

'A Candlestick All of Gold' Its Function

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the candlestick as a symbol of the Church's call to be a source of divine light, holiness, love, and righteousness in the world.

Scripture: Exodus 25:31

Topics: "Light Of The World", "Spiritual Position"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the 'candlestick of pure gold' as a representation of the Church's calling to be a source of divine light in the world. He highlights the urgent need for believers to seek a new spiritual position, moving beyond mere doctrine to embody the impact of God's holiness, love, and righteousness. The candlestick's primary function is to illuminate, challenging the darkness and revealing the eternal holiness of God. Sparks calls for a heart-searching response to this divine challenge, urging believers to actively participate in making the candlestick a reality in their lives and communities. Ultimately, he stresses that the Church's existence hinges on its ability to reflect the light of Christ in a way that provokes change in the surrounding darkness.

Transcript

Reading: Ex. 25:31-40; 37:17; Zech. 4:1-7.

"And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold." (Ex. 25:31). It is the latter part of the sentence that is the more important - "a candlestick of pure gold," but there is something very significant and important about the former part. "Thou shalt make..."

The Need for a New Spiritual Position

In approaching this matter of the candlestick of pure gold, we do so from a more distant point. We stand back, withdrawn. I think that we are all conscious of a growing sense of need among the Lord's people for a new spiritual position. It may not be universal or general, but it is something which we are meeting a good deal in these days, and, when you come to think about it, it is a thing which marks the Word of God throughout - that is, a challenge to reach a new place. You find it in the Word, you find it in subsequent history. Even when the Lord's people are in the right way or in the right direction, this need is constantly brought before them - the urge not to stay there, not to rest there, but to move on. That is very true in a general way as to the spiritual history of the Lord's people and all the ways of the Lord with His people - constantly challenging, constantly creating a sense of need to reach some position which has not been

reached, or, it may be in some cases, to recover a position from which they have receded.

But among ourselves (and when I say ourselves, I mean those of us who have been related here in this ministry, in what we have often called this testimony) this sense is growing - a sense of the need of coming to a new spiritual place. One and another has expressed that to me during these past months particularly - 'I must get to a new place with the Lord, I must somehow get to a new position.' It is expressed in different ways, but what lies behind it is this sense that we are being exercised, wrought upon, and that prevailing conditions are forcing us to this. We must somehow get to a new spiritual place. I think that many of you will find a response to that in your own hearts.

There are many with us who have not been with us for long, and do not know the spiritual history of things among us. To them, what I am going to say must be an explanation of why we are here, of what this means as something more than just an occasional coming together of Christian people for conferences, to hold meetings.

Now that sense of which I have spoken, while it carries with it to those concerned a good deal of trouble and exercise and trial and suffering, is, after all, a very healthy sign. The most unhealthy thing would be that we were able to settle down with our spiritual position. Such a sense of need and challenge leads to heart searching, and that heart searching leads to a reach out to the Lord. It may lead to adjustments, correcting what may be wrong or false. It will lead to a clarifying of our position. The main upshot of such exercise must, and will, be that we come to closer grips with that to which the Lord has really called us. It will, or it should, lead us to the place where we say, 'Well, what is it all about? What does the Lord mean by this? What is He after? What is it that He has called us to?' And to discover, or rediscover, that will be to have a good deal of explanation of the Lord's dealings with us. It will help us perhaps to get rid of a lot that is superfluous, and to get right into line with what is essential.

Now, this calling, this purpose of God, this object of the exercise, this meaning of the challenge and of the sense of need, is very concretely and, I think, inclusively represented by this candlestick all of gold. Many of you will realise that in that very phrase we are going back to the beginning of our local history, behind everything of all these years. It lies behind the very title of the paper - "A Witness and A Testimony" - upon the cover of which the candlestick all of gold is seen. That is where we began. That is what is supposed to have been governing all through the years. That is not only superimposed upon a magazine; that is what has been imposed upon us by God from the beginning - "a candlestick all of gold" - and there is a challenge to us to make it so, to produce it, to have the thing actually in us, really, truly.

There seem to me to be three aspects of that candlestick. One, its function; two, its character; three, its form.

The Function of a Candlestick - to Give Light

Simply and precisely, the function of a candlestick is to give light; not to be an ornament, not a pretty thing to look at, not some mystical symbolism to interest and to fascinate and to intrigue; not some abstruse, imperceptible suggestion. No - to give light! That is what it is for - light. In God's thought and intention, the function begins and ends there. At the opening of the book of the Revelation the Apostle in recording his vision, said, "I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man" (Rev. 1:12-13). And as the Lord proceeded to speak to and through His servant, what issued was this - for every church, the one question upon which their very existence depended was the function of the candlestick. There were many

things noted, but the one vital thing was the light; and the Lord said quite clearly that the churches had no justification for continuing their existence except on the ground of the function of the candlestick. "I... will move thy candlestick out of its place" - when? - when it becomes merely a candlestick and not a light-giver; when the thing without its meaning is there; when the instrument, the creation, exists without its function. When those conditions obtain you may as well remove the candlestick, and the Lord said that He would. The function of the candlestick which the Church is called to make is to provide light - that is all.

