

Seven Golden Lampstands

A Message of Hope from the Lord

A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Andrew M.T. Dibb

And I turned to see the voice that was speaking, And I saw seven golden lampstands
Rev. 1:10

We will begin this morning by looking around this cathedral. It is a work of art designed not only to represent the Lord in His creation, but also to lead us to Him. It is obvious that the focal point is the Word, resting on a golden altar in the inmost part of the chancel. Every detail of the cathedral draws our eyes to the Word: the nave stretches towards it.

Something we can't see unless we are looking for it is that the floor of the nave rises a whole foot from the West door to the steps of the Chancel so that one rises to approach the Word. Now look at the chancel itself: the outer chancel, where I am standing is narrower than the nave, as if focusing inward towards the Word. The middle chancel is narrower still, and finally the inmost chancel forms a square, visually set apart from the rest of the chancel. This is where the Word stands in its glory. Everything is designed to draw the eyes inward to focus on the Word.

The Word, of course, is the Lord with us. As we read in the first lesson this morning, the Gospel of John begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and He came down and dwelt among us." As we look at that book on the altar, what we see is the last level of divine truth. It is the final descent of the Word which begins in the Lord Himself and passes down through the heavens until it takes its final rest in the stories and teachings of the Old and New Testaments. In a purely natural sense, we are looking at a book, but in reality we are looking at the support, basis and containant of all the good and truth the Lord presents to us. This explains why the Word is the focus: it is the Lord speaking and this is why the Word is placed in a special, inmost part of the chancel, and why all eyes are drawn to it.

As we contemplate the Word, however, we might find ourselves overlooking the other articles in that holy place: the seven golden lampstands arranged in a circle around the Word. This

morning I want to focus our attention on those golden lampstands, for they are not merely decoration, but together with the Word they form a powerful tableau of everything the Lord stands for. It is a message of hope from the Lord to us.

In the opening chapter of the Book of Revelation, John is drawn into the spirit and tells a story of hope and promise for each of us. He describes how he heard a voice as loud as thunder behind him. As he turned to see the voice that spoke to him, he saw seven golden lampstands. These are the first things he mentions, and after them he saw in the midst of them one like the Son of Man who is, of course, the Lord as the Word, and the rest of John's description describes Him in detail.

But those seven golden lampstands are the first things John sees in the vision. The reason it is so important to stress this is because of what we are told about first mentioned things in the Teachings for the New Church. In the book *Arcana Coelestia*, or *Secrets of Heaven*, we are told that "what is stated first must be held in mind and must be seen to reside universally in everything that follows" (AC 8864). In other words, the correspondence of those lampstands infuses and leads the entire book of Revelation. Another way to put it is that the whole book of Revelation is about those lampstands. This makes them extremely important and if we understand them, that understanding should fill us with hope.

When John turned to see the voice that spoke to him, he may have been expecting to see an angel, but what he saw were the seven golden lampstand. He did not see an angel, he saw an image of us for the seven golden lampstands represent us, the people from whom the Lord will form and create a new church and a new heaven.

John then goes on to describe in detail the One like the Son of Man in the midst of the seven lampstands. Every aspect of His appearance relates to the truth making a picture, or an image of the Word as it comes from the Lord. In focusing on the Lord, we might, at this point, think the lampstands are forgotten, but that is not the case, because, the Lord from the midst of the lampstands and draws attention back to the lampstands, saying: "the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches" and this is explained in the Heavenly Doctrine: "the seven churches mean all people in the Christian world who turn to the church - and this in every case

according to each one's state of reception" (AR 43). These are the seven church of Asia, and the Lord has a message for each of them—they will be the New Church and in the next world, the New Heaven.

As we look at the Word on the chancel, the lampstands surround it, as if containing and holding it in a matrix. It looks as if the lampstands are there for the Word, but it is really the other way around: the lampstands are there because the Word is there. The purpose of a lampstand is to hold a lamp, and the purpose of a lamp is to shine with light, that light comes from one source, the Word. The Word flows directly from the Lord into the Book and it flows from the Book to the people of this world. As we receive the truths of the Word, the Word shines through us, and darkness is dispelled. The Word connects to each lampstand and holds it in its place, representing the billions of individual people in this world, who each shines with the light they receive from the Word.

The Word is the Lord's Divine love and wisdom flowing down from Him like the heat and light of the sun, and passing through the different levels of heaven and adapting to the state of the angels there, until it enters into the lowest point which is the book we see on the altar. But the stream of truth does not stop at the book instead it enters and opens the minds of people, individuals, you and me, so that we can see Him, respond to Him and become connected with Him. We can shine with the light He gives to us. The lampstands represent everyone who receives that truth. These are the people who will make the church on earth, and afterwards heaven itself.

John's description of the lampstands is given in a very specific order: there are seven of them, they are gold and they are lampstands. Each one of these details is important.

First there are seven lampstands. Seven is a very common number used in the Word because it signifies all or completeness. Bearing in mind that these lampstands represent the people who will make up the Church and heaven, the fact that there were seven of them contains the promise that the Lord gives His truth for all people. There are no exceptions. Every single one of us is included in this number. This becomes clearer when we think of each lampstand being one of the Seven Churches of Asia.

The second and third chapters of Revelation describe each of these churches, which are different types of people who respond to the Lord. Some people in this world, represented by the Church of Philadelphia receive the Lord and respond to Him fully—we could say these people are already regenerate. The other six churches represent people with a mix of good qualities and spiritual failures—times when we turn towards the Lord, and times when we turn away.

