

"A Candlestick All of Gold"

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Table of Contents

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Its Function

The Need for a New Spiritual Position
The Function of a Candlestick - to Give Light
True Light is an Impact
The Light of God's Holiness
The Light of the Strong Love of God
The Light of the Power of Divine Righteousness

Chapter 2 - Its Character and Form

Its Character, All of God
The Outcome of Suffering
Suffering Inevitable for Vital Testimony
The Lord More Concerned for a Testimony than for a Work
That to which the Holy Spirit Commits Himself
The Form of the Candlestick - Plurality in Oneness
Oneness through Suffering

Chapter 3 - Its Testimony

The Testimony - The Fullness of Christ
What Christ Is
 (a) All of God
 (b) Universal: The Satisfaction of Heaven and Earth
A Vital Impact of Christ, Not a Teaching

Chapter 4 - The Church as the Vessel of the Testimony

Born of the Holy Ghost
Testing Unto Perfecting
The Attesting of God
A Contradiction to the World
A Contradiction to the Works of Satan
The Testimony before the Work

Chapter 5 - The Cross in Relation to the Testimony

The Lampstand Constituted on the Basis of the Cross

The Cross - Death, Resurrection, Fulness of Life

The Cross - An Inwrought Experience

The Testimony - The Presence of the Risen Christ

The Church Repeatedly Brought Back to the Cross

The Cross the Way to Fulness

The Cross the Way of Divine Glory in the Church

Chapter 1 - Its Function

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 We stand back, withdrawn.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.

Chapter 2 - Its Character and Form

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.

"Ephraim... 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.

Chapter 3 - Its Testimony

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

Let us here say a word quite briefly as to the two places in which this candlestick is presented. In Exodus we have the beginning of things; the Lord is setting up His testimony originally, bringing it in for the first time. In Zechariah, as in all prophetic ministry, it is a matter of recovery, the testimony having been more or less lost. The candlestick of gold is God's original and full thought, to be recovered when that fulness of His mind has suffered loss in the midst of His people and in the midst of the nations. I just mention that, because the Lord is always reacting to what is original and basic, always seeking to recover, never content to move on with anything less than that original revealed mind of His. It is in connection with that thought of recovery that we have felt through the years that the Lord laid His hand upon us and brought us into being as a ministry and as a part of a vessel - to seek to show again in a practical way what His mind is as to testimony in the earth; and right back there, at the very beginning, it was this "candlestick all of gold" which the Lord made basic to this ministry.

The Testimony - The Fullness of Christ

In our previous meditation, we were speaking about the form of this candlestick, and there are some other things which have to be said about that. Those who have been with us through the years, will recognise these things as having been brought at different stages particularly to our view. I think there are three phases represented by three lines of consideration of this candlestick. So far as spiritual history is concerned, what was third for us has come to be seen as first with the Lord. The Lord did not begin with us at His own beginning, but He led us to His beginning. We came eventually along two distinct lines, by two distinct phases, to that beginning. I will not mention the other two just now, but speak briefly concerning the primary and all-governing aspect of the testimony of our Lord Jesus - the fulness of Christ.

What Christ Is

(a) All of God

In an earlier meditation we said that the fact that the candlestick was all of gold means that it represents something that is all of God; and in contemplating this candlestick as Christ, the very first thing that we have to be impressed with is how utterly of God He was and is; all of God - fulness, the fulness of God.

There are two primary numbers in this candlestick, and they are three and seven, the numbers of Divine fulness and of spiritual fulness respectively. There are three branches on either side of the stem and with the stem they make seven. There is the fulness of God and the fulness of what is spiritual. That is a key to the life of our Lord Jesus. He was here in the days of His flesh amongst men as the candlestick of God, revealing as by a living flame what it means to be all of God. You know that in the description of the candlestick it was to be in its own light, that the light was to shine upon itself - "to give light over against it" (Ex. 25:37); upon other things, yes, but upon itself. It was to stand in its own light and its light was to pour down upon itself; and the

Lord Jesus was found from time to time saying things which corresponded to that. The testimony could be seen as in Himself, the testimony bore witness of Him. He could consistently walk in the light of God; where He was concerned there was nothing whatever to cover from the Divine light. The testimony was true in Him, because in Him all was of God, as could be seen in countless details. You have to study very closely His inward and His outward life to see how it was all of God, how He was constantly putting back everything else that might be of Himself or for Himself, everything that might come from any other source, that might minister to any other object. It was all of God, through and through.

What is the testimony of Jesus? Oh, again let us rid ourselves of all false ideas that it is some particular system of teaching. No, the testimony of Jesus which is to be here, which God would have in His house, in the midst of His people, in the midst of the nations by reason of His people - in the very first place it is that here is something which is delivered entirely and utterly from everything of consideration and interest and object and ambition but God Himself. No one must ever rightly and truly be able to account for anything on the ground of man, or any ground whatsoever, save God. It has to be said, 'This is of God; this is all of God; this is the Lord.'

As we were saying earlier, the fire produces this gold. Oh, what a work that fire accomplishes to get rid of the alloy, the mixture, the dross, so that at last it can be said, 'This is all of God, there is nothing of man in this, nothing can account for this but the Lord'. I am quite sure that in the light of a statement like that you can see the meaning of the ways of God. What is He doing? He is seeking to produce a testimony in which the strength, the wisdom, the very endurance, the very ability to go on at all, is of God and not of man. All of God - yes, the fulness of Christ is that.

