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Oil for the Light

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in July 1955.

The book of Exodus, chapter 27 at verse 20: *"And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually. In the tent of meeting, without the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the Lord: it shall be a statute for ever throughout their generations on behalf of the children of Israel."*

Oil for the light. It is my growing conviction dear friends, that the greatest need of our time is a true knowledge and understanding of the Holy Spirit and His work. Such knowledge, if spiritually apprehended, would really solve by far the greater number of the problems which beset Christians and the church today. If only we really lived in the good of the indwelling Holy Spirit with all that that means as a matter of light... how different everything would be.

So I say again, the pressing need of our time is for such knowledge, such understanding. And so, what follows this morning is just touching on the very fringe of that matter; not by any means an attempt to cover it or exhaust it.

This simple fragment: "thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring pure olive oil for the light..." You notice this is a *command* to the Lord's people. This is an imperative. This is a necessity. This is indispensable, this is essential - a command. It is not optional, left to choice; this is an obligation: "*Command* the children of Israel that they bring oil for the light".

Now, first of all note the place of the light. The lampstand, as you know, was in the holy place, between the outer court and the most holy place. It was in that place which in type is a between place, a place *between* heaven and earth, heaven and the world - there's the outside and there's the inside. There is all that is here in this world on the one side, on the other side there is all that which is essentially heaven - the very presence of God. And in between heaven and earth, this light was to be a place which united heaven and earth and yet divided them.

I think the meaning is what our Lord meant in His great prayer. It seems to me that He was standing very much in this position when He prayed in John 17: "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world, and yet... and yet they are in the world, these are in the world. I come to Thee, they are not of the world." It is so familiar a truth, almost a hackneyed phrase, "in the world but not of it". Here is an in-between place which is the place of believers in this present dispensation at this present time. It is our place *between* heaven and earth in a very real sense. Well, we know that don't we? We know that on the one hand we are here in this world, right enough and it's very real. And yet it is just as real that we don't belong to it, we are not of its life, we're in an in-between place. We know that we're not yet literally and actually in heaven, and yet and yet! Somehow or other we are deeply linked with heaven. The place between... that is where the light was to be or where the light was; a place which divides heaven and earth and yet brings them together.

There were no windows in that place. No windows in the holy place. No provision was made for natural light. Natural light was excluded. But for this lampstand, it would have been totally dark. All that was there represented in type and symbol, all the values and functions of that place were only possible, capable, of being effective by a light which was not the light of nature.

The Light of the Spirit

The light is produced by the oil. That is very true and touches very closely upon my opening remark. This holy place, this in-between place was symbolic of the position in which Israel were just at that time, they were out of Egypt but they were not yet literally and altogether *in* the land of Canaan. They were in an in-between place and oh, how they needed the light of heaven for that wilderness journey!

There are two aspects of the Christian life. In Christ it is true we are seated in the heavenlies, but Peter will tell us that we are still pilgrims and strangers; we are sojourners - always the two aspects. And on this side, the peculiar, peculiar position of God's people at the present time: the pilgrimage aspect.

And this is true to very positive teaching in the New Testament. In this life God has made no provision for natural light. If you and I are going on our way to reach God's full end then natural light, for one thing, will be no good to us, but for another God has ruled it out. He has made no windows. That's the argument of the first letter to the Corinthians isn't it? "The natural man receiveth not the things of God and neither can he know them". And the whole force of the chapter in which those words occurs, is: "God has made no windows for that - *your* reason doesn't come in here, the light of *your natural* judgement is not allowed here. It is all excluded. The light that is here is the light from the oil. It's the light of the Spirit."

So the argument of the first letter to the Corinthians is the argument about the Spirit, isn't it? And about what is spiritual for guidance, for judgement, for counsel, and for the knowledge of everything

of the Lord. No place for natural light, yet God's own provision for light which is better than that, it's God's own light.

Now look at the contents of this place, the holy place. Well, in addition to the lampstand, the golden lampstand, you know there was the golden altar of incense and then there was the golden table of bread, of the loaves. Simple symbols that help us to understand the meaning of the light, the functioning of the oil. Just this, dear friends, and of course we know the symbolism is that the oil is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is our light for the things of God. But this light is not just unto itself. It is to throw its rays upon, to light up, to *illumine* this whole matter of prayer.

