

# The Lampstand: God's Shining Glory

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Date: 01 December 2024

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, so we're continuing to think about the tabernacle as this visual aid for worship, revealing spiritual realities to us. And when we come to the lampstand, I think we're invited to think of God's shining glory. The lesson of the lampstand is, here is the God of infinite shining glory, who comes to live among His people, and who wants His glory to shine in all the world. And the way that He tells that lesson is through this lamp that's always burning. Now, we can look outside our windows, and we recognize we are now hitting the depths of winter. It's that time of year where we begin to long for the light, either sunlight, or we long to get the Christmas tree lights out. It's nice to see decorations go up.

Some people find it a really hard time of year. They also get the sad lamps out. Darkness can be hard, and light is good for us. Also in the dark, and this is something that we'll come back to, if you're going to visit someone, and you see the lights on in the window, then you know that they are at home. And that's important to what's happening in the temple. Because think about the scene. So remember, this is a group of people living in tents in the wilderness. So as night would fall, as darkness would come at dusk, there in the center of the camp, because God's tent is right there in the middle. At the heart of their national life, they have a lamp that continues to shine brightly.

And here is this visual reminder, this symbol, that God would bring joy to the hearts of His people, because God Himself has come to be at home with them, to be their light and to be their salvation, Psalm 27. Of course, we also use the imagery of light and darkness to speak to spiritual needs.

So this week, the Free Church had their national day of prayer on Wednesday. And as we pray for the nation, we recognize that for many people, there is a spiritual darkness, a lack of understanding and knowledge of who the true God is. Our greatest need as people is to know the God who describes Himself as light and with whom there is no darkness at all. To know God the Creator who said, let there be light, and there was light, and then there was everything that came to be.

And we need to know this God is our Redeemer, our Savior. Also, the one who said, 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6, let light shine out of darkness, has made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ Jesus. This is the God of light that we need to know, our Creator and our Savior. And wonderfully, for everyone who is here who's a Christian, we have that testimony, we have that experience that once there was darkness, and we were in darkness, but now there is light in the Lord. But it's also for us as well, our great mission, that people would know this God. And it's the great need of people that don't know God. And so we need to think about the truths of this lampstand, both for what it says about God and what it also says about our mission, as the people of God, that with God's help, we might in some way be dazzled by the truths represented by this lampstand, the truth that God is with us, the truth that God provides for us, the amazing privilege that God wants us to shine for Him, and especially, perhaps especially at this time of year, that in Jesus God sends the true light into the world. So we're going to think about those four simple things. The first truth, that God is with us.

[ 4 : 0 9 ]     Verse 31 we're introduced to a description of the lampstand. Make a lampstand of pure gold. And it's beautiful. It's got flower-like cups. It's got buds and blossoms.

And we thought about this in the tabernacle, that the gold of the tabernacle speaks of beauty. It speaks of royalty. It speaks of glory. In Exodus chapter 27, we discover that this lampstand, one of the jobs of the priests was to make sure that there was always oil for the lamp, that the lamp was always burning.

And so God always wants His glory to be on display. God has already chosen to identify Himself with light. And light throughout the Bible comes to be identified then with ideas of God's purity, God's glory, and God's presence.

The Lord is my light and my salvation. In the book of Exodus, it's a key theme. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

And it's significant, I think, that the lampstand looks a bit like a tree. And God has also been appearing to the people of Israel day by day in this pillar of fire, going before them and guiding them.

[ 5 : 28 ] So because the light is a symbol of God's presence, it stands to reason that this lampstand needs to be beautiful, because God is glorious. But we need to recognize that this lampstand, it both displays God's glory.

It's intended to show to Israel and indeed to the nations that God is glorious. But it's also an indication of His grace. Because one of the things that's really important about the lampstand is that it enables the priests to do their work.

They are to minister in God's presence both day and night. But if they didn't have the lampstand, they wouldn't be able to work. So God is making provision so that the priests can come near to God.

And the priests are God's representative for the people and the people's representative before God. And so God is allowing His people to draw near. So it displays His glory and His grace.

So again, if we go back to the camp, Israel's camp, tens of thousands of tents in the wilderness, and they would all be lit up by their own little candles.

[ 6 : 41 ] But there in the middle, there's this great lamp. There's this one tent that shines more brightly. It's God's tent. That when darkness came and it was time for lights out and every other tent, one light would still be seen glowing dimly behind the curtain.

God's light. God's glory. God's presence. God's grace. Permanent reality for the people of God. And so the lampstand then illuminates this truth for us that in Jesus, the God of glory and grace will come near.

