4. Parables about responsibility and Grace.

The time of the Savior's public ministry was nearing its end. In His previous parables, the Lord taught about the preconditions for the dissemination of God's Kingdom amidst and within people. In His last six parables, the Lord spoke also about His Kingdom, full of grace, and stressed the idea of a person's responsibility before God for disdaining the chance of salvation, or, even worse, for directly rejecting God's grace. These parables were told in Jerusalem in the last week of the Savior's life on earth. They revealed the teaching about the truth, or justice of God, the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgement. The last six parables include the parable about the wicked husbandmen, the barren fig tree, the wedding dinner, the laborers who received equal pay, the men waiting for their lord, and the ten virgins.

a) The Responsibility of a man.

The Lord who knows the hearts of men knows who have the most spiritual gifts, and to them He sends His grace in greater measure than to others. In ancient times, the Jewish people were distinguished for their exclusive spiritual gifts, and in the time of the New Testament these were the Greek and Russian peoples. God evinced extreme care of these peoples and poured out His gifts of grace onto them. This is witnessed by the great number of God's servants who shined amongst them. However, this abundance of the gifts of grace imposes a particular responsibility before God onto each nation and every single person. The Lord expects an effort of will from each of these people and also the tendency to go towards moral perfection, for "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Of course, it is far from true that everyone in these nations tends toward moral perfection; some people consciously turn away from God. Often the result is that an abundance of grace creates a certain polarization among the representatives of a select people: some of them attain to great spiritual heights, even sainthood, while others, contrarily, turn away from God and become hard-hearted, even becoming theomachists. In the parable of <see next chapter>

The wicked husbandmen.

Christ shows what conspicuous obstinacy towards God is like in this parable, where the spiritual leaders of the Jews, the high priests, scribes and Pharisees, are depicted by the wicked husbandmen.
"A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others" (Lk. 20:9-16).

The implication of this parable is that the servants sent by the lord of the vineyard were the Old Testament prophets and the Apostles who then carried their work forward. Indeed, the majority of the prophets and Apostles died by the hand of the 'wicked husbandmen'. The fruit that the Lord expected from the Jewish people were faith and good works. The prophetic part of the parable — the punishment of the wicked husbandmen and the bestowal of the vineyard to others — came true 35 years after the Ascension of our Savior, when, in the time of the captain Titus, all of Palestine was devastated and the Jews were dispersed around the world. However, by the efforts of the apostles, the Kingdom of God was given over to other peoples. The compassion of the Son of God for the Jewish people, and His intention to save them from the approaching disaster is expressed in the parable of <see next chapter>.

b) Grace.

"As breathing is necessary for the body, and without breathing a man cannot live, so without the breathing of God's Spirit a soul cannot live the genuine life," wrote the Righteous St. John of Kronstadt, in My Life in Christ.

In the last three parables, the Lord Jesus Christ taught about God's grace. The first parable, which is about the laborers who received equal pay, reveals how God gives grace and the kingdom of heaven to people, not because of their specific services to Him but exclusively out of His infinite love. The second parable, which is about the ten virgins, tells us we must consider gaining God's grace the purpose of life. Finally, in the third parable of the servants waiting for the return of their
lord, the Lord teaches us to sustain diligence and a burning spirit by the expectation of His Advent. This is how the three parables add up to one another.

The grace of God is the power sent by God for our spiritual revitalization. It cleanses our transgressions, heals our spiritual infirmity, directs our thoughts and will towards good, conciliates and enlightens our senses, and restores vigor, confidence and ethereal joy. Grace is given to people for the sake of the sufferings on the cross of the Son of God. Without grace, man cannot succeed in good works, and his soul will remain lifeless. "The Holy Spirit the Comforter, filling the Universe," wrote the Righteous St. John of Kronstadt, "passes through all faithful, gentle, meek, kind souls, and becomes everything for them: light, power, peace, joy, success in work and especially in righteous life for all the good" (ibid).

