

Let the Light Shine

Mark 4:21-4:25

We are back in Mark 4 this morning where Jesus is teaching. Remember that chapter 4 began with Jesus teaching the multitudes from a boat on the Sea of Galilee as the crowd faced him on the shore. He taught them in parables. A parable is a comparison, it's putting something alongside something else to compare or contrast. First Jesus told the parable of the sower and his soil conditions. This was an extended metaphor, and He later explained the meaning of it to His disciples. Today's parables are more like a collection of short images and sayings.

Listen to Mark 4:21-25:

- 21 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?"**
- 22 For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.**
- 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."**
- 24 Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given.**
- 25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."**

It is usually the context that makes the parable's meaning clear. The peculiar challenge of these sayings in Mark 4:21-25 is that Jesus teaches the same or very similar things in the other gospels (Matthew, Luke, and John), but they are given in totally different contexts. Sometimes He combines these sayings with other sayings, giving a different application to their meaning. Quickly, let me show you how.

Listen again to verse 21, **"Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?"** Where else do we hear that saying? Jesus says it in *The Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew 5:

- 14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.**
- 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.**
- 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

In that context, Jesus clearly exhorts His disciples to shine the light, not to hide it. The light of their good deeds will bring glory to their Father in Heaven. Is that what Jesus is saying here in Mark?

Look at verse 22, "**For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.**"

Jesus also says this in Matthew when Jesus sends out his disciples on a missions trip and He warns them that they will be persecuted for the gospel. There Jesus says, "**Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.**" (Matthew 10:26-7). There, Jesus is exhorting his disciples to boldly proclaim the gospel in the face of opposition.

But in Luke 12 Jesus applied this saying much differently when He says, **Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.**" (Luke 12:1-3). In this case the hidden things that will be disclosed are men's secret words and deeds.

Then Consider verse 24: **"Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given."** This also is a familiar saying used elsewhere. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, **"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."** (Matthew 7:1,2). By the measure we judge, we will be judged. But is that is not the same application we have in Mark.

Finally, we have the statement in verse 25: **"For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."** That saying is also the conclusion to the well-known parable of the talents in Matthew 25 and the parable of the minas in Luke 19. Luke's version expresses well Jesus' intent. Jesus has the nobleman give a mina (three months' wages) to ten servants. We are only told of the results of three. The first earns an additional ten minas; the second an additional five, and the third simply returns the one he was given. Here is the response of the nobleman in Luke 19:24-27:

And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.

The application is to use what God has given for productive service in His kingdom. And those who refuse the kingdom will be cut off from it. But again, I ask is that the same conclusion we get from our context here in Mark?

The problem we have as we approach passages like this in Mark 4 is that we sometimes jump ahead as we read these saying because we think we already

know the meaning and application that was clear elsewhere. I want to caution us against doing that today.

I want us to approach this text as a detective approaches a crime scene. We need to look both inside the incident and outside to the larger context. First, let's take a look outside. What precedes the passage? - the parable of the sower. What had Jesus talked about? It was the effect of the gospel He preached on the people who heard him. For many, they heard and yet did not hear well enough, so that the word had little or temporary effect in their lives.

What comes after these sayings? We have two short parables, both about the mysterious and amazing growth of the kingdom. They complement the ending of the sower parable, which concludes with the wondrous growth of the kingdom as well. Think of what the common elements are. There is great growth and the result of the harvest or the size of the plant is surprising.

All right. We note these clues on the outside. The context is the growth of the Kingdom of God as people respond in their hearts to God's word.

Now, What is inside? What do we find within the passage itself? Notice how it falls naturally into two sections divided by sayings about hearing. Verse 23, **"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."** And verse 24, **"Take heed what you hear."** Jesus often uses these phrases to introduce or conclude His teaching.

Look at the first scene, the first two verses. **21 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? 22 For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light."**

Now again the Lord, as He always does in His parables, uses common objects. He's speaking of a lamp, one in every house, and He also is speaking in the backdrop of a familiar scene, the home. The lamp that was in the houses in Jesus' day was a clay dish that was filled with oil, and there was a wick put into the oil and it was lit. Here's the question the Lord Jesus poses: is a lamp brought into a house to be set under a basket, or put under a bed; or is it not brought in to be set on a candlestick, a lampstand, so that that light may shed abroad in the whole house for the greatest benefit?

What does the lamp represent here? A more literal reading of the Greek text helps here. It reads more like this. "Does the lamp come so that it might be set under the basket or the bed?" Mr. Lamp doesn't enter a room so he can be hidden. His purpose in existing is to shine so that he can be seen and can cause everything else to be seen.

What is the lamp a figure of speech for? What fits with this image? Think back to the parable of the sower. Instead of a lamp, what object was brought out? It was seed. The sower took seed and tossed out onto the soil. What did the seed represent? Verse 14, **"The sower sows the word."** And here the lamp sheds light.

It all starts to fit. The gospel in the form of Jesus and in His message has come. Jesus has come and is speaking the words of light and life. And yet, what is

happening? His hearers behave as though the light is still hidden. That is what we pick up from the outside evidence. Indeed, it is as if the lamp has come only to find itself being hidden all over again. The religious leaders tried to snuff Him out. The crowds treated Him as a star but still missed who He was. His own family failed to recognize Him. Even his disciples had difficulty comprehending His nature and His mission. As John explained in his gospel:

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. (John 1:4-11).

