

Part 28: Shining Lights and Family Rights

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What does it mean to be successful? What does it mean to be healthy? What does it mean to be good? What does it mean to be masculine? What does it mean to be a female? What does it mean to be a Christian?

For most of those questions, depending upon who you ask, where they live, and what era they are living in, we might find different answers defining the same noun. For example, a cancer patient and a body builder might answer the health question differently.

But despite all the changes and seeming relativity of reality one of those questions can be answered, defined and understood the same way: What does it mean to be Christian?

The irony of all the questions listed above isn't that we can't answer them. There are answers on every webpage, every history book, and every social media account. The same is true of what it means to be a Christian. The challenge this is not if we have an answer, the question is if our answer is the right answer.

In a world where it seems meaning and clarity has never been more obstructed today Jesus continues to do what Jesus does—he speaks truth into a confused world and peace into our anxious hearts. As we continue in the book of Luke today we are going to see what it means to be a Christian, that is to say what are the most natural qualities of one who follows Jesus. This is going to be presented to us in both a parable form by Jesus (Luke 8:16-18) and a real example among his own family (Luke 8:19-21). What we are going to see today as our big picture is this: **Followers of Jesus shine their light and know their rights**. There is no more natural identity to a Christian than one who reflects Jesus brightly and relates to Jesus rightly.

Our text today picks up right on the heels of Jesus' parable of the sower and is itself another parable. But the context of the parable of the sower is helpful for us today because just as Jesus pleaded with us last week saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," today he similarly says, "Take care how you hear."

This is important because both of these parables are directly relevant to each and every one of us in here today because these parables are for anyone who receives the word of God. Last week it was those who received the word of God, the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God, who received the seed of the sower. This week those who receive the word of God are referred to as lamps that have been lit.

The word of God lights aflame the heart of those who hear it. This is our first point this morning: **Christians naturally shine their light**.

Read with me: **Luke 8:16-18**.

In John 8:12, Jesus says he is the light of the world any anyone who follows him will have the light of life. Here we see that anyone who follows Jesus is lit up with the flame of Jesus. In this metaphor all we are—are dead, dry wicks. We don't come full of our own potential and strength we come empty in ourselves but wet with the grace of the gospel and Jesus does the rest.

Here Christians are seen as burning lamps. This is a theme often used in scripture, and it's actually a theme Jesus himself will circle back to later on the book of Luke. In the book of Revelation, individual churches are described as candles and lamps burning in the midst of a dark world.

Jesus' remarkably simply parable highlights for us the purpose for which lamps are lit, and therefore the purpose for which the word of God is given. Jesus points out the obvious here doesn't he? Who would turn on a lamp in their house, on a dark night, only to put it in the closet and close the door? Who would go through the process in Jesus' day of filling the lamp with oil, trimming the wick, and lighting it only to throw a pot over it?

We don't need to be PhDs to know that no one would do that! Jesus' point then is obvious too. If you have been converted from death to life, from darkness to light, then why would you assume that it is not God's design, and your very true and natural purpose to bear that light?

One of my favorite parts about the Olympics is a part we get to see very little of. It's the torch relay. Several months before any Olympic event, a flame is lit in Olympia, Greece and someone takes a torch and lights it from that Olympic flame, and a relay begins carrying that torch across the globe, by use of thousands of athletes, until it arrives at the host site of the games which begin by lighting the main torch in the center stadium.

When sinners are saved by grace, we are torches lit up by the Olympic flame of Jesus for the purpose of running this light through the nations and home to glory. This is not the unnatural forced life, this is the natural life of purpose. There is a "so that" statement in this text, we have been saved on purpose, for a purpose. We therefore bear the light of Christ for a purpose as well.

What are those purposes? Jesus gives us two in this text.

First, ***We shine light for the sake of others***. Look back again at **Luke 8:16**.

Why are we lit on fire with the gospel? So that others who enter might see. Why are we to be distinct to our world? Because the world needs what we have. Because the world is dark and light shines the way home. Because sin leaves us cold and lifeless and there's nothing like the fire of grace to rouse stone hearts out of the grave.

