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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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## The Gold of the Sanctuary

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

Reading: Lam. 4:1-2; Rev. 2:4, 3:18; 1 Kings 14:25-26, 15:18-19; 2 Kings 12:18, 16:15, 20:13-17, 24:13.

This is a further little word following upon earlier meditations upon the gold of the Sanctuary. This meditation originated with our contemplation of the Candlestick of pure gold, of beaten work, which the Lord commanded to be made for the tabernacle, which we have seen to be the vessel of the Lord's Testimony constituted according to His own thought: in the first instance the Lord Jesus Himself, and then those who are brought into perfect spiritual relationship with Him, being conformed to His image, the church, which becomes in turn the vessel of the continuation of His Testimony on this earth.

We have looked at the gold of that candlestick from time to time, with specific purposes in so doing. Now there is one further purpose and thought in our present meditation, and it is concerning *the persistent and many-sided activity of the enemy against the gold of the Testimony*. These passages which we have selected from the books of Kings are representative and are typical of a long-drawn-out history expressive of deep antagonism against the gold abiding amongst the people of God. If we were to take up each of such passages and study carefully the context, we should see how many-sided is this effort of the enemy, from how many quarters, along how many lines, by how many different means he is always seeking to take the gold from the Lord's people.

This selection alone would be a valuable means of instruction. Egypt, Syria, Babylon all represent different forms of opposition to this gold abiding in the presence of the Lord's people, and the reasons or occasions for the departure of the gold are also very enlightening. Sometimes the parting with the gold on the part of the representatives of the Lord's people is a means of seeking to find favour, to secure safety, to avoid clash and difficulty. However we may view it, and taking it

altogether, there is one thing that is quite evident, that whenever or however the gold departs from the people of the Lord it is always the result of a lost spiritual position, or a state of spiritual decline. As you see in the setting of these passages in the books of the Kings, the spiritual condition was gradually declining. It is interesting and significant that at such a time of spiritual declension, when at best, even in the days of Asa, when there was some little improvement upon Rehoboam and Jeroboam, there was a parting with the gold, and things were in a weak spiritual state. It is at that time that much reference is made to the gold going away. For one reason or another they part with the gold, they let the gold go. The House of the Lord, the sanctuary, is deprived of its gold.

When we turn over to the book of the Revelation it is quite clear that we find there a spiritual and true interpretation of these things. The churches are introduced as candlesticks, or lampstands of gold, the Lord is presented as the One Who is in the midst of the golden lampstands. That is His thought about His church. The divine thought for the churches is lampstands of gold, but it soon becomes apparent that they are not according to His thought, that the fine gold has become dimmed, the precious stones of Zion comparable to fine, pure gold are poured out at the top of the streets. As you study these letters to the churches in Asia, you are able to see how it is the gold has gone from the Lord's people.

It all bears out this one thing, with which we begin, that there is through history a persistent, unceasing, many-sided effort put forth by the enemy of God to see that the gold is taken from the midst of the Lord's people. He is against the gold. We know quite well what the gold is, for we have thought about it very much. We can say in a word that the gold is the Lord Himself in a living and glorious way in the midst of His people; the risen and exalted Christ manifested in the midst. That is the gold. That can be defined, and much can be said about that in its meaning, all its values, its moral excellencies, what Christ is as risen, in the power of a life triumphant over death - the exalted, glorified Lord, yet by His Spirit in His people. That is the gold, and the enemy is against that. The enemy will never give up his efforts to remove that gold, to see that that Testimony is destroyed, and his persistence will be along every line conceivable to him in all his diabolical wit; from every angle he will seek to dim that gold, to destroy that gold in the midst of the Lord's people.

That is a thing which we know as a general fact, but it is a thing concerning which we have constantly to adjust our minds, and apply it in a very practical way to ordinary things. We must not be mere idealists and romancers about the gold, having wonderful mental pictures. We have to come down to the practical matters of everyday life, and see that our relationships together in our homes or wherever we live together, or in our business where we have to work together, in relationships of any kind, in our own conduct, in our own manner, in our own character, in everything, all our transactions, Christ as the Living One, as the Triumphant One, as the Glorious One, is manifested. That is the Testimony, and that is the gold - that it may be true of us in a growing way that as the Lord looks upon us, He sees an increase of Himself in us, and as the devil looks upon us he sees the increase of Christ in us, and then as we have to do with one another, while we are still conscious of one another's natural, human weaknesses and imperfections, we are able to discern that there is a movement Christ-ward, some increase of Christ (though perhaps all too slow) through the fire, through the beating, and the hammering. Against that the enemy is set, to destroy the increase of Christ, or, in these symbolic words, to take the gold from the sanctuary, to see that the Lord's people are robbed by some means or another of the pure gold.

We have to square up to this fact in practical ways every day, and as we come under the government of the Holy Spirit He will check us up, and we must see to it that we respond to the checks of the Holy Spirit over this matter and where we fail in a Christly disposition, in Christly behaviour, we have to put that right with one another and let the humility and the meekness which is a moral and

spiritual element of Christ come out in a confession to one another of our faults. That is pure gold, and in a multitude of ways you and I have to increase with the increase of Christ; the gold has to be there. But, as we have said, that is a thing that will be fraught with constant, and persistent, and many-sided activity in opposition of the enemy. Somehow or other it seems that all the nations round Israel had their eyes upon that gold. And it is like that. These great spiritual forces that are set against us, the intelligent forces of evil, have their eyes on that gold, not that they want the glory of Christ, but they do not want us to have it, they do not want Him to have any glory in the church. It was that that the apostle Paul kept so much in view in his great doxology, "...glory in the church unto all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. 3:21). It is the Lord's glory in the church. We can see that as the glory of the sanctuary was constantly taken away by robbery, or delivered up by responsible people in an hour of compromise and weakness, it was simply the Lord's glory departing from His House. You and I have got to have a great jealousy over the Lord's glory in His House, and not get these general mental ideas about the House of the Lord as being somewhat vague and nebulous.