True Light is an Impact

But there are one or two things to be said about the light. The first is that this light, for which the people of God are created, formed, constituted, is an impact. True light is an impact. It is such an impact that anything that is contrary to it cannot co-exist with it, but has to go. That is the proof that it is Divine light. We know quite well something of the impact of light. We come suddenly out of darkness into the blaze of the sun, and we cannot bear the light; we have to shade our eyes, the impact is too much for us. When we let light into a dark place where there are things which belong to the darkness and not to the light they very quickly make their departure. It is an impact.

What I mean is that the testimony of this candlestick is not the giving of a lot of information. It is not just the statement or presentation of cold facts. It is not just a matter of doctrines and truths; and it is so easy, in the course of time, for that which began as an impact of light to degenerate into words, mountains of words, and ideas - scriptural, spiritual, in a way Divine ideas - and yet, still only ideas. It is so easy to degenerate into that, and for all that to be present in great volume, and yet somehow or other the mighty impact not to be present and to be registered and felt among those who have it all. I find that that is one of the challenges to the seven churches in the Revelation. They had their orthodox teaching and beliefs; they would have laid down their lives for this truth and that; they hated certain things which were not sound; but the impact had gone. It was all right in its way, but not the impact of light. The surrounding darkness was not provoked and challenged by their presence. The kingdom of the evil powers was not made aware that here was something to take account of. We know it all - ah, but that is not enough; that might be more to condemnation than otherwise.

Now this is not intended to be a word of condemnation or judgment or criticism; but may not this explain a lot - the Lord's dealings and ways with us? Especially may this be so where there is this deep sense of the need of a new position. We have tried to weigh up our position, perhaps, from the standpoint of our beliefs, our doctrines, our teaching - we have said, 'Yes, but our position is such a right one according to the Word of God, it is so scriptural' - but we may not have weighed it up from the standpoint of the impact of our beliefs. What effect is being produced? Light, from God's standpoint, is not just cold light; it is a mighty impact. So these churches in Asia were challenged on the ground, not of what they believed, held, or even taught, but of the effect of their position over against every aspect of the realm of darkness.

The Light of God's Holiness

Another thing about the candlestick, or this testimony, concerns its object of illumination - that is, what it lights up. What does it light up? What does it make clear with an impact? It not only shows certain things, but it shows them with an impact, and it is here, I think, that we can best understand what we mean by impact. One of the things which the candlestick all of gold is intended to illumine with an impact is the eternal holiness of God - the eternal holiness of God brought into the midst of the Church in the Person of the Son of man. Early in the description of the Son of man in the midst of the lampstands is this - "And his

head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow." Go back to the book of Daniel, and you find that that description is given to One Who is called "the Ancient of days" - "the hair of his head like pure wool" (Dan. 7:9) As I understand it, the head and the hair as white wool symbolises age - timelessness, all time compassed - and utter holiness, utter purity. When you recognise that everything is being brought to judgment before this "Son of man," this "Ancient of days," this "Father of eternity," you understand that that means that all things are being first of all dealt with and challenged on the ground of His eternal holiness; and the candlestick brings that testimony to light with an impact.

"Thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold." What does that amount to? It means that, where God is going to have what He wants, holiness is going to be an impact, an impact upon unholiness. You cannot have anything unholy persisting there. Holiness is not a word that is greatly loved; it is very much feared. It is not a matter into which we can go in any detail now; but it is one about which we can have our own secret understanding and life with God. But be assured that inasmuch as those eyes of flame see anything that is inconsistent with that head and hair as white wool, the impact of that testimony is weakened, is lost, and the justification of that candlestick is forfeited. It is a solemn word, but is it not true, grievously true, that we can have a lot of first-class doctrine, of truth, of Divine ideas, and stand for a very high level of teaching, and yet at the same time there may be very much in the private, personal life that is not holy, not pure, that could not bear the light of God's presence. I say that, and leave it there.

This is, of course, where responsibility comes in. "Thou shalt make a candlestick." There are things to be dealt with before the Lord which are not holy. I leave it to you; but we are concerned about our effect upon the powers of darkness, upon the darkness around us - our effect upon darkness both absolute and comparative; that we should register, not our teaching, not our system of truth, not our ideas, but the presence of something which is more than words, much more than even scriptural language - the registration of an actual power. That is what we are really concerned about, that the forces of darkness in every degree should meet something by our presence. It can never be if those forces of darkness have some darkness inside us, if they have their own ground. Their strength is unholiness. Their strength is not official, it lies in their nature. If they can get some unholiness in, they have undone us; they laugh at our teaching, they ridicule what we call our testimony; it matters nothing to them how much deeper truth we have. They are in the place of power because of unholiness, and we learn from the Scriptures that the unholiness of one life in a company is enough to arrest the progress of the whole; an Achan may bring all Israel to a standstill and defeat. "Make a candlestick" - deal with it! This is your matter, it is my matter. The light of the eternal holiness of God is a tremendous power. Oh, that evil coming in should feel it cannot abide this, it has to do something about it! Oh, that people who are wrong should feel, 'If I am going to stay here, I must put things right'; things revealed as needing to be dealt with, not because of something said, but because of the presence of the Lord in holiness. Holiness is a tremendous power. There is to be the light of that holiness present, making itself felt.

