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The Lampstand

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in 1957.

This evening we shall be on somewhat familiar ground, as we seek to review the Lampstand of Testimony. We will read two portions, from the beginning of the Bible and from the end, in the book of Exodus chapter 25, verses 31 to 40.

"And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made, even its base, and its shaft; its cups, its knops, and its flowers, shall be of one piece with it: and there shall be six branches going out of the sides thereof; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side thereof, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side thereof: three cups made like almond-blossoms in one branch, a knop and a flower; and three cups made like almond-blossoms in the other branch, a knop and a flower: so for the six branches going out of the candlestick: and in the candlestick four cups made like almond-blossoms, the knops thereof, and the flowers thereof; and a knop under two branches of one piece with it, and a knop under two branches of one piece with it, and a knop under two branches of one piece with it, for the six branches going out of the candlestick. Their knops and their branches shall be of one piece with it; the whole of it one beaten work of pure gold. And thou shalt make the lamps thereof, seven: and they shall light the lamps thereof, to give light over against it. And the snuffers thereof, and the snuffdishes thereof, shall be of pure gold. Of a talent of pure gold shall it be made, with all these vessels. And see that thou make them after their pattern, which hath been showed thee in the mount."

In the book of the Revelation chapter 1, verses 12-20:

"And I turned to see the voice which spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the midst of the lampstands, one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to his foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were

white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in its strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks or lampstands are seven churches."

So, dear friends, we come back to look again at that which, so early in our history, we saw as the object of the Lord's concern, and that for which we have given ourselves through the years, as fully and as wholly as we have been able. And as you know, that which has engaged and controlled our hearts through these years, has been what is represented by this Lampstand of pure gold; it has its place there on the front of the little printed messenger that has gone out into the nations through all these years - the symbolic representation of all that to which we are committed. [*The image on the front of the A Witness and A Testimony magazines is a golden lampstand.*]

When we stand back from the symbol, the figure, the type, and ask ourselves what does it inclusively represent, the answer is: the presence of the Lord in this world in a people. I think that explains this Lampstand everywhere as we find it in the Bible. The passages which I have read are only the first and the last reference to this; there are others, as you know; we will mention them in a minute or two, but it is something which governs or dominates the Scriptures. It is there so early; it comes up again and again and it is there at the end. And again, I say, to give the comprehensive explanation of what it means, what it stands for, is just this: *the Lord's presence in this world in a people*. If you think about that, you will, I am quite sure, find more and more light upon this representation, this symbolic representation.

But then, it goes on to be shown to represent not only the Lord's presence Himself as here in a people, but the *identity* of the Lord *and* that people. You find that you are not able to divide these two things; that while it represents the Lord, it also represents the people; while it sets forth the thought of the Lord, that thought is embodied in a people, and has no real meaning apart from the people. The Lord and His people are one for His purpose in this world; there is an identity of the two.

Now, in Exodus, as we have read, this Lampstand represents the introduction of that Divine thought in a symbolic form. There it is brought in as at a point when things are crystallising; when what has been in the mind of God all through, is now taking definite shape and form, becoming concrete. The Lord is here producing in a very real and definite way, by a concrete means, the representation of what has been in His mind; and there, when He gets that people out to Himself, He introduces this matter of the Lampstand as a part of much more - but it is with this that we are concerned. There, then, it comes in, as we believe, not as some casual afterthought of God, but as expressive of what He has been working toward, and seeking to have, up to that time.

You pass to the second book of the Chronicles and chapter 4, where you have it again; you know that that links it with the Temple, and there it represents the consolidation of the Divine thought. There had been movement as in the Wilderness, as in a Tent - nothing settled and fixed, but always mobile, with an end and an object in view. You come into Chronicles, the end and the object is reached, and now you have the consolidation of the Divine thought.

When you pass into the prophecies of Zechariah chapter 4, there again you have the Candlestick all of Gold brought into view, you know that there it is the question of the *recovery* of the Lord's thought, which had been lost. The Lampstand had been removed out of its place; the testimony had been lost. Seventy years of exile had passed over the people, they were neither in their place, nor fulfilling their vocation. Now it is a matter of recovering - the Lord hasn't let it go for good, the Lord hasn't given up this idea. It may have suffered some loss for this period, but it is impressive that, when at last He gets a remnant back into position, He introduces the Lampstand again; it seems to come in, very naturally. Well, this is what it was always intended to be. So, it's a matter of recovery there.

