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Mark 4:21-25 Parables of The Lamp and The Measure

Discussion: Is there something you are quite proud of but are uncomfortable talking about, in case it seems you appear to be “showing off”? Tell each other what it is!

Mark 4	Matthew 5	Luke 8
<p>A Lamp on a Stand 21 He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand?”</p>	<p>15 Neither 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.</p>	<p>A Lamp on a Stand 16 “No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.</p>
<p>22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.</p>		<p>17 For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.</p>
<p>23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”</p>		
	<p>16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.</p>	
<p>24 “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued.</p>		<p>18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen.</p>
<p>“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.</p>		
<p>25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”</p>		<p>Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them.”</p>

Context

- In Mark and Luke, Jesus is still speaking to the disciples, building upon the concept of *insiders* and *outsiders* and the Parable of the Sower.¹⁷ God gave us the free will to disregard and even reject His message, or to choose to hear it instead. We can become active, willing participants in the implementation of his Kingdom on the Earth, to be the good soil into which the seed falls, takes root and then produces an abundant harvest of ‘Kingdom fruit’.¹⁸

Comparison

- Matthew locates this parable elsewhere in his Gospel and introduces the idea that *believers* themselves are shining the light of Christ outwards for all to see, but Mark and Luke have Jesus in view as “the Lamp”.
- In Mark and Luke, Jesus once again warns people to heed what he is saying and to consider it carefully.
- Mark inserts an extra thought, warning that the *measure* we use will reflect back on us.

Key Points

- A lamp is normally *brought* but some translations of Mark prefer instead to render *bringing* a lamp as “the Lamp comes”.^{19,20} Jesus is of, course, speaking of himself.²¹
- The purpose of the lamp is not that it should be hidden but is for illuminating, throwing light upon everything around.²² Jesus is the light by which people are enabled to see.²³
- There are those *insiders* who know the secrets of the Kingdom of God. But, there are the *outsiders* who do not, who fail to understand that the Kingdom of God has indeed “come” and that Jesus is the bringer of it.²⁴
- The Kingdom of God and the Lamp have come in an unexpected way.²⁵ The Messianic secret is entrusted to the few to begin with but is destined for all to see. It is like a treasure hunt, where the organizer has hidden things “in order that they might be found”.²⁶ That turning point will occur later, at the resurrection of Jesus, when what had been hidden becomes an open declaration for all to see, as Jesus takes his seat at the right hand of the Father.²⁷ The Kingdom of God is only part of what is hidden; the bringer of that Kingdom also has his true identity hidden.²⁸ There is a time for hiddenness, but that time will come to an end.
- The parable of the measure introduces a level of accountability and personal responsibility. We select measures of different sizes to gather, for example, sufficient flour for a recipe or enough coffee granules for a drink. What measure do we use when engaging with God’s words? The measure we use for this will be the measure used back on us! The more open we are to receiving, the more we will understand.²⁹
- Taken together, these parables show that nothing will be hidden in the long term, and the measure of our individual response will be visible.

Mark 4:26-34 Parables of Growing Seed and Mustard Seed

Mark 4
<p><i>The Parable of the Growing Seed</i> 26 He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”</p>

Key Points

- This parable is unique to Mark’s Gospel. It tells of the mysterious way in which the kingdom grows, even though the farmer doesn’t understand how. Despite the hiddenness of the kingdom, growth is certain and inevitable.³⁰ Despite seemingly insignificant beginnings, the gospel message contains its own power and will grow.
- The parable is less focused on the period of growth and more on what the end result is.³¹ Eventually, a time will come when the harvest will be gathered, which points to the end of time when Jesus returns in glory.³² Then the true greatness of the kingdom will be visible to the entire world.

Mark 4	Matthew 13	Luke 13
<p><i>The Parable of the Mustard Seed</i> 30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”</p>	<p><i>The Parable of the Mustard Seed</i> 31 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”</p>	<p><i>The Parable of the Mustard Seed</i> 18 Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.”</p>
<p>33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. 34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.</p>	<p>34 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”</p>	

Key Points

- The mystery here is the contrast between the seed's small size at the beginning compared to its size at the end.³³ The seed was the smallest that an Israeli farmer would have encountered, but it could grow into a tree perhaps 10 feet or more in height, sufficiently large that birds could take shelter in it.³⁴ In this way, the kingdom starts out small but will continue to grow, until it becomes the mightiest kingdom in the world, in which all the nations of the

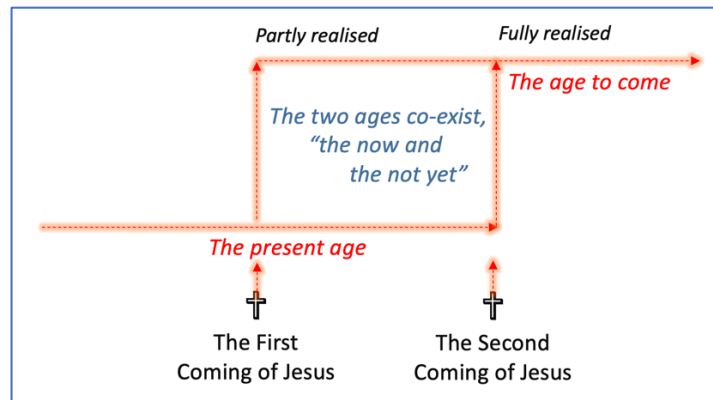


Figure 16: "the Now and the Not Yet"

- world can find a home.³⁵ A similar idea is conveyed by the medieval proverb "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow."³⁶ We are reminded of the "Now and the Not Yet", where the kingdom has come, but its full implementation is some time in the future.
- Mark concludes by stating that Jesus taught by speaking in parables to the wider crowds, and only explaining the meaning of the parables to the group of disciples and close friends in private. Mark also indicates that these parables are only a selection of those that Jesus taught.
- In **v34**, Matthew is quoting a prophecy from Psalm 78:2.

Discussion: Have you ever been somewhere or done something, to an event perhaps, and discovered that it was far, far bigger than you had anticipated, and that you had completely underestimated the scale of the event or the situation?