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Golden Snuffers

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Exodus 37:17-24.

"And he made the lamps thereof, seven, and the snuffers thereof, and the snuff-dishes thereof, of pure gold."

We have here the great vessel of light and testimony in the candlestick, which quite clearly is Christ in corporate expression, but Christ pre-eminently; and we have the oil for the light, which is the Holy Spirit: the two Members of the Godhead in co-operation for bringing the light of God into this world amongst men. But when we have said all that we can say about Christ Himself and about the Holy Spirit, there is something else necessary to God for the carrying out of the Divine intention in the coming of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that something else is represented by the wicks of the lamp. These wicks are never prescribed; nothing is said about them, no provision is made. We do not read anywhere that the Lord said, 'Make wicks: this is how the wicks should be made'. There is nothing like that at all. They are simply there by indication. The fact that there are snuffers indicates that there must have been wicks, or it can be taken for granted that the oil would not burn by itself without a medium, and although there is so little notice of the wicks themselves, they are indispensable to the Lord Himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for Their purpose in this world.

And the wicks, of course, are the children of God - 'Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail'. The Lord needs wicks, and cannot fulfil His purpose without them. You and I are in the capacity of the wicks of the great Lamp of testimony, the Lord Jesus; the great power of testimony, the Holy Spirit. There are one or two very simple thoughts then in connection with wicks that I will pass on to you.

The Lord's Desire for Freshness

The first is that the provision of snuffers for the wicks implies and carries with it the Divine desire and thought to keep things fresh in the matter of His testimony. These lamps, these wicks, were to be trimmed regularly morning and evening; and, although it may seem strange, yet the fact remains, and we know it all too well, that the human element does creep in even where there is the presence of the Holy Spirit. It might be thought that if you are in living touch with Christ and if the Holy Spirit, like the oil, is really flowing through you, the human element would be eliminated and there would be nothing of that which speaks of staleness coming in at all. There would be no need for snuffers, surely. But the fact remains that the snuffers are still necessary. The human element does persist and the Lord has taken account of it.

And the Lord has constantly to take steps with us in order to keep things fresh, to keep things alive. We are the element that would arrest the full fresh blaze of the testimony. We often cause an obscuring of the light. It is not due to the Lord; it is not due to the Holy Spirit. It is this human element coming in all the time. It comes in in many ways, and the fact that the Lord has said that morning and evening continually the snuffers must come into operation, the wick must be trimmed, indicates that even as to our experience of Himself, even as to our union with the Lord, even as to the Holy Spirit flowing through us, it must not be something of yesterday or of last week or of ten years ago, twenty, thirty, forty years ago. It must be something fresh today. It is so easy to live in a past experience and to be always talking about something that the Lord did long ago. The Lord's thought is that there must be a freshness and livingness for today. Our life in the Lord, our experience of the Lord, our testimony to the Lord, has got to be renewed day by day. So, as a safeguard against living upon something of the past, snuffers need to be brought into operation. The Lord says, 'No; living in a past spiritual experience can be like charred wick. It was quite true - yes, it was the Holy Spirit - but it belongs to the past'. We have to bring things up to date; things have to be kept alive and fresh today. So we get rid of mere past history, "forgetting the things which are behind". Even though they were of the Lord, things must be renewed.

There is another way, of course, in which the human element can come in. It is in connection with those words of Paul - "Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Now, if we live on the outward man, we shall be like a charred wick and it will be a smoky testimony, the light will be dim. There is to be a renewing day by day of the inward man. Well, we know the day by day principle of the Lord for daily bread from above, for inward renewal from above. We have got to get rid of everything that, although once good, has now become something of the past and lost its freshness. The snuffers speak of the Lord's thought for keeping everything up to date, up to the hour; and if that is the Lord's thought, then it surely must be possible, surely it is His intention that we shall never exhaust things, never exhaust the freshness of our life with Him; that there shall always be something more - and there is.

But something has to be done in order to preserve that freshness, and that is by constant trimming - the work of the snuffers. The Lord has many ways of trimming, and I expect some of us know quite well that the Lord does do this - how He causes the greatest and best things of the past to seem as though they never had been, to lose their strength and their grip upon us. Great experiences they were in our history, but unless the Lord does a new thing now, they are as nothing. They were tremendous things in our spiritual history, and we thought that nothing could ever be greater - yet now they are as nothing, because we have been brought to a position where the Lord must exceed all that has been. The snuffers are at work. They are cutting off the past, cutting off that which is not right up to date, and seeking to trim us for something fresh today.