When we come to the Book of the Revelation, and the Lampstand arises again in vision, in presentation - here we find that everything is being brought to judgment according to the thought embodied in the Lampstand. You know that this book is the book of judgments, and judgment begins at the House of God. So the first chapters are the judgment of the church, or the churches; and, right away, the idea of the Lampstand is brought into view, and everything is, at the end, ultimately judged according to the Lampstand.

That is, I am quite sure, impressive to you and it is all said with the object of impressing you with the fact that this is something about which the Lord is very jealous, which He has never given up, and which He brings at last forward as the standard and basis of His judgment dealings with His people.

There is a difference, of course, between the Old Testament and the New Testament representation. In the Old Testament the seven branches of the Lampstand, which is one, is in one place. In the New Testament the seven are in seven different places. It is not that just branches are taken off and put in different places; it is seven in every place - the completeness is there.

Now, the focal point of the interrogation here is this: "The *Spirit saith...* the Spirit saith to the churches". The Spirit is speaking, and speaking in relation to the Lampstand in every place; and the challenge and the interrogation is: "He that hath an ear to hear, *let him hear*". I do want that to fasten itself on you before we go further. "The Spirit saith..." at the end of the dispensation, when the judgment of this whole world and all that is here, is beginning - and who shall say that we are not on the brink of that, the judgment of this world? And God cannot, He cannot judge the world until He has judged His church. He just cannot; it would be unrighteous if He were to do so. And so the word is that it must begin at the House of God. And we may be right on the very threshold of the judgment of this world, which must be introduced by the judgment of the church. And if that is true, if there is anything at all to indicate that, here is the solemn call: "*He that hath an ear to hear...*" it is made personal; it is made individual: "*He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit saith*". The challenge, you see, is an individual one, and it focuses upon the faculty amongst the Lord's people for hearing, knowing, what is of the Spirit. That's a very deciding factor in the end, whether we have an ear to know what is of the Spirit and when the Spirit speaks, whether we know what it is the Spirit is saying.

Well, having said all that by way of introduction, let us come to this representation and that which it represents - The Lampstand, all of gold - God's purpose and God's means of testimony and self-revelation in this world.

We mentioned just now that in the Old Testament it is in one place - one Lampstand. And I think that while there may be other meanings, *the* meaning of that is this: in the Old Testament, *everything* points to Christ; everything is concentrated upon Christ. It is Christ Himself that is the object toward which everything in the Old Testament moves; and all there points to Him

personally. That, of course, is quite understandable; nothing else can be until He is revealed and is present. But in the New Testament, things go further. He is present; but in the New Testament everything moves *through* and *from* Christ to the church, and then to the world. In the one it is a concentration on bringing Him personally into view; when that is done, the next movement of the Spirit is *through* Him to the church, that the church may take up His ministry, His purpose, and the church embodying that to the nations, in the midst of the nations. So we have in the Old, the One; in the New, the many.

Now we shall examine this, and I do trust that we shall get through symbolism to the real spiritual meaning and message. Need I underline what I have just said, that whether it is the One or the many, in constitution, in experience and in vocation, they are identical; they are one - Christ and His church - in constitution, in experience, and in function.

Look then again, in the first place, at the nature or the substance of this vessel. It is said to be of "pure gold".

Of Pure Gold

It must be that to serve the Divine purpose - it just *must* be that. And we understand, in the symbolism of the Old Testament, and in the New for that, that gold does represent the Divine nature. Of course it has been said that gold symbolises the Deity, and no doubt there is much truth in that, but I think it would be more correct, or better, to say that it represents the Divine nature. That which is to reveal God must be like God; that which is to convey God to the world must partake of the Divine nature; it must be constituted according to the nature of God. That is different from Deity. I am not saying that the church is to partake of Deity - I would never say that; it would be wrong. But I do say that that vessel which the Lord has in mind and in view for His very purpose in this world, must partake of His Divine nature. And the essence, the *essence* of the Divine nature is: Holy Love. "He that walketh in the midst of the seven lampstands has a golden girdle about his breasts". The symbolism is striking and forceful, that He judges according to the standard of Holy Love - Holy Love. "His hair is as white wool" - that is the character of His judgment - His Holiness. And He will judge according to Holy Love.

