

## 26 – The Parable Test: Are You Being Fruitful for God's Kingdom?

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*Series on Mark*  
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**Bible Text:** Mark 4:21-25  
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Our text this evening is going to be from Mark 4:21-25 but to understand these words, we need to understand the good soil, so I want to read verse 8 and verse 20 through 25 of Mark 4. Mark 4:8 and then 20 through 25.

8 And other [seed] fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

Then verses 21 through 25, our text for this evening,

21 And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? 22 For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. 23 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 24 And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. 25 For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

May God add his blessing to his infallible word.

It might be good to announce again that the senior youth group will not meet this evening, instead they will be meeting on February 18 together with the young adults for the topic of developing healthy relationships by the Kelderman's, but the young adults will meet tonight in the Neely home.

Our text this evening is Mark 4:21-25. I'm just going to read verses 21 and 22 again.

21 And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? 22 For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.

With God's help, we want to look this evening at what I'm calling "The Parable Test: Are You Being Fruitful for God's Kingdom?" That's what these two little parables in these five verses are dealing with, as well as the middle verse which says, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." So we have three thoughts. First, the test of the light, verses 21 and 22. The test of a hearing ear, verse 23. And the test of a measuring cup, verses 24 and 25. So the parable test: are you being fruitful? Test of the light, test of the hearing ear, test of a measuring cup.

Well, to understand these five verses in Mark 4, we need to look at them as Jesus' application to the long parable we considered together a few weeks ago of the four kinds of hearers, the four kinds of soils into which the word falls, and so verses 21 through 25, Jesus presents two, may we call them, mini-parables to apply the major parable, and to apply it in such a way that we might examine whether or not you and I are among those who have good soil into which the word falls and the roots go down and the plant springs up, or the crop springs up, and we bear fruit, good fruit, some 30, some 60, some 100 fold. And so what Jesus does as he's applying this large parable, he gives us two verses of one little mini-parable and basically asks, "Are you producing fruit?" Then he gives us in between the two parables a little statement, "If you have ears to hear," really hear because it's those who really hear that will bring forth fruit, so that's a test of a hearing ear. Then he brings forth another little parable that does the same thing about the measuring cup. Hence these three things are tied together under one theme: Jesus' application of the parable of the sower and it's teaching simply this, the soil of our hearts must, not maybe, not I hope so, must bear good fruit. That's what he's saying. Those who have heard the Gospel, those who have heard it well, those who understand that salvation is entirely out of Jesus Christ, who truly embrace what you heard this morning, that you know your sin and misery, you know deliverance in Christ, and now you want to live intentionally a life of gratitude, to live wholly and solely for Jesus, those who truly hear and embrace and receive and believe this word will produce a crop. That's what these five verses are teaching us. There will be evidence in our lives that we are Christians. We will be useful even though we hesitate to claim it because it seems too much for us and we struggle with our sin, but we will be useful to the Lord. Our lives will be fruitful. If we're true hearers of the word, if that word falls into good soil and we bring forth fruit, we will experience something of Abraham's blessing, "I will bless thee and thou shalt be a blessing to others." Maybe only thirtyfold, but we will want it to be sixtyfold, we want it to be a hundredfold, but there will be fruit.

So what Jesus does in these five verses, he gives us a test through these mini-parables and through this admonition to hear well, to examine our soil. So you might call it a triple test and we're going to look at that test now.

So the first test is the test of the light. The King James version calls it a candle, or literally translated into our 21<sup>st</sup> century we would call it the lamp or the light. And you remember perhaps right away that Jesus uses this illustration in other places in the Gospels. Like a good parent, he often repeats his lessons to his children making the same point in different occasions in slightly different ways. But what he's saying here in particular is that the life of a Christian is like a lamp, a lamp that is lighted because of The Light, Jesus Christ operative in our lives. And so he says this in verses 21 and 22, "Is a candle," or a lamp, think a lamp or a light, "brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick," or a lampstand, "For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad."

Now there are four things mentioned here, isn't there, four object lessons. You've got the candle or the lamp. You've got the bushel. You've got a bed. And you've got a candlestick, or probably better translated a lampstand. So lamp, bushel, bed, lampstand. What do we make of all this? Well, the first thing we need to do if we're going to grasp the meaning fully is we need to unpack what these four things meant in Jesus' own day.

