who "are outside" [or as Luke has it, "the rest"] don't understand it. Those among the disciples can, but not by their own un-aided intelligence or perception, but because they have been 'given' to know it. To the disciples the mystery of the kingdom is given.

So, the disciples have access to the secret while it is clear that the general public do not. When we look for the evidence that they know something that others do not, there is nothing to indicate that they understood even the publically stated parables. It is a matter of record that they not only require them to be interpreted by the Lord, they find His later teaching about the nature of his ministry very hard to take in to their understanding. Witness the difficulties they

experience on the road to Jerusalem, when He speaks of his impending trial, death and resurrection; they are needing to deal with their own self-ambition, pride and unwillingness to serve others.

If we think of something that they know which the general public do not then we might be looking for information that they have, or an aptitude they have been given to see certain things. If we expect them to “get it” all the time then the evidence of the Gospels is to the contrary. Indeed, in Matthew’s record of this exchange the disciples ask Jesus, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” – by “them” we take it the disciples mean the crowd. The implication is that his message, as spoken, is not at all clear. Have they come to that conclusion simply by watching the crowd’s obvious puzzlement, or do they have the same experience themselves as well?

But the matter is made clear the minute we turn from the quest of some “thing” that the disciples might know that is different from the crowd’s knowledge, to the question of “Who” they know – who they have as their rabbi – this is the provision of “someone”. What the disciples do have, which the public around them did not, was that they had been admitted to intimate fellowship with Jesus himself.

This was a matter of his call to them, not of their voluntary applying to him. He chose them, and called them and appointed them to be “with Him” [Mark 1.16-20; 2.13-17; 3.13-19]. They had been appointed as his associates.

Just by being in His company they would learn deep things of the rule of God, especially through His life. For His was a life of obedience, and the disciples were drawn into sharing it – and, in this way, knowledge of the kingdom was given to them.

He is the gift as His Father is the Giver. This is the secret of the authority with which Jesus taught, let alone his explanations of that teaching. He conveys the secret by sharing his life, not by instructing and appealing to the intelligence of the disciples.

So, it is from their Rabbi, the gift of God to them, that they are given the allegorical explanation of the parable by Jesus [*nt-89*].

To the man among the crowds who can audibly hear Jesus teach, their instruction is in parabolic form. These parables are, for the most part, pictures drawn from ordinary human life and they show how the rule of the Kingdom of God operates in the world. They have the effect of judging their hearers, and they have the power to lay bare the condition of the heart of the hearer; for while they were audibly heard, they were not heard as to their meaning.

88-2 Isaiah's call to be a prophet began with secure, cleansing forgiveness

Jesus answered his disciples' question as to why He spoke in parables, with a clear back reference to Isaiah the prophet. He said that as he taught the lost sheep of the house of Israel in parables, that the response to Isaiah's words in his day were being portrayed before them as Jesus spoke and the crowds did not understand.

Called to his prophetic ministry in the year that King Uzziah died [735 BC, according to Bright], Isaiah saw a majestic vision of God. The elements of it were:

[1] In the temple, where God was worshipped, He is presented as seated – ruling – and far too large for it. The hem of his cloak filled the whole house. His greatness cannot be contained by the house of worship built for Him – as indeed, Solomon's prayer at the time made clear. It is an exalted, lofty, majestic and awesome impression Isaiah records was the effect upon himself. [verse 1]

[2] God is worshipped as Three Persons, by the awed and respectful Seraphim. Their worship, in words whose volume shook the foundations of the temple building, spoke of God as three times Holy, and as the Lord of Hosts. They stressed his command and control over all things, and that the whole earth is full of His glory. He is the Creator, and men and women are creatures, and as such, Lord of heaven and earth. [verse 2-4].

[3] Isaiah's response to this spoken worship in words, is to rue the fact that he is a man with unclean lips. He, along with all the rest of mankind around him, are ruined for they have forfeited their right to such worship due to their compromised mouths. Further, He has now seen the King, the Lord of hosts. The implication is that he cannot stay, his life is called into question. The sight of the holiness of God is his destruction [verse 5].

[4] But a Seraph, cleanses his mouth by cauterization. A burning, holy fire is applied to his lips; and his iniquity is taken away and he is forgiven – atoned for, because it is a coal from the altar of God's own gracious provision to propitiate His people when they sin against Him [verse 6-7].

88-3 Isaiah called to speak in a way that his listeners ears are shut

[5] Now the Lord's voice is heard. Spoken in the singular, "Whom shall I send..." and then in the plural "...who will go for Us?" [verse 8]

There is a Trinity of Persons whose united Mind is behind the mission Isaiah will take up; Isaiah will go for God, later revealed through the work of

Jesus as Father, Son and Spirit.

There is a single Sender, who calls Isaiah to this task. Isaiah, full of faith and sure in his new-found forgiveness and cleansing, responds to this call, God should 'send' him.

[6] The call is for Isaiah to "go and tell this people..."; Isaiah is to go, to speak and to Israel, who are under the disciplinary judgment of God [verse 9].

[7] He is to announce that, as they hear him, their ears are shut and their eyes uncomprehending [verse 9]

[8] Isaiah learns that the impact of his words is a judgment itself, because his words will "...render the hearts..." insensitive, dull "...lest..." they do see and repent and be healed. The implication is that the mind of the Lord is that they are in a place that He will keep them in for a time, and that they will have a prophet speak, but they will not comprehend. The prophet especially needs to know this.

[9] Isaiah understood this is a strange, alien thing for prophecy from God to do; so it must have to do with God's temporary purposes; so he asks, "...for how long?" He knows that this cannot be the permanent mind of the Triune God, it is not consistent with their nature, but it might be consistent with Their temporary purposes in relation to Israel [verse 11]. God knew, at this time, that Israel would not receive what Isaiah was saying; it was His discipline upon them for this time.

[10] Isaiah is to do this until Nebuchanezzar flattens Jerusalem and burns it with fire and the people are taken into exile and the land is devastated. That is for how long!

[11] Then the Lord adds a promise of restoration for a portion, a holy seed, a tithe, a tenth portion. So there will be a return, and yet the small portion will be subject to burning once more – so the return from exile is not the final phase of the journey.

Isaiah is a pre-exilic prophet who, in speaking judgment to his present generation finds that they do not repent [Isaiah chapters 1-39]; yet he also speaks of future restoration [chapters 40-55] and a final judgment [chapters 56-66].

88-4 "...but blessed are your eyes, because they see..."

Jesus' parables are falling on deaf ears and blind eyes. They come to the current present generation of the lost sheep of the house of Israel and they do not make the appropriate response to a prophet in Israel [nt -79]. But that they

do not hear and see and so respond, is evident that the speaking of the prophet Jesus, who is filled with compassion for them, is nevertheless consistent with the discipline of Israel at the current time.

Larger themes are playing out here which have implications for the gospel when it will go to the whole world. It is also true that the final matter of Israel is not found in this initial response she makes to Jesus. At this time Israel [what Paul will later call, "children of flesh"], as a whole, are elected to reject Him [Romans 9-11].

