

The Memoirs of Peter
Eyes to See, Ears to Hear (Part 1)
August 2, 2009
Mark 4:21-25

Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

In the brief time that we have remaining to us tonight to look into the Word of God, I want us to look at a brief parable. As we continue our study of Mark's gospel, I invite you to turn with me to Mark 4. And I want to begin by reading just a short passage, the next passage in our study together. Mark chapter 4, and I'll begin reading in verse 21. This is, of course, after His explanation of the Parable of the Soils. He says in verse 21,

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

Mark here records for us two brief parables of our Lord's. These two parables are intimately connected. They are both about the truth of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ. Together these two parables tell us why the truth has been revealed and why we should be careful to listen. Tonight I want us to look briefly at the first of these two parables, and that is the Parable of the Lamp.

Remember that the first parable in this chapter, the Parable of the Soils, was spoken to the multitude that was gathered there around the Sea of Galilee as Jesus is on a boat just out from the shore, speaking to that cove there on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. Mark 4:10-20 was

spoken privately to His disciples later on in the day, as they had left the lake and gone into a house. So that's kind of a parenthesis. Mark now takes us back in verse 21 to where Jesus was speaking in parables to that crowd that was gathered there on the sea. And He picks up with another parable that Jesus told them.

Now, you recognize these sayings, these aphorisms of Christ, because they appear in other places in the gospel. You've probably seen them and read them in other contexts. Often they appear in a totally different context and with entirely different meanings, so don't always assume that it's exactly the same meaning when Jesus tells a story. As D. Edmond Hiebert writes, "These brief, proverbial utterances are pithy seed thoughts which might be used on numerous occasions with different applications." Let's see how Jesus used them here.

I want us to start, as we look at the Parable of the Lamp, with the illustration itself. We need to understand what Jesus is describing. Verse 21 says, "He was saying to them, 'A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?'" Now this would have been a very familiar image in the teaching of Jesus. In fact, He used this same illustration on three different occasions. He uses it with His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. There His meaning is we are to let the light of our good works show to others. You remember that passage. He uses it in Luke 11 to unbelieving Jews, basically saying to them listen, you have received the light of truth in My preaching. I'm the lamp, and what I've taught you is the light. You've received the light of My preaching just like the truth was revealed in the preaching of Jonah to Nineveh. And He judges them for it. This is the third time that Jesus uses this illustration. It's here in Mark 4 and in the parallel passage Luke 8:16-17. And Jesus basically asks the crowd that's gathered there on the shore two questions in a parable form. The first question expects a negative answer, and the second question a positive answer, even in how He addresses them in the Greek language.

The first question literally is this: the lamp does not come to be put under a basket, does it, or under a bed? Now, in that short statement Jesus mentions three items that were present in every Jewish home in the first century. By “lamp” He was referring to just a small terracotta bowl that held only a small amount of olive oil. It was often enclosed. It had a hole on top in which to pour in the olive oil, had a wick (and sometimes it would have a handle) for burning. This is some early versions. You see one that was from the time of Abraham, a model of the one from the time of Abraham. That particular one may not be from the time of Abraham. But it gives you a picture of what they were like (and have been pieced together through archaeology) where you have double wicks that cross, and you have four flames out of one olive oil lamp. Then the time of David they were pinched just once. You see, still an open bowl. By the time you get to New Testament times, it would've looked something like that: a small hole which to pour the oil, a wick coming out and a flame. That was the lamp He referred to.

Then He says when you have a lamp like this, you don't put it “under a basket.” The Greek word for “basket” is a word borrowed from Latin, the language of Rome. It was a dry measure that was used, for example, with grain. It was about a peck, about eight quarts or about two gallons in size. And He says you don't put the lamp under a basket, a dry-measure basket of two-gallon size. You don't put it “under a bed.” The word for “bed” there could refer to two different pieces of furniture. It could refer to the cloth mat on which most people slept in the first century. It was kept simply rolled up during the day and over in the corner, and it was laid out at night, perhaps on an elevated area in your home. Or the word could refer to the slightly-elevated couch on which wealthier people slept and reclined on one side to eat their meals. Perhaps you've seen pictures of that or you've seen images of it. So Jesus says listen, you don't light a lamp—which was the primary source of light in the Jewish home in the first century at night. When it got dark this was your only source of light. He says you don't light a lamp in the darkness only to cover it with a basket, because that would be to—what? Extinguish its flame. You don't put it under a mattress or under a couch. That too would either extinguish the flame or it would diminish the light, and so you don't do that either. So the answer to His first question is of course not. You

don't take a lamp and light it at night to cover its light, to diminish its light or to extinguish its light.