First, the light or the lamp. Jesus isn't talking about the kind of lamp that we have at home with a shade, a light bulb, a cord, a plug, next to your bed. Jesus is talking about the kind of lamp that his audience would have known, a little clay bowl with a handle, filled with a few ounces of oil, with a little wick at the front, and a spout which would then be lit, and that's what they used to light homes in their days, their houses were actually quite dark in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel, some houses had no windows at all, others had one or two small windows, there were no big glass windows to let in light, there was no electricity, of course. So typically the house was made of stone and clay with a door and hardly any light. During the day, some of the Israelite people would keep their doors open to give light in their home, but at night the door was closed and latched for safety and for protection and the house would be very very dark. There was not even a little nightlight to plug in. And so this lamp, you see, was very important in the evening functions of the home.

Secondly, this lamp, this light would be put on a lampstand. A lampstand, here called a candlestick. In a poor home, a lampstand was simply a little shelf protruding from the wall, usually quite high off the floor so that the light could be set on it and it could give light to the whole room. The idea was that the light would radiate through the entire room. Now in more wealthy homes, it wasn't just a little shelf protruding from a wall but it usually was some kind of metal, some kind of instrument that went from the ground and it was put in the middle of the room and it was a little more expensive, you see, sort of something like you'd hang your plants on that was maybe chest high, and that was a more fancy kind of lampstand, and that's the word, actually, that Jesus uses in Revelation when he's walking in the midst of the seven lampstands. So whether Jesus is referring to the little shelf or to the more fancy lampstand really doesn't make a difference because the purpose of both is the same, you put the light on the lampstand and it sheds light throughout the whole home, the entire room.

Then there is the bushel. The bushel refers to a utensil used to measure grain and other dry goods. You might compare it to a very very large oversized measuring cup. It was a Roman measuring instrument equal to about one-fourth of one of our bushels, or a good-sized bushel, probably like a little wastebasket size that you might have in your bathroom. But it was a standard measurement and people would take that bushel with them to market when they'd buy different commodities, and they'd measure out their dry goods in that bushel. So in Jesus' day, everybody knew what a bushel was and how big it was.

Now what about the bed? Well, there were two kinds of beds in Jesus' day. One was a thin mattress, sort of like a sleeping bag that was rolled up when not in use and you put it to one side, and you rolled it back out at night for sleeping. Then there was something that was thicker, more like a six inch mattress or so that would be kept out somewhere in the house, and sometimes they'd pull them over when they would eat. You know, they'd lean back, recline in eating, more like a thick mattress, something bigger than a sleeping bag, and that would be pulled alongside the table so people could recline on it and eat a meal leaning backward.

So now that you have the picture of these four things, you can see what Jesus is doing with his question. He's actually asking a nonsensical questions, probably a question that would actually make people smile when they heard it because it's so foolish, the very thought of it, and Jesus is doing this purposely, of course. It seems blatantly absurd so he says, "Is a candle brought into your home, is a light brought into your home to be put under a bushel?" Would you turn your wastebasket in your bathroom upside down and put a light underneath it to spread light in the house and cover the light? Of course not. It doesn't make any sense. The light would stay inside that little tiny bushel and it wouldn't go throughout the house. You see, that's the point. Would anyone in their right mind bring a little clay candle lamp at night and hide it under a bed? Would you pick up that little sleeping bag with that little mattress and put the light under there? Well, of course not. That would be absurd. You'd be hiding the light. Well, you'd probably burn the mattress as well.

So it's senseless, you see. It doesn't matter, you see, if you have the biggest, nicest, brightest lamp in the entire world, Jesus is saying, if you cover it up with a basket, all you'll have is really a well-lit basket in a pitch-black room. Oh, the lamp will still be a lamp but it will have ceased functioning as a lamp. It won't give off light. It will be useless. What is the purpose of a lamp if you're not using its light to overcome the darkness?

Then in verse 22 he goes on to say that just a lamp is set on a stand or a shelf sticking out from the wall, so whatever is hidden is meant to be manifested or disclosed. Whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. What in the world does that mean? What is Jesus talking about? What is it that is hidden that must be brought out to the light sometime in the future? Well, in the context of this parable, really there's three thoughts here that need to be conveyed. The first and the preeminent thought is that "the light," and in the Greek there's the definite article, the light that shines is Jesus Christ himself.

He's the Light of the world. So he's really saying does "the Lamp" come in in order to be just put under a basket, under a bed? Have I come into this world with my ministry as "the Light of the world" just to be covered up by a basket and just shine, maybe, to a few people that are under the basket with me, if you could follow the picture? Or must "the Light" fill the world, fill the room of this world? You see, Jesus isn't talking about any lamp here, he's talking about himself. "I'm 'the Lamp.'"

