

# 10.8.2023 Sermon

## Be Ready When the Light Comes On

### Luke 8:16-18

#### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

darkness, light, hidden, moment, Jesus, text, share, worked, god, great, talk, life, thought, ground, assignments, parents, hovers, overnight success, love, jar

#### **SPEAKERS**

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I always thank God for the laughter, the energy, and the joy that fills the room when we gather for service. Some people, unfortunately, don't have those moments in life where they can simply laugh with familiar faces. As I age, I find myself increasingly grateful for the little things.

Perhaps I'm now what one might call a senior citizen, though I'm not quite ready to embrace that title. After all, I have children. Their growth has taught me to appreciate the smaller joys in life: good health, a family that greets me warmly, shared laughter, and the simple act of making eye contact.

These might seem insignificant, but they are the very essence of life. We often glamorize grand achievements, but sometimes, it's the little things that deserve our gratitude. Even taking a deep breath is a blessing. I never want to overlook these moments because, when combined, they create a magnificent life. This is the life God intended for us, one that is enriched by the everyday experiences we often take for granted.

As Sandra mentioned, my name is James Beatty. I'm here to share some thoughts with you this morning as part of our "Choose Your Own Adventure" series. We've had various speakers share their insights, and I've been moved by each message. It's intriguing because the series encourages speakers to delve into their favorite biblical texts.

Some of our choices overlapped, and we navigated that. Today, I've chosen a text that I've struggled with. It's not that I dislike the entire passage, but certain parts challenge me. This is precisely why I was drawn to it. When studying the Bible, we shouldn't cherry-pick only the verses we're comfortable with. We must embrace it in its entirety, understanding the context

and purpose of each verse. Brian Chilcote, who occasionally teaches Bible classes, often poses a question: How do we approach the verses that unsettle our beliefs about God, church, and theology? We must explore these challenging verses, for they might hold answers to our deepest questions.

Let's delve into the text I've chosen: Luke 8:16-18. It's a familiar passage, but I'll explain my reservations later. The text reads: "No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor anything secret that will not become known and come to the light. Then pay attention to how you listen. For those who have, more will be given. And for those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away." The last part troubles me. It suggests that those who are already downtrodden might lose even more. How can this be? What lessons can we draw from such a statement?

Before this passage, Jesus narrates the parable of the sower. It describes seeds falling on various types of ground: the path where seeds are crushed, among thorns where they are choked, and on stony ground where they cannot root deeply. Each type of ground represents how we receive and nurture the Word of God.

The disciples, puzzled by the parable, seek clarity from Jesus. He explains that the seed symbolizes the Word of God, and the type of ground illustrates how we receive and nurture it. Our actions and circumstances determine the fruit we bear. Sometimes, despite our best intentions, we find ourselves in unfavorable situations. The key is to listen carefully and discerningly. The way we interpret and act upon the Word will determine whether we are blessed or face challenges. Theological interpretations of such texts have been debated for centuries, and I won't delve into that today. I hope that's alright with you. Thank you for your understanding.

However, I want to turn to this particular text. If I were to retitle my sermon today, it would be "When the Lights Turn On." This is because Jesus has been a bit more straightforward in this parable than in the previous one. He had to pause and instruct the disciples on what he was discussing.

In this instance, Jesus was clearer. He presents a lamp and discusses what one should or shouldn't do with it. In this context, instead of the seed representing the word, it is the lamp, the light, that symbolizes the word. Consider this: in that era, they didn't have the kind of lights we have now; it was an open flame. One wouldn't place that flame under a jar. Common sense tells us that if you cover a burning flame with a jar, the flame loses the oxygen it needs to continue burning. Similarly, you wouldn't place a flame under a bed. It's a hazard; it could burn the house down, endangering the family and rendering the light useless.

This "word" is not merely something to store in our intellect, words, or memories. It's meant to be utilized in our lives, illuminating the space around us so that others can benefit from our presence. There's also scripture about what is given and what is taken away, and the distinction between deeds done in secrecy versus those done openly.

