

## *The Lamplighter*

### *Luke 8:16-21*

Aunt India lived in a world of washboards and stove heated irons. Home was an unpainted farmhouse, worn Confederate gray by years of wind and weather and wear.

My aunt had a houseful of children. Each summer, I spent a week or two with them. And it was like stepping back in time.

My uncle was a well digger. The trade had been handed down father to son since the Middle Ages. But this was the twentieth century. And his ancient art was obsolete.

No one wanted the old fashioned, brick-lined, hand-pump wells he dug anymore. So he worked at whatever he could find.

Most of the time that was not much. So money was not just scarce at their house. It was nonexistent.

Electricity was too. So my aunt cooked on a blazing, black stove, stoked with firewood chopped with an axe back behind the barn. And on bath nights, water was brought in by the bucket and warmed on the same stove.

Night came early in that hillside house. When the sun inched down to hide behind the western ridge, the world went dark. And the only light was the flickering orange flame of a kerosene lamp, its glowing wick as delicate as a spider web.

For uncounted millennia, the whole world lived like that. In Bible times, homemade lamps were lit at dusk in humble farmhouses. And slaves lit gold and silver ones in posh palaces.

Lamp lighting was a daily chore. It was as familiar as the smell of baking bread in the earthen oven outside the door.

Maybe that is why Jesus used the image of a lamp to illustrate the intricacies of loving and living for Him.

## *The Purpose of Faith*

It was wintertime. At the temple an enormous menorah was raised up above the courtyard. All over Jerusalem, people stood out in the street to marvel at the light that gleamed up on Mount Zion.

On the temple courtyard, people stood shoulder to shoulder. And Jesus spoke to them.

*Then 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." John 8:12*

Our Savior said trusting in Him brings the Light of His holy presence into our very soul and spirit, into our heart and mind. It is, He said, like lighting a lamp on a moonless night.

The darkness of death and defeat, of sin and shame is forever obliterated by the power of the Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

As Christians, we are transformed into the likeness of our Lord. And just as He is light, we are also light.

*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; Matthew 5:14*

I thought of that verse on an airplane one night. We left the sparkling sequins of Miami behind at sunset. And for hours we flew over a dark ocean.

Then the hills of Haiti loomed outside the window. It was indeed a dark land. The mountains were black mounds under a silver slice of moonlight.

But on a mountainside, I could see an orange ember. It was the glow of a single lamp through the window of a mud hut.

In a dark world, even a dim light cannot be concealed. So surely the blinding light of our Lord's presence cannot be hid, either.

*Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. Verse 16*

Our loving Savior transforms sinful men into shining saints and gives them a home in Heaven. But He does not take them to that home right away. Instead, He leaves them here to shine as lights in a dark world.

Of course, we who trust in Jesus do not have any light of our own. We are moons, not suns. We merely reflect the life and love, the purity and power of God's Son.

We are not one of many lights, either. We are the one and only spiritual light in this world. There is no other.

So we dare not hide our light by silently and secretly concealing our salvation. If we do not shine the Savior to those who are still lost and alone in this dark world, who will?

After all, the purpose of a lamp is to shine light in the darkness. And it not only must not be hidden. It cannot be concealed.

If a bowl is clogged over a lamp, the wick will smoulder to a smoking ember. And the light will go out.

So it is with faith in Jesus Christ. Real faith cannot survive in secret. If it is not public, it is not powerful. That is why Jesus warned us against being ashamed of belonging to Him.

*...whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. Luke 9:26*

If we serve the Savior in secret and hide our faith from others, Christ cannot confess our faith on judgement day. There is no faith for Him to confess.

Anything that is genuine cannot be hidden for long. If it is real, sooner or later it will be revealed.

*For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Verse 17*

Real faith is public. It is a burning lamp that everyone can see.

## *Faith is Practical*

Our Redeemer repeated this same parable many times. But He did not always tell it the same way.

So Mark's account of the parable records Christ's command just as Luke did. And the two versions seem the same. But they are not.

*And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to." Mark 4:24*

That is true, of course. We must always beware what we listen to. We dare not open our hearts and minds to the dark deception of cults or the empty ideas of this world.

But in Luke's account, Christ did not command us to be careful what we hear but how we hear. And that is altogether different.

*So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him. Verse 18*

Yes, we are to listen to the pure and perfect Word of God. But even so, we must be careful how we hear.

The principle is not a splitting-hair nuance. It is all wrapped up in the way the Word of God defines hearing.

