

“The Lamp Oil”
Exodus 27:20-21
(Preached at Trinity, November 16, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Beginning with **Chapter 25** we began looking at the detailed description of the Tabernacle and its furnishings.
 - A. We’ve looked at the Holy of holies with the Ark of the Covenant.
 - B. We’ve looked at the Holy place with the Table of Shewbread, the Golden Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense.
 - C. Both of these inner rooms were adorned with costly gold and beautiful tapestries.
2. As we came to **Chapter 27** we found the continuing description of the Tabernacle. Here our attention is focused upon the outer courtyard of the Tabernacle with the bronze altar of sacrifice.
3. The Courtyard was also a place designed by God – It signified that Israel had access to God, yet at the same time was kept at a distance. The Holy of Holies with the veil of separation loomed in the distance. And standing in the midst of the courtyard was the altar.

Again, God ordered the construction of the Tabernacle as an instrument of instruction.

 - A. The Altar was the place where the sinfulness of man was displayed
Daily animals were slaughtered. Blood was spilt. Smoke rose up continually.
The continued reality of the wages of sin was demonstrated
 - B. The altar was the place where atonement was made. It ultimately pointed forward to God’s ultimate sacrifice of His Son.
4. As we come to the end of the chapter our attention is once again directed to the golden lamp stand. At the end of **Chapter 25** we read God’s detailed instructions for the lamp stand. It was placed opposite the table of showbread and was the only source of light within the sanctuary.
5. In the last two verses of **Chapter 27** we read that the children of Israel were to provide the oil for the lamp and that it was to burn perpetually.
6. As we’ve seen over and over one of God’s purposes for the Tabernacle was to instruct Israel. The elements in the Tabernacle all had spiritual significance.
 - A. As I’ve stated before, great care has to be exercised in seeking to understand the spiritual significance of the various elements of the Tabernacle.
 - B. On one hand we must not impose our own imaginations and notions upon the interpretation of Scripture. We must not suppose that every chapter in Scripture has a some symbolic meaning. We must be careful when we determine that a particular passage can be interpreted symbolically and what it symbolizes.
 - C. On the other hand, some passages are rich in symbolism. As we’ve seen, one of the purposes the Tabernacle was to teach Israel the truths of God’s covenantal promises, ultimately finding fulfillment in Christ.

7. As we come to **Verses 20-21** we are puzzled as to their significance. They seem a bit out of place. **Verse 20** speaks of oil for the lamp stand in the sanctuary. But we've already seen God's instruction concerning the Golden Lampstand at the end of **Chapter 25**. What is God's purpose in speaking again of the Lampstand here? Tonight I want to direct your attention to the oil of the lamp stand.
8. It obviously has practical implications. It would stand to reason that oil would be needed if the lamp was to burn. Without oil the lamp was useless. It gave off no light.
- A. The Tabernacle was a tent four layers thick.
1. The inner lining was made of fine linen – white with blue, purple, scarlet
 2. This was overlaid by cloth woven from goat's hair.
 3. These two layers were then covered with ram's skins
 4. Finally over the top was stretched with badger's skins – the word could also refer to porpoise skin
- B. No light could have penetrated into the interior of the Tabernacle. It would have been enveloped in pitch black.
- C. In **Verse 20** God makes provision for the fuel.
9. But the quantity of oil needed would be relatively small. It could have been acquired in many ways. God says, however, "command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light"
- I believe God's charge here has some significance for us and that it contains important symbolism.
10. Again, God is very specific in His command here. The word implies that God is giving a direct command. Until now all attention has been upon God – the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God, His presence. Now attention is placed upon Israel.
- The oil was to be provided by the children of Israel
 - It was to be pure oil
 - They were to keep the lamp burning perpetually
 - It was to be under the oversight of the priests
- I. Once again God is teach Israel of His faithful presence
- A. God has already taught this in several ways
1. The Tabernacle was to provide a sanctuary where God might dwell and be worshipped by His people.
The word for Tabernacle is מִשְׁכָּן (mishkan) - dwelling place
Exodus 25:8 – "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them."
 2. The Ark was the particular dwelling place of God.
He would dwell above the Mercy Seat and between the Cherubim.
Exodus 25:22 – "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which *are* upon the ark of the testimony, of all *things* which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel."
- B. The Golden Lampstand would also serve to demonstrate God's presence
1. God is often symbolized with the metaphor of light
1 John 1:5 – "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

