

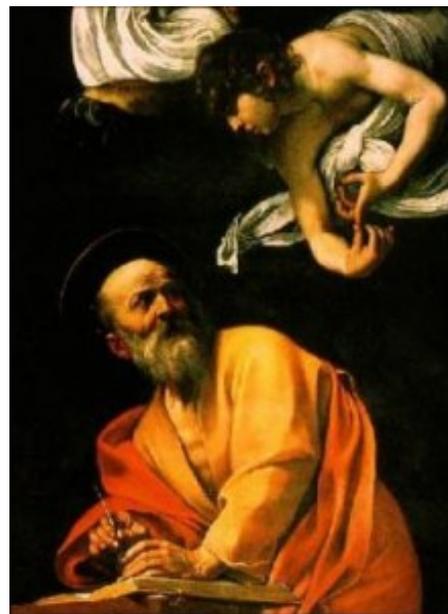
AlbertMohler.com —

To Utter What Has Been Hidden Since the Foundation of the World



Friday, May 18, 2012

We humans are creatures of days and dates, though most fade quickly into the fog of memory. Researchers have recently identified a newly discovered phenomenon called “hyperthymesia,” more commonly known as “autobiographical memory.” Those who possess this condition are able to remember the most precise details of every day of their lives. Mention a date and they can tell you where they were, what they were doing, and what of significance happened in the world on that day. These people remember every single day, including those in which nothing out of the ordinary happened. It is, we can only assume, a gift of sorts. Most of us do not possess this gift, nor can we really imagine it.



That is why days like today are important to us. We are gathered together in this place and with these people in order to mark this day as out of the ordinary. Many of us are dressed in a way that could only be described as odd if worn everyday, but perfectly fitting when worn today. The faculty and gradates arrayed before you are dressed in the medieval attire of scholars, complete with the regalia indicating degrees, subjects of study, and academic rank. Within hours, these gowns and robes will be rehung or reboxed and put away until needed again for another day like

today. And yet, even those of us without the gift of autobiographical memory will remember this day, for it is not just like any other day.

The formality of this ceremony signals that something important is happening here — something out of the ordinary, something powerful and worthy of our close attention. What we witness today is the setting loose of hundreds of God-called ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These graduates have completed courses of study and have earned degrees. They have fulfilled academic requirements and will receive degrees and diplomas. They have aimed for this day with their lives and their labors, and they have now arrived at the ceremony of commencement.

At the same time, this is hardly the only commencement ceremony to be scheduled for this season. Kindergartens now schedule graduation ceremonies, as do other grades and classes. Millions will graduate from high schools, colleges, and universities. Pomp and circumstance will abound for a length of weeks, and then the academic cycle will start all over again.

But I would submit to you that this is not just like those other graduation ceremonies, as meaningful and memorable as they may be. The difference lies in this — these graduates are assigned the task of preaching, teaching, telling, and taking the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ to the nations. Their aim is not merely to make a difference in this world, but also in the world to come. Can you imagine a Christian who is not moved and motivated by such a vision?

What, exactly, are these graduates now to do? They have fulfilled all their coursework. They have been taught and trained in the arts and sciences of biblical studies, theology, ethics, apologetics, preaching, and a host of practical ministry applications. What now? They have been immersed in theology, steeped in worldview, laden with learning, examined for their proficiencies, and evaluated in their calling. Now what?

We set them loose to do what God has called and gifted and empowered them to do — to teach and preach the Word of God, to shepherd the flock of God, to guard the good deposit and to follow the pattern of sound words, to herald the good tidings of the Gospel, to teach the church, to counsel believers, to reach the unreached and to comfort the afflicted. They are set forth to defend the truth, to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints, to mourn with those who mourn, and to minister in Christ's name and stead.

At the heart of it all is their message — the message of salvation for sinners through the atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ our Lord, and the message of God's truth applied to every dimension of life.

In Matthew chapter 13, we find Jesus telling his disciples why he taught in parables.

Answering the question asked by his disciples, Jesus said: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” [Matthew 13:11-13]

Jesus used parables to reveal truth to those who sought the truth, and to conceal the truth from those who refused to hear. Just after this, Christ told two short parables, and then Matthew inserted an important note of commentary.