At the very beginning of the judgment of the churches: "Thou hast left thy first love"! The "first love" was the Holy Love - that is the essence of the Divine nature - holiness in Love - Love in holiness. It is a peculiar kind of love; there really is no love like that holy Love. You see, here we are in the presence of the Light of God - the Light of God with His people in the world. Jesus, who is the Lampstand of Testimony of God, when He was here in this world and its darkness, declared Himself to be the Light, the Light of the world and the Light and the Life of men, supremely revealed in this world - the holy Love of God. You think about that. His life, His ministry, His works and His death were all governed by this one thing: the holy Love of God. On the one side - a witness against unholiness; on the other side - a love for holiness, even unto death. Sin, corruption, uncleanness, defilement, everything evil - He was here as a testimony against it; the Light exposed it and condemned it, and at last, destroyed it in the Cross. Here in the Revelation, He is present as the Risen One, the Living One, as we have said, taking up the matter of judgment first in the church, and then in the nations, and then in the kingdom of Satan.

And notice again in this Book, in all the symbolism - judgment against defilement in the church; corruption in the church; uncleanness in the church; unholiness in the church, and then in the world, and then in the unclean kingdom, for its destruction. Judgment against all that is not holy Love, beginning with the loss of that in the church, as represented by Ephesus. That is "all of gold".

Dear friends, while it is not my desire for one moment to bring any burden upon you, and weigh you down at all, I have for some time been very, very deeply and strongly exercised about this matter of holiness in the church, in the life of the church. If it is true, dear friends, if it is true that the Lord calls His people, and us amongst them (and for the time being let us focus this upon ourselves) and calls us into that identity with Himself for this purpose of manifesting Himself here, in this world, and being in us, in the midst of us, present as Light in the darkness, this very first thing about the vessel of such a purpose, the Lampstand, says with such emphasis - that's got to be like the Lord: holy, holy. The eyes "which are as a flame of fire" - the eyes of His glory, will search out unholiness. Let there be no doubt about it, in the end, anything that is unholy and hidden is going to be brought out to the light; in us personally, in our family life, in our business life, in every department of our life - He is going to uncover that which is not holy, and bring it to judgment. I am sure He is doing that. We must be able, by the grace and mercy of God, and by all faithfulness to Him, to the Light that He has given us, we must be able to stand in the light, and walk in the light as He is in the Light. For this is a matter of what it is that holds the Light and gives the Light - it is something of pure gold; that is, it partakes of the nature of God Himself. And that nature is *holy* Love.

John's final ministry, as you know, centres in and circles round "the testimony of Jesus". The testimony of Jesus, and when you look to see what John means by the phrase that he employs, as distinct from other apostles and servants of the Lord: "the *testimony* of Jesus", you'll find that in his gospel, in his letters, and in the Revelation, the Testimony of Jesus is along the line of Life, Light and Love. Life, Light and Love - you know that those three words comprise his gospel and his letters, but it is that now which is the ground of the judgment of the church universally. Life - "I am the Living Word"; Light - "in the midst of the candlesticks (or, the lampstands)" and Love - the very nature of all: holy Love.

We must go on; that should challenge our hearts and our lives - the Lord give us grace to bear that light.

In the next place, its *construction*. You see that this Lampstand is in the form of a tree.

An Almond Tree

A tree with leaves, and flowers, and fruit; it is therefore an organic unit. Again and again you notice in the reading, "of one piece... *of one piece*". This is not a composite thing; this is not something externally put together; this is not something that is built up from the outside, and held together by a framework. This is not something, in other words, that is constructed, and constituted, and brought together and held together by creed or creeds, by sacraments, by ordinances, by orders, by a set of rules and regulations, principles and practice, by human control, by legal bonds - it is none of those. Its unity, its oneness, its organic wholeness, springs out of the very Life that is in it: it is all of the Spirit. It is of the Spirit! It is the Spirit that constitutes its oneness and maintains it.