- a. God led Israel in the wilderness in the form of fire
Exodus 13:21 – “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night:”
 - b. The divinity of Christ is described in the form of brightness
Hebrews 1:3 – “Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;”
 - c. Jesus appeared to Paul in the form of great light
Acts 26:13-14 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
 - d. The second coming of Christ will be a great manifestation of brightness.
2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:
- C. The Golden Lampstand was a perpetual light - The eternal presence of God in the lives of His people.
- 1. Aaron’s benediction: **Numbers 6:24-26** – “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: ²⁵ The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: ²⁶ The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”
 - 2. God deserves everlasting praise. In order for it to burn perpetually a priest had to be perpetually in the tabernacle to tend the flame. This guaranteed that someone would always be worshipping God.
 - 3. We can see our responsibility for maintaining fellowship with God
 - a. Israel was to supply the oil
 - b. It was to be pure oil.
 - c. They were to faithfully keep the fire burning
 - d. Every believer has the duty of maintaining continual devotion to God. We should apply ourselves daily to God’s means of grace. We are to give attention to purity and holiness.

I believe there is another wonderful symbol seen in this perpetual light.

- II. God’s people shine forth in the brightness of His glory
 - A. We are described as the light of the world
Matthew 5:14-16 – “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”
 - 1. Each of us are like a burning candle

2. Each burn perpetually
 3. What is the source of our light?
We have no light of our own. Our light is produced by the holy hand of God within us. More specifically our light is produced by the Holy Spirit
- B. The Lamp of Israel was kept burning by a constant supply of oil
1. Oil can be seen here as a symbol of the Holy Spirit
The oil was pure, it was essential, it was the source of the light
 2. Each of the twelve tribes had their own candle. Each shined forth in the holy sanctuary. Each flame was maintained by the oil.
 3. The flame was to burn perpetually
- C. We can see this in the life of every believer
1. We shine forth brightly, perpetually
The source of our brightness is the Holy Spirit who dwells in us in power and purity
1 Corinthians 3:16-17 – “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ¹⁷ If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.”
 2. Notice that Israel was to provide the oil – This points to human responsibility.
 - a. Remember the parable of the ten virgins
Matthew 25:1-4 – “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. ² And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. ³ They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: ⁴ But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.”
 - b. The oil is seen as the spiritual graces wrought by the Holy Spirit
 1. The indwelling by the Holy Spirit
 2. The outward demonstration of sanctification
 3. The reality of our Christian conversion
 - c. The false professor of Christ may shine for a while but he will not endure - he will grow cold just as the wick of a lamp that has been extinguished. He has the lamp in his hand but nothing in his heart by which to fill it
 3. The Holy Spirit continues to work in us His sanctifying graces
 1. He fills us with holiness, joy and gladness
Romans 14:17 – “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”
 2. We should desire to be filled with His fullness
Ephesians 5:18 – “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;”
(*The fruit of the Spirit*)

III. There is yet one other aspect we can see here

A. The duty of keeping the oil supplied and the candles burning was given to the priests

Exodus 27:21 – “Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the LORD: *it shall be* a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel.”

1. They were to be perpetually present attending to their duty
2. They were actually representing the people helping to keep their flames burning brightly

B. This is the duty of pastors today

1. They aren't serving in the capacity of priests but as those set apart to minister to God's people
2. Their purpose is to continue to apply the fuel of God's Word to God's people

Ephesians 4:11-15 – “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴ That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:”

3. **Matthew Henry**: “The priests were to light the lamps, and to tend them; it was part of their daily service to *cause the lamp to burn always*, night and day; thus it is the work of ministers, by the preaching and expounding of the scriptures (which are as a lamp), to enlighten the church, God's tabernacle upon the earth, and to direct the spiritual priests in his service. This is to be *a statute for ever*,”

Conclusion:

1. God has blessed us in ways unimaginable.
 - He has given us His perpetual presence. We are never alone. Never are we left to fend for ourselves. Our mighty King continues to go with us. We are to maintain continual fellowship with Him.
 - He shines the light of His countenance through us. Our oil will never run dry.
 - He has given us His Spirit who blesses us with every divine grace.

1 Corinthians 1:4-5 – “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; ⁵ That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge;”
 - He has given the ministry to teach and instruct us in all truth.
2. Is God not worthy of all praise and honor and glory? He will never leave us. He will continue to fill us with His divine grace until the end.