That He will come as the light of love and truth shining in the darkness. That just as God provided for His people in the Old Testament, so in a new way God has provided for us today light in our darkness.

Whether that's the darkness of fear or loneliness or suffering. Because He's given us Himself. That the truth of Jesus, the glory of Jesus is able to shine through and penetrate and bring light and life.

Because God is with us, the lampstand says. Here's the second truth that we can learn from the lampstand. God provides for us.

[ 8 : 07 ] We need to do a little bit of thinking with this one. So think about designers that we are familiar with. Designers like to use branding so we can easily identify their products.

You see a Nike swoosh. You know exactly who made it. You see those flowers. And you know those are Rennie Macintosh flowers. We understand the connection between a designer and what they produce.

In verse 40, we're reminded that this lampstand was to be made according to God's great design. See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

So God designs. Every part of the tabernacle is designed by God. We've got a special emphasis here. So God wants to be identified with this lampstand.

And the details that we find within the lampstand then reveal truths about the grand designer. Because it's an amazing design. Think about verse 32.

[ 9 : 09 ] Let's read that. Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand. Three on one side and three on the other. So this tree, so people that know their botany, have long identified this as looking somewhat like an olive tree.

So there's these pairs of upward curving branches. We know what the lampstand looks like with that central trunk. And so there's these seven lamps.

There's this complete light. And it represents an olive tree. Now why is that important? Because the olive tree is one of those images that God uses in the Old Testament to represent His people Israel.

You can find that in Psalm 52, Jeremiah 11, Hosea 14. So the lampstand is a reminder that God has established His people as His own.

He's given a new identity. They are the people of God. Think about all that we've seen in the book of Exodus. He has chosen them. And He's made promises to them.

[ 10 : 12 ] And He's acted in power to save them. And He's met with them. And He's given them the law. And they've established covenant together. And now He lives right among them. And so they are His people.

And He is absolutely committed to them. God the designer wants to communicate that. But it's not just that it's like an olive tree.

There's all those mentions about the almonds. Verse 33, Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on the branch. Three on the next. And the same for all six branches.

So it's a bit like an olive tree. And it's a bit like an almond tree. Now what is the significance of the almond tree? Well, if you think about Aaron's staff in the book of Exodus, that's what it's made of.

We discover at one point when there's a challenge to Moses and Aaron's authority, God shows that Aaron is His man because His staff, the almond staff, buds and blossoms.

[ 11 : 16 ] But the staff of Aaron is a symbol through the book of Exodus of God's presence, of God's miracles, of God's rescue mission. And so within the lampstand, there is this highlighting of the fact that God has provided for His people's salvation.

So He's given them this new identity and He's brought them salvation. But it's also recognized as a general principle that this tree with lights in the middle, scholars will all agree with this, that it's a reminder of an earlier tree, a tree that we meet in the book of Genesis, the tree of light.

I think when we first spoke about the tabernacle, we went back to the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Eden as the original sanctuary, this holy place where God has placed Adam and Eve and where He meets with them, sanctuary.

And in the center of the sanctuary in the Garden of Eden, there was the tree of light with the promise of the gift of life if Adam and Eve would live in covenant obedience.

And now we come to another sanctuary, the tabernacle, and we have that same truth represented this time by the lampstand, which looks like a tree. So the God of grace has given a new identity.

[ 12 : 43 ] He is the God who has saved them, and He is the God who provides and promises life with Himself in this covenant relationship, calling them to faith and obedience, calling us to faith and obedience.

So the lampstand speaks to us of how God provides for us. This week I came across an interesting article, Big Five Moments in Lighting History.

It's not really a passion of mine, but it's amazing what you find on the internet. Top five moments in lighting history. When they discover fire. That was the first one, obviously. Then the light bulb, which was quite some time after.

And then after the light bulb, it's all kind of similar. There's the fluorescent, I can say that word, lights. And then sometime in the 60s, LED lighting. The interesting one now, coming out of Edinburgh Uni, Li-Fi.

So the idea that lighting can be used as a Wi-Fi router. That you can get this fast data transfer. So like airports, some airplanes are now using this Li-Fi technology.

[ 13 : 54 ] And so I was thinking about, you know, if we were to see one of the, I don't even know what they look like. But if we were to see a Li-Fi bulb, and we were to ask ourselves, what does the designer value?

Well, we would know that he values light. But also, the information and connectivity and technology are really important. When we look at this lampstand that God has designed, and he's given that design to Moses, what matters to our God?

What does he value as we look at that lampstand? He wants his people to understand that he is their provider. He is our provider.

