

Mark 4:21-25

(v. 21: cf. Mt 5:15; Lk 8:16; 11:33) (v. 22: cf. Mt 10:26; Lk 8:17; 12:2) (v. 23: cf. Mt 11:15, et al.) (vv. 24-25: Mt 7:2; 13:12; 25:29; Lk 6:38; 8:18; 19:26)¹

²¹ Then Jesus asked them, "Would anyone light a lamp and then put it under a basket or under a bed? Of course not! A lamp is placed on a stand, where its light will shine. ²² For everything that is hidden will eventually be brought into the open, and every secret will be brought to light.

²³ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." ²⁴ Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given-- and you will receive even more. ²⁵ To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them." (NLT)

²¹ También les dijo: «¿Acaso se trae una lámpara para ponerla debajo de un cajón o debajo de la cama? ¿No es, por el contrario, para ponerla en una repisa? ²² No hay nada escondido que no esté destinado a descubrirse; tampoco hay nada oculto que no esté destinado a ser revelado. ²³ El que tenga oídos para oír, que oiga. ²⁴» Pongan mucha atención —añadió—. Con la medida que midan a otros, se les medirá a ustedes, y aún más se les añadirá. ²⁵ Al que tiene, se le dará más; al que no tiene, hasta lo poco que tiene se le quitará.» (NVI)

²¹ Καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς μὴτι ἔρχεται ὁ λύχνος ἵνα ὑπὸ τὸν μῶδιον τεθῆ ἢ ὑπὸ τὴν κλίνην οὐχ ἵνα ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν τεθῆ ²² οὐ γάρ ἐστιν κρυπτόν ἐὰν μὴ ἵνα φανερωθῆ οὐδὲ ἐγένετο ἀπόκρυφον ἀλλ' ἵνα ἔλθῃ εἰς φανερόν ²³ εἴ τις ἔχει ὧτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω ²⁴ Καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς βλέπετε τί ἀκούετε ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε μετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν καὶ προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν ²⁵ ὅς γὰρ ἔχει δοθήσεται αὐτῷ. καὶ ὅς οὐκ ἔχει καὶ ὁ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ (NA28)

Notes:

A. Setting {Markan Sandwich}:

- Recall: Jesus is teaching the crowds from a boat in 4:1-9 & 21-33² {the bun}. ← We are currently in the bottom bun.
- Jesus is teaching the *insiders*: the *twelve* and those with Him (4:10) in a private location in 4:10-20 {the filling}.

B. Relation to the rest of this block of Jesus' teaching (4:1-34):

- Although these parables don't feature seeds like much in the rest of this collection, they are related thematically:
 - To *hear* (and the importance to hear).
 - Insiders*—who can understand the revelation of the Kingdom of God & *outsiders*—who can't understand the revelation of the Kingdom of God (4:11).
 - The relation between one's *hearing* and one's status as an *insider* or *outsider*, and consequently one's status to the Kingdom of God.

C. Parable of the Lamp (4:21-23):

- Purpose of a lit lamp? (4:21)
 - Is it to be **Concealed?**—"[To] put it under a basket or under a bed?...**Of course not!**"
 - Or is it to be **Revealed?**—“A lamp is placed on a stand, (consequently) **where its light will shine.**”
 - Answer: The purpose of a lit lamp is to be revealed.
 - “For³” [in order that]: (4:22)
 - everything that is hidden will *eventually*⁴ be:
 - Brought into the open, and
 - Every secret will be brought to light.”
 - In short, to reveal.**
 - Therefore: the purpose of a lit lamp is to be revealed in order to reveal.**
- Who/What is the lamp?
 - The lamp is the subject of the sentence, and Mark refers to it with the definite article: *the*⁵ [lamp]⁶.
 - Often in the OT, a lamp is a metaphor for **God** (cf. 2 Sam 22:29); **the Davidic Messiah** (cf. 2 Kgs 8:19; Ps 132:17); or the **Torah** (cf. Ps 119:105).
 - The idea of the lamp *coming* (ἔρχεται, *erchetai*) is more appropriate for a person, rather than an object.
 - **Jesus is the lamp**, specifically, the *coming of Jesus* on the scene. (cf. Jn 8:12⁷; Rev 21:23).
- Therefore: Jesus' ultimate purpose (and God's ultimate purpose in Jesus) is to be revealed (not concealed)—in order to eventually reveal (not conceal) *everything* by its [Jesus'] light (cf. Jn 1:5; 8:12).

