

# PARTICIPATING IN THE LAMPSTAND CHURCH

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Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 14 June 2020  
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## Introduction

Hello, everyone. Today in our Bible Study we will be working from Chapter 5 of *The Steps of Salvation* Part 8. Our focus today will be on how Christ is building His church.

## God's church – seven lampstands and presbyteries

In the book of Revelation, Christian churches - *all* Christian churches - are symbolised as 'seven golden lampstands'. Rev 1:20.

Speaking to the apostle John, Jesus said, 'The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in My right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.'

Remember that John wrote seven letters to the 'angels', or *angelos* (Gr.), referring to a group of leaders who have been given the responsibility for the care of the church. The seven stars, then, are the 'angels', or presbytery, of the seven churches.

## Seven lampstands – God's complete church

'And the seven lampstands, which you saw, are the seven churches.' Rev 1:20.

Now, the seven lampstands of Asia are representative of *all* Christian churches. From this point, it is important to note that a lampstand is not a particular denomination. It is not that there are Catholic churches, Presbyterian churches, 'Lampstand' churches, etc. Rather, *all* Christian churches are symbolised by Christ in the book of Revelation as seven golden lampstands.

Neither do these seven golden lampstands refer to only the seven churches in Asia in the time that John was writing.

These letters are addressed to all the churches of *the whole church age*.

That is the significance of *seven* golden lampstands, or seven churches, where 'seven' in the Scriptures is representative of *fullness*, or *completeness*.

So, the fact that he has written seven letters to seven churches highlights the point that his letter is applicable to all the churches across the whole church age.

That is also picked up in the content of the book of Revelation because, obviously, the first three chapters were written to the seven churches.

The rest of the chapters of the book of Revelation refer to 'the time of the end'.

This highlights the point that, if the whole book was not applicable to the whole of the church age, then there would be a split between the relevance of the front part of the book to only those churches that would not be connected with what is going to happen 2000 years later - and then the disconnection between what is happening 2000 years later, and the front end of the book.

The point is that the *entire* book was written to every person who is a believer, and is a Christian, for the whole church age.

So, every person - all of us - needs to *hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches*.

I have made this point, but I am going to keep reiterating it today, and I will give some explanations to do with this point that a lampstand church is *not a particular denomination*, even if a group call themselves a 'lampstand' church.

## Hearing the word of the cross in order to be made ready for His coming

Remember that the lampstand churches symbolise Christian churches, and Jesus is addressing *every* Christian church.

And we need to *hear* what He is saying to us because, when His word is coming, it is *the word of the cross*.

And it is coming to bring a people to Himself, in order to make a people ready for His coming.

## A lampstand to shed light

To understand the nature of the lampstand church that Christ is establishing, and of which He wants us all to be a part, it is important to look at what a lampstand is.

The lampstand was a piece of furniture that belonged to the tabernacle of Moses, and then, of course, to the temple that David built.

This piece of furniture provided *light* in the holy place of the tabernacle.

Now, in particular, the lampstand focused light, within the holy place, *towards* the most holy place, which was an enclosed section of the temple in which resided *the ark of the covenant*.

On *the Day of Atonement*, when the high priest approached the most holy place and, in particular, the ark of the covenant, to *sprinkle the blood* of bulls and goats for *atonement seven times* on the mercy seat, the light of the lampstand *shone on the pathway* for the priest to access the ark of the covenant.

We read in the book of Exodus that the lampstand was crafted in *the form of an almond tree*, and this almond tree had *seven branches*, and twenty-two blossoms. Exo 25:35-37.

So, blossoms were flowers on these branches. And the blossom at the top of each branch was the receptacle in which each of the seven lamps was placed. So this piece of furniture, a lampstand, was *to hold lamps*, but it was crafted in the form of an almond tree. And there were seven blossoms at the top of the lampstand, in which were to reside seven golden lamps. Those lamps, of course, were to *provide light*.

It is an interesting point about the lampstand that the blossoms, or the flowers, in which the lamps were set, acted like *mirrors*. And when that lamp-light was placed in the receptacle, which is actually the petals of the flower, those petals would *reflect and focus the light of the lamp* like a lens. And that light would be focused *in front of the lampstand*.

This is how the lampstand was shedding light in front of it.

In fact, that is what Moses said when he was giving instructions for its construction. He said, 'You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it.' Exo 25:37.

So the light was not shed indiscriminately. It was *focused* by these petals of a flower, which acted like a mirror.

