

## **"To See that God is in the 'Small' Stuff"**

### *Zechariah 4*

Two weeks ago we were listening to Jesus tell the parable of the sower/soils. About how the sower casts the seed and depending on the soil conditions the seed grows. What we take for granted in our understanding of the parable is that we don't question the absurdity that something as small as a seed planted in the ground will actually produce something much larger that we can actually eat or can feed hundreds of people. Just by planting something really small.

None of us ever question the sanity of a farmer when he sows tiny seeds in the ground believing by faith that something productive will grow from that seed. Nor do any of us doubt that if I feed this newborn baby everyday a little bit here and a little bit there, and love on it a little bit each day, and teach him or her a new thing every day or so that he or she will grow into fully functional, able to communicate and love human being. And none of us question the intelligence of a builder who digs a hole in the ground believing that a few months later by pouring some concrete here, then building some walls there, then putting on a roof, adding siding, wiring, plumbing, drywall, paint, floor ... that there will be a lovely new house for someone to live in.

So then why do we doubt the power of God to do something amazing when only a few people get together to pray here or just a few people get together to study God's Word together or only a few people get together and sing songs or just a small group of people make cookies or rake leaves or put a Christmas float in a parade or have an evangelistic service in a backyard? Most of life functions by doing something small over a long period of time in order to produce something large or productive. And that includes the spiritual life as well.

This morning we come to Zechariah 4 where the remnant of Jewish exiles who have returned to Israel from Babylon with permission (initially) to rebuild the temple, are now discouraged because it's not as big as it was before; they are not as numerous as they were before and they no longer have a son of David ruling on the throne. So discouraged are they that after rebuilding the foundation in Ezra 3, that now it has sat dormant for 15 years. At this point God sends two prophets - Haggai and Zechariah – to work together to encourage God's people to continue the work because God is in it, even if it's smaller and even if the people are fewer. God is in the smaller stuff.

During these 15 unproductive years (536-521 BC) the people of Israel have been busy (according to Haggai 1) at building their own houses and not God's. So Haggai explains to them that if they are wondering why there's a drought or that they have little to show for their hard work on the land, that they better reread Deut. 28-29 and realize that God said He wouldn't bless the land with rain if Israel failed to obey Him. Then we read in Haggai 1:12,

*<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup> So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, <sup>15</sup> on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.*

As the work continues God sends Zechariah as well, and He gives Zechariah 8 dream/visions from 1:7-6:15 to communicate to Zerubbabel and Joshua – the key leaders – to hang in there and lead the people to finish rebuilding the temple, even if it is smaller than it used to be. And God

arranges these 8 visions in such a way that Vision 4 & 5 are central and vision 4 is for Joshua the high priest while vision 5 is for Zerubbabel, the governor of Israel who is also a descendent of David. So already we see how God has arranged for these two men who followed God, to be in these two key positions of leadership; Joshua a faithful high priest over the temple and its workings and Zerubbabel, a descendent of David who is the leader over Israel, even though they are still under the authority of Persia.

And this is what the people are to be encouraged by; a high priest who follows the Word and a descendent of David in charge of Israel who also follows the Word. No, there's no king and no, the temple isn't like Solomon's but God is still working. And the point of the dream vision of the lampstand is that

## **God's Work is Accomplished through His Word By His Spirit** **(4:1-6)**

In this middle dream Zerubbabel is awakened and once again asked by the angel what does he see? And he sees a lampstand that is similar to but different than the Menorah that was in the holy place. This menorah has instead of 7 separate branches with oil lamps on it, has a large bowl on it from which are 7 pipes leading to 7 lamps. And an olive tree on each side of the lampstand that continually fills the bowl through two pipes attached directly to the tree. Not unlike tapping maple syrup with a line.

The menorah was the only light source in the temple. No windows. The menorah was also a visible reminder of God's presence as the source of light and it was a symbol of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. The twelve loaves of bread in the holy place were symbolic of the twelve tribes. So the Holy Place reminded Israel that God's light is continually available to His people and He is always watching them. That's why the priests were never to let the oil run out. They trimmed the wicks and monitored the olive oil supplies twice a day.