The message of hope given by these lampstands is that even though we fall short of the mark, the Lord, by means of the Word, continues to lead us. He could concentrate on our weaknesses, berate us and turn away from us. But that is not what He does, with each of the churches of Asia He patiently confirms good that is in them and then identifies their issues and shows them how to rectify them. The promise for each church is that if we turn from our sins and build on the goodness the Lord implants in us, then first the church and afterwards heaven, develops within us.

The second detail about the lampstands is that they were gold. Gold in the Word corresponds to goodness, and because these seven lampstands were made of gold means that every person in this world has good in him or herself at some level. From the moment we are born right through to the end of our lives, the Lord implants states of goodness and truth in each of us. He gives us the capacity to respond to Him. This is the raw material we are made from, for just as the lampstands were made of gold, so the church in us is based on love to the Lord and to each other.

In the messages to the seven churches of Asia we see the different states of people who are called to be part of the New Church and the New Heaven. While each person has their own particular form of good, they also have spiritual failings, which are inclinations towards evil and the actual sins we commit when we give in to those inclinations.

Most people are aware of these failings in themselves. With a bit of self-examination, we can see times when we have been self-absorbed or when we have been critical of others. There are times when our priorities are out of order. The list of our shortcomings can go on and on, and at times when we think of these and feel hope drain away. The message to the seven churches

of Asia, and the message of the seven lampstands surrounding the Word is that there is always hope. The Lord gave each of the seven churches specific instructions on how to rectify their sins, and if they did, they would receive the blessings He wants to give to them. He held out the message to them that there is hope that the church and heaven can be established in them if they let go their evils and sins. And He is willing to help every step of the way. His final words to the last of the Seven Churches, is a promise to all of us:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sit with My Father on His throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Rev. 3:19-22)

When we hear what the Spirit says to the Churches, we are not only lampstands, but lamps. Lampstands serve one purpose: to hold up lamps and shed light into darkness. Lamps represent the common purpose the Lord has for each of us, to reflect His love and wisdom. The object of the Word is not simply to tell us truth. Truth is a means of an end, and that end is goodness. The Lord tells us the truth so that by understanding Him we can remodel our lives according to what He teaches us, to become the gold the lampstand was fashioned from and a lamp shining in the darkness.

As we overcome the evils and sins of our lives, gradually we become a part of the Church of Philadelphia where good and truth are evenly matched, then we don't need instruction to remove evil, for the evil has been removed. Now we need instruction of how to do good and build those heavenly states that will make us a part of the New Heaven.

When the Lord showed John the seven golden lampstands as the first image in the Book of Revelation, He was essentially saying: I am going to create a New Heaven and a New Earth, and I will populate them with people of all types who have overcome sin. The seven golden lampstands are a promise that each of us can reach this state. Truth can lead us through life, away from evil and into real goodness, and that goodness is the gold the lampstands is made from, and it is the oil within the lamp on the top of the lampstand. Just as the oil fuels the lamp

so it burns brightly, so love from the Lord burns with a bright in a new understanding of the meaning of the Word.

In the Gospel of John, we read how the Word came down and dwelt among us, and in the words of John, the Word is a light shining in the darkness. It shines into the darkness of our minds and turns our darkness into light. And when this happens, the Lord has made all things new. Our light is His light, and the descent of truth from the Lord down through the heavens and through the Word to us now finds a fitting receptacle, a person who receives and reflects His love and wisdom. They are now they Church, and in time, they will be the angels of heaven.

As we allow our eyes to be drawn through this cathedral to the tableau in the inner chancel and see the Word, we can think of the descent of the Lord's Word, down to the heavens and into a book. As we contemplate those seven golden lampstands, we can think of how the Lord achieves His purpose of a New Church and a New Heaven, not abstractly, but in each of us. Each of us is in and part of one of those lampstands. We may be at different points of journey, we have different journeys to travel, but the Lord has provided for that by giving not one but seven lampstands

Each time we sit in this cathedral and look at that representation of the Word surrounded by the seven golden lampstands we are being given a message: a message of hope from the Lord, that out of the many mixed states of our lives He will build a new heaven and a new earth.

And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

To him who thirsts I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely.

7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

AMEN

Lessons

John 1:1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²The same was in the beginning with God.

³All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

⁴In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

⁵And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

⁷The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

⁸He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

⁹That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

¹¹He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

¹²But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

¹³Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

¹⁵John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

¹⁶And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

Revelation 1: 9-20 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

¹¹Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

¹²And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

¹³And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

¹⁴His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

¹⁵ And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

¹⁶ And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

¹⁷ And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

¹⁸ I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

¹⁹ Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

AR 43. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands. This symbolizes a new church, which will have an enlightenment from the Lord from the Word.

We are told in the last verse of this chapter that the seven lampstands are the seven churches, and it may be seen in no. [10](#) above that the seven churches mean all in the Christian world who turn to the church - and this in every case according to each one's state of reception (no. [41](#)).

The seven lampstands mean a new church because the Lord is in it and in the midst of it. For we are told that in the midst of the seven lampstands John saw one like the Son of Man, and the Son of Man means the Lord in relation to the Word.

The lampstands appeared golden, because gold symbolizes goodness, and every church is a church by virtue of the goodness that is formed through truths.

AR 66. "And the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches." This symbolizes a new church on earth, which is the New Jerusalem descending from the Lord out of the New Heaven.

That the lampstands mean the church may be seen in no. [43](#) above. And because seven symbolically means all (no. [10](#)), the seven lampstands do not mean seven churches but the church in its entirety, which in itself is one, though varied in accordance with people's reception. These variations may be compared to the various jewels in a royal crown; and they may also be compared to the various members and organs in an intact body, which nevertheless form a single unit. The perfection of every form arises from various components suitably arranged in their proper order. That is why the seven churches describe the entire New Church in its varieties