

Jason Upchurch - Mark 4:21-25 - The Good News Is to Be Shined

This morning we continue on in our study through the gospel of Mark. And as I've said Jesus here has transitioned in his teaching ministry to preaching almost exclusively in parables. He does this as a means of judgment against Jewish unbelievers so that they will not fully understand the truth.

Last week we covered the parable of the 4 soils. The gist there was that a true follower of Jesus will obey his Word until the end. You know a person is a true follower of Jesus by their life-long, heartfelt obedience to the Word of God - and all the Word of God - that is shown by bearing fruit.

Also if you remember, the reason for the parables and the interpretation of the parable in **Vss. 10-20** is given later that evening. The sermon that Jesus gives is a sermon of unexplained parables. The 4 soils in **Vss. 1-9**, and these other parables here in **21-32** along with a while bunch of other parables that aren't recorded here are the entirety of his sermon.

So this morning in **Vss. 21-25** we're back on the beach listening to Jesus preach in parables. And we are not given the interpretation of these parables like we are the parable of the 4 soils. And on a simple reading they are a little tricky. What is Jesus talking about with lamps and measures and mustard seeds?

Even for us now, not all parables are obvious on the surface. It takes a little digging to understand them. And I think that's good because whether or not we choose to spend the effort to figure out the parable is actually kind of the point of parables. How bad do you really want to know about the Kingdom? Those who have ears to hear will push to know more.

Now, many times when parables are given Jesus tells us at the beginning or end of the parable what the meaning is, but not here which makes understanding these next parables a little tough.

So here's the deal: The parable of the 4 soils was about the Word of God. And most scholars believe - and I agree - that these next few parables also deal with how the followers of Jesus should understand the Word. What do we do with the Word? How do we understand the Word - by which which I mean the entirety of the Christian belief system?

Jesus said if the disciples didn't understand the parable of the soils - which is about the Word - they wouldn't understand the other parables. So these other parables are about the Word.

And let me just give you the bottom line of the next 4 parables, but know that we'll only get to the first 2 this morning.

1. **Vss. 21-23:** Parable of the Lamp: If you have the Word, Shine the Word.
2. **Vss. 24-25:** Parable of the measures: If you won't shine the Word, it'll be taken away.
3. **Vss. 26-29:** Parable of Seed Growing: The Word grows slowly by itself.
4. **Vss. 30-32:** The Word grows surely over time.

So all of this is about the Word. We've already seen that we want to be the 4th soil, the soil that bears fruit for God. The soil that take the word of God and hides it deep down in our heart and changes our life. But now what?

That's what Jesus gets to. So this morning we'll focus on the parable of the lamp and the parable of the measures.

1) Parable of the Lamp: If you have the Word Shine the Word. **Read 21-23**

So Jesus has changed up illustrations but I think we are still supposed to connect the dots. We want to be the fourth soil, so now what do we do? We shine the Word. The illustration has changed but the subject is still the Word.

First, let's talk about the lamp. The lamp Jesus mentions here is a small oil lamp usually filled with olive oil and a wick at the top. People would usually have a stand to elevate the lights or put them on a high shelf in order to light a room at night.

It's hard for us to understand the significance of the modern day convenience of electric lighting. When I was in the remodeling industry there was whole segment of design that revolved around lighting for mood, use, function, so on. That is a modern luxury because just 150 years ago lighting was very primitive. And in ancient times lighting was very difficult and expensive and time consuming to make (candles, lamps, so on). You might only have a few lights in a main room in the house for the evening time.

And we know this, but the very purpose of a lamp is to shine into the darkness to reduce the darkness. It would make zero sense to spend all that time and money on a lamp only to hide it under something that completely defeats the purpose of the object.

How do we know this is talking about the word?

Side: How to interpret the Bible. Biblical interpretation is called hermeneutics which is a big long word that just means the way you interpret something.

And for the most part I think people are bad at hermeneutics for one reason: we fail at reading comprehension. I do too.

Let me give you an example. A few weeks ago I saw this click bait thing for getting a GED that said you could take a small practice exam for a GED. So I took it. It took like 10 minutes and it was like 20 questions. About 5 questions were reading comprehension where you had to read a paragraph and then answer a question. And I'm just going to be honest, I would barely skim the paragraph and then go to the question to see if I could answer it. And if I wasn't sure then I'd go back and read.

Now, I read a lot but I suspect many people do that. And then, as Christians, when we get to the Bible we're so accustomed to the stories - or so confused - we also just blitz through stuff that we can miss stuff or we just look down at our study notes or just make something up.

So I want to encourage you to not do that. To slow down and read and thoughtfully consider passages.

When I took biblical Greek and Hebrew the advantage wasn't usually that the original language gave some great insight. Usually the advantage was that you didn't know the language and had to slow way down to read carefully and provide a coherent translation.

So slow, careful reading is what helps us learn the Word. That's all for free.

