

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 7, 2009

The Purpose of a Lamp

by Dan Trygg

“And He was saying to them, ‘A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck-measure, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?’ ²² For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.’ ²⁴ And He was saying to them, ‘Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides. ²⁵ For whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.”

Mark 4:21-25

This is the second of six parables which Jesus spoke on this occasion. The unifying theme has to do with the Kingdom of God. **The first one, the parable of the soils, emphasized the concern of the sower to obtain a good crop from the seeds he would sow.** As the seed fell on various soil conditions, it came to an unproductive end, -- except where it landed on the good soil. There, it produced a multiplied crop of thirty, sixty or even a hundred times as much as the original sowing. The crowd was not immediately privileged to hear the interpretation of this word picture drawn from everyday life. The point of it was clear, however. **The farmer is looking for his investment to produce something. Where it does not, for all practical purposes his investment is lost.** What matters is that the seed that is sown becomes established, grows up to become healthy, and ultimately bears lots of fruit. Anything less is more than a disappointment. It is a loss. As explained privately to His followers, the message of the gospel is to be received with an honest and good heart, and the one who bears fruit with perseverance will draw many others into the Kingdom. Misunderstanding, fear of man, unwillingness to endure hardship, distractions of worldly concerns and desires are things that keep those who hear the word from embracing it and growing up to become productive. **An underlying assumption is that we all should be affecting others, so that they are drawn to follow God.** This is a theme that is sounded throughout the NT. **We cannot be a Christian and think that we have no responsibility to evangelize, in some way.** If we are willing, and faithful, God will give us opportunities to share our faith with others. **We need to be mentally and spiritually prepared, so that when those opportunities come, we can recognize them and make the most of them.** Jesus was the Master Soulwinner, and He can teach us how we can become “fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19).

This second parable follows along with this idea. Here, Jesus asks a question, worded in such a way as to expect a negative response: “A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck-measure, is it, or under a bed?” The obvious response is, “Of course not!” It is ludicrous. Why would anyone bring a lighted oil lamp into a room, only to put it under a peck-measure, or under a bed? A “peck-measure” was an earthenware container for measuring grain. The lamp could be extinguished under the peck-measure vessel, and it could even start a fire under a bed! Why would you light a lamp and do such a thing? It is craziness! No. Everyone knows that is not what you would do with a lighted lamp! He states the obvious, “Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?” Luke’s account adds “...so that those who come in may see the light” (Lk. 8:17). Another version of the parable states, “...they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (Matt. 5:15). **What is the point?** Like the parable of the sower, where the purpose of planting seed was to get a multiplied crop, here, the purpose of lighting a lamp is so that the light could be *widely* displayed. **The purpose of the light is to shine openly in the darkness, so that people can see clearly.** The lamp is not lit, and brought into a dark place, to be hidden away, or covered up. It cannot fulfill its purpose, then. **Its purpose is to expose the things hidden in the darkness.** Jesus goes on to say that “nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should come to the light.” This statement is then followed by the refrain, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Once again, a parable is a word picture drawn from everyday life, “cast alongside”, or set down, as an illustration of a spiritual truth. Something within the story offers a point of comparison with some important spiritual truth. Here, it would seem obvious, especially since it follows the parable of the soils. **God is expecting something from our lives. If He “lights the lamp” in us, He expects us to put it on display, not hide it away. This is the main point of the parable.**

This illustration is used a number of times in the NT. Jesus Himself had used it before, in the Sermon on the Mount. There, He was describing the characteristics of those who become Kingdom people. Although their outward circumstances may appear difficult to the world, the key word Jesus uses to describe them is “happy” (Matt. 5:1-12). Then, in vs. 13, He uses a parable to describe His followers, “You are the salt of the earth.” He then reminds them that salt that has lost its flavor (lit., “it became foolish”) had become worthless. It was good for nothing, except to be thrown out on the pathways, to be trampled underfoot by people. Then, **He employs the word picture of light to describe His followers, “You are the light of the world”, ...or it could also be accurately translated as, “You are the world’s light”.** That is an interesting word picture, isn’t it? **We are to be shining in the darkness, so that other people can see**

more clearly and, hopefully, find their way (Phil. 2:15). Jesus then uses another word picture to remind us of this purpose, “A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house.” Then comes the application, “In this same way let your light shine before people in order that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in the heavens.” **Like “unsalty salt”, light that is hidden or covered over is of no value to anyone. How do we display our light? Through acts of love and service to others.** We are to be bold and open about doing these good deeds in a way that people can see them. (At the same time, however, we are warned *not* to do them so that people will praise *us*, but that *God* would get the glory. Sometimes that means we must be somewhat secretive about who gave what, e.g., Matt. 6:1-4. What matters is that people know these acts of love and service come from those who know God.)

