

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

Yves I-Bing Cheng, M.D., M.A.

Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

www.meetingwithchrist.com

THE PARABLE OF THE LAMP AND THE MEASURE

Luke 8:16-18

The parable of the sower is immediately followed both in Mark and Luke by another parable, a parable concerning a lamp and a measure. It is found in Luke 8:16-18, and also in Mark 4:21-25 with a slightly different wording. Let's read the passage in Luke.

Luke 8.16. "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, that those who enter may see the light.

17 For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.

18 Take heed then how you hear; for to him who has will more be given, and from him who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."

I will also read the passage in Mark so that you can compare the two passages.

Mark 4:21. And he said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not on a stand?

22 or there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.

23 If any man has ears to hear, let him hear."

24 And he said to them, "Take heed what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you.

25 For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

We are going to study this parable by considering first the general train of thought for this passage. That will make it easier for us to understand Jesus' teaching. Whether is it in Luke or in Mark, there are three things that we need to observe, and they are all related to each other. (1) Firstly, there is a lighting of a lamp. (2) Secondly, this lamp, once it is lit, is to shine out without hindrance. (3) And thirdly, the more it shines, the brighter it gets; the less it shines, the darker it gets.

Do you see that in the parable? A lamp is lit. Its light must not be covered. If the lamp does not fulfill its function, it might lose the light.

A lamp is lit

Now, let's look at these points one by one. The first thing that happens is that a lamp has been lit. What is the lamp? The lamp is man's life, the life which he is given when he is born into the world.

Who lit it? God lit it. God kindles the light. Every believer has had his lamp ignited by God. He is like an oil-burning lamp that burns and shows forth light.

In the context of this particular passage, the light refers to the truth of God, a truth that is designed to reveal and to guide, not to conceal. This was already quite plain in the OT. In Psalm 119:105, God's word is described as a light that directs the way to go and leads along the right path. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* In our parable, Jesus says that the disciple is to be like a light. How do we become a light? Through the word of God. God's word is that by which the fire will be kindled in our hearts. Using another picture, Peter says that 'we are born again by the word of God' (1Peter 1:23). That light of life is kindled in us by the word of God. And God's word comes to us in the life and teaching of Jesus. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you,* Paul says in Colossians 3:16. When we let the word of Christ dwell in us, when we let it so deeply implanted within us so as to control our lives, we become more and more like Christ. We reflect more and more the light of Christ.

But there is something we must understand. In order for man to have his lamp lit, he has to take some initiative. He has to come to Jesus, the light of the world, and receive the quickening spark of His light. He has to put the lamp of his life up to the light of Christ in order to be lit. This is taught by Jesus in those terms. *I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life* (Jean 8:12). 'He who follows Me shall have the light of life.' We have to follow Him. If we don't, we won't have the light. So it is the person who commits himself to Christ who will have the 'light of life,' the knowledge of God which gives life to his soul. And as a result of that light in us, we become the light of the world. *Once you were darkness,* we read in Ephesians 5:8, *but now you are light in the Lord.*

The light is not to be hid

Secondly, the purpose of lighting a lamp is not to conceal the light, but to illumine a room so that those who enter can see. So once the lamp has been lit, you don't cover it with a vessel or put it under a bed. When God puts light in us and makes us light, He doesn't want that light to be covered. However, if it does get covered, it is not God who does it. It is we who cover ourselves.

Here, several things are mentioned that might cover us. Luke mentions the vessel. When you light a lamp, you don't cover it with a vessel. Mark mentions a bushel. When you light a lamp, you don't cover it with a bushel. And both Mark and Luke mention the bed. When you light a lamp, you don't have it covered by a bed, i.e., you don't put it under a bed. What is this saying to us? The point being made here is that you don't let the world get on top of you. If you let the world get on top of you, your light will get dimmer. It might not even shine anymore. Notice that these things literally get on top of the light. Covered with a vessel. Covered with a bushel. Covered by a bed. How can your light shine when you have these things on top of you?

A bushel is a basket that contains grain. It is a measure for grain. And grain means what? It means wheat. It means barley. It means corn. In other words, it means food. If you let your concern for food get on top of you, it will be hard for your lamp to give light. What about the vessel? We saw that a bushel contains dry matter. A vessel, on the other hand, contains liquid. Food and drink, the basic necessities of life. Did we forget something? Yes, the bed! A place where we rest. And where do we usually rest if it is not in our homes?

Food, drink, shelter. The necessities of life. In Matthew 6, Jesus says, 'Do not be anxious about your life, your physical life. Don't worry about what you are going to eat, what you are going to drink, where you are going to sleep. God gives food and shelter to the birds of the air. He will likewise take care of the believer who trusts Him. Don't be anxious over these things, but seek first the kingdom of God.'

Don't be so preoccupied with the material things of this world that they dominate your life (as necessary as those things are). In other words, don't allow them to get on top of you. Don't allow them to cover your light. Otherwise you will begin to neglect God and His kingdom, and your light will get dimmer and dimmer.

The responsibility of the hearer

A lamp is lit. Once it is lit, this lamp should shine without hindrance. And thirdly, the brightness of the light depends on the lamp. Let's examine this third point. It says in Luke 8:18, *Take heed then how you hear; for to him who has will more be given, and from him who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.* It is clear that in this verse Jesus gives the warning to anyone who hears what He says to hear very carefully.

