

THE RECOVERY OF THE PRIESTHOOD FOR GOD'S BUILDING

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

Lighting the Lamps and Burning the Incense

Scripture Reading: Exo. 27:20-21; 30:7-8, 34-38; Psa. 141:2; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4

- I. The lighting of the lamps in the sanctuary of God is a priestly service, a service of the priests—Exo. 27:20-21:**
- A. In typology, lighting the lamps in the sanctuary of God signifies the proper way for us to meet as Christians:
 - 1. The tabernacle as the Tent of Meeting, the place where God met with His people and spoke to them (Lev. 1:1), typifies the meetings of the church.
 - 2. In typology, lighting the lamps points to the proper way to meet as the church; the proper way to meet is to light the lamps, that is, to give off light—Luke 11:33.
 - 3. Everything we do in the meetings—praying, singing, praising, and prophesying—should cause the holy light to ascend.
 - B. There is the need for holy persons to light the holy lamps in the Holy Place—Exo. 27:20-21; 30:7-8:
 - 1. A priest is a person who is absolutely for God, who is fully possessed by God, and who lives and has his being wholly for God; in every respect and in every way, his unique interest is God—1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:9-10.
 - 2. The one who lights the lamps is a person who is possessed by God, who is saturated with God, and who lives absolutely for God—Exo. 27:21:
 - a. Whatever such a person says and does in the Holy Place is the lighting of the lamps; all his actions are the lighting of the lamps.
 - b. When the holy priests speak in the church meetings, the light ascends, and the sanctuary is full of light—1 Cor. 14:19; Matt. 5:15-16; Mark 4:21.
 - C. The light in the Holy Place is neither a natural light nor an artificial light—it is a divine light, a holy light, the real light, which is God Himself—John 1:9; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 21:23-24a:
 - 1. Today's Christians are divided by many kinds of natural and artificial light—Isa. 50:10-11; 2 Cor. 11:14.
 - 2. For the building up of the Body of Christ, we need to live and walk under the unique and genuine light, the light of our redeeming and shining God—Rev. 21:23; 1 John 1:5, 7; Eph. 5:8-9.
 - 3. The purpose of the gathering of the believers is to have the sanctuary of God with the lighting of the lamps by qualified priests so that we may see the different aspects of Christ, signified by the items of furniture in the Holy Place, and also see the way leading into the Holy of Holies, into the depths of Christ within God—Exo. 25:23, 31; 30:1.
 - 4. Certain elements must be involved whenever we experience the genuine lighting of the lamps in the church meetings—the embodiment of the Triune God (the lampstand), the divine nature (gold), the uplifted humanity of Christ

(the wick), and the Spirit of Christ (the oil)—Col. 2:9; 2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 1:3-4; 8:9.

5. Meeting together to light the lamps includes every aspect of our spiritual experience in the Christian life.

II. The main commission of the priesthood is to burn the incense—Exo. 30:7-8:

- A. The lighting of the lamps is connected to the burning of the incense—vv. 7-8:
 1. Whenever the priests burned the incense, they lit the lamps, and whenever they lit the lamps, they burned the incense.
 2. Whenever we read the Word (light the lamps), we should pray; to light the lamps is to read the Word, and to burn the incense is to pray.
 3. Proper prayer is prayer that issues out of the light from reading the Word; the light from the Word will enlighten us to have the right words to pray.
- B. The burning of the incense is the central matter of everything in the tabernacle, God's dwelling place.
- C. Burning the incense typifies praying—Psa. 141:2; Luke 1:10-11; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4:
 1. Burning the incense signifies our praying in and with the resurrected and ascended Christ.
 2. This kind of prayer, which is actually Christ, is our ascending to God through Christ and with Christ; such is a sweet-smelling fragrance to God.
 3. The smoke of the incense indicates that the incense is burned and ascends to God with the prayers of the saints; this implies that the prayers of the saints become effective and are acceptable to God—v. 3.
 4. The prayer offered in Christ and with Christ as the incense governs God's dispensing of grace and motivates the execution of the divine administration.
- D. The holy anointing oil signifies Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit coming to us from God, whereas the incense signifies Christ as our prayer going to God from us—Exo. 30:23-25, 34-38:
 1. For the two-way traffic between the Triune God and us, we need both the anointing of the holy ointment and the burning of the incense:
 - a. The anointing brings God to us in Christ and through Christ for our participation in the divine element; the incense is our going to God with Christ and as Christ in prayer for God's enjoyment.
 - b. This kind of prayer simultaneously satisfies God with a sweet fragrance and carries out God's economy, God's administration.
 2. God sanctifies us with the holy ointment so that we may enjoy the compound Spirit, and we may satisfy God with our prayer, the holy incense, and carry out God's administration.
- E. Priests are a people of incense; their work is mainly to burn the incense:
 1. A priest is a person who burns the incense inwardly to contact the Lord—vv. 7-8.
 2. We need to learn how to burn the incense in a fine way to offer a sweet savor to God.
 3. When we pray in the way of expressing Christ, it is not only we who are praying but also Christ who is praying within us; we and Christ become

