

Nothing Is Hidden

Luke 8:16-21 | Bryce Beale | June 30, 2019

Paul, the great apostle, with more to boast about than any of us here have, refused to boast. “If I should wish to boast,” he wrote to the Corinthians, “I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth”—he was indeed a *great* apostle—“but I refrain from it,” he said, “so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.”¹

Paul wished that those who saw him did not think any more of him than he actually was.

And this is the moral daring of Christianity in all the colors of its ethical bravery. That someone should present himself as a great lord over others, a greater lord than he actually is, that is common among the nations who know not God; but that someone should be just what he is and make what he is known to all who pass by, that is Christianity.

As Tozer expresses it, “There is hardly a man or woman who dares to be just what he or she is without doctoring up the impression. The fear of being found out gnaws like rodents within their hearts.”²

We would all cloak ourselves in darkness and don the prettied masks of actors and actresses, in our natural state. So would Paul have done—had not a brilliant light struck him from the sky. The Savior exposed his deeds of darkness and gently but firmly pulled the scaly mask from the persecutor’s face. He was transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son. Dark mists must always scatter and hide when the bright, transfigured Christ appears before them—and whatever devices we employ to conceal our essential selves from God and others, they cannot survive the coming of the Light of the world.

If the church cannot be understood by those who stand outside and watch, it cannot be the fault of the church. What we are, we are—and the exceptions do not disprove the rule. As our God is light, so we are children of the light out in the open. “We have renounced,” as Paul, “disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse

¹ 2 Corinthians 12:6 (ESV).

² A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Amazon Digital Services, 2011), Kindle, loc. 1043.

to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."³

Where else do sinners so freely confess that they are sinners, but here in the household of God? Where else are men and women so self-aware and transparent with one another as here, where the light of Christ has dawned. We make no claim to perfection—and in that very fact we come closer to perfection than some.

But Paul was not a lover of transparency for its own sake. It would have been no merit to him if he had, from the time of his encounter with the light, continued to kill Christians but then honestly admitted to others what he was doing.

No, the transparency that Paul practiced, and that Christianity commends, is better described by the term *integrity*. We may be honest with one another and the world because, although we fall far from perfection, we do not lead on the whole private lives worth hiding. The light exposed and drove away our old leaven of hypocrisy; now our private lives, if discovered by the public, would not be interesting enough to occupy the magazine racks.

This is what it means to walk in the light. We are Christians; we have nothing to hide.

I mention this concept of Christian integrity because it is the subject of our text today in Luke 8. See how Jesus both describes such transparency and urges it upon us.

LUKE 8:16-21

Jesus has just spoken of the several soils which all hear the word of the kingdom, but who hear in different ways. Some hear and pretend to embrace the message—but eventually the rift between their inner and outer lives shows itself in their lack of fruit. Others hear and really receive the word; they are inwardly transformed and a lifetime of fruit follows. They become people of integrity, clean on the inside and fruitful on the outside; they become true Christians.

We find now in our text for today that theme continued. True Christians do not merely claim to bear good fruit, but they really do. There is in other words a unity between their inner and outer

³ 2 Corinthians 4:2.

lives, their private and public personas. They are characterized in every way by light—they are not perfect, but more and more their private lives are rid of anything that would surprise you.

And Jesus offers us in these verses two reasons for the Christian's transparent integrity. Why do Jesus' true followers have integrity? Why can they expose themselves without fear to the whole world? Jesus' answer may be divided into two parts.

Witness

And the first part of his answer appears in our first verse, verse 16: "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light." Christians have integrity, first, because they are intended by God to be good witnesses to the world, and good witnesses must have integrity.

This image of a lamp is a word picture that Jesus uses more than once. We will see it again in Luke 11:33; you probably recall it from Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount:

You are the light of the world[, recounts Matthew]. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.⁴

As a traveling teacher it was Jesus' custom to repeat certain sayings and similes, and he did not always use his sayings to teach the same point. Here, the saying conveys a point similar to Jesus' use of it in Matthew, though with a different nuance, which we will consider under the second heading of this sermon.

But for now, let's note the similarity. In both the Sermon on the Mount and here in Luke, the saying expresses this at the very least: "God means for Christians to live open lives, like lamps sitting atop a lampstand and shining their light to everyone in view. God intends for Christians to have that sort of integrity."

Where do I find such a meaning in this verse? The key lies in the connecting words in the two verses that follow.