Oh, our ideas about the fulness of Christ! 'Oh, for the fulness of Christ!' we cry. It cannot possibly be until there is an utter emptiness. If He is to fill all things, everything else has to go out. It will not be "all things", and it will not be "all and in all" if there is something else. The fulness of Christ demands a full place. But the point is this - the fulness of Christ is something which is to be entered into, to be experienced. What fulness! 'I have seen the face of Jesus, tell me not of aught beside' - do you mean that? Sentiments, hymns, poems! Are you quite sure they are true? Ah, we are put to the test over that - what we want beside Him. We do not know our own hearts. However, the true testimony is all of God. It was so in the case of the Lord Jesus, and it is the Lord Jesus Who is being contemplated.

(b) Universal: The Satisfaction of Heaven and Earth

The next thing is the fulness of Christ in the matter of universality. This is only saying the same thing in another way. You have this candlestick represented as in two places. In Exodus it is in the sanctuary, in the holy place. What does the holy place of the tabernacle represent? It is the place between heaven and earth. Outside the holy place you come to the world, the outwardness of the testimony. It is the world that brings you to the holy place. Beyond the holy place is the Most Holy Place, that is heaven itself; "into heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24) as the apostle said. The holy place is the link between heaven and earth, the boundaries of earth and heaven meeting there. The person of the Lord Jesus unites them. He stands as the Son of man between heaven and earth, and

unites them and comprehends them in their entirety. Fulness, heavenly and earthly, is found in Him in a place not all of either, but uniting both, satisfying both.

He is not wholly of this earth, of this world; He is apart; and yet, so to speak, He has His hand upon it. He is representatively related to it, it meets in Him - He is at the point where all the nations find their fulness. The world finds in the Lord Jesus the answer to everything. There is not a nation, not a tribe, not a people, not a language, not a constitution, national or temperamental, in this whole creation in any age, which cannot find the answer to its need, its true need, in Him. He is outside of time, He is above time, He is as good for the twentieth century as for the first and every century between - just as apt, just as suitable. All the conditions of all the ages of this world met on earth in Him.

On the other hand, heaven is satisfied with Him, all heaven's fulness is found in Him. Heaven had a need at a point; heaven waited breathlessly while something was carried out upon which, in a sense, its very existence seemed to depend. Heaven was tremendously and solemnly interested in that drama of the Cross; nay, more, in the whole drama of His earthly life. Heaven is always watching, concerned; angels are intent. Heaven met in Him, and now all heaven is satisfied because of Him. God finds His satisfaction in Him.

So the Lord Jesus is just there between heaven and earth, meeting all needs. How universal is the testimony of Jesus to answer need!

We find the candlestick mentioned again in Scripture - in the book of the Revelation; and we find there confirmation of what I have just said. If you wanted to present two pictures of the candlestick, as in Exodus and Revelation respectively, you would put the former in the holy place of the tabernacle. Where would you put the other? You would need to have a map of the whole area then known as Asia, as representative of the creation, the world, the nations, and there you would put a candlestick in Ephesus and another in Smyrna, another in Thyatira, in Pergamos, and so on; and yet you would see one Man covering the whole of that area - the candlesticks, so to speak, being brought into that one Man. It is Christ in testimony in all the nations. It is not now only centred in one place, in the holy place; it is now in the nations. The first is in the holy place - everything is in Him. But when He is seen as the seven candlesticks in the nations, it is He in everything - a picture of God's ultimate intention that the fulness that is in Him shall be found everywhere, in the nations, in the whole creation. Paul says, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" waiting for its redemption (Rom. 8:19-22). The creation groans. What is it groaning about? Why do we groan? Because, in some form, we want something we have not got. If we are in pain, we groan because we want to be free from pain. We groan if things go wrong - we want them to go right. The creation is groaning because it has not got something which is necessary to it. What does it need? - Christ, that is all. He answers to the creation's need. Christ in all the nations - that is the ultimate vision. The universality of Christ - that is the testimony. All heaven's need, all earth's need, all man's need, all the creation's need, met in fulness in the Lord Jesus. That is a comprehensive statement, but it is also a challenge to us. Is that the testimony we are talking about?