one by praying, and our prayer to God is sweet incense ascending to Him—Psa. 141:2:

- a. “Thou art the incense unto God, / In Thee acceptance is complete; / I want to pray yet more and more, / To offer up this fragrance sweet”—*Hymns*, #813.
- b. “Let us the incense burn / Of prayer before the Lord; / The lamp we’d light, through day and night / Our praise to Him outpoured”—*Hymns*, #791.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THREE PRIESTLY STEPS OF PRAYER

Today, if we are going to be the real priests, we must burn the incense. This means that we must pray. But to pray does not mean that we go to God and ask Him to do something for us. Prayer means so much more than this. It means, first of all, to apply Christ as our offerings. When we pray to God, we must apply Christ as our sin offering, as our trespass offering, and as so many other offerings. Then we must feed on Christ to enjoy Him and take Him in. It is by this Christ with His redeeming blood that we can go into the presence of God. Then we will utter something from within—not from our mind or mentality, but something of Christ from deep within our spirit. This is prayer, and this is the way to pray.

To pray means to apply Christ as all the offerings, to enjoy Christ as nourishment, and then to utter something of Christ from deep within. This expression of Christ is the sweet incense ascending to God. It brings us into God and God into us. As a result, we will not only be mingled with Christ but also mingled with God.

All Christians know that they should pray. However, although they always say that they ought to pray, it is regrettable that very few Christians know the proper meaning of prayer. The proper way to pray is to apply Christ as all the offerings, to feed upon and take in Christ as our full nourishment, and then to utter something of Christ from deep within. These three items are the three stages of real prayer.

Suppose we rise in the morning to pray. First of all, we must apply Christ as all the offerings. When we begin to pray, we may have the deep conviction that we are sinful. Immediately, we must apply Christ as our trespass offering or as our sin offering. We must pray, “O Father, I am so sinful, but how I thank You that Christ today is my sin offering, and Christ this very moment is my trespass offering. I simply come to You with Christ as my sin offering and trespass offering.” If we do not pray in this way, we can never get into the Holy of Holies. This is why so many Christians are praying outside the spirit. They can never get into the spirit, which is the Holy of Holies, because they do not apply Christ as all the different offerings.

In contacting God, we must learn to apply Christ as the various offerings. This includes our confessions to God. We must confess that we are short in this matter and that matter, wrong in this and that. We also need to confess all our weak points. It is when we confess all these things that we apply Christ as the sin offering and trespass offering, the peace offering, the meal offering, and the burnt offering.

Second, we need to enjoy Christ in the presence of God. Sometimes we may enjoy Christ by reading His Word. We take Christ in through the Word by prayer, through pray-reading the Word, and we enjoy Him before God.

Third, from within we utter and express something of Christ. When we pray in this way, it is not only we who are praying, but Christ who is praying within us. We and Christ, Christ and we, become one by praying. Then our prayer to God is the sweet incense ascending to Him. The more we pray by offering the ascending incense in this way, the more the glory of God will come down. The incense goes forth, and the glory comes down. This is the real communication, the real communion, and the real fellowship. Prayer as the incense ascends to God, and the glory, the light of God, shines down into us. Eventually, we will be full of Christ and saturated with the shekinah glory of God.

