

The Mysteries of the Kingdom of God

Luke 8:1-15

In this text Jesus gave a parable and then he went back and explained it piece-by-piece to his disciples. In this text Jesus taught his disciples, and us by extension, some of the mysteries of the kingdom of God.

I. The Ministry of Jesus Christ

This passage begins with some details about the ministry of Jesus Christ. First, we learn what Jesus himself was doing at this time. Verse 1 tells us where Jesus went: “throughout every city and village.” This is in reference to Galilee, where Jesus was ministering at this time. He did not stay in one location. Rather he travelled the region and visited these population centers. Notice that Jesus ministered in towns and villages and also in wilderness areas as we have seen earlier in Luke’s gospel. And from Jesus’ example we learn that the gospel is not limited by location. In cities and towns and villages and out in the country: wherever there are people, the gospel is to be proclaimed.

We don’t need to go to the big city to share the gospel. We don’t need to go to way out in the country somewhere to share the gospel. Wherever God places us, to whomever is there, we are to preach the gospel. By the grace of God may we be

faithful with whatever opportunities God gives us to share the gospel The gospel is not limited by location.

Verse 1 also tells us what Jesus did. He went “preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” Once again we see that the major focus of Jesus’ earthly ministry was the preaching of the kingdom of God. Did Jesus perform miracles? Yes, he performed a great number of miracles, but they supported the message he preached. They were not his primary ministry. Beware of those who claim to have a miracle-working ministry. In Scripture see many mighty miracles, but the focus is always on the message, the Word of God. Even the ministry of Jesus himself was focused on preaching.

And the message of Jesus is referred to in v. 1 as “glad tidings.” Good news. This same word is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “gospel.” That is what the word “gospel” means, it is good news. There is a lot of news that we are bombarded with every day: bad news, frightening news, concerning news, fake news, propaganda. We hear of wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes and famine and troubles all over the world (Mark 13:7-8). But we have hope, we have confidence, we have assurance in the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. May we be faithful in preaching this gospel to ourselves as we seek to walk worthy of our calling in Christ Jesus. And may we be faithful in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

So far in verse 1 we have seen where Jesus went and what Jesus did: “He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” Next, we learn who was with Jesus.

The end of verse 1 tells us, “The twelve were with him.” These were the 12 apostles who were selected in chapter 6. Eventually the 12 would be sent out to preach themselves, both during the ministry of Jesus as well as later on, after his ascension. But at this time they travelled with Him, learning from Him.

Verses 2 and 3 tell us that there were also women who were with Jesus at this point in his ministry. Three women are specifically named. First, Mary called Magdalene. Magdalene is probably a reference to the city she was from. The only other detail this verse gives us about her is that she had been demon-possessed. Seven demons had come out of her. This was a lady who had experienced unimaginable oppression, and then found freedom through Jesus Christ. What a beautiful testimony of the power of Jesus Christ to set sinners free.

Whatever your struggle, whatever your oppression, whatever your sin you can find freedom in Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 8:34, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” And in verse 36, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Freedom, true freedom, is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The next lady named in this text is Joanna. And we are told that she is the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward. Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee, a very

important man politically. Chuza, as his steward, the manager of his business and household, occupied a very important and influential position. And here is his wife, Joanna, a follower of Jesus.

The final lady named in this text is Susanna. We don't know anything else about her. This is the only time this name appears in the New Testament. She may have been known to the first century church. But all we know from this passage is that she was a follower of Jesus.

After Susanna, v. 3 tells us that there were "many others." This is important because it demonstrates that Jesus did not reject women or turning women away from his ministry. In fact, we see several examples where he encouraged women and even children to be present for his teaching and preaching. Why? Because the gospel is not bound by gender or age or culture or location or time. It is an eternal message that is to be proclaimed to all people. And so it is that the gospel call goes out today, just as it did during Jesus' ministry, to men and women, boys and girls, "Repent ye and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

Finally, we learn who was supporting Jesus. Jesus was a man, a human being with all the same physical needs you and I have. He got hungry and had to eat. He got tired and had to rest. He needed clothing and money and other supplies for traveling. Where did Jesus get these things? Verse 3 tells us: "[these] ministered unto him of their substance."