A Vital Impact of Christ, Not a Teaching

What do we mean by the testimony? Is it Christ in fulness known in that way by us? You say, 'Well, what is there particularly different about that so far as this vessel is concerned? Is not all Christianity supposed to be that? Is it not all centred in Christ? Is not its witness that Christ is all, to be all, and that Christ meets all need?' Yes, it is quite true as to language, quite true as to terms of Christianity; but there is a good deal extra to Christ in Christianity - how much we do not know. Many of us would strongly affirm that, so far as we are concerned, Christ is all, but we do not know our own hearts. The Lord has only to put His finger upon something very precious to us and a big battle flares up; it is not so easy then to say, 'Christ is more than that to me.' The issue becomes very practical and personal. But you can spread that out over a wide area - all the extras to Christ that there are in Christianity from centre to circumference; and only the fires of God can discover what are the extras that we Christians and Christianity must have. Oh, look on Christianity today as we know it in this world! Do we not have to say that there is a lot that is called Christianity that is not Christ? There is a lot added in. There is not this fiery work of separating between the pure gold and the dross. It is a pure gold testimony wrought in the fire that God is after, and only His eyes know what has to be dealt with in the fire. There is a difference between the general, ostensible Christian testimony about the Lord Jesus and the actual spiritual one - a great deal of difference. I do not know that in this life we shall ever get to the point where it is so utterly Christ that there is nothing else at all, but God is working toward that. All of God; all is spiritual, nothing carnal; all is heavenly, nothing earthly. What is in view is not a movement, a mission, a work, a sect, a 'fellowship' as an institution, something here on this earth. It is something which is behind the very people who constitute the physical body of it all, something intangible but very real. There is something about this candlestick which is more than itself. It is its spiritual and heavenly nature. In a word, you do not meet a thing at all, you meet the Lord. You are not impressed with the thing, the organization, the company of people, or the place, or anything like that; you just meet the Lord. 'The Lord is here' - that is the testimony of Jesus. Do you not covet that for yourself personally? Surely if people were able to say of our passing this way - a way which we shall pass only once - that we brought the presence of the Lord with us, that there was something of the fragrance of Christ about us, something that suggested the Lord, would not that be the greatest thing that could possibly be said? Would not that be the answer to our heart's deepest desire? If, by our being together as companies of the Lord's people, everyone coming into touch with us could say, 'It is not the people, nor the phraseology, nor the peculiar teaching, but somehow or other it is the Lord you meet there' - well, there is no end greater than that. For the Lord to do that necessitates deep, fiery work. That is the candlestick all of gold. It is the Lord Jesus. The Lord give us grace to seek that it shall be so, that our presence here is His presence.

Chapter 4 - The Church as the Vessel of the Testimony

In our previous meditation, we were occupied with the ultimate meaning and nature of that testimony which in God's thought is primary, and fundamental, but, so far as the Church is concerned, is that toward which the Lord is working - namely, the fulness of Christ.

Now we take the next thing in relation to that matter which, of course, has been in view all the time and has been referred to; but we desired first of all to have Christ Himself in contemplation as overshadowing all. Now, having that established and recognised, we are brought to the vessel which God has chosen, in which the testimony of the Lord Jesus is to be deposited and embodied - the Church as the Lord's vessel of testimony here in this dispensation. Of course, this follows the same lines as the fulness of Christ. You remember that in speaking of the fulness of Christ we saw how He was and is all of God. The Divine fulness and spiritual fulness is gathered into Him as all of God. Then as to His place (like the place of the candlestick in the holy place, between heaven and earth) there was that about Him which did meet on the one hand every kind of need of every race, of every station and level of life, from the poorest to the most distinguished amongst men; all nations, all degrees, every aspect of this world's life as represented by mankind, found in Him the full answer to its need. On the other hand, heaven found its satisfaction in Him; God found His full-hearted satisfaction in the Lord Jesus. The universality of His fulness for heaven and for earth was the matter in view.

Now the Church follows the same line as the Lord Jesus. The vessel of the testimony proceeds along the same course as He did. He said to His disciples, the nucleus of His Church, "Follow me." But they came to realise that that meant something more than walking about where He went on the earth. It was something very deep. "Follow me." Oh, what a content! And the Church's spiritual history as the vessel of His testimony is, in that deeper and fuller sense, a following of Christ. It follows Him in the spiritual significance of every step and stage of His life when He was here.

Born of the Holy Ghost

First of all, He was born, and He was born of the Holy Ghost, and any vessel for the testimony of Jesus in the sense in which we are speaking of it, in the sense in which God has embodied it in this symbolism - a candlestick of gold - any such vessel or instrument has got to be born, and born of God the Holy Ghost. It is not something you can make and put together, it is not something that can be organised and arranged, it is not something people can decide to have - 'We will form something, we will set up something, for the Lord's service' - it is not like that at all. It has to be born, and born as He was born - of the Holy Ghost. It has to come right out from God. If you make the birth of the Lord Jesus common with all other births and take out of it the absolutely supernatural and miraculous element, then you destroy the whole concept of God as to a heavenly testimony. If you make something yourself after the likeness of this, there is no guarantee that there will be the heavenly flame in it. This has got to be born. You cannot repeat it. That, of course, carries a lot with it. Let us take that as containing much more than we are able to say and explain at this time. For all work of God let it be remembered that you cannot duplicate and multiply the original. The original is of God,

not of man, and everything that is of God has to be born like that; not of man, not of the will of the flesh, but of God. It is only the first step, but it is a very radical one. Do not go away and say, 'We are going to have something like this where we are.' Do not get the idea that you can repeat anywhere anything that you think is good. If God does not do it, it will break your heart if you try to do it.