To pray properly is not just to ask the Lord to do this or to do that for us. We have to go to the Lord, applying Christ as the different offerings, enjoying Christ as our full nourishment, and then uttering something of Christ from within as a sweet-smelling fragrance which ascends to God. Only this kind of prayer will bring the shekinah glory of God into us. Then we will enjoy Christ in the presence of God.

This kind of prayer needs time. We must spend time in the presence of the Lord to offer the offerings and to burn the incense. It really takes time to burn the incense, but my deep feeling is that Christians today do not need anything else. What we need is the priesthood with the priestly function, that is, to burn the incense through all the offerings. If all the brothers and sisters reading this...would practice this priestly office daily, the whole situation of the church today would be changed. We must convert our times of discussion into the burning of the incense. Merely to say that we must pray is not good enough. It is not just to pray but to burn the incense. We must learn to apply Christ, to enjoy Christ, and to utter something of Christ. This is the proper prayer of the priesthood. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1966*, vol. 1, "The Priesthood," pp. 556-558)

THE CENTRAL ITEM OF THE TABERNACLE

In the last chapter we saw that the main commission of the priesthood is to burn the incense. We need to be impressed that the burning of the incense is the central matter of everything in the tabernacle, God's dwelling place. We know that there is the outer court and then the tabernacle with the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies there is the Ark, which is a type of Christ, and it is on this Ark that God meets with His people. This is the place where man can meet God. Then there is the lampstand, the table of the bread of the Presence, and also the golden incense altar for the priests to burn the incense. These are the things within the tabernacle. There are two other things outside the tabernacle in the outer court—the laver for cleansing and the burnt-offering altar to offer the sacrifices.

If we look at a chart of the tabernacle showing all these things, we see that the incense altar is the very center of the whole tabernacle. It is the very center of God's building, God's habitation. The incense altar is for man to meet God at the Ark.

By this we may realize that all the things in the tabernacle are for the incense altar. The offering altar, the laver, the table of the bread of the Presence, and the lampstand are all for the incense altar, and the incense altar is for man to contact God at the Ark.

All this is a prefigure, a shadow, of the church. The tabernacle is a type of the church as God's habitation among man. Today the church is the real tabernacle for God. In the church there is the reality of Christ as the Ark in which, on which, and by which God can meet man and man can meet God. In the church man can meet God on Christ, in Christ, and with Christ. But how can this be done? This can only be done by having the altar for the offerings, the table of the bread of the Presence for the life supply, and the lampstand for the light. All these things are for the burning of the incense through which man can meet God in Christ.

LIGHTING THE LAMP AND BURNING THE INCENSE

Now we must see that the lampstand also has something to do with the burning of the incense. Not only the altar but also the lighting of the lamp is connected with burning the incense. We have seen in [Exodus 30:7-8] that whenever the priests burned the incense, they lit the lamp, and whenever they lit the lamp, they burned the incense. This means that whenever we read the Word (light the lamp), we must pray (burn the incense). To burn the incense is to pray, and to light the lamp is to deal with the Word. God's Word is the light, so whenever we deal with this Word, we light the lamp. Reading and praying must be one thing. They must be mingled together as one. When the priests light the lamp, they must also burn the incense.

Without lighting the lamp, the priests will burn the incense in darkness. This means that without reading the Word, we pray in darkness, in a foolish way. Because we do not have the light, we are in darkness. Without the light of the lamp, there is no enlightenment. This shows us that whenever we are going to pray, we must first deal with the Word of God. When we read the Bible, we light the lamp and are in the light. Then we know how to pray. Otherwise, whatever we pray will be in darkness.