The Bible commands us to hear the Word of God. But that does not mean merely to listen to it. Or even believe it.

If we are to truly listen to God's Word, we must not only hear and believe it. We must also do it.

*...prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. James 1:22-25*

If we merely listen to what God has to say to us and do no more than that, we open ourselves up to deception. We think we have faith, but we do not. Yes, faith comes by hearing. But if we do not add performance to our hearing, we have not really heard at all.

That is why Jesus said that if we do not listen correctly, we will not only lose what we have. We will also lose what we think we have.

What we do not use, we lose. If we do not listen to God's Word and both believe and act upon it, we are not really receiving it at all.

If we go to the doctor, it is not enough that we believe he is able to help heal our sickness. It is not even enough to take his prescription to the pharmacist and have it filled.

It does not make any difference how much faith we have in the medicine, either. If we do not actually take the pills the doctor prescribes, our faith is empty and impotent.

We must both receive and respond to God's Word. That is how Jesus described those He claims as members of His forever family.

*My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it. Verse 21*

When we hear God's Word, we must act upon it. If it is a command, we must obey it. If it is a good and godly example, we must imitate it. If it is a negative example, we must shun it. And if it is a judgement upon sin, we must confess and forsake it.

That means we must not only hear and believe God's faithful promises. We must also live them out, acting upon the firm foundation of God's faithfulness. If we stop short of that, Jesus said we will not retain the truth we have received.

But that not only thing we must do if we would reap blessings from God's Word. We must also let our light shine by telling others about it. That principle reaches all the way back to Moses.

*Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons. Deuteronomy 4:9*

Again and again, God commands those who trust in Him to tell others about both His love and His law. And for good reason.

Refusing to let our light shine by sharing with others the love we have for Jesus causes what little faith we might have to drift away. But the opposite is also true.

If we both act upon God's Word and share His truth with others, our faith will grow steady and strong. In fact, that is exactly what it must do.

After all, anything that is truly alive grows. And nothing is quite so completely alive as God's Word.

*...the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)*

So we must be careful to hear God's Word the way He has commanded us to do so. We must not only hear and believe it. We must also obey it and openly share it with others.

Only then will God grow our faith within us.

## *Faith is Personal*

Just six months before the Savior was crucified, it was feast time. And the beaten path south to Jerusalem was packed with people. But Jesus did not join them. He stayed behind in Galilee.

That might have puzzled His disciples. But it irritated His brothers. So they came to Christ with a cynical smirk.

*Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For not even His brothers were believing in Him. John 7:3-6*

Mary and Joseph had sons of their own. And they did not believe their older Brother was the Messiah.

Earlier at Capernaum, they were convinced the Master had lost His mind. So they tried to take Him back home and shut Him away where He would not embarrass them.

*When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." Mark 3:21*

Now an enormous crowd gathered on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Indeed, the press of people was so overwhelming, Jesus had to teach them from a boat, bobbing on the waves off shore.

And sometime in the middle of the Master's message, His mother and brothers arrived.

*And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. Verse 19*

We do not know why these members of the Master's immediate family came that day. If they had come to hear, believe and obey Him, they would have come earlier to hear all He had to say.

But they came late, hoping their family relationship with Him would part the crowd like Moses parted the Red Sea. However, the people were so enthralled by Jesus' preaching, they crowded all the closer to hear. And Mary and her boys could not get to Him. So they sent word to Him.

*And it was reported to Him, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You." Verse 20*

One of the disciples delivered the news. And that messenger probably thought Jesus would drop everything to speak to His family. After all, they were even more important than members of the house of Herod. They were His blood relatives.

The Redeemer's response surprised the disciples. But it shocked his brothers.

*But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." Verse 21*

Our Redeemer's refusal to give preferential treatment to His mother and brothers teaches us an important truth. Jesus was and is and ever shall be the high and holy God. And our God does not play favorites.

*For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality... Deuteronomy 10:17*

Our loving Lord gives preference to neither priests nor princes. He listens to the prayers of the poor, the lowly, and the despised as eagerly and earnestly as He does the most dedicated saint.

And that is not all. If we listen to our Lord, believing and responding to the message of His sinless life, His sacrifice, and His victory over death, we are not merely promised a place in Heaven.

We are actually engrafted into His eternal family. We are indeed, His brothers and sisters.

We are bound to Him by blood: His precious blood. We live in a personal relationship with our high and holy big Brother.

So we can never dare to be ashamed to claim Christ as our Savior and Lord. He is our Brother. And family is forever.