Throughout this sermon, I'll frequently interchange two terms: "hidden" and "darkness." I use them synonymously. Our society often associates darkness or things that are hidden with negativity. From a physiological perspective, darkness simply means the absence of light. However, sociologically, we've linked darkness or hidden things with corruption, danger, shame, and other negative connotations.

Many traditions, including the one I grew up in, caution against deeds done in the dark, implying they will eventually be exposed. This was a warning for children, like me back then, to behave even when unobserved. Societal interpretations of "darkness" or "hidden" can differ from biblical contexts. What if one's actions in the dark are righteous? What if you're doing the right things when no one's watching? If you're doing commendable deeds in the dark, they might be magnified in the light. Conversely, if your hidden actions are negative, they might be taken away when exposed.

Let's delve deeper into this concept. When discussing darkness, we also touch upon the idea of emerging from it prematurely. Our elder, Kevin Brisbin, shared insights about the Jewish perception of a day. Unlike our understanding where a day begins at dawn, for them, it starts in the evening. It begins with family communion, a meal, and rest in the quiet of one's home. Only then do they step into the light of the next day. In Western society, we're often eager to step into the light, perhaps leaving our moments of rest and rejuvenation too early.

Darkness, or being hidden, isn't inherently negative. It's a space for introspection, understanding one's motivations, and seeking solace from life's noise. It's even a space where one might hear God's voice. Remember, darkness isn't intrinsically bad. Consider Genesis 1:2, which speaks of the Earth being void and darkness covering the deep, yet the Spirit of God hovered over it. I've attended many Vacation Bible Schools and Sunday schools, but I've never been taught that a place where God resides could be considered bad.

Never.

So, what I want you to be able to do is, in the dark and hidden moments of your life, search within yourself. Ask, "What is God hovering over in this moment? What things can I get revelation out of in this moment that shapes me? What am I to learn?" I don't want to hear anybody else's voice but God's in this moment. Because in this hidden away place, I want to

become me. In this place when no one wants to be around me, I know God loves me and wants to be around me. What can I learn from God here?

And if you have that construction of hidden places and darkness, do you really want to leave? So? Do you really want to leave? We pray all the time in church, "God, be with us, walk with us, hold my hand." What if God is in darkness? What if God is in the hidden places? What if it is time for you to settle in this moment?

This is not a new phenomenon. I love studying the life of Jesus and what Jesus went through. I remember Jesus. His first miracle was at the wedding, and his mother comes up to him and says, "Jesus, they're out of wine, do something." And what is Jesus's reply? First, I thought it was hilarious. "WOMAN, what am I to do with you?" You said that to your mother, Jesus? Really? Oh man, my mother would not approve.

So, Americans are quite nice. I'll start there. And then he says, "My time is not yet." But Mary's pushing him out. Why is Mary pushing him out? Well, being a 30-year-old male then was like being a 30-year-old male now; you are not hanging around in your mama's house. That's what Jesus said. And she's like, "Yeah, I know. I know. You were the Promised Son. But you're 30 years old now. Let's get it going. Whatever we're gonna do, let's do it, man." Okay, I got a 30-year-old son. If he was all caught up, well, yeah, no. All right. This is not uncommon for people to say, "Look, it's time to go, it's time to jump in."

The problem is you really need to know when it's time for God, for you, when God wants you to move and be. Because here's the wonderful understanding of the shadows: When the lights turn on, there's only one thing you can be assured of. And that is everybody will see what you truly are.

When the lights come on, you get attacked. When the lights come on, yes, there will be people who will take a jar and try to snuff out the energy and the information you need to continue to breathe. When the lights come on, people will try to put you in the wrong situation that is dangerous and does no good.

When the lights come on, you need to know who you are. You need to have the roots deep enough that you know you were founded on great ground before the lights come on. Before your challenges, which are guaranteed, you got to know who you are. And you can't depend on the friends you get after you get popular. It's only in darkness that you know who your friends are, as our brother Joe said. It's only in darkness you know what's important to you, as King David realized after he lost his kingdom.

And think about David's beginning. For those of you that are suffering and thinking that you are forgotten, I want to compare your story to David's story. You're out in the field, doing the job that your parents asked you to do. You're a shepherd, you protected the sheep, you've done all you're supposed to do.

