

Sermon Ex25,31-40: lampstand

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Series: tabernakel #5

Theme

Theme	The church shines in God's sanctuary
1	for God
2	by the Holy Spirit
3	Through us

Believers, members of the body of the Lord Jesus,

The entire tabernacle is about approaching God.

Every step gets us closer to him. God lives among his people. He calls us to himself.

Believers did not get any farther than the altar in the courtyard.

From then on, only the priests could get closer to the place of God's presence. They represented the people before God.

(Aaron and his sons were the only ones allowed in the tabernacle.)

Now we take a look in the Holy Place.

Do you children still remember from Sunday school what was inside?

Here we find the Table with the Showbread, the Altar of Incense, and the Lampstand. Then there were curtains with cherubim woven into them, and behind them was the Holiest Place, where the ark was.

We can look at pictures and get an idea of what it looked like. But the Israelites could never look inside. They could only hear the description in the book of Exodus. Only Aaron and his sons were allowed inside and could see the table, the lampstand, and the altar when they served there.

This was a special room. It was full of beautiful furnishings, all made of gold.

Even the walls are made of gold: wooden planks overlaid with gold.

But one thing is missing. Have you ever thought of this: where are the windows?

They're not there. They are missing in the whole tent. No windows.

Isn't that a bit strange? How can you see all these beautiful golden objects? And how could the priest do his work inside the tent?

It must be dark without windows.

That's why God told Moses to make a lampstand:

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"make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it." (Ex 25:37)

That's where the light comes from: 7 lamps burn on top of the 7 arms of the lampstand. It is sitting against the side of the Holy Place and spreads its light over the whole room. Imagine that: the whole place lights up, because everything is gold. The light is reflected in a thousand different ways!

1. For God

why light? – not for the priest

We can think: 'that's helpful for the high priest when he serves there. He needs light. But this was not a work light for Aaron that he switched off when he was done with his work and left the tent.

Ex 30 gives us the opposite order: Aaron must burn fragrant incense when he lights the lamps:

"Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. [8] He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come." (Ex 30.7-8)

That's not like 'switch on a light so that you can burn incense.'

The Lord had instructed Moses (Lev 24):

[2] "Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. [3] Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. [4] The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD must be tended continually."

Do you hear it?

Continually. Continually. Continually.

The light is always on. For whom? Not for the priest.

It is for God. The light is present in God's sanctuary. It must be kept burning continually.

the church

I've wondered about this. It is clearly a symbol. But of what?

- Is it a symbol of God who is light? (1Jn1,5)
- Or is the lampstand a symbol of the church that is a light in the world, as the Bible says elsewhere? (Mt5,14)
- And how about Jesus, who is called the light of the world (Jn8,12): is he the true meaning of the lampstand?

I think we may find the answer if we look at the design of the whole tabernacle. Take a look at the floor plan and you see two rooms in the tent: the Holy Place and the Holiest Place.

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God's throne was in the Holiest Place, which was a perfect cube (10x10x10 cubits) (15 feet on each side). It was on top of the ark's atonement cover.

"Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover." (Lev 16.2)

If the Holiest Place is God's throne, what is the Holy Place?

This is his throne room where the church appears before him. But the people cannot come here, not only because the room is too small for all of them, but because they are not holy.

Therefore the objects you find here represent the church before God.

Look at the three furniture pieces there:

- the table showed the 12 loafs of bread to the Lord. They represent Israel's daily food, its entire life, offered up to God. They received it from him, now they dedicate it to him every day.
- The altar of incense: according to Ex30, the altar of incense was placed in such a way that it was located before the ark:

"Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony—before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony—where I will meet with you." (Ex 30.6)

Only a curtain separated the two. On this altar the high priest sacrificed the incense, which symbolized the prayers of God's people. This was a sweet smell for the Lord.

- Then there is the lampstand. This also represents the people of God before his throne. They receive light from God and now shine as a light in on earth. Their light shines for him, in the tabernacle, bringing light to all the objects that are dedicated to God. All this golden beauty is for God, brought to him in worship.