In Jesus' time, the Judaic attitude towards religion started to become utilitarian. For following some ritual instructions they expected an appropriate and specific reward from God in the form of worldly goods. A living communion with God and spiritual revival were not the basis of their religious life. That is why the Lord shows the wrongs of such a utilitarian approach to religion in the parable about the ten virgins.

The ten virgins.

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Mt. 25:1-13).
The parable about the ten virgins has been clearly and convincingly explained by St. Seraphim of Sarov in his conversation with Motovilov.

"Some say that the shortage of oil of the foolish virgins signifies their shortage of good works in their lives. Such understanding is not exactly correct. How can they be short of good works if they, though foolish, are still called virgins? Chastity is a supreme virtue, the state of being equal to angels, and could itself serve as a substitute for all other virtues. I humbly think that they were actually short of the grace of God's All-Holy Spirit. These virgins did good, and out of their spiritual foolishness supposed that doing good was exactly the point of Christianity. They did good works and by this obeyed God, but they did not care in the least beforehand whether they had received or reached the grace of God's Spirit…This very gaining of the Holy Spirit is that oil which the foolish virgins lacked. They were called foolish because they forgot about the necessary fruit of virtue, the grace of the Holy Spirit, without which no one is saved and no one can be saved, for: ‘it is by the Holy Spirit that any soul is vitalized and exalted in chastity, and any soul is lit by the Trinitarian unity in holy mysteries’. The Holy Spirit moves into our souls, and this installation of the All-Mighty into our souls, and co-existence of His Trinitarian Unity with our spirit is given only through the gaining by all means, the Holy Spirit, which prepares in our soul and body the throne for God’s creative co-existence with our spirit in strict accordance with the word of God: ‘I will dwell among them and will be their God, and they will be my people’. This is the oil in the lamps of wise virgins, oil that burnt bright and long, so that the virgins with the burning lamps could wait until the Bridegroom who came at midnight, and enter with Him into the house of joy. But the foolish virgins, seeing that their lamps were going out, went to the marketplace to buy oil but would not come back in time, for the doors were already shut. The marketplace is our life; the door of the house of marriage (that was shut and did not lead to the Bridegroom) is our human death; wise and foolish virgins are Christian souls; the oil is not works but the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God which is received through these works, and which converts things perishable into things imperishable, transforms spiritual death into spiritual life, darkness into light, the manger of our being, with passions tied like cattle and beasts, into the Divine Temple, into the glorious palace of never-ending rejoicing in Christ Jesus."

The Savior’s teaching about the Kingdom of God in the last group of parables is close to the very real prospect of His Second Coming. Foretelling His Second Coming and the judgement that follows, the Lord urges us to be "ever-watching," always working to correct oneself. Indeed, nothing can so much dispose a person to assiduity as preparing oneself daily to report before God. To be more matter of
fact, when death comes, the world stops to exist for us; we arrive at the hour of judgement. The Lord told the following parable so that the moment of death would not be sudden and tragic for us: <see next chapter>

**Conclusion.**

We have seen that the parables told by Christ were bright and visual stories, which contain an integral and harmonious teaching about the salvation of man and the kingdom of God, the Church. In the initial parables, the Lord spoke about the conditions favorable for people to receive the Kingdom of God. In the subsequent parables, He spoke about God's mercy on repentant people and taught us to love our neighbors, do good works and improve our inner moral character. He also gave us instructions to be discreet and to pray thoroughly. The final parables were about each person’s accountability before God and about the necessity to be vigilant and to draw the light of God's grace into the heart.

In this work, devoted to the Gospel parables, we did not try to provide the reader with complete and comprehensive explanations of the hidden spiritual wisdom. We put before us a much more modest task: to present the basics of Evangelical teaching, as given in the parables, to the reader. Christ's parables are the ever-true pictorial instructions that show us the way to Salvation.