

Sermon: A Practical Life

Text: Luke 8:16-21

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Introduction: When Jesus is asked in Scripture what it means to be a follower of his, he is usually quick to give concrete answers. In the very next chapter, Luke records Jesus' voice:

Luke 9:23 (NIV) ²³ ...“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Sometimes the answer to the question of how to follow Jesus is even more clear:

Luke 18:22bc (NIV) ^{22bc} Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Luke 18:29-30 (NIV) ²⁹“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”

Last week, Luke (8:1-15) provided us the *Parable of the Four Soils*. With that story Jesus provided an interpretation. He told his disciples that the secrets of the kingdom of God had been given to them (v. 10a). In our text today Jesus continues to elaborate on this *theology of hearing*, and what it means practically to be a part of God's plan.

To be a part of God's plan and to be in a saved relationship with Jesus:

I. Genuine Followers Need to Be Seen (vv. 16-17).

Luke 8:16-17 (NIV) ¹⁶“No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. ¹⁷For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.

The lamp that would have been familiar to Jesus' audience was something like the Herodian lamp. It was small enough for the palm of the hand. It was open on the top and made of a thin, light-brown clay, filled with olive oil, supplied with a simple wick out through a nozzle that sloped downward. Once it was lighted, it was intended to burn all night.

If you are a genuine follower:

A. Don't hide your light.

It would be silly to light a light meant to produce safety and security, a means of seeing in the room at night, and then keep it hidden. Otherwise, why light the lamp at all? And if you hide the lamp under a jar, there would be danger in it going out.

I suppose there are many options for interpreting this parable/allegory. In the writings of John there is much talk of darkness and light (day and night; truth and lie).

John 9:4 (NIV) ⁴As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

Jesus is self-identified as the Light of the world as are his followers, and in Matthew's Gospel this light *cannot* be hidden. Jesus says to his disciples:

Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV) ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

B. There is a reason for light.

The Lucan text indicates that it is **so that those who come in can see the light**. Light is to be shared. If the light stands for Jesus, or the Truth, or the gospel, if it represents anything about salvation, safety or security, wouldn't we want to share that?

The light is put up high in the middle of the room for *everyone's* benefit.

C. God will reveal everything.

In the new age of the Messiah and the current Church age there should be no secrets, no real mysteries about God's agenda. Everything will be revealed, and so God's witness in the world is to be both seen and heard by those who are searching for God.

Luke 8:10a (NIV) ¹⁰He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you,

Jesus came to earth to show us God. We are here to do the same for others!

Some areas that God's light reveals and uncovers in our lives may need attention or correction regarding the way we live.

“Years ago, a wealthy Chinese businessman visited England and was fascinated by a powerful microscope and the wonders it uncovered. So he bought one and took it back to China. He thoroughly enjoyed using it until one day when he looked at some rice that he was planning to eat for dinner. To his shock, he saw tiny living creatures crawling in it. He didn’t know what to do, since rice was a staple of his diet. Finally, in frustration, he smashed his microscope to bits. It had revealed something distasteful to him so he destroyed the source of the discovery!” (Illustration from Steven J. Cole sermon entitled *Take Care How You Listen!*)

You can use the Word or stop up your ears. The better approach is to listen and allow God to help change you.

II. Genuine Followers Need to Be Attentive (v. 18).

Luke 8:18 (NIV) ¹⁸Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

“Those who lean forward to hear, who invest trust and commitment, who come to the altar of the word seeking, asking, and hungering--these are the ones to whom ‘more will be given.’ Those who think they already know, who acknowledge no blindness, who listen with ears that register only likes and dislikes, who fold the arms across the chest waiting to be convinced or entertained, who want information without obligation--these are the ones who discover painfully that even what they thought they had has been taken away.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p. 113

A. Be a careful listener.

Our relationship with God through the Holy Spirit is not one to take for granted. Like with any relationship, time, distance and neglect can weaken or destroy it.

The positive principle here is that if we do listen carefully, we will be given more light, more understanding. And this is not to impress others with what we know, but to share with others Whom we know.

B. Show an interest.

Build in time into your schedule for devotions, Bible study, prayer, worship. I never tire of investing in my knowledge of God’s Word and trying to build on my growing relationship with Him. I find the Bible familiar, but ever new! Some people, though, don’t pay much attention to this Treasure while others richly benefit from time spent with their Savior and Lord.