Rev1 shows us the same image: Jesus walks between the lampstands, tending to them so that they keep burning. Jesus explains the mystery of the lampstands and the stars to John.

The lampstand with 7 branches is presented in a different form: 7 lampstands in different locations.the lampstands are the seven churches he is sending letters to, the stars are their angels.

So the church of Jesus is the light bearer.

Now before we make a connection with Mt5: "You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men.", let us realize this: the lampstand is standing in a closed room. There may be an effect for the world (we will look at that), but the lampstand is here for God: it shines its light for him in his sanctuary, where Israel's prayers were brought before the Lord (the incense on the altar) and their daily lives offered up to him (the showbread).

Why does the light not come from the ark and the atonement cover? It is dark there, and Aaron had to make smoke on the day of atonement so that he would not see the ark.

This is a symbol that God lives in unapproachable light, as 1Tim6 says:

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"God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, [16] who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen" (1Tim 6.15-16)

God is light, but his throne on earth is shrouded in darkness, a cloud, and smoke. God is light. How can he best be served? By a church that becomes a light before him. God is light and we receive light from him and become a light in the Lord:

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Eph 5.8)

So all these passages come together in one picture: God is light. Jesus is the light of the world and brings light to our hearts. He saves us from darkness and not only places us in the light but makes us light.

We shine our light in the world, but first of all for God.

The lampstand is the church in each location. Every church that belongs to Jesus is a lampstand that reflects God's light and brings glory to him.

If God is light, what do you think is the most beautiful thing he likes to see? A church of light, where the light of the truth takes away all darkness of sin.

Living in the darkness, we loved the darkness because it hid our evil deeds. Crime, sin, lies, murder – they are committed in darkness and covered up, so that no one will find out who did it. But, as John says:

"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (John 3.20-21)

When it is clear that what you have done was done through God, God gets the glory. This is what the light in the tabernacle is all about: God gets the glory of our renewed lives.

2. by the Holy Spirit

Dedicate yourself

The lampstand revealed the beauty of all the other things that were placed before God. It shows us how precious and beautiful God's church, God's people are before Him. He takes pleasure in seeing our lives renewed, seeing you fight against sin, hear you speak the truth, encourage others, asking Jesus what to do in any given situation, hearing you pray, and receiving your daily life as a sacrifice to him. God is pleased and glorified.

So should this not be our deepest desire: to be a lampstand before the Lord? To dedicate our hearts, our lives to him? To reflect the light he gives us in our words, our actions, our attitude?

God intends your life to be filled with light, to become a light, shining before Him. What a great purpose he gives to your life!

Those of you who are in or before you twenties, what are you going to do with your life? What are you studying for, what are you working for?

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And those of you who have reached the end of your career: what have you worked for?
Is it only to have an income so you can live?
Is or was it to contribute to society? Or have you never thought about it?
There is a higher goal: be a light for God. Live for him, glorify him in what you do, serve him in the church. To live your entire life as a light in God's presence.

Now we ask another question: how is this possible?
How can this light burn brightly before God?
If God looks at your life, is it like a burning light?

The design of the lampstand shows where the source of light is.
We look at two things: the 7 arms of the lampstand and the pure oil that was needed to make it burn.

Seven: the Holy Spirit

Do you remember the greeting in Rev1? It has the following words:
"Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne," (Rev1,4)

The seven spirits stand for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
"These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." (Rev 3.1 NIV)

Jesus is in control of the leaders of that church and of his Spirit that he sends to that church.

In Rev 5, the lamb, Jesus, has seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God. In Rev 4, seven lamps are blazing before the throne, and we are told that these are the seven spirits of God. This is the clearest reflection you can get of the lampstand with its seven branches and seven lights, burning before the throne of God in the tabernacle.

This is what changes and fills the church, and what makes it possible that it burns like an oil lamp that spreads light: the seven spirits of God.

The light comes from Jesus, and we receive it through the Holy Spirit:
"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2Cor 4,6)

This is the reality of the church. The Holy Spirit brings us and kindles in us the light of Christ, which is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ". The light means that you know God and his glory through Jesus. And for 'light' you can also read 'truth' or 'life'. This is where our life comes from: from Jesus who saved us, who revealed the Father to us, who told us about his glory, and who is the shining "radiance of God's glory" in person (Hebr 1,3).

