

The Parable of the Lamp and Lampstands

The Gospel of Mark #16

Mark 4:21-25

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.

Over the 25 years that I've been preaching the Word of God in a pulpit on Sunday mornings, there's always a tune or two that swims around in my head just prior to the proclamation event. We usually sing one of them. I don't plan for it either. The song usually just kind of comes forth, slightly off key and two steps down. But there is another one that's always been there in my subconscious just before preaching, though I've yet to sing it. It's the first Christian song I learned by heart. Here are the words to it: The B.I.B.L.E. Yes, that's the book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God. The B.I.B.L.E. *B.* Read it backwards. Read it forwards. Read it backwards. *I.* For your insides. For your outsides. For your insides. *B.* Makes you brave. Makes you bold. Makes you brave. *LE.* Love forever. Love forever. Ever. Ever.

There are many great themes in the Bible that run from cover to cover. There's the theme of what pleases God. That's faith alone. For faith is the substance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. It's by faith and faith alone that the ancients in the B.I.B.L.E. were commended for. There's also the theme of the presence of God. In the beginning, the spirit hovers over waters at creation. In the end, at the re-creation, the Father, Son, and Spirit dwells face to face with His people in the New Garden of Eden. That's what the B.I.B.L.E. tells us. But today, I want to draw your attention to another great theme of the Bible that runs from cover to cover. It's what sets the Book and the People of the Book apart from every other religious claim in the world. It is this theme: light. God created light in the beginning. He guided the Hebrews with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire (light) by night as they marched towards the Promised Land. When they got there, the light of the Menorah continuously burned at the Temple in the Holy of Holies. Isaiah predicted a Messiah would come who would provide light for people walking in darkness. In the New Testament, Jesus is that Messiah who is the Light of the World. And in Revelation, at re-creation, the People of God will have no need for the light of the sun. For the Lord their God himself will give them light.

When last we gathered at the river, my brethren, the pillar of fire burned brightly in the sky as we learned from Jesus about how the Kingdom of God begins in our life in the Parable of the Sower and the Soils. It begins with the fertile soil of hearing the Word of God and responding in the right way. Today, we are going to see the next step. It is this: After we hear the Word of God and respond in the right way, a light begins to shine in our hearts to cause the seed of faith to grow deep inside us. And in time, the light inside begins to be used the way God intended: to be a lamp and light to others. In the Old Testament, Israel was that Lampstand, that city on a hill that cannot be hidden. But unfortunately, something went terribly wrong: they pierced the One wounded for their transgressions and crushed for their iniquities. Now that city on a hill that cannot be hidden is the bride of Christ, the church. As a result, the light God shined in our heart to give us the light, of the knowledge, of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus our Lord has been given to us to do something with. How do we know that? We know that from Jesus Christ himself in one of the greatest parables ever proclaimed on this earth. It's the Parable of the Lamp and the Lampstand. And we can learn four simple lessons about light, lamps, and stands from it. To do that, please turn with me to Mark 4:21-25.

²¹ He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?"²² For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."²⁴ "Consider carefully what you hear," he continued. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.²⁵ Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."

Light, Lamps and Stands Are:

1. **Designed for a Purpose (21)**

- **The Leg Lamp** – (1) In just a little less than two months, one of the greatest movies ever made will run for a period of 24 hours. (2) And it will feature one of the greatest scenes in cinematic history. (3) It all starts with the news of the Old Man winning a major award. (4) Then it builds with a wooden box arriving that the Old Man understands to be "Fraageelee." It must be Italian. (5) Then it culminates with not just any old lamp, but the mysterious leg lamp. (6) And the first the Old Man does it put it in the window.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Light is designed to shine. Lamps are designed to harness that light and make it shine continuously. And Lampstands are designed to give that light a platform for greater reach.
- **The Two Rhetorical Questions:** (1) Jesus begins the parable with two rhetorical questions. Both of which the audience knows the obvious answer. (2) Putting a lamp under a bowl or a stand would defeat the purpose. But putting it on a stand to let the lamp reach illuminate dark places fulfills the purpose.
- **Lamps and Lampstands in the New Testament World:** (1) The ancient Mediterranean world had no electricity, but plenty of olive oil. (2) Lamps were ceramic looking objects that looked much a genie vase. They were oblong objects with a spout. The ancients poured oil in them and then

lit them and, viola, you have a lamp. (3) A major piece of furniture in the Ancient World wasn't a couch or even a bed. It was a lampstand. They were placed strategically throughout the house so that as people moved from room to room, there would be a place the lamp.

