

'A Candlestick All of Gold' Its Character and Form

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Lord is more concerned with a testimony than with a work, and suffering is necessary for a vital testimony.

Scripture: Revelation 1:12

Topics: "Divine Testimony", "Suffering"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the golden candlestick as a symbol of God's character and the necessity of suffering in the life of believers. He explains that the candlestick, representing the Church, is made of gold, symbolizing its divine origin, and is refined through trials, which are essential for authentic testimony. Sparks highlights that true effectiveness in ministry comes not from outward activities but from the depth of suffering that shapes a believer's character and unity with others. He asserts that God prioritizes a living testimony over mere works, and that the Holy Spirit commits to those who have endured the refining fires of adversity. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of suffering as a divine trust that leads to spiritual maturity and oneness in Christ.

Transcript

Reading: Rev. 1:12-20.

In our previous meditation, we said that there are three things about the candlestick. One is its function, another its character and a third its form. We have already considered its function. Let us proceed to say a little about the others.

Its Character, All of God

The character of the candlestick - the statement is, "all of gold". Whenever this means of testimony is brought into view, whether in Exodus 25 or in Zechariah 4 or in Rev. 1, it is always stated to be of gold. We all understand that in the Word of God gold is the symbol for what is of God. This candlestick is of God; man has no place in it. As to its character, it is of God.

The Outcome of Suffering

But it is gold refined in the fire. Yes, it is all of God in itself, but when it comes into relation to us, when it becomes associated with the Church, with the people of God here, we find this extra factor comes in, that

it is the outcome of fiery ordeal, it is that which is born of suffering and of travail.

We must always discriminate in the sufferings of Christ. There are two sides to them. There are His atoning sufferings, which are uniquely His, and no one has any part in them; but there are those others which relate to His representative work as perfecting unto glory, the destroying of the ground of Satan's power. Now in Himself, of course, there was no ground of Satan's power; He was without sin; but at the same time He did take the place of man to be tested along one line, that is, as to whether he would exercise that Divinely-given responsibility of freewill in His own interests as apart from and independently of God. It was not that there was a wrong will in Him; but to what would He hand His sinless will? He was tested as to the use of that sacred gift and responsibility of choice, tested in the fires of terrible adversity, in sufferings of all kinds; and the one issue in every suffering was - would He choose other than God's will, in order that by so choosing He could be free from His suffering, He could escape and have an easier time? That was representative suffering. It is the suffering that we are in, and He was tested in all points like as we; in His case without sin inwardly, but on the same ground as we in this sense - there were intense fires of suffering, and He had only to hand His will over to Satan and take it out of the hands of His Father, and He could be free from it all. Would He do it on any consideration?

Having said that, we find that this is the point where testimony comes in. It is here the testimony becomes something more than words, truths and doctrines; it becomes something very real, it becomes power, effectiveness, impact, when it is established through suffering. I do want that we should be helped to see this thing. I believe it would help us a great deal if we could grasp it. While the Lord has called us to serve Him, and the majority of Christians interpret the Lord's service in terms of many outward activities - such as preaching the Gospel to the unsaved, or fulfilling a teaching ministry, or doing many things in different ways and of different categories, all of which are included in His calling and we must not in any way fail to recognise our responsibilities in those matters - we must, at the same time, see very clearly that it does not matter how much, how earnestly, how continuously we serve the Lord in those outward ways, we yet do not escape intense suffering. It might be thought that if only you are doing the Lord's work, going where He has sent you, doing the thing He has called you to do, knowing of absolutely nothing that is contrary to His mind, and being very open to Him and constantly having dealings with Him that there shall be nothing that offends Him, then the Lord ought to facilitate the doing of this work by every means in His power, acting sovereignly and allowing no hindrances, no adversities, never allowing you to be laid up or put out of the work to which He has called you. But it never was like that and it never will be.

Suffering Inevitable for Vital Testimony

Look at your New Testament; you can look at it from three standpoints. Firstly from the standpoint of the great servants of the Lord upon whom rested tremendous responsibility as the pioneers and the foundation layers of the gospel for this whole dispensation; consider the work that they did. Surely the Lord wanted the gospel preached in Asia and in Europe and everywhere? Surely He wanted those churches established? Yes, there is no question about it. Look how utterly abandoned to the Lord these men were, and see what close accounts they kept with the Lord as to their lives, that there should be nothing offending to Him - men simply poured out for God, and yet they talk about Satan hindering (1 Thess. 2:18), and of being desperately ill. "Epaphroditus... was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, that I might not have sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil. 2:26-27). The Lord's servants were thrown into prison, on to beds of sickness, meeting every kind of adversity, all seeming to say that there is every imaginable hindrance and limitation and frustration of this very thing that God wants done. What a contradiction! There is something wrong somewhere! No! In the case of these

very men it was like that. They did not escape suffering, suffering of every kind.