Testing Unto Perfecting

Then, having been born, it must be placed upon a plane of testing, just as He was - a testing unto perfecting. That does not allow any place for sin in the case of the Lord Jesus. The fact that the Scripture distinctly says that He was made perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:10) and that "though he was a Son, yet learned (he) obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8) - that does not admit of any sin in His nature. It only signifies that He was placed upon the level of humanity, and in a representative way went through what we have to go through. He was without sin, we with sin within. The principle is the thing that governs. It is the testing as to the direction of the will. "Thy will, not mine." By every means conceivable - and conceivable by the most diabolical ingenuity of hell, all the art and cunning of the serpent deeper than man's wisdom - He was assailed in the realm of the will, as to whether He would or could be diverted one hairsbreadth from the will of His Father. By attraction, by allurements, by bribery, by prizes offered, by sore trouble, by terrible assaults, by treachery - oh, everything was used to tempt Him! But His will remained steadfast to the Father. On that ground He was tested, and we are tested in exactly the same way. The Church has to follow that course of testing unto perfecting. The perfecting in His case was simply that He brought that steadfastness to completion, that faithfulness to a final end without deviation or loss.

Now, by the grace of God, by the strength of the Spirit of God within, God is calling upon us to recognise that there is no contradiction with Him, no contradiction in this realm. He has deposited with mankind the most sacred trust, freedom of will - freedom to make choice, to make decision. That is a sacred gift of God upon which He counts very much, and for the exercise of which He always calls; and destiny depends upon the exercise of that trust in decision, choice. God focuses upon that which is His most sacred trust, making man a morally responsible person. The contradiction would be if, now that we belong to the Lord, we sat down and waited for the Lord to make our decisions for us, to do something which would decide the whole matter where we are concerned without our having anything to say about it. That would be a contradiction; God would be contradicting Himself - counting upon our will, and yet acting independently of it. I am not saying that there are not times and issues where God just steps in and acts, but that is not the normal. The normal is that God is seeking to have our will cooperating with His. On that basis, by every test imaginable, the Lord Jesus was perfected. On that line, you and I are following the Lord Jesus; on that line the Church has to go, willing one will with God. Sometimes that means a great deal of repudiation of our own will, sometimes a tremendous act of decision which usually is focused in a crisis as to what we call the will of God. That is not passive, it is active.

We are placed, then, on a basis of testing. The vessel has to be perfected in that way. Oh, there is no royal road to this true service of God, no easy way of just handing it all

up to the Lord for Him to do it all, so that you need not worry or have anything to say or do in the matter. That would be very easy, but it is not the Lord's way. Beware of that snare.

The Attesting of God

Through the testing, there comes the attesting. I believe that the baptism of the Lord Jesus represented the utterness of His abandonment to God. It was a foreshadowing of the burial and resurrection - immediately followed by the allestation of God "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It foreshadowed, it summed up, the whole of His life from the moment of His consecration to the moment of His death, and therefore the attesting of God from heaven was on the ground that He had proved Himself unto death abandoned to the will of God and entirely dead as to His own will, that is, as to another will, an independent will, apart from God. The point is that God drew attention to what was wholly of Himself. God never draws attention to man as such, nor to our works as such, even though they be for Him. God draws attention to what is wholly of Himself, and He could draw attention to His Son all the way along, and say, 'Look, behold, see!' And such an instrument as will have the testimony of Jesus in it, whether it be individual or corporate, will be like that - that God is seeking all the time so to work in that vessel that He can say, 'That is where I am, that is what I am after. Look here, look there, and you will find Me.' it is not glorifying the thing, the people, or anything on that level, but it is drawing attention to what is of Himself. If the Lord is going to add to the Church, you may be quite sure He is not going to build up something that is not of Himself, in which He is not very fully present. It was when the Church was full of the Holy Ghost and Christ was regnant in the midst that the Lord added to the Church. It is the secret of growth, it is the secret of revival, that God has something that has within it His Son in such measure that He can say, 'I can go on with that, I can attest that, I can add to that, I can build that up.' Attested through testing; approved.

And the Lord Jesus is said to have been "perfected the third day" (Luke 13:32), perfected through suffering, and, being perfected, He was received up into glory. Nothing, that is not perfected has ever been received up into glory. Do not think of glory as being only a place. It may be a place, but it is a state also; a state of glory. It is being glorified. Jesus, having been tested and attested, was glorified; and the Church, the vessel of His testimony, along the same line, following Him, can be glorified because perfected, and perfection means simply that everything that is not of the Lord has gone out and everything that is present is of the Lord. It is the Lord Who is glorified in His saints. It is His glory, not ours.

A Contradiction to the World

That is very simple, but you see that is the nature of things. This vessel, this instrument, this candlestick, has got to stand as a full-orbed contradiction to all that exists which is not of God, that is contrary to God; that means a full-orbed contradiction to the world. What do we mean by the world? I think we can sum up the world as it is referred to in the Scriptures in two words - gain and self-glory: that is, glory which is not the glory of God. Is it not true that the spirit of this world is gain? How can you explain or interpret things in this world otherwise than that - gain? To have - whether it is territory, riches,

knowledge, or whatever it may be - in every connection the goal is to have, to possess, to gain advantage, and thus by gaining to come to glory of its own. It is very subtle, it works in us all. We may think of the world, but it is here in our hearts - to have some gratification by coming to a position, to be self-satisfied by attaining to some eminence, some influence, some place of power, some possession. That is the spirit of this world, and that now is utterly contrary to God. Christ was a contradiction to all that spirit, and His Church, this candlestick vessel of testimony, is to be the embodiment of that contradiction - contrary to the world spirit and principle; not to get but to give; not to be glorified in itself but for Him to be glorified in all. The Lord Jesus sought not His own glory but the glory of Him that sent Him. He said "I seek not mine own glory" (John 8:50), and, by the context, it was a reflection upon those around Him - even the religious leaders - who sought glory by possession, position and so on. No, this is an instrument which contradicts that whole thing in spirit and in principle.