That brings us to the second question. “Is it [that is, the lamp] not brought to be put on the lampstand?” In a first-century Jewish home at night, you light this lamp. It's your primary source of light. You wanted it to be up so that it spread the most light around the room. That's why we put our lamps on tables, or we have floor lamps that rise a little higher, or we even hang them from the ceiling, because the higher up, the more light they cast across the room. In the first-century home there would have been a shelf extending out from a wall or a pillar, or perhaps a separate stand near the center of the room for the lamp. There's a shelf in a first-century home that was uncovered, and the lamp would have sat on it much like that, set up high so it would cast light around the room. Jesus says of course, if you light an oil lamp in a dark home at night, you do so for the light to be seen as far as possible. So you put it on a lampstand. Recently, (maybe you had the same experience we did) our power went out on a couple of occasions. And it went out in the evening after dark. So I kind of felt my way to the place where we keep our flashlights and broke out the flashlight, and then went and found all the other fun things that the kids wanted to play with in the dark. You know, the lanterns, et cetera. Why do you take a flashlight and turn it on when it's dark? Do you do it to hide the light? No. Why wouldn't you put it under something? Because you want the light to be seen as far as possible. That's Jesus' point. And so in Luke 8:16, Luke records that Jesus added to these two questions: “He puts it on a lampstand, [in order] that those who come in may see the light.” Jesus says you light a lamp in a home that's dark, you give it as much exposure as possible.

Now that raises the first and important question that we have to answer. What is the lamp? What is the light? Well, remember what comes right before this. The Parable of the Soils. And in the Parable of the Soils it's about the seed and how it falls into the soils. What's the seed? The Word of God. The truth of God. And then you have clearly in 4:24-25—which we'll look at,

Lord willing, next week—you have truly one's response to the Word of God, listening to the Word of God. So it seems clear then when you put the evidence together that the lamp is the truth of God revealed and manifested, made known through the teaching of Jesus Christ. He is the lamp, and the light is His teaching. It brings light in the darkness. It brings understanding. It brings knowledge, a knowledge of God, a knowledge of His ways. Isn't that even what the psalmist hinted at in Psalm 119:130? "The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." And when you come to the Gospel of John, John really focuses on Jesus as this light. John 1:5, "The Light shines in the darkness [referring to Jesus], and the darkness did not comprehend it." John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light." Notice, even the translators understood it to be a reference to Christ, and they capitalized it.

The Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

John 8:12, "Jesus again spoke to them, saying, 'I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.'" And John 12:36, "While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light." By the way, there's a sober warning there. Jesus was warning the people of His time that there would come a time when there would be no more light for them. You don't respond to the light? Eventually there's no light for you to see at all.

The point here in this lamp parable is that as the light of an oil lamp is intended to be seen, and you do everything you can to make it seen, God intended that the light of truth that Jesus taught be seen. Christ wanted people to see the light. That's the purpose of the lamp. You say well,

wait a minute. Didn't we just study in chapter 4 that Jesus spoke in parables partly to to conceal the light, to conceal the truth? Look back in Mark 4:10:

As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, "To you [it] has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but [to] those... outside [they] get everything in parables, SO THAT WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."

What does that seem to imply? That God wants to limit people's vision of the light. But here's Jesus' point in this parable: concealing the truth in parables was a judgment on the Jews of that time, and it was not God's long-term plan. How do I know that? Look at verse 22: "For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light." This is also a statement that Jesus makes on several occasions. It has different meanings and different applications depending on its context. Here Jesus means this: God intended that the light of truth be seen, and to whatever extent the truth of God had been hidden in the parables Jesus used, it was eventually His intention that it be completely revealed and made manifest. To whatever extent the truth had been kept secret by the use of parables, it was ultimately Jesus' intention that it would come to light.

Think about it for a moment. Isn't that exactly what happened after Jesus' death and resurrection? The crowd at the Sea of Galilee in Mark 4, what did they hear? Only the parables. They didn't hear the explanations. It was the disciples who got the explanations. But the disciples were not to imagine for a moment that Jesus intended for them to keep what He had revealed to them secret. What happens after His death and resurrection? At Jesus' own

prompting the apostles wrote down for anyone who was interested the explanation. What was secret was intended to be revealed. What'd been hidden was intended to be declared. So that for everyone who has ears to hear, not only the parables spoken publicly were revealed, but even the private explanations Jesus gave only to His disciples are here. And anyone who's willing to open this book and read them can get in on the secret. So the light was not ultimately intended to be shielded from people. It was intended to be seen as far and wide as possible. "For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light."

So there's the illustration. In Jesus and in His ministry, God had set the lamp of the light of truth on a lampstand for everyone to see. Can you get that picture in your mind? Jesus is the lamp. His teaching is the light. And God put Him on the lampstand in the middle of all of those people in Israel, so the light could go as far and wide as possible. And even to whatever extent He shielded that truth for a time with parables, within three years it was being declared by the apostles everywhere. On the Day of Pentecost, you remember, a short time after His crucifixion and His ascension, there you have Peter proclaiming the truth to every body. Later through the apostles those things that had been temporarily hidden and secret were revealed and brought to light.