Notwithstanding this, as Isaiah indicated, there is the remnant of Jesus disciples, all exclusively from Israel, and representative of what Paul would later call "children of promise". They are marked as those who distinctively relate to God 'by faith' – the consistent explanation of Jesus as to the way people lay hold of salvation. To them Jesus could say, "...but blessed are your eyes, because they see...".

Jesus sets this statement against the desire of many righteous and prophetic people in history. They wanted to understand what is now being made clear to the disciples of Jesus. They were disappointed in their expectation. So, the disciples are now set in history, by their rabbi, as a very favoured group. This interpretation of history is decisive for the larger themes mentioned above. Climactic matters are being brought to a head in the ministry of Jesus and the disciples have a significant future part to play in this. The future of Israel will follow their stream, not the old ones. This will prove to be a place of departure.

nt 89 – Luke 8.16-18

Matthew 13.18-23

Allegorical meaning of the parable of the Sower

Read carefully Mark 4.21-25

89-1 "You therefore, hear the parable of the sower.."

89-2 "... the word of the kingdom...and does not understand it..."

89-3 "...soil in rocky places..."

89-4 "...seed sown among thorns.."

89-5 "...good soil..."

89-6 *The issue of time in the objective purpose of God*

89-7 *The issue of time in our own subjective life*

89-1 “You, therefore, hear the parable of the sower...”

We have just noted in nt-88 that Jesus ended with “...but blessed are your eyes, because they see...”. So now He opens with a clear explanation of the elements of the story. Like the parable of the tares [nt-94], the parable of the sower is an allegorical story. Jesus explains the elements of the story by identifying their individual meanings.

[1] Where he does not start his explanation is instructive. He does not speak of the sower who went out to sow. By this we may take it that it is, in the light of the Isaiah back reference, obvious that he is the Sower himself. He is the prophetic figure, He is the speaker. After all, the issue in question is, ‘why does He speak in parables?’. So his explanation takes its point of departure from the time the seed leaves the hand of the sower and begins to fall. He asks for his listeners – those with ears to hear - to consider where it falls.

89-2 “...the word of the kingdom...and does not understand it”

What Jesus is speaking in the climactic day of his ministry to Israel [nt 88-4], is the word of the kingdom. We are to understand by this that the word he is sowing, is the active and present rule of God - present because Jesus is present – sounding into the ears of his listeners.

This first group are the outside group. These find that when they do not understand, then, although the word is sown into the heart of the persons, the evil one comes and snatches it away from them. The word of God is unfettered, it can penetrate to the heart of the person, but its sound is audible only, it does not meet with understanding. There is no penetration into the person themselves, deep into their inner being, of its meaning as from God.

Further, if not understood, it does not linger. This is not some matter that reflects the mind of God for it, but rather, reflects the fact that it is spoken in an environment where there is an enemy of mankind. History is not a neutral time, nor are there any neutral places, hearts or persons.

This is seed that is sown beside the road, it is cast from the hand of the sower, but where it falls is not on soil that is productive at this time.

89-3 "...soil in rocky places..."

We are perhaps to understand the rocky places as being a substrata of rock underneath a thin layer of soil. Just as the seed germinates and looks to be going fine, suddenly it falters, due to the lack of depth of soil, to the inability to penetrate further.

Jesus thinks here of the man who receives the word with immediate joy. It has a response within him that indicates he has understood its message and that message generates a response that is evident in the man's emotional life.

But attention is now directed to the root in the man. It is not deep. It has not penetrated into his life and soul's depth. An external hindrance – persecution on account of the word – is encountered. A matter that Jesus had forewarned his disciples about. The good word that had been such a boon to them, would also, in the light of its expression in the world, bring them deep persecution and pressure from the world [nt-75,76].

This weakly root system is exposed in the previously, joyous receiver at a time of encountering persecution on account of the word. As the underground root hits the rocky substratum, so the plant begins to fall over and die.

In the modern day preaching of the word of the kingdom, it is vital to tell people, in advance, that the gracious word of God to them, can also, by its reception in the world become a powerful tool in the hands of the outsiders, for persecution.

89-4 "...seed sown among thorns..."

The thorns in the life of the man who hears the word are his internal worries. They are worries that have their expression about external things, but the root is personal anxiety as a result of inordinately caring for them. The worries of the world, such as Jesus forbade his disciples to be concerned about if they knew their heavenly Father [nt-63]. Worries about needs arise in the hands of the poor. Their concern is for their needs to be met; for they think that life consists in these things.

There is a deception also in having riches, that is, matters in surplus of needs. Such surpluses take on a form which deceives us. We may think that their presence in our life means that we are blessed such that, if they departed, we would not be. That would be to read our relationship with Father in the light of the externals rather than internally direct to our own conscience. Add to the fact that the world adds to such a deception through envy and desiring the riches that we may have. In this way, the world underlines this view of our surplus.

These thoughts and worries are 'chokers'. They have an effect on the life of the soil that it cannot give due freedom and reign for the word to have its way

in the life of the individual. The word's way is choked out by constant worrisome presences that demand the life of the soil.

This effects the fruit of the seed. The word cannot bring forth what it normally would in the life of the individual who is worried. The restfulness of soul does not arrive, the frantic pre-occupation with things, ambitions and work-driven matters destroys the serenity of spirit.

89-5 "...good soil..."

In good soil the word is received and understood. It bears a harvest for the sower in the person on whom it fell. It is a varied harvest, as is the case with all seeds. Not are entirely the same, and that has to do with the soil, and not the seed itself.

Many different persons, in very different environments, states of health, situations of life, married, single, poor, rich, etc "receive the word and understand it". No two soils are the same. So the variation of the harvest is not the issue here, but that there is fruit for the sower.

That, by comparison, there are 100's, 60's 30's emphasizes different yields. But not in a way that takes our attention away from the main matter – the seed has fallen into soil and prospered, bringing forth its own distinctive fruit there, in that person. It has not returned void to the Son of God who sowed it, but has accomplished the purpose for which it was sown. That is the main issue here.

89-6 The issue of time in God's objective purposes

We notice that the tapestry of the story includes the development of the seed is seen over a trajectory of time, particularly the last three examples.

The first sown seed that is not understood and stolen by Satan takes place at the time of sowing. [And of course, we the readers, understand that the sowing is still going on]. But there is an instant non-comprehension and there can be a stealing of the word at that time.

But there is a flow of history that is taking place over which, at least in the experience of the soil, there can be persecution, and the impact of worries, and also the various yields of the good soil can begin to become evident.

Some things are not seen until the viewpoint of the harvest has come. We shall see this objective viewpoint in other parables that follow this one. The meaning of God's purpose in all things is not declared until the end. If we know that Jesus is the Alpha, we must also reckon on the fact that He is also the Omega - the beginning and the end.

89-7 The issue of time in our subjective lifetime

This parable, with its objective purposes of Israel's history and former tapestry in mind, nevertheless expresses the grace of God to his disciples.

Rocky places can be anticipated and prepared for, surely this is the impact of the teaching of Jesus for his disciples in warning them of this clear possibility.