Remember what He said in the previous verse. *For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.* This is a word of judgment. Exposure and judgment are the main points in this verse (v. 17). It is the function of truth to illumine, to expose reality. One day the nature of the light as light will become obvious because it will expose what has previously been hidden. Truth and light will manifest themselves, and what is hidden will become known. So the warning is clear: God's standard will be revealed, and one day executed – so beware how you respond to His word. We read in Ecclesiastes 12:14 that *God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.* If we relate this warning to the parable of the sower and the various responses that the soils give, then the message is clearly that God will evaluate how each person responds to His word.

'Take heed,' the Lord Jesus says, 'be careful how you hear. Because God's words come to you either as words of grace and salvation or as words of judgment and condemnation. You are the one who will determine what the word of God will do to you.'

Notice these words. 'Pay attention to how you hear, for to him who has will more be given. And him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.' You see, the responsibility is placed on the person who hears. Whether you have more or less is up to you. 'To him who has will more be given. To him who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.'

The hearer is responsible for how he hears. In Mark 4:24, the wording is slightly different. It exhorts one to take heed of what a person hears, i.e., to watch the content of the teaching. In Luke, the stress is on how a person hears it.

*Mark 4:24a. Take heed **what** you hear.*

*Luke 8:18. Therefore take heed **how** you hear.*

The two ideas are closely related since how a person regards the content will affect how he responds and what he decides to hear. So he is responsible for what he hears and how he responds to it.

The measure you use

And then, in the passage in Mark 4, Jesus states why we must take heed. Because *By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides* (Mark 4:24b). What does that mean? Jesus is saying that the measure to which a person gives himself to know the truth determines his reward.

In the time of Jesus, commodities like oil or flour were weighed or measured out by the merchant to the customer. Although there were standard-sized containers, the merchant could either be

honest with his measurement, or he could be dishonest. It is quite possible that Jesus had this sort of situation in mind when He said, 'With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.'

After saying that, He then goes on, in the following verse (v. 25), with an explanation. Verse 25 in Mark is actually explaining v. 24. That is why you have the word 'for' at the beginning of v. 25.

Mark 4:25. For whoever has, to him shall more be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

This means that the measure is a promise that God will reward people according to and in proportion to their actions. Again the responsibility is put on the shoulders of the hearer. The person who gives himself to know the truth will know the truth and he will be given more truth. The person who does not give himself to know the truth will lose everything. This principle applies to any spiritual blessings. In the context of the parable of the sower, with the reference at the end to people producing fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold, we can conclude that God blesses people according to their response to the word.

A dynamic principle of life

This point about a person being given or deprived according to what he has done with what he has is so important that the Lord Jesus has given us two parables to illustrate it. The same principle is found for example in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 which concludes in v. 29 with similar words. *For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away* (Matthew 25.29). You are probably familiar with this parable. The master gave talents to his servants as he left. And then, when he returned, he called his servants together to account for the money they were each given. One servant increased the talents he had. The second one did the same, though he had less talents. The third one decided not to do anything with his talent and the result was that even that one talent he had was taken away.

We find the same saying in Luke 19:26 in the parable of the pounds. The message is very clear. Jesus said, 'I gave you this pound. It is given to you as a free gift of grace. You didn't earn it. I gave it to you. But the fact that it is a free gift of grace doesn't mean that you can do whatever you want with it. One day, you are going to give an account of how you have used the resources that I entrusted to you. You are going to explain to Me what you did with them.' When He gives us light, He wants us to know that He expects us to put it to use.

Some Christians seem to think that God's grace automatically does its job, that they have nothing to do and it develops itself. God expects us to be responsible for the blessings that He gives. The relationship of divine grace and human responsibility is made plain for example in 2Timothy 1:6. Paul says to Timothy, *...stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.* A gift of God was given to Timothy, but it seems that there was some decline in the exercise of it. And Paul is saying to Timothy, 'Rekindle it.' We can think of it in terms of coals of fire covered with ashes. The fire is almost extinct and needs to be blown up into a flame. From this, you can see that gifts and graces multiply by being exercised. Nothing will happen if we don't use them.

The same idea is found in 1Peter 4:10. Peter says, *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* Notice. Grace is a free gift to us and we are to be good stewards of this gift. A steward is somebody who looks after something, who takes care of something. Whatever gift we have received, we must not put it in our pocket and keep it to ourselves. As faithful servants, we must use it to serve others in the best way possible.

Again, we see that grace is given to us so that we can do something with it. We are responsible for the use of God's blessings. Remember: The measure with which you use them will be the measure

that you get. If we don't put God's gifts into use, they will decline. If we use what God has given us, the light that is in us, we will find that this light will get brighter and brighter.

This doesn't mean that entry into the kingdom is on the basis of human effort. But it does reinforce the importance of obedient response, as we saw in the parable of the sower. The blessings of God are for those who commit themselves seriously to serve God.

Share the truth

The parable of the lamp and the measure is an exhortation to the disciples to function as light, to go openly into the world and proclaim the message of salvation, using the gifts that God has entrusted them. The purpose of lighting lamp is to give light, Jesus says. Thus, a lamp is not hidden under a vessel, or a bushel, or a bed. The believer must let the light that is in him shine forth and illuminate people.

Great encouragement is given to those who prove themselves to be faithful hearers of the word, by being doers of the work. If we use what God gives, it will increase. But the opposite is also true. If we don't use what God gives, there will be a spiritual loss. We will lose even what we think we have.