

Take Heed How You Hear

Luke

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Bible Text: Luke 8:16-18
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Our text is found in Luke's gospel, chapter 8, verse 16 through 18.

16 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. 17 For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. 18 Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

The Lord Jesus has just taught the parable of the sower, after which he interpreted it for his disciples and now in Luke 8 verse 16 through 18, he's making application further of the truth that he has taught. You will remember that as the sower went forth to sow, there were four kinds of ground upon which the seed fell: the good, the stony, the wayside, the stony, the thorny, and the good. And so here in these verses we could summarize what Jesus is saying by the words that we find at the beginning of verse 18, "Take heed therefore how ye hear." Everybody doesn't hear in the same way. Everyone doesn't bring forth fruit unto God and there's a theme throughout these verses, and indeed into the next section, where that fruit is defined as hearing and also doing. You'll note that when he answers and says unto them, verse 21, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it." It's the same theme.

"Take heed therefore how you hear." Consider first of all the proclamation of the word of God. Verse 16, "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light." This is very similar to what Jesus says of believers in Matthew chapter 5, verse 13 and 14 where we're told not to hide our light under a bushel but we are to go forth and manifest by our good works the light of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. He is the light of the world. We reflect that light by receiving his word and obeying it in our lives. We are to live fruitful lives. But here Jesus is using the same figure, not so much about the good works that we do in response to the word, but off the word of God itself. The word is the light. So Psalm 119 would tell us the same thing in verse 105, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Or take, for example, Proverbs chapter 6 and verse 23.

Proverbs chapter 6 and verse 23, speaking about the word of God, "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."

Well, Jesus says in our text that this candle, which is the word of God, is not to be hid. Children, you can get the picture. Maybe you've been at home and there's been a power cut and the lights go out and the question is, does anybody have a lamp, or it used to be a candle? And you certainly didn't go get the candle and light it, bring it into a room and put a box over the light. No, the whole purpose is to lighten the room. So you would place it on a candlestick in the best place so that the whole of the room might receive the light. Well, Matthew 5, your life is to be like that, but Luke chapter 8, the word itself is to be that candle. It is the candle that is to be set up and not hid. So you can tie this to the Great Commission, where the Lord Jesus commands us to go into all the world and teach all things that he has revealed. In so doing, we're taking the light, we're putting it on a candlestick, we're carrying it to all places where there is darkness. And you understand that that is the mission of the church. We are to shine the light of the word of God in a dark world. We're not to keep it to ourselves, we're not to hide it under a bed or under a bushel, but rather we are to seek ways to get to the most prominent places and manifest the glorious light of God's word.

In Isaiah chapter 40, verse 6 and following, we're told about the word of God and its importance and what we're to do with it. "The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever." In a world where everything is fading away, everything is fleeting and our lives are temporal, we have something of substance, something that will stand, something that men need. The word of our God shall stand forever. What are we to do with it? The voice said, cry, verse 6. The content of the cry is the word of God. The method is described in verse 9, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" Do you get the picture? Ascend into the mountain where everyone can see and hear you and lift up your voice that they might come to know the word of God. Jesus is saying the same thing with a different image, "Get the candle, put it on the candlestick so that all who enter into the room will see the light."

Two words of application at this point. First of all, the church is to shine the light of God's word to every creature. Whether they be adults or children, whether they be rich or poor, doesn't matter what ethnicity they are, what nation they come from, we are to welcome all into the church of the living God and set the light of his word upon a candlestick that all who enter may see the light. And then there are multitudes who won't enter into the church of the Lord Jesus. They're unchurched. So what do we do? We take the light out to them. Like men who would take these torches out into the dark, walking through the forest, out we go with the word of truth. A little bit like Jonah, "Jonah, get to Nineveh and preach my word unto them." Shine the light by teaching the word. Expose

them to the law of God so that they know what God's demands are upon their life, what he defines as sin and righteousness, and then follow it with the clear proclamation of the gospel so that sinners may understand and know their way to reconciliation with God. Don't hide it from anyone. Don't take it into a corner for your own little private exposure to this light and do this knowing that yes, there are four kinds of here and three kinds of soil will not produce good fruit. It's not your concern in the first place. Your concern is to go and sow. Your concern is to take the light of the word of God into a dark and perishing world.