Chokers can be recognized, and repented of; otherwise why mention them? There is not an inevitability about these hindrances. The Lord is teaching us that rocky soil and choked soil can happen; but, at the same time, they can be elements of the parable that make us aware of such matters in considering the inevitable subjective question, "What sort of soil am I?"

So, over our own life, and at episodes within it, we can be asking all the time, "what sort of soil am I here, and here, and here!?" Not in a neurotic worried sense, but in a sober, wise and listening-to-the-word-of-the-Rabbi sense.

nt 90 – Matthew 13.24-30

Tares and Seed growing secretly

Read carefully

Mark 4.21-25

90-1 "...compared to a man..."

90-2 The need to explain the mixture that is appearing

90-3 The wheat growing is people becoming what they should be

90-4 "...in the time of harvest..."

90-5 "...don't judge before the time..."

90-1 "...compared to a man..."

We have just noted in nt-89-6 that Jesus spoke what he spoke against the background of the flow of time right through to the end of the age. Here in this parable of the wheat and the tares [weeds] that background tapestry controls the discussion of the issue of mixture during the times in which we now live.

It is significant that the comparison we are meant to follow is that the kingdom is like unto a man. What this man did was sow good seed in his field. So we should follow this man through the parable.

What happens is that people, naturally fall asleep. It turns out that

while they were sleeping an enemy has also sowed weeds among the wheat. They wake up to find that the field is producing a mixed crop.

The servants of the landowner ask how this mixture has come about since it is a settled matter that the seed the landowner put in was very good.

He explains about the enemy who worked over the field. When they enquire as to whether he wants them to weed the field the landowner makes clear that they shouldn't do this now; because it would be likely to root up the wheat as well. They are to wait for the harvest time.

If the kingdom of heaven is like unto the man, then the key questions are:

[1] how does this man explain to his labourers the presence of the weeds in the field?

[2] Should anything be done to separate these now?

90-2 The need to explain the mixture of people at this time

Jesus is tackling with this story the issue that the work of the kingdom, done in the world through the Son of Man who has come to sow the Word of God and to reap a harvest, ask us to think of the wheat currently growing, as a crop of men and women who are ripening for God.

What this emphasizes is that this is a work done in the world where there is an enemy of mankind at large.

At the Incarnation of the Word of God, when he takes human sinful flesh upon Himself, He stands with us in the compromised world where we stand. At his Baptism he is prepared to identify with us in our own sins and eventually, He will, as He moves toward Jerusalem, fulfill that 'baptism' to die for us in our place as a substitute.

As the incarnate word of God, Jesus is also a representative Man for us all. Unlike Adam, who lost his authority over the earth that he was given by God, Jesus is the one who, in our place and in our stead will live a life, before God, upon the earth for us. He is the true Man, the One through whom proper humanity will be conveyed upon us.

It will be through Him that our authority will be restored upon the earth, so that, eventually the ground which fell under a curse through Adam's rebellion will yield properly for mankind again. Yet, right now the kingdom of God accepts that there a mixed yield as well.

For, right now, the kingdom of God suffers violence. It too, does its work in a hostile environment. But Jesus rules in the midst of his enemies – that is, His ripening wheat is there and it will bring forth its harvest in the world environment.

Nevertheless, at this time, it is accompanied by mixture, by a defiling enemy that also is sowing alongside the good seed.

90-3 The wheat growing is people becoming

It is at this point in our exposition, that we see that the seed, unlike the parable of the sower, is not the word. It is men and women of Jesus' planting who live in the world, seen as his field. This is a parable of the kingdom, of the rule of God, not of the word. And while it is never said that the wheat growing is men and women, the harvest at the end of the age declares that by inference.

90-4 "...in the time of harvest..."

Behind Jesus' teaching is a picture of the kingdom having come as men and women receive Him, have authority to become children of God, as they mature, stand for Him, bear witness to His name and obey Him. People can recognize the mixture, so they must have enough information to discern the comparison.

At the same time, behind his teaching is the understanding of the kingdom has yet to come upon the earth; he taught his disciples to constantly pray for this to come about.

So, the kingdom has come, and is yet to come. Both of these statements are true and true simultaneously. We are living between the times when the work of God's harvest has begun, the field is ripe with kingdom people growing and maturing; yet the harvest has not come as yet, the final judgment, the final sorting through the people of the field is still yet to come.

"The question is sometimes discussed whether the world gets better or worse as it grows older, and optimists and pessimists take opposite sides upon it. Both... are wrong. It does not get better only, nor worse only, but both. Its progress is not simply progress in good, evil being gradually driven from the field; nor is it simply a progress in evil, before which good continually disappears: it is progress in which good and evil alike come to maturity, bearing the ripest fruit, showing all that they can do, proving their strength to the utmost against each other. This is the same truth which we are taught by our Lord in the parable of the wheat and tares: 'Let both grow together until the harvest...' not until the wheat and the tares alike have shown all that is in them, will the judgement come." Denney, James [1898] Comm. Thessalonians p.313-4]

90-5 Don't judge before the time [1 Corinthians 4.5]

So this parable teaches us, by virtue of the timing of the objective purposes of God [not the subjective matters of our own lifetime] that while we may discern the work of the kingdom in those around us, and even recognize the maturing of the wheat, we are not to attempt a selection before the final harvest.

First that is the work of the man whose field it is, and it comes about by his call "...at the time of harvest I will say..." – the kingdom is being compared to that man, it comes to fruition at the word of the King.

Second, a final call cannot be made early without deep danger to the maturing of the wheat itself. To attempt a separation by men is to usurp Christ's initiative, for all judgment has been committed to Him because He is the Son of Man.

God then, has fixed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness by a man, whom he has appointed [Acts 17.31].

nt 91 – Matthew 13.31-32

The parable of the mustard seed

Read carefully Mark 4.21-25

91-1 "...compared to a man..."

91-2 The seed that is planted

91-3 The mature plant that arrives

91-4 Again, the issue of time

91-5 The kingdom as an established, substantial rule of God

91-6 Summary

91-1 "...kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed..."

We now come to very simple parables, that paint for us an uncomplicated word picture. Our method of interpretation is to follow the likeness which Jesus has directed us towards. In this case the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed; so we follow what happens to it and see if his picture is clear.

In the previous parable of the wheat and tares, we had a man to compare the kingdom with. Here we have a seed which a man takes and sows in his field. We need to stay focused on the seed.

91-2 The seed that is planted

What is presented for us to consider is the seed in two stages of its growth. The comparison is one of size.

In the early planting of the kingdom, it is, as is the case with the mustard seed, a very small seed indeed. So in seed form it is tiny compared to other seeds that are known. It is not a pretentious seed in that respect. The kingdom of God is quite capable of very small beginnings. Indeed, Jesus is teaching us that it is the case. In his own case, as the king of that kingdom, it comes into the world as a babe, it stands in with sinful people and has humble beginnings. In its quiet expansion it travels incognito, hardly recognized as the great power of God that it is.

So then, at its inception, the kingdom of heaven is seen, in its seed form, as the very smallest of the small.