### **Understanding Christ's lampstand church**

So, the lampstand is for *the purpose of shining light*, and Jesus described, or symbolised, Christian churches as lampstands.

We will consider today, then, how Christ's church was established, and what it means to be part of His church.

How are we to be functioning as a lampstand church, and when was the lampstand church first established?

### **Christ establishing His churches**

We will begin with the passage where Jesus spoke specifically about *building His church*, remembering that building the church is building a 'lampstand'.

He said to the apostle Peter, 'I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.' Mat 16:18.

Jesus is the Builder, and He is building it on a 'rock'.

And then He said, 'And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.' Mat 16:18.

Now, when I previously read this passage, I always focused on Peter as being the 'rock'. But, really, the focus of this passage is not Peter at all; it is actually on the *builder*. And, of course, the builder is *Christ*.

### **Christ's church was built through His offering and sufferings**

In this passage, Jesus gave us the information to explain *when* that church was built.

It was built *when the gates of Hades were not prevailing against it*.

That is what we are going to consider today. When did that happen?

Now, the most important thing that we need to understand is that the lampstand, which is the church, was *built through the offering and sufferings of Christ*.

It was through His journey and, as we will see, this is because *He* is the Lampstand.

And when His offering journey was finished, the gates of Hades did not prevail against it, because it was all *the old creation* which had passed away.

It had passed into 'the sea of God's forgetfulness'. Everything was finished when His offering journey was finished.

This offering journey began at the last supper. This was where Jesus took the bread and the wine, and established the elements of the New Covenant, and the point of participation for His disciples.

So, He journeyed from the last supper, which was the first communion service, on a pathway from Gethsemane to Caiaphas' house, to Pilate's house, to Calvary, enduring seven wounding events. Thus, He completed an offering journey.

### **The work of the word of God is through 'the branch of an almond tree' - the Lampstand, Christ**

Now, we know that Jesus built His church through His offering journey, because Jesus Himself is the Lampstand. It is quite straight forward to demonstrate this in the Scriptures.

We read in the book of Jeremiah, 'Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, 'I see a *branch* of an almond tree'. Jer 1:11.

We have already understood that the lampstand is an *almond tree*, and here we note that Jeremiah was being commissioned to be proclaimer of God's word, and had a capacity for sight. And the first thing that he saw was a branch of an almond tree.

'Then the Lord said to Jeremiah, "You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word". Jer 1:11.

So the image of the branch of an almond tree was indicating the means through which the Lord was going to *perform His word*.

So the effective work of the word of God is through 'the branch of an almond tree', which is the lampstand.

That is how the apostle John opened his Gospel, isn't it? He spoke about 'the word from the beginning'. And then He explained that Jesus was *that* Word, and that He had *life* in Himself; and that that life was 'the light of men'.

This is the *word*, which is doing a work as a *light-bearing activity*.

So we see the symbology of a branch of an almond tree, through which the word is being performed.

### **Christ, the Branch and the Rod**

Then Isaiah declared, 'There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse.' Isa 11:1.

'The stem of Jesse' refers to the *kingship* of David, because Jesse was David's father.

And there is a rod coming forth from the stem of Jesse. Now, when you think of a rod, think about 'the rod of Aaron'. Aaron was Moses' brother,

whose rod budded, to identify him as the *priest* - the high priest - over Israel. And when his rod budded, it budded with *almond blossoms*.

So, 'There shall come forth a Rod' speaks about the rod that is like an almond blossom. This refers to Jesus.

'There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots.'

So we have established from Jeremiah that the branch is an almond tree.

Then Isaiah spoke about the 'rod', which has to do with *kingship* - because it is from the stem of Jesse, who is King David - and that rod is an almond tree, or an almond blossom, which is then a branch.

So, when you see the 'branch', it still refers to the almond *blossom*.

### **The seven-fold Spirit of God in His Lampstand**

Then Isaiah said, 'The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.' Isa 11:2.

This verse identifies 'the seven Spirits of God'. So the 'rod' and the 'branch' are both elements of this lampstand expression, or of this almond bush as a lampstand - and on it is *an anointing of seven Spirits*.

This is important because, in the book of Revelation, there is only one lampstand before the throne, and it is identified as the *seven-fold Spirit of God*. Rev 4:5.

So the seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God, which are these seven identified elements of anointing on Christ, who is the Rod and the Branch.

### **Jesus branching out to build His church**

Zechariah recorded, 'Then speak to him, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying: 'Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch! From His place He shall *branch out*, and He shall *build the temple of the Lord*'. Zec 6:12.