Jesus was fully man but he was also fully God. There were times when physical needs were met by divine, miraculous power during the ministry of Jesus. And every single need Jesus and his followers had *could have been* met with supernatural power. But that is not how God chose to work. Not all the physical needs of Jesus and his followers were met with divine power. In fact, the majority of these needs were met by the generosity of some of his followers, as we see in this text. And it seems that this was specifically done to draw men's attention off of the physical and on to the spiritual.

In John 6 Jesus addressed this very issue. In John 6:26-27 Jesus said to a crowd of eager followers, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed."

The first three verses in this text tell us about Jesus ministry. Next, in verses 4-15 we read the parable of the soils and its explanation.

II. The Parable of the Soils

Verse 4 tells us that a large and diverse group heard this parable when Jesus first taught it. In verses 5-8 we read the parable itself. Then, at the end of verse 8 Jesus said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Now look at how the disciples responded to this parable in verse 9. They had heard the parable, but they did not understand it. We might think that parables were like illustrations designed to help the people grasp spiritual truth, but that was not the case for most people. For most people, the parables concealed the mysteries of the kingdom of God. And Jesus specifically says that in verse 10. Even the disciples did not understand this parable at first.

And notice that they did not wonder about it to themselves, but rather they asked Jesus. Jesus has the words of life. To whom else should we go? When we are puzzled, when we are distressed, when we don't understand, may we follow the example of the disciples in this text and go humbly before our Lord and ask for understanding.

Look at how Jesus responded to the disciples request in v. 10. The disciples had a desire to understand what Jesus taught, and to them it was given. Jesus said, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God." And Jesus would go on to explain this parable to them.

But before he did, Jesus told the disciples why he spoke in parables: "But to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."

The spiritual blindness and hard-heartedness of man is seen in this response to Jesus ministry. Man in his fallen nature is blind to the things of God. There were many in Jesus day who saw him with their eyes, who saw the miracles he

performed, but gained no spiritual benefit from that experience. Though they saw Jesus and the miracles he worked, they had no discernment. They did not recognize Him as the Messiah. “seeing they might not see”

Man in his fallen nature is deaf to the things of God. This text is an excellent example. Verse 4 tells us that a great multitude of people heard this parable, but it was not readily understood. Even the disciples didn't understand what Jesus had taught. And it was only the disciples who came and asked Jesus for an explanation. Maybe the multitudes were amused by this parable. Maybe they enjoyed pondering over it and what Jesus might have meant by it. But without going to Jesus for an explanation, it did them no good. They heard what Jesus said, but they did not understand.

In verse 11 Jesus began to explain the parable. The first detail Jesus explained was the seed. In verse 11, “The seed is the Word of God.” Think back to the parable. What did the sower go out to sow? The Word of God. This is what was sown by the prophets of the Old Testament. This is what John the Baptist had preached. This was the message of Jesus, the Word of God manifest in the flesh. This is the gospel that has been entrusted to us: the Word of God.

The Word of God is the seed, and the seed is to be sown. Are you a Christian? Has the Word of God taken root in your life? Are you producing fruit to the glory of God? This is because someone shared the Word of God with you. May we be faithful sow the Word of God in the hearts of others. And as we see in this

parable, the seed of the gospel is to be sown without distinction. Preach the gospel to all men everywhere. And trust God for the increase.

In verse 12 Jesus explained the soil by the wayside. This is a description of people who hear the Word of God, but then the devil comes and takes it away. The devil and his cohorts of fallen angels do all they can to stop people from benefiting from the Word of God. Man's depravity is not the only obstacle to his salvation. All the forces of hell stand in opposition as well. And Satan's method is to take the Word of God away, out of the hearts of those who hear.

Why? Jesus said at the end of verse 12, "Lest they should believe and be saved." You must believe to be saved. The Word of God is not a saving word unless it is received in faith. You must believe the Word of God and the devil does not want that to happen so he seeks to take the Word of God out of the hearts of careless hearers.

Keep in mind that the devil believes the Word of God. James 2:19 says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." The devil does not want you to believe and be saved, to be redeemed, to rejoice in salvation, while he believes and trembles at his damnation. There is no redemption possible for the devil. All he can do is try to bring as many with him into damnation as he can. Take heed and hold to the Word of God, lest the devil come and take it away.