Now, having said all that, dear friends, I have touched very deeply into that which the Lord has many times said, but which has been the vision of these many years - not something set up from the outside, made by man or men, by committees or bodies - not something joined, not something with affiliation from the outside, not something with any of these things that I have mentioned - a doctrinal foundation to hold it together, or a system of regulations, or anything of that kind at all, but something which springs organically and spontaneously out of the *Life* of the Spirit. And there is a vast difference between those two things - all the difference. The one you have got to take responsibility for to hold it together and maintain it; the other, the Holy Spirit takes as His responsibility, if it is of Him. And there is much more to it than that.

What is it the Lord wants here? Well, we know what He wants. We may have failed; it may be a very poor representation, but that is not what we are talking about, we are talking about what the Lord *wants*, and what the heart, of some of us at least, is set upon, and that to which we have given our lives at some little cost. The Lord wants this *organic* thing, that springs out of the Spirit of Life Himself, and grows by its *own* organic life. That's why we have refrained from doing *many* things that are done in Christianity, in organisation, and the many things that we could do, to build up something, to make something, to form something, to extend something. We say, "No; stand back; hands off; let the Spirit do it." Ours it is to be filled with the Spirit and the rest will follow. There is no doubt about that at all, that where there is a Spirit-filled and Spirit-governed people, the rest *will* follow; souls *will* be saved and added to the Lord - it will follow as the day follows the night. And other things will follow. But if it is not like that, then it is a life-long agony and burden.

Next, the spiritual formation of such a vessel: "Of beaten work".

Of Beaten Work

One translation says: "*hammered* out"; and that's vivid, and how true it is! I would go further and say it's knocked into shape by many a hard blow; this thing is produced that way: beaten, hammered, knocked! it goes through a process of heavy, very heavy handling to produce the Divine conception.

Well, that's one way of speaking of the suffering, and the discipline, and the chastening that is essential to produce such a vessel and such a testimony. It's like that; it just goes through it. The Lord finds there preponderances and excesses, He smites them; He strikes blows at them. The Lord finds there deficiencies, He works to make good; it is all hammered out on the anvil of suffering; there is no doubt about it. It may explain a lot, but it is very true. It's very true.

Let me say it like this: to be an integral part of such a vessel for the Lord, involves you in a lot of difficulty and trouble that you would *never* know otherwise. It just *does* result in a lot of suffering, unto glory - but it is a lot of suffering.

Let me say it to the younger brothers and sisters, both in years and in association: have no illusions - should it be, should it be that that is what the Lord is after here in this place, in this company; should that be what the Lord is aiming at; your touching and association with that will involve you in a peculiar history of difficulty and suffering. If you are not prepared for that, you'll not stay; you will take offence, you will be in confusion. Understand that; all faithfulness necessitates saying it.

The next:

Its Position.

You know the position occupied by this Lampstand in the old dispensation, and it's typical. It was in a place which symbolically was between heaven and earth; it was in the intermediate chamber of the Tabernacle. On the one side, the very Presence of God Himself as in Heaven; on the other side, this world; and in between: the Lampstand - in between Heaven and earth. On the one side, yes the earth-touch broken; on the other side, the heaven-touch secured and established.

That opens the door to very, very much in the Word. I see such a comprehensive and detailed embodiment and representation of *all* this in John 17. Read that familiar chapter again in the light of what we are saying this evening. Here is He, who is the Light, He is there with the Father in prayer, and He has gathered His church, as represented with Him there and what is He praying? What is it

that is coming from His lips about Himself and about them? "Mine... they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world... They are not of the world even as I am not of the world! I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. And yet as to the world... that the world may believe by what it sees; by the light which shines upon them, and radiates from them, the world shall be affected!" And yet it is all toward the Father: for the Father's pleasure, for the Father's satisfaction.

