

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

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**The Mysteries of God' Kingdom**

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***“And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’” (Luke 8:9–10, ESV)***

As our Lord moved throughout the countryside of Galilee and Judea, He preached to numerous, large crowds. Some of them heard what He had to say and believed, others turned Him off, and still others were only momentarily enthused by His word or trusted for a while but failed to remain followers of His. To illustrate this situation Jesus gives us the Parable of the Sower. Now the parable doesn't speak to the temporary deafness of some who hear Jesus, such as the apostles whose flawed understanding of our Lord's messianic mission came to a true understanding only after our Lord's death and resurrection. Rather it speaks to those who hear and eventually believe, and to those whose deafness ends in their destruction.

It's easy for us, as we digest the words of Christ in this parable, to stand in judgment of others, pointing out their failures, pointing to their harden hearts, their rocky spirits, or their poor soil. Pridefully, we can pat ourselves on the back, giving ourselves credit for being of “good” soil, having ears that can pick out every syllable of the words of Jesus so that we fully understand His message. This appeals to our self-righteousness. Like the Pharisee in the Temple, we can stand with chests uplifted and say, ***“God, I thank you that I am not like other men.” (Luke 18:11, ESV)*** But this response to the Parable of the Sower fails to hear the Word of God. It fails to hear when He tells us that we are by nature all the same, reminding us that we are all children of Adam, equally sinful and corrupt from birth, thereby putting us into the category of the unjustified Pharisee, rather than the justified tax-collector.

Others, who hear this parable, may decide the reason some do not hear and come to faith is not because they are deaf, but rather, because God has made them deaf. Thus, their failure to hear and believe is the fault of God. Or perhaps the seed is of poor quality or God doesn't send sufficient rain to cause the seed to grow. Regardless, these scenarios are the fault of God. Such logic leads to the dangerous and erroneous doctrine of double predestination. That is, some, from birth, are destined for heaven while others are destined for hell. It matters not whether they hear the word, their fate is sealed while they're in their mother's womb. Nothing could be further from the truth. Where in the parable does Jesus say some of the seed is incapable of growth? Nowhere! Indeed, Jesus says the word has the power to yield a hundredfold, reminding us of the words of Isaiah, who said, ***“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10–11, ESV)***

These faulty assumptions regarding this parable fail to understand that the Parable of the Sower speaks to the ***“the secrets of the kingdom of God.”*** Those mysteries of God according to His pleasure. To say more would be adding to Scripture the wisdom of men. Now a time may come when God will choose to reveal more regarding this parable, but there is one thing that is clear,

this parable speaks to the mystery of God's election, and it is consistent with the revelation of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

Jesus said to His apostles when they asked Him to explain the parable, ***“To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’” (Luke 8:10, ESV)*** His words to the twelve are much the same as His words to the seventy-two whom He sent ahead of Him into the communities where He was going. When they returned, they rejoiced that even the demons were subject to the name of Jesus. Responding to their jubilation, Jesus says, ***“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” (Luke 10:21, ESV)*** Furthermore, He said, ***“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Luke 10:23–24, ESV)*** There is no subtlety in these words of Jesus. His word is clear, *the Mysteries of God's Kingdom* are not revealed to everyone.

Now the question becomes, why not? Why aren't the *Mysteries of God's Kingdom* revealed to everyone? Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten our understanding of the *Mysteries of God's Kingdom* as we contemplate the Parable of the Sower.

In telling the parable, Jesus says, ***“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.” (Luke 8:5–7, ESV)*** In the parable the birds represent the devil who takes away God's Word from the hearts of hearers, so they won't believe. The rock is fleshly temptation which draws the believer back into the world and away from faith in Christ Jesus. And the thorns are our natural, corrupted flesh, the result of Adam's disobedience, which cleaves to the pleasures of life and rejects the promise of the Gospel. Not one of these things is the work of God; therefore, God cannot be blamed for the evil desires of men or for their lack of faith. Closing this parable, Jesus says, but not all is lost, there is some seed that bares a crop. He says, ***“some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” . . . “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”” (Luke 8:8, ESV)***

Now it would be easy to take a pessimistic view of the power of preaching predicated on this parable. Look, three out of the four scenarios spoken of by Jesus, end in failure! Reading this parable one might conclude that the odds of successful preaching of God's Word are pretty slim. But optimism is not the focus of the parable, the focus is the mystery of God's election and the history of man's rejection. The seed is the Word of God, and it alone has the power to produce “good” soil, which produces fruit in abundance, fruit a hundredfold.