Now there is another element here. There is a Branch, which is an almond branch, which is a lampstand, and it is *extending and building out from Him*.

Further, as He is building out, as it is branching out, what is He doing?

He is *building a temple*. This is 'the temple of His body'. Joh 2:21.

'Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a *priest* on His *throne*, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.' Zec 6:13.

This passage is amazing, because it draws together the element of the *branch*, which is an almond tree that is branching out, and a *temple* that is being built.

So, He is the Branch, and He is branching out as a church, building a temple, which, as John noted, is *the temple of His body*.

Then Zechariah highlighted that He is a *priest* within this temple context.

This is the very picture that we see in Revelation. We see seven golden lampstands, with Jesus dressed as a priest of Melchizedek - the kingship/priesthood order of Melchizedek.

And Jesus is 'priesting' in this context of a temple.

So, there is a church - a temple of His body - and priesthood. Christ is the priest ministering in this context.

### **Christ, the Branch, bringing light to the world through His church**

Now, as the Branch, Jesus is also the 'flowers' that belong to the branch. The flowers are, obviously, coming out of the branch.

And Jesus identified Himself as being the Light of the world. So, He was saying that He is the fullness of lamp-light. There is no other light for the world except the lamp-light that He is bringing as this almond branch.

Now, the *fullness* of lamp-light - 'fullness' is represented by the number *seven* - is represented by seven *lamps*.

One lampstand has seven lamps, and Jesus was saying, 'I am the full revelation of that light, as seven lamps.'

So, how was the light of these lamps shone in all the world?

That is when the church was built, isn't it?

The church was built when the lampstand was established, and this light began to shine.

### **The life in His blood is the light of men**

Now, previously, we have made the point that the life of the Father was in Christ's blood.

This life (Gr. *zoe*) in the mortal body of the Son of Man was *exanastasis* life. It is *resurrection life in a mortal body*.

The Scriptures teach us that the principle of atonement, which Christ came to make, is that 'the life is in the blood'; and that life was given to us as the blood was shed. So, we are understanding that Jesus, the Son of Man, has life within Him.

### **Each wounding event was the lighting of a lamp**

Now, the apostle John, in the beginning of his Gospel, said that this life that was in the Son, is 'the light of men'. So, Jesus, the Son of Man, the Branch, has this life in Him. And that life that is in Him is the light of men.

So the question is, 'How did the *light* begin to shine?'

It shone when the life *in Him* was coming *from Him*.

And that happened when He was bleeding because, as He was bleeding, that life was being given, and that *light was shining*.

This means, then, that every wounding event that caused Christ's blood to be shed and sprinkled on His body was blood that was *speaking*.

We read, 'The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life'. Joh 6:64. The word of God is a 'light' and a 'lamp'. Psa 119:105.

So this blood, which contained His life, which is light, was 'speaking' as it was being shed. And it was bringing *illumination*. That is beautiful, isn't it!

So then, at each wounding event, as Jesus was being wounded and His blood was being shed, there was a lamp being lit. *Each wounding event was the lighting of a lamp*.

### **We are part of the ministry of His light**

Now, Jesus said, concerning the pathway of His offering, 'I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.' Joh 8:12.

So, He was on an offering journey and, as He was being wounded, a lamp was being lit, because His

blood was being shed – His blood contains the life, and the life is a light.

So, He is the Light of the world, and He was establishing this offering journey and was lighting a lamp at each wounding event.

And He is saying that *you* will have that light in yourself, and will become part of the ministry of that light if you walk on that same pathway that He walked on.

### **Christ's church was built at His seventh wounding**

Now, as Jesus journeyed along the pathway, these lamps were being lit, and He was enduring seven wounding events.

So, when He reached the end of His journey, and the final wound, which was the piercing of His side, was inflicted, what happened?

*All seven lamps were burning.*

All of a sudden, the lampstand was lit, and the church was built.

### **His church – those who journey with Him on the pathway to the cross**

And every person who is going to be part of that lampstand church must walk on that pathway with Him to have *the light of life*.

Can you see that to be a member of Christ's church has nothing to do with the theology you believe, with your doctrinal tradition or with your membership conditions?

All of that is just an exercise of our own construction.

The way to be joined to Christ's church, which He has built, is to journey with Him on the pathway through which the church was built. That is what it means to be part of a lampstand church.

Can you see that it has nothing to do with denominations?

Rather, it has to do with *how we respond to the word of the cross*.

### **His pathway revealed the light of life, bringing illumination**

So, we recognise that the journey of Christ from the last supper to the cross was the pathway that *revealed the light of life*.

