

Mark 4:21-23

21 And Jesus 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.

The following is the New English Translation:

21 He also said to them, "A lamp isn't brought to be put under a basket or under a bed, is it? Isn't it to be placed on a lampstand? For nothing is hidden except to be revealed, and nothing concealed except to be brought to light. If anyone has ears to hear, he had better listen!"

Asa can be seen from the above NET translation, the meaning of a bushel is a basket, actually a container used to measure an amount of dry foodstuff, like grain.

Although this is a simple and short parable, the teaching is very powerful, and to the point.

Jesus uses the example of going to the trouble of getting a light, which is very necessary in the days where there was no electricity or gas, everywhere pitch dark, and potentially dangerous, and where oil for the lamps was not cheap, and even tallow candle type lamps were expensive to make, and the stupidity of putting that light source

under a bed or a basket, where the benefit of the light is immediately greatly reduced – just what is the point??

The NET translation captures the tone, Jesus is saying no one would think to do that, it is just plain silly!

If we look at the parallel passage in Matthew 5, Jesus continues:

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

The whole point of getting a light, is for the light to be used, and in this example to give light to all that are in the house, so that many receive benefit from it, and not just the person who got the light!

It is not difficult to understand. But Jesus was not just talking about domestic lighting arrangements. He was using this to illuminate a point.

Staying here with Matthew, we look at the previous verse:

Matthew 5: 14 *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.* In other words, the disciples had been chosen by Jesus to be the source of light. They were to convert the oil of the Word of God, given to them by Jesus, in the teaching of the Gospel, into bright light, that would be of benefit to many – in much the same way, as a city on top of a hill could easily be seen, and simple for people to navigate to and difficult to get lost, so it should be with the light given by the disciples, with the light held aloft high, to maximise the reach of the light.

Jesus continues (in Matthew) *16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Here Jesus reveals his parable. It illustrates how words are converted to light – as Mark says: *22 For there is nothing hid, which shall not be*

manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad.

The light is the conversion of words into actions. ... *that they may see your good works...*

This is in line with what Jesus taught about himself:

John 8:12 Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (see also Isaiah 60:1-3)

The Light of Life is the Life of Jesus Christ, one who converted the pure oil olive of the Word, just as it was burnt for the light in the tabernacle of witness.

This transformation of fuel into light can be further understood by reading Romans 12:2: *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

Since Jesus has explained what the light actually is – the doing of good works so that glory is given to God – then how is it possible to put the light under a bushel, or under a basket or bucket, or under the bed so that it cannot be seen?

One might immediately think it is the act of failing to preach the Word, and talk of the Gospel to all we come into contact with. It may refer to this. At times we may feel reluctant to share our knowledge of the Word of God, - because of past experiences we may feel embarrassed, or vulnerable in some way, we may feel cowardly and fearful, because of the laughter and scoffing that normally follows, and so we shrink into the shadows, and do not allow the Word of life to multiply.

But it is likely to mean more than this. Light is produced by converting fuel energy by burning – it is by heat, by activity- it is not produced by simply passing around the oil or the fuel itself.

The following passage is therefore very helpful. It shows that hiding the light under the bed or basket is equivalent to the stupidity of having access to the Word of God, but instead of allowing its power through heat and trial converting to good deeds, the decision is made to do the very opposite, - wicked deeds, and behave in a way which is from ignorance and foolishness:

Ephesians 5:3-15

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

We can see that hiding the light under the bed is equivalent to deciding to live a life in sin, and behave as described above – the works of darkness: Coveting, idolatry, filthiness, sexual immorality,

impurity of any kind, greed, vulgar speech, foolish talk, coarse jesting, are all activities which extinguish light. For a disciple of Jesus to engage in these activities is to give a bad reflection of the city which is on the hill. It is to put out the light which God at first set alight, it is to undermine God and to do a grave disservice to the Lord Jesus.

To take hold of the light, and to hold it aloft, is a lot more than just being willing to speak of the gospel – it is to live of the gospel.

Philippians 2:15-16: *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, ...*

We would conclude these short remarks with the words of the Apostle:

2 Corinthians 4: 2-7 *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; (which are the actions of putting the light under the bed, or bucket) but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

The Apostle observes, that even if the light is bright through the good deeds of lives of truth, do not be surprised that shadows remain in the hearts of men -

3 *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

6 *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

The Apostle then says: 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

The light at present is contained within us, and we are earthen vessels, a bit like a bucket. In that sense we can only allow the light to shine by allowing the earthen vessel to be broken – in much the same way Gideon commanded his 300 men to smash their clay jars to allow the bright light within to startle the enemy in Judges 7.

It is vital then that we do not allow the earthen vessel, the clay pot, that we are ourselves, to extinguish the light through the sins which do so easily beset us (Hebrews 12:1), but instead allow the light to burst forth, break out, in godliness, by showing the fruits of the burning Spirit - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (Galatians 5:22)

Brother Terry