A Contradiction to the Works of Satan

It contradicts all the works of Satan. Can we sum up the works of Satan in one word? I think we can. It is selfhood. You trace the history of Satan in the Scriptures. You go right back and you find that he became the adversary of God by seeking selfhood. He made Adam the tragedy that he became by imbuing him with the same spirit of selfhood. "Ye shall be..." (Gen. 3:5). Selfhood, self-centredness; it is born in us. You can see it in the youngest child - how a child likes to be the centre of all attention. This spirit is there and it is in us all. There can be no true testimony of Jesus where things are centred in any man or body of men, or in any thing as such. Oh, how Satan has spoiled what would otherwise have been a thing very precious to God, by putting some individual as the focal centre of everything and causing everything to circle round that individual; or by making much of the thing, the instrument itself (whatever it might be), drawing attention to it in order to divert attention subtly and cleverly from the Lord. People so easily become taken up with the thing, the work, an instrument.

Selfhood has many subtle ways of expressing itself in the work of God; and surely the tragedy of much work for God has been that the people have sported themselves in the work, have gained or sought for themselves reputation, name, place, recognition and title. All that has come in imperceptibly, the Lord Jesus being hidden behind men and things. No, this vessel must be all of God, and this testimony must be, in its very essence, a contradiction to all that work of Satan.

Again in the matter of divisions. Is it not one of the great works of Satan to produce divisions, schism, conflicts, parties, factions? Oh, what a long and terrible history of Satan's work there has been dividing the people of God, stopping at nothing until he has made them individual fragments; not even allowing two to remain together in spiritual fellowship if he can help it! The battle for spiritual oneness is a real battle against Satan and all his spiritual forces. But this candlestick is a whole. It is not a composite thing. It was not made of pieces stuck together, mortised in to the main stem. It was to be one piece, all beaten out of one piece. There are no joins here, no places of which you can say - 'that is where one begins and another ends; if you are going to divide it, that is where you must start the work.' You cannot find a crevice, crack or join in this. It is all one piece wrought by fire, wrought by the hammer. It is a contradiction to all the work of

Satan in division. Let us recognise that - that division is the work of Satan. The testimony of Jesus contradicts division. It is the oneness of the great Divine love. Is it not there that all independence is such a pernicious and dangerous and damaging thing - our independent decisions and courses and life?

It may be that it is in that very connection that we have light thrown upon the Lord Jesus in His choice of friends. "I have called you friends" (John 15:15). "I chose you" (John 15:16). "He appointed twelve, that they might be with him" (Mark 3:14). "...having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). It would have been, in many respects, a very much easier thing if He had been without them and gone on alone. Knowing all that was involved in choosing those men, why did He deliberately do it? He spent a night in prayer before doing it, evidently not only for guidance, but I should say for grace. Why? Because He had to undo the works of the devil in all that disintegrating power in human life. He could have thrown over one or the other of His disciples any day; He might have washed His hands of them; but he loved them unto the end. When at last, as a result of all His patience, forbearance and love, you have those men intact - with the exception of the one who was never really an integral part of the whole from the beginning - and He is able to say, "I kept them in thy name... and not one of them perished, but the son of perdition" (John 17:12), the devil's work has been undone. There is something deeper in that than that the Lord has managed to maintain a kind of fraternity to the end. Something very deep has been done. That is the testimony of Jesus. It is a contradiction to the divisive work of Satan, and God is wanting an instrument, a vessel, like that - a candlestick to maintain that testimony; and that is very searching.

The Testimony before the Work

Is it not true - sad though it be - that very often the work of the Lord is hindered or spoiled by the workers themselves? It is a terrible thing to say, but it is true. The problems often relate not so much to the work but to the workers. They cannot get on together, they cannot live with one another, they must be moved from one part of the field to the other because of incompatibility. Why is it? You say, of course, that it is because the work of the Cross has not been done in them. Quite true; but may it not be equally true that it is because the work has been put before testimony, or in the place of the testimony - that they have gone out for the work, not for the testimony? Suppose they were to stop - and confer and pray together, and say, 'Look here, this is no testimony, this is a contradiction of the testimony of Jesus. What are we here for? Have we come all this way and made all this sacrifice merely to do some work, and yet to have no testimony to the Lord? By our being here doing all this (or trying to do all this) we are a direct contradiction to the Lord Himself.' I think they would either pack up and come home, or they would resolve the whole thing and say, 'The testimony comes before the work, for the work must come out of the testimony: it must not be something apart. We must find a ground for going on together in a way that glorifies God.' What are we as Christians on the earth for? Are we here to do a work, or for a testimony? Yes, so many people are concerned about the Lord's work, and (in their phraseology) concerned about the Lord's testimony, but they are most difficult people to get on with. You are constantly coming up against such cases, and you have to say, 'Well, they are

very concerned about the work of God, but I don't know about the testimony where they are concerned.'