Each wounding event that caused the blood of Christ to be sprinkled so that it speaks, became a manifestation of a lamp that gives light.

In this regard, the offering of Christ comprises seven *illuminating* events.

The end of Christ's journey was the cross. This was the highpoint of His journey, when all the elements of His blood were speaking together to bring illumination.

### **He is drawing all men to Himself to be part of new creation**

This was Christ, who was lifted up and is *drawing all men to Himself*.

This is what the light does. It *draws all men to Himself*, because it is shining a pathway to the very *fellowship* of Yahweh, where every person's name is found.

And we are drawn to Him, and we have a decision, or a choice, to make in relation to that lamp-light.

Will we forsake our own way - the way of old creation - and be established as part of His new creation?

Or will we continue to walk in the darkness of our own sight?

This is the question that faces every person who is being called into the church that belongs to Christ.

### **It is finished! – the gates of Hades no longer prevail against His church**

When He declared, 'It is finished!', the old creation had passed away, and the new creation, of which He was the firstborn, was revealed.

Now, this is important, because we know that Christ built His church *when the gates of Hades did not prevail against it*.

I had thought that this occurred right at the end of the age – that that is when the church is fully built and finished, and Hades is cast into the lake of fire. But that is not the full truth, although those events are going to happen.

But Christ's church was built and established when He said, 'It is finished!'

And, why is that? It is because, at that point, the whole of the old creation already had passed away. It was all gone. And new creation was fully revealed in Christ.

Now, how do we know that this is when the gates of Hades did not prevail against the church?

It is by understanding what the word 'Hades' means. The word 'Hades' literally means 'the unseen'; and also means that which is 'in darkness'. So, the gates of Hades are the gates of that which is unseen, or in darkness.

It describes the context of *the old creation*, in which sin reigned in *death*.

Through Christ's offering on the cross, judgement was passed on the whole of the old creation, and it passed away into the sea of God's forgetfulness.

Now, when it went into the sea of God's forgetfulness, it was *unseen* by Him.

That is when the gates of Hades no longer prevailed upon Him, because He was *drawn out* of the waters of forgetfulness, and He was drawn up out of them as a new creation.

That is when the church was built. That was the finished and complete church.

And *we* are to be joined to *that* church. That is the response we are to make, as we are drawn to Him, who was lifted up as a great light to the whole world.

### **Christ's priestly ministry to His lampstand churches**

Now, the seven wounding events of Christ, which were seven sprinkling events, draw our attention to the Day of Atonement, don't they! This is because, on the Day of Atonement, the blood of bulls and goats was *sprinkled seven times* on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant for *atonement*.

I want to draw our attention to the fact that, on that day, the high priest wore a particular set of clothes.

On every other day of service in the temple, he wore a set of clothes that were called 'garments for glory and beauty'. Exo 28:2. They were an intricate, rich and colourful set of garments that he was to wear as part of his ministry.

But, on the Day of Atonement, the priest was to wear a different set of garments. These were *linen* garments. It was a linen tunic, and linen pants; and he was to wear a linen sash around his waist. This was worn only on the Day of Atonement. Lev 16:4.

Remember that the apostle John saw Christ. He said, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard a voice behind me ... I turned to *see One like the Son of Man*.' Rev 1:10, 12-13.

He said that Christ was dressed in a garment down to His feet, and was girded about the chest with a golden band.

The point here is that John saw Christ, arrayed not in the garments of the high priest for the daily activity of the temple, but arrayed in the garments that belonged to the Day of Atonement.

These were the same garments that Jesus was wearing when He was being wounded seven times, and His blood was being sprinkled seven times.

Now, the point to note is that the ministry of Christ's offering journey is being 'priested' to His church. Remember that He is standing in *priestly* garments, which are related to the Day of Atonement, in the midst of seven golden lampstands. That is where He is.

This means that everything that is part of that finished offering of Christ is *still being ministered to His lampstand churches* throughout this church age.

The point to note is that the ministry of Christ's offering journey is being priested to His church *until* the time of the end.

### **Christ's blessing comes to us through messengers who proclaim the word of the cross**

And this is how we obtain the *blessing* of entering the kingdom of heaven as the sons of God.

It also means that, to obtain the blessing that He wants to give to those who are part of His church, we must *receive* that which He is priesting to us from the cross, in the way that He is coming to us.

This is *through messengers* who proclaim, through testimony, the word of the cross; and when we receive the word of the cross, we are joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

### **Joined to His offering and established as part of His church as we receive the word of the cross**

This is also the means by which we are established as part of His church, which Jesus Himself identified as a 'lampstand.'