Many times we pray in a natural way according to our concept because we have not been enlightened by the Word. This kind of prayer will not be accepted as an offering to God. When we come to contact the Lord, we must be in fear and trembling. We know that our sins have been washed away, but if we do not first deal with the Word to receive the light, we may pray in a natural way according to our disposition. This kind of prayer is an offense to the Lord. It will not be a sweet savor to Him. So before we pray, we must read the Word to be enlightened. We must light the lamp. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1966, vol. 1, pp. 562, 564*)

LIGHT ISSUING OUT OF LIFE

The table of the bread of the Presence is for the lampstand because the table is for life and the lampstand is for light. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." The life is the light. At the table of the bread of the Presence there is the life supply, and from this life the light is produced. The light comes from

life. The more life supply we enjoy, the more light we are in. Life produces light. If we do not partake of and enjoy Christ as our life supply, we will be in darkness. When we are filled with the life supply of Christ, we will have the light. The enjoyment of the life supply will give the light.

Some people receive light when they read the Bible, but this receiving of light depends to a certain extent on the enjoyment of life. The more life we have, the more light we will receive from the Bible. The more we grow and mature in life, the more light we will receive. Light depends on the growth of life. The more we enjoy Christ as our life supply, the more light we will have.

To burn the incense requires the light, and to have light requires the life supply. In order for us to burn the incense in a proper way, we need the light, but to get the light, we need the life. We must learn to feed on Christ as the bread of the Presence, the life supply. It is not simply to receive Him once for all; we must feed on Him continually, day by day. We can never graduate from feeding on Christ. We must eat continually to receive the life supply. The supply of life we receive will become the light. The life is the light, and this light is necessary in order to burn the incense unto God. The burning of incense depends on the light, and the light depends on the life supply.

THE ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

In the morning when we get up, the first thing we must do is pray. But if we are going to have the proper prayer that is acceptable to God, the sweet incense with something of Christ in it, we cannot begin to pray immediately. The way is not so straight. First of all, we must apply the blood. In other words, we must come to the offering altar to confess all our shortcomings, our sins, and our filthiness. After confessing all these things, we must apply the blood to be cleansed.

When we confess and apply the blood, we will enjoy Christ as our nourishment. The redeeming Christ will become the bread of the Presence to supply, to nourish, and to feed us. When we enjoy Christ in this way by feeding on Him, we are satisfied. Spontaneously, from this inner satisfaction there is something shining and enlightening. That is the lighting of the lamp. Then we know what to utter and express to God. In this way, whatever we say to God is sweet incense. It will issue out of the Spirit with Christ as the sweet and fragrant element. Our prayer will be just like the incense to God.

I have no intention to give you teachings about typology. My burden is to show you the right way to contact God. This is not a kind of teaching, but a certain kind of instruction to show you the proper way to contact God and to enjoy and experience all the riches of Christ in the presence of God.

Now we have seen the way. We must start from the offering altar by confessing. Every time a priest goes into the Holy Place, he cannot escape the offering altar. We cannot say that yesterday we passed it, so today we do not need it. No, yesterday we passed it, and today we still need it. Whenever we are going into the Holy Place, we need not only to touch the offering altar but also to stay there. We must stay there to apply the blood so that the redeeming One will become our enjoyment.

If we would just confess all our sins, our failures, our mistakes, our wrong deeds, our shortcomings, and our weak points, and apply the redeeming blood of Christ to cleanse us, immediately we would have the sense within that this redeeming Christ has become our inner enjoyment and nourishment.

As we feed on Him in such a way, He becomes our bread of the Presence. Here is a table, and a table means a feast. We must stay here to enjoy Christ for a time. We must not begin to pray too quickly, but first we must feed on Christ. Then this nourishment, which is the Christ we have taken in, has to be assimilated by us. This takes a certain amount of time.

After enjoying the feast at the table, Christ as our nourishment brings us to the lampstand. The nourishment of Christ as life produces the light that we need. Something within enlightens us and brings us into the presence of God. Then, whatever we express is something of Christ. It is the fragrant odor of the different aspects of the sweet Christ. When we assimilate Christ into our being, we have something so sweet and precious of Christ to utter to God. Then our prayer is on the incense altar ascending to the heavenlies to be accepted by God. This is the acceptable prayer.

DRESSING THE LAMP

The lampstand gives us the light by burning the oil, but there is a real problem with the burning of the oil. The lampstand needs the wick in order to burn the oil for the light. I am afraid that some of the younger ones do not know what a wick is. A wick is a bundle of loosely twisted, soft spun cotton used to draw up the oil of the lamp or the melted wax of a candle to be burnt.

