

Lamps Belong on Lampstands (Luke 8: 4 - 21)

Challenging his wife with a riddle, the man began, "You're the engineer of the train. There are 36 people on board. At the first stop, 10 get off and 2 get on. At the next stop, no one gets off, but 5 get on. At the third stop, 4 get off and 2 get on. Now for the question: What is the name of the engineer?"

"How should I know?" snapped the wife.

"See, you never listen! Right at the start I said, 'You are the engineer of the train.'

I did think of reversing the roles as we husbands are renowned for not listening and comprehending what our wives are saying to us, well certainly in my case.

This morning we are going to be thinking about hearing and doing and proclaiming. Our starting of point is Luke 8: 16 and this short parable. "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.". The earthly meaning of the parable is simple. When it was dark enough to light a lamp, you'd set it high enough to provide illumination. What you don't do is light the lamp and hide it, that would be pointless, senseless, futile. Jesus probably told this parable scores of times during his ministry. It's found in several places besides here in Luke 8:16 you will find it in Mark 4:21, Matthew 5:15 and Luke 11:33.

Let's remember that a parable is an earthly story used to illustrate a spiritual point. Let's look this parable with fresh eyes to see what spiritual point Jesus actually wanted to teach his disciples.

Listen anew to Jesus' words. "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light." (8:16) Jesus' statement is almost funny -- and he probably smiled when he said it. The earthly focus of this parable is the lamp and light. So here in this parable what does the lamp and light represent spiritually?

First, let's look at the immediate context. The parable is followed by a verse about nothing being hidden verse 17, and then in verse 18 a familiar saying "Therefore consider carefully how you listen" , which is very similar to verse 8 in the Parable of

the Soils: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear". In fact, the word "hear" appears seven times in the Parable of the Soils.

The clear theme of the Parable of the Soils is hearing and responding to the Word of God, and it appears that this theme of hearing the Word of God stretches from 8:1 where Jesus is traveling from village to town "proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God" to 8:21 where Jesus finishes with an emphasis on doing by saying that his true family are those who hear God's Word and do it.

If hearing and doing is the theme of 8: 1 - 21, then it is reasonable that the light in 8:16 is the Word of God, the Good News, the message of the Kingdom that Jesus has been proclaiming all over Galilee. However, the lamp itself, the vessel for the light if you will, is those who have heard the good news and now need to let that light, the Good News of the Kingdom they have been hearing shine for all men to see. Here is the hearing and doing. Jesus' clear expectation is that those who have heard the Good News will now share it freely with those around them. It's all about hearing and doing or receiving and giving.

In verse 16 Jesus is addressing a serious issue that those who have heard the Good News will not to share it, but rather to hide it away. Why would Jesus' think that those who have heard the Good News would be tempted not to share what they have received? Why would they be tempted not to let the light shine. Well, probably for the same reasons that we today are tempted to hide the light we have received under the bed or stuff in a jar.

- Fear of persecution.
- Fear of being ostracized from "respectable society,".
- Fear that we won't be accepted by those closest to us.
- Fear of ridicule.
- Fear that this will affect our business.
- Fear that we will lose our job.

Are we tempted to not proclaim the Word of God, not to let the light shine before all people? I think that we all find it difficult to share the Good News

Jesus then makes a bold statement, "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open."
(8:17)

The use of *for* at the beginning of verse 17 links it to verse 16. This linking of the two verse allows us to simply understand Jesus as saying, "Don't hide the message now, because everything is now to be revealed."

In the Parable of the Soils, "the secrets of the kingdom" have been given to the disciples (Luke 8:10). But these secrets of the kingdom, this Good News, is now to be revealed to all. It is now to be out in the open to be proclaimed for all men to see. Yes, some will not understand it, some will reject it, and some will struggle with it, but it still needs to be proclaimed. This Good News would shine through Jesus' continuing ministry and then through the disciples and eventually through us. Jesus is saying now is the time to proclaim the Word of God, this Good News that he has revealed in Himself. That is the disciples' and our glory and our vital mission. The lamp has been lit; this light, this Word of God, this Good News must not be hidden but must be set on high so all can see. This light is to shine forth in the lives of all disciples everywhere.

Moving on to verse 18 "Therefore, consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

Why does Jesus warn us again about how we listen? Because there is a danger of self-deception, the deception of merely hearing and not doing. The parable of the "Wise and Foolish Builders" is about those who heard Jesus' words and put them into practice versus those who heard the same words but did not apply them. For those foolish builders who only heard Jesus word there were catastrophic consequences. So, in verse 18 Jesus warns again, "Consider carefully how you listen" (NIV). Jesus' brother James (who is mentioned indirectly in the next verses), gives a similar warning in his epistle: *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately*

forgets what he looks like." (James 1: 22 - 24). Verse 18 has stark warning for those who just listen to the Good News and refuse to do anything with it.

The message hearing and doing and proclaiming is driven home in verses 19 -21 with a brief rather shocking account of Jesus's encounter with his family. *"Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.' 'He replied, 'My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice.' "* (Luke 8:19-21)

Does this seem harsh to you? It certainly seems rather harsh to me. But to the ears of Jesus' disciples, raised in a culture where family was preeminent, and held together with the unbreakable bonds of blood these words were doubly harsh. The disciples must have been utterly shocked!

Jesus intended for them to be shocked so they would never forget the lesson he was teaching: "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." Hearing God's word and putting it into practice is the message that must be indelibly tattooed upon our minds.

The message of Good News, the Word of God, this light of the Gospel must never be hidden, but proclaimed even more widely. That is Jesus' clear directive. The lamp that is lit to be placed on a lampstand to give light to all who enter. The time for secrecy is past -- now everyone must know. That is our great commission Matthew 28: 18 – 20 *"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Wait before you that we are all to pick up our Bible and soap boxes and go and stand outside Morrison's to proclaim the Good News, I would urge to think through what we having been looking at this morning. Yes, some are called and given gifts by God to be Evangelists publicly declaring the Good News and that was certainly what Jesus

wanted the Apostles to do. **John Holwell**. However not everybody is called to let the light shine in such a manner but all of us are called to let the light shine by doing what we have heard. There is a link here between hearing and doing and shining. It is clear that Jesus believed that if we lived out his words, we would be proclaiming his message as loudly and as clearly if we stood on a soap box outside Morrisons with a megaphone. If we do what we have heard, we will shine brightly in the darkness proclaiming the Good News to all we encounter. We let the light shine in our lives when we love our neighbour as ourselves, when we love those around us as Jesus would, when we live our life as God wills and commands, when we sacrifice our own selfish desires to serve those around us. We are called to be a living Gospel to be lamp shining forth the Good News of the Kingdom of God to all those around us.

Edgar Guest's great quote makes the point more elegantly than I can:

*"I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs."*

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you have said this with such power and finality -- hear and do, hear and put into practice, hear and proclaim. Let me never be ashamed of You and your Word as sometimes I have been. Forgive me. Let me proclaim it as fearlessly as you and your disciples did. In Your holy name, I pray. Amen.