There is your Lampstand, personal and corporate, between Heaven and earth, in the place of intercession. But the emphasis is: "*this is not of the world* - this is not of the world". It is impressive again that it is in John that you have that, in his gospel, that you have in chapter 17. And then you go over to his letters - and what is it all about? Oh, it is with this tremendous emphasis upon this matter of being apart from the world, and related to Heaven. All those strong things that John says in his letters about "the world" - "*the world lieth in the wicked one*"; "all that is of the world - all that is of the world..." Here is a challenge; here is a challenge to us.

Of course, in some respects, we may not need this and yet, and yet, I'm not sure that we don't. You may not be of those who *love* the world; and in some real ways, you have left the world, and you are not of the world, but do realise, dear friends, that the enemy's persistent effort in order to neutralize and nullify the testimony of Jesus, is to bring its vessel down on to an earth-touch in some way. That, of course, is so clear and evident in those letters to the churches - it was exactly what had happened. They had come down, spiritually, and touched the earth, and the enemy had spoiled their testimony; even the Lord had to say: "I cannot go on; I must remove your lampstand out of its place unless this earth-touch is again severed, and you get clear." There are many ways in which the earth-touch can be brought about.

Of course, this speaks of the *essential* heavenly nature and relationship of the church, if it is going to fulfil this Divine vocation. It is so *utterly* different from and a contradiction of that *false conception* of the church, which has its centre in Rome, and has touched so much of Christianity outside of Rome - it is an earth-thing, it's a political thing, it's a national thing, it's a historical thing and that is all a denial of the real nature of the church and the church's testimony. It is a contradiction. It is *not* political; *not* political: "*My kingdom is not of this world... if it were, My servants would fight...*" it would be a political thing; but it is not - not political. Any church that touches the political realm and is associated with it, has left its holy place, and has *lost* its testimony; there is no doubt about it. As a thing it is *not* historical, it is *eternal* - altogether above history. It's not the many things that the thing that is called the church is on this earth - oh, no! It is between Heaven and earth; it touches the world for testimony, but its link is with Heaven; and it is "not of this world" even as its Christ was and is not of this world. That is its position.

The Lord keep us there. Watch, watch carefully, against the involvements the enemy will try to bring about with you and the world. There must be a spiritual space between us all and the world - a spiritual space, that is, where our *spirits* are not involved. We walk here, and work here, and do so much here, in this world, and have so much contact with it, but our *spirit* must remain clear and free. It is essential, to our vocation.

And finally, its function. Well, we have said it but we underline it. The function of this Lampstand, of this vessel and instrument - it is the Light of the Spirit.

The Light of the Spirit

We know that that oil is symbolic of the Spirit, and the flame of the oil is the flame of the Spirit's life. And the object of that is to give light. It is therefore: the Light of the Spirit.

Do you see what we are here for? What are we here for? Well, it may work out in many ways, connections, and forms, but the inclusive object is: the Light of the Spirit in this world. In every form in which that Light can go forth, can shine, be manifested, and those who need Light can see it and find it, and find their way - that is what we are here for, or should be here for - the Light of the Spirit.

Do dwell upon these things seriously, and earnestly, and prayerfully. The apostle Paul, it seems to me, was the instrument for the setting up of the Lampstand, and setting the light in every place - these seven churches were very largely the fruit of his ministry. And he is the instrument for this dispensation, for bringing the Lampstand *in* with its Light, and what Light! What Light of the Spirit was derived through the ministry of that servant of God all over the world. Yes, but the Light has got dim, and John's ministry is needed; and John comes in with the golden snuffers. There is no doubt about it, that is the ministry of his letters and of the Revelation: to get rid of the dead wick; to get rid of the smoke that has gathered around the testimony, to *revive* the Life of the Spirit, to say to us: "The anointing that you have received abideth in you, but walk in the light as He is in the light". The ministry of John at the end is to revive the testimony of Jesus. In other words, to revive the Light that was committed to the church as the vessel of God in this world for this dispensation.

I have used many words, I have used much symbolism. I am always afraid that it might be regarded as teaching, ideas, but may I say again, dear friends, that I feel that the Lord would say this to us at this time, at *this* time, as a part of His very faithful speaking to, and dealing with us, that we don't fail Him, and that we really do rise to all that He has sought to show us as to our calling, through all these years.