

THE PARABLE OF THE CANDLE

Final Week of the 3-Week Series, "Parables of the Bible"

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So this school teacher asked one of her students, Mary, who was the pastor's daughter: "Mary, if you have \$5 and you asked your father for \$3, how much money do you have?"

And she said, "I have \$5."

And the teacher said, "Mary, it seems that you don't know your arithmetic."

And Mary said, "Teacher, it seems you don't know my father."

[Laughs with congregation]

Alright; so today we close our three-week series on Jesus' parables, and today we're going to close with "The Parable of the Candle." It's sometimes called "The Parable of the Lamp." And this parable is about knowing ourselves. It is about knowing and understanding our spiritual power and knowing and understanding our spiritual responsibility.

It's in Chapter 5 of the Book of Matthew, Verses 14-16:

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one, after lighting a candle, puts it under a bushel basket, but on a candle stick. And it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

And so we're going to look at this parable and the incredible gift and message it has for us for living our lives more fully.

I was looking at an Aramaic translation of this, and it said, "*For you are the light of the world.*" You are the light of the world. It says we really need to start by the first two words, "*You are.*" YOU are. It means that you are here; that you exist; that you are present; that you are the one ... to not look outside ourselves. That you are -- YOU are -- the light of the world.

In Aramaic the translation of "*You are*" actually means that you are the self that is between the two extremes of holiness and unholiness; of ripeness and unripeness; of the higher self as well as the lower self. To say "*you are*" is an acknowledging of our being. You are the light of the world. And in ways you could say -- if you personalize it a bit more -- "*you are*" is really "*I AM.*" I AM the light of the world.

"I AM the light of the world."

Let's say that together.

[With congregation:] *"I AM the light of the world."*

Take a deep breath. [Breathes deeply]

And let's own it even more by saying: "*I AM; I AM; I AM.*"

Together: [with congregation] "*I AM; I AM; I AM.*"

So a horse walks into a bar ... [Congregation laughs] It's a true story! [Congregation laughs] And the bartender says, "*Hey, why the long face? Are you depressed?*"

And the horse ponders for a second and says, "*I think not*" and disappears.

Okay, so that joke is based off René Descartes' famous line, which is: "*I think, therefore I am.*" And I will admit the joke would have gone over better had I shared that reference before. [Congregation laughs] But if I did, that would have been putting Descartes before the horse. [Congregation laughs]

You didn't see it coming, did you? Okay ...

"You are." And the thing about the message is: You are more than you believe you are. You are more than you think yourself to be. Jesus is saying that you are more than your impermanent, changing, human self. You are more than your body; you are more than your feelings. You are so much more.

You are the light of the world.

And the light of the world has two important meanings. To say "*You are the light of the world*": It means that you are the light of all creation. That you are the light of God. That you are the light of love; the light of peace; the light of wisdom; and compassion; and understanding. You are the light that comforts and heals; that you are the light that creates. You are the light that embodies the goodness and the allness of God. "*The light of the world*" means that you are the essence of God.

And the second aspect of "*You are the light of the world*" is that: You are the awareness of the light. It's one thing to be the light, but to be aware of that light. That you are a part of the thinking and the knowing and the consciousness of the cosmos.

See, the truth is: It is the awareness of light that influences what we experience in our lives. And sometimes we can't see the light. Sometimes our awareness isn't there, and we can only see darkness. But to be able to see and be aware of the light helps us bring the light of illumination -- the light of understanding -- into whatever situation that we are in.

To say "*You are the light of the world*" means that you are a creative being. You have a causative energy in the power of your words and your thoughts and actions. You are the light of the world, and you are always the light of the world ... regardless of what situation is going on. That truth is always the truth.

That's why in the Book of John, the line says, "*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never overcome the light.*" Because the light is always there. You are always the light of the world.

The first thing that God says in the Bible is, "*Let there be light.*" And what He's really saying is, "*Let there be an awareness of light that exists within us and around us.*" That you are the light of the world.

And then the second line says:

"A city built on a hill cannot be hid."