Then there is the second standpoint, that of the individual churches, or the churches in the different areas. There are not many churches written to and represented in the New Testament without some reference being made to their sufferings. What those churches had to suffer! It was all in line with the Lord's purpose. They were there in the will of God, they were standing for God, they had come right out for God, but He did not shield them. He did not say to Satan, 'That is sacred to Me; touch not Mine anointed.' They suffered, and they were told that they would suffer; it was inevitable.

Then there is the third standpoint, that of the Church universal. What a history! This sacred thing, this precious thing, this pearl of great price, this wife of the Lamb, what a history of suffering, of suffering unto death! Those early martyrdoms under Nero when thousands were just torn to pieces by wild beasts - what a story! The Lord did not intervene with an angel to save them; they went through it.

The Lord More Concerned for a Testimony Than For A Work

What does this mean? It means that the Lord is more concerned for a testimony than for a work. We need to get clear on that. A good deal of confusion comes in when you begin to think of things in the light of a work. When you get a lot of people leaving their employment to go into 'the work,' all kinds of complications arise; and really the Lord is not, in the first place, after the work. I am not saying you are not to work for the Lord, but in the first place it is not the work the Lord is after, it is a testimony, it is a fight, a living flame. As I was saying, it is here that testimony becomes something more than a system of truth and teaching. Do not be too concerned to pass off on to other people certain terms, certain ideas, certain truths. 'Have you seen the truth of this? Have you seen the truth of that?' What you mean by such language is truth as a teaching, as a concept. Be infinitely more concerned that there shall be a living impact of life, before you say anything. People will see you have something before you speak. 'You have something I need.' That is the testimony. That is only born of suffering.

"To you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf" (Phil. 1:29). It is granted to you! You will not reach out your hands eagerly to receive that! It is given, a gift - to suffer for Him. The testimony comes that way. If you ever should think that in getting into the work of God you are going to find a good deal of gratification and satisfaction and pleasure, that it is going to answer to something in you that you long for - to be 'in the Lord's work!' - you are destined to disillusionment, for you will find that it might have been easier for you to have stayed where you were than to get into what you call the Lord's work.

Let me say further that it is just here that real effectiveness is secured - at the point where suffering begins. It is a law established now in this very universe since Adam failed, that every bit of fruitfulness of the earth, of human lives in every realm, is the outcome of travail, the result of some fiery ordeal. Fruit for God in the spiritual realm, the real effectiveness of testimony, is born of suffering and travail. It is here again that the Lord gets something more than our activities. He gets something which cannot be expressed in mere language, that is, in terms of truth; something which cannot be found in mere external activities. It is something wrung out of the soul, it is the travail of the soul, that satisfies God. It is there that He gets something.

That To Which the Holy Spirit Commits Himself

Now, this is the character of that which has the testimony; and being like that - something dealt with in the fire, and which is not the fruit of only one fiery ordeal but of many - that is the thing to which the Holy Spirit commits Himself. You notice in Zech. 4, where the prophet describes what he saw - the candlestick all of gold, the olive trees, and the oil flowing from the olive trees to the candlestick, maintaining the living flame - the next declaration that is made is, "This is the word of the Lord... Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit". To what does the Holy Spirit commit Himself? We pause here to ask ourselves, What can we do without the Holy Spirit, after all? What is the use of anything without Him? There is not a Christian who will not readily assent to this, that if the Holy Spirit is not with us, we had better give up. We are absolutely dependent on Him, there can be nothing without Him. What, then, is it to which He will commit Himself? It is to a candlestick like this - something born of the fire, the furnace, something wrought and beaten out with hammer blows. Yes, hammer blows - but not of God's hand. Oh, do not be mistaken about this! It is not God's hand that is striking you. Satan says that it is God Who is striking you, and all the time it is Satan himself.

There is only one passage where God is revealed as the striker of one of His own, and that is Isaiah 53, and the Stricken One is His own Son. We read, "we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted". But that refers to the work of atonement. God is not striking you and me in that way. Dr. Pierson illustrated it in this way. He had been down to the smithy and seen the smith and his helper at work. They had the iron upon the anvil, taken out of the fire, glowing, flaming. The smith himself had a little hammer, just a little one, but his helper had a big one. The smith just touched the iron and then the other man came down with a terrific blow at the place touched. The smith rapped again, at another spot, with the little hammer and down came the heavy hammer at that spot. A little boy looking on, said, 'What a silly thing! Why does the smith have such a little hammer?' Dr. Pierson said, 'My boy, he is only pointing out the place where the blow needs to be struck, and he is leaving the other one to do the striking'. Dr. Pierson says it is very often like that. The Lord sees something that needs dealing with, straightening out; He just indicates, and the devil does the rest. So the Lord is making the devil do His work to perfect His saints. It does seem to be true in principle. Do not let the enemy tell you that it is the Lord Who is doing all this hitting and knocking about. It is the devil who is doing it, and the Lord is letting him and using him. The fact is that what God is after is a wrought work, a beaten work. It is the result of first, the fire, and then many a blow. It is after many a blow that God gets something more in our lives, or something in our lives is taken out of the way. Any vessel that has not gone this way is only a candlestick without a flame - an ornament There are plenty of beautiful ornaments in the way of candlesticks, but that will not do. The Holy Spirit commits Himself to the thing that has gone through the fire.