We all know the numbing power of hypocrisy, but here Jesus calls us to the enlivening experience of shining gospel light on and for others.

I heard this week that some of our members were serving with an outreach to refugees in town. One of them was unexpectedly pulled aside by a news crew and asked why they were doing it. She hardly had time to think of her answer but her unfiltered response was: "We love people, we love refugees and we love Jesus."

I have never met a Christian who hasn't felt a some sort of desire to be more evangelistic. But the work of evangelism doesn't start when we open our mouths, it starts the moment we become lights in a dark world. Our lives are different. Our words are different. Our hobbies, our Netflix queues, our finances, our responses to bad bosses, our comments on our political leaders, our tone towards our kids, our relationships towards the opposite sex—all of it is different. Why? Because once we had no light and Jesus changed that. Once we too lived in darkness and we not only know the illuminating effect of the light, but we know the joy of it.

Our lives should not only show the difference following Jesus makes, but they should also show the joy of following Jesus. We have a storage closet in our basement and the light is turned on very rarely, and if my wife and I are downstairs and we walk by to see the light on we quickly turn it off. Why? Because it's gross and chaotic in there.

However our living room lights are almost always on. When people come over we turn on more lights. Why? Because there's something worth seeing. We shine our lights not only because we ourselves have been brought out of darkness into light, but we seek to obey Jesus, love Jesus, and worship Jesus publicly because we believe this light shows us the life of greatest joy!

My wife and I often drive up around the nice houses on the hill, and we love to do it at night because we have the privilege of seeing into their homes. When people look at your life, do they see a world in which they would long to live?

A.W. Tozer once said this: ***The Church will come out of her doldrums when we find out that salvation is not a lightbulb only, that it is not an insurance policy against hell only, but that it is a gateway into God and that God is all that we would have and can desire.***

We shine our light, we display gospel change for all of life, because the world needs it for both salvation and for satisfaction. But we also do it because we need it. This is Jesus' second reason we shine our light: ***We shine light for the sake of ourselves.***

Look at **Luke 8:17**.

What's interesting about Jesus' parable here is that he assumes some people will try and hide the light. Isn't that interesting? He says some will hide it and some will try and keep it secret, but in the end everything is exposed for what it is.

I was trying to think this week of why anyone, having the joy of the gospel and the light of Jesus would want to hide it, and I think there can be two primary reasons.

First some, we may wish to keep hidden what could be offensive and relationship changing to the world. If our neighbors find out we are Christians will they treat us differently? Hold us at arm's length? If my classmates find out I go to church on Sundays will they stop inviting me places? If my boss were to see my faith would I be subjected to more scrutiny or labeled as hostile or close minded.

This is a fearful concern for though we are light, the world loves darkness. Where light goes, so goes a revealing of all that is not light.

But for others it's less that we are worried about non-Christians who would judge us, but perhaps the Christians. Maybe there are those who for a time being, through sin, through suffering, or through doubt, shine less brightly than they would hope. So in fear of being seen as dim, struggling or in need of encouragement, we hide all together and smolder in secret.

But Jesus here calls us to bear the light all the more for the sake of our own soul and sanity!

For those who fear the response of the world, know that one day God will expose everything. Your heart will be exposed. Your works will be made manifest. The hearts and works of the whole world will one day stand before the Lord and a DVR of your whole life will be judged by Jesus.

This should incite a level of sobriety in each of us, but more than that it should give believers a sense of peace when it feels the world wages war against our nature in Jesus. One day evil will be seen for what it truly is. Wickedness and the rejection of the gospel will be unmasked and we will see that we feared only what was foolish.

Have you ever seen old ads which promote what we would now find silly? I saw a Butterfinger ad this week that boasted on the wrapper that it was flavored with dextrose. Cigarette ads used to boast about being doctor and dentist approved, one slogan was to smoke this specific brand "for the good of your throat," and others promoted the health benefits of smoking on your weight loss and stress.

