

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 21st February 2021. Andy Banks.
Mark 4:21-25 - Jesus' Parables: The Shining Light and the Measure

For those with children in Godzone feel free to access the parallel video to this talk on our YouTube channel. We're continuing our series in Mark's Gospel, asking ourselves the question Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do *you* say I am?" And, "What difference does who he is make to your life?" It's a short reading today from 4:21-25.

[Read Mark 4:21-25]

21He 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?

22For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

23If 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. 25Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.'

[Pray]

I thought we could enjoy a little candlelight while I talk this morning.

[Light candle, then place flowerpot over the top]

Knowing how much you appreciate them, Jon and Helen! There is something incredibly beautiful about candles. The way they glow and flicker, and the flame is consistent but constantly moving. In fact, fire in general has a real beauty about it – providing it doesn't get out of control. It really can mesmerise us! Nature's television, as I've heard it described! ... But not when it's hidden under a bowl or a pot!

[Lift up flowerpot]

And not just because it goes out! Even if it stayed alight, there'd be no point in lighting a candle, only to hide it so you couldn't see its light. No-one in their right mind would do that! So, we're going to relight this candle and let it shine and enjoy its light.

[Light candle again]

But I'm hoping that may have illustrated how deliberately ridiculous Jesus' picture-parable was, here. Following on, as it does, from the parable of the Seed and the Soils, perhaps it offers further explanation as to how the *good* soil produces a crop of thirty, sixty or a hundred times what was sown. For, we will not produce a good harvest if we "hide our light under a bushel" (as the Old King James Bible puts it). Rather we must let our light shine boldly before people.

But what is the light that we are to let shine? What has been hidden, or is at risk of being hidden, that should be disclosed? First and foremost, it is the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ, itself. It is the truth that, with the coming of Jesus into the world, the Kingdom of God has come near, too. Four times in his letters, Paul also refers to the gospel as a *mystery* that *was* hidden and has *now* been revealed. Actually, it's worth exploring those references briefly because together they give us a richer understanding both of why this gospel was hidden for so long, and of how and why God has revealed it now.

In Romans 16:25-27, Paul highlights how his preaching about Jesus was "in keeping with the revelation of the mystery *hidden* for long ages past, but now *revealed* and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith." In other words, the full meaning of the Old Testament prophetic writings remained a mystery through the centuries *until Jesus came*, when they finally made sense. And one purpose of God revealing their true meaning was so that the Gentiles – the non-Jews – might be welcomed into God's chosen people.

Similarly, in Colossians 1:24-27, Paul talks of a "mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people," particularly the Gentiles. He also explains something of what this glorious mystery is: "which is Christ in *you*, the hope of glory." One of the most amazing truths that has now been revealed in the gospel, is that Jesus Christ comes to live within his followers through the Holy Spirit of God coming to dwell in each of us.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, Paul talks of the revelation of this previously hidden mystery as “God’s wisdom” displayed, which brings *us* glory. Because, by his Spirit, he has revealed to us the glorious *future* he has prepared for us, which “no eye has seen, ... no ear has heard, and ... no human mind has conceived.” But Paul also declares that, “None of the rulers of this age understood [this mystery], for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” So, God kept his plans in Christ hidden to a degree and for a time because human ignorance was actually essential for the fulfilment of those plans. Without it, Jesus would not have been crucified for us, and then we could not have been rescued from our sin and brought into God’s Kingdom.

Lastly, in Ephesians 3:7-10, Paul talks of the grace God gave *him* to make known this previously hidden mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ (especially to the Gentiles). But interestingly he adds that God’s intent in revealing this mystery, “was that now, through the *church*, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the *heavenly realms*.” God wants to use us to declare the mystery of his plans in Jesus Christ, not just to our fellow humans but also to all the unseen spiritual beings around us – both angels and demons.

Of course, there *remains* a degree of hiddenness about this gospel, even now. For, as Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 4:4, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” His glory will only be revealed fully to *all* when he comes again at the end of time, when *every* eye will see him, and *every* tongue confess that he is God. But nevertheless, the light of his glory has been significantly revealed in his first coming, and continues to be revealed through his faithful believers.