And what Jesus is doing here: He's comparing our minds and our consciousness to a city that is built on a hill. So our mindset: We're the ones who build our consciousness, our outlook, our mindset, our attitudes. And so a city that's built -- a mind that is built -- on a higher truth, on a higher consciousness, on a higher level of awareness, on a higher level of faith cannot be concealed, but can only be revealed. That it could only be expressed and embodied and experienced. "*A city built on a hill cannot be hid*" means that it radiates; our spirit radiates beyond our being.

Have you ever looked at a candle and see the physical flame? But then there's this glow beyond it? There is that spirit and essence of us that radiates beyond our physical being. Some people call it an aura. But there's an energy that radiates based on that light within ourselves.

Have you ever been around somebody that, just being around them, they just radiate this positive energy? You know, this uplifting energy? Because they've chosen to build their city on a hill! And have you ever been around somebody that kind of drains your energy and is not so much fun to be around? And sometimes unknowingly building the city -- our mindset -- on a lower level with negativity.

One of the greatest examples I've seen of "A city built on a hill cannot be hidden" -- that how Spirit emanates beyond us -- was when I met Mohammed Ali about 15 years ago. Everybody knows how charismatic; how athletic; how good-looking; and how everything he was ... I mean, the greatest of all time in many ways! And then, with his Parkinson's to the point of not being able to speak, physically not being able to move the way he used to and shaking all the time. He could have hid. He could have fled. He could have been embarrassed with how great and incredible he was, but he did not do that.

And one of the things he did is that he kept turning to prayer. He prayed five times a day, and his prayer life -- and building his city on a hill; holding his consciousness high -- absolutely became the most important thing in his life. And he lent himself -- whether it was Parkinson's or cancer or Special Olympics -- he was always out there! Remember when he was holding the torch in the Olympics? He did not let what was going on in the outer stop his spirit from radiating!

So I knew somebody who knew somebody in his inner circle, and set up a meeting between us. And Mohammad could not speak, but we got to chat and visit. He looked at me and shook my hand. And I will tell you: It was amazing to see someone lose all of that, and yet their spirit still emanated a level of greatness; a level of grace. A level of a willingness to serve. One of his things that he believed: It's in the Book of Luke, Chapter 12, Verse 48. And it says: "*To whom much is given, much is expected.*" And he believed that; it was his mantra. He felt he was given so much in his life that he wanted to give, that he wanted to express.

And even though -- after all his physical self -- he turned to pray and spiritual stuff was his focus. And he evolved. And I would say, in some ways, he did even more after Parkinson's than he did with his physical skills.

He had a beautiful line that says, "*If you look at the world the same way at 60 as you did at 30, you wasted 30 years of your life.*" [Congregation laughs] And so he kept going deeper; being one with the light. The awareness of the light is something he practiced, and practiced being at one with. So that, even without physical skills, his spirit was so powerful that his ability to touch and transform; and to bring entertainment to children; and understanding and connection to people was still there.

"A city built on a hill cannot be hid." The light and the magnificence of Spirit within us cannot help but radiate. But it's our job to bring the awareness of that light so that we can be one with it.

And then the next line it says:

"No one, after lighting a candle, puts it under a bushel basket."

And he's saying, "*This is crazy! Why would you light a candle and put it under a bushel basket?*" That's not wise; that's not sensible; that's not helpful; that is not good in any way, because it limits the light. It diminishes the light. It deprives us of the very light that we want. That's crazy; why would anybody do that? We're too smart human beings! We could never do that ... would we? [Congregation laughs]

Anybody relate to these words by the Apostle Paul in the Book of Romans: "*I find my own behavior baffling.*" [Congregation laughs] "*I find myself doing things I know I should not do, and not doing things I know I should.*" How many people ever not do something you should do and not do ...

And so it is amazing how we hide our own light. It is amazing how we diminish our own light and deprive ourselves of the very light that we have within us, and the very light that we seek! How we hide and deprive and sometimes live with a dim light or sometimes even live in the darkness.

There are five baskets that I would say we hide our candle -- five bushel baskets we hide under -- and that limits our light.

And the first one is that sometimes we're afraid to take a risk and really step out. Sometimes we don't want to step out of our comfort zone. Sometimes we don't want to show up as big as we can and are meant to in our lives. We'd rather play it safe, play it small.