And further, mustard is a herb for the kitchen garden, it is not a great oak tree. It is not expected to grow to any taller than a bush and to be harvested by hand when the herb is necessary to the cook. There are certainly no expectations as the seed form is contemplated. Such as small seed; and anyway, it will be a small bush.

91-3 The mature plant that arrives

But that is the kingdom's appearance as a seed - these are early days. Jesus' parable takes a turn, and an unnatural one at that. Contrary to all expectations, the unpretentious seed, when planted, grows and matures over time. That is not unnatural but its size certainly is; it grows into, not a bush which is hip-high in the domestic garden, but into a giant tree; the sort that birds of heaven - of the air - come and nest in and among its branches.

Jesus has a quotation from Daniel 4.12.31 at the back of his mind here. At the time when Nebuchanezzar, in Babylon, with his great kingdom about to be cut down, he, as a king, is described as a great tree in which the birds of the air find shelter and succour. Jesus is drawing from this worldly kingdom a picture of what kingdoms provide. They offer shelter, care and shade but also a resting place for the bird life. They secure those who are at risk on the ground, giving them a place to live out of harms' way. Kingdoms care and secure people.

91-4 Again, the issue of time

We have to be careful in taking the measure of something at a point in time of its inception. It is not appearing as it will be. There is a time of growth to be taken into account. As we have seen before this is the issue of the kingdom as it appears on the earth at the time of Jesus. It is small, a band of disciples, waling behind a rabbi in the company of some women [nt-83].

Similar to the issues of the tares, the movement over time needs to be taken into account. Men and women tend to assess things on the basis that they are on the earth for a very short time. God works over longer and more profound slabs of time.

91-5 The kingdom as an established, substantial rule of God

So this parable teaches us, that the kingdom of God is a sure and confident exercise of rule. It will start small but it will move to become the eternal, established and wonderful succour of God for men and women.

It will be a kingdom that secures their lives, it will become their home, where they settle their life to be, where they come for refuge and rest. The kingdom will be an astonishing kingdom, out of all proportion to its small beginnings.

91-6 Summary

The rule of God is that which came with Jesus' presence among us. When it first appeared it looked to be the smallest of the small. Early expectations at that time did not anticipate its' future to be all that great.

Later, it grew and developed into a stupendous kingdom with large numbers of needy people attracted to its breadth, stability and provision of God's wonderful gracious care. They became free voluntary servers of the King, having found their freedom in his service.

In surprising contrast to its humble beginnings the kingdom of heaven expanded beyond all people's earlier expectations.

People who have found their security there have taken into account the unpretentious beginning; they themselves have found rest of soul that allows them to live a humble life. They are quiet sure that, in appearing this way in no way detracts from their gracious and now exalted King who, as the true Man, won us to Himself through his humility. A king who stooped so low has raised us. We are willing to be so governed. His rule is expressed at this time through our freely offered obedience.

The kingdom of God has by no means finished its expansion. It promises to govern the whole earth as it already does so in heaven. This expression of that kingdom is still yet to come; and for that we pray Him every day.

nt 92 – Matthew 13.33

The parable of the yeast [leaven]

Read carefully Mark 4.30-32; Luke 13.18-21

92-1 "...compared to a man..."

92-2 The seed that is planted

92-3 The mature plant that arrives

92-4 Again, the issue of time

92-5 The kingdom as an established, substantial rule of God

92-6 Summary

92-1 "...kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed..."

We now come to very simple parables, that paint for us an uncomplicated word picture. Our method of interpretation is to follow the likeness which Jesus has directed us towards. In this case the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed; so we follow what happens to it and see if his picture is clear.

In the previous parable of the wheat and tares, we had a man to compare the kingdom with. Here we have a seed which a man takes and sows in his field. We need to stay focused on the seed.

92-2 The seed that is planted

What is presented for us to consider is the seed in two stages of its growth. The comparison is one of size.

In the early planting of the kingdom, it is, as is the case with the mustard seed, a very small seed indeed. So in seed form it is tiny compared to other seeds that are known. It is not a pretentious seed in that respect. The kingdom of God is quite capable of very small beginnings. Indeed, Jesus is teaching us that it is the case. In his own case, as the king of that kingdom, it comes into the world as a babe, it stands in with sinful people and has humble beginnings. In its quiet expansion it travels incognito, hardly recognized as the great power of God that it is.

So then, at its inception, the kingdom of heaven is seen, in its seed form, as the very smallest of the small.

And further, mustard is a herb for the kitchen garden, it is not a great oak tree. It is not expected to grow to any taller than a bush and to be harvested by hand when the herb is necessary to the cook. There are certainly no expecta-

tions as the seed form is contemplated. Such as small seed; and anyway, it will be a small bush.

92-3 The mature plant that arrives

But that is the kingdom's appearance as a seed - these are early days. Jesus' parable takes a turn, and an unnatural one at that. Contrary to all expectations, the unpretentious seed, when planted, grows and matures over time. That is not unnatural but its size certainly is; it grows into, not a bush which is hip-high in the domestic garden, but into a giant tree; the sort that birds of heaven - of the air - come and nest in and among its branches.

Jesus has a quotation from Daniel 4.12.31 at the back of his mind here. At the time when Nebuchanezzar, in Babylon, with his great kingdom about to be cut down, he, as a king, is described as a great tree in which the birds of the air find shelter and succour. Jesus is drawing from this worldly kingdom a picture of what kingdoms provide. They offer shelter, care and shade but also a resting place for the bird life. They secure those who are at risk on the ground, giving them a place to live out of harms' way. Kingdoms care and secure people.

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92-6 Summary

The rule of God brought to us is expressed in the person of Jesus. God dropped it, as a small dynamic power into the peoples of the world he came to save. With self-sustaining and unstoppable power, it is able to work its way through every sort of people no matter where they are, for the boundaries of the kingdom's reach is the whole of creation.

Once introduced to the world, the kingdom is mighty in its ability to have its effect upon each and every person – since it brings revelation of salvation and judgment. It will have its sway over the whole; it is simply a matter of time.

nt 93 – Matthew 13.34-35

Jesus' use of parables

Read carefully Mark 4.33-34; Psalm 78

93-1 *"...in all his teaching..."*

93-2 *The variation in the manuscripts at Matthew 13.35*

93-3 *The fulfillment of prophecy – Psalm 78.2*

93-1 "In all his teaching..."

As Matthew follows Mark's order, he picks up this report of Mark and makes clear for us that the practice of Jesus was always to speak to crowds in parables and to explain the parable that was spoken to the disciples privately.

93-2 The variation in the manuscripts at Matthew 13.35

Unlike Mark, Matthew makes an additional point that he wants to report for us. He presents, as he does so often, this way of teaching the two audiences before Him as a fulfillment of prophetic word that has gone before. The quotation Matthew uses is from Psalm 78.2.

There is a variation in the transmitted text of the New Testament here. Before the quotation is given some ancient manuscripts read

[1] " ...thus fulfilling the word through the prophet saying..."

[2] Others read; " ...thus fulfilling the word through Isaiah saying..."