The Form of the Candlestick - Plurality in Oneness

Now a word or two about the third thing in connexion with the candlestick - the form of it. We have the full description in Ex. 25. Summing it all up, it amounts to this - it is something corporate. It is a plurality in oneness. There are six branches to the central stem. In the Revelation, the figure somewhat changes but the principle does not. There we read of seven golden lamp-stands, but there is One like unto the Son of man in the midst, and He holds them all in His hand. He makes them one by His own person. It is the oneness of one Divine Man, and yet multiple; many, but One. My thought here is this - that God gets His testimony in fulness, not in detached and unrelated individuals or parties but in something that has been wrought into a oneness by His fires. Oh, when God really does weld children of His together through suffering, you have something very precious to the Lord. When we have gone through the fires together, have met the sufferings and the sorrows through the years together, and by reason of them God has done

something in making us one - not the oneness of an outward arrangement, an outward agreement - and in the sufferings Satan has not been able to disrupt and divide; then there is something which is very precious. You notice Satan always tries to use suffering to divide. When you suffer, your first inclination is to separate yourself, to get away, or to blame somebody else. That is the work of Satan. When God brings two or more, a company, into His fires, He is seeking to remove all that personal element that detaches and divides and separates and sets against, and to bring together. If you have never suffered together, you do not know what true unity is. Those who have gone through life together in trial and adversity attain to a maturity which is very precious; it is thicker than blood.

Oneness Through Suffering

It is something like that between the Lamb and the bride, and it is to be like that between the members of His Body. It will only be brought about by suffering. Therefore God allows companies to suffer. A church goes through trial together; it comes out with something of an inwrought oneness which represents something very much of God. You cannot explain this except from God's standpoint. It is something very precious to God. It is therefore significant that when this presentation of the Son of man in the midst of the golden candlesticks is given, the very first thing that is said about Him is that He is clothed with a garment down to the foot. Before you begin to touch on details, aspects, you get the whole - that seamless robe, that garment which envelopes all, that which brings every member into oneness, that which makes Him complete, one Person, the Son of man; one garment from head to foot. You see the point.

He is coming to the churches, and the first church is Ephesus; and He will speak there about first love. Oh, the fires of Ephesus! What fires that church went through! Evidently, there was some very wonderful love wrought into that church. Now He, clothed in His all-embracing, all-encompassing robe, comes to Ephesus and says, 'Something has happened here, something has gone wrong, first love has been left'. Oneness has come out of His death, His Cross. In the power of His resurrection He has overcome all that is against oneness - all division, all schism; He has destroyed it in His death. He comes forth as the One in the encompassing of one robe from head to foot. Now He finds what is so contrary to the work of His Cross - division, loss of the first love. The thought is this - that we have to go into the Cross in this sense, that we have to know the suffering which gets rid of the self, which deals with all that divides, we have to come up out of a travail into a fire-produced oneness, and the Lord gets His satisfaction.

This is not meant to be oppressive, but it is something we have to look at. We are concerned about effectiveness, what we have called impact, spiritual influence; not words, not teaching, not a framework of things, not a form, but the flame which is something so much more than words, the registration of that power of living light. That is what the Lord is after, and that is why He deals with us as He does. We have to commit ourselves to this. It will help us to understand the meaning of our sufferings. May the Lord give us grace to do the hardest thing for anyone to do naturally, that is, to give a new interpretation to suffering - that it is a deposit, a trust. It is something which has bound up with it the real thing that we are after. If I understand the Christian life and the ways of God at all, I have found it always to be like this, and I have seen it so often, that when people have asked the Lord for more power, more life, more blessing, more spiritual wealth, for some gain - when they have really meant it, it has not been long before they have gone into something exceedingly testing, and the Lord has answered their prayer in that way. They did not ask for that; probably they would not have asked for anything if they had known what would result; but that is how the Lord does it in the mystery of His ways. Let us see that it is real value He is after. He does not protect from adversity anything that is most precious to Him. It is that which is precious to Him which He seems to feel is most worthy of His refining fire.

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