More than once in the Gospel of John Jesus says, **"I am the light of the world."** The lamp has come to shine forth its light, but its receivers are still keeping it hidden. In John 3:19 Jesus tells us why the light is still hidden, **"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."** Because they hardened their hearts through evil deeds, wickedness, and unbelief, they couldn't see the light and they dwelt in darkness.

Now, look at the Lord's commentary on the parable in verse 22, **"For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light."** What had been hidden? Christ's glorious identity as Messiah, as the Son of God, as the Suffering Servant, Savior, King was hidden to the unbelieving Jews of His day. That's the interpretation of this parable. But you need to see also that what was hidden and what was not manifested, what was kept secret will eventually be shed abroad and will be manifested, revealed.

The common phrases that follow take on more meaning in light of what is being said. Verse 23, **"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."** Verse 24, **"Take heed what you hear."** Jesus is admonishing his hearers to let the gospel sink in.

The next two verses bring forth the consequences of hearing and not hearing. Verses 24-25, **"Then He said to them, 'Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him'"**

Here is the principle: we will be given according to what our hearts desire. If we desire greatly his light and truth, then so we will receive and even more. God in a sense says to us, "Bring to me a container for me to fill with the riches of my glory and grace." Some of us bring a little measuring spoon and hold it out. God in turn gives us a few little grains of his blessing. Others drive up in 18-wheelers and said, "Fill'er up!" God grins and pours out such wondrous grace that the trailers

sag from the weight. Not only that, he takes the little spoons of the others and empties their remaining grains on top of the trailers. You want? You get! You don't want; you don't get.

Now, let's put the two sections together. When we do so, we have this message. Jesus is saying, *"I, the lamp, have come with the light of the gospel. Don't cover me and my message over as many of you are doing. Let the lamp shine openly. The reason that you hide my light is that you really prefer something else which is less than the gospel. Be careful. If you refuse the light I offer, you will lose what little bit you might have. But if you desire it, then you will receive more blessing than you could have expected."*

So the principle is: the one who responds to the word of God receives more of the word of God, but the one who does not respond to the word of God actually loses what he thought he had of it!

Application

What then do we do with this message? His critique of how the people listened to what he was saying pinpointed two concerns: one, that the people did not listen well enough to catch what he was saying, and, two, that they really did not want to hear. The same two problems are with us today.

You have come for no less a purpose than to hear the Word of God delivered to you. Far from passively waiting for me, as the preacher, to grab your attention, you ought to be actively engaging your mind to grasp what is being spoken. You need to do the hard work of thinking through the message.

That is what we were doing with the passage. I could have skipped all the part of reasoning through the verses with you and simply stated at the beginning what Jesus was saying. That would have left more room for me to say whatever I want to say. But, I want to get you into the Word, not into my conclusions about it. The more time we are exploring scripture itself rather than my wisdom on how to apply it, the better. But it takes an openness and readiness to learn.

And we will do that according to our desire for it. How much do you desire to hear what God wants to say to you? I thought carefully how I phrased that. We each have a list of what we want to hear from God about how to get along in life. That is precisely, though, what gives us hearing problems. We set the agenda. But it is not ours to set.

We must come to the message with one purpose – to hear what God would have us hear. I know each Sunday what he wants you to hear, what you need to hear. It is the message of his holy scripture. That is what you need more than anything else to hear. You have come here at this time because God has drawn you, and he would have you to hear his word given to you through his holy scripture.

But to go even further, and this is where you must develop the ears to hear – you must hear the gospel of Jesus Christ that shines through all of scripture. Whether the scripture topic be about marriage, or enduring trials, or how to listen well, what you must really listen carefully for is the gospel that speaks of the greatness of our God and the glorious work of redemption. If all you learn from Sunday

sermons is how to be a nicer person and get along better in this life, you have missed the point. But if you come to hear God speak His gospel to you, well then know, with that measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Grace upon grace will be poured into your heart.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world and the church is His lampstand.

Englishman James Hudson Taylor spent 51 years as a missionary in China shining the light of Jesus Christ. Nee Yung Fa was a Chinese Cotton Dealer, and he was converted through Taylor's the ministry. He had also been a leader in what was a reformed Buddhist sect, which would have nothing to do with idolatry, didn't worship things, and that was genuinely searching for truth - but in all the wrong places. At the end of one of Hudson Taylor's sermons, Nee Yung Fa stood in Hudson Taylor's place, and turned to address the audience and said these words: "I have long searched for the truth as my father did before me, and I have traveled far but I haven't found it. I found no rest in Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, but I do find rest in what I heard tonight. From now on I believe in Jesus."

Nee took Hudson Taylor to a meeting of the Buddhist sect he was a leader of, and he allowed Hudson Taylor to explain the reason for the change of life that was in him. Then eventually Nee spoke, and Taylor was impressed with the clarity and the power with which he spoke - and another member of the group was converted that very night, and both Nee and he were baptized. Then came the question: "How long has the gospel been known in England?" Nee asked Taylor. "For several hundred years," replied an embarrassed Taylor, vaguely. "What! And you have only now come to preach to us? My father sought after the truth for more than 20 years and died without finding it! Why didn't you come sooner!."

Difficult to answer, isn't it? Maybe he didn't come sooner because the church was hiding its light under a bushel.

The issue this morning is: are you? This word is weighing very heavily on my heart, and I want to tell you that God is dealing with me in my heart. Is He dealing with you? What are you going to do with God's word? Harden your heart against it? Make excuses? Be shallow? Desire other things more? The church is the lampstand. The world needs the Jesus Christ, the light, the Son of God. What are you doing with the light He has given you?