Now let us face that quite frankly. We are tremendously concerned about the Lord's testimony. The testimony of Jesus is utter selflessness, the contradiction of self-centredness, of every form of selfishness, of selfhood. That is the testimony of Jesus - not work done and doctrine taught, but Christ here expressed in that way. But are we quarrelsome at home? Is it difficult for others in the home, in the family, to get on with us? Are we always making difficulty and strain and conflict? That is the devil's work, and that is no testimony. Christians are here on this earth for a testimony, and that testimony must be shown in our ability to get on with others. The only people who could not get on with the Lord Jesus were the people who were self-centred - religious or otherwise. Everybody else found Him wonderfully easy to get on with. Oh, do not let us make of this word 'testimony' anything other than this - the Lord Himself found in us; not things of truth that we want other people to have, but the Lord Himself primarily.

The Lord should therefore know when He has what He wants and is able to put His hand upon it and place it where He wants it to be. Christianity has become another system of things. You get an idea that you are called to the Lord's work, and then you say, 'Now I must be prepared for the Lord's work,' and you go for a course of training to an institute. Then when you have finished, you say, 'Now, I am prepared.' What do you mean by being prepared? Do you mean intellectually, theologically? Well, I do not know how far that is going to carry you. The Lord only knows when you are prepared. It might be a very good thing if after that you went back to business and waited for the Lord to confirm your call by saying to you, 'Yes, I have got what I want where you are concerned, and now I will show you where I want you.' You can trust the Lord. If He has called you to His service, you can be quite sure that sooner or later He will confirm that call, even if you have to go back to business for a time. These disciples were called, and then they went back to their fishing, and the Lord came and confirmed their call. Saul of Tarsus was called on the Damascus road, and he went and waited in Antioch until the Lord came and confirmed his call and said, 'Now you are ready, now I have what I want, now the time has come.'

Are you afraid of that? Do you trust the Lord about that? After all, it is the testimony the Lord wants, and it may be that that testimony is going to be produced in those realms and spheres which you would not choose. You think that it will be very much more straightforward and easy for you to bear the testimony if you are out in full-time spiritual work. You are deceived if you think that. Listen to one who is not a novice and not a juvenile now. I can tell you that with all the demands of spiritual work, with all the opportunities and demands for spiritual ministry with which one cannot cope, the most difficult thing in all the world is to keep the testimony abreast of the demand; and we have to confess that there so often we fail. What we are calling the testimony is not our ministry, our teaching, our work, the articles we write, the addresses we give; that is not the testimony. That goes for nothing if there is not something behind it that is approved of God. God would take infinite pains to keep us abreast of our ministry in testimony. He would cut right across the path of Moses, even after He had called him, and seek to slay him. The Lord had commissioned him, and yet it says "it came to pass on the way... that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him" (Ex. 4:24). Something was lacking in the

background. You know what it was; it had to be attended to. It is what is behind that is the testimony, and the Lord knows when He has got that, and He can be trusted to use us when and where we are ready to be used. We have got to be the thing that the Lord needs to have reproduced in other places, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to know where the need is and where the provision is, and to bring the two together. There was evidently a need to be met at Antioch when Barnabas went there (Acts 11:20-26) and he, being full of the Holy Ghost, said, 'I know the man through whom this need can be met,' and he went off to Tarsus to fetch Saul to Antioch.

The Lord knows if you are there in that home with all its monotony and drudgery and lack of incentive and interest; in that business with its round of duties which are not inspiring; in that setting of deep trial. You are there to be approved under testing, and when the Lord sees you are approved, He will say, 'Come, you are the one I want; there is something else for you; come up higher.' Let it be like that with your service.

That all focuses upon this, that the Lord is more for a testimony than for a work. If we put the work in place of the testimony, we shall have confusion. We are on this earth for a testimony, and that is why, even with the greatest and most useful of His servants, the Lord never allows the work to set aside fresh discipline, fresh suffering. It looks like a contradiction. The work appears to need the man; the man is not able to do it because he is going through such trial and suffering. What a contradiction! But the Lord is more concerned to have spiritual measure in the vessel than He is to have a lot of work done.

The Lord help us by this, and give us grace to accept it. I know it is not easy; but do see that the Lord is after a candlestick all of gold, to bear a testimony; not to be an ornament, a show piece, something which attracts attention to itself, but a testimony to the Lord Himself.

Chapter 5 - The Cross in Relation to the Testimony

We have been occupied thus far with a re-statement of that testimony for which we believe the Lord raised up this instrumentality and this ministry at the beginning, now many years ago. To us, the purpose of the Lord in the ministry and in the corporate instrument which He brought into being came to be gathered up in this symbolic representation of a candlestick all of gold, and it has been the figure and symbol all through the years. But many have come and many have gone, and it has not always been clear to all fresh comers what exactly it is that is stood for amongst us; and, although the ministry in certain quite distinctive terms has gone on, it has not been often that we have sought to gather up the whole ground in a short space, to re-present it. The Lord seems to have been laying upon us recently the need for this.

We said earlier that there are in the main three aspects of the testimony, represented by three lines of consideration of the candlestick. The first of these was the fulness of Christ; the second, the Church as the Lord's vessel of testimony. These we have already considered. We now pass to the third - which is, the need for the Cross as basic to all else.

