



DO YOU BRING IN A LAMP TO PUT IT UNDER A BOWL OR A BED? INSTEAD, DON'T YOU PUT IT ON ITS STAND?"

~ MARK 4:21-23 ~

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ AUGUST 18, 2013

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? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

A long time ago, in a land far, far away, people used to look up at the stars and ponder the meaning of life. The civilization that is most famous for this were the Greeks, and one of the famous philosophers was a man by the name of Plato. Plato questioned what was really real. He developed a philosophy that came to be known as the Allegory of the Cave. The idea goes like this: Imagine a group of prisoners bound in a cave. They were born there, grew up there, they have been chained their entire life, they have known nothing else. The only thing they are able to see is the back wall of the cave where they see shadows of figures going back and forth, illuminated by a fire they cannot see. To the prisoners this is reality, they know nothing about the fire and they know nothing of the people making those shadow animals on the wall, nor anything of the outside world.



Next, someone unlocks the chains of one of the prisoners. That prisoner is able to look around and see the fire and see the characters making those shapes. This completely shatters his present reality, for to him, the shadows are more real than the people making them. But then he ventures toward the front of the cave and he sees a light that he has never seen before. He stands at the mouth of the cave and is bathed in bright sunlight, he has to shield his eyes because he isn't used to it. Gradually as his eyes adjust he sees trees and plants and animals, first just shadowy outlines as his eyes have not quite adjusted. But with the passing of time he sees these things in their full beauty and is amazed. Then he remembers his fellow prisoners he got to know in the cave. He goes back to them and loosens their chains and encourages them to come out and see the light, but they refuse. Their reality is in the cave. If this sounds like a familiar story it is. Movies have employed this basic plot line, a more famous one is the *Matrix* trilogy.

Plato thought and knew there was something beyond what people could see or touch, and he used this story to explain it. It's amazing how similar Plato's Allegory is to the Bible's description of the natural state of man. The Bible describes a situation similar to Plato's cave, where all mankind is stuck in a dark cave, but instead of someone leaving the cave and finding the light, the Bible describes the light coming to us. This is certainly comforting considering a common childhood fear is of the dark. Are you SCARED OF THE DARK? TRY GOD'S WORD:

1. A lamp for your feet and
2. A light for your path

(1)

Isn't it amazing how far we have come technology-wise from Jesus' day? There are so many things we take for granted now that they couldn't have even imagined. Our need for light is a big one. Today, we are just able to flip on a light switch when the sun starts going down, the people in Jesus' day didn't have that option. Instead, they had to light a lamp. Some of these lamps were no more than small bowls made out of clay with a little oil and a wick.



So the question Jesus asked, and the question we consider for our summer series is almost rhetorical. **"Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand?"** A rhetorical question is one that doesn't need to be answered, because the answer is so obvious. What is the purpose of a light, whether it's a lamp or a flashlight? It's to shine light in a dark place. Therefore, it would be foolish to light a lamp or turn on a flashlight, whose purpose is to give light, and then hide it under a basket, or put it under a bed where no one is.

But Jesus was talking about more than just common sense when he mentioned this household tip. He was talking about spiritual common sense. We know this because of the section of Mark's gospel this is in. Jesus is talking in parables, earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. He is talking about more than just physical light that we can see coming from a lamp or from the sun. He is talking about a spiritual light. We see this theme again in the gospel of John where Jesus said, **"I am the light of the world."**¹

So Jesus comes up to his disciples and says, **"I'm the light of the world,"** now go out and share me with others, don't be ashamed, don't try and hide me, don't try and just keep me for yourself. Now why would Jesus say this to his disciples? He says it to them because he knows how the disciples will act. He knows the disciples will be timid, he knows the disciples won't want to share it with those outside of Israel. So he compares his Word to a lamp they might light.