“He put another parable before them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’ He told them another parable. ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.’ 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.’” [Matthew 13:31-35]

Christ declares that his kingdom is explosive in its growth. The kingdom of heaven is like a tiny mustard seed, which explodes in growth and produces massive growth. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman hides in flour. A tiny lump of leaven leavens the whole loaf. The Gospel is like a contagion that cannot be stopped, and Christ’s rule is irresistible energy. The kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ is unshakable, unstoppable, unquenchable. The graduates we see before us today are evidence of this truth. The powerful seed of the Gospel has born rich fruit, producing a great harvest. As Jesus promised within this very chapter, the powerful seed of the Gospel produces a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

Can we imagine what God will do with these ministers and missionaries who graduate today? They join in a long line of faithfulness and devotion. No earthly calculation can predict or measure what God will do through them to his singular glory. They represent seeds and yeast, ready to be set loose for the cause of Christ and his Gospel.

There is more here, of course. Matthew explains that Jesus consistently taught by means of parable. This was to fulfill, he says, what was foretold by Asaph the prophet in Psalm 78:2. “I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.” In Matthew’s Holy Spirit inspired words, “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

To utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. Matthew tells us that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Asaph in his use of parables and the remarkable, even breathtaking power of what he revealed.

Mark tells us that Jesus came preaching. Matthew tells us that Jesus came uttering what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. In Jesus, those who dwell in darkness have seen a great light. In his parables and in the entirety of his preaching, Jesus uttered those things hidden from the foundation of the world. He uttered the things formerly hidden so that we might know the truth and that the truth would set us free.

Jesus declared salvation, even as he came to purchase our salvation by his blood. That which was hidden is now revealed says Paul, the mystery that is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [Colossians 1:27] We are now, Paul declares, stewards of the mysteries of God.

In other words, what Matthew reveals in terms of Jesus and his mission is now assigned to those who, in his stead, are called to preach and teach. We are called to utter what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.

These graduates, and all who receive this calling, are not assigned to preach and teach a clever message. They are not assigned the task to compose their own truth and develop their own good news. They are to utter what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.

Just think of this: These graduates are now to be set loose in the world to utter hidden things, to make the name of Jesus famous, to declare the Gospel as public truth and as a message of salvation to be declared to every person and taken to every nation. They are not assigned to conceal, but to reveal. They are not to remain silent, but to speak. They are called to speak truths that so many prophets and righteous men longed to see and did not see it; longed to hear and did not hear it. [Matthew 13:17]

These graduates are not naturally capable of these things, but Christ will make them able. No human voice is worthy of uttering these truths, but God gives the utterance. Our salvation is all of grace, and so also is our ministry.

Graduates, you are called to open your mouths and utter what has been hidden from the foundation of the world. Following the call of God, you are commissioned to take the Gospel to the nations. Eternity hangs in the balance and the health of Christ's church requires your faithful preaching. Some of you will labor out of our sight, ever known by God. Some of you will leave home and homeland for the cause of the Gospel. Some of you will die early in Christ's service, knowing that you are safe in the faithfulness of your Savior. Some of you will grow old and live long, knowing that we are called to be faithful to the end. All of you will face adversity and exhilaration in ministry. In Christ, you will all get

safely home.

You go with our prayers and our hopes. You leave with our affection and our admiration. You will take this band of teachers and scholars with you, their teaching lodged in your minds and hearts. You leave with friendships made and forged in common calling. Take those friendships with you. Some will leave with an entourage of spouse and children, those bonds deepened and strengthened by your time here. Take everything good you received here, and leave anything that does not glorify God and strengthen Christ's church. Remember all who made this possible for you, knowing that all these things were provided so that the church may be faithfully taught and the nations gladly reached.

You go with our hopes, our prayers, and our confidence. This great assembly represents the hopes of Christ's church. Go forth and fulfill those hopes. Remember what Christ accomplished for us, and what you must now do in his name.

Remember your calling and imitate your Savior and Lord. You are called, and you are now sent, to utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

This is a commencement address and charge to graduates of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, delivered May 18, 2012 by R. Albert Mohler, Jr., President. The commencement ceremony may be viewed live at 10:00 a.m. EDT at www.sbts.edu.

Artwork: *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew* by Carravaggio (1602)

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