In biblical categories, you see, Jesus is speaking here about the Light that has come into the world which comes into the world with the breakthrough, the breakthrough of the Light in the darkness, the breakthrough of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the rule and reign of God on earth. Four hundred years of darkness since the last prophet, prophet Malachi, and now Jesus is born, he's raised up, and when he's 30 years old he breaks through. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. The parables, you see, are most all connected with this theme of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God. The kingdom has broken through. The Light is going to shine in this dark world. Jesus is saying, "I did not come here to be concealed forever, to be hidden. I came as a lamp to be set on a lampstand so that the light that I may bring may burst forth and manifest it clearly to those that dwell in darkness all around the globe." And so this lamp cannot, cannot be put under a bed. This lamp cannot be put under a bushel. This lamp is the Light of the world, the true Light of the world.

Yet when you looked at Jesus, if you didn't have ears to hear and eyes to see, well, you'd say, "What does he mean? Isn't this Joseph's son, a poor carpenter from Nazareth? He doesn't look like the kind of king we've been waiting for to deliver us from the Roman yoke." You see, Jesus' true glory was concealed and his true majesty was hiding under his humble status as a country preacher, but Jesus is saying here, "The Light of the world must be uncovered. My glory must be brought out, and every now and then I bring it out through a miracle." Every miracle he did, you see, is really a quick pulling back of the curtain of his glory and you see his miracle, who he truly is. Who can do this? Who can calm the waves? Who can stop the storm? This man must be the Son of God. For a moment, you see, but the next moment you look at Jesus, he looks like an ordinary man.

So that's the first thing we need to understand in this context. He's talking about himself here. He's saying, "I must be manifested." But secondly, by extension, he's talking about what will happen when this light, that is "the truth" from "the Light," Jesus, comes out into the open through his own disciples. Through his own disciples. Notice how verse 22 begins, "For," you see, this is the connective word, "For there is nothing hid which shall not be," future tense, "neither was any thing kept secret, but that it will come abroad." So now Jesus is really conveying what he wants to convey. He's stripping away all the images now and there's nothing here about beds and lamps and bushels and stands.

He's giving us here two purpose clauses confirming that whatever has been made in secret is in order that it should come to light, and whatever is hidden is in order that it should be made manifest. You see, what he's saying, he's saying, "Right now I've got to speak in parables," remember we saw that last time? "I've got to speak in parables because my time to be offered on the cross has not yet come. I've got more teaching to

do. So the multitudes won't get my wisdom for the most part, but I will tell you, my disciples, the true interpretation, and you will carry the message further to the multitudes. You will be my servants. And so now what is hidden from the multitudes you will be openly proclaiming from the housetops," especially post-Pentecost. So Jesus is explaining once more in Mark 4 why he's speaking in parables. There are expressions of God's judgment upon the willful blindness of the masses, and that willful blindness will turn to judicial blindness ending in their eternal damnation if they don't receive ears to hear, and hearts to understand, and eyes to see. But to those who do believe, he's explaining his teaching. That's why you see later, verse 34 in the same chapter, "without a parable spake he not unto them," the disciples, "and when they," the disciples, "were alone," with him, "he expounded all things," just to them.

So Jesus is doing something very purposeful here but because he's just telling the real truth, the real meaning of his parables to the disciples, he knows he could easily be accused of being one of those Greek philosophers who just took a small group of people around themselves and they were called the initiated ones, and let them know the secrets of life and they're not to tell anyone else. Just a small group. But Jesus is saying, "No, no, my secrecy, I'm different than them, my secrecy is but temporary, a temporary expedient in order for me to fulfill my ministry to the end, but also because I'm going to open up the truth and spread it abroad through my disciples to the ends of the earth. And so the day is coming, you see, that what I tell you now in darkness," Matthew 10:27 says, "that my disciples, you speak in the light and what you hear in the ear, that you must preach upon the housetops," Matthew 10:27.

So Jesus is concerned to underscore for his own people that the end in view in all of this private tutoring is that ultimately many all around the world shall hear and know his truth. The Lamp of Truth will be set in its most strategic place through the preaching of his disciples, his apostles, and it will radiate its light all around the world. And that's what happened. All those little private lessons in Jesus' three year seminary from the time he was 30 to 33, training the 12 and then the 11, you see, that would be used. On the day of Pentecost, Peter will stand up and declare the glory of God in Jesus Christ and 3,000 will be saved. And so the apostles would continue to do all throughout the book of Acts, and by extension Christ's true servants will do so until the end of the world, and so it's actually what I'm doing by the grace of God right now. This is going on at 540 Crescent as I speak. We're opening the light and through SermonAudio, other people will hear this and the light gets spread around the world through conferences, through books, through ministry, whatever it may be from the servants of God still today to the end of the world. Through mission fields. Through church plants. Through evangelism.

