

Text: Luke 8:16-21

Title: Lamps and Family Members

Truth: Hear and obey God's word so that God's truth shines through you.

Date/Location: February 18, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

The Bible tells us the audience is a great multitude. A straightforward reading of the text as it applies to this audience suggests that the application of the Lord's word is to all of humanity, not a subset.

The immediately preceding parable of the soils concerns how you and I hear and keep God's word, which Jesus likens to a seed. In other words, it is about how we understand it, believe it, obey it, and produce good fruit as a result.

I. Seeing the Light, v. 16-17

A. The word of God is like a seed, but it is also like light. The Lord uses the metaphor of light to call us to demonstrate our faith "out there" in real life and to shine it into the lives of other people.

Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Lord in verse 16 illustrates with a lamp: you do not light it and then cover it up with an opaque object. No one who has a lamp intentionally covers it because that would waste the light, the fuel, the wick, etc. It would completely defeat the purpose of creating light. If you are just going to cover it with a basket or set it in a low corner of the room under a piece of furniture, you might as well extinguish the torch or candle. You might use something translucent to reduce glare or make the light more appropriate for the setting, but never to snuff it out entirely. Rather, you put it up high. God revealed light to have it be seen, not hidden.

B. What is light? Light sometimes represents holiness in Scripture (1 John 1:5). Other times, as here, it represents God's truth and particularly his truth about Jesus (2 Cor. 4:6). It represents the message of Christ as it manifests itself in the life of a Christian.

C. In the same way, if we have the seed of God's word and the light of God's truth, then it is completely ridiculous to store it in a freezer so it cannot grow, or obscure it so it cannot shine. We instead set it on a lampstand, up high, in a visible place, so that it shines and people are blessed by the light. It then serves its purpose.

Shining the light and *seeing* it are two different things, so I offer an extended illustration to help you understand how that happens.

John 1:5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

- D. The phenomenon of visible light makes up a small portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. On that spectrum you find shortwave radio signals, AM and FM radio signals, television, microwaves, infra-red radiation, visible radiation (which we call light, in its diverse colors), ultraviolet light, x-rays, and gamma-rays. They are all forms of the same type of thing: EM radiation. God created the human eye to be sensitive to a small range of radiation from 400 (violet) to 700 nanometers (deep red) in wavelength, with all the colors between.
- E. Some people can see outside the normal visible part of the electromagnetic spectrum. For example, the lens of the eye blocks UV light. If a surgeon removes that lens, then the person can see another 100 nanometers into the UV range where the light looks blueish white in color. Then also imagine if you could see radio waves of various sorts. The world would be a busy looking place!
- F. We can illustrate *truth* using *light*. In my illustration, I could say "truth is on a spectrum" but that might confuse someone who is not paying attention. I am not talking about "your truth, my truth, someone else's truth" and truth having various gradations. I am talking about several types of truth or "facts," like mathematical, scientific, social, moral, and Biblical facts. Line these categories in your mind or on a piece of paper like an electromagnetic spectrum chart. Now think of human perception of these truths. Our "eyes" can naturally see some mathematical truths very easily, like addition and subtraction, and with a little more squinting, also multiplication and long division! It takes people with more acute

vision in the mathematical part of this spectrum to see derivatives and integrals and Fourier transforms. Similarly, some facts in the realm of physics are easier, some harder to see. General facts are easy enough to see if they are brought to “light,” but they are often hidden from vision by propaganda or misinformation or just general ignorance due to lack of proper teaching or homework.

- G. Moral truth exists at the edge of human ability to understand. Some people see more moral “light” than others. Biblical truth is beyond the grasp of humanity in our native state. Like our inability to see ultraviolet light or radio waves, in an analogous way humans—because of their innate spiritual condition—are not tuned to grasp God’s truth without a serious upgrade in capability. God has designed that the upgrade happens when a person contritely repents of their sin and trusts in Jesus Christ.
- H. Christian theologians have more direct, less “metaphorical,” expressions of this situation. But I thought that the illustration of frequencies beyond our ability to see with our eyeballs might help you to understand when you observe or interact with non-Christian people that they have a kind of blindness. It is hard to understand. You might exclaim with frustration, “Can’t you see!?” But the reality is that they *cannot* see because that part of the truth spectrum is outside of the capability of their “eyes.” No matter how brightly *your* light is shining in their direction, they may miss it entirely, or mis-interpret it, or be confused by it because it seems to interfere with their normal vision.

