

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Parable of the Lamp

Luke 8:16-21

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Scripture

In our last study of the life of Jesus, we looked at Luke's account of Jesus' first major parable, the one we know as The Parable of the Sower.

Jesus said that a sower went out to sow his seed. The seed fell on four different soils. The seed fell along the path, on the rock, among the thorns, and into the good soil. When the disciples asked Jesus what the parable meant, he explained it to them. The seed is the word of God. The four different soils represented four different responses to the word of God:

- The path represented hard hearts.
- The rock represented shallow hearts.
- The thorns represented divided hearts.
- The good soil represented fruitful hearts.

Jesus continued teaching how his true followers respond to the word of God. He gave his disciples another parable, the one we call The Parable of the Lamp.

So, let's read The Parable of the Lamp in Luke 8:16-21:

¹⁶“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ¹⁷For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

¹⁹Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. ²⁰And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” ²¹But he answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of

God and do it.” (Luke 8:16-21)

Introduction

Have you heard the story about three friends who decided to go deer hunting together?

A lawyer, a doctor, and a preacher decided to go deer hunting. As they were walking, along came a huge buck. The three of them shot simultaneously. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three rushed up to see how big it actually was. Upon reaching it they could not figure out whose shot had actually killed the deer.

A heated debate ensued, and a few minutes later a game officer came by and asked what was the problem. The doctor told him that they were debating who shot the buck. The officer took a look at the buck and within a few seconds said with great confidence, “The preacher shot the buck!”

They all wondered how he knew that so quickly. The officer said, “Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other.”¹

Although this story makes fun of preachers, it actually illustrates a far more serious challenge that all of us face. How do we hear God’s word (either read or preached)? Does God’s word go in one ear and out the other? Or do we hear God’s word in such a way that we really obey it?

Jesus of course was a master preacher. His message was about the kingdom of God. He told people that God had created a people for himself. However, all people had rebelled against God. They refused to submit to the sovereign kingship of God. They did not obey the moral law of God and they did what was right in their own eyes. However, God is a merciful God. He determined that he would provide a way for rebellious people to be reconciled to himself. So, he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to seek and to save the lost. Jesus preached a marvelous

¹ As retold by P. J. Alindogan, *The Potter’s Jar* blog, “Hearing” (3-4-2012).

message about the good news of the kingdom of God. He said that if people did not turn from their sin, then they would suffer the penalty for their rebellion against God. However, if people repented of their sin by turning from it, and if they believed that Jesus was the one who paid the penalty for their sin, then they could receive God's forgiveness and be reconciled to God. Now that is good news, isn't it?

Jesus' message took the country by storm. Thousands of people came to hear Jesus preach, although they also came to see him perform miracles. A growing number of people believed Jesus and became his followers and disciples.

Toward the end of his Galilean ministry, about 16 months after he started his public ministry, Jesus told people a parable, the one we know as The Parable of the Sower. In this parable Jesus was showing people different responses to his message. Some hear the word of God and there is no response at all. Others hear it and respond superficially, but when testing comes, they fall away. Yet others hear it and respond to it, but as they go on their way the cares and riches and pleasures of life choke them, and they fall away. Finally, some hear the word of God and respond to it, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Jesus continued to elaborate on responses to his message, the word of God. He gave another parable, The Parable of the Lamp, to teach people how to respond to his message.

Lesson

The analysis of the parable of the lamp, as set forth in Luke 8:16-21, will teach us how to respond to Jesus' message.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Jesus' Message Must Be Heard (8:16-18)
2. Jesus' Message Must be Obeyed (8:19-21)

I. Jesus' Message Must Be Heard (8:16-18)

First, Jesus' message must be heard.

Jesus said, in verse 16, **"No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light."**

It would be completely foolish to light a lamp and then cover it so that it could not light the room. That would be like buying a computer and setting it up on your desk but never turning it on to use it. Or it would be like buying a treadmill, setting it up in your garage, and never using it. That simply does not make sense, does it? No, the point is to use these items properly. And that is Jesus' point. A lamp is lit so that it can function correctly by lighting a room.