The Light of the Strong Love of God

Then it is the light of the strong love of God. Another thing said about this Son of man in the midst of the candlesticks is that He is girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. Symbolism again; a girdle speaks of strength, strength unto action; the breasts, the affections, the seat of love. Girt with a mighty strength of Divine love in the midst of the candlesticks. The candlestick, the testimony, is to be this also - the impact of this light, the strength of Divine love. Oh, here we must all confess our failure, and go down before the Lord. We have so much truth, so much teaching, so much knowledge, so much spiritual information, but what do people meet in the matter of the impact of love? This strong love of God is one of the things that

Satan really cannot get over. Do you not feel you need a new position over that? Have you not had any exercise about love? What is the use of going on? - that is the point to which we come - what is the use of going on keeping a candlestick? We have no room for ornamental candlesticks. It is the function that justifies the candlestick, and its justification is here - the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in terms of the strong love of God, the girding of Divine love.

Listen! "Make a candlestick." There is something we have to do about this. We have been waiting for a flooding of love, something to happen to us in this matter, waiting for it to come to us. We have been asking the Lord to fill us with love. Quite rightly so; but there is another side. Make it! Do something about it! We have a part in this matter of the strong love of God. It will all be a mighty battle - God only knows what a battle! - because of the importance and value of such a testimony, of the terrific effect that it will have in the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of hatred. All this work of suspicion and criticism and doubting, all that many-sided work of the hatred of Satan from what we will call its simple forms (if there are such things as simple forms of hatred) between Christians, out to that awful thing we are finding in the world today, Satan's work of universal and terrible hatred - the only counter to it all is the strong love of God. Think about that. We have to do something about it, we have to make the candlestick. We can only make it by Divine grace, but we will make it when we think on these things, we will make it when we face these matters, when we deal with our own hearts before the Lord.

The Light of the Power of Divine Righteousness

Then it is the light of the power of Divine righteousness. Another thing said about the Son of man in the midst of the candlesticks is that His feet were "like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace." Brass is always a symbol of strength, but it is also the symbol of righteousness; and, seeing that it is His feet that are as burnished brass, this speaks of His goings, His ways, His steps, in righteousness, absolute righteousness. It speaks of our activities, the righteous acts of the saints, our ways. As I see it in the Scripture, righteousness is that which always stands over against the dark works of Satan. Unrighteousness, iniquity, in the Word of God is that which at any point, in any way, in any degree, has a complicity with Satan. Satan's one inclusive object is to take from God what are His rights, and that is unrighteousness in its root and nature - taking another's rights away. And while the taking away of rights will and does work out between man and man, creature and creature, behind it all God's rights are involved. When you rob your brother of his rights, you rob God. So that righteousness is the opposite of every work of Satan to deprive God of what He ought to have. Very often we have to sacrifice, to let go what we call our rights, in order that the Lord should be honoured. So often, when we stand on our rights, it is our honour and our vindication, not the Lord's, that actuates us. Sometimes it does amount to this - that we have to let go what we believe to be, and what may quite rightly be, our rights; to allow the Lord to be glorified, to give the Lord an opportunity.

If we track this matter of unrighteousness to its very core, we find it is self in the place of the Lord. Think that out. Look at any work or act of unrighteousness, track it to its source, and you find it is self every time. Robbery, withholding, misrepresentation - there is a self motive behind it. And here is this Son of man Who has now come back from the Cross; He Who has been dead is alive; He is in the midst of the candlesticks; and He is the embodiment of that utter selflessness which is utter righteousness, which means that God has everything, that is, all His rights; there is no question at any point, no debate with the Lord, the Lord must have all, whatever it costs. It cost the Son of man everything in order that God should have His rights. He says in effect to these churches, 'Look at My feet!' There is the impact of an utter selflessness which is the impact of not only an utterness for God but an utterness of God. "Make a

candlestick of pure gold."

Has this seemed a hard word? I feel, as I said at the beginning, that the Lord has brought us back together at this time to come to a new position, and it is of this kind. For my own part, I tell you I am taking this to heart. But we say to one another together - what matters it that we have meetings, larger or smaller, and go on with our teaching, with our magazine with a candlestick of gold printed on it? None of these things matters at all. I say, let them go, the Lord save us from them, unless, as the fruit of all and as the source of all, there is this light which is an impact - without any inconsistency, without contradictions, without a lie - so that our teaching is not in the first place heard but seen. If there is to be a coming and an enquiring, it is because something is seen. "I turned to see the voice." People are hearing things, and they are turning to see. What do they see? A light, not a teaching? A light with an impact? May the Lord make it so.

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