Jesus says share my gospel with the world, like a lamp up on a stand. But like the prisoners in Plato's cave, we cannot free ourselves from our chains of sin, we cannot even turn our head to the light of the gospel. Passages from Romans and Colossians confirm this, **"You were slaves to sin,"**² **"You were dead in your sins."**³ We have not only been living in the darkness, but we are the darkness. So why does Jesus tell us to do something we cannot do? To remind us that our situation is hopeless. The light *must* first come to us, and that's what it did. We must let the light of Christ be a lamp to our feet, before we share it with the world. **"The people living in darkness have seen a great light."**⁴

We might think that when this light came, everybody would be happy to see it. But John says in his gospel, **“The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”**⁵ People may be AFRAID OF THE DARK, but sometimes they’re more afraid of what the lack of darkness will uncover. And that goes for us as well. When the light shines on our lives, it’s not a pretty picture. It shatters our realities of what is right and wrong. It reveals our actions against other people, it reveals our thoughts, it reveals how scared and inadequate we feel about sharing this light. The light immediately makes us defensive. But don’t confuse our warped sense of reality and justice with God’s reality and justice.

For Christ’s purpose in coming was not to make us feel defensive, it was not to expose us for the rotten sinners that we are, it wasn’t even to bring the light so we could pick up the mess we created. Remember our situation, we’re still chained in the cave. But Christ came **“to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.”**⁶ He set us free by taking our place in bondage, taking on our punishment in the darkness– that is what his sacrificial death on the cross was all about. He is the light that God shared with the world.

And once we have been set free from those chains, it is our redeemer Christ who leads us victoriously from the dark cave that we had lived in, out into the open, into the bright sunlight of his gospel, and we see all things new. **“God’s people have been called out of darkness into this wonderful light.”**⁷ He came to loosen *your* chains of sin which have burdened you with guilt and calls you to follow him. It’s true, after coming out of the cave, this light is powerful, we may not understand its light because it is so different than what we know, but the longer we are exposed to it, the clearer it becomes. Let God’s Word be a lamp to our feet.

(2)

Again I mention, how close Plato really came to explaining what God’s Word had to say about Christ bringing us from darkness into light. We follow the plot of the story once more. We are enjoying the light which the gospel brings to us. It also gives us a light for our path. Jesus gave his disciples and us a direction to go. And I am talking about our mission on earth. It really isn’t so much of a mission as it is an invitation. We want to go back to our fellow prisoners in the cave, those who have not seen the wonderful light that we have seen and invite them to freedom.

So we go back into that cave of darkness with the light of Christ lighting our way and we loosen them from their chains and explain what a wonderful world there is outside of the cave. But so many in the cave don’t understand what you’re talking about, it sounds like nonsense to them, they don’t want to leave the cave of darkness, reality is staring at the back wall of the cave at the shadow puppets. How can this be we wonder?

Paul explains exactly how it can be, **“The god of this age [the devil] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**⁸ And you see, maybe for the first time, unbelievers not only don’t see the light, they are blind, just as you were before Christ’s light came. The devil has made bad seem good, foolishness seem like wisdom, the ungodly seem godly. This is a sad reminder that we are not the ones who convince people to believe, we are not the ones who make people see. But instead of getting depressed about how we have failed, we remember the one who created the light.

The one who made the light at the beginning of the creation, is the same one who created the light shining in our lives right now. He is the same one who creates light into the hearts of those he chooses. And instead of wondering why things aren't working, we look at Jesus' words once more, **"For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open."** Things may not make a lot of sense now, why some people believe in the light and why others don't. But in the end, everything and everyone will be revealed and judged in light of that great light that is Jesus.

As believers, we can rejoice God **"made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."**⁹ It is a light we enjoy every day of our lives, in the good days and bad days, in the happy days and sad days, in our strengths and weaknesses. We don't have to be SCARED OF THE DARK anymore, and we don't want others to be either. But what we enjoy here on earth is the appetizer to what we will enjoy in heaven. John describes this in the final book of the Bible, Revelation, **"There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."**¹⁰

You know, the Greeks got it right when they thought there was more to life than meets the eye. There is more to life. That more is found in God's Word and the light he shared with the world. **"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."**¹¹ Amen.

Bible Passage Challenge:

The Bible compares belief and unbelief to light and darkness in a number of places. Look up the different passages referenced in the sermon and read them in their context. Are there other passages which come to mind that bring comfort to your soul?

¹ John 8:12

² Romans 6

³ Ephesians 2:1

⁴ Matthew 4:16 (from Isaiah 9:2)

⁵ John 1:5

⁶ Isaiah 61:1

⁷ 1 Peter 2:9

⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:6

¹⁰ Revelation 22:5

¹¹ Psalm 119:105