In verse 13 Jesus explained the seed which fell upon a rock. This is a description of people who who gladly receive the Word of God, but there is no root and in times of temptation they fall away. The Word of God is powerful, true, and beautiful. It can make an impression upon people that looks very much like saving faith. Someone may receive the Word of God gladly. They may even appear to continue on in Godly paths for a time. But because there is no true root, they will eventually be exposed. When temptation comes, they will fall away.

Sometimes temptation comes from the world's disapproval. In times of suffering and persecution the visible church, those who profess to be Christians, has massively decreased. While at the same time God continues to add to the invisible church, the true body of Christ. In times of persecution, those who have no root will fall away.

Sometimes temptation comes from the world's pleasures. The gospel calls upon us to die: die to self, die to the world, die to the pleasures of sin. We are to take up our cross and follow Jesus. When temptation arises to leave the hard and narrow way to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, many fall away because the Word of God had never truly taken root in their hearts. They sprang up quickly, but just as quickly they fell away.

In verse 14 Jesus explained the thorny soil. This is a description of people who hear the Word of God, but that seed is choked out by the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life. See the warning Jesus gave in these verses. The devil may

take the Word of God from your heart. Temptation may take the Word of God from your heart. The necessary, and even the good, things of this world may take the Word of God from your heart.

The word of God may be choked with cares. All of us have cares. We all have responsibilities. We all have troubles. We all have pressing concerns that must be dealt with day in and day out. This is the nature of life. And we can become so focused on the necessary things of this life, that the Word of God is choked.

Becoming a Christian does not reduce the cares of this life. In fact, in some ways it may increase our cares. But when we are in Christ, God will bear these cares for us. I Peter 5:7, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” Don’t let the cares of this life choke the Word of God in your heart.

The Word of God may be choked with riches. Without doubt one of the great false gods worshipped in the world today is money. There is a tremendous focus on money in our culture. How to make it. How to keep it. How to grow it. The worship of money is one of the most diverse religious communities that exists. The worship of money has even found a home in many so-called churches. This brings shame and reproach upon the name of Jesus Christ.

God is not interested in any sort of syncretistic worship. You cannot mix true worship of God with worship of money. “The love of money is the root of all evil.” (I Timothy 6:10) “No man can serve two masters . . . Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24)

But the situation does not need to be so extreme for riches to choke the Word of God in your heart. You might be content with the money you have. You might look at your possessions and think, "I'm not rich." And yet the material things of this world can still choke out the word of God in your heart. It is also possible to be very rich and not have a problem in this area. We read about believers in the Old Testament who were very wealthy yet walked with God faithfully. But riches are an area of great temptation and danger and we must be on guard lest riches choke out the word of God in our hearts.

The Word of God may be choked with pleasures. Have you ever considered that it was God who created us with the ability to have pleasure? In some ways, we were created for pleasure. There is nothing innately wrong with pleasure, just as there is nothing innately wrong with riches. But when we over-indulge in anything, even a good thing that God has graciously given to us, it can become a hinderance in our walk with God.

Pleasure has a strong grip upon people in our culture. The people call out for bread and circuses. We want to enjoy ourselves. We want pleasure: we want as much as we can get and we want it now. In Genesis 3:19 God cursed man with toil because of his sin. In our relentless pursuit of pleasure we try to escape this curse. But we will never find rest in pleasure. We rest in Jesus Christ. He is the cure for sin's curse. We use pleasure as a salve to ease the curse, but it does not solve the problem. And what's worse, pleasure can choke the word of God in our hearts.

And what is the result of the Word of God being choked in a heart? At the end of verse 14 Jesus said that they “bring no fruit to perfection.” They did not bring forth fruit to perfection. It may have appeared that they were going to bring forth fruit. It may have looked like they were going to yield a great harvest to the glory of God. But in the end, the stalk was choked with thorns before the fruit was brought to perfection. Before there was any harvest, the word of God was choked out.

I think of Demas. In Colossians 4:14 Demas is named alongside Luke as a companion of Paul. In Philemon 1:24 Demas is referred to as a “fellowlaborer” of Paul. But then, in II Timothy 4:10, very late in Paul’s life, Paul would write, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.”