But exactly what did Jesus mean when speaking about the lamp? Was he referring to his disciples being lights to those around them? In Matthew's Gospel Jesus said to his disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16). Clearly in Matthew's Gospel the emphasis seems to be on his disciples being evangelistic.

Or was Jesus in Luke's Gospel referring to the light of his own teaching? Luke said that Jesus had come "to give light to those who sit in darkness" (1:79) and that he was "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (2:32). It seems that the emphasis in Luke's Gospel is Jesus' own teaching, and in particular how it is received. Like a lamp in a house, the truth of Jesus' message must be received and put into practice.

We could say that Jesus' message must be heard *responsively*. Jesus' point is that now that the disciples had heard his message, what were they going to do with it?

The fact is that many people hear the message of God's word and it never makes any difference in their lives. The message goes in one ear and out the other. The gospel is meant to make a difference in our lives. Bishop J. C. Ryle said,

The Gospel which we possess was not given us only to be admired, talked of, and professed, – but to be practiced. It was not meant merely to reside in our intellect, and memories, and tongues, – but to be seen in our lives.²

Friends, if you profess to belong to Christ, the message of the gospel must transform you. When you hear the message of the gospel, the message of God's word, you must hear it *responsively*. You must adjust your life in accordance with God's word.

What will happen if you do not hear God's word responsively? According to Jesus, you will not get away with ignoring God's word forever, but will be held accountable. Jesus said in verse 17, **“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”**

R. C. Sproul shares a very interesting perspective on Jesus' statement that nothing is secret. He says:

It is interesting to speculate as to how God will expose all of these secret things and the hidden, covert dimensions of our personalities in that last day. One brilliant student I taught, said to me once, that he, too, wondered how God would reveal the secrets of our hearts on the last day. He was becoming increasingly amazed at the capacity of the human brain to store data and information, and gave a lengthy and complicated description of how the brain works, saying to me that there is no impression, no experience, no word that we ever hear, no sight that we ever perceive, that is not recorded somewhere in the inner chambers of our brain. The brain is a massively complex

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 256–257.

computer with a storage capacity that is nothing short of incredible. And he said, "You know, I kind of envision it this way, that on the last day God is not going to bring in witnesses to speak against us, but he is simply going to unplug our brains and run them through his own gigantic computer and play back messages whereby our own brains will reveal to us the storage data of our own experience and every word we have ever spoken, every deed we have ever done, will be confessed by our own brain cells. It will be all a matter of absolute record."

Now, of course, that is all speculation, but the man was saying something that was important, and that is that we cannot erase the reality of the deeds that we have committed. We cannot blot out, as Lady Macbeth sought so desperately to do, the blemishes upon our soul. But we try; we try to hide them, we try to keep them concealed from people. It is not that we are supposed to stand naked before the world and confess every one of our sins before all mankind. No. But we are to reveal those things and confess those things to God, knowing that if we don't, that God will himself expose us. "For nothing is hidden," says Jesus, "that shall not become evident; nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light."³

Jesus then issued a warning to his disciples in verse 18, **"Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."**

This is the message of the Bible, and especially of the Book of Hebrews. The author argues that now that Jesus has come, how foolish it is to neglect his message. He says, again and again, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8; 3:15; 4:7). Do you know that church is a dangerous place? Every time you hear the message of the gospel and resist it, you make it easier to resist the next time. And so, little by little, even what you think you have is taken

³ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 169.

away from you.

Many of us took music lessons when we were children. But we haven't picked up an instrument in years. We have forgotten far more than we ever learned.

The same principle applies spiritually. You come to church. You hear the message of the gospel. But you do nothing with it. You hear it, but it goes in one ear and out the other. You do not hear it *responsively*. And it is imperative to hear it responsively if the gospel is to do you any good.

So, Jesus' message must be heard, and it must be heard responsively.

II. Jesus' Message Must Be Obeyed (8:19-21)

And second, Jesus' message must be obeyed.