So we shine the light to every creature and then we shine the light to the ends of the earth and until the end of the world. The Bible tells us that the gospel must and will be preached to all nations before the second coming of the Lord Jesus. And again, we as the church have to keep this mission perpetually before us and the question of our text is very helpful because the answer is so obvious. Is a candle to be put under a basket or under a bed? The answer, of course, is no. Set it up. Get thee up into the high mountain. Or as Paul puts it, writing to the Philippians, holding forth the word of life, shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Like the stars against the blackness of the night sky, so the Christian is to be in his life and with the word of God.

Well, you know these things are true but that's not the same as recognizing that the church has always been faithful in applying them. No, instead you'll find periods in the church's history when they have been very slow to put the candle of the word upon the candlestick so that all the world might see. You need only go back in our own Presbyterian history in Scotland, you come into the 18th century and it's a day of increasingly, increasing rationalism and moderatism within the church. Nobody is to be too evangelical or too enthusiastic; we just need education and civility and everyone will do just fine. Towards the end of that century, a question came up in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland about beginning foreign missions. Now that's sad in and of itself that it took so long to deal with this great question. And as it was debated, the predominant argument upon the floor of the General Assembly was, no, it's not time to do foreign missions because the nations of the world are barbaric and they need to be civilized first. And there was a minister in the Assembly called John Erskine, and he famously stood up and said, "Moderator, rax me that Bible." Give me the Bible. And he opened to Acts chapter 28, and he showed how Paul preached to the barbarous people in Melita and he says, "The church must not wait until the nations are civilized. The church must take the gospel to the nations now. They need the light." What did they think was going to civilize the nations anyway? I don't know but Mr. Erskine understood the question well. Having been commissioned, the duty lies upon us, brethren, having received grace, we are to feel a debt like Paul did. "I am a debtor to the Greek and to the barbarian, to the wise and to the unwise, to take and give to them freely what I receive myself, so that they together with me might be saved."

So we take the light from under the bed, and as the church of the Lord Jesus, we are determined to spread that word, and in God's providence, is that not fitting? We've had all kinds of hiccups between the fall and now as to when we're going to start our door-to-door evangelism, but it's scheduled for next week and the Lord has brought us to this text

today to press upon us what it is we're doing. You're going out with a few leaflets, you're going to knock doors, but you need to conceive of it in your mind like this. "I've got a candlestick and I'm putting the light of the word of God and I'm carrying it out into this community to lighten the darkness of men." And we must always be conscious that when visitors walk through the door of this church, that whatever is taking place here has to be a fulfillment of this picture, that there's a candlestick and the light of God's word is held up central and preached in all of its fullness and clarity that nobody would be able to sit in the pew wondering what's going on in this place.

This is what has to happen here. "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light." You know, one of the greatest compliments that we can receive as a congregation from visitors is when they walk out the door and say, "It was the word of God. It was just the Bible." That's what it has to be, brethren. That's what it must always be, the proclamation of the word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

Secondly, we have not only the proclamation of the word of God, we have the power of the word of God. Verse 16, the light is put upon a candlestick to lighten the darkness, but look what happens in verse 17, "For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear." Verse 17, though debated by commentators, I believe is properly understood as what happens when the word of God is preached. Now it serves two main functions as light. The first is it dispels the darkness. The second thing is it brings things to the light.

So consider first of all here, the word is a discerner of your heart. When we set it up on a candlestick in this place, expect to be exposed. It's like a candle is not only lifted up from the pulpit, but it's taken into your very heart and it casts its light in all of the dark recesses of your soul, all those places that you may prefer were left to their own darkness, all the shadowlands that you're content to bury things in, all of the closets that you've conveniently closed that have and house your skeletons within them. Well, what happens? You come under the word of God, and the more you come under the word of God, you are confronted with the true reality of yourself. We would go as far to say, if that's not happening regularly, there's very likely a problem with the preaching, the light is not being placed on the candlestick and carried into the heart in the way that it should be.