The Greek Text of the United Bible Society, 3rd edition [1966, 1968, 1975] prints option [1] above. It does this while noting [2] in the critical apparatus. It gives [1] a “C” rating, which means that, although it has printed [1], there is a considerable degree of doubt as to whether the printed reading is superior to the alternative. The 3rd [corrected] edition of 1983 makes no change to this earlier printing and judgment.

Bruce Metzger, in the Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, makes the following observations:

[1] above is supported by the fact that it is the most difficult reading – a principle that those who work in this area of study understand to be significant, given that a scribe tends to render any variation to be more easily read or understood, rather than the reverse.

It is also supported by good manuscript evidence as well.

On the other hand, if [2] were the original reading, it can be easily seen that some scribes might have dropped in the name Isaiah as a best known prophet.

So, the Committee printed [1] and, at the same time, gave it a high degree of doubt.

93-2 The fulfillment of prophecy – Psalm 78.2

The quotation, as we have seen, is from Psalm 78.2.

“I will open my mouth in a parables;

I will utter things that have been kept secret since the world was made”

Concerning the “things that have been kept secret since the world was made” the third verse [Psalm 72.3] goes on to say “...Which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us”. In speaking these things to the next generation Asaph is making clear that the history of God’s dealings with Israel was a secret from Creation – since Israel was not a foundation nation, but called out later - but has become known in the revelation of God to Israel and His covenanting with them.

It is a long Psalm, attributed to Asaph. And it takes the form of a story, it is a continuing narrative, typical of the style of a parable.

It rehearses for the generations to come, the rebelliousness of God’s ancient people Israel. It repeatedly illustrates that all through this way of relating to God, as He disciplined them for their own good He was a merciful and generous Saviour to them.

It culminates in the final rejection by God of the tribes he had previously worked with and showed how He chose the tribe of Judah, and in particular

David, his servant, to finally shepherd his people Israel.

Matthew is telling us, as readers, that the parables of Jesus are, like Asaph's narrative, spoken to, and about, a rebellious people. In that they don't register the meaning they do not change their response to God. To this people, God has finally brought his servant David – a recurring theme in Matthew's Gospel. In showing how Jesus never spoke to the people without a parable, Matthew is identifying the crowd as the rebellious ones who will reject God's provision yet again.

Conversely, Matthew sees the disciples as the small group who have everything clearly explained to them, they are 'in the know', they are given to see what it is that God is doing in their time.

nt 94 – Matthew 13.36-43

Jesus explains the allegory of the Weeds

Read carefully Revelation 21.9-2; 2 Thessalonians 2.1-12

94-1 "...Explain to us the parable..."

94-2 *By the 'end' the world has become Christ's kingdom*

94-3 *The "place of wailing and grinding of teeth" [NEB1961]*

94-4 *The righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father*

94-5 *A principle operating throughout history*

94-1 "Explain to us the parable..."

As if to demonstrate the way Jesus spoke outwardly to the crowd, and then explained everything privately to the disciples [nt-93], Matthew now gives us the interpretation of the parable of the Tares [weeds, darnell] that were sown among the wheat which we have considered earlier [nt-90] in the light of this explanation.

The disciples ask for him to make clear the parable of the weeds. His answer is to simply give them the allegorical keys to each element in the story He told the crowd.

[1] The "man" is Himself, the Son of Man. He is the active sower looking for his harvest to mature.

[2] The field is the world; so it is not the kingdom at this time, but see 94-2.

- [3] The good seed sown are the children of the Kingdom
- [4] The darnell, the bad seed are the work of the devil.
- [5] The harvest is the end of time
- [6] The reapers are the angels

94-2 By the 'end' the world has become Christ's kingdom

In speaking about the Son of Man sending out his angels at the end he states that the angels will gather out of his kingdom everything that causes offence, and all whose deeds were evil. These are committed to the furnace of fire and also to the gnashing of teeth.

This implies that, as we saw the field was the world [94-1,[2]]but by the end it is the kingdom of the Christ. So the end is the arrival of the Son of Man to the earth. We shall see this made very clear in Jesus' teaching to his disciples in [Luke 17-20-37, *nt-172*].

94-3 The "place of wailing and grinding of teeth" [NEB 1961]

This expression used here to make clear that there is a removal of these folks from the people of God. Their judgment is not pleasant, it describes personal torment and also that of great personal anguish and regret.

This expression of Jesus is found in seven places. In the following places it is spoken as a warning to the Pharisees and scribes, or to the sons of Israel:

1. Matthew 8.5-13 [8.12] The Centurion's Request [nt 37-8]
2. Matthew 13.36-42 Parable of the Tares [nt-94]
3. Matthew 13.47-50 Parable of the Dragnet [nt 97]
4. Matthew 22.1-14 Wedding Feast [in setting of 21.23-46] [nt 216]
5. Luke 13.22-30 "Only a few saved?" [nt 153]

It is also spoken in reference to Jesus' teaching by parables told to his disciples on his coming again to the earth. They concern how to wait for his coming again

6. Matthew 24.45-51 Slave in charge of house nt 233]
7. Matthew 25.14-30 Parable of the Talents [nt 235]

First, all of these contexts deal with the issue of mixture within the invited people of God. Second, all of them have in common that the judgment is pronounced upon them. We see from the point of view from the end where the fate

of the persons is clear.

So, we can see that the behaviour of these folks is designed to instruct us on the basis that the judgment is announced to us beforehand. As a warning, yet as a gracious warning - for the design of the parables to us is not to drive us to works as a means to salvation; but as a way of understanding the works as demonstrating the people as who they are. And all is visible by virtue of the resultant works they are doing now.

Luke's material has the sense of the angels as the agents of God in executing the judgement which has been pronounced upon them.

94-4 The righteous shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father

The removal of the tares, at the time of the coming again of the Son of Man to the world which is now his kingdom, is the removal from the kingdom of "all that is offensive and those whose deeds are evil."

This removal means that the previous mixture is now clarified. And the purity of the persons who are left means that they can now shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Their purity is not defiled by the mixture. So that there is something here to the Father's glory. It is that there is no persons doing anything offensive or compromising with in the kingdom of God.

We see similar themes developed in the Revelation to John 21.9-27. Here, the bride, the wife of the Lamb is shown. She is portrayed as a heavenly city, founded upon the foundation stones of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and having gates with the names of the tribes of Israel. The Lord God and the Lamb are the light of this city, and there is no one in it who is doing anything shameful.

94-5 A principle operating throughout history

Sometimes people ask as to whether the world is getting better or worse as time goes by. And there are people who point to evidences of greater good as a change, and also to increasing evil as well – for there are evidences for either of these optimistic or pessimistic views. And this should alert us to the fact that the question, put as an either-or, is the wrong one.

It is not that either is increasing at the expense of the other. For the fact is that world testifies to an increase in both. Progress is not simply in the good, so that the evil is gradually driven out of the arena of life. Nor is it true that the evil increases so that the good disappears. As time goes forward, it is clearly the fact that good and evil are coming to their maturity, they are moving to a climax

where they will show their ripest fruit. Not only this, their conflict will intensify as well, for they shall be showing what each can do in the face of the other.

