

Mark 4:21-23 The Parable of the Lamp

21 And He was saying to them, “A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, or under a bed, is it? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?”

The parable of the lamp is one that describes what the life of those prepared hearts, who have received Jesus, have been watered by His Word, and are producing a crop will be like. It describes the nature of the Gospel of the Kingdom, and our responsibilities, the expectations that Jesus has of His followers. The word for lamp here is of a clay lamp. When the lamp was filled with oil, it would be placed on a lampstand, in order to light the whole house. It would be illogical to cover up the only source of light that was available, because then the house would be in darkness.

The basket that the light is not brought to be put under is a bushel basket holding nearly two gallons of grain. Since the basket is meant to hold grain, it is tightly woven, so that the little wheat kernels cannot fall out. This means that if it were to be put over a lamp, it would nearly completely block out the light coming from it, and potentially put out the lamp. First century beds were sometimes located on the second floor and accessed by ladder, had beds made of wooden frames with rope stretched over them. A mat was then laid on each bed. Putting an open flame below an ignitable object such as a woven basket or a straw-stuffed mattress would be very ill-advised!

The parable is in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 5:14-16, Mark 4:21-25, and Luke 8:16-18).

Matthew describes Jesus' introduction to this parable, saying in 5:14 **14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;** This is the only time that Jesus tells His disciples directly that they are the light of the world, although there are other verses that imply this idea.

Then, there's John 8:12 in **12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”**

Jesus is calling Himself the light of life that is in the disciples, and shines through them to the rest of the world by means of burning the oil, which is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was speaking of himself as the lamp that has been kindled and that has come, in keeping with the mission pronouncements of Jesus which stress the purpose for his coming. Jesus is the lamp that makes holding the oil possible. That light of life was brought forth to us by God John 1:3-9 **4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. 5 And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it. 9 This was the true Light that, coming into the world, enlightens every person.** So, the nature of Jesus is to enlighten the whole world, shining His light of truth, so that all may see, and follow Him. Jesus, the "light of the world" calls us, as His disciples the light of the world, because He has commissioned us to continue His ministry on Earth. To ensure proper illumination, the light must be placed in a high, prominent place—often they were placed on lamp-stands to elevate them, or even hung from the ceiling. Similarly, Jesus must be the most important thing in our lives if we are to shine as an example of what He can do in a life. People must be able to see Jesus in us. Matthew 5:16 **Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.** But, we must have works in order for people to see them in the first place, and Jesus must have such a prominent place in our lives that it is Jesus' light shining through us, and our lives put Jesus' love for them on display for all to see, showcasing the wisdom of His Word that illuminates and clarifies our path.

22 For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. Jesus did not “come” to be concealed or covered under a basket or bed, or to be hidden away in secrecy. Rather, he came as the lamp to be set on a lampstand, so that his light may shine brightly and be seen by all those who are in darkness. We have the choice of what to do, but if we want to please our Master Jesus, shining our light is not optional. And, if we consider why people might want to conceal the light of Jesus within them, this becomes clear. People conceal things to gain an advantage of some sort. Often, people hide things for selfish reasons, such as committing a sin or gaining an unfair advantage, or to avoid risk or harm to themselves. But God

knows everything, both what we do in public and in secret, and what is in our hearts and minds. Jesus made it clear that nothing can remain hidden forever. Now consider whether the practice of concealing Jesus from those you love, work with, consider as friends, encounter on the street, etc. is likely to be motivated out of love for them, or out of selfishness or fear, and you will see why hiding the light of Jesus in your life **under a basket, or under a bed** is almost always contrary to the Will of God. If the Holy Spirit tells you to keep silent, do it, but most often the Holy Spirit is prompting us to share with people what Jesus has done in our lives more often isn't He? So, why do people conceal the light of Jesus?

To Fit In--Sometimes people hide Jesus' light because they want to fit in. To "go along to get along", to be "in the crowd", "with the cool kids"...whatever way people want to say it. They hide Christ's light by conforming with the people around us, trying to look more like them than Jesus. Paul said in Romans 12:2 **2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** In other words, if you conform to the world, then you're not going to allow the Holy Spirit to transform your heart to act on the Will of God, by demonstrating Jesus to the world, even if you mentally agree that God's will is **good and acceptable and perfect.** You're not going to (Rom 12:1), **by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship** if what you're worried about is fitting in, and staying silent when we should speak, not saying something that needs to be said because it will be unpopular. Consider the Rich Young Ruler, who loved his possessions more than he loved God or Nicodemus, who did not join Jesus as one of His disciples publicly, instead he met Jesus at night. Wealth can be used in such a way that it is a shield from harm, but also can be an armor that traps the wealthy away from opportunities to rightly shine their light of the gospel.

Fear and Sin--Peter denied knowing Jesus three times during His trial before His crucifixion. Several people recognized him, asking things like **"Aren't you one of His disciples?"** Each time, Peter denied it. Peter wanted to blend into the crowd and feared that they might crucify him too, so he pretended that he did not know Jesus. Peter's faith faltered in a very difficult situation. John 18:26 tells us that the last time Peter denied knowing Jesus, it was in response to someone who was **"related to the one whose ear Peter cut off"** in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10). Sin and its aftermath (guilt, fear that others will find out what you did, etc.) will dim our light. Peter would eventually be restored as a leader among the disciples and become a bold preacher who was not afraid to be recognized as one who had been with Jesus. But as long as sin, guilt, and shame controlled him, he hid his light, choosing instead to blend in.

Ignoring Need--We might also hide the light by ignoring the needs of others. Jesus said that we shine our light by letting people see our good works. "Good works" is not the same as moral purity. Many Christians see the phrase "good works" in the Bible and think, "I don't do bad things, so I must have good works." Whenever the New Testament speaks of good works, it speaks of direct action that Christians take that blesses others: **"For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me"** (Matthew 25:35-36). **"What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself"** (James 2:14-17). If we are going to shine the light, we have to step out of our comfort zone and show God's love to those around us. People sometimes hide their light by ignoring the need that they see all around them. They just look the

other way, when God's Will is that people see God's love shining out of us. They will see it most vividly when we are actively, perhaps sacrificially, bringing God's love to others.

Fear of Attack or Reaction--The reason why the lamp is not placed under a bed or basket is that the light of God reveals a world of darkness and sin. This is the very purpose of Jesus as the lamp. Remember that in the first century, and even up to the point in history where electricity was available in most places, Most people went to bed at sunset and got up at dawn, because there was no light to do their work. Honest people didn't work after dark, hence the phrase "works of darkness" was developed. (See Luke 22:53; Rom. 13:12; Eph. 5:11-14.) If we keep the light that has been given to us hidden--"under the bushel" or "under the bed", then no-one else will benefit from it, and we will be ignoring our mandate to Matthew 28:19-20 **19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."**

Jesus is urging people to listen carefully to what He is saying. We are accountable for how we respond to the light of Jesus, and what we do with His light, once we have it. 1John 1:5-7 **⁵This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.** Walking in the light is what we are called to as Christians—we are called to the Way of Living in the Light, not just to a conversion. And again in John 1:12-13 **12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.**

Reaction to the light

But some will not accept the light. John describes this in **John 1:10-13 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, and yet the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own people did not accept Him.** Most of the people that Jesus encountered did not accept Him, and His Messiahship. John 3:19-21 **19 And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed.**

But for those who choose Jesus, to come into the light, we see that God works with His character to perform deeds in keeping with being a child of light. John 3:21 **21 But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God."**