

Four Baskets that Hide the Lamp from the World
Mark 4:21-25

THE THREAT OF DARKNESS

A great and ancient darkness spreads in the world today. It is a moral evil that defies the glory of God and quenches the Spirit of God. This darkness enslaves the heart of man, corrupts the spirit of man, binds the will of man, blinds the mind of man. This darkness infiltrates culture, community, church, home, and heart. This darkness is real and present and poses both an immediate and eternal threat, for those who embrace the darkness within and around them take on the nature of the darkness and fall under the judgment of God, who is Himself light and in Him is no darkness at all.

It is into and against this darkness within and around us that God sent His Son, Jesus. Of Jesus the apostle John writes,

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5, ESV)

The darkness is real and present and poses an immediate and eternal threat for those whom embrace it, but the darkness of sin and the world and the devil is powerless against the light of God. The light dispels the darkness. Knowing exactly this, Jesus spoke to His disciples in this parable and said,

Does the Lamp come in order to be under a basket or a bed? (Mark 4:21a, Literal Translation)

Jesus is the Lamp, the light of God, come into the world not to hide from the darkness, but to dispel the darkness with grace and truth. Disciples are those who hold the Lamp before the world. Disciples who fulfill the role of discipleship actively allow the glory of the Lamp to shed His light into the spiritual darkness that threatens to overrule God and destroy His image in the world by condemning God's beloved human creation.

Those who are in Christ reveal Christ to the world. It is the privilege and responsibility of every true believer to set the Lamp on display on the stand of their life where He can be easily seen. Disciples, we were once saturated with darkness. Paul writes of what we once were in his letter to the Ephesians:

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)

... remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from

the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12 (ESV)

Once we were those who loved and embraced the darkness. We made excuses for it, claiming the darkness wasn't so bad, everybody was doing it. We denied the darkness, advancing the idea that we are all basically good and our moral defect was nothing a little education and culture couldn't fix. We rejected God our creator, we turned away from His purpose, we declined His heart, and refused His love.

But then, God!

Ephesians 2:4-5 (ESV) ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Ephesians 2:13 (ESV) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

What has God done? God revealed the Lamp and the light to you. God spoke the powerful gospel truth of the Savior, Jesus, into your life, into your heart. God forgave your sins as you put your faith in Christ. Through faith in Christ you were born again in the Spirit, you gained a new heart and a new life from God. The Spirit of Christ himself came to live in you, to dispel the darkness from the cavernous reaches of your heart and soul. Paul explains in Colossians 1:2,

Colossians 1:27 (ESV) To them [you] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

And why has God worked this amazing and glorious transformation? Yes, it was for your eternal benefit and His infinite glory, but it was also that through you God reveals Christ the Lamp, the hope of glory, to the world as you share the gospel with the world. The application, the personal impact of this parable Jesus shares with His disciples, with us, is this: **Christ came to you, the Lamp on a stand, so that you will place Him in the stand of your life for all the world to see!**

This is the reality Christ revealed to His disciples in this parable of the Lamp on the stand. **What Christ is in you, what Christ is to you, you are to share with the world.** As you set the Lamp before the world, His light dispels the darkness that envelopes the world.

THE PROBLEM WITH BASKETS

While the parable reveals great promise, it also uncovers a potential problem: baskets! Baskets hide the Lamp and hinder the light. I believe it is in the heart of God this morning to remind us that there can be baskets in our lives, in the lives of believers, that, when these baskets are present in our lives effectively conceal the Lamp from the world. These baskets of ours prevent a needy world from seeing the Savior we and they so desperately need.

Let me suggest three baskets that obscure the Lamp from the world.

First, there is the shame that comes from unconfessed sin. No one likes to be called a hypocrite, and we like it even less when we know it's true. Unconfessed sin, secret sin that we hold on to and indulge creates in us a reservoir of guilt and shame. The Bible tells us,

1 John 1:6-9 (ESV) *⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Jesus did not come into the world to hide from sin, to excuse sin, to ignore sin. Jesus came to defeat sin, to die for sin, to cleanse us from sin. To embrace sin is to deny Jesus.

The shame of unconfessed sin silences our witness before the world. It covers the Lamp. So, let it go. Confess your sins, cleanse your heart, clear your conscience, come again into the freedom wherewith Christ has set you free!

The sorrow that comes from life in a broken world is a second basket in our lives that obscures the Lamp. There is a sorrow that indicates a healthy response to the brokenness we encounter. Grief, mourning at the loss of a loved one is a healthy sorrow. There is also godly sorrow that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11:

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 (NIV) *¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. ¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.*

Godly sorrow works good in our lives, but there is a sorrow tied to disappointment and despair, a worldly sorrow colored by selfishness and pride where our expectations have not been met and resentment and bitterness begin to fester. This kind of sorrow is darkness, not light. The kind of sorrow that exalts the self at the expense of others, that denies the providence and sovereignty of God, that crushes the potential for grace, that sorrow is a basket in our lives that obscures the Lamp. To this kind of sorrow in our hearts we must take a stand.

Philippians 4:4-7 (NIV) *⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

The joy to which we are called by the word is not a denial of injustice or hurt or pain that comes from living in a broken, sinful world. Rather, it is an affirmation of the goodness and love and faithfulness of the Christ the Lamp, of the glory of God, and of His enduring presence in the lives and circumstances of those He loves.

One final basket that obscures the Lamp deserves your consideration. The ignorance that comes from undisciplined faith obscures the Lamp from the world.

If it was true before the pandemic, and I believe it was, that a growing number of people who called themselves Christians, were increasingly biblically illiterate, then it is likely even more true now. Many Christians relied entirely on their Sunday morning exposure to the Word for everything they know about Christ and the Christian faith. Far too many do no study on their own, spend little time in prayer, and live by faith only by happenstance and not intent.

Christian, because we do not study God's word personally and faithfully we do not know Christ well. Because we do not know Christ well we are not convinced of the value of Christ to God and to ourselves. Because we are not convinced of the infinite value of Christ, we love Him less than He deserves and serve Him with less devotion than we ought. Because our love and devotion are diminished compared to His value, the light of the Lamp is often hidden from the world, His light diminished by our ignorance and lack of appreciation of Who He is and what He has done.

I want to leave you this morning with Paul's final admonition to Timothy ringing in your hearts:

2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV) *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

If there is a silver lining to pandemic isolation it is the multiplication of good, solid, Bible-centered, God-honoring, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled resources available online. There are websites and webstudies. There are online worship services and prayer meetings. There are email devotionals and Facebook pages. You have more access to the word of God than ever before. Having the need to study the word and the opportunity to study the word, take the time to study the word.

A day is coming when we will be together again. In the meantime, do your best to know all that you can know about Jesus! Do your best to study the word, to know the word, to embrace and trust and believe and follow the word, to live the word in every area of your life, in every conversation, in every decision. Let the word be your testimony on Facebook. Let the word be your tweets on Twitter. Know the Light of the Word so well you are never ashamed to let the Lamp shine brightly in your life for all the world to see.

There is grace and mercy and light. Put down your baskets. Take up the Lamp.