

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **The Candlestick - the servant's need for light and guidance**

When I was young, I had a game called Magic Robot. You placed the little robot figure in the centre of a circle of questions and pointed him to one of them. You then moved the robot into the centre of a circle of answers and he 'magically' turned round to point at the correct answer! Apparently it was all done with magnets but, as an eight year old, it amazed and impressed me. Unfortunately, some of us have never really grown up and we still look to God as a kind of celestial Magic Robot who should give us instant, clear and simple answers to all of life's difficult questions and choices.

Today we are continuing our look at the servant's chamber that the Shunamite woman prepared for Elisha. 2 Kings 4:10 tells us that she said to her husband "Let us put a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand". Our subject today is the lampstand or candlestick and we will consider this under the heading, 'The servant's need for light and guidance'. I will divide up this morning's talk into three sets of three points.

- Three things that light does
- Three principles of God's guidance
- Three problems of guidance.

This series of talks is all about the provision for a servant. Paul makes it clear in Romans 6:20-22 that we are all God's servants. "You were the servants of sin... But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God." If we have been set free from sin by accepting Christ as our Saviour, then we have stopped being servants (or slaves) of sin and become servants of God. The point of a servant is to serve! The concept of a servant requires a master, who is giving the instructions, and a servant who listens and does what he is told. What possible use is Christian service if it is not directed by God? A servant who does what he pleases is not actually a servant at all! Therefore light and guidance are absolutely essential for the servants of God. Let's consider our first set of three points...

### **Three things that light does**

1. Light illuminates
2. Light removes fear
3. Light raises the spirit

#### **1. Light illuminates**

That is the very nature of light; it makes things visible and evident. In John 3:20, Jesus says, "Everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light". The first thing God's light does for us is to show us our own sinfulness. This is not pleasant and we would naturally hide away from it, but 1 John 1:5 states clearly, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all". The moment we enter the presence of God, our sins and sinful nature are exposed for exactly what they are. But if we have come to God through faith in the Lord Jesus we are now completely changed. As Paul says, in Ephesians 5:8-10, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light... finding out what is acceptable to the Lord". So now, far from being repelled by the light, we are attracted to it. Indeed, we have become light ourselves in the Lord. Put simply, God's light allows us to see things. First it let us see what we were really like. Now it lets us see what we have become. It also shows us what the world is really like. We sometimes say after a significant experience that we are "seeing things in a whole new light". This is precisely what happens when we are converted.

If God Himself is light, His word is also light. Psalm 119:105 makes this plain, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path". God's word sheds a light both on my immediate concerns - my next step - and also my whole Christian pathway - my path. If I want wisdom for my day to day decisions, or if I wish to see the purpose and glory of my whole life and spiritual blessings, the place to discover both is the Bible.

## **2. Light removes fear**

Both my children are still quite small and like to have a light on when they are sleeping. No matter how old we are, we all retain some fear of the dark. The dark contains things that we cannot see, and our imagination will quickly build monsters of some kind, and a rising sense of fear. In the days of Moses, God spoke to the people out of a "thick darkness". Since they lived before the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus they could not know about the revelation of the Father or the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. The darkness was therefore necessary for their protection. Nobody could look on the face of God and live. The Bible normally uses the phrase "the fear of the Lord" in the sense of reverential trust and respect, but often in the Old Testament the thought of terror is not very far away. The light we now enjoy has removed this fear, at least it should have. The complete revelation of the love of the Father for us, and the work of the Son on our behalf, should have removed all terror. Indeed our approach is now meant to be in "boldness". Of course the reverence should remain, but the light should have chased the terror away. This light should also take the fear out of other things and situations.

## **3. Light raises the spirit**

I am recording this talk in June. The longest day of the year is approaching, so light arrives early in the morning and stays late into the evening. It is a fact of nature that a sunny day tends to brighten our mood and make us feel more optimistic. This natural phenomenon has its parallel in the spiritual realm. Christians are children of light, not just because they are the offspring of the One who is light, but also because light is now their natural habitat. Walking in the light is the way to satisfaction. In years gone by, horses were used to pull loads underground in the mines. They spent almost their whole lives in the dark. This was neither natural nor healthy. Believers are not meant to live their lives in the dark either. We need the constant 'lift' of being consciously in God's presence. We need the light of God's word to shine on us daily. If we are not regularly speaking to and learning about, our God and Saviour then we will become spiritually depressed. People who live near the North Pole and endure long winters when there is no light for almost 24 hours each day, suffer very high rates of depression. If we live for 24 hours a day, day after day, without God's light, we will experience a kind of spiritual depression. Thankfully we have the privilege of 24 hours of sunshine every day, even those of us who live in the rainy North of England!