Which leads me to number 3: this light does not only refer to Jesus himself, he is the Light, and does not only refer to the immediate apostles and disciples to spread that light, but in verse 22 he's hinting at, you see, that when that light comes to you today nearly 2,000 years later, when the Light of the world makes himself known to you and you are saved by him, you are then called to be light in the world as a reflection of his light. That's the implication. So until the end of the world, you who receive the light and are transformed by this light must also be lights, little lights. You must be cities set on a hill.

Jesus says, "Let your light, your light which is my light, so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify my Father which is in heaven." You must be fruitful. You will be fruitful. When you walk in the light, you cannot but be fruitful and useful. You cannot hide your life under a basket. You cannot tuck your life under a bed. You bring a candle lamp into a dark house and then place it under a bed? It's a joke. Of course not. You just keep the darkness, that's what you do.

And you see, that's what the world desperately needs today. Most of the world today doesn't darken the doors of a church and so how are they, they never read the Bible, so how are they going to come into contact with the light? By coming into contact with Christians who walk in the light. There's a 19<sup>th</sup> century atheist, well, a famous agnostic, a German philosopher named Heinrich Heine, and he said to Christians, "Show me your redeemed life and I might believe in your Redeemer." Now he may have said that a bit sarcastically but, you see, that's what the world's looking at and they see the life of a Christian that is really lived intentionally, purposefully to bear fruit for Christ, the world sits up and takes notice, and what Jesus is saying here is if you are the good soil and the seed is planted in you, you will bear fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold,

And don't avoid the application of this to your own soul, he says in verse 23. If you have ears to hear, hear. In other words Jesus says, "Do you get it now? Do you get the purpose of my whole parable? I've just applied it to you now. Do you understand it? Are you really hearing? If you're really hearing and you're really getting that, you will understand that if you're the good soil and I put my light in you and you germinate, I give you spiritual life, you now have a responsibility to go out and bear fruit by my grace and by my power." God is now revealing his secret that has been hidden about who Jesus is and what he has come to do as a sin-bearer of mankind, but you must go out now and bear that message to others. You can no longer be like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, a night disciple hiding your faith under a bushel or under a bed, but you must like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, finally come out into the open and declare to others the glorious Savior and what he means to you. God's light, God's work in you must come out into the open.

That's the message. He who has ears to hear tonight, let him hear, let him take this responsibility upon himself. If you come to the light by the grace of God, only by the grace of God which is Jesus Christ and you find your life in Christ, you must walk in that light. You cannot hold that light to yourself. That light will shine through your walk, through your deeds, but also through your words. So let me ask you tonight: are you passing the first test, the test of the light? Are you walking in the light? Can others see the light in you? That's the first test. I don't ask you are you walking in the light as much as you'd like to, can others see in you the light to the degree you want to. Of course not. Every believer wants to be more a reflector of the light of Jesus than he is, but I ask you be honest with yourself, can others look at your life and say, "I see some light there. I see someone who doesn't walk with the world, someone who walks a separate lifestyle but it's a beautiful thing. One thing I can say about that man, that woman, that teenager, that boy, that girl, you know, he's got his flaws and faults like everybody else but he really loves the Lord Jesus Christ. He belongs to Jesus Christ. You can see it. You can hear it.

You can feel it. This is his only comfort in life and death, as we heard this morning, belonging to Jesus Christ. There's a humility there. There's a love there for Christ and the things of God. There's a longing there to walk in obedience. You can see the light." Is that true of you?

Well, the second test is a test of a hearing ear. "If any man will have ears to hear, let him hear." Let him hear. So Jesus is saying when you come under the Gospel proclamation and you hear the word of God, you have a responsibility by God's grace which he freely gives, to respond to that word and so walk in the light. And so the question here is: are you really hearing the Gospel? Are you really understanding the Gospel as it comes to you every week? And are you responding to that Gospel by the grace of God and does your life show it? Do you have spiritual hearing? That's the question. That's test number 2.

