

A Lampstand Survey

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This morning I'll be sharing from the first chapter of the publication that you've been handed on your way in titled; 'Walking in the Spirit in a Lampstand Church'. This is the publication that accompanied the recent Youth Seminar that was recently hosted in Brisbane and then Bowral. As we've been considering this regional combined Sunday, we felt it timely to *take heed* to the things we have come to know and believe through this past season, particularly in relation to our journey through COVID. In order to focus this morning's meditation, I want to pose two questions that relate to the first article in the booklet:

- What is a Lampstand church? (And do you believe in a Lampstand church?)
- And have you chosen to belong to this Lampstand church, where the Father has chosen to plant you? (And the reason that these two questions are so important is because this is where Christ is speaking to you).

Where is Christ speaking to me?

- In this season, God the Father wants to illuminate us to the necessity to hear what Christ is saying. As He articulated, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. *Hear Him!*' Mat 17:5. Why is this important? The Father is only speaking to you and me about our sonship *through* Christ. And Christ is only speaking to you and me about our sonship through His star-messenger and a star-messenger is only speaking to those joined to the fellowship of a Lampstand church.
- The Father wants to illuminate us concerning the specific *context* in which Christ is speaking to us. Like the church in Sardis, the Lord is calling us to remember therefore *how* we have received and heard. So, where is Christ speaking to us? He is speaking to us in a *Lampstand church!* The Scriptures bear this out in great clarity.
- 'Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands was *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. Rev 1:12-16; Heb 4:12.
- Three points to note; (1) we are illuminated to a Lampstand church, as we turn from our former modes, teachings and understanding. (2) As we turn, we see Christ among His Lampstand churches and (3a) His voice sounded like many waters and I'll insert *many messengers* and (3b) its effect is likened to a sharp two-edged sword, which is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb 4:12. This is the word of the cross that cutting some in and cutting some out.

- So let's acknowledge our first dilemma; the hearing of His voice does not imply that you will understand what He is saying. That can be quite an offense for some. When Peter was confronted on this point He confessed, by faith, 'Lord to whom (where else) shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (even if at first I don't understand).' Like Peter, we each need to confess, by faith, that the word of our salvation is only found here, in this Lampstand church where Christ is speaking to us. And as we remain joined in fellowship we will receive understanding.

God the Father places each one

- Our second dilemma and a key being able to hear Christ, is to accept that God the Father places us in the body where He chooses. He does this by 'planting' us in a location among a community of His people. In truth, we have no say where He plants us, our only choice is to choose what He has chosen for us. That is, we need to choose to embrace the location within the Lampstand church where the Father has planted us. We do this by simply believing and obeying the word that calls us to abide. The Scriptures then liken us to a tree planted by the river. Psa 1:3.

Choosing what He has chosen

- For many of us, we have been born into, and have grown up in, this church. This reality is on account of the faith of our parents or grandparents. But even though our parents or grandparents may have chosen this Lampstand – every person must choose this for themselves, and Christ makes the issue of choice personal – just between you and Him.
- In reference to the John 6 account, He says to each one of us, 'Does this requirement offend you?' And what was that requirement? It was 'unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you'. Jn 6:53. Our choice is not simply to join team Jesus! Our choosing, will be demonstrated by our participation in His agape meal. And Jesus clearly provokes us to make a choice just as He did Peter; by asking 'or do you also want to (choose to) go away or go another way?' Jn 6:67.
- We know that our choice is put under pressure through offence. The offence is not what others do to us, but rather, that we have become an offence to Christ. Christ reveals that our mode of connection to Him and His brethren is as one fallen from the heights. Just when you expect a pat on the back for choosing Him, He informs you that you need to 'remember from where you've fallen'.
- And this is a key point – the culture of *agape* fellowship with God and one another is the high calling of our sonship. Accordingly, the capacity for agape fellowship is not innate within *any* person. It must be learned from Christ and so we must get to where He is speaking. And it is this agape fellowship that are the heights to which we are being restored.
- So our greatest danger now, concerning this Lampstand church is not COVID, it's not the next birth pang, it's not wars and rumours of wars, it's the loss of first love or the agape fellowship among the presbytery and among the flock. That is why the Lord calls us to repent quickly. Now before we press on I want to take a moment to look back and understand the particular journey for the Victorian church.