¹ Recall: Because Jesus was an itinerant teacher, He told many (if not all) of His parables on multiple occasions and contexts—therefore, a parable's interpretation must take into account occasional aspects and nuances—which are best determined by their immediate context within each Gospel. Once the parable is viewed within its particular Gospel's context, it may then be compared *vis-à-vis* its particular context in other Gospels.

² “Although it is not specifically stated, the resumption of parabolic speech in v. 21 leads us to assume that Jesus is again teaching publicly beside the Sea of Galilee” (Edwards 2002); cf. (Lane 1974). For discussion on the possibility that Jesus is still speaking just to the *insiders* in private, cf. (Stein 2008).

³ ἵνα

⁴ i.e., at the appropriate time. “The light did not come ultimately to be hidden, but it may be concealed for a time until the appropriate hour or venue or audience appears. In Jesus' case the ultimate disclosure does not come until the crucifixion and resurrection.” (Witherington III 2001).

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⁶ Mt & Lk, the NLT, NIV, and many (I would anticipate most) English translations place the lamp in the objective case, and with the indefinite article: *a* [lamp], due to the awkwardness in the original Greek esp. the implied ‘lamp coming’: “Does the lamp come in order...”

⁷ You'll notice this verse referred to frequently.

- i. Jesus, who He is and His purpose, is not to be hidden or secret forever; nor can it be⁸—eventually the lamp [Jesus] will be placed on a *lampstand* and infinitely illuminate→ revealing everything⁹, i.e., be revealed and reveal.
 - 1. For the *outsiders*: if Jesus and His parables are concealing truth, and His purpose is to reveal, then revelation is available with Jesus, i.e., no need to be outsiders, come be with Jesus (*insiders*).
 - 2. Be with Jesus and all will be revealed. Don't be with Jesus, and all remains concealed (cf. John 8:12; 9:39; 12:35; 14:6). Recall: listening leads one to be with Jesus.
- d. So...listen and understand (4:23)!
 - i. To reinforce the importance and urgency of listening and understanding, Mark appends the following parable, or saying, to the theme of revelation and concealment in general, and to the *listening to* and the *understanding of* parables in particular:

D. Parable of the Measure¹⁰ (4:24-25):

a. **“Pay close attention to what you hear.**

- i. The closer you listen,
 - 1. The more understanding you will be given,
 - 2. And you will receive even more.
- ii. To those who listen to my teaching [*insiders*],
 - 1. More understanding will be given
- iii. But for those who are not listening [*outsiders*]
 - 1. Even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.”

b. **Example: those who listen→more understanding than is initially possessed.**

- i. **Initial understanding:** some degree of understanding and/or recognition of God. → open to *hear* God's revelation when encountered with it:
- ii. **Hear the OT (1:2-3).** → **Hear John the Baptist (1:4-8; cf. Jn 1:29-37).** → **Be with Jesus (3:13; 3:35; 4:11).**
- iii. **Hear/See Jesus' authority via His words & deeds (1:16-3:6¹¹).** → **Hear Jesus (4:1-33).** → **Be with Jesus (3:13; 3:35; 4:11).**
- iv. **Progressively understand the Gospel¹²: who Jesus is (1:1) and His message (1:14-15)—progressively revealed through His ministry, and ultimately revealed through His suffering, death, and resurrection.**
- v. **Hear and Understand God's (then) future revelation: NT (including Mark's Gospel).**
- vi. **Hear and Understand God's future and final revelation: Jesus' 2nd coming (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).**
- vii. **The ultimate revelation [revealing of God]: “Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. (Rev 21:3)...And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 21:4-5).**
- viii. **Example's conclusion:** those who listen began with some degree of understanding and/or recognition of God, and conclude not just with understanding, but are intimately (and eternally) *with* God¹³, i.e., understanding par excellence—more understanding was definitely given¹⁴.

⁸ Recall: 2:21-22, just as Jesus cannot merely be appended to the old, or contained within the old, He cannot be indefinitely concealed either—He will, albeit eventually, be fully revealed and bring ‘everything that is hidden into the open, and every secret brought to the light’ (vv. 21-22).

⁹ Keep this imagery fresh...we will see in Mark, Jesus ultimately revealed in His suffering, death, and resurrection. “Upon his resurrection, Jesus will indeed be manifested and set on a lampstand through the witness of the church (9:9c), so that everyone can believe that Jesus is the Christ and enter into eternal life (cf. John 20:31). Yet Mark's community knows that this “already now” manifestation since the resurrection is still in part and awaits that day when every eye will see and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Mark 13:26; 14:62; cf. Phil. 2:10-11; Titus 2:13).” (Stein 2008).