How do you think of the House of the Lord? What is your mentality when such words are mentioned as "the House of the Lord", "the Sanctuary", "the church", "the Body"? What comes into your mind? We have to get out of that general, and often very vague, realm associated with such a thing, right down to these practical things. It is you and I in our homes, in our daily lives, and in all our relationships, which is the church. The church can never be more than you are, and more than I am, in relationship with others, wherever it may be. The gold has to be found there.

There is always the danger of an illusion about substitutes for pure gold. That was the trouble at Ephesus. "*I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men ... and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake... BUT I have this against thee...*". For Ephesus the illusion was that labour, works, with patience, with perseverance, and a certain sense of consistency which hated hypocrisy, were substituted for the pure gold. The Lord said, "*...I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love*" (Rev. 2:2-4). What does that mean? To me it bears some significance that this is the first message and stands right at the beginning of things. The word is: "thou didst leave thy first love", and the Lord's message is: "*I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire...*" (Rev. 3:18). If I understand the meaning of the "first love", and of the gold, it means things as they were at the beginning. That is comprehensive, and yet it is very definite. Everything has to be constituted according to the beginning. In spite of an almost overwhelming measure of discouragement and disappointment and threatening of such a hope, the Lord is determined to have at the end of this dispensation, even though it may be in a comparatively small way, what He had at the beginning, and that is what He is after.

At the beginning there was a wonderful expression of Christ risen and glorified, everything was centred in Christ as risen and at God's right hand. And everything came out of that as to their testimony and their fellowship. All their problems were solved by a really great apprehension of that fact. The question of fellowship, of unity, was all answered by that apprehension, by that heart-grasp of the Lord Jesus. The question of the carrying out of the Gospel, the reaching out to others was involved. It does not matter where you touch the life and work of the church, it was perfectly as it ought to be, because at the beginning there was such a wonderful realisation that Christ was living as raised from the dead, and He was exalted. It solved all their problems.

It was the possession of His life which brought this Ephesian assembly into being, and you know the history of that assembly's origin, what an abandonment to the Lord there was, a tremendous heart out-going to Him. He became Lord indeed with them. And now that fine gold has become dimmed, they are going on with the work, they are very active, seeking to maintain a sense of right and wrong, and yet there was something lacking of what there was at the beginning, and the Candlestick of pure

gold had been dimmed. The Lord is seeking to get things back to a first state, and the way back is the way by which they came into it. It is a fresh apprehension of Christ in glory and in life.

The only safety, the only defence for the testimony, is in faithfulness to the original position of fulness. That is Israel's history as marked in these books of the Kings. At the beginning there was fulness with David and Solomon. What fulness came in with Solomon! There is no word which expresses the reign of Solomon better than the word fulness. The Queen of Sheba had all the wind taken out of her sails as she looked on the fulness of Solomon; "...*there was no more spirit in her*" (1 Kings 10:5). She was simply overwhelmed with what she saw. She said the half had not been told. Now the successive kings are in a state of spiritual declension, and as they decline the gold goes out. I am quite sure that Asa and Hezekiah and all the rest would have been perfectly safe if they had been true to the original position, whether Benhadad or Shishak or any other, or all the others combined, came up against them. They would not have had to compromise, make bargains, send the gold of the treasuries of the House of the Lord to ward off their enemies, to bribe them to depart.

Faithfulness to God in the original fulness would have been their safety. The Lord would have seen to the rest. Our safety is not by compromise, our safety is not by giving something of the fulness away. We shall never be established by coming down on to a lower level. We shall never save ourselves trouble in the long run by letting go a bit of our high spiritual position and the fulness of our testimony. That is not the way to be established. That will go on until all the gold has gone and we are undone, and the Lord has to say, "*I come to thee, and will move thy lampstand out of its place...*" (R.V.M.) Our safety, after all, although it may increase the number of our enemies, although the antagonism may become more and more intense, is in faithfulness to the fulness of Christ. The Lord will establish that. The Lord will stand by a position like that, though the enemies may become all the more active in their attempts to destroy that fine gold.

Is it not patent? If you have any knowledge of the history of the things of God, if you are able to trace the movements of God even over a century or two, you will know that wherever God has raised up for Himself some vessel or instrument for a greater measure of the fulness of Christ, to bring into the view of His people something more of Christ than they knew, that instrument has been the object of far more vehement activity and antagonism on the part of the devil than anything else in the world. We can call to mind half a dozen instrumentalities of that kind. But oh, how tragic it is that so many of them have lost their fine gold before they finished their ministry. In some way the intensity or the subtlety of the enemy's activity has caused them to come down, to let go a bit, sacrifice something of their position, weaken in some direction, make a compromise, cease to stand in the utter position which they had taken up in a divine revelation, and the fine gold became dimmed before their history ended.

We, by the grace of God, are going to stand for all the fulness of Christ that we know, and that shall ever be revealed to us, or ever has been revealed to us, but it involves us in this: that the eyes of myriads of forces of intelligent evil are focussed upon us to destroy that gold, to rob of some measure of Christ. It will be revealed in multitudes of ways. It is as well that we know it. But our defence is not along the line of coming down, giving up, letting something go, surrendering, weakening. It will not be by trying to ward off in a kindly, pleasant way the antagonism, by taking something of our treasure and handing it over. Our strength and our safety is by remaining true to the Lord Jesus right up to the full degree of our knowledge of God.

The Lord save us from coming to the place where it can be said in our case, "How is the gold become dim!"