So you imagine a derelict house which could be too accurate an illustration of our souls at time, and you walk in and there's no electricity and you carry that candle on the candlestick around and you find rooms that are boarded up, and you kick through the boards and the dust falls and the light begins to strike things that haven't seen light for far too long, things that you've left undisturbed with layers and years of dust piling up upon it. What are we talking about here? Sinful habits. Sinful thoughts. Sinful attitudes that have abode there for so long that you're even ignorant of their existence. This is a function of the word, you see, and so we take that light, and no matter how uncomfortable it is, we go into the corners of these rooms within our soul. We open the cupboards and you know what's in some of those cupboards, because you've hidden

things there, and other of these cupboards, you don't even know what's in them. The word of God just comes and exposes them more. What's happening? God is shining his light and, in a sense, putting his spotlight upon everything in your life that needs to change and you become convinced of that under the Spirit-blessed proclamation of God's word.

The Bible uses another image of this in Hebrews chapter 4: the word of God is quick and sharp and sharper, quick and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword. And what does it do? It has the ability to divide between soul and spirit and the joints and the marrow and it is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Now you can unpack every single one of those words there or you could simply understand it to mean this: the word of God divides between things that are most closely joined together. It discriminates. It takes one thing, like an action, and it divides it into three, the action, the attitude, and the motive. Now the action might look good, but when the word of God gets to work upon our hearts, our hypocrisy is exposed. That's what happens. It tells you what God sees, in other words. Like we sang in Psalm 139, not only does God hear your words, he knows the very thoughts behind those words. There's not a word in your tongue that God doesn't know altogether. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It's high. I cannot attain unto it. And yet, sitting under the preaching of the word, God is giving you repeated illustrations of it. One of you said to me this afternoon, something to the effect of, "Well, believing in God and coming into church is a confirmation of it." Why? Because the preacher hasn't a clue what's going on in your life and yet God keeps speaking through a dumb preacher, showing you exactly who you are and what you need. You see, that's what God is doing, he's lifting up his light. With regard to your sins, he's assuring you that you really don't have any secrets whatsoever from him.

Do you see the power of the word of God? It's light that penetrates your darkness and exposes all that you are. It's a sword which discerns the thoughts and intents of your heart and presents them to you as they really are, "nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad." But there's another aspect to this power, not only do we find that the word is a discerner of the heart, but as the word is a discerner of your heart, it is also a precursor of judgment. You're searched and known when you read the scriptures, when you sit under preaching, and that's a mercy because the Lord is reminding us that there is a day coming when we will stand in all of the nakedness of our soul before him and give an account for everything we've thought, everything we've spoken, and everything that we've done in the flesh. And on that day, there are no secrets, things that nobody else in this world knew. You will realize then and practice what you should at least acknowledge in theory now, that God knew it all along.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 4. There are many texts that emphasize this. God's just gonna rip through all of your smoke screens, all of the little excuses, and all of those abominable spiritualizing arguments that we use sometimes to justify our sins. What a wickedness. God's going to show you that, as I mentioned, he knew and he saw all along. 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 5, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." Note that, "the counsels of the hearts." Not your

external works. "And then shall every man have praise of God." You'll find similar things in Hebrews chapter 4; Ecclesiastes chapter 12.

Do you see what we're saying? Every man will give an account for everything to God, everything that you have buried, everything that you have hidden, everything that you have forgotten. All of the skeletons come out of your cupboards on that day before a holy God and your only hope will be Jesus Christ. He's the only one that we can light the candle of God's word and search every recess of his soul and find nothing. Just like Satan couldn't find anything in him. God doesn't find anything but holiness in him. But as for us, brethren, on that day, we'd better be found in him because the word of God preached here, even this afternoon, is convincing you that you are utterly hopeless to stand of yourself in that day. You say, "Well, this is very uncomfortable." Well, you simply can't avoid that, but it is a very merciful discomfort because the power of the word operative in your soul now is a merciful warning and precursor of the day of judgment when all of these things will be set before your eyes and ranked in order.