The lessons of COVID

- During 2020-2021 parts of Victoria were subject to over 260 days of strict lockdown - the most days in lock down of any modern democratic region. And this number is in addition to many more days of restricted movements and limited freedoms, which extend even to the current day.
- As a church community, we were initially prohibited from meeting in public and then eventually from gathering in small groups in our homes; instead, we came under a kind of house arrest. Now I trust with hindsight you are able to give thanks to the Lord for His loving mercy in bringing us low in order that we might be properly joined to His presbytery where the Lord taught us how we might be established in the culture of agape fellowship with Him. Let's take a moment to reflect on the key elements that He led us in.
- We were initially invited to receive a *weekly communion service* live-streamed to our homes. This was a crafted ministry package in which presbyters from among the QLD fellowship invited us to join them on the ground of fellowship where we could have fellowship with them noting that their fellowship was with the Father and the Son. Who could forget Luke, Colin and Damien leading us in song and worship, ministering words of application, exhortation, and comfort? Who could forget the ministry focus of Vic, Peter, Bruce, David (and others) whereby the Lord taught us the four-fold foundations of fellowship; the apostle's doctrine, the apostle's fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer? Acts 2:42. *Though we ought be teachers by now, we had need to be taught again.* Heb 5:12.
- At this time the weekly live stream ministry was accompanied by the sending of local first fruits brethren to every home inviting a *fellowship discussion* in relation to the communion word. This provoked the mobilisation of some 50 or so men across the region. Do you remember those visits? Who could forget the communion elements still being part of those early gatherings? But of greater significance, was our reconnection with each other and the intimacy of true fellowship being restored within households; children with their parents, husbands and wives and households learning to receive those sent. A strange mixture of emotions sat among us, great uncertainty about what was happening whilst acknowledging that the Lord was bringing restoration among His church. We were learning how to meet the word, learning to share testimony, confessing our faults and our faith and learning again how to invite our brethren to pray for us. The Lord was establishing us in the four foundations of fellowship.
- In addition to the weekly live stream communion service and the weekly communion visitation program was the provision of a weekly presbytery *teaching word*. For the most part this took the form of Peter Hay and David Baker pre-recording teaching sessions that we continue to be blessed with right up to this current day.
- The extent of the various lock downs limited our movements and activities and restored to us one commodity well exhausted in most homes prior to lock down; we were given time and then the opportunity to re-order our household priorities. The Lord emptied our busy programs and removed the impediments to fellowship within our own homes

and with other homes and he began to fill us with His word, joining us to His fellowship, where He was granting to us faith so that we could be joined to His offering journey, where we were being healed.

- Prior to COVID, many of us were simply travelling through life, busy and focussed on whatever had become our priority. But the Lord came among us with His eyes as a flame of fire and began to expose and address the motivations of our heart. He particularly addressed the complacent attitude that said '*we are rich and have need of nothing*'. Rev 3:22. In His mercy the Lord showed us that the true condition of our families, of our marriages and of His congregation was far from rich, instead showing us that we were in great and even desperate need. You might liken our condition to the luke-warm or half-hearted church of Laodicea described as *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked*. Rev 3:17.
- During this season of visitation, the Lord was inviting us to make a choice. He knocked upon the door of each home, desiring to come in and sup with us. And that's the point we must not forget, it was Christ who came to your door and knocked by the preaching of His word (in the mouth of His star messenger), dignifying each home to open the door to Him and then to invite Him in so that we could learn and be established in the culture of true fellowship.
- As ones have been joined to His agape meal, they are testifying that the treasure of their calling as a son of God is buried in the field of fellowship with the presbytery, which is fellowship with the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:3.
- We now bear witness that many are selling all, including their most prized possession; their own understanding of the gospel, in order that they might buy this field. Have you sold all to buy this field?
- Toward the end of 2020, the communion elements (the biscuit and the cup) remained a peculiar feature of the weekly visitations. And so it was that the great impediment of sacramentalism was identified, and we were directed to repent from this mode of participation (and not just concerning communion). Heavenly places that we had been raised to in our baptism and where we were being invited to live and walk in fellowship with Yahweh and each other in first love, was the heights that sacramentalism had pushed us from. And like the Ephesian church we were being provoked to remember the heights from which we had fallen. Praise the Lord that He is now restoring us to the first love fellowship of His agape meal, in heavenly places.
- So, what now? What did the lessons of COVID teach us? In short, He's come to invite you to choose this Lampstand church. Not to simply be carried along by what every one else is doing but to personally and accountably choose. Many have had the theology of a Lampstand church but now He's come to join you to its fellowship.