Now let me just speak just a few minutes to those of you who are yet unconverted, and then I'm going to speak to the saved as well because you're going to answer this question, of course, differently and there's different message, really, to both of you. To you who are not saved, I just want to speak plainly and lovingly. The privileges you've had in your life are just unspeakable. They're just unspeakable. You have a privilege that the masses who sat around Jesus on the shore of Galilee hearing him tell this parable did not have. He told the parable but then he walked away and told his disciples the meaning. The mystery of the kingdom was veiled from them. But you see, 2,000 years later, the mystery of the kingdom is not veiled to you. You're privy to the real meaning. This word has been pressed repeatedly on your conscience week after week, year after year, some of you decade after decade, and you know you need to be born again, and you know what it means to be born again. You heard it again this morning to have a true knowledge of your sin and misery, to have a true sense of deliverance in Christ, to have an intentional life of living out of gratitude to God, three things that alone are marks of salvation, and three things alone by which you can live and die happily. You have it memorized. And you see, today as Gospel ministers, we don't have to hide any of it from you. In fact, we're commanded because what is hidden must be revealed. After Jesus died and rose again, he sends forth his servants so that nothing be kept secret now, and so our job description is to tell you the whole counsel of God and to tell you how willing God is to save the greatest wretch in the entire congregation. The door is shut to no one. Everyone is welcome with God.

You've heard that, some of you, thousands of times and yet you don't hear. You hear big invitations, unconditional invitations from the Bible, "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" And you thirst. You know your life is empty. You know it deep in your heart. "And he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price," and you say, no, after every single sermon year after year, decade after decade. You don't have ears to hear.

Well, you do have physical ears but did you ever think about this, that God gives us physical ears for many purposes but the primary purpose is that we might hear the Gospel, and by faith you are saved, Romans 10 says, by hearing the word of God and the



Spirit taking that word and applying it to your heart so you understand the Gospel. What a wonderful thing it is that we don't have to keep anything secret. "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." You now have all the secrets that the people didn't understand because Christ has commissioned his servants to bring the whole Bible, the complete Canon, you have it all, you have the entire word of God. The lamp is no longer under the bushel. The light is no longer surrounded with darkness. Every single sermon you hear from this pulpit brings you to Jesus Christ one way or another, the Light. You're told plainly, you're told openly, you're told fervently, you're told pleadingly, you're told passionately that you are a sinner under the wrath of God by nature and yet that God is infinite in mercy also for just the kind of sinner you are and you're invited to come to him just as you are, poor and needy. You're a sinner who sits weekly under the gracious invitations, the Spirit-given invitations, of this merciful God to come to his Son, to repent and believe the Gospel, and have all your sins blotted out, and find true happiness, and go out and shine as a light in this dark needy world and yet you refuse.

You're not sitting in a church week by week where the preacher only makes an occasional allusion to sin and repentance and faith in Christ. You're not sitting in a congregation where the preaching once in a while bleakly might infer that you have a little bit of a problem and might infer that if you listen carefully that the problem may be sin, and that somehow if you listen more carefully, the answer might be Christ. You're right in the midst of the spotlight and you're not hearing the word of God, the plainness of the Bible. The concealed is revealed to you but you're not hearing it, and if you don't hear it soon, if you continue to reject Jesus Christ to the end of your life, you will be, you will be rejected by him forever. You will be one of the three kinds of false hearers and you will go to hell for your unbelief. For your unbelief. For your wicked, wretched, blatant, God-dishonoring unbelief.

And that's what Jesus says in verse 25, "For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." So here in this life even though you're an unbeliever, the common grace of God is poured out upon you again and again and again. So you get that coming to you as you sit in church. You get it as you walk around in society. You've got health. You've got abilities. You've got freedoms that people don't have in many countries. You've got so much, whatever you want to call it, common grace, common goodness, common mercy of God, but in hell you won't have any of that. Revelation 14 is plain: God will pour out his wrath upon you without any mixture, no common goodness, and you'll be in the land of everlasting darkness where the light will never come to you again. You'll never hear one more sermon. You'll wish like ever you could but you can't. No more opportunity of repentance.

"He that has ears to hear, let him hear." Tonight. But obviously this word also has a particular relevance to the people of God. They have been given ears to hear. It's all grace, you see. What's the message to God's people in verse 23? Well, the message is plain: whatever light is given to us in the context of our peculiar relationship with Christ, our intimacy with Christ, his word is given that we might put it in the place of the most prominent display, that we might put the light on the candlestick, on the lampstand rather,

and that that light might shine to the most people possible. Or to put it negatively, spiritual light is never given to believers to hoard it for themselves.

J. C. Ryle works with this text, this is what he says, "We are to display to others the precious treasure that we have found; and persuade them to seek it for themselves. We are to tell them of the good news that we have heard, and endeavor to make them believe and value it themselves. It becomes all Christians to lay these things to heart."