The point is that Christ is ministering from the very journey by which His church was established,

still in the garments of the High Priest, ministering this Day of Atonement reality, through messengers.

By this means, we are *joined* to the *very same offering* by which He established the church, so that we can become part of that church.

### **Christ is speaking to all Christian churches**

All Christians churches – this is the point that we began with – are symbolised as seven lampstands.

In this regard, a lampstand church is not a particular denomination. It is not as though we can look across the lampstand churches listed in the book of Revelation, and say, ‘That is an RFI church; that is a Presbyterian church; that is a Latter Rain church.’ This is not the way to look at it.

The way to look at it is to understand that those seven letters are written to *every Christian church*.

The admonitions of Jesus, contained in the letters to the seven churches, are addressing cultural aberrations and departures from the truth, which, while they may be *particularly* applicable to *some* churches, are *definitely* applicable to *all* churches.

This is what Jesus said at the conclusion of *every* letter that He wrote to the seven churches. Every one of His letters ends this way: ‘He who has an ear, *let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*’.

For example, He wrote a letter to Ephesus, and then He said, ‘All you churches! If you have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying, you will recognise that what I am writing to Ephesus *applies to you, too*.’

### **What the Spirit is saying to all the churches, He is saying to us**

Knowing this, it is important that we resist the temptation, in relation to other church groups, to identify, and confront, the speck in our brothers’ eyes. This would be to look at them and make some judgement about their deviancy or aberration, or about their consistency with some aspect of admonition that Christ identified in His letters.

We need to resist the temptation to address the speck in our brothers’ eyes and, instead, give attention to the *logs* that are in our *own* eyes, which the Spirit is drawing *our* attention to, in relation to His word.

The clearest example of this for me has been the communion.

In this season, the Lord has placed significant restrictions on us, and indeed on every church in the whole world.

We, RFI Fellowships, are a group of churches who would have thought that we were very committed to, for example, the communion.

And we may have recognised that other churches who do not celebrate the communion or who have a somewhat mystical understanding of the communion elements might be likened to Laodicea, for example.

But what I have come to understand is that the initiative of the Lord in this season has been to address our *own* mystical understandings of what the communion is. The Lord called us to repentance in relation to our understanding of the communion, so that we could participate rightly.

When Jesus said to the Laodicean church that He was standing on the outside, knocking on the door, wanting to come in, He was talking to *us*.

He may be talking to other churches also; but our concern is not how other groups are responding to what the Lord is saying, is it?

Our concern needs to be the fact that there are some points of repentance that we have had to touch, to turn from our former understandings of the communion, and to be established in what the Lord is wanting to establish among us.

Jesus said, ‘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.’ Rev 3:20.

Isn’t that a communion meal? Isn’t that what the Lord is restoring to us in this season?

Can you see that, in relation to the application of these letters, we do not need to be pointing fingers at other church groups.

Rather, we *all* need to, *individually*, hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches so that we can, *ourselves*, find *repentance* in what Jesus is saying to us, through the Spirit.

### **The true substance of Christ’s church**

While we recognise that the seven lampstands symbolise Christian churches in all their diversity, this diversity, marked by *denominational distinction* of different groups, is *not Christ’s church*.

I will say that again. We recognise that the seven lampstands symbolise Christian churches in all their diversity. However, the *denominations*, and all the variations that mark those denominations, are not Christ's church.

We must grow in our understanding of the church, so that we can see that we are not attempting to be part of the church that *Christ is building* on the basis of *our* theology or *our* loyalty to a particular doctrinal tradition.

We are not part of the church because of some membership protocol or sacramental activity.

We are not the church because of some ecumenical initiative that we have – a desire to meet with other groups because we know that we should.

Neither are we the church because the points of doctrinal agreement between denominational groups give us some points of coherence.

These *do not mark us as part of the church*.

The church is *the body of Christ*. Eph 1:22-23. Col 1:18.

### **The church is His body – new creation**

This is what Paul said, speaking of Christ, 'And He is before all things, and *in Him all things consist*.' Col 1:17.

Isn't that the outcome of His offering journey? He filled *all things* while in a mortal body. Eph 1:23.

He finished the complete judgement of the whole of the old creation and established the *full new creation*.

That is what Paul meant when he said that 'He is before all things, and in Him all things consist'; and that 'He is the Head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence'. Col 1:18.

### **The church – those who are His own, joined to His offering – is among the denominations**

The church, the body, is *among* the denominations, including our own.

