

THE SECRETS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke 8:1-21

Key Verse: 8:10a

“He said, ‘The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you...’”

The main theme of Luke’s gospel is that Jesus is the Savior King who came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus is not only our Savior, but also the Eternal King of God’s kingdom. In today’s passage Jesus proclaims the good news of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is good news of great joy! This good news is not just for a few special people, but for all the people (2:10). Though Jesus proclaims this good news universally, not everyone, but only some receive it. What enables some to receive it? In this passage Jesus emphasizes that how we hear or listen is very important. The words “hear,” “hearing,” and “listen” are repeated nine times (8[2], 10,12,13,14,15,18,21). Luke especially emphasizes “how” we listen, while Matthew and Mark emphasize “what” we listen to. We are listening to so many things every day. So much of it just goes in one ear and out the other. This is okay because a lot of it is junk or even harmful. But we dare not have such an attitude toward God’s word. It is because the word of God is the word of life. Whether our lives are fruitful or barren totally depends on our attitude toward the word of God. This is not a light matter; it is a matter of life and death. Let’s consider carefully how we listen to Jesus’ words so that we may have the secrets of the kingdom of God as our very own. Let’s also learn how we can grow to maturity.

First, glimpses of God’s kingdom (1-3). From the beginning of his ministry to the end Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God through teaching the word of God. Some people accepted the message, began to practice it, and committed themselves to Jesus and his ministry. In this way a community of kingdom workers began to form. This included the Twelve and some women (1). Verse 1 tells us that Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. This was Jesus’ main purpose in coming. Only Luke uses the phrase, **“the good news”** (4:43; 8:1; 16:16). Why is the kingdom of God such good news? As we know, the world overflows with bad news. The worst news is that everyone is destined to die once and face God’s judgment (Heb 9:27). It is because of our sins, through which the power of death and Satan rule over us.

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Jesus came to save us from our sins, give us life, and bring us into the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (Jn 5:24). Satan can no longer rule over and torment us. Now Jesus reigns over us with love, peace and joy. We can experience the kingdom of God by faith, no matter who we are.

We can see glimpses of the kingdom of God in the community which began to surround Jesus. Luke mentions the Twelve and some women. To human eyes, the Twelve were an unlikely bunch. They were not well educated or special; they were ordinary people from the despised region of Galilee. Some were fishermen, one was a notorious tax collector, and another was even a zealot—a kind of terrorist. Some women were also among them, who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Mary Magdalene had been tortured by seven demons. She became a terrible woman whom no one could bear to be around. Out of great compassion, Jesus drove out the demons and restored her as a beautiful woman of God. Since then, she followed Jesus and poured out her heart to serve his ministry. Joanna was the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household. She was a woman of influence in her society. But she was sick and tired of being in Herod’s palace surrounded by adulterous, corrupt, deceptive and malicious people. She was dying. But when she met Jesus, her spiritual eyes opened to see the kingdom of God, which was pure, holy, beautiful and everlasting. She found purpose of life and hope, and followed Jesus, serving his ministry wholeheartedly. Susanna is also mentioned, and “many others.”

At one time these women had been miserable, but now they were beautiful daughters of God. They helped to support Jesus and his ministry out of their own means. They served voluntarily; they were devoted and sacrificial. Though they were from various backgrounds, and social positions, they were united in love and gratitude to Jesus and worked together joyfully to support him. At that time, women were disparaged and not even included in the census counts. For women, especially those with checkered pasts, to serve in Jesus’ ministry could be considered scandalous. But Jesus welcomed them as they were, cherished them as daughters of God, and enabled them to live the most meaningful and fruitful lives. Because of such women, Jesus’ ministry advanced. The same is true in our own community. There are so many devoted and sacrificial women that I cannot list them all. If I tried, I

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could not finish this message on time. The point is that the kingdom of God is good news to everyone, no matter who they are. The question is, how can we be part of God's kingdom?

Second, those who hear and practice Jesus' words experience God's kingdom (4-21). Here we see how we can receive the kingdom of God and experience it. It is through hearing the word of God and putting it into practice. While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told them a parable. Parables are short stories about earthly reality which have a spiritual meaning that reveals the secrets of the kingdom of God. Jesus often used parables. The parable of the sower is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. In Matthew and Mark, it is followed by more parables. However, Luke does not include other parables. Luke wants to emphasize having a right attitude toward the word of God.