If you are a believer, you are under a solemn Gospel obligation to be enterprising and zealous in seeking to take whatever life has given to you in secret and to make it public. Public knowledge, whether it's the light that comes to us in our own devotional reading of the word, the light that comes to us in personal or family worship, light that comes in public exposition of the word and to preaching, light that comes from the many good Christian books available to us, whatever light comes to us, don't place it under a bushel or a bed because of your false modesty. Let the light shine. That's what Jesus is saying to you, dear believer, when he says, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear."

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a minister who said to his theological students, "Young men, hold up your lamp before men, hold it up fearlessly. Let it shine. Let it shine but do not dash it into anyone's face." That says it all, doesn't it? You hold up your lamp, the Gospel lamp before men, you hold it up fearlessly in school, in the workplace, across the backyard fence, in every situation where you can wisely under the impulse of the enterprising love of Christ, and the burden for the lost, and where you can, you convey the truth as it is in Jesus, you hold it up fearlessly but you don't cram it into peoples faces. Oh, you warn them with love but the way to evangelize someone is not just to hand them a tract and say, "You're going to go to hell if you don't believe," and walk away.

We're not advocating an unChrist-like demeanor but we are advocating a Christ-like demeanor. Do what Jesus did when in the presence of an immoral woman, he made her feel at ease long enough to be able to draw the conversation around to true and living water. And look how he handled the woman committed in adultery. He spoke to her. He warned her. But he also said, "Go and sin no more." And he opened the door of salvation.

So what about you, are you passing the second test? Do you have a hearing ear that results in an open Gospel life where your light shines? A test of a light, a test of a hearing ear, and now the test of a measuring cup. Look with me at verses 24 and 25, "And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." In a nutshell he says, "Put to use the light I've given you and you'll receive more. Don't put it to use, you lose what you have. If you fail to listen, you fail to heed, you fail to profit from what you've heard of the Gospel, you'll be deprived even that of which you have." Today, a colloquialism is "use it or lose it," and there's an application here, a powerful application to the Gospel.

You see, people say, "Well, I once heard a language and I kind of knew it and then I lost it because I didn't use it. Or I once played a certain musical instrument when I was young and I could play all kinds of music, but I haven't done it for years now and I lose it." Well, Jesus said in Matthew 21:43 if you fail to make use of the Gospel message, you fail to respond, you fail to build on it, you fail to take what you believe and add to it by a fruitful life, it shows you didn't really have it to begin with and so it will be taken away from you because his people will bear fruit. So he says in Matthew 21:43, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

You see, someone else who will make use of the grace of God and generously bear fruit will make their life count when your life has not made a difference, and so the imperative is clear, you've got to use your life, invest it in the lives of others, serving the Lord, serving others, serving his people, serving the lost. If your enemy hungers, give him something to eat. If he's thirsty, give him drink. And you will receive more. If you are a channel of blessing, God will continue to use you and increasingly so, that's the point of verses 24 and 25, as a channel of blessing to others.

And if you're a believer, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Some of you young people, some of you have by grace you've become believers and maybe you've gone a mission trip to Mexico or wherever, and you come back and you say, how many times have you said to us pastors, "Pastor, I just can't believe that I actually went to help those people. I thought I'd try to do them some good, try to share a little bit of the Gospel and try to be an example. I went to use a small measure of my gifts but as I did so, I felt like I received in return much more than I gave." You see, that's the way God works. God really meant it when he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." He really meant it when he said that when you serve him and you give yourself away, you'll get more back in return and you'll be able to serve him more. When you bring forth fruit thirtyfold, soon you're bringing forth fortyfold, maybe sixty. But if you don't bring forth fruit, if you take what God gives you, the gifts he gives you and you refuse to have ears to hear and you hide the one talent in the ground, he'll take away even the one talent that you have and his curse will be upon you.

You see, whenever you use your gifts to serve the Lord, that very service will boomerang back in a positive way to bless you. That's the beauty, that's the beauty of full-time ministry, actually. It's not the paycheck you get at the end of the month. It's the joy of service, the joy of seeing people come closer to God through the ministry. That's a minister's real wages but that's a Christian's real joy as well.

Service is what life is all about. There's joy in service. If you know your sin and misery and God has brought you to find deliverance in Christ, you will want your entire life, I wish that everything in me, you will say, would serve the Lord spotlessly. I just want to serve him with my thoughts. Paul says, "I want to bring every single thought that runs through my mind into captive obedience to Christ, and I want to honor him with every word and every action. Oh, to serve the Lord, that's my desire."