I want to give you 3 reasons I think the lamp here represents the word with the implication that we should proclaim the word.

1) Most important: the immediate context. The very next parable seem to be more clearly talking about the Word. **Read 24-25**

We'll unpack this more in a minute, but Jesus says be careful with what you hear. So the concern is paying attention to Jesus's words. If you do, you'll get more. If you don't what you have will be taken away.

The emphasis is on hearing the Word and living out the Word. These 2 parables seem to be related to each other.

2) Also context: a little larger: the whole of chapter 4 is about the Word and how the Word should be received and what the Word will do. This is the theme and parables often come in themes. **Look at Luke 15** for a minute.

The gospel writers will often daisy chain parables together with themes. In **Luke 15** we have a great example of a series of parables and in all 3 the theme is basically the same.

We have the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, prodigal son. Now I've heard all kinds of crazy interpretations with these parables. The lost sheep: we should prioritize foreign missions over ministry at home. The lost coin: how valuable we are to God. The prodigal son: how the Father just really longs for us to come back to him.

But none of those are the point of the parables. Look at the lost sheep and see if you can tell the point. **Read 1-7**

What's the point of the parable? It's **Vs. 7** there is joy when a sinner repents. That's the proper response to true repentance. In **Vs. 1** the Pharisees were grumbling because sinners were repenting. Oh the horror! And so Jesus calls them out for their response to people repenting.

What about the lost coin? Lady loses her coin, searches the whole house to find this thing. What's the point? We're so valuable that God will meticulously look everywhere to find us? No. **Read 10**

It's the same point, isn't it? All of heaven rejoices when people repent and we should do the same. I'll give you 2 guesses about the meaning of the Prodigal Son. Rejoice when someone repents. **Read 31-32**

A lot of times the gospel writers string together parables with similar themes or purpose to hammer home the point. And think about that: Luke, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, burns up a whole chapter in his gospel - precious space - on exactly one thing: when someone repents from their sin and follows Jesus we rejoice like heaven rejoices. You think that's important? Absolutely.

Very often the gospel writers string together parables in a theme to make points. **Back in Mark 4** I think Mark is stringing together a theme of the Word. Just like Luke burns up a whole chapter on rejoicing when someone repents, Mark burns up a whole chapter on the value of responding rightly to Jesus's Word. How we respond to the Word - the whole of the Christian message - is worth an entire chapter in his short gospel.

Jesus was talking about the Word before the parable of the lamp and after the parable of the lamp. It makes sense the lamp is about the Word.

3) The third reason I think this is talking about light is that there is a biblical pattern of God's word being compared to light.

Psalms 119:105: Your word is a lamp unto my feet. And a light unto my path.

Prov. 6:23: For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.

Psalms 19:8: The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

John 5:30-35: John the Baptist is called a burning and shining lamp and people rejoiced in his light. What was he doing to be a lamp? He was testifying about Jesus. He bore witness to the truth.

So the truth of God being equated to a lamp is very common in Scripture. Jesus does use light to refer to good works sometimes - let your light shine before men - but even then how do we know what good works please God? Through his Word and living according to the Word of God.

So the light is the Word. What is Jesus telling us then? He's telling us to shine the light of the Word everywhere. Broadcast the Word. Broadcast the Christian message.

To chain this together with the last parable: if you are the good soil where the gospel has taken root what Jesus is saying is don't keep the Word of God to yourself. Don't hide it. Don't put it under a basket, don't put it under your bed.

Don't avoid telling people the truth. Don't hide that you're a Christian or hide biblical truth. Don't hide that your life revolves around Jesus and the Word of God.

And don't be indifferent either. There are some who kind of want to keep their Christianity close to the vest. They don't want to tell people that they're Christians. Maybe it's a fear of man, maybe it's a fear of being rejected. If someone else asks, they'll talk about the gospel but they'll never take the first step.

No, listen: what we are proclaiming is good news! The best news that could ever possibly be proclaimed. That God in Christ has come to reconcile those who have faith in the crucified and risen Jesus. That's good news. That news should be on our hearts and on our minds and on our mouths as we go throughout the day.

Those who are transformed by the gospel speak the gospel. I'm not saying you have to be annoying like someone selling a multi level marketing product. But we should be intentional.

Broadcast the Word - all of the word. Why do we do this? Because when we preach the Word it lights things up. **Read 22**

What does that mean? I think it means when you preach the word you're going to find out who people are based on their response.

When you shine light into a room you find out what's in the room. The good, the bad, the ugly. All of it.

That's what happens when you shine the light of the Word of God. Things that were hidden in the heart are revealed. I think Jesus is actually saying basically the same thing as when he was talking about the soils.

You go scatter the seed of the gospel and you'll figure out where people are at based on how they respond.

Same thing here. You shine the light of the Word of God and things will be revealed that weren't revealed before. That's what God wants: he wants that distinction to be made clear.