This is what the Lord taught in this parable of the wheat and the tares [weeds]. They should be allowed to ripen together, and then climactically, at the great judgement, there will be a separation of the good and the evil and the evil will come to be burned.

We also notice that as the historical struggle intensifies, the character of sin manifests itself in deeper spiritual forms. There is a crowning wickedness which manifests just before the coming of our Lord where the man if sin arises as a malignant, prideful personage, only to be judged and destroyed by the Lord at his coming. [nt2th2-3].

nt 95 – Matthew 13.44

The hidden treasure

Read carefully Genesis

23.1-20

95-1 "...lying in a field..."

95-2 "...is like treasure..."

95-3 "...which had been hidden..."

95-4 "...buried it..."

95-5 "...for joy..."

95-6 "...sold everything he had, and bought the field..."

95-1 "...lying in a field..."

This short parable allows us to follow through the likeness described, the kingdom of heaven is like the treasure; so we should follow through the treasure. But in doing that we shall see that it is the effect of the treasure on the man that discovers it that reveals the meaning of the treasure. For it is treasure in the double sense, it is treasure to God who had hidden it, and it is treasure to the man who finds it.

What happens to the kingdom is that, from the point of view of the man, it is discovered in the field by him. That it is lying in a field indicates that to the man, the kingdom was not something that he was looking for in the field, it was something about which he might have said, he 'happened' upon.

The kingdom is found by the man in an incongruous place. It took him by surprise as to where it was. It was the place where he would have least expected to find such a thing. This is the implication of the expression "lying in a

field". The kingdom was a surprise to the man. It always is.

95-2 "...is like treasure..."

But the man does find the surprise to be valuable. He recognizes this kingdom, occurring in such a surprising place, to be a kingdom of great worth. He has happened on a treasure. So he is a man to whom the worth of the kingdom of God has come home to. He is not a casual observer, who simply kicks something lying on the ground and walks on. He has been given to register that this kingdom is of overwhelming value.

95-3 "...which has been hidden..."

So, if this treasure has been found by this man, it is the discovery of someone else's secret to him. It must be the case that the man has had opened to him the secret kingdom which has been previously "hidden" there.

The kingdom of heaven then, is a secret of heaven, which has been covered over before this time, but now has been, from the man's point of view, happened upon, lying in a place where he would have not even have known to look. But from the point of view of the Hider of the treasure, this man has come to appreciate the treasures' disclosure. He knows it to be there, has come to value it for what it is, it is from heaven.

95-4 "...the man, having found it, buried it..."

The kingdom of heaven is found on the site which is someone's field. Whatever we can say of this treasure, it has been found, and its worth is appreciated by the finder, but it belongs to someone whose field it was hidden in.

So, it is a kingdom which is treasure to the finder, but it is treasure that belongs to another. As a kingdom, of course, it belongs to another as an exercise of his rule, it is something which is not a thing, so much, but is an extension of the authority of his heavenly person. So it may not be taken, it cannot be stolen from its field. It lies in situ, it belongs there.

Such is his appreciation of the treasure, that he wants time to secure it for himself.

95-5 "... for joy..."

The treasure of the kingdom of heaven engenders joy in the man who has its hiddenness disclosed to him and also its worth. He is overjoyed to have discovered such a treasure; it affects his person, it has the capacity to bring him the joy which only a kingdom can. For a king, when obeyed, brings to the one

who freely obeys such joy, as only the Son of God has when He obeys his Father [John 15.11].

It is for the joy that the man now experiences and knows that leads him to desire to buy the field.

95-6 "...so he went and sold everything he had, and bought the field."

A field may be for sale; and in the ancient world, it was not appropriate to buy something in the field, you had to acquire the field to have the 'thing'. [See how Abraham must buy Ephron's field, even though he only wants the cave within it to bury his wife, Sarah. Genesis 23.1-20].

The kingdom, the treasure, is not for sale, it never ceases to be the full expression of the person of the King. But such is the nature of the king, and his kingdom, that it engenders joy in the man who has discerned its worth. Entry to the kingdom's rule is free, but it will cost everything that the man has. And he doesn't buy the kingdom, he buys the field. He sells his whole livelihood, all that he has, to gain the life he can have in the joy of that kingdom treasure.

Those who know the treasure of the rule of God on their life, soon discover that there are other matters that cost them for the sake of that kingdom. They are seen buying fields, things, all of which are not the kingdom, but are of its sake and for its worth. Such people live in the joy of the kingdom – and they second their all in pursuit of the joy it brings.

nt 96 – Matthew 13.45-46

The pearl of great value for which all was risked.

Read carefully Genesis 1.1-9; John 1.3; Colossians 1.15-20;

Hebrews 2.12-13; John 15.11; Revelation 5.9.

96-1 "...like unto a merchant seeking..."

96-2 *The kingdom of God is an actively seeking kingdom.*

96-3 *God was not always Creator*

96-4 *God seeking a man*

96-5 "...finding one..."

96-6 "...for joy..."

96-7 "...went and sold all that he had, and bought it..."

97-8 The Incarnation is a new being for God – such a price!

97-9 The Pearl

97-10 The death of God – extreme price!

96-1 "...like unto a merchant seeking..."

The key given to us at the start of the parable is that the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man. So we should follow the course of the man throughout the short narrative. We must be content to do this even if we find that the scenario described makes only one point.

But we are introduced to the man as he is already engaged in a commercial enterprise. He is not just any man; he is a merchant on the lookout for fine pearls; fine in the sense of what he himself would value.

96-2 The kingdom of God is an actively seeking kingdom

The kingdom of God is a dynamic, seeking kingdom and it is looking for what its King considers to be of great value to Himself. And what is of value to a King, who exercises a rule, is that the life of a kingdom is only found in the to and fro that takes place between the ruler and the ruled; the king and his subjects. This is the supreme expression of the life of a kingdom.

But why must it be "seeking"? Is there something missing in the kingdom? And yet, as we have seen in the parables of mixture, at this time, in this age, there are plenty of creatures of God, especially the ones made in his image. They are of great value for who they are as His creatures but they are mostly rebels, who in their rebellion have forgotten, or cannot rightly judge, their own value to God and so to themselves.

And so, just because God alone knows their value, it is especially difficult and dishonouring to Him when their deeds accompany their person; they bring the King of the kingdom no honour, as they can bring Him no pleasure on account of their deeds. They are heading to be burned. This a terrible dilemma that only a resourceful and loving King can deal with.

96-3 God was not always Creator

Deep within the inner relations of the Trinity of the Godhead, whom the New Testament teaches us to call the Father, the Son and the Spirit, we have the life of God as it is found the equality of their Persons, for each is God and truly so. So that God is one God in the Unity of the Three Persons who are co-equal and co-eternal. It has always been so; for God was, and is and will be. Their

heavenly kingdom, which included the angels, was already established at the time of the creation of the world in which we live.

But at the creation of the world, the three Persons of the Trinity are deeply involved in a new thing. For, while God was, and is, always God, He was not always Creator. The movement to make the world was an act of his will, it is a work of God and so is separate from His person.[Creation is not a projection of His nature – that would lead us to pantheism, that something of God is in everything.]