Jesus' parable in verses 5-8 is about a farmer sowing his seed. Modern city dwellers are not familiar with farming. But in the agrarian societies of ancient times it was easy for them to understand. Back then, farmers did not use tractors. They spread their seed by hand. In the early spring, in the hope of producing a harvest, farmers sowed seed, scattering it over plowed soil (5a). It fell on different kinds of soil (5b). Some fell along the path; passersby trampled on it and then hungry birds spied it and swooped down to gobble it up (5c). Some seed fell on rocky soil; it sprang up quickly, but withered just as quickly because it had no moisture (6). Other seed fell among thorns; although the seed began to grow, the thorns grew more rapidly and choked the plants (7). Still other seed fell on good soil. It sprouted and grew and took deep root. As it took in the sunshine, together with sufficient nutrition and moisture, it grew steadily and blossomed and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown (8a). The seed has a great potential to reproduce 100 times. But it depends on the soil. If the soil is not good, the seed's potential is not realized; it withers and dies without producing fruit. Jesus finished his parable by saying, **"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear"** (8b). What did Jesus mean? Everyone has ears, but not everyone has "ears to hear," God's word, that is spiritual ears. Those who have spiritual ears can discern the meaning of Jesus' words. Jesus challenged people to have spiritual ears to grasp the meaning of his teaching. Listening is related to one's heart. Usually people listen to what they like and do not listen to what they do not like. We call this "selective listening." When Eve practiced selective listening, she

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ended up as a prisoner of Satan. To Cain, it led him to be a murderer of his brother. Jesus never forces people to listen to him. But he calls out because he wants us to really listen to his words.

After Jesus finished his story, some people shook their heads and went away, saying, “That was just a story about farming. It’s boring.” Other people thought, “He seems to be saying something, but I don’t know what it is. I’m confused.” Then they left. The disciples may have thought, “We just heard something very, very important. What does it mean?” They came to Jesus with eager desire to learn what the parable meant. They were truth seekers. Jesus was very glad and said to them, **“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you...”** (10a). The word “secrets” implies that they are hidden and very valuable. To keep our nation safe, secrets about national security are marked “Top Secret.” Only qualified people can access them by permission of the government. Jesus compared the secrets of the kingdom to a treasure hidden in a field (Mt 13:44). It is worth any investment: time, energy, money, and even our lives. Then what does it mean to know the secrets of the kingdom of God? It begins with knowing Jesus, who is the Savior King of the world. According to Matthew, Jesus adds, **“Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear,”** referring to himself (Mt 13:16). Paul says, **“...they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Col 2:2b-3). In Jesus we find all the most priceless treasures, such as God’s love, the forgiveness of sins, true peace and joy, eternal life, real meaning and purpose, our holy mission, living hope in the kingdom of God, and more.

The question is, how can we come to know these secrets? Secrets must be revealed. It is like getting an access code to a high security facility. The access code to the kingdom of God is given by God to those who earnestly and humbly seek him. Deuteronomy 4:29 says, **“But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.”** “But if from there” means during the time of God’s discipline due to sin. Even the most wretched sinners can receive God’s mercy when we seek him with all our hearts and souls. Among the kings of Israel, Manasseh was the worst sinner. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord for 52 years of his reign, and because of him God’s wrath devastated his nation. But in his distress as an Assyrian prisoner, he humbled himself greatly

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before God and sought God earnestly. God was moved by this and saved him (2Ch 33:12-13).

From a young age, Shane Taylor started to burgle houses and steal cars; he sold drugs, kidnapped, stabbed people, and attempted murder. He was classed as one of Britain's most dangerous people. While in prison for his crimes, he heard a fellow prisoner say, "Though I may never get out of prison, I am free because of Jesus." He thought, "What are you talking about?" But these words compelled him to seek Jesus earnestly. Through a prison minister he heard the gospel and knew in his heart that Jesus died for him, forgave all his sins and gave him eternal life. Though he had not cried for many years, he wept uncontrollably without stopping. Since then he began to study the Bible deeply and grow in the holiness of God. He gained an early release from prison, married a godly woman, had two daughters and is now sharing the gospel among prisoners. God is willing to share the secrets of the kingdom of God with anyone who seeks him humbly and earnestly. On the other hand, to those who do not seek God, the meaning of Jesus' parables is hidden: **"though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand"** (10b).