A great prophet comes to your home, talks to your parents, and says, "In your house is the next king. Could you bring me your sons? I want to talk to them, and I am going to anoint the one that God speaks to me about because that's our new King." And then your parent calls in all the rest of your siblings. The prophet goes from one to the next, down the line, gets to the last one. The prophet looks at them all and says, "None of these are the one?" And then the Prophet asks your parents, "Do you have any more?"

Here's the most disrespectful thing: even your parent has put you in the shadows. When the moment of revelation comes around, even your parent has forgotten about you. Oh, how my ego would be bruised! And then they finally say, "Oh yeah, I got this kid in the field. Let me get him out here." This is the one. As Pastor Tracy said a few weeks ago, most of the songs were written when David was a child in the field when everybody had forgotten about him. That's when God saw him, not out in the light, but in the shadows. Who are you then, in the shadows? And why are you so intent on getting out of there too soon?

Understand, Western society is all about instant gratification. Could that be it? We have instant coffee, microwave meals, instant pudding, dating shows, and even 90-day weddings. But you really don't know a person. No, I'm not going down that rabbit hole. But it's so instant.

And we are all conditioned to think that what's happening in darkness is negative. I want to get to the light because in the light, I'm the center of attention. Life must be going great because I'm in the light. Life must be wonderful. I'm in the light. The light must be great. I'm in the light. I'm in the light. So, the focus is on me. It could be terrifying if I'm not prepared. It could be terrifying. Because some things take time.

There are still 24 hours in a day, still 365.25 days in a year. It still takes a year to circle the sun. It still takes a certain season to grow crops, and it still takes crops to feed you. Some things take time. But darkness is not meant to be either negative or positive. It just is. For the whole course of your life, these things balance. And I encourage you not to be fed up in your hidden moments, in your dark moments.

There's a great basketball player that my wife loves because he's from Chicago or played for Chicago, Michael Jordan. And yes, I'm with you, Brandon. Whatever. Okay, look at this. They're taking sides.

In the first few years of his career, he was fantastic. It was truly a great time for him. However, he soon ran into challenges, particularly from a group known as the "bad boys" who would consistently defeat him and send him home. For the initial years, his primary reaction was to complain about these defeats.

Then, one transformative year, he had an epiphany. He declared, "I changed everything about me. Because I wanted to beat them." This wasn't just a superficial change. He altered his diet, his workout routine, and even his mindset about the game, all with the singular goal of defeating this formidable group. As a testament to his dedication and success, he stands out as one of the few, if not the only, undefeated champions.

When he was later interviewed about his journey, he reflected, "I could have never become who I am today and understood the pain necessary on the darkest days if I hadn't had to go through them." He believed that these challenges, the times he was knocked down, the moments of sheer disappointment, and the instances when no one seemed to care about his pain, were crucial to his development. When the opportunity finally came for him to compete for the NBA championship, he was unstoppable. He had been through the rigorous process and was ready.

Let me share another story. A colleague and friend of mine had seemingly done everything right in his career. He had the best education and took on the right assignments. By all metrics, he was set up for success. In our corporate culture, there's an unspoken understanding: if you excel in certain assignments, you're rewarded with promotions. Everyone knew this. However, for some inexplicable reason, despite meeting all the criteria, he never advanced as expected.

Seeking advice, I approached him. He was older and I thought he might offer some guidance. But he responded, "I can't really tell you because I've done those things they tell you to do, and they didn't work for me." He had taken on significant roles, like expat assignments which are reserved for the best. He even expanded the company into new markets. Yet, the rewards he was supposed to receive eluded him. At one point, he even considered leaving it all behind.

However, life had a twist in store for him. He was given an opportunity to become a supplier for our company. While others had been offered this role and failed, he excelled. When I spoke to him after his success, I asked, "How does it feel to be a certified, bonafide multimillionaire with your own company?" He chuckled and replied, "Many see me as an overnight success. But I've worked all my life to become this 'overnight success'."

This is a sentiment many can relate to. Working tirelessly, waiting for that one defining moment. I hope that when your moment arrives, you're the one who is rewarded abundantly, and not the one caught unprepared, losing even the little they have. Amen.