At the Creation, God acted through His Word as the agent of creation [John 1.3, Genesis 1.1-10]. It is through the Son of God that the world was brought into being as the Spirit hovered over everything to perform what the Word declared.

96-4 God seeks for a man to restore men and women, and so the whole creation

Human beings were made in the image of God, and specifically the Son of God. He is the heir of all creation, the firstborn of all [Colossians 1.15-20]. As the Father sees the Son, he sees us connected to Him as his brethren [Hebrews 2.12-13]. In thinking like this, it is His way of dealing with us all in His Son. This was a matter decided before the foundation of the world [Ephesians].

Consistent with God's sharing his heavenly rule with His Son and by the Spirit, we can understand God's own desire that the man and the woman, made in the likeness of His Son, were to rule the earth. The kingdom of God, as expressed in this world, was, at the creation, given over to the man and the woman that God first made in the likeness of His Son.

There was, prior to the creation, an angelic rebellion in the kingdom of heaven. Satan, a major angelic being in the order of heavenly matters, wishing to be god himself, was banished from the holy mountain and the worship of God.

Set in his rebellion, Satan desired the earth, which was not given him by God. He tempted the man and the woman and they, with the earth they ruled, fell into rebellion against the God who made them.

So the kingdom of heaven, seeking to rescue the earthly kingdom, must seek for a man – for it is to men and women that the rule is given in regard to the earth. This man would have the mission to redeem mankind and restore the kingdom of God in heaven and earth. All of the kingdom, both in heaven and earth will be put up to secure this great restoration.

This restoration has yet to be finally established on the earth, but at the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is already established in heaven [Revelation 12].

96-5 "...finding one..."

The picture so far is that, like the seeking merchant, the kingdom of heaven is a seeking kingdom, looking for what that kingdom would regard as something of great value. As the man who is seeking, looking for what he wants, suddenly he is successful. He finds one pearl of great price. "Price" is what is of interest to the merchant; it is his livelihood after all.

Yet, "price" is just indicative of value. It is indeed a valuable pearl, or it would not command such a price. So a desire awakens in him to take further steps, as a merchant he must first buy it.

Where does the kingdom of God find such a pearl of great value?

The first thing, in considering the Being of God, we must say that the value of the Son of God to God has to do with Who He is, not simply what can be done through Him. He is the precious, eternal Son of God, who is the very Life of the Father. For just as the life of the Son is the Father, so the life of the Father is the Son. The very life of God is here being considered.

Second, in considering the rule of God, the kingdom of heaven, we are dealing with created beings who are the subjects of the great King. So when the parable directs us to the kingdom of God we are to see this Pearl of great value in the light of what will be accomplished through Him for that kingdom as well as the fact that He, because of Who He is, is the kingdom.

Third, in the submission of the Son to the Father we see the personification of the kingdom. For it is not that the Father rules the Son as an overlord, it is that the voluntary joyous submission of the Son is the Son's real joy, in obeying and serving the Father. In this sense, the Son is the kingdom – whatever there will be of willing obedience in the rest of the rule of God it is already found its most wonderful expression in the Person and work of the Son of God.

96-6 "... for joy..."

The treasure of the kingdom of heaven engenders joy in the man who has its hiddenness disclosed to him and also its worth. He is overjoyed to have discovered such a treasure; it affects his person, it has the capacity to bring him the joy which only a kingdom can. For a king, when obeyed, brings to the one who freely obeys such joy, like as the Son of God has when He obeys his Father [John 15.11]. It is for the joy that the man now experiences and knows that leads him to yield all that He has in pursuing his desire to buy the field.

The kingdom of heaven is like this man. It is the joy in the great Pearl that motivates the astonishing expenditure of the whole life of God in acquiring the kingdom's restoration.

96-7 “ he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

As we follow the man we discover that such is his value placed on the pearl then, as to the commercial moments of his merchant’s life, this is the big one, this is make or break. He actually realizes all his capital and stakes all on the purchase of this wonderful pearl. But the price to him is very high. If the value is known to him, the price is accordingly.

The kingdom of God does the same. Bearing in mind that the King is the kingdom, and the kingdom is also people, as considered in Him, what we find is a stupendous movement takes place in the Being of God.

96-8 The Incarnation is a new being for God – such a price!

Just as the Creation was a new thing for God, the Incarnation is overwhelming. It had never happened for God before. Within the amazing freedom that God has, the Son of God lays aside his glory, and becomes true man. This makes a change in the Being of God that had not been before and will never be altered afterwards. Without ceasing to be God, God becomes incarnate of his own will, and takes sinful flesh. The very life of God is involved in this cost – all of God’s life is involved in our salvation. Such is His desire that we should share His life and that His creatures should not be lost but restored.

If God is looking for a man, who can live for Him and bring Him glory and honour in that his obedience to his Father is the deepest expression of their rule, then as far as God is concerned, he becomes the pearl of great value in the kingdom.

If the God-man can come among us, and live a life that we should, but of ourselves, cannot, then He will live it for us, as God’s true man, His true pearl. He will *substitute* for us in places where we would be destroyed as the righteous wrath of God falls upon us. He will bear things in our place that we cannot bear, lest we be destroyed. He will be our *representative* before God as one who lives an obedient life for us in our stead. And his substitution and representation will accrue to us, since God sees us *in Him*.

96-9 The Pearl

If we are considering matters from within the very Life of God then the Pearl of great value is the Son of God in his relation to the Father. He is the embodiment of the kingdom of God, and He saves us by His obedience – He has authority because He is voluntarily, within the life of God under authority

[nt-37]. He is the delight and joy of the Father, as the obeying of the Father is a joy to the Son. Who can, among us creatures, measure this value?

If we are considering matters of the kingdom, the rule of God in relation to the creatures, then we must consider the restoration of the humans, made in the image of the Son, and the created world, subject too them, by God's order. The restoration of the first is decisive for the restoration of the second. In which case, the Son of Man carries us with Him into the obedience of the life He lived for us, and ever lives before God as the God-man. There is now a man in heaven who is a co-regent with God the Father, as his true Son, who as Son of Man all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him.

96-10 The death of God – extreme price!

In considering this last matter. We have noticed how the value of the Lord to the Father is a matter for which He dies not need to pay a price – it is His already as they share life in relation. That is why, in relation to the Lord as the Pearl, we have stressed the aspect of “finding” – in the sense that God has found a man to achieve his great salvation for us. But the Man Himself, as He takes flesh as the incarnate Word of God, is, to God, also the price that is paid. In this sense the Lord is both the ‘found’ pearl and the price paid for it.

So, in considering the great price paid for our salvation shifts the pearl and its value to us, as we are seen in Him.

He has ransomed us [nt-247,289]. Our forfeited lives have been restored to us. They were forfeited lives that were broken; under the power of sin, under alien, angelic powers who had taken us and what is ours by creation, with diseased bodies, having corrupted minds, oppressed by failures of the past and the guilt for them. All is new, having atoned for in the dying work of the Son of Man for us, they have been buried as dead old lives. And He has lifted us to a new life by rising from the dead and ascending into heaven for us – He carried us with Him.