In many other matters which we could mention, the Lord operates in this way. But whether we enumerate the ways in which the Lord uses the snuffers or not, let us look at the fact that the Lord prunes or trims, cuts off, deals with, the human element; makes necessary by various ways and means the freshness of His life, the new experience, a new leaping up of life. We come into the way and the Lord has to deal with us in the way; this human element, this charred wick, has to be got out of the way - and how prone we are to be charred, how easy it is for us to be charred. We all know that. We are every day troubled with this tendency of ours to be like a charred wick. We get so stale and so earthy. The Lord is always out for the maintenance of life up to date in freshness, and in order to do that, He has to do a lot of trimming.

I think Paul in Asia fits into that so well. He had known many resurrections. He could say, "God... who delivered", and he knew many deliverances. He had at length to say: "We despaired... of life... we... had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8,9). A new resurrection was necessary, something beyond anything that had ever been: and the Lord trimmed him for that. So He would trim us continually for new experiences of His life, fresh manifestations of Himself, right up to date.

Priestly Ministry

Then another thing is that trimming is priestly ministry. It was given to the priests to do this and no one else dared to do it. It is priestly ministry to trim. Of course, we have spoken almost entirely of the Lord doing this trimming, and it must be the Lord who does it in the first place; but the Lord has priests. There are priests with the High Priest, and to them is given this secret ministry of working together with Him in using the golden snuffers. Galatians 6:1 is just the using of the golden snuffers. "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted!" "Ye who are spiritual": that surely answers to priesthood, surely that is what priesthood is amongst believers. Priesthood and priestly ministry are bound up with spiritual men and women. I will not go back to show from the Old Testament how priesthood was based upon spirituality, or to point out all that is there represented of spirituality in the matter of priesthood. I think we can take it for granted that spiritual men and women are His priests, and priestliness now is a matter of spirituality. "If a man be overtaken in a fault" - there is the wick charred and the testimony a bit blurred and dim and smoky; then the golden snuffers come into play, and "ye which are spiritual" are to use them, to restore such a one. It is priestly ministry in restoring.

Snuffers of Pure Gold

But remember that these snuffers are of pure gold. That is the Divine nature by which this ministry is to function. "Restore such a one in a spirit of meekness" or "gentleness". Is that not Divine nature? They are *golden* snuffers, pure gold. "A spirit of meekness" - that is Christ. "Considering thyself lest thou also be tempted" - that is humility, meekness. Oh, it is so easy to use the snuffers in such a way that you snuff people out, snuff out their life. It is said of Him, "A bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench" (Isa. 42:3). No, the Lord's idea, even with a smoky wick, is not to quench the testimony, by coming down upon the poor vessel; but the true spirit of priesthood will seek to deal with that which is wrong, the fault, the trespass, the evil, with the positive object of reviving, refreshing, restoring.

It is so easy to discuss and criticize and speak of the fault and wrong - and do nothing. 'Look at So-and-so. Their testimony is not very bright. Look at this and that and the other thing about them.' Yes, the dimly smoking wick to be talked about, the faults indicated and pointed out and taken note of.

That is not good enough for priestliness. The priestly ministry of spiritual men and women is, while recognizing the need, to help to meet the need in a true spirit of service, to get rid of the difficulty.

Well, that is all very simple, but it has a deep meaning. We are wicks; we may have the Holy Spirit, we may be joined to Christ, we may be bound up with the great testimony of God, to be for Him vessels of light on this earth; but with all that, given union with Christ, given Divine purpose, given the Holy Spirit, something is needed in us continually. We have to be kept in a condition day by day which makes it possible for the Lord to be seen, and the Lord is just continually renewing His testimony in us by keeping away things that seek to come in - sin and self and the world and other things that char the wick. The Lord wants His testimony kept fresh and living continually, right up to date, and then He wants us to help Him in this - but in a spirit of meekness. Oh, it is no use our trying to take the mote out of our brother's eye if we have a beam in our own.

The Lord give us much grace and much wisdom in fulfilling this ministry. It is an important one, to help the Lord's people to maintain freshness and fullness. And if the Lord uses the snuffers, let us remember that He is seeking not to lessen but to increase, not to quench but to make greater His light through us. It may be cutting off, it may seem to be sometimes reduction, but the Lord intends enlargement and purification by His using of these instruments, which seem often to be destructive but are intended by Him to be just the opposite. So much, then, for the golden snuffers. The Lord make us those who can be used as snuffers: not to limit, crush, quench, but to help, restore, revive, increase.