⁴ Matthew 5:14-16.

I want to show you where I find the meaning that I do. It will require much of your mind, but it will also give you confidence that I am making nothing up.

Here then is the logic.

Verse 16 contains the image of the lamp—it is the meaning of that image that we are trying to discover. Move on to verse 17 and you will find a bridge between the verses: “For.” “For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest.” The “for” means that our image in verse 16 is built on top of whatever is asserted in verse 17. Look at the start of verse 18: “Take care *then* how you hear...”⁵ That “then” (or “so” or “therefore” in your translation) means that verse 18 is built upon whatever was just stated in verses 16 and 17. So we have a pyramid with verse 17 at the base, then our lamp in 16, and then the command of verse 18.

So if we start at the bottom, we can come to the meaning of our lamp—it will be whatever makes sense between the base of the pyramid and its peak. We are filling out a Sudoku puzzle, really.

At the bottom in verse 17 we are told, “Nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest.” That statement stands alone—as we will see soon hereafter, God will bring every hidden thought and word and deed of mankind out into the light on the day of judgment. If God will expose every deed on that day, then what might the image of the lamp, which follows from that idea of judgment, mean?

It could mean one of two things: since we have just been hearing about hearing the word, in the parable of the soils, the image of the lamp could mean that God has given us the seed of the gospel, which is a light, and which we must not hide from others but cast broadly, like we spoke of last week. If we do not claim Christ before others, he will not claim us before his Father. So then the lamp would remind us of our obligation to shine forth the gospel to the world by speaking it. On the other hand, since we have been hearing about hearing, the lamp could be a picture not of our speaking the gospel, but of our hearing it. Just as a lamp is not lit to be hidden but set on a lampstand for all to see by its light, so we ought to hear God’s word, receive it, and bear

⁵ Emphasis mine.

fruit—that is, we should hear in such a way that our lives shine to all around.

But which of these middle pieces of the pyramid fits best in its center? Is the lamp about how we speak the gospel, or about how we hear it?

Verse 18 at the top seems to me to hold the answer: “Take care then how you *hear*.”⁶

No one lights a lamp and then hides it—so then, do not hear the message of Christ and then forget it, neglect it, lose it. No, those who light lamps put them on lampstands to be seen—hear the word in such a way that you receive it in a good and noble heart and bear fruit before the world.

In simple terms, the church’s witness to the world depends upon her inner holiness. She cannot just confess Christ like a tree with leaves but no fruit; she who claims a divine power in her midst must prove that power by her own holiness. What she claims to be, she must be in practice. That is, she must have an integrity of life, being what she is and not just pretending to be.

Every one of us who has heard this word of Christ, we must either be the cobblestones of the path that lead the world to Jesus, or we must be the stumbling stone over which the world falls. There is no other way to hear.

I myself feel frequently the weight of what Jesus is stating in these verses. Too many times a preacher who has shone like a lit candle in the eyes of men and women, after illuminating them has shoved himself under a jar or a bed and ceased to be publicly useful. He has turned from scolding men for immorality, only to partake of immorality himself.

A preacher of righteousness should be held to the highest standards of righteousness—the church and world alike, different in so many of their opinions, are of one mind in this. The public proclaimer of Christ’s word cannot be perfect; but he must be holy. He who teaches others, he must teach himself.

I have in mind one preacher who was widely useful for the kingdom; not long ago I sat under his teaching of the word. He was bold in his proclamation, and spoke the truth. A short time

⁶ Emphasis mine.

afterward, it was discovered that he had been involved in multiple affairs—and these were part of his hidden life even while he was teaching us! He will not lose the salvation promised him, which he did not earn—but he will be saved as though through fire, his works burnt up, his candle nearly snuffed.

I cannot despise the man; I am too busy trembling at the weight of responsibility that I carry. I must have integrity as one who has heard and who claims the word of the kingdom. I must heed that same command that Christ gives also to you in verse 18: “Take care then how you hear.”

So then, we must have an honest transparency for the sake of our witness to the world.

Judgment

But there is more. Why ought the Christian to have an integrated life, the private and the public life conjoined? Not only because of his witness to others, but also because of the coming judgment of God.

The bottom and the top of our pyramid, which surround the proverb of the lamp, say as much.

See them again in verses 17 and 18:

For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.

These are, like the saying of the lamp, utterances that Jesus often repeated, and which could be used by him to get across several different points.