- **App:** The Kingdom of God starts with hearing the Word and responding in the right way. When that happens, a light begins to shine and provide illumination to all former areas of darkness in your life. That's how he works. That's because you are that lampstand.

2. Shine for a Purpose (22)

- **There's No Middle Road Response to the Phrase "I Am a Christian":** (1) For the last 2000 years, there's been one constant reaction to saying: "I am a C. I am a Ch. I am a Christian." (2) One response: Praise the Lord. It's why people who know the Lord but speak a different language can embrace. (3) But the other is just as common: hostility. Even world leaders have thrown out the most disparaging of comments: "I like your Christ very much. It's your Christians I have a problem with" (Mahatma Gandhi).
- **Main Idea of the Point:** God designed light to shine for this purpose: to illuminate darkness. When that happens, those who walk in darkness and see a way out of it rejoice. Those who wish to remain in darkness scorn.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Whatever is Hidden is Meant to be Disclosed:** (1) The best instrument to keep the peace in an ancient city wasn't a Billy club and a pair of handcuffs. (2) Instead, it was light that flowed from city lamps placed in common areas. (3) Before the lamps were lit, people had to rely in the light of the moon to get where they were going. It also was dangerous to travel because of it (though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil). When they were lit, they could see. (4) And when they were lit, those who were engaged in shenanigans often scattered.
- **The Point:** The light and the lamps shine in the world to do both things: **(a)** to reveal grace and **(b)** to reveal darkness. Thus, the reason for the two responses. Jesus was saying that's what his reign as Messiah is all about. As his light bearers, we share in that rejoicing in one corner and reproach in the other.
- **App:** The sign from heaven that our light is shining the way it is intended to shine is when it produces both responses, not one or the other. That's what light is designed to do.

3. Sustained by a Principle (24)

- **The Battery Displays at the Dollar General:** (1) If you want to see the principle of you get what you pay for at work, take a tour of the Dollar General and stop at the battery display. (2) If a hurricane is coming and you get there in time to buy batteries, you notice two different options: (a) a 12 pack of generic AA batteries for 5 dollars (at the Dollar General, but I digress) or (b) an Energizer 12 pack of AA batteries for 50 thousand dollars. (2) Which one are you going to buy when you prepare for a hurricane? The Energizers, of course. They keep going and going.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The best lamps have biggest oil reservoir, necessary to keep the light continuously shining.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: The Measure Principle:** (1) One of the hardest statements of the parable to make sense of occurs in v24: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (2) Some take this like "judge not lest you be judged." (3) But that's not the case here because it ends with the positive "even more" and doesn't fit with the theme of the parable. (4) Understanding the historical context of lamps will help us understand what he means. (5) Small lamps with small reservoirs held enough oil for a time and burned out after a while. But bigger lamps with bigger reservoirs could more oil and burn brighter for longer periods of time.
- **App:** The degree your light shines is directly related to the degree that you work on and invest in your relationship with the Light of the World, himself: Jesus. With the measure you use, it will be measured to you. If you invest more time in Him, you will learn more about Him. If you devote more time to shining, you will shine brightly in direct portion to the time you invested.

4. Given with Fine Print (25)

- **Hard Education for Florida Residents about Disney Passes:** (1) The first thing people told me about living in Florida was to get Disney passes as a Florida Resident. (2) Problem is, I didn't read the print and showed up at Disney on a blackout date. (3) That made for a bad day.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The gift of being a lampstand of God comes with Provident fine print: Don't take it for granted. If you do, the lampstand will be removed. On the other hand, if you treasure the gift, God will expand the influence of your lampstand.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Caution and Encouragement:** (1) The parable ends with a word of encouragement "whoever has will be given more" and a word of caution: "whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away. (2) To fully appreciate what Jesus says here, you must understand the call of Israel. (3) Israel was that lampstand in the Old Testament. When the oil started running out, God sent prophet to warn them. (4) They didn't listen, and the lamp and stands were removed. (5) The same thing applies to Christians. In fact, Jesus warns the 7 churches in Revelation that it is possible for God to remove a lampstand. (6) But the reverse is also true, the more oil desire for our lamps, they greater our influence will be.
- **App:** The influence of Genesis Church in this community will rise or fall not just with the preacher, but with each one of you, the lampstands. We've seen God put sacred torches out. But may that never happen here. May ours burn brighter this day and it did when God first lit it. Praise the Lord. Thine the Glory.