Now that brings us to the invitation. Look at verse 23. How are we to respond? How are you to respond to the light of truth? Listen, what else could God have done? How else could He have made the truth any clearer? What more powerful presentation of the light and the lamp could He have made? What better lampstand could He have put Jesus on than He did? He made it all visible. He made it obvious. The light is getting as far a view as possible. How do we respond to it? Well, Jesus tells us in verse 23: "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." God has brought the Lamp of light into the world. And He has shed the light truth into the darkness of the world to bring a comprehension of reality, bring an understanding of Him and of the way things really are. And although that Light has been brought into the world in the person of Christ, the light of

truth was still partially concealed. It was concealed to some in parables, but what was once partially concealed has now been put on the lampstand in the writing of the apostles.

There's only one thing to say in response to the truth that has now been so clearly seen and revealed. If any man—there's a universal invitation. If any man, “if anyone has ears to hear.” That is, they have ears that are willing to listen. We're ears that, as we learn in other places in Scripture, have been opened by a gracious act of God to really hear and to really understand. If you have ears that long to hear the truth, then “let him hear.” Let Jesus' teaching really sink down into your heart and mind. You want the truth? You want the light? God couldn't've made it any clearer. He put Him on a lampstand. The truth is right here. Everything He's said has been revealed. Everything you need to know about Him is here. How are you going to respond? If anyone, if *you* have ears that want to hear, “let him hear.” Let Jesus' teaching influence your heart and mind. Let it change how you think, your attitudes, your relationships, your actions, your habits. Remember, Jesus had offered this same invitation at the end of the Parable of the Soils back in verse 9, and now He repeats it here.

What does this invitation mean? Well it's best understood in light of an Old Testament passage, Ezekiel 12. I pointed this out to you when we went through verse 9. To really understand what Jesus is saying, you have to understand what Ezekiel wrote back hundreds of years before. In Ezekiel 12:2, God said this to Ezekiel: “Son of Man, you live in the midst of the rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear.” In other words, they have eyes that I have made capable of seeing, they have ears that I have made capable of hearing, but they don't see, and they don't hear. Why? “For [because, here's the reason] they are a rebellious house.” People don't see and they don't hear because of rebellion against God. So then this is a call. When Jesus says, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear,” it's a call to—what? Repentance. It's a call or an invitation to leave your rebellion against God, to repent and to return, to deeply consider and weigh all the implications of what Jesus was teaching. It's an

invitation to say I'm willing to leave my rebellion in which I have shut out the light, I've shut out the truth, I've lived my own way, I've done my own thing. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one (what?) to his own way. It's an invitation to say, are you ready to hear now? If you're ready to hear now, then you can hear. "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." An invitation to repent.

Jesus taught this in John 7:17. Understanding the truth, understanding the truth of God, understanding what Jesus taught begins with a willing heart. This text is really a profound one. John 7:17, "If anyone is willing to do His will." It starts there. Are you willing to do the will of God? I'm not talking about what car you drive or what job you have. I'm talking about God's revealed will taught, the light taught through Jesus Christ. Are you willing to do God's will? "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." It starts by laying down your rebellion against God and saying I'm willing to know, I'm willing to do His will, I'm willing to hear. That's called repentance. Jesus leaves His hearers with an invitation. If you are willing to turn from your rebellion, you will be able to really hear and to really understand. You know, that's the real question. If you're here tonight and you're not sure you're in Christ or you wonder about it, the real first step is to ask yourself this question: am I willing to turn from my active rebellion against God and His will, and am I willing to come to Him on His terms? "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the [doctrine, of the] teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." It begins with a willing heart.

So it's an invitation, then, to turn from rebellion and to really listen. Tragically, not everyone listens like that, do they? Many only listen to Jesus superficially. They miss the point, and the seed of truth—back to the Parable of the Soils—the seed of truth is gone forever. In essence, Jesus is saying here, here is a test of what kind of soil you are. How are you responding to the light? How are you responding to the light, the truth? Have you turned from your rebellion?

Are you really hearing the truth? Do you understand the truth? Do you love the truth? Are you obeying the truth? Are you seeing a harvest of righteousness, of obedience to the truth in your life? Verse 23, like verse 9, is a call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” If he's willing to turn from the rebellion that's made him deaf, that's made him blind, then let him hear.

