

MARK 4:21-34

²¹ He said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? ²² For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. ²³ Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” ²⁴ And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. ²⁵ For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”

²⁶ He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰ He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

I CAME ACROSS THE LYRICS OF A SONG THAT I HAVE NOT HEARD IN MANY YEARS.

IT IS A SIMPLE HYMN THAT PROCLAIMS A POWERFUL MESSAGE AND COMPLIMENTS JESUS WORDS ABOUT WHAT IS HIDDEN WILL BE DISCLOSED, RATHER THAN BEING KEPT SECRET.

LET US LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF THE SONG AND SO WE MAY HEAR WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM IT.

“IN THE BULB THERE IS A FLOWER; IN THE SEED AN APPLE TREE; IN COCOONS, A HIDDEN PROMISE, BUTTERFLIES WILL SOON BE FREE.

IN THE COLD AND SNOW OF WINTER THERE’S A SPRING THAT WAITS TO BE, UNREVEALED UNTIL ITS SEASON, SOMETHING GOD ALONE CAN SEE.

THERE’S A SONG IN EVERY SILENCE, SEEKING WORD AND MELODY; THERE’S A DAWN IN EVERY DARKNESS, BRINGING HOPE TO YOU AND ME.

FROM THE PAST WILL COME THE FUTURE; WHAT IT HOLDS A MYSTERY, UNREVEALED UNTIL ITS SEASON, SOMETHING GOD ALONE CAN SEE.

IN OUR END IS OUR BEGINNING; IN OUR TIME, INFINITY; IN OUR DOUBT THERE IS BELIEVING, IN OUR LIVES, ETERNITY.

IN OUR DEATH, A RESURRECTION; AT THE LAST A VICTORY, UNREVEALED UNTIL ITS SEASON, SOMETHING GOD ALONE CAN SEE.”

SOMETHING THAT WILL BE REVEALED IN ITS SEASON IS WHAT JESUS INTENDED WHEN HE SPOKE IN PARABLES.

AFTER ALL, EVEN WHEN HE EXPLAINED THINGS TO THE TWELVE THEY HAD NO REAL UNDERSTANDING ABOUT WHAT JESUS MEANT, UNTIL AFTER THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO THEM FOLLOWING HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

SO AS JESUS SAID, HIS INTENTION FOR SPEAKING IN PARABLES, WAS NOT TO KEEP SECRETS, BUT TO PLANT SEEDS THAT WERE INTENDED TO GROW AND BLOOM IN GOD'S TIME.

HIS REASON FOR EXPLAINING THINGS TO HIS DISCIPLES WAS TO ENABLE THEM TO BE EQUIPPED, WHEN THE TIME CAME, TO NURTURE AND HARVEST THE FRUIT OF THE SEEDS OF FAITH.

THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS, BOTH THEN AND NOW, ARE GIVEN INSIGHT SO THEY MAY HELP OTHERS SEE, AND HEAR, AND BELIEVE, THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT GOD'S LOVE, AND GIFT OF SALVATION THROUGH HIS SON.

AND OF COURSE OUR WITNESS TO JESUS IS NOT SOMETHING DONE WITH WORDS ALONE, FOR EXAMPLE- SHARING THE GOSPEL- WHICH IS SOWING THE SEEDS OF GOD'S WORD.

OUR WITNESS IS ALSO DONE, OFTEN MORE PROFOUNDLY, THROUGH OUR ACTIONS, WHICH IS LIKE- LIGHTING A LAMP AND PLACING IT SO OTHERS CAN SEE IT SHINE.

WE CAN FIND AN EXAMPLE IN THE SECULAR WORLD, OF THE POWER OF A SMALL ACT IN THE LIFE OF BEN FRANKLIN.

FRANKLIN HAD A STRONG DESIRE FOR THE STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA HAVE LIGHTS THROUGHOUT THE CITY.