We would be very unwise, and deceived, to say that our group of churches, because we are committed to understanding the lampstand 'principle', are the lampstand church.

Our *denomination* does not mark us as being that!

When we look through the letters that Jesus wrote to the churches, we note that in *every one* of these seven churches, there were those whom Jesus identified as His own.

Some of these churches were highly corrupt, and He was going to 'kill' their leaders 'with death' – they were going to hell. Rev 2:23.

Yet, even in these contexts, despite the corruption among the leaders, or 'angels', of the churches, in *every one of them*, there were those whom Jesus identified as His own.

They may not have been aware of the theology of the cross, this wonderful mystery that has been made known to us.

However, because they believed His word, and had been born of His life, and had trusted their life to Him, and were walking in fellowship with Him as a daily reality, they *belonged to Him*, irrespective of which 'denomination' they belonged to.

Can you see that those *who belong to Christ* are those who are *born of God* and who have entered the kingdom by being born of water and the Spirit?

That is, the reality of their life is *joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings*.

Christ identifies them as *His own*, from every one of the churches marked by the symbol of seven 'lampstand' churches.

### **Called to continue to turn to Him and be established as His church in truth**

It is in this context, this diversity, that Christ, by the Spirit, is *addressing every church with the word of the cross*.

Further, He is calling us to be *established* as His church and as members of the *body of Christ*, through new birth and an *ongoing fellowship* in His offering and sufferings.

A focal point is that this is the *same* word that first brings salvation to a person. It makes a distinction between that which is of the world, and that which belongs to Christ.

However, once we have chosen that, the word of the cross *doesn't cease*. This is the point that I am trying to make!

He is *still* in His high-priestly garments of the Day of Atonement, *ministering*, not out in the world but, rather, *among His churches*.



That word of the cross is *still coming*, calling us to *continue to turn* to Him. For what reason? It is because all that is *old* in us still needs to be taken out of us! And we need to be established in what is *true*.

We are to change from one degree of glory ('glory' is the shining of a *light*) to another. 2Co 3:18.

### **Jesus is sending star-messengers to gather out of His church all things that offend**

This is what Jesus said about His church; about these seven lampstands among which He is ministering as a Priest.

'The Son of Man [remember, John saw 'One like the Son of Man' clothed in priestly garments *among* the seven lampstands] will send out His angels.' Mat 13:41.

He was not referring to angels such as Michael and Gabriel. He was referring to 'angels' who are *messengers in His hand*. These are the 'stars'. Rev 1:16.

He is sending out angels, or star-messengers, who are being restored and recovered to Him, recovered to His hand, through repentance and faith and according to their sanctification, or their name, from the Father.

He is sending them with the message of the cross.

'The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather *out of His kingdom* all things that offend.' Mat 13:41.

He is not saying that He is gathering out of the *world*. He is gathering out of the *kingdom*.

This means that within this church context, marked by seven lampstands, there is a *great degree of mixture*.

Of course, the letters in the book of Revelation bear this out, don't they? In some of the churches today, there is 'a synagogue of Satan'. There is the spirit of Jezebel; the doctrine of Balaam; the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. There is sexual immorality. There are things sacrificed to idols. There is mixture all the way!

There is the rejection of the communion; Christ being outside; people trusting in their own sight and riches.

This is Jesus speaking to His own church!

However, He is sending angels, or 'stars in His hand' – this is interesting, because the stars belong

to His hand, *so that* they can address the lampstands – *calling* everyone out to *Himself* and *getting rid of* everything that offends.

### **He will gather out of His kingdom those who practise lawlessness**

'The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practise lawlessness.' Mat 13:41.

Lawlessness is really the rejection of 'the law of love'.

'Lawlessness' simply means living by our own 'other law' – everyone living according to the sight of their own eyes.

He is getting rid of those who practise lawlessness, 'and will cast them into the furnace of fire'. Mat 13:42.

Can you see that this is the *lake of fire*, which He lit through His offering journey?

This is the outcome of the *old creation being taken away*. They are forgotten there.

These ones are not gathered from the world. They are gathered out of *His own kingdom*.

'There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.' Mat 13:42.

### **Lawlessness will not receive the word of the cross; the word brings division**

How does He deal with lawlessness?

We would think that, to deal with lawlessness, there would be some angels, or messengers, of Christ coming, saying, 'That is lawlessness! Get out of here!'

That is *not* how it works!

What happens is that those who are angels, or star-messengers in His hand, proclaim *the word of the cross*; and the *word*, as they are proclaiming it, brings this division.