History has shown those ideas to be laughable and one day, when God judges the earth the opinions, practices and desires of the world that we fear in the flesh will be seen as foolishness in glory. To find ourselves often at odds with the darkness, and uncomfortable in the world is to find the wonderful affirmation that we may at the same time find the comfort of abiding in Jesus. The light will be vindicated.

But secondly, as it relates to hiding our light before others there is both a caution and a confidence in this text.

The caution is that good or bad, who we are will be exposed. God will know it. Therefore we ought to seek to live our lives in accord with the gospel and not think that we can fake it till we make it.

But the confidence is that for those who have been lit aflame by Jesus, flame is our future. We will grow, we will shine, we will become more and more like Jesus. What is un-natural to our flesh becomes natural by the power of grace. Look at Paul's words in **Romans 6:4**. Yes judgement awaits, but take confidence that true light shows itself in newness of life.

Look at Daniel's prophetic vision into God's future glory and how he sees faithful saints: **Daniel 12:1-3**. What is the future of all who hope in Jesus? We will shine with righteousness like the stars. We will look more like Jesus.

This is the future of all who are saved. This is the joy and comfort of those who hear Jesus' call in the parable of the sower to hold fast and to bear fruit with patience. We might be frustrated and fearful of light that flickers but Jesus calls us into public so that we might not only get help, but that we might trust the power of the light to shine forth even in difficult times.

But this is where Jesus adds his final challenge: **Luke 8:18**.

In the Greek there's actually a play on words here. The verb translated "take care," is the same word in the Greek for "to see." Very literally Jesus says, "See carefully then how you hear." In other words look at the life you see in light of your hope you hear. Is the light of the gospel visible in you?

Because if it is, you may know that God will add more. His promise to sanctify his church is as concrete as the air we breathe. But for those who hear this message, and look at their life and see no light, know that whatever comfort, whatever confidence you might think you have, it is nothing at all.

I once heard of a man who, exploring the savannah on a moonless night, found a soft patch of ground and comfortably settled in for the night only to wake up the next morning and the light of the sun revealed he slept on a dunghill. You might be one who thinks they can find joy in this world apart from the light of the gospel, but one day the light will come on. You may think you have ground for joy now, but when the light comes on in full, what you thought you had will be seen as nothing at all.

This paradigm is illustrated briefly and powerfully in Luke's closing account of Jesus and his family. Read with me **Luke 8:19-21**.

So here we have our final point this morning. Not only do Christians shine the light of Jesus, but **Christians naturally know their rights**.

Here is a living parable of what Jesus just spoke on. No one would have heard Jesus more than his mother and his brothers. For over two decades they have gotten to know him, they have eaten with him, they have heard him. But what we see by the end of this story is that they still miss it.

Even what they had, blood rights to Jesus, was taken away from them.

If you remember, Jesus teaching here began because of crowds. Luke 8:4 says great crowds from many towns came to see Jesus. And now, Jesus' family has come to speak and we don't really know why. Perhaps it was because they hadn't seen him lately and they wanted to. Maybe it was because they think Jesus is making a bit of a fool of himself, or walking into danger, and they want to chastise him a bit.

But for whatever reason here is what we know—it was on account of the crowds that they couldn't physically get to Jesus. The Greek stresses a physical separation that they couldn't meet him, they couldn't come at him.

Yet three other things are made clear which are helpful. First, Jesus is alerted to this by someone else. We are not told that the family sent a message to Jesus. The family didn't cry out to Jesus. The family simply showed up, and someone else let Jesus know.

Second, what this second hand messenger tells us is that his family desired to see Jesus. In the Greek this is a present active participle, in other words they are actively at that desiring to see him.

But what we also see is that though they desire to see Jesus, they are standing. That verb is an active and perfect verb, that is to say they are actively standing having stood perfectly and completely. It is a past action that doesn't need anything more.

So what do we see here? We see that even though his family desired to see him, they themselves weren't willing to call out, and they themselves were not willing to do anything more than to stay standing on the outside. They had done their part and they expected Jesus to do his part.

Why? Because they are his family. It is their right to see their family member and Jesus ought to have stopped what he was doing and to acknowledge the weight of this relationship.