The second one that we hide our light under a bushel basket is that sometimes we care too much about what other people think. We think, *"Man, if I fail, I'm going to look silly. I'll embarrass myself. What will people think of me?"* Or, even if we succeed, we think, *"Maybe they'll get jealous; maybe they won't like me any more. Maybe they'll judge me."* And sometimes we care what other people think so much it affects how we're showing up and how we're living the life that we want to live ... or not living the life we want to live.

Somebody once said, *"I don't know the key to success, but I know the key to failure, and that's trying to please everyone."* I think sometimes we have dimmed our own light by trying to please people.

And then the third one is: sometimes we feel unworthy. Like, *"I'm not capable of that; who am I kidding? I don't have what it takes to achieve that level of greatness; that level of success or happiness."* We are so uncomfortable and so unworthy -- feel so unworthy -- we're uncomfortable saying, *"I am the light of the world."* We actually have a hard time. We have an easier time saying, *"I am such a knucklehead. I'm such a goofball. I'm a loser."* But light of the world? Whoa.

I am the light of the world. YOU are the light of the world. That is the absolute truth! And we are worthy of it. And we have to reclaim that.

So I am the light of the world; YOU are the light of the world. I want you to turn to somebody and each of you share, *"I am the light of the world, and YOU are the light of the world."* I want you to say it and then hear it.

[Congregants affirming to one another]

Alright. Alright. Keep shining your light; just do it a little quieter. [Laughs]

So number four -- bushel basket number four that we hide our light under is sometimes we just don't listen to God. Did you ever have guidance from God and then you said, "No, no. No, God; no thanks. I'm not doing that one." Anybody ever do that?

You know, like you get *"Call your ex and apologize."*

"Nope; that's not happening, God." [Congregation laughs]

"Quit your job and start your own ..."

"Nope; not starting my own business, God."

I mean, you ever know that Spirit is guiding you to change, but you just don't want to change? Spirit's calling you to do something harder than you want to do and it's just like, *"Nope; no thanks."* And what we're doing is: We're covering our light. We're hiding our light.

And the last one we hide under is our negative patters, negative habits, negative choices. And you always know your negative patterns, habits or choices if you catch yourself saying like, *"Why is this happening to me again?"* Sometimes in our lives the negative patterns and negative conditions get us to a certain point where we will sometimes sabotage and undermine our own success.

You know the areas in our lives where we're hiding our light by the areas where we are struggling. And habitually struggling. Sometimes getting into a relationship that isn't healthy. Making certain decisions that we keep coming up to the same issue. And it means that we're hiding our light; that there's some way that we're dimming ... and some ways that we are in the dark.

But we shouldn't be afraid of the dark, because it's a sign for us that, *"Hey, I'm not shining my light. I need to bring more light to this situation."* In the beginning, the world was created, and it says there was darkness and God said, *"Let there be light."* So that, even in situations where we notice that we're hiding our light -- and we have to notice it first -- we can realize that we can still bring light to the situation. You're still the light of the world, even when we're doing that! And we can make new choices to bring light to those situations.

You know how we do it? Three things we've got to say in those areas where we're struggling; the areas where we're hiding our light. And that is: *"What do I need to learn? What do I need to heal? What do I need to let go?"* Any situation that you're struggling in, or you feel you're not letting your light shine, or you're in the darkness: *"What do I need to learn? What do I need to heal? What do I need to let go?"*

The next line says:

"But they put it on a nightstand."

You don't hide it under a bushel basket, but you put it on a nightstand or a candle stick and it gives light to everyone in the house.

And so my question for you is: What ways are you letting your light shine? Because we're all letting our light shine ... And maybe you're letting your light shine by bringing joy and laughter and smiles to people. And maybe you're doing it by art. Or maybe by generosity or kindness. Or being a great mom or being a great dad. Or being a great friend.

But whatever way you are letting your light shine, I absolutely want you to begin acknowledge and celebrate that. Celebrate that you are letting your light shine! Celebrate the good that you're doing! We think it's conceited to say that, *"I'm good at this,"* or to feel good about ourselves doing great things.