What is a lampstand church?

- A lampstand church is a fellowship! And the apostle John was more specific He described it as the 'fellowship of the presbytery'. Joh 1:3. As we discussed earlier, the

Scriptures reveal the culture of His agape fellowship is the ‘heights’ of heavenly places to which we are being restored. Eph 2:6.

- Understanding and participating in the fellowship of the presbytery as part of a Lampstand church requires *illumination*. Jesus described it as a mystery with two unique aspects: seven lampstand churches and seven star messengers. Rev 1:20.

Star messengers

- The ministry of star messengers is depicted in the Scriptures as ‘flashes of lightning’. The flashes of lightning refer to the points of illumination as messengers proclaim the gospel of God. The apostle Paul said that you know these ones, because they are not only pleased to impart the gospel of God, but their own lives also. 1Th 2:8.
- Every Christian needs to be obedient to a word from heaven in the mouth of a presbytery – for that word is necessary for your development as a son of God. As we read, ‘See that you do not refuse Him who speaks from heaven.’ Heb 12:25. Paul rejoiced that the Thessalonians received the word preached as being from God.

One presbytery and local leaders

- A lampstand is a fellowship of churches with one presbytery (star messenger) for the whole lampstand. We are connected to the fellowship of the presbytery because we receive the word and program of the presbytery. For example, the pre-recorded bible study each week, called ‘the presbytery fellowship word’ is directed to every household of the lampstand.
- Even though we belong to one Lampstand, God the Father has placed each one of us in a specific congregation. It is within this community of firstfruits believers that we are to lay down our lives in agape fellowship.
- The Lord appoints overseers and elders in every local congregation to shepherd the flock. The Lord also calls us to submit and obey the ones whom He has appointed to a specific work in each local congregation.

A sufficient provision

- As a result of these local firstfruits brethren being connected in one Spirit with the presbytery, the lamp set in each congregation is alight. The lamp in a local congregation is not the presbytery, but rather, the fellowship of the word.
- In the same way that we don’t float between congregations within the lampstand, also, we do not need to ‘resource gather’ or *binge listen* to every spoken word, by every messenger, in every local congregation. We accept that the presbytery word and the local expression of the fellowship of that word is sufficient for your sonship.
 - We do not complain that the local fellowship of the word is not adequate.
- We take heed to that word by giving diligence to multiply the fellowship of that word in the local congregation that we’ve been planted. Each person is to multiply that word as a conversation of faith. This is what it looks like for a person to be planted and to participate in a lampstand church!

- BUT, in order for any person to be joined in first love fellowship of a Lampstand church they must be delivered from all the alternate modes of relating together and some of these are listed on page 9.
- Suffice to say that the Lord was and is showing us that all these alternate modes is not the first love fellowship that we were raised to in our baptism.
- Let me just say it again, the Lord came among us in a most sovereign way in order to illuminate us regarding how far we'd fallen from first love. Said another way, how far we'd departed from agape fellowship with Him and with those joined to this fellowship – which is heavenly places. Did you register how far you'd fallen?
- But in His loving mercy He came to find us. And He made His intentions abundantly clear, he shut the church buildings, he shut the church program, he shut any house based expression. He said, no visitors, minimal movement and He said I want your attention!!! And I think He got it. He constrained us within our homes and then He sent His word by His messengers, knocking on the door via the livestream ministry. He did everything but turn the TV on. And in all that He did, which included removing every impediment, every distraction and every excuse - He left you and I with the dignity to choose!
- Now if you've become religiously institutionalised and you've simply checked out and this place is just a network of old friends and gathered memories then the past two years was simply a world health crisis followed by the political manoeuvrings to attempt to manage it. So the only choice you exercised was to choose how to survive the chaos. But I hope that many more of us here today are in awe of the mercy and grace of God to come so deliberately to us in the way that He did.
- But this clear initiative toward you still requires you to choose it. You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink.

Response

- In response to today's meditation, I want to direct you to three key questions posed by Luke in His article, and I'd love you to consider these and to find opportunity to testify of your choice and commitment to the fellowship of the presbytery within this Lampstand – and also testify of your repentance from alternative modes of connection.
1. Have I chosen to belong to this Lampstand church?
 2. Do I believe there are messengers in this church speaking the word of my sonship?
 3. Am I fully submitted to the fellowship of the presbytery?