The lampstand is one piece of pure gold. The table of the bread of the Presence is made of gold and wood, as is the incense altar. Even the Ark is made of both gold and wood. In the past I thought the lampstand was only gold, and nothing else. But recently the Lord showed me that even the lampstand is not gold alone. If it were only gold, it would not burn and give us the light. The lampstand must have something of the plant life, so soft, thin, and fine to be the wick. Without the wick, how could the golden lampstand give the light? The gold needs something of the plant, the vegetable life, to give the light. The gold, the wick, plus the oil will give the light.

When I was young, we always used either oil lamps or candles. We always had a problem with the wick. When the wick is burned overmuch, it becomes charred. This charred, overburnt wick is called snuff. The snuff must be cut off from the remainder of the wick. Therefore, in Exodus 25 there are the firepans with the tongs. The priests pinch off the snuff with the tongs, and all the pinched snuff goes into the firepans.

Sometimes we have an enjoyment of Christ as our life supply, and this enjoyment really brings us to the light. But still, it does not give light. This is because the wick has been burnt too much. It is overburnt, too old, and too charred. To dress the lamp means to snuff, or to pinch off, all the charred remains of the wick.

The lampstand is made entirely of gold. Gold signifies the divine nature, and the wick signifies the refined human nature. It is not only the human nature, but

the refined human nature. When the refined human nature cooperates with the divine nature and the oil, there is the light. But sometimes the human nature becomes too old and overburnt. It does not work so well. It needs the snuffing, the cutting, and the pinching.

When we contact the Lord, to begin with, we must stay at the offering altar to confess our failures and to apply the blood. This is good, for it will cause us to enjoy Christ and will bring us to the table to feed on Christ and receive nourishment. Then the life supply will bring us to the light. But many times when we are under the enlightening, we realize that something is too old. It does not need to be washed or cleansed, but to be snuffed, pinched, and cut off. Yesterday it was a good wick, but this morning it has become overburnt.

Three years ago, certain brothers and sisters were fresh wicks. But today they have become charred, just like charcoal. Five weeks ago, some of the sisters were so fresh, just like fresh, new wicks, but today they are charred. Now they are not proper wicks. They need to be pinched and cut. They do not need the blood; they need to get rid of all the snuff. Then they will be the fresh wicks to give the fresh light. Perhaps even yesterday I was so fresh, as a proper wick, to burn the oil and to give the light, but this morning I am overburnt. I have become a charred wick, too old to give the right light.

ORDERING THE LAMP

To cut off the snuff means to *dress* the lamp, and to supply the lamp with oil means to *order* it. In the morning, after the lamp has been burning for the night, the priests have to dress it. This means that they must cut off all the snuff to get rid of the charred part of the wick. Then in the evening they have to order the lamp by filling it with enough oil. If it is short of oil, it will go out.

Sometimes the wick is fresh, but the oil is short. So we not only need the dressing but also the ordering of the lamp. We not only need the snuffing but also the supplying of oil. Since the oil signifies the Spirit, this means that we need more and more of the Spirit so that we might burn.

If we will bring all these things to the Lord, I believe the instructing Spirit will show us all our problems. We cannot do a quick job; there is no shortcut. The Lord is available, no doubt, but we cannot be so fast. We must stay at the offering altar, then make a curve to the table of the bread of the Presence to enjoy the Lord as our food for a while. Then we must make another curve to the lamp. Sometimes we have to dress the lamp in order to get rid of all the charred part of the wick, and sometimes we must supply it with oil. Then it will give the proper, adequate light. It is then that we will know how to utter something to the Lord and be acceptable to God.

Our shortcomings, sins, and failures must be confessed, and the blood must be applied. The old, overburnt part of the wick must be pinched off. We must be a clean wick, and we must take care of the shortage of oil. Then we will have the lamp with the proper wick and adequate oil. This will give the light under which we will know how to pray. In this way we will get into the presence of God. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1966, "The Priesthood," pp. 572, 573-574, 576-578*)