Those who hear the word will either *turn to it* and find repentance, and forsake their own way and be *established in the truth*, or they will *reject that message*.

### **Lawlessness rejects the love and fellowship offered in the word of the cross**

Jesus said that the sign of *the end of the age*, which is when the finished reformation of the church is happening, will be that, because of *lawlessness*, the *love of many would grow cold*. Mat 24:12.

Can you see what is happening?

It is not that Jesus is coming and saying, 'Get out of here, you who are lawless; you have no future!'

It is that, as the *word of the cross* is being proclaimed - the word which is bringing the *love of God* to them - they reject it, in preference for and loyalty to their own law.

They are the lawless ones and they begin to *hate* the very *fellowship* that is being offered to them.

It is *their* love that grows cold, and they 'take themselves out of the kingdom. That is what 'the love of many growing cold' means.

So, the action of the word of the cross is to *rid the kingdom* of all that offends, and to establish *one church*; not seven golden lampstands, but *one golden lampstand* before the throne.

### **God's jealous love brings division between what is of Him and what is not**

Just as we do not judge another, it is foolish to believe that everyone who *claims* to be a Christian is going to heaven. Even Jesus, in His letter in the book of Revelation, said that this is not true.

If we have any understanding of the Scriptures, we will know that that is the truth.

Some may think that all who claim to be Christians are going to heaven, believing that God is *bound* by love; but we forget that God's love is a *jealous love*. That jealous love does not comprehend or encompass anything that is *not of that same nature*.

So, the love of God is actually the *very activity* that is bringing this division.

### **One lampstand before the throne through response to the word of the cross**

*Each person's* focus needs to be *our response to the word*, and the expression of life *in fellowship* with those with whom the Father has placed us.

In the book of Matthew, after Jesus had spoken about the removal of all that offends and those who practise lawlessness, we read, 'Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*' Mat 13:43.

Isn't that amazing! Jesus, at the end of each of His seven letters, declared that very statement: 'He who has an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, let Him hear'.

In explaining the activity of His angels within the context of these seven lampstand churches, He was saying that we are to have *ears to hear* what He is saying, so that we do not choose lawlessness as our mode of conversation and conduct.

He *wants* us to be '*the righteous who shine forth as the sun*'.

Can you see that that is what a lampstand does? It *shines light* in front of it.

If we want to be a part of the church, this is the response that we are to make as we hear the word of the cross come to us.

We see that at the conclusion of the church age, when the refining and sifting process is complete, there are no longer seven lampstands.

There is only *one lampstand*, with seven lamps which are the seven Spirits of God before the throne of the Lamb. Rev 4:5.

The first six verses of Revelation Chapter 4 record the scene of the throne of the Lamb, where we see the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and *the lampstand* before the throne, with *the seven lamps* which are the seven Spirits of God.

### **Hearing and believing what the Spirit is saying to the churches**

What is our beginning point?

We have been noting the reality that seven golden lampstands represent all Christian churches.

And yet, the word of the cross has been ministered by the Spirit in the context of all this diversity, to see an *end* to all that is *lawless* and *of darkness*, and to *establish every person* as a part of Christ's own church, through *fellowship with Him* in the *offering and sufferings* that He *finished* for us.

Our beginning point is *not* our association with a denomination, while accepting that we are part of denominations - and we are a denomination.

If we have time in future weeks, we are going to talk about denominations, particularly in relation to presbyteries and their work and function.

However, the point that I want to make today is that *we are not hearing as denominations*. We are not hearing and responding to *theology*.

We are hearing and believing *what the Spirit is saying* to the churches.

Therefore, our beginning point is to *humble ourselves*, and to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

This is how Jesus ended every one of His letters, and this is how He explained it in the book of Matthew. We are to give our ear to that!

### **Our beginning point is repentance**

The first thing that He is saying is, 'Turn, and come to Me.'

*Repentance* is the first work that we are to do.

In fact, repentance is not just the beginning.

Repentance is to *become a foundation*, so that every time that the Spirit is speaking, we are turning from our own way and turning to Him.

This is the action of the old creation passing away and the new creation being established.

Repentance is the first work and was, in fact, the very first instruction that Christ gave to Ephesus, which was the first church that He addressed in the book of Revelation. Rev 2:5.

*Our beginning point is repentance.*

### **To come to Christ is to be joined to the fellowship of His corporate body**

To come to Christ is to be joined to the fellowship of His corporate body.