He is our light. He is our life. He is our salvation. And he shows us that even more clearly in the sending of his Son, the Lord Jesus. That God in Christ provides our salvation by his coming into this world and by his going to the cross in order to die to redeem us.

That God in Christ provides for our new identity. We become children of God by putting our faith in him. That God in Christ gives the gift of life, eternal life, which is to know the Father and Jesus, the Son who was sent.

[ 15 : 14 ] And so we have this wonderful promise, this wonderful hope. And we've discovered it to be true if we're Christians. In our darkness, in our confusion, in our searching, there is light.

There is the provision of light. And there is Jesus, the Son of God, who says, come to me. Come to the light and find true life. So that's the second truth.

Here's the third one. It's that God sends us as his people to shine. So we need to do a little bit of work for this as well.

So remember, these are a wilderness people. They are a people on the move. They've been called out of slavery in Egypt. They've come to Mount Sinai.

And they still need to get to the Promised Land. They need to get to Canaan. And they're being invited to build this tabernacle, which is a tent. So the people are on the move. And the tabernacle, the tent of God's presence, is also on the move.

[ 16 : 15 ] And as they go, led by the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud, they go as a people on a mission. And that mission, of course, is God's mission. And it takes us back to God's original purpose for people, for all people.

That God has made us in his image that we would glorify him. God wants his glory to spread, to shine in the world.

Creation of Adam and Eve. The first image bearers. Their calling was to live in obedience to God, to live in this perfect garden, to live in perfect relationship with God, and to spread the glory of God, to move it beyond the Garden of Eden, that the glory of God might fill the earth.

Now, of course, we know that they failed in that mission because they wanted to take glory to themselves. And so they rejected God's Word and God's will, and sin came. And now Israel has been given this same task.

Book of Exodus, they're described as God's Son. And they too are set apart in order to display his glory among the nations, that they will become the light of the world.

[ 17 : 38 ] They are supposed to live literally with God at the center of their existence in true worship and true obedience, as a pilgrim people of God, walking through places of intense spiritual darkness.

The people that they would meet, they would always be worshiping a whole variety of different gods. They would have these small gods for the land and the sea and the crops and fertility and all of these things.

And they needed the light of truth to shine. That was Israel's job. In that sense, their mission was an attractational one, to attract others to God's light.

Like moths are drawn to flame. As the people of the nations saw the unique way in which Israel lived and worshipped, they were to be drawn to the true God.

No one else has the true God living with them like those people. No one else has good laws like God's people. I'm going to join them.

[ 18 : 38 ] That's how the mission was supposed to go. How did Israel get on? Well, we understand, don't we, that ultimately they too would fail, that so often what happened instead was that they were drawn away.

They were drawn into the darkness. But there was always that promise. And it becomes really clear in the prophet Isaiah, I think especially, of this servant, this chosen one, this son, this true Israel who would come as the light of the world.

And Jesus comes as the light of the world and he succeeds where all before him failed. And so the beauty and the glory of God is in Jesus on full display.

And he is building the church and he is extending the glory of God by drawing people to himself. Calling people out of the darkness of sin.

And causing people to enjoy the gift of God's salvation. And so he stands up and says, I am the light of the world on multiple occasions. But he also says to his church, you are the light of the world.

[ 19 : 48 ] As he sends the church on mission. We've seen it in the book of Revelation. The lampstands in Revelation represent God's churches.

And Jesus is with his churches. And he gives power and grace to his churches. And those churches are to shine with God's glory for God's glory.

So our mission as the people of God, like Old Testament Israel, is to be the light of the world. That in the way that we live.

And in the way that we love. In the way that we work. In the way that we worship. That we are to display the grace and the glory of God. As Paul puts it in Philippians.

We're called to shine in a crooked generation like stars in the sky. As we hold firmly to the word of life. But how do we do that? How do we shine?

[ 20 : 48 ] In such a way that we might lead people towards God and salvation. To help us. Swallows and Amazons.

That classic novel. Made into a film fairly recently. Hopefully some of us. I know some of us are familiar with it. But it is a family.

Some children. Who have holidays in the Lake District. And when they have holidays they go sailing. And on these sailing expeditions they come across an island. Which they name Wildcat Island. And it becomes apparent that it's quite difficult to get their little sailboat into Wildcat Island.

And so they have this idea of setting up the leading lights. To warn of the dangers of the rocks around. And to guide to safe harbor.

That's what leading lights do. They warn and they guide. Think about that image. Warning and guiding lights. As we think about our mission in the world. That we as the people of God.