¹⁰ Cf. most other English translations for a more literal rendering of the saying (v. 24), e.g., “And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure (μέτρον, *metrōn*) you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you” [ESV]. The NLT captures the function and meaning of the saying very nicely—it saves time discussing *measures* and such.

The saying: “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you”, apparently is not just an old Jewish proverb that occurs in a variety of forms, cf. (Edwards 2002); but it is also a common proverb found in many cultures in various forms, cf. (Stein 2008).

¹¹ Thus far...of course much more to come.

¹² “Good News” [NLT]

¹³ ‘face to face’—the ultimate expression of intimacy—to be with God intimately is the ultimate revelation of God (cf. John 1:18; Ex. 19:16-22; 24:1-2; 33:19-23).

¹⁴ “This isn't quite like saying ‘You'll get out of this what you put in’, since of course when everything depends on the grace of God it's never a matter simply of people trying a bit harder and so getting a better return on their moral investment. It's rather...If they grasp what Jesus is saying and go deeper and deeper into it, they will get more and more from it. But if they remain at the superficial level, like the uncomprehending crowds, they will lose even that sense of God doing something new in their midst which they have at present.” (Wright 2004).

- ix. Similarly, we could look at a *not listening* scenario—progressively moving the non-hearer farther from revelation until even the original, *some degree of understanding and/or recognition of God*, is ultimately lost—as the non-hearer thoroughly orients themselves with non-revelatory¹⁵ ‘understanding’¹⁶.
- c. Understanding given & Understanding lost → Proximity to the Kingdom of God given & lost:
 - i. Recall: Jesus is announcing and discussing, i.e., **revealing**¹⁷ the Kingdom of God (1:15; 4:11).
 - ii. One’s inclusion into (*insiders*), or exclusion from (*outsiders*), the Kingdom of God, is dependent on how one responds to (accepts or rejects) the **revelation** of the Kingdom of God.
 - iii. How one responds to (accepts or rejects)¹⁸ the **revelation** of the Kingdom of God, is proportional to the degree in which one *understands* the **revelation** of the Kingdom of God.
 - iv. The degree of *understanding* (**revelation**) one has, is proportional to the degree in which one *hears*.
 - v. The degree in which one *hears*, is proportional to one’s proximity to Jesus.
 - vi. Summary (§§ D.c.i.-v. above): One’s (future and ultimate) proximity to the Kingdom of God¹⁹ (*inside* or *outside*) is directly related to one’s (present²⁰) proximity to Jesus²¹ (*insiders* or *outsiders*).
 - 1. *Aside*: what is given by God, i.e., the Kingdom of God is graciously over-proportionate²² with respect to humanity’s effort to *hear*!

E. The Lampstand, Harvest, & the Kingdom of God:

- a. The parable of the Lamp *shines light on the receiving of the seed*—the *hearing* of the Word in general, and parables in particular.
- b. Despite possible appearance to the contrary, similar to the harvest (4:13-20), the Lamp [Jesus] will eventually be placed on the lampstand where His light will shine, and everything will be brought to light, i.e., the Lamp will be **revealed** and will **reveal**²³. The Harvest will come. “The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near.” (1:15)—solely because: “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.” (1:1). Therefore, “Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” (1:15).

¹⁵ Recall: The Kingdom of God can only be understood by revelation (4:11); so consequently, to resist (*-hear*) revelation is to resist (*-hear*) the announcement and invitation to the Kingdom of God.

¹⁶ I think Nietzsche understood this well (cf. *The Gay Science*).

¹⁷ Recall: sowing the seed: God’s word—revelation (4:14).

¹⁸ cf. 4:13-20

¹⁹ Recall: the significance of Harvest (4:20) and its inevitability.

²⁰ “...what will ultimately be received in the Kingdom of God will depend upon that which a man possesses of it now. Present possession depends upon hearing, upon appropriation or rejection of the word of the Kingdom that has scattered like seed.” (Lane 1974).

²¹ Not based on one’s mental capacity, cleverness, or ability to solve riddles, but based on one’s choice and willingness to *listen*.

²² For lack of a better term.

²³ This has both happened in Jesus’ first coming—culminating in Jesus’ resurrection, and will commence with Jesus’ second coming (already/not-yet). “This is both a promise and a warning. The promise: don’t worry, this kingdom-message will be public knowledge soon enough. The warning: make sure you’re listening now, because you will need to know.” (Wright 2004).