**The Mystery of Godliness**

Based on [Matthew 13:44-52](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt13.44)

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After Jesus concludes his speaking to the crowds in parables, the parable of the sower, of the wheat and the weeds, the Mustard Seed and the leaven, Matthew writes, “**All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: ‘*I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.’”*** (Matt. 13:34-35).

What Jesus teaches in parables is mysteries. Mysteries are the hidden truths of God. These hidden truths of God, when they are apprehended and believed, give the knowledge of salvation. Jesus has come to reveal these mysteries, these secret truths, to “utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.” And, at this stage of his ministry, he does so in parables.

Today we are given three parables that Jesus tells his disciples. He says “the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, like a merchant in search of fine pearls, and like a dragnet thrown into the sea gathering all kinds of fish. We will consider especially the treasure hidden in a field and touch on three mysteries it teaches, first that the treasure is the mysteries of the faith, second that the hiddenness of the treasure is the humiliation of Christ and his church, finally the selling of everything to buy the field is repentance and belief in the gospel.

First, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.” The field is the scriptures and the treasure is the Mystery of the faith revealed in Christ. Every religion in the world deals with mysteries, divine things hidden to normal understanding. But every man-made religion teaches that knowledge of divine mysteries comes from our own preparations. Buddhism teaches you must follow an eightfold path to attain Nirvana, a spiritual state that transcends the vacuous cycles of worldly bliss and pain. Ancient Greeks thought that, through philosophy, through reasoned thought and argumentation, ones intelligence could transcend to the heavens and perceive eternal truths. Paganism, the attempt was always to sacrifice, to give something or do something in order to please the gods and have them behave favorably toward you.

The problem attempts to uncover the mysteries of God is that they begin in ignorance and end in uncertainty. St. Paul says it best when he preaches to the Men of Athens:

 “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. **23**For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. **24**The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, **25**nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. **26**And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, **27**that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.  Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (Acts 17:22-27

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth…that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way towards him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.”

Man-made religions begin and end in uncertainty and ignorance, because they don’t go to God to unlock the mystery; instead they believe they must unlock the mystery to get to God. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. That treasure is heavenly treasure, the hidden things of God. The mysteries that other religions seek but never find because you cannot decipher or decrypt the mysteries of God. They must be revealed to you from above. Mankind cannot storm heaven and make off with sacred fire. God must give it freely and he does, because he speaks; he reveals mysteries, and “utters what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

The field is the Scriptures, the Old Testament Genesis through Malachi. These scriptures were written by prophets, men who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The field is the Scriptures, the treasure mysteriously hidden there is the life and salvation won for all men by Jesus Christ. Paul writes, “**Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: [Jesus Christ] was manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory**.” Sounds a lot like the apostles Creed, doesn’t it? In other words, Jesus “manifested in the flesh” is Jesus made man, who suffered and died in the flesh…he was raised up by the Spirit and vindicated…he was seen by the apostles who were angels, messengers appointed to proclaim this good news to all nations…and men and women from all nations of the world believed the message of the revealed mystery of God in Jesus Christ, who is now taken up in glory to return again in glory at the end of the age.” Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness.

The parable continues that the treasure hidden in the field is something “**which a man found and covered up**.” This is the second mystery of the parable. The hiddenness of the treasure is nothing other than the preaching of the cross, the humility of Jesus Christ, the fact that the messiah would come not as a conquering soldier, but as a suffering servant, and that he would expect the same of his disciples.

That the messiah would come to save us through his own suffering and death is the central stumbling block of the faith. Paul writes,

“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Ha not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

The man in the field finds the treasure hidden, he finds God hidden in Jesus Christ who made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant. He finds Christ hidden on the cross, and he leaves Christ hidden on the cross. There are churches today--usually they have victory in their name--that want to take Jesus off of the cross. They preach of a treasure that is not hidden, but a Christ that is not covered in humility is a Christ that cannot save. A victorious Christ draws the powerful, the rich, the elite, the arrogant, the proud, who want to brush elbows with those who seem influential. However, a suffering Christ, a sacrificed Christ, a crucified Christ, draws the poor in spirit, the lame who cannot walk to God, the sick who need a physician, the captives awaiting God’s judgment, the blind who cannot perceive the kingdom; it is these little ones who are called to the kingdom of God. And by being lifted up on the cross, Jesus will like a dragnet draw all men to himself.

The hiddenness of the treasure is the humility through which Christ saves us. And the humility of Jesus Christ must be preached, the gospel of the kingdom is veiled in the flesh of Jesus. Anyone who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. The Jews in Jesus day did not recognize him to be God. Though they had the scriptures, they did not recognize him as their hidden treasure. And so he says, to them “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39). You think in the field you have eternal life, and it is the field that contains the treasure.

And even after he died and was raised, Jews continued to miss the forest for the trees, the treasure for the field, the Christ for the Scriptures. St. Paul writes, “For to this day, when [the Jews] read the old covenant, [the veil of Moses] remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.” (2 Cor 3:14). The veil of Moses is that which prevents the proud from seeing the hidden glory of God in the humility of his son on the cross. The mystery of Godliness is still a mystery to those who are perishing. And we proclaim the mystery revealed in Christ to all who believe.

“Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” The third mystery taught in this parable is that the disciple who sells all that he has is the one who repents of his sins; and his buying the field is believing in Jesus Christ for salvation. Many modern commentators do not like this interpretation because, if such were the case, it would make salvation a result of works. They say that it is not our repentance, neither our belief in Jesus Christ that purchases our salvation. And that is right.

However, selling all that one has is a figure of repentance. Jesus tells the rich young man who wants to be a disciple, “Still one thing you lack, sell all that you have, give the proceeds to the poor and then come follow me. And he ran away weeping for he had many possessions.” In contrast to the rich young man, Peter said to Jesus, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?...Jesus says, “**And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life**.” (Matt. 19:27, 29).

Not all disciples of Jesus are commanded to literally sell all that they have. Some have families, others work and support the mission of the church with their offerings. But the one who has seen the treasure, who has known tasted and seen the salvation won by Jesus Christ and the treasure he laid up for you, nothing is more precious on this earth than the knowledge of that mystery. And you who know this by faith realize that all of your material blessings really belong to God and are worth nothing compared to the love and salvation you have in Christ Jesus.

And it is by faith, which is not your own doing, but a gift of God—it is by believing in the salvation of Jesus Christ that you purchase the field, that you believe the Scriptures which tell of God’s saving love throughout all human history, from Adam, to Noah, to Babel, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, from David, to the prophets, to Mary and Joseph—all of them the field in which God has laid up the treasure of his own son Jesus Christ to be purchased by grace through faith, that is purchased for free.

Isaiah says, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk *without money and without price*”.

**2**Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,

and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,

and delight yourselves in rich food.

**3**Incline your ear, and come to me;

hear, that your soul may live;

and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

**4**Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,

a leader and commander for the peoples.

**5**Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,

and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,

because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,

for he has glorified you.

 (Isaiah 55:1).

The treasure is the mystery of Godliness, the salvation revealed to us in the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The field is the Scriptures and all salvation history. The hiddenness of the treasure is the folly of the cross, the weakness by which God came into the world in Christ to suffer and die for us. And this hiddenness we proclaim everytime we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord, under which he hides his true body and blood for us to eat and to drink. And the selling of all else and purchasing of the field is the repentance and belief in the Gospel that all who have seen the treasure accomplish by the Holy Spirit.

Paul writes, “**Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: [Jesus Christ] was manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory**.”