

The Golden Lampstand

May 21, 2017

Exodus 25:31-40

I hope you took up the challenge from last week and carved out some time for communion with God. If you were successful, I encourage you to do it again this week. If you just could not find the time, don't be discouraged. Give it another shot this week.

We are doing a series on the Tabernacle. Today we are talking about the lampstand. I'm reading from Exodus 25, starting in verse 31.

1 "Make a lampstand of pure gold. Hammer out its base and shaft, and make its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms of one piece with them.³² Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand—three on one side and three on the other.³³ Three cups shaped like almond

flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand.³⁴ And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms.³⁵ One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair—six branches in all.³⁶ The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold.

37 "Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it.³⁸ Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold.³⁹ A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories.⁴⁰ See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

When a person entered the doors to the holy place, the table of showbread was immediately to the right. We talked about that last week. To the left was the golden lampstand. It was hammered out of about one hundred pounds of solid gold. It had seven lamps, three on each side and one in the middle. The branches had three buds, three flowers, and three fruits. A cup shaped like an almond flower topped each branch. Why was the almond blossom chosen? The word *almond* in Hebrew meant awakening. The almond tree was the first tree to blossom after winter. It represented the springing forth of fruit, awakening from spiritual slumber, the reemergence of life.

The lampstand was the only light in the holy place and it was arranged so that light fell in front of it.

It burned olive oil and the lamp was to be kept burning from evening to morning. The priests were to care for this.

(picture of lampstand)

What does this mean?

So what does this lampstand symbolize? A Sunday school teacher asked a question to her third grade students. Children, what is gray, has a long fuzzy tail, and eats nuts?" The students said nothing. Finally Johnny spoke up, "Teacher, I know the answer must be Jesus, but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me."

Let's get past the obvious. Everything in the tabernacle foreshadows Christ. The gate represented Jesus because he said "I am the gate." The altar of sacrifice represented Jesus because he was the Lamb of God. The basin represented Jesus because he is the word and water of life. The table of show bread represented Jesus because he is the bread of life. And the lampstand represented Jesus because he said he is the light of the world.

Light

Light is one of the frequently used symbols that represent God and his word, his truth. But it can also symbolize God's people. In Isaiah 49:6 we discover that Israel's mission was to be a light to the Gentiles. Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light..."* And in Matthew 5 Jesus says that we are to be the light of the world, a city built on a hill. So light symbolizes making something known, something that is revealed.

The Bible writers talk a lot about light and darkness. They talk about truth and error. Very often when they are talking about light, they are talking about truth, and when they talk about darkness they are talking about confusion. When God begins to shine his truth into our lives it's not unlike the early morning sun dissipating the fog. The warmth and the

sunshine moves away the darkness and confusion.

I remember when I became a Christian, things I had done in the past without giving it a thought became uncomfortable. Using the Lord's name, drunkenness, gossiping, sexual promiscuity, telling off color jokes didn't feel right anymore. And hanging out with people who did those things didn't feel right either. I'd like to say the changed happened all at once but it took a while.

We hear testimonies all the time of people saying they were headed in a certain direction in their lives but they knew an inner sense of dissatisfaction and emptiness and discouragement. Then they made the discovery that they were loved by God and it changed everything. The light shone into their hearts. The darkness was dissipated. They began to see things in the light of the glory of God. They discovered that the light not only

shows the way forward but also exposes what is there.

Paul says, “*Live as children of light.*” If you rejoice in the fact that truth was beamed into your error and reality took away your confusion, and light shined in your darkness, then begin to live transparently before God. He knows everything anyhow so why hide? We are to live in the light of the searching truth of God, transparent before him. There’s nothing hidden from his eyes; all things are naked and open to him. Knowing that affects my lifestyle more than anything else.

Paul wants to be sure our Christian behavior is consistent no matter where we are: home, church, work, hanging with friends. I can act Christ-like at church or in my small group. But do I follow through at home or at the soccer game? When I’m under stress? When someone insults me?