But here they clearly indicate a time to come when every person in this room will stand before his or her Creator for judgment.

Paul describes that time with these words in 1 Corinthians 4:5:

do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

He speaks of it again in Romans 14:10. “We will all,” he writes, “stand before the judgment seat of God.” And he adds, “each one of us will give an account of himself to God.”

This great doctrine of future judgment is one of the reasons we Christians live transparently. We let our lights shine because, as our text says, “nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest.”

There can be no true integrity without the watching eye of God, and without the assurance that the God who sees will call every person to account for what is done even in private. Think of the numberless injustices committed in our country against minority groups at any point in our history—only one hundred years ago our state had the most powerful Ku Klux Klan in the nation. The blood and lynchings that went unpunished at the time of their happening were not unseen by God.

We might trace our current moral decline to any number of sources, but here is perhaps the most prominent: we as a nation no longer fear God. Our lust for absolute independence in our decision making, for the right to determine our own identities regardless the opinion of God, and to trample and mock any who might disagree, these are all symptoms of a more profound sickness. We do not fear God. We think the eye of providence, though still printed over the pyramid on our dollar bills, has closed.

But the saintly author of Psalm 94 still cries from the pages of our Bibles:

O LORD, God of vengeance,
O God of vengeance, shine forth!
Rise up, O judge of the earth;
repay to the proud what they deserve!
...
they say, “The LORD does not see,
the God of Jacob does not perceive.”

But here is the Psalmist’s warning: “He who formed the eye, does he not see?”

The one who thinks God does not see will not be bothered if he himself fails to hear. But the one who knows God sees, who knows God will bring everything he sees to light on the day of judgment, that person will be careful how he hears right now.

Jesus speaks these things not only to warn the *world* of his judgment, but to warn those who inhabit the visible church.

This is evident in verse 18: “Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”

There are those who think they have—they come to church and think they are a part of God’s people—yet even that illusion will be stripped from them on the day of God’s wrath. God is impartial in his judgments; it does not matter to him whether we think we have or do not. The question is, “Do we have?” Do I have true faith? Do I have a real portion among God’s people, a real inheritance in the heavens, a share in the Spirit of God? If I do, I will be graciously rewarded on that day; but if I only think I do, that will not sway God’s judgment one hairbreadth to the side.

The same impartiality is portrayed in verses 19-21:

Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” But he answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

If the inner life is not reformed, it does not matter how polished your surface may be, or what human associations you may have. Here are Jesus’ own relatives—here is his own dear mother, and his half-brothers. But, as we find in other passages, they think Jesus out of his mind and, at least in the case of his brothers, they do not believe in him. You cannot get closer, on a human level, to Jesus than these few were, as his immediate family.

But there is no partiality with God.

Those who hear and do, whose inside matches their outside, who have the integrity of the true Christian, they alone will stand on the day of God’s judgment.

Conclusion

Do you think this standard of integrity to be too high for you? It is. You cannot reach it, and nor can I. We are but dust; our frames are earthen. How will any of us escape the snuffing of our lights, or the judgment of the God who sees even thoughts? How can we

remove our masks and live as saints in open light? It can seem a dream unattainable.

Until we quiet our anxious thoughts and do the one thing commanded in our text: hear! Hear with a humble heart the word that God has spoken.

For the gospel word of Jesus Christ is not a bare law which says, "Have integrity." If it were, how would that be good news? The command, "Have integrity," would only be telling us what we already know we should do; and what's more, it would be a word not of salvation but of condemnation to us all, for anyone here who has tried one moment to force integrity into their lives will know the impossibility of the task.

Does your heart yearn to be among that family of the Savior which he describes in verse 21, his true family who hear the word of God and do it? Then there is one word you must hear and do before all the rest.

Jesus revealed it to the Jews in John chapter 6, who asked him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" What is our first step, if we are to hear and do the works that God would have us do?

Jesus answers: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

Your two selves, the private and the public, cannot become one until they are wed by faith. Integrity is above your ability, but it is not above God's, and he will give it if you will believe in the Savior whom he has sent into the world.

Your heart and your outward life are a magnetic pair of such power that no human hands, not even your own, can join them together. But there is one set of hands, still marked by the nail holes of their suffering, which have the power to bring the two together. Lay your life in those hands this moment—that is the word that God has spoken. And if you hear that word and obey it, you will become a person of integrity.

You will become a Christian.