

'A Candlestick All of Gold' the Cross in Relation to the Testimony

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Cross is the foundation of the Church and the source of spiritual fulness and glory, and it is a reminder of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Scripture: Romans 8:1, Revelation 1:18

Topics: "The Cross", "Spiritual Testimony"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the candlestick as a symbol of the Church's testimony, rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ. He explains that the lampstand represents the fullness of Christ, the Church as His vessel, and the necessity of the Cross, which serves as a constant reminder of our dependence on God's Spirit rather than our own strength. The repeated motifs of death, resurrection, and new life illustrate that true spiritual growth requires continual engagement with the Cross. Ultimately, the sermon calls for believers to embody the testimony of Jesus, not just in words but through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

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 knop, 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.

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