BUT RATHER THAN SEEKING TO PERSUADE CITY AUTHORITIES TO INVEST IN PUTTING UP LAMPS ON POLES, HE TOOK SOME ACTION.

HE HUNG A LANTERN ON A BRACKET IN FRONT OF HIS HOUSE SO THAT IT ILLUMINATED THE AREA.

FRANKLIN MADE SURE THE GLASS WAS KEPT CLEAN AND THE WICK TRIMMED, AND HAD IT LIT EACH DAY AROUND DUSK.

WHEN PEOPLE SAW THE VALUE OF THE LIGHT, OTHERS PLACED ONES UP, UNTIL FINALLY THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR SUCH LIGHTS AND PUT THEM IN PLACE THROUGHOUT THE CITY.

SO ALSO IT IS WITH THE LIGHT OF CHRIST, AND THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL, PEOPLE NEED TO OBSERVE THE VALUE OF JESUS IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS, AND NOT JUST HEAR ABOUT IT.

THUS THE SAYING ABOUT OF THE LAMP IS DIRECTED TOWARDS JESUS' FOLLOWERS WHO ARE REMINDED THEY ARE GIVEN HIS LIGHT IN ORDER TO SHINE IT, NOT HIDE IT.

SURELY THE LAMP, IS A METAPHOR FOR JESUS CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, WHO CAME INTO THE WORLD TO REVEAL GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD.

IN FACT, JESUS PROCLAIMED HIS PURPOSE WAS TO COME INTO THE WORLD TO SHINE THE LIGHT OF HIS FATHER'S LOVE AND GRACE.

JOHN 8:12 RECORDS THE SAVIOR'S MESSAGE ABOUT PURPOSE OF HIS MISSION: "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. WHOEVER FOLLOWS ME WILL NEVER WALK IN DARKNESS BUT WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE."

AND WHILE THE LIGHT OF CHRIST MAY BE DENIED, TURNED FROM, ATTEMPTED TO BE HIDDEN OR SNUFFED OUT- ULTIMATELY THAT LIGHT WILL PREVAIL.

THINK OF THE SUN IN THE SKY: THE ROTATION OF THE EARTH, CLOUDS, OR A SOLAR ECLIPSE MAY HIDE IT FROM OUR EYES.

AND YET THE SUN REMAINS PRESENT IN THE UNIVERSE, WITHOUT ITS POWER BEING DIMINISHED JUST BECAUSE WE DO NOT SEE IT.

SIMILARLY, THE LIGHT OF JESUS WILL ALSO PREVAIL NO MATTER WHAT OR WHO TRIES TO IGNORE, BLOCK, OR OBSCURE IT FROM SHINING IN THE WORLD OR THROUGH THE SOULS OF BELIEVERS.

HOWEVER, WHEN HIS LIGHT SHINES THROUGH US, IT MAKES A BETTER WITNESS FOR JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO OTHERS, WHICH IS WHY JESUS WANTS US TO SHINE HIS LIGHT RATHER THAN HIDE IT.

FURTHERMORE, JESUS IS NOT ONLY THE LAMP, HE IS ALSO THE SEED OF SALVATION PLANTED IN THE WORLD.

HE IS THE WORD OF GOD MADE FLESH SOWN IN THE WORLD TO PRODUCE AN ABUNDANT HARVEST FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

AND IT IS THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION THAT HE CONTINUES TO YIELD THE GREAT HARVEST GOD PLANNED.

WE PARTICIPATE IN THIS WORK BY CONTINUING JESUS' MISSION AND MINISTRY, WHICH IS TO SHARE THE LOVE OF GOD IN WORD AND DEED.

BUT LET US NOT THINK THIS ONLY HAPPENS BY DOING GREAT DEEDS, BY GIVING A POWERFUL TESTIMONY, OR THROUGH ELOQUENT WORDS.

WHEN WE LISTEN TO JESUS' TEACHING WE HEAR ABOUT HOW LITTLE THINGS CAN PRODUCE BOUNTIFUL RESULTS. AND WE CAN LOOK AT HIS ACTIONS TO SEE HOW HIS MINISTRY BEGAN.