## **Three principles of God's guidance**

It is the great mystery of our age. God has shone His great light on us and urgently wants to lead and guide us but we all find guidance one of the hardest things in Christianity! We all struggle, and I have the same struggles as others, but I will try and draw out three important principles from God's word.

1. God wants to guide
2. I must follow and obey
3. God wants to teach me to think like Him!

### **1. God wants to guide**

We often fall into the trap of thinking that God has to be persuaded to offer us guidance. That He is somehow very reluctant, and it takes much cajoling and pleading in prayer, before He can be persuaded to help us. When we put it in plain words like that, we can see immediately how silly the idea is, but it creeps into our way of thinking very easily. We pray regularly for guidance about a matter and we receive no clear voice from heaven. The suspicion enters our minds that God needs a bit of encouragement. But, in Psalm 32:8, the Lord says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye". "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" says Solomon in Proverbs 3:6. The Bible makes it very clear that it is God's desire and intention to guide us. This might not sound like a very helpful principle. However, recognising God's character and disposition is vital to all of Christianity, and central to seeing guidance from a scriptural perspective. If we persist in seeing God as in some way reluctant to answer us, we will be tempted to somehow try harder in our prayers. "If only I can summon up more faith, God will surely answer my request" we think. "If I am more fervent in my prayers and claim God's promises more enthusiastically, He may be more forthcoming" we reason. "Perhaps I need to try fasting" we say to ourselves as we get ever more frustrated. I am certainly not arguing against faith, fervency and fasting! We can surely do with more of all three. The problem is that we have a mistaken belief that *I* need to make things happen. The emphasis has shifted from God's provision to my persuasion. We have become political lobbyists trying to get the powerful to do what we want, rather than eager listeners to a God who longs to make Himself heard. We cannot hope to hear God speaking to us if we have fundamentally misunderstood His attitude towards us and desires for us.

### **2. I must follow and obey**

I am ashamed of how quickly, and how often I forget, this simple essential of guidance. Just as a servant who does not serve is not really a servant at all, so it is simply perverse to ask for guidance at the same time as refusing to

follow and obey. I occasionally train people in the use of IT and there is nothing more futile, or more frustrating, than telling a person what to do when they are not listening to a word, but busily pressing keys! To describe me as guiding such a person would be to abuse the word. Do you recognise a similar scenario in God's attempts to guide you? God speaks to you about a certain issue but you are simply not listening. Guidance is something that we learn by experience. God speaks to me about something; I hear and do what He asks. He speaks again and I respond again. So I start to recognise His voice. I also start to build confidence in Him and bring more things to Him. In this way guidance is very like faith. I learn by doing and I can progress to greater things only as I learn in small things. Abraham, the great biblical example of faith, did not begin with the offering of Isaac; that was the outcome of many years learning to trust God. Very often we forget this process. We confidently manage all the small issues of life ourselves and ignore God's inconvenient attempts to speak to us. When some large issue or decision arises that we feel we cannot cope with, we turn to God for guidance! Then we are surprised and disappointed when no voice speaks from heaven. We want to keep God in a little box, ready to bring Him out when we have urgent need of Him. But God is not a genie in Aladdin's lamp and will not be treated like that. Guidance is really about following. A large part of our problem is that what we really want is our own version of the Magic Robot. I want God to tell me which university I should attend, what job to take, and whom I should marry. In truth I don't want guidance so much as a heavenly Citizens' Advice Bureau. Of course, every believer should look to the Lord for the big decisions I have listed. My point is that God wants to direct every part of my life, not just the bits I want help with. If I do not regularly listen to the Lord speak about the small things in life, how can I expect to recognise His voice when I want Him to lead me in the big choices? It is not that God sulks because I would not listen before. The problem is with me. I have not learned to recognise God's voice in the small things and so I cannot hear it now in the large things.

### **3. God wants to teach me to think like Him!**

This really brings us to the heart of the issue. Far too often we are on a different wavelength to God. I am thinking about education, career, family, while God is thinking about holiness, sanctification, giving of thanks. It is not that God is not interested in my concerns. Rather He is more interested in the person I am. He wants me to take everything to Him, not so that I will never make any mistakes, but because that is the best way I can learn what He is like and learn to think like Him. That ultimately is God's will for me. Let me quote Psalm 32 again, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you." God does not want to guide us by the mechanical processes required for horses. They must be restrained and physically directed in the right way. At times we secretly wish that God would guide us like this. That He would "take over the reins" and ensure that we go the right way, that things would be so obvious that we could make no mistake. However God's lovely design is that we should understand His thoughts for us. He wants us to turn left or right, as we understand His intention, not because He makes us. "I will guide you with My eye" the Lord says. This lovely expression helps us understand a lot about the way that God wishes to lead us. If I am to experience this kind of guidance, I will have to look constantly at the Lord's face. If I am fixated with the circumstances of the issue itself, I will inevitably miss this subtle guidance with the eye. If I want to know which way to turn, I have to look at the Lord Himself and see where His eye is looking, and then I will choose to go that way. Sometimes I may not fully understand why He wants me to go a particular way but, if I follow this way of guidance, I shall get to know the Lord better and better and I will find that my whole way of thinking has changed. I will begin to think about things the way that God Himself does, and that is His great aim.