Those who receive the secrets of the kingdom of God enter a new world. It is the beginning of a spiritual journey of transformation that culminate in God's kingdom. In verses 11-15 Jesus explained the meaning of the parable to teach us how we can grow. The seed is the word of God, which has power within itself to give life (11b; Heb 4:12). This is the source of spiritual growth: the living word of God working by the power of the Holy Spirit. But there are things that can hinder the growth of the seed. The birds refer to the devil, who takes away the word from those who do not accept it (12). The devil is not lazy or negligent. He is diligent to capture stubborn and proud people (1Pe 5:8). Those who harden their hearts to God's words will become the prey of the devil (1Pe 5:8). The consequence is serious: they are not saved. Rocky soil represents people who do not let the word of God take deep root in them (13). They may be very emotional for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. Testing comes to everyone, and only those who take root in the word of God by persevering will produce fruit. Jesus said, **"If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you"** (Jn 15:7). Paul says, **"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built**

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up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Col 2:6-7).

Thorny soil represents those whose hearts are divided. They seem to take root in the words of God and grow (14). But the problem is that they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures and do not mature. Due to anxiety about their security, they succumb to greed for riches, thinking this will enable them to live a more comfortable and easy life. They become very fearful about losing pleasure. They are so busy earning money that they have no time for spiritual life. They fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction (1Ti 6:9-10). When thorns of greed and pleasure arise in our hearts, we need to pull them up immediately. Otherwise, this kind of desire gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown, gives birth to death (Ja 1:15).

Good soil refers to those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop (15). These people study the word of God with a humble heart and really hear what it says. They hold on to it, reflect on it and meditate on it until it becomes their own. When times of hardship come, they hold all the more firmly to the word they received. As they do, they are purified by the words of God, become more and more like Jesus, and grow in hope in the kingdom of God. This is what it means to produce a crop: it is to bear the likeness of Jesus and be a blessing to the world.

Charles Simeon (1759-1837)¹ was the son of a rich attorney. He went to a privileged boarding school and then to Cambridge. By force he had to attend the Lord’s Supper and this terrified him. While preparing, he read that Christ died for our sins. Amazed, he accepted Jesus and experienced new birth into eternal life. He was transformed. He gave up his extravagant lifestyle devoted himself simply to Christ. Later he became the senior pastor of Trinity Church, which ministered to Cambridge students and the London community. Cambridge was destitute spiritually. Simeon was by nature a harsh and self-assertive person. He was slow to change and made many mistakes. Church members were hostile to him. Those who had the rights to church pews locked them so no one would be able to sit in them during the

¹ See desiringgod.org/messages/brothers-we-must-not-mind-a-little-suffering

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Sunday morning service. Since the congregation had the right to choose the Sunday afternoon speaker, they chose his associate pastor every week for five years. After that man left the church, they chose someone else for another seven years, before finally asking Simeon to preach in the afternoon. During this entire time, Simeon devoted himself to deep Bible study and sharing messages that were faithful to the Bible text. This quote explains his attitude toward God's word: "My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head; never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding." He remained in that church for 54 years and endured many more hardships and trials. In the course of time, many young men of God were raised and sent throughout England. One of Simeon's spiritual sons was Henry Martyn, the great missionary to the Muslim world. According to the historian Thomas Macaulay, Simeon's "authority and influence... extended from Cambridge to the most remote corners of England, ...his real sway in the Church was far greater than that of any primate." Charles Simeon shows us a good example of persevering and bearing abundant fruit.

Jesus continued his teaching with the analogy of a lamp on a stand. The purpose of lighting a lamp is not to hide something, but to let the light shine (16). In the same way, the purpose of Jesus teaching in parables is not to conceal the message of the kingdom but to reveal it (17). Jesus wants people to receive the message of the kingdom and be saved. In order to do that, Jesus again stresses that we must have a right attitude toward the word of God. So Jesus said in verse 18, **"Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them."** Here we find Jesus' principle in revealing secrets of the kingdom: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. While this may be economically undesirable, it is spiritual reality. The more we have a spiritual desire to know Jesus through the words of God, the more insight and understanding we gain and the more we grow in depth of Christian character. But if we do not meet Jesus through his words, we become more and more dry and weary, and life becomes really miserable.

As Jesus diligently taught the words of God, his mother and brothers came to see him but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd (19). When someone told him that his family members wanted to see him,

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Jesus replied, **“My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice”** (20-21). Here we learn that Jesus’ kingdom is God’s household (1Ti 3:15). The bond is not based on our DNA, but obedience to the word of God. This obedience is not always easy, but it brings us the great privilege of becoming children of God and members of his family.

If anyone has not received Jesus as Savior King, I urge you to do so today. As for those of us who have received the secrets of the kingdom of God: we live in this world, but do not belong to it. We are citizens of God’s kingdom. Jesus wants us to grow by carefully considering God’s word and putting it into practice. Then we can experience the kingdom of God daily and become a blessing to the world.