Then thirdly, we have the reception of the word of God. We're to lift it up so that it shines its light and when we do that, we've seen something of its power. But yet Jesus reminds us that as that word is preached, you and I have a responsibility in hearing and that's really the point of the whole parable, the parable of the sower in this briefer picture that is applying that parable. It's recorded here in Luke chapter 8, we also read Mark chapter 4 earlier, and when it comes to this point of application, the wording is slightly different. So if you turn to Mark's account and look at verse 24 of Mark chapter 4, you'll see that Jesus there says that you are to take heed to what you hear. That's very good counsel as well, you don't want to be listening to lies. But you see it there in Mark 4:24, "And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear," or we could say, "to what ye hear." But then when you look at chapter 8 of Luke's gospel, he says, "Take heed therefore how ye hear." Now there's no contradiction between these two things, they complement one another, because you need to be very careful to take heed to what you hear. You're to hear the right thing, in other words. But then, it's not simply enough to make sure you're hearing the right thing, you have to hear the right thing in the right way.

Take heed how you hear. If you stay with Mark's gospel, the first thing that we note there from verse 24 is that there is a principle of reaping what you sow. Mark 4 verse 24, "And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given." That's really the great scriptural principle of reaping what you sow. As you measure out, so you will likewise receive. But now don't you see it's applied to the hearing of the word of God. Think what that means for your life. Jesus is saying the measure with which you give attention carefully to hearing is connected with how God is going to deal with you. It's a little bit like an equation. This, therefore, that. To put it in very simple terms, God will treat you the way you treat his word. You understand that? That should make us sit up and listen. God will treat you, he will measure out to you the way you have meted with his word. It's like a gauge. You can actually predict in some way how the Lord is going to deal with you at the day of judgment by how you have dealt with his word in your time in this world. That's the point.

Let's flesh that out. If you hear and cast off what you hear, how's God going to deal with you at the day of judgment? You don't need to be a genius to work that out. If you've cast off his word, he is going to cast you off at the last day. If God has blessed you with so many privileges under God's word, then you can be sure that he's going to hold you to account for the privileges that he has given you. It's not a neutral thing to come and sit under preaching. It's not a neutral thing to sit day after day in family worship in your house and not pay attention and not realize you're going to answer for every time your dad opened a Bible and read with you and pressed it upon your heart and you sit there as, "Well, this is just something we do every day." No, what are you doing with it? God says, "That's what I will do with you. I will judge you more severely for the greater privileges that I have given you that you have done nothing with."

Press it again upon your hearts. You can know what God is going to do with you by what you do with his word but then, Christian, think of this also: it also teaches us that you will get out of preaching what you put into it. You're going to reap what you sow. Now this isn't all neat and tidy and absolute. We know that the Lord gives us principles and he's free to work differently but it's still a general principle that we can go and lay hold of, that we're going to get out of preaching what we put into it. We don't come to church like a sponge, passively sitting, expecting to benefit without putting our measure of spiritual effort into the process. With what measure you mete when you come to church and sit under the word and when you sing the Psalms, you're not going to get anything from the Psalms because you know the tune and you're familiar with the words and you just on autopilot go through them, but if you sing the Psalms, gleaning, gleaning the words that you sing, that the Lord is here saying that he will bless you accordingly. If you come with hunger, he'll fill it. If you come hanging upon his word, he'll speak to your soul.