So the light then, Jesus says—I'm the lamp, and truth I teach is the light, and God has put Me on a lampstand where nobody can miss it. It's been put on display for all to see. That raises the question to me, so what if you don't really see the light? What if you don't get it? What if you just don't understand the truth of God, the teaching of Christ and its application? So important, crucial to understand this, not only perhaps for yourself, but for many of us who are in Christ for those people around us—that we can't understand why don't they get it? Absolutely crucial to understand this: the problem is not with the light, the problem is with their eyes. Not His light, but our sight. The problem is with our eyes if we can't see the light. God has made it clear, obvious. The light is permeating everywhere. That's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4: “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” The light's clear. If you're a believer, you've seen the light. Right? You understand Christ. You understand His demands. You understand what He's accomplished, and you embrace it. And you can't understand why other people don't get it. The light seems so clear to you. The problem isn't with the light, the problem is with their sight.

Turn with me to Luke 11, because this really brings it all together. Luke 11:33, here Jesus uses that same illustration. This is a different context, but He uses it really with the same basic meaning in this case. Luke 11:33, “No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but [he puts it] on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light.” Again, the idea is He's the lamp, His teaching is the light spreading the light of truth, and God

has put it on a lampstand. Jesus hadn't hidden anything. He's put it out there. For those who have ears, they can hear it. But then notice what He says. He switches metaphors from the light to sight. Verse 34, "The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your [eye] also is full of darkness."

Here's what Jesus is saying. The light's out there. The light's clear. What I've taught, who I am, the light is absolutely clear and visible. If you don't see it, if your body is dark, it's because there's a problem with the lamp of your body. It's with your eyes, with your sight. You don't see. You don't understand. You're blind to the light. The light's everywhere: the light's in creation, the light's in conscience, the light's in providence, the light is in Jesus Christ. He's the ultimate lamp displaying the ultimate light. So why don't people respond? Why don't your family members and your neighbors and your co-workers, why don't they respond? The problem is not with the light, the problem is with their sight.

Jesus points out another problem. Not only is there the problem of being blind and not able to see the light, verse 34, but in verse 35 there's another problem. And that problem is not even knowing you're blind, thinking you see the light when in fact you're blind. Notice what He says in verse 35: "Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness." Wow. There're a lot of people in our world who think they have seen the light but actually live and walk in darkness. So there's the danger of being blind to the truth, not being able to see it. But there's also the danger of thinking you see the Light when it's not really the light. It's not Christ, it's something else. It's some other religion, it's some other way, it's your own sort of hodgepodge deal.

Verse 36, "If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays." There's the other alternative. This is my prayer for you and for me: that the truth of God would be so powerful in us that it would

illumine us entirely; there would be no darkness in us, but we would comprehend and understand the truth, we would love the truth, we would obey the truth; and the dark corners of our souls would gradually be disbursed with the power of the light.

My question to you tonight is how have you responded to the light? “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Have you ever come to the place in your own life—this was really the invitation Jesus was extending to those people gathered there on the shore. Have you ever come to a place in your own life where you're willing to acknowledge your rebellion against God, to say I have shielded myself from the truth, I have refused to follow the truth, I have followed my own way, and God, I'm laying down my arms, I'm turning from my rebellion, from stopping my own ears from the truth, from shielding my own eyes from the truth? If any man will do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether I speak of Myself or whether it's of God. It starts with that act of repentance, that willingness to come acknowledging what you've done and turning to God, and then you can see the light.

If you're here tonight and you're a believer, let this continue to fill out your understanding of what the Parable of the Soils began. People in your life who don't get it? Understand why they don't get it. It's not the light, it's their sight. Pray for them, that God would turn on the light and allow them to comprehend it, to see it; He would remove the blindness and allow them to get it, to understand, to see the light that's there. It's on the lampstand. You can't miss it unless you're blind. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You, for the revelation of truth in Your Son. Thank You, that You have given us the Light of the World, that He has brought Your truth. And Lord, You have publicly displayed it, You've made it clear, You've put it on a lampstand. And Father, we thank You that in grace and mercy You took away our blindness and You allowed us to see it. Father, our hearts go out to

those people in our lives who just don't see it, who don't get it, who don't understand, because they are like we were, rebels against You. And therefore they've stopped their ears, and they've shielded their eyes. And they cannot see and they cannot hear, because they will not see and they will not hear. Father, do a work of grace in their hearts as You have in ours. Declare, as You did on that wonderful day of creation, "Let there be light." O God, keep us faithful to pray for them, to hold them up before You. And Lord, I pray for someone here tonight who's a part of this church or who's our guest, maybe a young person who's grown up in this church who has been a rebel against Your truth, who has plugged their ears and covered their eyes because they want their own way. Lord, I pray that tonight would be the night they would turn in faith and repentance. Lord, remind them of what You said, even when You were here, that for those who turn from and refuse the light, and refuse the light, and refuse the light, there comes a time when the light is taken away. Father, I pray that that wouldn't be true of any person sitting under the sound of my voice tonight. We pray it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, for His sake, amen.