How do you become a child of light? Jesus said that we need to believe in the light, and walk in it, while it is available to us (Jn. 12:35,36). As we saw with the seed that fell on the path, often we receive opportunities to hear and respond to the truth. If we do not choose for God, then the enemy will try to come in and steal away what was heard. Thus, **it is important to respond to the revelation God makes known to us as soon as possible, or we begin to lose the clarity and sharpness of the insight we had received.** It is important to recognize that **it is through faith that we are transformed into children of light.** Through faith, we are given authority to become God’s children (Jn. 1:12,13). He delivers us from the dominion of darkness, and He is the one who shines His glory into our hearts and qualifies us to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in the light (Col. 1:12,13; II Cor. 4:6). **Faith in what? Ultimately, it is faith that Jesus is the Light of the World, the True Light, who enlightens every person** (Jn. 1:9; 8:12), who died for your sins, and can transform your life, if you will align yourself with Him.

As children of light, we are expected to put off, or abandon, the deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:8-14). We ourselves were formerly darkness, but our identity and inner nature have radically changed, so that **we are now light in the Lord. Therefore we are to walk as children of light,** and we are to learn how to live consistent with that new inner nature. Part of the change involves no longer participating in the unfruitful deeds of darkness. In place of them, we are to try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Instead of partaking in those old behaviors, we are to expose them. The word for “expose” here is very interesting. *It doesn’t mean to judge or tattle-tale. It means to “show something up for what it really is”, by placing alongside of it a better example or alternative.* In other words, **we expose the deeds of darkness primarily by showing forth a positive example. The superior example will expose and even rebuke the lesser behavior as inferior, unhealthy and destructive.** Basically, we “turn the light on” people’s unhealthy and unfruitful behavior by showing them a superior, more righteous and desirable way to live. As Paul writes, “All things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible *is* light” (Eph. 5:13).

It is interesting that Jesus mentions that **there is not a secret, if not to be revealed;** nor is something hidden away, if not in order to come out in the open. It is true that there *are* no secrets. God knows it all, and He *will* bring every act, every careless word, to judgment (Heb. 4:13; Ecc. 12:13,14; Matt. 12:33-36). In *this* context, however, Jesus is probably referring to the fact that **the time will come when the truths He is carefully hiding in parables will be preached openly. In fact, that is the Divine purpose,** to get the message out there. He then warns His listeners to watch what they listen to, because they will be accountable for their response to the truth. If they disregard it, the illumination and understanding they have will be lost. If they respond, God will give them more. In any case, they are to take care to *correctly* listen and understand, so that they can correctly communicate the truth.

What is the purpose of a lamp? Is it not to shine forth clearly, to illuminate brightly, to reveal and expose what is otherwise unseen, and to offer clarity and guidance to those in darkness? What good is a lamp under a bucket? What benefit comes by putting a lamp under a bed? None at all. Just as unfruitful seed, or unsalty salt are worthless, similarly a lamp that is hidden is of no value, either. Even if we work hard at brightening or purifying our flame, unless we are somehow on display to bring healthy, helpful illumination to those in darkness, our efforts will be in vain. **The Christian life is not to be lived in a corner, or under a bucket. It is to be lived out in the open.** Jesus is to be unashamedly the reason why our lives are changing, why we do what we do. **If we are not taking seriously our responsibility to shine the light of Jesus on others, ...if we are not making changes,** if we are still partaking in the deeds of darkness, and continue to hang out with people living in darkness, and never *encourage, challenge, or inspire them toward faith,* truth, health or growth, **...then, in what sense do we think we have light at all?** “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they will see your good works, and glorify My Father who is in the heavens.”