Right now I've got a friend of mine named Carl, and he's renovating my bathroom. And Carl absolutely believes he is a phenomenal renovator! He's phenomenal! And he really is! He's got exceptional skill; incredible work ethic; and he has such joy! He'll always say, *"Richard, you're going to love this! This is going to be so fabulous; you're going to walk in your bathroom and just smile all day!"*

I'm thinking, *"Who says that?"* [Congregation laughs] But I'm looking forward to looking into my bathroom and smiling every day!

And so there's nothing wrong with us owning our greatness and our magnificence. You don't have to brag or put anybody down; just accept the truth of who we are. You are here to let your light shine, and you are shining it in great and wonderful ways. And each of us has to accept and celebrate that great truth.

And then we need to ask ourselves: *"What area of my life can I turn up my light a little bit more? What area is a little dim, and I'd like to bring more light and more brightness and more passion and joy into it?"*

Do you ever get the feeling, like, sometimes you think, *"God, I know there's something more for me"?* Anybody ever get that kind of feeling? That is something in our soul saying, *"I want to shine! I want to be expressed and embodied in a fuller way."* And it's calling on you to open yourself to allow it to shine in greater and wonderful ways.

Not letting our light shine is what it says in the Book of James. It says, *"Not letting your light shine is like looking at your face in the mirror and walking away and then forgetting what you look like."* [Congregation laughs] Because you are the light of the world! This is the truth of who you are.

And letting your light shine does two things: It brings fulfillment to yourself in enjoying the riches and glory of God right here and now. But it also, like the parable says, gives light to everyone in the house.

Back then, houses were four walls and a big roof, and they had multiple families living there. And what they would do is: Everybody would have limited oil or lard or whatever it is that they fueled their candle or lamp with. And then they would notice some people not lighting theirs, and they were kind of "mooching" light from the others. So then there'd be more hoarding of the light. But the more everybody hoarded the light meant there was less light for everybody. But when you let your light shine fully, it gives light for everyone.

Everybody know our candlelighting service? One of the things I love about it is that: We start with the Christ candle, and we all light of it, and the room is filled with light. And notice that, when someone lights off of your candle, it doesn't diminish your candle; in fact, it just gives more light to everybody! And that is the powerful and important thing to remember: That we are here to let our light shine, because it will bless our lives, and it will also help uplift and bless others.

I want to close with two poems. At least one of them you know really well; it's by Mary Ann Williamson. And then the other one by George Bernard Shaw. And they both really demonstrate the point and the message of this parable.

First, Marianne Williamson.

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our Light, not our Darkness, that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?"*

*You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World.
There is nothing enlightening about shrinking
so that other people won't feel unsure around you.
We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within you.
It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone.*

*As we let our own Light shine,
we consciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others."*

We have a responsibility to let our light shine: to bless our lives, but to be a blessing to others and uplift us all.

George Bernard Shaw won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925. He wrote *Pygmalion*, which became *My Fair Lady*. And then he just actually revolutionized comedic drama, if such a thing exists. He created it and it was amazing. And here's what he said. He said:

"I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no 'brief candle' to me; it is a sort of splendid torch that I've got to hold for a moment. And I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it over to future generations."

He absolutely wanted to live his life fully; he wanted his life to shine and burn brightly! George Bernard Shaw died at the age of 94, because he fell off a ladder pruning his apple tree. At 94 years old! He was letting his light shine! He wanted that torch to burn as long as he could ...

We don't have it all forever, so while we have it, let's make it shine! Let's let our lives shine; our love shine; our light shine in all that we do! You are the light of the world!!! It means you've been given a great gift and power; but it means you have been given a great responsibility, as well, to bring this light - to bring more light into your life; into people's lives; and into our world.

As we celebrate our 70th anniversary as a ministry, I want to give thanks to all the people who let their light shine so that we could have what we have. And now I want us to take the responsibility -- with what we have -- to shine our light now so that people in 70 more years will be saying, "Gosh, I want to thank all those people who let it shine back then."

And not just in our ministry -- let all of our lights shine. Because it will give light to everyone in the house. And that is the lesson from "The Parable of the Candle."

God bless you!

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