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

- I. Even though there is this kind of spiritual blindness to the wavelengths of God’s truth, Christians are called to shine it brightly anyway. The least we can do is eliminate any obstacles, like lampshades or hiding the light under our bed! The natural obstacles are too severe already to be adding any more.
- J. Verse 17 looks forward to the final judgment and reminds us that God will lay everything bare. Secrets will be open, hidden things

will be brought to light (1 Cor. 4:5). In other words, the light of truth is going to shine at some point into every life. That includes us who have the Word of God—did we hide or shine the light in our life? God makes known the good news of Christ to us, with the purpose that we would become conduits of the light to others.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

II. Hearing the Light, v. 18

- A. I trust you will tolerate one more technical illustration. It is about *synesthesia*. “Synesthesia is when your brain routes sensory information through multiple unrelated senses, causing you to experience more than one sense simultaneously. Some examples include tasting words or linking colors to numbers and letters.”¹ It is “a neurologic condition in which two or more senses mix or amplify one another.”² How about *hearing light*? “A new study suggests that one particular form of this condition—hearing sounds from flashes of light—may be more common than once thought...22 percent of participants claimed they heard faint sounds associated with the flashing lights.”²
- B. In verse 18, our Lord Jesus Christ switches abruptly from a shining light to something heard, which connects back to verse 15 where seed is proclaimed by word of mouth: “Therefore take heed how you hear.” So, how do *you* hear the light? When the light of God’s truth flashes across your eyes, do you hear it in your heart? Do you keep it and bear fruit (Luke 8:15)?
- C. “How we hear” refers to how we respond to God’s truth. We might be or function as if we are deaf to it, as if it is outside of our range of hearing. “How” in that situation is bad. Or, if God has tuned up our hearing to hear the truth, the question is, are we doing more

¹ <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24995-synesthesia>

² <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/hearing-flashes-light-may-be-much-more-common-thought-180961850/>

with the truth we hear than just storing it away? Are we turning it back into light to shine out to others?

- D. Considering the coming judgment (v. 17), we must pay close attention to how we hear the word of God. Verse 18 continues with a two-part explanation that on first reading suggests that the rich will get richer, and the poor will become poorer. True—but the “wealth” is not monetary—the currency is divine revelation and the knowledge of God. If someone hears the word with care, he is the “one who has.” God will reward him or her with more such light in this life and in eternity. But to the one who does not pay heed and listen to the words of God, God will take away what little bit he has.³ This teaches us that spiritual life and truth are not static. If you seek them, you will receive more. If you reject them, your situation will not remain the same but will degrade.

III. The Lord’s True Relatives, v. 19-21

- A. Mary and her other sons could not physically get near to Jesus because of the crowd. Those present relayed the message to Jesus that His family was trying to see Him. The other gospels indicate that the family thought Jesus was overdoing it or was beside Himself with all the activity and crowds (Mark 3:20-21, 3:31-35).
- B. The Lord’s reply may shock our sensibilities, but He is *not* dissing His dear mom and brothers. He took the opportunity of the situation to teach two spiritual lessons. **First**, to His family members, He was not going to stop what He was doing because of their incorrect evaluation. There was no problem with Him. He was *not* out of His mind. In fact, He was “about His Father’s business” as some translations render His childhood statement (Luke 2:49). He was teaching the way of God in truth; the people needed to

³ Matthew 25:21, 28 have similar wording and a similar concept, but that passage is not specifically about revelatory information from God. It is more general, speaking of the resources that God has given to His servants and with which they can serve Him. If they steward well those resources by being faithful, God will give them more, perhaps in this life and more in the next life. One of those many resources is God’s revelation, but in Luke 8, the specific focus is on revelatory information as “light” and how we “hear that light.”

hear it; and His family members also needed to hear and obey the word of God just like everyone else.

The **second** lesson applies what Jesus has been just teaching about the seed growing and the light shining. As close as Mary and the brothers were “by blood,” Jesus says that those who hear God’s word and obey it are as close and even closer to him in the spiritual realm. They are related to him by “blood” too—another kind of blood, to be sure, the blood of the cross, which makes one in fact closer than a blood relative. Those who hear with a noble and good heart and keep the word and bear fruit and set their light to shine out are Jesus’s mother and brothers (Heb. 2:11)! They are his friends (John 15:5). Christians are part of God’s family, the body, the church. Christ is the head of that household!

C. In this way, Jesus ties His preaching all together...seed to growth, to hearing and obeying, to light set forth, to hearing and obeying again, to being rightly related to Him.

Conclusion

The lamp’s lesson for us is that we must set forth our light to those around us. If our light is dark, how will our neighbors see the light of Christ? How we “hear the light” is critical—like letting the seed *grow* instead of sitting in the freezer doing nothing! Our response will be tested at the judgment.

Matthew 10:32-33 ³² Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

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