God sees us now, in Him. In that sense, we are the pearl as well – in Him, to be sure. We are those who were purchased for God at such great cost to the Being of God, the life of the God Himself. We have been purchased at great cost, from every tribe and people and tongue. That is why it is a “new” song that is sung in heaven by all the worshipping ones around the throne [Revelation 5.9].

Our value, is something the kingdom of God knows, because it knows Him, and us as in Him.

nt 97 – Matthew 13.47-50

The dragnet

97-1 “...a dragnet...”

97-2 “...when it is filled...”

97-3 “...they sat down...”

97-4 “...the end of the age...”

97-1 “...a dragnet...”

A dragnet, or a seine net, is a net that is dragged along the bottom of the lake or sea, and it funnels the catch into the base of the net. It is then hauled up to the surface. The water may be shallow or deep –it can be used in either case.

The kingdom is likened to the dragnet, so, since this is a thing, what it does is catch up in its movement all that is before it. So the kingdom is a kingdom that gathers fish of every kind. This is not a selected catch, there is no “targeting” of the catch at all. The point that Jesus first makes is that the dragnet is unselective, it picks up fish of every sort.

97-2 “...when it is filled...”

Professional fishermen do not haul up the net until they sense there is a significant weight of catch in it. Jesus draws our attention to the full net. What is going to follow is when all that is to be gathered is caught in the net.

So, we are led to think of the catch as complete.

97-3 “...they sat down...”

Now comes the appraisal of the catch. Now they can see what it is that they have caught, what has swum into their net. The fishermen draw it up to the beach, sit down and sort the catch into fish worth keeping and fish you throw away as worthless.

Fish worth keeping are designated for the containers they have provided. The worthless ones are simply left on the beach, warranting no more attention than that.

97-4 “...the end of the age...”

As we have seen before, there is a time element in the parables of Jesus and He is teaching us what to do at the appropriate time, or what it is that others

do at that time. Here he makes an application for the us, as we have considered the likeness of the kingdom to the net.

The kingdom catches a mixture of men and women at the present time, both when Jesus was speaking and also in our day. What is in the net remains hidden until it is beached.

The sorting of the catch of men and women, into the righteous and the wicked is a future matter, for the kingdom's catch is not sorted yet.

But when it is, it is the work of the angels, the heavenly beings who serve God in their obedience and power.

The worthless are burned and experience a torment and personal disturbance. We have examined this expression in *nt-94-3*.

Our task, here and now, is not to judge before the time. And the sorting through of people is not the work of men and women – it is angelic work; and it takes place in the future, there and then.

nt 98 – Matthew 13.51-52

Householder with his treasure

Read carefully Luke 24.44-45; Acts 2.14-39; 15.11ff

98-1 “...every scribe...”

98-2 “...disciple of the kingdom...”

98-3 “...is like a head of household...”

98-4 “...his treasure...”

98-5 “...things new and things old...”

98-6 *The early apostles did just these things.*

98-1 “...every scribe...”

Jesus checks that the disciples have understood all these things. They say that they have. In the light of that answer he gives another simile, another comparison in respect to them as scribes of a rabbi. They have now become learned, not in the sense of academically clever and accomplished in the learning that comes from human sources but in the sense of the revelation that Father has made about Him, and the revelation that He has brought, in his teaching about the kingdom. They are now ready to teach others.

The revelation that they have from Jesus is to be passed on. Of course,

not immediately, for we have seen Him caution them about the pace of revelation and the pace of his actions and life. The disclosure must keep pace with His own words and works that are currently taking place with them in attendance.

98-2 "...disciple of the kingdom..."

Jesus modifies the normal setting of the 'scribe'. He is a person attached to a rabbi, and he passes on the yoke - the interpretation for practical life - of the rabbi that he is following. That is what it means to be a disciple in the context of first century Israel.

Jesus, having said that they are scribes, modifies this to be not of a rabbi, but called them 'disciples of the kingdom'. This makes clear that that to be his disciples - a matter of present, personal attachment - is also to *become* disciples of the kingdom. They have come under a rule, or reign, and in this way have a practical obedience to the rule of God.

It also means that the kingdom, while personified in the presence of Jesus, will also be established by His words and works that He will subsequently do. So this title, 'disciples of the kingdom', looks forward to a time when the affects of all of Jesus work, and the coming of the Spirit as He goes to the Father, as a kingdom which has come, and which is, as we have seen, yet to come in its fullness of time. The time frame of this is from Jesus to his coming again to judge the world.

98-3 "...is like a head of household..."

Having established this description of the current disciples with its modifications, Jesus now gives us the simile – they are like a head of a household.

This picture conveys a person of authority over a domestic scene of everyday life. He has a fixed group of people for whom he is the head of their life.

It also conveys a caring senior person. He is there before the people of his household. He has a relation to them, where they would look up to him, and look to him for guidance and practical oversight of their life.

98-4 "...his treasure..."

This is the normal Greek word for treasure of any sort. But when it is applied to the householder it normally means a *treasure chest*. It is a repository of things he has reserved as valuable, things to be kept and guarded. In the course of the events of every day life, this chest contains things which the householder can draw – it is his stash for others in his care.

Jesus makes clear that he brings forth out of his treasure things which are both old and new.

98-5 "... things new and things old..."

That disciple of the kingdom is likened to a scribe, we can begin to see that this tapestry suggests that the householder is a person who instructs for living. In doing this, as a disciple of the kingdom, he has in his hands, from out of his treasure, things that the household, along with himself, would recognise as "things old". These would be the revelation of God to Israel in former times, the law and the prophets. These would include the ancient wisdom of the proverbs and the intimate worship of the Psalms.

But, specifically as a disciple of the kingdom, he can also draw out "things new". For the coming of the Messiah, and the coming of his Kingdom among them means that the fulfillment of the "old things" now takes on the look of the "new thing" which is happening among them. The householder can instruct out of his treasure that the "this" in the new, is "that" which was said in the old. The disciples were instructed as to how the old and new things went together [Luke 24.44-45; nt-300].

98-6 The early apostles did just these things

Early Christian disciples, who came to revelation-and-response through hearing the apostolic preaching, regarded the apostolic men just as Jesus described this householder who was a disciple of the kingdom. The new disciples came into existence through the preaching, teaching and baptizing of the apostles.

The apostles, after the replacement of Judas, were trusted men who had the life of their Lord evident in their everyday practice. It was because they had the life that they were listened to.

They instructed the disciples of Jesus from the things "old" and showed how they fitted together in the life of Jesus and the great plan of God [Acts 2.14-39]; and so became "new". They were full of the Holy Spirit to do this time and again, as the Spirit took an initiative and led the work forward into surprising new areas of understanding of God's plan [Acts 15.6-11].

They were householders who led the household in a sure-footed and clear way. It was through their God-given revelation that they were so powerful in putting together their integration of things 'old' with things 'new' that their overall plan of God began to question the traditional Jewish understanding. They had a treasure chest and, through the residency of the Holy Spirit within them, they delivered from it for their household again and again.