And I'm quite sure I carry you with me when I say what a *tremendous need* there is that the people of God should know how to pray in the Spirit. *If only we knew how to pray in the Holy Ghost!* That's a New Testament phrase: "praying in the Holy Ghost". We need that. We shall never really get very far without that. We'll be going round in circles. And you see the Lord from time to time called a halt in this journey for the setting up of the tabernacle again, with everything that it contained. But right in the centre was this thing: the light in the holy place upon this matter of intercession and prayer - the altar of incense. It is as though the Lord was saying, "we can't get any further until we have put a new emphasis upon this matter of prayer in the Spirit, praying in the Holy Ghost".

Our future, our progress, our fresh stages will require that we get into the Spirit of prayer again and we get prayer in the Spirit. Now, it's difficult for me to convey all that I am feeling about that, but dear friends, you will grasp the point. If in our prayers and in our own prayer life privately, and when we came together, we come together for prayer as the Lord's people, we were really praying in the Spirit, how much further we should get! Instead of praying in our own judgements, our own feelings, our own impulses, our own ideas, our own *reasoning* - what ought to be, what we think should be and so on - and uttering a lot of things out of our own *natural* light. If the Holy Spirit got hold of our praying and we prayed in the Spirit *even one thing*, how much further we should get! See, I do not believe it is possible to pray a thing in the Holy Ghost without an issue, without something happening, without something being reached and some moving taking place.

Look again in the book of the Acts. That's just what it was, you see, they prayed in the Spirit. And that does not mean that they just prayed in a kind of feeling, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of light, you see. And the Holy Spirit knows what God wants. He knows all the purposes of God, all the designs of God, all the ways of God, all the times of God. He knows when the time is *due* for such and such a thing. He knows exactly *how* that thing ought to be done. He knows it all, He's the Spirit of light! Pray in the Holy Spirit and you pray right on to the things that God intends and they must be.

And I can do no more this morning than just make this appeal: that you and I seek the Lord yet more earnestly that our prayer life shall be *in the Spirit, illumined* by the Spirit, that we shall pray in the intelligence and the understanding of the Holy Spirit.

So the oil for the light has a relationship to prayer in the Holy Spirit. On the other hand this light was thrown upon the table and the bread. And that surely indicates that we must feed upon the Word of God in the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This is the extra factor that is so necessary, I feel perhaps more necessary today than ever, if that's possible.

You can take this book, the Bible, and from the same book, using exactly the same Scriptures, get a hundred different positions, even every one of which is in conflict with the other. That is what has

been done! That is what is being done. You see nearly all the different aspects and forms of Christianity today build themselves upon Scripture, support their position by Scripture, and very few of them can stand together. They are contradictory if not antagonistic to one another, they take one thing out of the Word of God and you get these different views which are absolutely in conflict with each other and yet built upon Scripture. And that can be extended over so many things, so many ways.

Well, what are we to do? How are we to know? Not by leaving the Scripture and arriving at our own conclusions and judgements, but *we need the Holy Spirit to tell us what the Scripture means*. There's something, you see, extra to the Word. The Spirit gave this Word and He knew what He meant by it. And He never meant two conflicting and contradictory things. He's not like that. The Spirit's mind is one mind. Always very consistent is the Holy Spirit, and there are no contradictions in the Bible where the Holy Spirit is concerned; there are in *our natural light* interpretations or apprehensions.

Do you not see how important it is to bring oil for the light? That in the Word of God upon which we have *got* to feed (it is our Bread) Christ has come to us as the Bread in the form of the *Word*, "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word..." every Word! Christ is the living Word as the living Bread. But oh! We need the Holy Spirit to illumine this Word and to interpret, and to convict, to save us from contradiction. Ah yes, but the Holy Spirit has no windows for *our* reasoning and our interpretations - natural light. Here everything is shut up to *Him*; shut up to Him - everything else excluded.

Well, our time is gone. I think you see what I meant, the *tremendous* importance in our day of the Holy Spirit - knowing the Holy Spirit. My last word is this: beaten. "Bring pure olive oil *beaten* for the light". There's got to be definite exercise about this matter of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It just does not happen and come about. It does not just come about, we've got to get down to this matter in *real* exercise and energy and make, shall I say, a business of it: "Lord, Lord, rule out *my* judgement, rule out *my* feelings, rule out *my* likes and my dislikes. You come by Your Spirit and have *absolute* pre-eminence in my heart, in my mind as I pray, as I read Thy Word". See? It's business, *beaten out*, real exercise about the place and the work of the Holy Spirit in our personal life with the Lord and in our collective life.

Let us long to hear that note in our prayer gatherings, a real laying hold of the Lord, "Now Lord, tonight in this hour we must come into the mind of the Spirit about things..." A real laying hold of God, beating it out. "Command the children of Israel that they bring pure olive oil, beaten... for the light".