



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 8:16-21

To better understand the purpose of the parables.

Focus On the (New) Family

From the very beginning, the family unit has been central to the heart of God for His people. Preceding the church and even the nation of Israel, the family is the first ever human institution that God created (Gen. 2:24-25). The so-called *Shema*, the Jewish confession of faith derived from Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, and Numbers 15:37-41 is a clear declaration of who God is that is meant to be confessed and heard primarily in the context of the family. The family is a major component in Jewish living in the Old Testament Scriptures and Christian living in the New Testament Scriptures, which is what makes Jesus' pronouncement of a new and better kind of family so shocking: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:21). Jesus' message is actually quite divisive to the nuclear family (Matt. 10:34-36). The Christian must forsake his/her family for the sake of their faith if necessary, and in doing so is given a new family of men and women who share in the common conviction to follow Jesus at all costs.

The Litmus Test

In verses 16 through 18, Jesus uses an illustration of a lamp to further drive home the purpose of the parables. Lamps or lampstands are common objects of illustration in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, the tabernacle in Exodus 25:37 had "lamps seven in number." It is also used to illustrate various truths. In Proverbs 31:18 it refers to the commerce of the godly woman's home. In Leviticus 6:12-13 it refers to the altar of God used by the Levitical priests. The "lamp" refers to God's revelation in 1 Samuel 3:3 and 2 Samuel 21:17. The latter understanding is most appropriately connected to Jesus' teaching here, wherein the

lamp refers to the truth revealed in the Gospel. However, Jesus' teaching here is more nuanced than it may first appear. It might be tempting to read verse 16 and interpret this to mean that the Gospel, like a lamp, must be allowed to shine forth. This is not necessarily wrong, and consistent with Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." However, given the context of Luke and the words of Jesus in verse 10, the parables seem to serve as a sort of litmus test for genuine faith.

Jesus says in verse 10: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'" In other words, the secrets of the kingdom of God have been given to the disciples, but the parables are preventative for people who have not been given the secrets of the kingdom. So the parables act as a stumbling block to some, but to others the parables are like a lamp. When they are told to those who have been given the secrets of the kingdom, the parables act as a source of light "so that those who enter may see the light." In other words, when someone hears a parable and believes, it is an indicator that they have been given the secrets of the kingdom and thus are the sheep that Jesus the Good Shepherd is after (John 10).

The truths of God's word are not meant to be hidden. They are not meant to be "kept secret" (Lk. 8:17). They are meant to be shared. This is why Jesus is constantly on the move. It's why chapter 8 began with Him and his disciples on the move, "proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk. 8:1). The Gospel is not meant to be kept hidden from the world, but let out, and those who hear and understand even the parables are illuminated by the Holy Spirit as He works through the message of redemption (Jn. 14:26; Eph. 1:18).

There is one other layer of this that is drawn out in verse 18: "Take care then, how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." Since the word is not hidden but proclaimed, that means the burden of hearing it falls on those who hear. In other words, if you hear the message of the Gospel, you are now responsible for responding rightly to it. You are without excuse.

The New Family

After talking about how parables separate those who will hear and receive the truth from those who will hear and reject it, Jesus goes on to discuss how those who hear and receive the words of God are unified into a new family. While Jesus was teaching the crowds, "His mother and His brothers came to Him" (Lk. 8:19). He was notified of their arrival, and how they desired to speak with Him. It's in this context that Jesus answers: "My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:21). This is not intended to cast negative light on Jesus' nuclear family, but draw out a broader definition of what the family of God is. Mary, Jesus' mother, has been shown as obedient already in Luke's Gospel (1:38, 45). The idea here is that those who believe form a new kind of family that supersedes the bonds of the nuclear family.

This makes sense given the divisive nature of the Gospel to the nuclear family. Jesus says in Matthew 10:34-37: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." The Gospel both unifies the family of God and has the potential to divide the family of man.

The “new family” in Jesus’ teaching also makes sense given the New Testament’s description of the church as a unified family. The apostle John tells us that we become “children of God” by receiving Jesus (Jn. 1:12), and our status as God’s children is reiterated in 1 John 3:1-2. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” As believers in Christ, we are given a new identity and a new family, and this family is defined by belief in the Gospel and submission to Christ as Lord. This family may include members of our nuclear family, but it might not. The old saying “blood is thicker than water” might be true, but only if it refers to Christ’s blood. His family must become the only family that truly matters.

What About Now?

One takeaway is the importance of sharing the Gospel if you believe it. Light is not meant to be hidden. Another takeaway is the profound value the family of God should have in our lives. Church is not simply a place we go, but a family to which we belong. This is not exclusive to only the people in your local church, but universally, all Christians. Our love for and commitment to believers must be front and center. After all, our love for other believers is how the rest of the world will know that we belong to Jesus (Jn. 13:35).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 8:16. What illustration does Jesus make here?

2. Read Exodus 25:37, Proverbs 31:18, and 1 Samuel 3:3. How is “the lamp” understood in each of these passages? Write them all down below.

Day Two

1. Read Luke 8:17. What is the point Jesus is making here, and what does it have to do with the parables?

2. Read Luke 8:18. What is Jesus speaking about? Why kind of responsibility falls on someone who hears the words of God?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 8:19. Who came to speak to Jesus? Why were they not able to reach Him?

2. Read Luke 8:20. What did the people tell Jesus?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 8:21. What did Jesus say in response? Who are His “mother and brothers?”

2. Read John 1:12 and Ephesians 2:19. What do these passages say about the group identity of Christians?

Week 31 Discussion: Family of Faith

One of the big takeaways from Luke 8:19-21 is that when you become a Christian by receiving the Gospel (and by extension, Jesus Himself), you join the family of faith. This family supersedes your nuclear family, although your nuclear family may also join the family of God through faith as well. Talk as a group about how important the family of God is to you and how you participate in it.

1. Icebreaker: Do you view the family of God as more important than any other family? Why or why not?
2. How important is gathering with the church on Sundays to you? How often do you miss?
3. How important is gathering with your Bible study to fellowship together and learn God’s word?
4. Do you struggle with prioritizing the family of faith over everything else? Why or why not?
5. How often do you invite members of your natural family to be a part of God’s spiritual family?
6. How can the church better love and care for you?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus explained that parables serve as a kind of litmus test to reveal who truly believes and who doesn’t.
2. Jesus explained that the true family are those who “hear the words of God and do it” (Lk. 8:21).