What is important to see is that by the end of the story Jesus' mother and Jesus' brothers are believers and active parts of the early church. But what Luke has showed us this far is tension in his family's understanding of Jesus. It was early on where Mary was confronted in her anxiety by Jesus' word that he would be in the house of his Father when he was in the temple. Here again there seems to be more family tension.

This isn't because Jesus devalues the family, and we will talk more about that in Luke 14. But instead what Jesus is attempting to show is how the gospel redefined the family rights and how it relates to hearing and doing.

Jesus' family desire him, they assume they have a natural right to him, but they do nothing more to get to him. Here we see how dangerous and difficult it is to simultaneously desire to see Jesus while at the same time wanting to relate to him according to our flesh.

Jesus' family knew Jesus primarily as their son, and their brother. They felt they had an innate right to see him. How might we make the same mistake, desiring Jesus, but wanting to relate to him based off the Christian family we were raised in, the moral person we want to be, the avoidance of special token sins.

But none of us based on our own flesh, our own natural abilities or earnings have any right to Jesus. Romans 3:23 says there is no distinction: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

This is why Jesus says, "Take care how you hear!" Yes, the path to Jesus is open, but who is it open to? Not by those who come by blood but by those who come by faith.

Here we see how far coming by blood gets you: to the outside.

But where has faith taken people before? Despite the crowds it was the faith of paralytic and his friends who tore a roof off a house to get to Jesus. Faith brought a Centurion to summon Jesus not because he was worthy, but because he was unworthy. Faith will motivate in a few weeks a woman to touch Jesus despite the crowds which ignored her.

Seeing Jesus as brother, or as a son, or as a friend will only get you so far despite your desire. But to hear and to do the word of God, is to come to him as a savior and is to come all the way on the inside. To be Jesus' family is to hear and do the word of God and the word of God calls all of us to repent and come to him not based on the strength of our flesh but on the merit of our faith.

But for those who humble themselves and come to Jesus, consider how John talks of this **John 1:12**.

To come to Jesus with no natural right is to be made a rightful family member of God. Unless we see Jesus as primarily our savior, we will wrestle to experience him as anything else. But once we see him as

our savior it's hard to not see him as everything else. He is our brother, he is our friend, our husband, our comforter and our King.

So what rights do we need to be mindful of? We have the right by grace to hear the message of the gospel and to do it. To create a life of obedience in the midst of it.

This is the right, the privilege, and the definition of what it looks like to be Jesus' true family. This is what his family would come to understand later, but that you have the privilege of understanding now: Hear the word of God, and do something with it.

I would like to give three points of application here in closing.

First, ***hearing and doing the word of God is the pathway to evangelism***. We touched on this a bit already but if you want to be a light to the world, trust Jesus with the whole of your life. Words are necessary for evangelism to happen in full, but do not miss the weight Jesus places on our lives to either undercut our words or to enhance them. Do our lives ring with the beautiful truth of **Psalm 119:35-37**.

Second, ***hearing and doing the word of God is the nature of God's new family—the church***. We talk often of discipleship and community here at the church and you might wonder what it looks like and where to even start this process. Jesus makes the work of the family of God easy in this text: hear the word of God together, and do something with it together. This is the goal of our community groups and the thrust of all our discipleship. If you feel disconnected from God's family ask someone around you how they might help you hear and do God's word. Or better yet, ask how you might do that with them!

And lastly, for those who don't feel the light, for those who don't feel like Jesus' family consider the simple hope that ***hearing and doing the word of God is an experience of intimacy with Jesus***. We might think that prayer, music, and Bible reading are the places we go when we want to feel near to Jesus but take Jesus at his word here. Those have merit and those have power because they too are acts of obedience. To hear and to do the word of God is to walk in familial fellowship with your brother-savior. Because of the dangers of legalism we often feel obedience is something dangerous to our love, and obedience apart from grace is dangerous. But, obedience flowing from grace is delightful. Consider not only Jesus' words here, but also his words in **John 14:15**.

What does it mean to be a Christian? It is to follow the natural course of our conversion—hearing and doing for our joy, for the salvation of the lost, and for the glory of God.