Can I be honest? Sometimes I am a jerk. Sometimes this preacher is a jerk. I tell other people how to behave but I can’t pull it off myself. The persons we are in public are sometimes far removed from the persons we are in private. In fact, I would say that’s my natural inclination. I simply don’t look anything like Jesus unless I have his Spirit living in me teaching me goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I can’t be a godly father without love. I can’t be a godly husband without joy, peace, and patience. If I did not have God’s light and truth in my life, my wife would be married to a grumpy, stressed out, jerk.

If we are mean, negative, driving like maniacs, treating our employees like slaves, drinking too much, gossiping, bitter, cursing, sexually promiscuous, and greedy, do you think people are going to look at your life and say, “I want to be just like those Christians?”

But if we live as people of the light, then people just might want to emulate your life and in that find Jesus.

In the Book of Revelation chapter one, John has a vision and he hears a voice and he turns around to see who is speaking to him and the first thing he sees are seven golden lampstands. And among the lampstands is the risen Christ. In verse 20 we are told what these seven lampstands are; they represent the seven churches that John is to send his letter to. Then beginning in chapter 2, Jesus begins to address each of these churches. The first is the church of Ephesus. *“I have this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”*

This is interesting because it wasn't many years earlier that the temple had been burned by the Romans and the

lampstand-called the menorah- and the table of show bread had been taken to Rome. There is a carving of this in the Arch of Titus in Rome that you can still see today. Here is a picture of it.

(picture of Arch)

I wonder if John had this in mind as he spoke about the church of Ephesus' lampstand being taken away.

Keeping our light shining

So how do we keep our light shining? How do we keep the flame and passion burning in our lives? The priests were to take care of the lampstand twice a day-in the evening and in the morning they had to fill the oil. An untrimmed wick produces two things; smoke and flicker. How is the flame in your heart? Does passion for Christ burn brightly? Are you keeping you bowl filled with oil?

Many Bible scholars see oil as symbolizing the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Olive oil was used in the anointing of the priests, the furnishings of the tabernacle including the Ark of the Covenant. Anointing them with oil set them apart and consecrated them for their use in worship.

In Mathew 25 Jesus tells the parable of the Ten Virgins *“Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves”*.

In these verses Jesus seems to be talking about the presence of the Holy Spirit. These virgins were waiting for the Bridegroom, which symbolizes Christ’s coming for His bride the church. Five were ready when the Bridegroom arrived and already had the oil in their lamps but the other five, the foolish ones, had to

run out and buy some more oil. They had procrastinated and failed to be ready when Christ came and now it was too late, so when they got back they came, *“saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour”*

So not only does the lampstand symbolize light, but it symbolizes the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church. In two weeks we celebrate Pentecost Sunday. Remember that Jesus made a number of appearances with his disciples for 40 days after his resurrection. At the end of 40 days, he told his disciples in Acts 1, *“not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’, he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

Jesus ascended back into heaven and ten days later, on the Jewish festival of Pentecost, there was a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the house where the disciples had gathered, tongues of fire appeared over their heads, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.

The crowd hears and sees this most amazing thing going on, and are perplexed by it all.

Peter stood up and said, *“This is the fulfillment of what the Prophet Joel said would happen 800 years ago when he prophesied that a day would come when God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh.”*

It’s his first recorded sermon, 3000 come to faith in Christ, and the church begins!

The Holy Spirit comes in a brand new way. This group of discouraged, depressed, and defeated disciples of Christ with no vision or understanding

are transformed into a daring, dauntless, determined band of Apostles.

We soon see them out in the marketplace preaching about Jesus. Peter and John encounter a lame man and through their prayers he is healed and runs leaping into the Temple with joy. Wonders and signs are taking place

They are now people of courage. They boldly stand up to the religious authorities who demand that they stop their activities.