Some who interrupt this parable see the “good” soil as the “free will” of man. You know that ability some claim men have, to accept or reject God's Word. “Good” soil though is not ours by birth, it is not something inherit in us at birth. Rather the corrupted soil with which we are born is made “good” by God's grace in Christ Jesus. The worthless soil of our heart is changed into “good” soil as we are grafted into Christ through the Gospel. This is the work of God who said, ***“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:26–27, ESV)*** Therefore, “good” soil is solely the work of God. How dare we think that we can compare ourselves to others! To do so is a sign of our corruption.

For those who have difficulty understanding this, we need but look at a few passages of Holy Scripture. First knowing that Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, St. John says, ***“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*** (John 1:11–13, *ESV*) Furthermore, St. Paul reminds us, ***“you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*** (Ephesians 2:1–3, *ESV*) Dead men cannot hear, they cannot decide. St. Paul then shows us how we were brought to life, saying, ***“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—”*** (Ephesians 2:4–5, *ESV*) The spiritually dead are made alive through the grace of God who opens their ears that they may hear the Gospel and be saved. We also listen to our Lord’s response to St. Peter when he confessed that Jesus is, ***“the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** (Matthew 16:16, *ESV*) Jesus says to him, ***“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*** (Matthew 16:17, *ESV*) St. Peter’s confession was not derived from human origin, but of divine origin. St. Paul tells us, ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*** It is not because of our effort, our “free will” our “good” soil that we are saved, but salvation is solely the gift of God. Moreover, this gift is given us so that we may produce a crop a hundredfold. Thus, St. Paul concludes his comment regarding salvation through faith as a gift, by adding, ***“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*** (Ephesians 2:8–10, *ESV*) Only by God’s mercy are we given faith to believe in the Gospel that we may become Sowers in God’s planting field.

Filled with this truth of Holy Scripture, we are emboldened knowing that by God’s grace preaching will be successful, the seed of God’s Word will grow and produce. Yes, the Word may encounter all sorts of obstacles, but there will always be those who hear the Word and be brought to faith by the mercy of God. Faith, after all, comes from hearing the Word of Christ, the Gospel (Rom. 10:17). Moreover, that soil which has been made “good” by God’s grace, is cultivated, watered, and nourished by the Means of Grace: The Gospel proclaimed, Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution. Through the means the seed planted in “good” soil will grow and abundantly produce fruit for God’s harvest at the heavenly banquet on the Last Day.

The writer to the Hebrews reminds us, ***“For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.”*** (Hebrews 4:2, *ESV*) The Parable of the Sower shows us both categories of listeners, those who hear and reject the Word of God and those who hear and retain His Word. For those who reject the Word, they are denied the gift of understanding the *Mysteries of God’s Kingdom* and are lost. But to those who hear, they are brought to saving faith through the Word, they are given the gift of understanding the *Mysteries of God’s Kingdom*. Those mysteries that are unveiled in the ministry of Jesus beginning from Nazareth where Jesus said, ***“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*** (Mark 1:15, *ESV*)

This mystery began at the incarnation of Christ Jesus who came in the flesh to be among His people, bringing with Him all of God’s saving activities. The *Mysteries of God’s Kingdom* are present wherever Jesus is, when He is speaking or when He is performing His messianic deeds.

As has already been said, the seed in the parable, *“is the word of God.” (Luke 8:11, ESV)* That Word according to the writer to the Hebrews which, *“is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12, ESV)* When an unbeliever hears the Word of God and his heart is changed bringing him to true faith, it is only by God’s grace that this happens, but the voice which proclaims that Word is the voice of the church. It comes from those whose hearts have been changed into “good” soil. It comes from those who will be counted among the hundredfold yield. It comes from those who are doing the *“good work”* God has prepared them to do. Thus, from that abundant crop new seed is planted, and the cycle continues until the Last Day. You, the members of God’s church are commanded to go and plant the seed of God’s Word. For through that planting, God chooses to pour out His grace upon others that they, too, may have their hearts changed into “good” soil, thereby understanding the *Mystery of God’s Kingdom*, the mystery of Christ Jesus Himself, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Word become flesh who came to give His life as an atoning sacrifice upon the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins. One of the greatest mysteries is that our Lord’s work and merit are credited to us, miserable sinners that we are, that we might be justified before God and declared righteous in His sight. Oh, the Mystery of God’s Kingdom.

Thus, there is no other means by which the hearts of men can be transformed to believe than the seed of God’s Word of the Gospel, which shows us our Redeemer so we might believe and be saved, and to be counted in harvest on the Last Day and brought into the new heaven and the new earth to live in the bliss and joy of God’s presence for all eternity. This is the *Mystery of God’s Kingdom* given to believers of which the Parable of the Sower speaks. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.