AFTER RETURNING FROM HIS TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS, FOLLOWING HIS BAPTISM, JESUS BEGAN PREACHING AND TEACHING IN SMALL GROUPS.

HE CALLED A FEW DISCIPLES AT FIRST, BUT THEN HE CALLED A FEW MORE, AS LARGER CROWDS WERE DRAWN TO HIM.

THE VALIDITY OF HIS MESSAGE WAS PROVED BY THE MIRACLES HIS DID, WHICH ONLY A COUPLE OF TIMES INVOLVED A MASS MIRACLE LIKE FEEDING THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE.

MOST OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES WERE DONE TO AN INDIVIDUAL OR A FEW PEOPLE AT A TIME, RATHER THAN IN WHAT WE MIGHT CALL "A MASS MARKETING" EVENT.

TRULY, IT WAS BY SMALL BEGINNINGS, LITTLE THINGS IN HIS WORDS OR ACTIONS THAT THE SEEDS WERE SOWN THAT WOULD LATER PRODUCE THE HARVEST OF CHRIST'S CHURCH.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED THE SAVIOR SPOKE ABOUT.

IT ONLY TAKES A LITTLE FAITH, A FEW WORDS, A SMALL ACT, FOR GOD TO MAKE AN ABUNDANT HARVEST.

FOR EXAMPLE, WE CAN SHINE CHRIST'S LIGHT IN ACTS OF KINDNESS, OR SHOWING PATIENCE, EVEN IF WE DO NOT FEEL VERY PATIENT.

THEN THERE IS THE SIMPLE ACT OF EXPRESSING THANKS, AND THE EQUALLY IMPORTANT ACT OF GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTING THE GRATITUDE OTHERS EXPRESS TOWARDS US.

WE ACCEPT THEIR THANKS NOT SO THAT WE CAN FEEL GOOD ABOUT OURSELVES, BUT TO HONOR THEIR DESIRE OR NEED TO THANK US.

WHEN WE DO THE LITTLE THINGS THAT SHOW OUR FAITH OR LOVE, THAT IS ONE WAY WE SHINE LIGHT, AND SOW SEEDS FOR JESUS, BUT IT IS STILL GOD WHO GIVES GROWTH.

THIS IS WHY JESUS DOES NOT CALL MOST OF US TO WHAT THE WORLD WOULD VIEW AS GREAT DEEDS.

INSTEAD GOD CHOOSES TO WORK MORE THROUGH SMALL BEGINNINGS, AND LITTLE WORDS OR ACTS OF LOVE OR KINDNESS TO GROW HIS KINGDOM.

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW A LITTLE THING CAN HAVE A LIFE CHANGING AND SAVING IMPACT OF ONE PERSON IS FOUND IN THE STORY OF A MAN NAMED CHARLES.

HE WAS A JEHOVAH WITNESS FOR OVER THREE DECADES AND STROVE TO WORK HIMSELF UP IN THE ORGANIZATION.

THEN ONE NIGHT AFTER A MEETING HE PASSED BY A MAN HOLDING UP A SIGN WITH A RELIGIOUS MESSAGE.

MOST, IF NOT ALL OF US, HAVE AT THE VERY LEAST SEEN PICTURES OF SUCH PEOPLE HOLDING THEIR SIGNS.

SOME SIGNS SIMPLY SAY “REPENT” OR “JESUS SAVES”. OTHERS HAVE “JOHN 3:16” ON THEM.

BUT THE SIGN THIS MAN HELD UP HAD SOMETHING SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT. WRITTEN ON IT WAS “1 JOHN 5:13”.

FOR SOME REASON THE UNUSUAL DESIGNATION CAUGHT HIS EYE AND AFTER HE GOT HOME CHARLES LOOKED IT UP.

THE VERSE SAYS: “ I WRITE THESE THINGS TO YOU WHO BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.”