Their vision is global. They take the gospel first to Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria, Rome and to the uttermost parts of the world. They no longer fear evil or death. They no longer are consumed by materialism and greed; they gladly share their possessions with the poor.

This is the way Spirit filled people live. We need the Holy Spirit to keep our flame

burning. He is the eternal Spirit, power of the most high, the Spirit of Glory. He teaches us, guides us, intercedes for us, and bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. He convicts us of sin.

We need God's power

Obviously we need God in us to have any chance of living God honoring lives. We need the gifts of the Spirit working in the church if we are going to see effective ministry taking place. We need the fruit of the Spirit growing in us if we are to see life transformation take place. Otherwise the church will be run by our own wisdom and power politics. That's what happens if we are living the Spirit-less life. Part of the problem is the church. We don't do a good job of teaching about the Holy Spirit. People are ignorant of the Holy Spirit and miss out on what the Spirit can do in their lives.

We find this in Acts 19. Paul is on his missionary journey through Asia Minor. He arrives in Ephesus and already finds a group of disciples there. For some reason he asks them, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*"

That's how it's supposed to happen. The moment you come to faith, you receive the Holy Spirit. Whenever we baptize, the next things we do is lay on hands on you and pray, "The Holy Spirit work within you that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ."

But not these guys. They never heard of the Holy Spirit. No one taught them this was supposed to happen.

So Paul sat them down and talked to them about the difference, baptized them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and laid hands upon them and the Holy Spirit came upon them and they had a little Holy Ghost revival!

So we can miss out on Spirit filled living because of ignorance. But we can also miss out by deliberately resisting the Holy Spirit. We see this most clearly in Acts 7 when Stephen is giving his defense of the faith before the high priest and Council and he finishes with these words, *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.”*

As you can imagine, that did not go over well. They take Stephen out and stone him to death. The first Christ follower to die for his faith in Jesus.

Have there been times when I have resisted the Holy Spirit? Sure. There have been times when I felt there was something I was directed to do and didn't do it. For whatever reason, I didn't want to do it. You can only do that so many times until God says, “Ok, you aren't going to listen. Then I won't bother you

anymore.” God is a gentleman and isn't going to force his way on you.

But most of the time, we just drift away. Like the Ephesian Church. We forsake our first love. The flame begins to flicker. Our oil supply dwindles. Our love grows cold.

What do I do when I find I have forsaken my first love? I repent. Just as Jesus called the church in Ephesus to repent of their lack of passion. I ask God to forgive me and restore me to a right relationship with God. And God does. Folks, the Spirit filled life is so much better than the Spirit less life. And one you have tasted it, you will never want to go back to the Spirit-less life.

For our 30th anniversary, Melinda and I flew to Hawaii and did a cruise around the islands. We had a great time.

When we were at the airport to catch our flight back home, my name came over the

loud speaker. I walked up to the desk and told them I was Mark Rowland. They said, “We have a seat empty in First Class, but only one. Do you want to sit together in coach or would one of you like to move to First Class and if yes, which one of you.”

It was a no-brainer. I thought it would be a wonderful conclusion to our anniversary for Melinda to experience the pampering of First Class. So I told her she was moving up to First Class and she said, “That’s so very sweet of you. But I want to share the experience with you so half way home, I’ll come out and switch with you.”

So we got on board and I went right into coach and she turned left through the curtain into total luxury.

I never saw her again until we landed. She didn’t even peak through the curtain to give me a wave.

I discreetly brought it up as we disembarked. “Hey, what happened to you?”

“Oh Mark, you don’t understand. Life in first class is so different from coach! We had big wide seats. We had steak for dinner that was so delicious. After dinner they brought us warm towels to tidy up with. Anything we wanted they brought to us. It was so wonderful I guess I just forgot about you.”

Folks, the Spirit-filled life is so different from the spirit-less life. There is so much power to live the Christian life and experience God that you don’t know what you are missing until you try it. You will not want to go back. Do you need the oil and the fire of the Holy Spirit? Let’s pray and ask for it.