There are certainly many problems that we have with being guided by the Lord. Let's look briefly at three of them.

### **Three problems of guidance**

1. Divergent Goals
2. Impatience
3. NOISE!

#### **1. Divergent Goals**

We are often on a different wavelength to God because we have different goals. I want to be comfortable. I want as little worry and as few problems as possible. God is more concerned about my growth and maturity as a believer. Sometimes He deliberately sends difficulties and suffering, to teach me to trust Him or to help me understand the sorrow that the consequences of sin in the world cause Him. This difference in outlook can make it very hard for us to recognise God's guiding. I may make a decision that I believe to be in the Lord's will only to find that it results in distressing consequences. Then I immediately think that this cannot possibly have been God's plan. 1 Peter 4:19 makes it plain that the will of God sometimes does involve our suffering: "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him". God wants to change my goals so that they align better with His. When I am seeking God's guidance for what job I should do, what are the criteria I am considering? Maybe I am thinking about salary, promotion prospects and job satisfaction. All these are worth considering, but God is probably concentrating on how much a job may consume my time and energy at the cost of my service to Him, and whether the working

atmosphere will be helpful to my spiritual growth. You see, if God and I are viewing the same issue with different goals and priorities in mind, I am going to find it very hard to understand what His will is in this matter.

## **2. Impatience**

I must confess that I struggle with this. Perhaps it is because I belong to a generation that has become accustomed to instant responses. Everything from hot water, to information; from a new car to a new garden, is available instantly. We have forgotten how to wait. Waiting frays our nerves. Not only do we demand that God makes His will known to us, we want to know what it is **now!** The exhortation, "Ye have need of patience", in Hebrews 10:36, might have been written especially for us. Perhaps God wants me to learn something else while I wait for His guidance. Perhaps He does not want me to do anything just at the moment. It is often said that God has three basic answers to our prayers: yes, no, and wait. I think 'wait' might be the hardest one for us to accept.

This spills over into a tendency to help God answer our prayers. We become like Jacob. God promised Jacob great blessing. Jacob's problem was that he could not trust God to deliver. Jacob was the ultimate schemer; he always had a plan, usually a devious one, to acquire the things that God had freely promised to give him. Our impatience often leads us into the same ceaseless activism to acquire, by our own means, things that God has promised to supply Himself. We would get ourselves into much less trouble if we were all like David! David, you remember, had been promised by God that he would replace Saul as Israel's king. On several occasions he had the opportunity to "hurry things along" by killing Saul. David was never tempted by these shortcuts. He knew that God would make him King in His time and that interfering would be foolish. David understood much more about the leading of God than Jacob did.

The final problem with guidance I want to consider is...

## **3. NOISE!**

We live in a world that is both physically and metaphorically very noisy. Radio and TV have ensured that quiet moments are very rare. Even church meetings have fewer and fewer opportunities for quiet thought, without speech or music in the background. Perhaps we should not be surprised that we find it difficult to hear the "still, small voice" that spoke to Elijah; there is just so much competition. Our lives are increasingly hectic. Our job is very demanding of our time and concentration. Our family and church responsibilities consume more of our week. Then we need to cram in all of those leisure activities ... Hopefully we retain room in the day for Bible study and prayer but, frankly, like everything else in our lives, they are rushed and rather sketchy. Understanding the will of God and being guided by Him are not activities that we can press into a few seconds here and there. It simply does not work. Learning to think like God will inevitably take time. Guidance requires contemplation and meditation on God's word. Unfortunately these two words have almost vanished from our vocabulary! I believe that Satan's biggest success in the last 100 years has been to make life busier for everybody. Being too busy to think seriously about what we read in God's word has been a hugely successful way of keeping Christians from growing and following closely after their Saviour. Having a problem with guidance? The answer might be as simple as slowing down and taking time to listen in silence.

## **In conclusion**

The servant's need for light and guidance is fundamental. Without them it is not possible to serve God at all. Thankfully there is an inexhaustible supply. Before there can cease to be light, God will have to cease to exist! Let us thank God then for His supply, and His constant desire and determination to communicate with us. Then let us set about the lifelong task of learning to listen to and obey His guidance with renewed determination. Then we can look forward to the day we will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord".

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