“A few years ago there was a man in his eighties named Carl Sharsmith who had spent over 50 summers as a guide in Yosemite National Park. This man delighted in the spectacular beauty of that place, and he was always discovering some new facet of it to revel in. But often he got hit with a question that a lady asked him one afternoon: ‘I’ve only got an hour to spend at Yosemite,’ she declared. ‘What should I do? Where should I go?’ The old naturalist ranger finally found a voice to reply. ‘Ah, lady, only an hour.’ He repeated it slowly. ‘I suppose that if I had only an hour to spend at Yosemite, I’d just walk over there by the river and sit down and cry.’” - (Illustration from Steven J. Cole sermon entitled *Take Care How You Listen!*)

One of my regrets is that I am incapable of fully relating to you the beauty of the Word of God and my Savior. I pray everyday that God will improve my ability to witness for Him.

III. Genuine Followers Need to Be Helpful (vv. 19-20).

Luke 8:19-20 (NIV) ¹⁹Now Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. ²⁰Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.”

A. Not a part of the crowd

The idea of the crowd is not always a positive image. Even in our culture “going along with the crowd” is usually a negative picture that lacks moral courage and integrity.

As we discussed last week, the crowd is made up of potential disciples for Jesus who have varying degrees of commitment to him. Some of the crowd’s makeup is religious people who are seekers as well as critics. Some of the crowd is there to get something from Jesus.

It struck me that the biggest obstacle to getting near to Jesus is sometimes those who are closest to him. Have you ever done or said something to someone that ruined your ability to introduce them to Jesus? It’s difficult to recover from that!

B. Helping people come to God

Jesus was later willing to die for us to introduce us to His Father and to show us the extent of his love. I wonder some days how much sacrifice we are ready to offer? How much inconvenience do we bear to see others come in to the kingdom?

The people who are real prospects for the church are those who are “wanting to see” Jesus. God develops the desire for a relationship, but it can be through our relationships that we aid in this divine work. This privilege we have been given is that of an ambassador - as if God were making his appeal through us.

IV. Genuine Followers Need to Be Practical (v. 21).

Luke 8:21 (NIV) ²¹He replied, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.”

Luke 14:25-27 (NIV) ²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

It takes quite a commitment:

A. To be a part of God’s kingdom

So Jesus insists that to be a part of his family requires hearing AND doing, knowing AND being! The Church has become the new Israel. Admittance around the Messianic banquet table is not based on genealogy or righteous parents, but on your response to the invitation: Come!

“It is when people have common aims, common principles, common interests, a common goal in life that they become really and truly kin.” - William Barclay

B. To pass the test

It is not just about receiving the Word of God, i.e., the seed from the Sower. The previous text was full of those who heard the word, but failed to follow through producing a harvest. Satan interfered, some withered under the heat of everyday life where human-generated joy can be absent, while others cared not enough about the most important part of life - a relationship with God.

It is not how much you know, but what you do with that knowledge. This whole section is not entirely about knowing, but growing, maturing and bearing fruit. “True growth means transformation and change. Maturity does not come by standing pat... The goal of God’s shining light is to make us light, so we can shine for him.” Bock, *Luke*, p. 235

Conclusion: Everyone who comes to the Lord has a different and personal experience. Certainly not everyone comes out of what some might call a terrible, immoral background. Some might even have been reared in a religious family, maybe even a Christian one. That, however, never guarantees that you will come to the Lord either out of desperation, or what seems to be a natural transition.

Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul thought he was doing God's will, but it took a trip to Damascus for him to really see and hear God for the first time. He had to be blinded so he could really see. He had studied all the Scriptures from a famous rabbi, but had never really heard God. One day Jesus spoke directly to him.

Paul recounts:

Acts 22:6-10 (NIV) ⁶“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ⁸“Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. “‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰“What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. “‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’”

For all genuine followers of Jesus there is a practical life to be lived so that others might see and hear our Savior through the way we speak and live. Jesus' brother, James, may have been with the family that day in our story. Let's make sure we heed his advice given later to the church and now to us:

James 1:22 (NIV) ²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Whether you are a Christian or not this is equally wise counsel.