[ 21 : 51 ] As those who have been called into the light. We have a responsibility. A calling. A calling. To warn others. Of the very real danger of rejecting God.

And of refusing to honor God. Which is the root of all sin. To speak the hard solemn truth of the reality of spiritual darkness.

And death. And separation from God. And all that is good. There is bad news.

There is part of the gospel of good news. And we need both. So we need to warn. And then we need to guide. Guide people that they might see Christ as the safe harbor.

Guide them to see that Christ is the one who would shield us from judgment. As he himself takes the darkness. To point people to Jesus.

[ 22 : 56 ] The light who gives salvation. Who brings life. And that takes us to truth number four. That in Jesus God sends true light.

It's really significant I think that Jesus when he comes to Jerusalem. When he comes to the temple. He chooses to stand up and to declare. I am the light of the world.

Because in this moment what's happening is he's. It's as if the spotlight is moving away from the temple. The temple is the place where you come to meet with God. Now it shines on Jesus himself.

He is now where you come to meet with God. Here is where the glory of God shines. Here is where all of God's provision now rests. He is the one who gives true life. And so the theme of Jesus and light runs through the New Testament.

Just to think about it at the beginning and the ending. Think about John's prologue. John chapter 1. As he begins to introduce Jesus. Chapter 1 verse 4.

[ 24 : 01 ] In him was life. And that life was the light of men. Recognizing Jesus the one who came into the world. Is the life giver. Chapter 1 verse 9.

The true light that gives light to everyone. It was coming into the world. And then it's so interesting. Just a few verses later. John says the word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

And it's just possible that even at this stage. John is inviting us to think about Jesus. As the fulfillment of the lampstand within the tabernacle.

The one who shines the glory of God. The one who tells us that God is present with us. That in Jesus the God of glory makes his home among us. And we know he comes to shine the light of God's truth into a world of darkness.

And then you come to Matthew's introduction. As Matthew introduces Jesus. The theme of light is there lots. I think we'll end up speaking about that next week at the carol service. But Matthew chapter 4 verse 16.

[ 25 : 07 ] Is a really significant one. Jesus just begins his preaching ministry. And we're told that he goes to live in Capernaum. And in doing so it's fulfilling what was said through the prophet Isaiah.

Chapter 4 of Matthew verse 16. The people living in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

That's a wonderful promise from Isaiah chapter 9. A promise that this coming one. This light will bring an end to exile.

That people who are far from God will be brought near. It's a wonderful promise that in this light. God will be pleased to draw people from all nations. To worship him.

That Jesus is good news not just for some people. For all people. And that this light. Who brings hope and who brings peace. Has got a remarkable identity.

[ 26 : 12 ] He is the wonderful counselor. He is the almighty God. He is the everlasting father. He is the prince of peace. And Matthew as he begins his gospel.

Wants us to know this is Jesus. And so Jesus ministry is going to be a victory over darkness. Via the cross and the resurrection.

And in that victory. He will cause God's light to shine. And of course that was Jesus own testimony. We read it in John 8 and John 9. I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness. But have the light of life. Reminding us if we want life. If we want true life. If we want a quality of life. The life that we were made for.

Of knowing God. And being in relationship with him. And living for his glory. If we want a quality of life that never ends. We need to come to Jesus. But let's close where the New Testament closes.

[ 27 : 16 ] With Christ's return. And with the establishment of new creation. So we think about the death of Jesus. And we think about the resurrection of Jesus.

That first Easter Sunday. The light dawns. The light of the world risen again. In glory and victory. And now he's ruling as Lord and as King.

And we have that promise that he'll come again. He will come again to judge and to save. And he will come to establish the new creation. And when he does.

We discover in Revelation 21. That this light of unimaginable glory. Will shine. And shine. And never be switched off.

Listen to Revelation 21 verse 22. I did not see a temple in the city. This is speaking about the city of God. The new Jerusalem. Because the Lord God Almighty. And the Lamb.

[ 28 : 14 ] Are its temple. The city. Does not need the sun. Or the moon. To shine on it. For the glory of God. Gives it light.

And the Lamb. Is its lamp. Jesus is the true light of the world. Jesus is the true. The lamp stand. He shines now.

Through the pages of scripture. He shines in our hearts. The reality that he is. The son of God. He is the savior of the world. That he provides a new identity. That he makes us new creations.

But there is a day coming. When we will see his light shine. In a whole new way. Bringing joy. To the hearts of all his people.

And so we are invited. Today. To walk in the light. And to rejoice in that light. And to look forward.

[ 29 : 14 ] To that greater light. And glory and joy. Still to come. Dear friends.