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oil

The church becomes an image of the light and life of Christ. The symbol of this is the oil. The light does not come from candles. There are cups and wicks, and the lamps are burning pure olive oil.

This olive oil was made and given by the people:

“Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually.” (Lev 24:2)

Do you see the beautiful symbolism here? The light is the light from God, through his Holy Spirit. But the oil was made and given by the people. The tabernacle does not just show us how great God is. It shows us how great God is in the church. God changes us through Jesus and his Spirit, and now the church may shine before the Lord. Israel brought the oil for the light that represented them before the Lord.

3. Through us

Our task & privilege

This is a great privilege: to live for God with the light Jesus has given us. To present the work of his Holy Spirit in us as a thank offering, glorifying God through our works of service.

God works in us and we offer ourselves to God. That is the right order. And we must realize that neither of these two can be missing.

If we were to say ‘God will do everything’, we fail to bring the oil and burn as light before the Lord. We can do that if we put so much stress on God’s work that we don’t talk about our task in God’s service any more.

If we put all the focus on our work, busy as we are serving the Lord, we don’t pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us any more, and we forget that the light must come from Jesus, or there will be no light.

This is God’s grace become real: God allows us to be lights in his presence, to offer our lives as sacrifices to him, while he is the one who made us a light and changed us.

So together we are the church of Jesus; we are the lampstand with the 7 lights in God’s presence, burning for him. We need to keep Paul’s words in mind:

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10] and find out what pleases the Lord. [11] Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. [12] For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. [13] But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, [14] for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” [15]” (Eph 5:8-15)

Do you let God’s light shine in your life so that you rise from the dead and Jesus shines in you? Do you live in the light and shine as a light in the world?

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Again, this is not first of all for the world, it is for God. You must shine as a light in the world for him by shunning all darkness that you could be caught up in. Expose fruitless deeds of darkness, do not get involved, but stay away from them, and live in the light so that you can be fruitful for the Lord.

The high priest tended the lamps every day so that they kept burning for the Lord. The oil had to be clear, he had to clean the channels so the flow of oil would not stop and one or several of the lights go out.

Jesus presents himself in Rev1 as the high priest who tends the lamps. That's why he sent the seven letters to the churches in Asia Minor. He analyzes their hearts and evaluates their commitment to the Lord, their faith, their love, and their service. Through these churches, Jesus is addressing us: how do you live? How do you shine your light for God?

He said this to the church in Ephesus:

"These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: [2] I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. [3] You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

[4] Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. [5] Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." (Rev 2.1-5)

Jesus can remove the lampstand. And he did. There is no church in Ephesus any more. Just like in many other places over the world: the church is no longer there because the people failed to continue to serve the Lord in holiness and with loving hearts. These people were very concerned about their doctrine but they lost the love for the Lord. Simple repentance from sin, giving themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord, trusting in his grace alone, rejoicing in God's presence and love, and serving him in good works.

Is that what characterizes your life? Is that at the heart of our church life?

Are we all willing to sacrifice ourselves to the Lord and let our light shine?

The lampstand was more than a stick with seven arms. It was a tree: an almond tree. It had buds, blossoms, flowers, and fruit: all the stages the almond tree went through in a year. They were all present in the design at the same time. This showed the fullness of life, how it grew and yielded fruit!

The almond tree was the first one to bloom. It announced new life. In the same way, the church is the firstfruits of all creation: it shows how God is going to renew the whole earth.

This is a powerful symbol for the world.

The light of the church shines for God in the first place.

And it shows the world what God is doing in the church, by his power and grace.

Will you show it? In your dedication to the Lord? In your walk of life?

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Receive life from Jesus. Live that life in pure dedication to the Lord. Live as children of light, for God, and visible for people so that God may be praised.

And pray that God keeps the light burning, so that he is glorified and the renewal of creation may continue when others repent.

Amen