ETERNAL LIFE WAS NOT SOMETHING CHARLES THOUGHT WAS REALLY POSSIBLE IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE FAITH HE DEVOTED SO MANY YEARS TO.

HE THEN READ ALL OF 1 JOHN CHAPTER FIVE AND HE STRUGGLED FOR ABOUT A YEAR WITH THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

CHARLES EVENTUALLY LEFT THE JEHOVAH WITNESSES, CONFESSED HIS FAITH IN JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR, AND JOINED A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

A PASTOR WHO KNOWS HIM SAID THAT CHARLES, AND THE MAN WHO HELD UP THAT SIGN, HAD NEVER MET.

THIS MEANS THE MAN WITH THE SIGN NEVER KNEW HOW GOD USED HIM AND HIS SIGN TO GROW HIS KINGDOM.

SO OFTEN WE TOO NEVER KNOW THE DIFFERENCE WE HAVE MADE, OR SADLY HAVE FAILED TO MAKE, BY THE LITTLE THINGS WE HAVE DONE OR NEGLECTED.

OUR CALL HOWEVER IS NOT TO REVISIT THE SUCCESSES OR FAILURES OF THE PAST, BUT TO SERVE GOD NOW IN THE LITTLE THINGS, AND SOMETIMES BIGGER THINGS OF LIFE AND FAITH.

THIS IS AS TRUE FOR CHURCHES AS FOR INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS.

MEGA CHURCH PASTOR AND AUTHOR RICK WARREN WROTE ABOUT THIS VERY THING IN HIS BOOK “PURPOSE DRIVEN CHURCH.”

HE SAID: “SUCCESS IS NOT BEING LARGER THAN SOME OTHER CHURCH. IT IS BEARING AS MUCH FRUIT AS POSSIBLE GIVEN YOUR GIFTS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND POTENTIAL.”

PASTOR WARREN’S WORDS HERE FOLLOW CLOSELY THE TEACHING OF JESUS, AS WELL AS THE WORDS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL CONCERNING THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

SCRIPTURE NEVER SAYS -THERE IS ANYTHING WRONG WITH BEING A SMALL CONGREGATION, NOR IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH GROWING TO BE A MEDIUM, LARGE, OR MEGA CHURCH.

IT IS NOT ABOUT OUR SIZE, IT IS ABOUT OUR WILLINGNESS TO SHINE THE LIGHT OF CHRIST AND SOW THE SEEDS OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH- OUR WORSHIP, BY SUPPORTING MISSION WORK, AND DOING MINISTRY.

THUS, JESUS CALLS US AND ALL CHRISTIANS, AS INDIVIDUAL FOLLOWERS, AND AS CONGREGATIONS TO BEAR HIS FRUIT ACCORDING TO OUR GIFTS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND POTENTIAL.

JESUS ALSO SAID: “ASK, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU; SEEK, AND YOU WILL FIND; KNOCK, AND THE DOOR WILL BE OPENED TO YOU.”

ONE OF THE WAYS THIS CAN HAPPEN IS FOR US GO TO GOD- WITH THE DESIRE TO LEARN HOW WE MIGHT BETTER REACH OUT TO OTHERS WITH THE LIGHT OF CHRIST AND THE SEEDS OF THE GOSPEL.

LET US TRUST IN THE PROMISE OF OUR SAVIOR AND ASK THE LORD HOW OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS AS A CHURCH, AND AS INDIVIDUALS, MIGHT HELP SPREAD HIS LOVE.

LET US PRAY: HEAVENLY FATHER, WE GIVE THANKS FOR YOUR PROMISES AND POWER. WE PRAY FOR YOUR GUIDANCE TO HELP US BEAR FRUIT FOR JESUS, ACCORDING TO YOUR WILL. SEND YOUR SPIRIT, WE PRAY, TO DIRECT US AND EMPOWER US TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS IN CHRIST’S NAME. AMEN

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