We can deceive those around us with an appearance of fruitfulness. We may even deceive ourselves. But we cannot deceive God. Eventually what is truly in our hearts will be revealed. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:20, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Where the Word of God is choked out by the cares, riches, and pleasures of this world there will be no fruit brought to maturity.

And finally in verse 15, Jesus explained the good soil. This is a description of people who heard the Word of God, kept it, and brought forth fruit with patience. Notice how this “good ground” is described by Jesus.

First, “they [with] an honest and good heart, having heard the word.” No one receives the Word of God because they are honest and good. The Bible is abundantly clear about the condition of man’s heart in sin. None of us are by nature good and honest. We may appear good and honest by man’s standards, at times. We may appear good and honest by comparison to others. But by God’s measure, none are good and none are honest. Because God’s measure is Himself. And none of us measure up.

But in salvation God does a work in our hearts that is not just a work of restoration or reform. It is a work of new creation. We are made new creatures in Christ. Old things are passed away. All things are become new (II Corinthians 5:17). He gives us a righteousness that is not our own, but is his. By faith we have God’s righteousness given to us through Jesus Christ. And God is pleased to bring faith through His Word. Romans 10:17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” If you have received the word of God, it is not because you were good. It is because God is gracious.

Next, we are told that they “keep it.” These who have heard the Word of God with a good and honest heart keep it. They hold on. They hold fast.

Compare this to the last two soils described by Jesus. They are not like the people compared to rocky soil in verse 13 who fall away in times of temptation. They are not like those described in v. 14 who are choked with the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life. Those people seemed to have the Word of God, but they

did not hold fast. In hard times or in ease, in temptation or in pleasure, they let go of the Word of God.

Not so with the people described in verse 15. In temptation they do not fall away from the faith. They do not give way to the choking cares, riches and pleasures of this life. They hold fast to the Word of God.

And finally, they are patient. They “bring forth fruit with patience.” Patience is both passive and active in a Christian’s life. Passively, we are to patiently endure in trials, in suffering for the gospel, under the chastising hand of God, and under unjust suffering. All these areas are specifically addressed in Scripture. And in all of them, the Christian is instructed to patiently endure. Actively, we are to be patiently persistent in well-doing and in running the race set before us.

As it is with the farmer who sows seed, so it is in the Christian life. Fruit will come, the harvest will come, but you must be patient. As Christians, we must be patient. We must patiently endure and we must patiently persist.

Look back to verse 1 of our text. Remember, the context for this passage was that Jesus was "preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." And then in verses 5-8 Jesus taught this parable that the people did not understand. It was about the kingdom of God, but they did not understand it. So in verse 9 the disciples asked Jesus, “What might this parable be?”

And what did Jesus tell them? “To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.”

What mystery is revealed here about the kingdom of God? Imagine the disciples crowding in close to hear what Jesus was about to say. What is the mystery? What sort of esoteric secret was Jesus about to impart to his disciples.

He told them what fruitfulness looks like in the kingdom of God. How does God judge fruitfulness? What did Jesus say?

Hear the Word of God, keep it, and bear fruit patiently.

Keep it. Hold fast. Hold on.

And be patient. Patiently endure suffering. Patiently persist in well-doing. “Bring forth fruit with patience.”

I have been at this church for about 13 years, which isn't very long compared to some of you, but it has been long enough to watch many of you face extremely difficult trials: financial troubles, sickness, cancer, heartbreak, the death of loved-ones. And where others have fallen away because of temptation or the cares of the world, I have watched so many of you hold fast to the Word of God and patiently bring forth fruit.

That is the grace of God. That pleases God. That is what the Christian life should look like. It may not seem flashy or exciting. It may be hard, impossibly hard apart from the grace of God. It may seem boring and mundane. But this is the life that pleases God as described by Jesus Himself, “In an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”

As you leave here today and go into the week ahead, dwell on the words of Jesus in verse 15. When you face trials, when you face temptation, when you are discouraged and tired, remember what Jesus said. You have heard the Word of God. Keep it. Hold fast. And bring forth fruit with patience.