And so every morning, I'll tell you what one of my prayers is every single morning. My wife must be tired of hearing it. Lord, make us useful and fruitful today. May there be someone today we can talk to about the Lord, or some book, or some sermon, or some reaching out. Use me today to bless other people. Use me today to shed that light across the room of this world, or to a neighbor or to a friend, someone somewhere associate that work within reason. Serving God and serving others is such a blessing, you can't put it into words. So this should be our prayer all the time. Help me, use me, make me fruitful, make me useful today, for with what measure I measure out, I will receive back and more. But if I'm not fruitful, well, the sad truth is I'll lose everything that I've been given.

I'll close this sermon tonight with five personal questions. The first is this: by the Spirit's grace, are you praying for and acting in such a way that you may be useful and fruitful in the lives of others? To do that you need in part, you need to be in your Bible, you need to be reading good books and filling your mind with good things, and we have those opportunities today, don't we? We've been given Christian freedoms and blessings and opportunities of resources everywhere we turn. God has not been stingy with us. So dear believer, I know, I know you've got your job, you've got your children, you've got all kinds of responsibilities but throughout it all is there an intentional, an intentional course of life by which your cup overflows with the blessings of God and you strive to give that overflow into the lives of others? You see, when you've been pardoned by Jesus and your sins are forgiven, the miracle of the Gospel is so great you want the whole world to know it. You want everyone to share your joy. And so is it your prayer daily, "Help me to be useful and fruitful in the lives of others for God's glory, by the Spirit's grace," it all has to come, of course, from the Spirit's grace, you can't do anything without the Spirit, but by the Spirit's grace to be fruitful and useful.

Secondly, have you perhaps fallen into spiritual atrophy, that is to say, have your spiritual muscles grown limp and unused? Are you backsliding? You know, one sign of backsliding is that you're not asking the Lord anymore to use you as an instrument of his grace for his glory and to be a channel of blessing to others. Sometimes as a minister you get a bit discouraged about things and maybe you're working on a sermon as I was on this one yesterday and it wasn't going very well, and you struggle and you say, "Ah, I'm just not being useful or fruitful right now. Things are going from bad to worse." And you just get up and you go and you visit someone to tell that very person what you need to hear yourself, to be encouraged, and as you seek to bless that person, you find that God often uses it as a blessing, your own words that you're giving to someone else, to use it for you.

There's a beautiful thing about service, being used by God. It doesn't have to be big things. You know, time and time and time again we put in the bulletin, don't we, we need more drivers so that we can pick up more children for the Sunday school, neighborhood children who don't have a chance to hear the Gospel. Can you drive? You think that if you drove and picked up children God would lay these children in your heart and you might be blessed even more than them by your helping out? Time and time again we put in the bulletin, we need more families to take the visitors who come to church in the morning Sunday morning, to take them to your home for the noon meal. Those who do so, I can tell you, have been tremendously blessed. Those visitors have come here,

they've had wonderful conversations in their family and yet we're always short. Honestly, we should have too many people volunteering for this. I know there's some legitimate cases where you just can't do it, but this is something easy to do, just a family go with a meal, put a little extra soup in or whatever. Can't you help out? Tithing. We don't have any rules for tithing but we know that there are wonderful causes that need your support. Are you doing what you can do? Perhaps you are. I'm not complaining. You're a giving church, wonderful. But you see, the point is this, when you live a life of gratitude, your attitude is not, "I want all of this for myself," but your attitude is, "How can I be a channel of blessing for others by God's grace with my gifts, with my time, with my talents? What kind of talent do I have?" Maybe you have a talent that you can really speak to other people easily and you love the Lord. Well, we've got a number of seniors who right now are in nursing homes who would love a visit, and when you visit them, you might as well try visiting a few other people next door. You could be a tremendous blessing just using any gift that you have. Don't get into spiritual atrophy. Ask God, pray, "How wilt thou use me?" And then go out and be used and be willing to give yourself away, you will be blessed.

Third, do you know how to grow in usefulness and fruitfulness to God and to others? It doesn't happen by just sitting in a chair and saying, "I wish I would be more useful and fruitful." It happens by delighting yourself in God and in his word, the living Word, Jesus, and the written word, the Bible, and then by communicating that to others and meditating on that, drinking it in and then giving it out, look to Christ by faith and saying, "Lord, here am I. Send me. Use me. Make me useful today." And then go out to whoever it may be and speak a good word for the Lord.