We saw that on the Day of Pentecost, didn't we? Peter, the foundation on which the church was being built, proclaimed the word of the cross.

Peter was not the foundation because he had a good theology.

He was the foundation because he had *touching the offering and sufferings of Christ* in a very acute way.

You will remember the trauma for Peter of Christ's second wound, then his recovery by the Sea of Galilee.

This was founding for us *how the cross works to establish messengers* who can proclaim this word of the cross, and to *join people to the very fellowship from which it is proceeding*.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the word of the cross – and what did the people do?

They responded by saying, '*Men and brethren, what must we do?*' Act 2:37.

Can you see that when the word is coming to us, and we are turning to it, our first response will be to recognise that *there is a fellowship that we are to join*.

There is no salvation apart from fellowship.

We do have an individual experience, and we do meet Christ; but it will always, if it is *of Christ*, join us to *a fellowship*.

It is interesting that those people did not say to Peter, '*Peter, what shall we do?*' They recognised that Peter was actually *part of a fellowship*. They said, '*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*'

And what was the first response of Peter? '*Repent and be baptised* for the remission of sins and you will receive the Holy Spirit.' Act 2:38.

Peter was saying that we need to be *turning from our darkness*, and to be oriented a *different way*; and that our beginning point is *baptism into the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings*.

This is *how* the darkness is passing away and true light is coming. 1Jn 2:8.

So, they came to the light for fellowship with those who proclaimed the word and began to have fellowship with each other – the very next day. Act 2:41-42.

Can you see, that if we are *born of God* and we are *joined to that offering*, we will want to have fellowship with others who are born of God, as well?

That is the *very nature of God Himself. He is a fellowship*.

If we are born of God, that will be our nature too.

This fellowship is the context in which we lay down our lives to reveal the name of one another, rather than our own name.

The book of Revelation recorded that Jesus said that, in relation to Ephesus, if we return, through repentance, to this first work, He will give to us the right to eat of the tree of life. Rev 2:4-5, 7.

Repentance is the first work. We are coming to Christ, *turning to Him* as an action of repentance. And Jesus said that if that becomes a foundation in our life, leading to fellowship, 'I will give you the right to eat from the tree of life.'

### **Restored to participation in the communion**

And what is the tree of life?

*It is His body and blood, which is a communion meal!*

He is restoring to us a communion meal and giving us access to His own table.

Why is this important? It is because the communion meal was the *beginning of His offering journey* through which He established His lampstand church.

And, as we partake, and are restored to *participation* in the communion, we are joined to *that same church* and are coming up with Him, not living according to a series of old principles, but walking in *newness* every day.

This is recorded in the book of Revelation. 'To him who overcomes [through repentance, returning to do the first work, which is fellowship], I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.' Rev 2:7.

The communion is a *fellowship* with those whom the Father has placed us with in the body, through our connection to a communion, or fellowship, meal.

As we noted, there are some churches who do not understand the significance of the communion – we noted Laodicea – however, the Lord is 'knocking' on the door of their heart. Rev 3:20.

While we are not to judge one another, we are hearing what the Spirit is saying about the communion, and we *can pray* for one another.

We can testify of what the Lord has restored to us.

And, indeed, we do find and can talk about the way that the Lord establishes stars in His hands, who are given to minister to *all* of the lampstand churches.

It is a precious thought that this word is going to every church, with no denominational distinctions.

Communion is the word of the New Covenant that causes us to *turn in repentance*.

It is how we come to Him and *are built together*, with Him, through His offering and sufferings.

### **Coming to Him – built together as living stones in His temple**

We said at the beginning, in relation to Jesus, that He was the Branch who branched out and was *building His temple*.

So, there are two elements now.

There is a *church* – that is, a lampstand – which becomes a *temple*.

It is a context in which there is *offering* activity being made.

Peter drew our attention to this in his first letter – 'coming to Him'. 1Pe 2:4.

The first initiative is to *come to Christ*; to respond to the word of the cross which is drawing us to Himself to receive the salvation that He has finished for us.

'Coming to Him as to a living stone [He is the *Living Stone*], rejected indeed by men.' 1Pe 2:4.

We do not want to be those who preference humanistic theology over the solid foundation of the Rock, who is Christ.

We do not want to be those who *reject the offering of Christ* because of our faith in theology.

'Coming to Him as a living stone, rejected indeed by men [this speaks of that which was rejected by the Jewish theology – the theology of the Old Covenant], but chosen by God and precious, *you also*, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.' 1Pe 2:4-5.

It is the word that is calling us to come out from the old creation and to be established in the *new*.