This is the light we are called to “put on its stand” so that all will clearly see it. “For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.” This is also further evidence that Jesus’ teaching in parables was not designed to deliberately *obscure* the truth, but rather to shine a light that would *draw* people *to* the truth. By extension then, each of us is also called to boldly display the light of *our* inner faith in Jesus Christ for others to see. For, as *we* shine the light of *our* faith in word and deed, the light of Christ’s gospel will also disclose to other people their need of him. That’s what a light does if you bring it into a room and let it shine – it shows up what is in the room. Similarly, by living openly for God, we shed some of God’s light on the lives of those around us such that, if they are willing, they too may see the light of his glory, displayed in the face of Christ. Once again, Jesus concludes, “If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

He then continues with a different picture-parable to encourage us to consider *carefully* what we hear. In other words, to not simply hear it and move on, but rather to hear it, to chew over what it means for our lives, and to act upon it. Measures, in Israel, were not standardised as they are today. We know that, because God sometimes called the Israelites out for cheating people by using *different* scales and measures depending on whether they were buying or selling. And there are other times when God made clear that measures were to be determined by the measuring implements used in the sanctuary.

So what measure are we to use in listening to God’s word? Jesus says, “The most generous one possible.” We are to consciously make the effort to take in as much as we can from Jesus’ teaching, to listen with open hearts and open minds such that we comprehend his meaning. But not for mere intellectual understanding – the cold, faithless study of theology as a mere academic discipline, as exists in many universities, is no good to anyone. No, we are to *listen* so as to *believe*. And we are to *trust* Jesus’ words to the extent that we put them into *practice* in our own lives and boldly shine his light to others by sharing his good gospel with them.

For, Jesus says, “If you use a generous measure when listening to my words, God will use a generous measure with what he reveals to you of himself and of his purposes through me. And if you act upon my words in large measure, then God will grant to you a large measure of reward both in *this* life (say in answered prayer, or in peace in your hearts in all situations), and also when it comes to Judgement Day. You will receive the rewards that are beyond anything any human eye has seen, any human ear has heard of, or any human mind has even imagined.

Contrastingly, if you use a stingy measure when listening to my words, if you don't allow them to penetrate to your hearts and wills and change you from the inside out, then even that understanding of me that you think you have will be taken from you. And you will be left without me in the final reckoning."

There is a sober warning in those words for unbelievers, but also for those who would say to themselves, "I'm doing well. I go to church and I hear the Bible preached. That's good enough for me." It isn't enough to merely *hear* Jesus' words, unless we *act* upon them and actively choose to entrust our life to him as our personal Saviour and Lord. It has to get personal – "Who do *you* say I am?" And, if we put this parable together with the Parable of the Shining Light that preceded it, we can see that it isn't enough to hold a private faith that no-one ever knows about. For Jesus longs that what is hidden in our hearts will be declared publicly, so that God will be glorified in all the world. I'm not saying a private faith may not be enough to get us into heaven. But who wants to scrape into heaven when they can be welcomed with a "Well done, good and faithful servant"? And if we truly love Jesus, would we not want to live to please him?

Having said that, though the warning exists, the emphasis here is not on the potential *negative* judgement to come, but rather on the abundant *generosity* of God towards those who hear Jesus' words with a generous measure: "Whoever has will be given *more*" ... and more and more and more! This is our God. He loves to give! He loves to bless! His heart's desire is that he might reveal more and more of himself to us. "Whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed." But God waits to see who he can trust with greater revelation, to whom it will be the greatest blessing because a greater revelation will make them love him even more.

Have you ever looked at another Christian and thought to yourself, "Why do they seem to hear from God so easily? How do they understand God so well?" The truth is, it's probably because they put in the effort to listen – in prayer and in reading the Bible. As David Linley was sharing with the prayer meeting this week, we need to all learn how to be *still* before God, so as to know afresh that he is God. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and *even more*." What sort of a Christian walk do you want? What measure are you using? How brightly is the Light shining through you?

[Pray]