Fourth, are you also seeking to be a light for Christ outside of our own church circles even if it involves challenges or maybe even some persecution? You see, it can be easy to live a life of activity and usefulness within the church walls, well, then the light is shining out but can we do that more perhaps beyond the church walls? You see, instead of just staying in our safe Christian bubble, the purpose of a lamp is not to just reach those who already believe in the church but to go beyond the safe circles and to reach those who don't have a chance to hear the Gospel, those who maybe they are resistant to the Gospel. I know that can be complicated because I know when you go out to the world, the world can influence you more than you influence it, so you've got to use your mind here, you've got to be careful, you don't compromise with the world, you're not called to bring the world in situations where you are tempted. If you're a recovering alcoholic, God hasn't called you to be an evangelist in a bar, certainly not, but there are areas we can go out and reach others. At work, beyond, where we can be creative in sending messages to people, or opening people's minds by bringing them some kind of natural gift, perhaps, and then speaking to them, maybe our neighbors. But you see, again it's a matter of attitude. Is my life every day intentional in wanting with all my heart sincerely to be a reflector of the light of Christ? That's the point.

And then fifthly, finally, are you striving by grace to surrender all of your God-given resources and gifts, be they few or be they many, to dedicate them to Jesus Christ? This is intentional living. We come short of it every day, every one of us. But this is intentional

living, this is our attitude, this is our direction, this is our purpose for living: you get up in the morning, dear believer, to be used by Jesus Christ as a poor needy sinner saved by grace in your marriage, in your family, in your church, and beyond. And God is asking you here lovingly to use your resources for him and his glory faithfully and diligently.

So you don't look out the window and say, "But my neighbor's got five talents, I only have two. I'd better bury my two." No, you use your two. If you have only one, you use your one. You use whatever God has given you. I once said to my wife, I'll tell you, it's kind of embarrassing but I once said to her, "You know, I wish I had the gifts of So-and-so. Think how much more useful I could be." And she lovingly rebuked me, she said, "You'd better be content with what the Lord has given you." That's it.

So you feel comfortable in your own skin, you don't have to use gifts the Lord hasn't given you, but you use the gifts he has given you and you ask him for open doors to use those gifts. Sometimes that usage may be hard, sometimes it may be demanding. Those people that are using their gifts down in the basement on Sunday afternoon, they don't always feel like ministering to all of those children perhaps, especially when there's disobedient, rowdy children, it's demanding, it can be exhausting, but on the other side there's a joy in it. There's a joy in serving God even in times of persecution.

So what you do is you entrust your resources to Christ and you ask him to give you the grace so that every moment, every breath, every resource you have might be dedicated to him. Let that be your natural impulse. You see, when the servant thinks he's done enough for his master, he's already burying his talent in the ground and outer darkness is at the door. A true servant says, "I'm an unprofitable servant even if I give all." Like my dad used to always often say to us children about my mother, "You can never ever repay your mother what she's done for you in your entire lifetime even if you were to give her everything." That's a thousand times more true of God.

So there's never any credit, this is not about good works or meriting salvation whatsoever, that's not what Jesus is talking about, he's talking about an attitude of gratitude and usefulness and fruitfulness that flows out of such a great deliverance for someone who is so sinful and so undeserving. And so pray for a new cleansed heart that passes the test of a light, the test of a hearing ear, the test of a measuring cup, and at the end of our exhausted lives, at the end of lives that could never really join hands with this world but lives that wanted, albeit always finding short, to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, may our hearts at the end of our lives be humbled and our ears swelled with astonishment when we hear those blessed grace-laced words, those astonishing words from the lips of our exalted Immanuel, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Amen.

*Great God of heaven, we thank thee so much for the Gospel. We thank thee for the gift of service. We pray that we will not hide our talents in the ground. We pray that we would be faithful all the way to the end to the Celestial City, that we would be useful servants of the Most High, every single believer. And we pray for every single unbeliever in this audience tonight, that they would receive ears to hear, ears to truly hear, and hearts to*

*bow, and words to confess, and faith to believe, and that their life may be made into a new creation that they, too, would find their only happiness in knowing their sin and misery and flying to Christ for deliverance and in expressing a life of gratitude to him for such great deliverance all out of Spirit-worked, one-sided, free, sovereign grace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

## SUNDAY MORNING

2/4/18

*Student Richard Slingerland*

Votum and Salutation

Psalter 228

Reading of the Law of God

Psalter 83

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1

Prayer

Psalter 415:1, 2, 4, 6

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1

Lord's Day 1

### **The Only Comfort in All Times**

1. *To belong to Jesus Christ*
2. *To be a child of the heavenly Father*
3. *To be sanctified by the Holy Spirit*

Psalter 280 (standing)

Sermon Conclusion

Closing Prayer

Psalter 317

Doxology of Praise (pg. 415)

Benediction