While Jesus was preaching, Luke said that **his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you"** (8:19-20). Luke does not tell us why Jesus' mother and his brothers tried to reach him. Perhaps Mary was concerned that her son was being taxed beyond his human capabilities and she wanted to get him out of there to get some rest. Clearly they got a message to Jesus while he was preaching.

Now I want you to notice something important. Luke made it clear that Jesus had **brothers**. Matthew lists their names as "James and Joseph and Simon and Judas" (Matthew 13:55). Matthew also said that Jesus had "sisters" (Matthew 13:56). So, Jesus had at least 4 half-brothers and 2 half-sisters.

The Roman Catholic Church says that Mary was a perpetual Virgin and so she could not have had other children. So, they say that James and Joseph and Simon and Judas were cousins. The problem is that word for **brothers** (*adelphos*) that Luke used is never used in the New Testament to refer to

“cousins.” There is in fact a word for cousin (*anepsios*) that could have been used if James and Joseph and Simon and Judas were Jesus’ cousins, but they were not his cousins; they were his **brothers**.

Other people argue that James and Joseph and Simon and Judas were Joseph’s children from a prior marriage, and hence they were his stepbrothers. There is no evidence, however, that Joseph was married before he married Mary. Moreover, if they were indeed Jesus’ stepbrothers, then one of the older stepbrothers, and not Jesus, would have been Joseph’s heir and the rightful king of Israel.

I am laboring this point because I want you to understand that Mary really did bear other children, who were Jesus’ half-brothers and half-sisters.

Jesus’ answer to his mother and brothers is astonishing. **He answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (8:21).**

First, I want you to notice Jesus makes it clear that spiritual relationships supersede family relationships.

And second, notice that those who are rightly related to Jesus are not those who merely hear the message but it is those who hear it *and* obey it. Jesus’ message must be heard *demonstrably*. We must demonstrate that we hear his message by obeying it.

Dave Stone is the pastor of Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. He shared a story of the time that his family was in the Dominican Republic on a short-term missions trip. If you’ve ever driven in a developing country, you know how dangerous the traffic can be. Vehicles whiz past, coming within just a few feet of children playing close to the road. One night, Dave’s son Sam was playing a game in his own little world, in which he would zig and zag, back and forth from sidewalk onto the narrow street and back. It wasn’t a heavily travelled road, but there was always loud music blaring, and it was pitch dark.

From about 10 feet away, Dave suddenly shouted, "Samuel, don't move!"

Immediately Sam froze. About a second later a Moped zipped past him, going 30 mph with no lights on – right where Sam was about to step. Dave's 6-year-old didn't ignore him, argue, or blatantly disobey. Dave said freeze, and Sam froze. That obedience probably saved Sam's life.⁴

How do we hear God's word (either read or preached)? Does God's word go in one ear and out the other? Or do we hear God's word in such a way that we really obey it?

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the parable of the lamp as set forth in Luke 8:16-21, we respond to Jesus' message by hearing responsively and obeying demonstrably.

One Sunday as they drove home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, there's something about the preacher's message this morning that I don't understand."

The mother said, "Oh? What is it?"

The little girl replied, "Well, he said God is bigger than we are. He said God is so big that he could hold the whole world in his hand. Is that true?"

The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, Honey."

"Mommy, he also said God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Is that true, too?"

Again, the mother assured the little girl that what the pastor had said was true.

With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If God is bigger than us and he lives in us, wouldn't he show through?"⁵

⁴ Dave Stone, "Teaching Respect Within the Home," in *Preaching* (July/August 2012).

⁵ Jerry Shirley, "When God Shows Through," in www.sermons.com newsletter.

Do you believe the message that Jesus preached? Do you believe the message of the gospel?

If you do, then is Jesus showing through? Are you hearing him responsively and obeying him demonstrably? Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, thank you for the word of God. Thank you for the message of Jesus.

Father, we believe the message of Jesus. We believe the good news of the gospel. We believe the good news of the kingdom of God.

Enable each one of us to hear Jesus responsively and obey him demonstrably. And in doing so may Jesus shine through each one of us. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!