Nothing is hidden that won't be made manifest. One day every person is going to give an account to God for their life and especially how they responded to the Word of God. What's hidden in their heart, hidden in their lives will be made very clear to God and everybody.

Jesus says that nothing is secret that won't come to light. If you shine the light of the Word you're going to find things out about people. They will react. You will see things that you never saw before. The Word of God brings everything to light. Things in our lives, things in their lives.

And sometimes that's a difficult process. You ever been asleep and someone flips the light on in your room and you're dazed and blinded and wondering what in the world is going on? That's the Word that is the light.

Heb. 4:12: The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing to the division of of soul and the spirit, of joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

So what do we do? We shine the light. We speak about God, speak about his word, marvel about his creation, speak with boldness and grace about the issues of the day in light of the Word of God.

You know what we do when we get together for Christmas Eve service? And we each have these little candles? And the flame gets passed from one person to two. Then 4, then 8 then 16 and soon the room is filled with light.

That's what the word of God does in our world as we proclaim it faithfully.

What if we don't proclaim it faithfully?

2) If we won't shine the Word our light will be taken away. So Jesus uses yet another metaphor to help us understand the Word. And the gist is: if we're faithful with what we've been given, we'll get more. If we're not, we'll get less. **Read 24-25**

This is a sobering statement by the Lord. This figure of speech about measures basically means "You get back what you give out." (Strauss, Mark; note on verse 24).

We see this saying in a couple of other places. In **Matt. 7:2** Jesus uses this to talk about judgement. "For the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged and the measure you use it will be measured to you."

There Jesus is saying that whatever standard we judge other people by, we better be careful because that standard will be used against us. What goes around, comes around.

The saying about measures is used in **Luke 6:27-38** in the context of forgiving other people and being generous to other people. If we forgive and are generous to those in need Jesus says it will be measured back to us "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over and put into our lap." God will give us back kindness for the kindness we give others.

You get back what you give out.

Here the issue is the Word. And faithfulness to the Word. If we're faithful with the Word - the whole of the Christian message - and faithful to shine the light of the Word we will be given more. More what?

More understanding, more responsibility, more opportunities with the Word. To teach and share and invest in the lives of other people.

To use the earlier illustration: if you're faithful to sow the Word, God will give you more opportunities to sow.

He who is faithful with little is faithful with what? Much. That's the idea.

Whatever measure you have been given with the Word, be faithful. And if you're faithful you will be given more. It might not be huge, it might not be supernova, but God will give you knowledge, more grace and more opportunities.

But there's a warning side to this as well, isn't there? **Read 25**

The one who does not have. The idea is the one who does not have **much**. They have little. If you waste what you do have it'll be taken away.

Maybe you don't know the Word very well, now what? Grow in your knowledge of the Word. If you don't what you do have will be taken from you.

You remember in the parable of the Talents in **Matt. 25**? The parable about the gifts and opportunities that God gives us in this life to work for him? The master gives 5 talents to one guy because he can handle it. He gives another guy 2 talents and another guy 1. The guy with 5 and the guy with 2 go and double their efforts. They work hard for the Kingdom of God and they're rewarded with more.

But the guy with 1 doesn't do anything. He just sits on his gifts. Never invests his life at all for the Kingdom. And when the master comes and asks him for an account of what he did he makes excuses. "You were a hard master" so I wasted what little opportunity you gave me.

And you know what the Master does? He gives that one man's talent - his opportunities and abilities - to the guy who had 10. What little bit he had was taken away.

The same is true with what we do with the Word of God. See a lot of times we think that our little bit of the Word of God doesn't matter. That because we don't know everything we can be lazy or foolish with what we have.

Or that that because we're not reaching dozens or hundreds or thousands of people that what we do doesn't matter. No it does matter. Every little bit matters because where we are is exactly where God has placed us and he wants us to be faithful to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord. And be faithful to spread that knowledge of the glory of the Lord to the ends of the earth.

We have no idea who we're teaching.

Do you know who RC Sproul's parents were? Do you know who John Piper's parents were? Do you know the name of the guy who discipled John MacArthur? Do you know Elizabeth Elliott's parents names? No. Do you know who their grandparents were?

No. We have no idea how God is going to use the people in our families or in our lives for his glory.

Listen, there's a chance that no one will be famous in our congregation. That's fine. But at the rate we keep having babies here, you realize that how you invest in your family, your kids, your brothers and sisters will have an impact generations from now?

I don't say that to be cheeky. I think Christians underestimate the long term Kingdom implications of faithfully teaching the Word to their family and friends and loved ones. They miss the true impact of what the power of the gospel can do now and into the future.

If we miss that, or undervalue that, what little we do have might be taken away.

So go, shine the Word and soak in the Word. Teach the Word, tell the Word.

And more will be added to you, to the glory of God.

Pray