"A candlestick all of gold." Before proceeding further, I think I might say here that the marginal word is better than that which is in the text. We have 'candlestick' here, and also elsewhere where the symbolism is used, but the margin says 'lampstand.' 'Lampstand' really is better, because a candlestick burns with self-consuming fire and light, whereas the full representation of the lampstand, as we have it in Zechariah, is a drawing from the living and inexhaustible source of olive trees, something very much better than a candlestick which burns itself out. We are not supplying from ourselves the fuel for the testimony - nor are we called upon to do so. God the Holy Spirit is the fuel of the testimony; and when it comes to endurance, to staying power, to real effectiveness, there is all the difference between what we can supply as candles, and what He can supply. Someone quoted to a certain indefatigable worker that he could not burn the candle at both ends. The response was, 'Of course, I can; it only depends on how long the candle is!' Given the longest candle, it burns itself out sooner or later; but, given the living fountainhead, the Spirit of God, it is inexhaustible. That by the way.

The Lampstand Constituted on the Basis of the Cross

This whole lampstand or candlestick was constituted on the principle of the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a very impressive fact. How much the candlestick brings that into evidence! If you were to approach the actual thing as it was made according to the Divine instructions, and closed your eyes and put your hand at the base of the central shaft out of which the branches went on either side, and then moved your hand from the base up that central shaft, at a certain point you would come upon something - what is called here a 'knop' or a knob, and you could not get past that, you would find that checked you; the smooth upward going would be arrested. We have met something, something calculated to arrest our progress, which stands in our way and challenges us, something that makes us take account of our movement. But, having taken account of it, you move up over the knob, and you feel something else. What is this? You feel round. Oh, this is the form of a flower with its leaves wide open. And, having taken note

of that, you then discover that this flower is actually a cup, a receptacle, a vessel, a reservoir. After that, you move on again. You go a little further without meeting anything. But here the thing is repeated, the same thing over again - a knob, a flower, a cup. And up that stem, you meet that threefold thing no fewer than four times. Four times it breaks in upon your progress. Then you come and you feel the branches; there are three on either side. You take the lowest branch, you feel up, you come before long to a similar threefold obstruction; and then a little further a repetition of it, and then again a repetition of it; and on every one of the six branches you will find this repeated three times. Four times on the stem and three times on every branch. The very number of occurrences, the presence in such fulness of this thing, is something that you have to take note of. Would it not be enough to have one of these things at the very base, at the very beginning, and then everything smooth going after that? No. It is repeated all the way through. The whole course of this instrument, this vessel of testimony, is marked by these three things.

The Cross - Death, Resurrection, Fulness of Life

What would the knob represent, the arrest, the check? You are not just going on; you are brought under arrest. Does it not say, 'Here you must stay to give heed to something of importance. Here is the death of the Lord Jesus, here is the Cross on its death side - that which brings you up short, that past which you cannot get without laying to heart its solemn meaning.' You cannot get over the Cross without taking account of it, you cannot pass it by and ignore it. When the Lord brings the Cross into your path, you are brought up short, you really have to take that to heart - the meaning of the death of the Lord Jesus.

But then - and thank God - on top of it is the blossom, and it is an almond blossom. You know that the almond is the type of resurrection. The almond blossom - new life, new hope, new prospect, resurrection; the almond blossom - a new season opens, for it is the earliest of the blossoms of spring. It goes before as the forerunner of all other blossoms, of everything else, and it is prophetic. It says that resurrection has come, a new year, a new Spring, a new fulness. Here are death and resurrection.

And then a cup. Here is a container, a vessel. What is this? Well, surely it speaks of that which contains the fruit of the death and the resurrection - the new life, the Spirit, the Spirit of life. "There is therefore now (because of the death and the resurrection) no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:1-2). Death, resurrection, and a new Spirit of life in the vessel everywhere.

And then, superimposed upon the whole, is the lamp of testimony throwing light upon the death and the resurrection and the life of the Spirit, keeping them always in view, so that in the light which is from above you see that the testimony of Jesus relates to His death which says 'No' to one whole realm; and to His resurrection which says 'Yes' to another whole realm; and to the power of a new life to live in that realm that God accepts; the light from above thrown upon that.

Four times we meet it in the stem - and four is the number of creation. If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) - through death and resurrection. In Christ

are the branches, the whole constituting a new creation. Three times in every branch we meet it. Three is the number of Divine fulness. It is also the number of death and resurrection. "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). "It is now the third day since these things came to pass" (Luke 24:21). Three - death, burial, resurrection - borne on all the branches of that testimony. Does that sound fanciful? You have to take account of Biblical symbolism. These things are not meaningless. God has written Divine thoughts in all His creation. So we say that the vessel of testimony is constituted on the principle of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Cross - An Inwrought Experience

Turn to the book of the Revelation, and at the beginning of it we are presented with "one like unto a son of man" Who says "I am... the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:18). And we see the seven golden lampstands and that Living one in the midst - the testimony of Jesus in the lampstands. And the testimony is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus *in* each lampstand, wrought into the very substance of this vessel, into the very gold. Those deft workmen who were called to make this candlestick - you can see them with their tools, their sharp and hard tools, hammering, cutting, working painfully upon the gold, making these oft-repeated symbols. It is not too strong a thing to say that if you and I and the Lord's people are anywhere to provide for Him a vessel of such a testimony, the testimony of Jesus, it is going to be cut into us, to be hewn into us, to be hammered and wrought into us. It is the result of deep and painstaking work - the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The Testimony - The Presence of the Risen Christ

I wonder if that was not just the meaning of the challenge to the churches in Asia. When all is said about these churches - what was wrong and what was right with them - was not the Lord, after all, only bringing them back to the original testimony? When the Church began, as recorded in the first chapters of the book of the Acts, the apostolic message and preaching was not much more than of Jesus dead and risen; that He Who was dead was raised; that Him Who was crucified, God had raised up.