Reaping what you sow, but then there's another principle here in verse 18, gaining and losing. Mark and Luke both record it. "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." Again, it's a common principle. Jesus applies it in the parable of the talents. Three men given different talents that are expected to use it. The person who doesn't use his talent but buries it, it's taken from him and it's given to another. Jesus is saying the same thing about your hearing so that the man who hears, receives the word of God and brings forth fruit, to that man is given more. That's the point. Jesus doesn't say, "Well he's doing well. He's got fruit. We'll just leave him alone." We have to pay attention to this person who's not doing anything and they don't have fruit. No, he's like the fruitless fig tree. "Cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground?" The man, in terms of the parable of the sower, who hears and seems to receive but has no fruit, Jesus is saying in this verse, that man is going to lose what he appeared to have, but he didn't have.

To those of you who are Christians, when God lights the candle of his word and shines it into your soul and you begin to wince under it, but by his grace, you receive it, apply it, and correct your life, being a doer of the doctrine and handling the word of God the way that you should, God is going to bless you and give you more than you had. But he's not going to give you more until you do what you should with what you have. That's the

lament, isn't it? Sometimes we look at other Christians and we fool ourselves. We think, "Oh, well, if only I knew what they knew." And here I am, this little pygmy Christian, and we're filled with a pretended jealousy. "Wouldn't it be wonderful to know what they know?" How do you think they got there? Did they wake up one morning and click their fingers and they'd arrive? No, God taught them bit by bit. And every bit he taught them, they did something with it and they kept moving forward and that's where they got, how they got to where they are. But that desire is often, it's just a cover for laziness because God has given you light, and instead of sitting back and saying, "Well, I wish I had that other person's knowledge of theology," the question is, what am I doing with the knowledge that I have? Because you can't expect to do anything more with more knowledge if you're not doing anything with the light that God has already given you.

If you don't use the light that you have, this text tells us that rather than give you more, the Lord will take it from you. The Lord will take it from you. He won't make you answer for what you didn't have, but he will make you answer for what you do have, and you'll stagnate and go backwards until in mercy he brings you to your senses. That may describe some of your lives, I don't know. You ask a lot of questions about where you are with the Lord. Maybe, maybe this is what you need to hear today. "I haven't walked in the light that God has given me and look where I am now." Well, listen to what he says today and use it and start to get back to where you should be.

But what about those of you who are not Christians? How many times the light of God's word has shined into your heart, commanded you to repent, commanded you to believe. What a long-suffering God. You know, sometimes it's hard for you as Christians witnessing to the same person over and over and over again for years. It's hard preaching to them as well. The same thing over and over and over and over again. Thank God he is more long-suffering than we are. But his patience, in a sense, it has its limit. And God has shone his light into your soul, and you haven't used the light that he's given to you. What does this text say? "If you will not repent, if you will not deal with this matter of your soul, I will take it away from you." That's the worst position you could ever be in in life. It's bad enough not to be a Christian, yet not to be a Christian and still have the word of God but not to be a Christian and God to remove the means and the privileges that he's given to you up to this point, you may as well be in hell. You may as well be in hell.

Stony ground hearers with all of their religious and temporary impulses and they say, "But I had conviction of sin." What did you do with it? "But I made a resolution. I was going to change." Yes, and it lasted about two weeks and you keep doing it. And God says, "From him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." Do you get what I'm saying to you today? If you despise the gospel, God's going to take the gospel from you? You get that? You despise the gospel, you put your fingers in your own ear, God is going to put his fingers in your ear and you'll never hear it again. Never. Or you might hear it with these things, but you'll never hear it resonate with your soul. And for rejecting this glorious light, God is going to cast you into everlasting darkness. That's going to be the end of it because you had the preaching of the gospel, you felt in measure the power of the word of God exposing your soul, lighting up all your sins and showing you who you

are and what you needed, but you feel at this point you did not take heed how you heard. You lost it all. "Take heed therefore how you hear."

Let's stand for prayer.

O Lord our God, thank you for the light of the word. Thank you for the power of that word. Thank you for its discomfort. Thank you for its exposure of bringing hidden things to light in our own hearts. Thank you for the warning that we're to be very careful what we do with that experience under the word. The one who brings forth fruit receives more, and the one who does nothing loses everything. Lord, will you please convince people of this today with a conviction that none of our pleading can produce? Plead your own cause, save sinners, and make your people holy. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.