That is the thing they were saying everywhere. Everything was built upon that, everything was drawn from that, that was the basic thing - Christ crucified and raised. It was the thing that caused all the trouble. Nothing like that had ever been known before, it was an unheard of thing. A man crucified - no doubt about His being dead - and, without any touch of man's hand or intervention of any psychic force, that one risen from the dead and alive! The claim was that God had done it, and in doing it had declared that everything in the risen One was according to His own mind. God was not identifying Himself with something that was only partly of Himself. He had put forth His power in resurrection because the situation was utterly according to His mind. Jesus Christ is utterly according to God's mind - all of God. That was the testimony that caused all the trouble; yes, in earth because in hell.

Now, so to speak, at the end of the dispensation the risen Lord is coming to the Church and taking it up as on the first basis. He would say in effect, 'You have a lot of works, there are a lot of good things about you, there are some bad things too; but whether they be good or bad, the one question is - Is there with you and in you the mighty impact of My death and resurrection? "I am... the Living one; and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages." Is that the thing that is being borne witness to - not in word but in very power - by your presence here in the nations?' I think that is how the challenge to the churches can be truly and rightly summed up, from the beginning to the end; how does the end correspond with the beginning? It is basic to everything and you cannot get away from it.

The Church Repeatedly Brought Back to the Cross

I do not think I am straining the application when I say that, inasmuch as this candlestick or lampstand has in its construction the constant repetition of this testimony, the Church (and the individual child of God also) is repeatedly brought back to its foundation and reminded that it cannot get away from that. You do not go on in the Christian life so far that you get away from your foundation, which is the Cross. The Cross on both its sides - death and resurrection - is ever present in the history of the Church. You cannot run on as though you had run past it; as if you could say that now you have left the Cross behind, and you have come to something beyond that. No, never! True spiritual history is that you come up against the Cross again and again. There has to be a fresh application of it. The knob is met and you cannot get further into the resurrection life and into the fulness of the cup until you have again allowed the meaning of the Cross to touch whatever it must touch of the old creation; and yet again it will happen, and yet again. It is like that in spiritual history, and it must be so.

The Cross the Way to Fulness

But as you go on - and you notice you are moving upward all the time, and being an upward movement it is a heavenly movement - you are coming nearer to heavenly fulness, the fulness of His glory, the sevenfold blessing; nearer to that which is on top - spiritual fulness of light, of testimony, of glory. Let us always remember that the application of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, whether made initially in one basic crisis or subsequently at different times for different purposes, is never meant to be other than the way to a greater fulness. Oh, do not be in a wrong way obsessed with the death aspect of the Cross. A lot of people are so occupied with their death and the need of their dying that it quenches their spiritual life; you do not meet spiritual life in them because they are so occupied with their death with Christ. While the death aspect is necessarily there, it is only a way to the almond blossom and to the cup of greater fulness, and it is an upward movement, a resurrection movement, right up to spiritual fulness.

The Cross the Way of Divine Glory in the Church

In what we have been thus briefly saying there is contained the whole of the spiritual work of God to secure for Himself a people in whom there is not merely a verbal testimony to the facts and the doctrine of the death and the resurrection of the Lord

Jesus, but by the Spirit there is the living flame, the living power of the testimony, of what that death and resurrection really mean. When all is said (and I am not going to add words and try to bring out all the full content of this) what does it mean, what does it amount to? Just this - God is out to show that He is the God of the impossible, the God of the miraculous, the God Who transcends nature. How can He do it best? He can do it best by bringing us, on the one hand, to know the death of the Lord Jesus to our own life, to our own strength, to our own resources, our own abilities, our own self-sufficiency, and all that - an end which is an end in death so that we are compelled to say, 'I cannot go on any further, I can do no more, I am at an end' - and then to discover Him as the God of a new beginning, a miraculous new beginning, the God of resurrection. The testimony is - 'But for God, where should we be? This cannot be explained on any other ground than that it is the Lord's doing, this is God's miracle of resurrection. It is God, and only God.' That is the testimony of Jesus. We can say these things, and probably embrace them as truth; but are we prepared for the Cross to cut from under our feet all ground but God Himself, to bring us repeatedly to Wit's End Corner, the end of all resources, the end of all hope, where, as Paul said, "we despaired... of life... that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. 1:8-9)? Are you prepared to accept that as the basis of your life? That is the basis of glory. That is the testimony. You cannot bring that about merely by the teaching you receive. That is the peril - that there should be a people accepting the teaching but not standing in the life and the power of it.

As we close these meditations, I think it necessary and right we should quietly bow in the Lord's presence and have an understanding, a transaction, with Him that we shall not hold a testimony merely in word, in doctrine, in teaching, in information, but that we shall in very truth embody the testimony of Jesus in the power of the Holy Ghost through the inworking of His death and His resurrection.

Originally published by Witness and Testimony Publishers in 1949-50

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