God Himself tells us here the olive oil symbolizes His empowering presence. Only the vision assures Zerubbabel and Joshua that God's power is always available to them. They need to

### ***Access the always available Word and Spirit (vv.1-3)***

It's easy to skip over the first part of v.6 as if it introduces v.6;

*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*

When the angel responds to Zerubbabel's question what are these, the angel says 'This is the word of the Lord ...' It's not just that you will build the temple by the ongoing available power of the Holy Spirit but by listening to God's Word which tells you the power of the Holy Spirit is available. Why did Israel go into exile? Because they didn't obey the Word of God, which tells you God will empower you to obey His Word. I emphasize this because the Word and the Spirit are in harmony with each other. The Spirit will never do anything that goes against the Word of God. How do we know to depend on God's Spirit? Because His Word says so.

We also need to remember, the word for Spirit is the same for wind/breath. When God says you will do this by the power of My Spirit He is associating that with the creative power of His breath that brings life. What awakens the dead bones in Israel? The breath/Spirit of God. Zerubbabel and the returned exiles were discouraged because of limited resources. God says 'Quit looking at what

you don't have and start seeing what you do have available to you – Me! The Creator of the world. The one who brings life from death. Darkness to life. Makes seas split in two (days of Moses). Can cause the sun to stand still (days of Joshua). Can reverse the sun (days of Isaiah). Makes the blind see (days of Jesus). Can make people hear foreigners speak in their own language (days of the apostles). Can split a mountain in half (days of Jesus' return).

God is saying to Zerubbabel and all of us;

### ***Trust in God's resources more than your own (vv.4-6)***

The temple was a ruin hill. It had to be cleaned up before they could start to rebuild. This is what God might be referring to in v.7 as 'the great mountain', this big mess but as we'll see it can also refer to other things that the people used as excuses why they couldn't do what God said. Remember, God gave them permission 16 years ago to start rebuilding. He even gave them financial resources to start the building from Cyrus king of Persia when they first went back. He even provided cedar lumber from the Syrians which we read about in Haggai 1. But then opposition set in and they stopped. They used the cedar to repair their own houses which Haggai rebuked them for.

Now how do they do the job? They've squandered the few resources they had. God says, 'you forget you have Me.' Don't we do the same? We look at what we don't have forgetting we have God Himself on our side. We say we believe He's always with us and knows our every need and is capable of doing anything He desires. But we don't always live like we believe these things. And when we pray and God doesn't do what we ask its not a sign of His weakness but for us to trust Him for a reason He hasn't disclosed to us yet. He has a purpose that we can't see but need to trust Him for.

The angel continues to encourage Zerubbabel regarding the monumental task of rebuilding the temple. He declares from God,

<sup>7</sup> *"What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'"*

<sup>8</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>9</sup> "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you."*

<sup>10</sup> *"Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel."*

The angel says this seemingly unmovable mountain will become a cleared plain because

## **With God We Can Overcome Every Obstacle** **(4:7-10)**

In Ezra 3 we read about when Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple. We read that there were shouts of joy but also wailing of tears by the older folks because it wasn't going to be the same as Solomon's. Smaller size. Less gold probably. Not the drawing card it once was that perhaps they took too much pride in. This is the 'small thing' that God says don't despise. Just because its small doesn't mean God isn't in it! That's the whole point. When God speaks through Haggai to the same people, after they said they would obey God, He said

*Hag. 1:13* *I am with you," declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup> So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God.*

So God's reassurance to Zerubbabel and the people was to help them remove their own personal obstacles as well as tackle the physical task before them. Ezra 3 points out that there was the obstacle of

### ***Doubt from the inside (v.10; Ezra 3:11-14)***

That God said 'Don't despise the day of small things' was because some of them obviously had. We read in Ezra 3:11-14 that the crying was a shouts as the shouts of joy. We all know too well that we have a tendency to listen to the complainers and doubters more so than the encouragers. While some were saying, 'We're going to build the temple again!' others were saying things like 'I suppose you can call it a temple!' or 'You call that a temple! Now Solomon's temple, that was a temple.' Or 'what good is a temple if we can't govern ourselves? The Persians will probably nix the whole project.' And that gets depressing.

They had a 'small temple' mentality. You've heard it before.

*"We only had six last night for Bible study."*

*"Well, only half of us were here for worship last week."*

*"We only have a few young families coming these days."*

*"Only 3 kids showed up for Sunday School."*

Sound familiar? Some things never change do they? Those are despising words. Those are words that discourage because we judge by sight and not live by faith. God said we are to give thanks in all things. Not despise what seems small and not appreciate what God is doing through a few. Everything that's big began small. And just because it's not big doesn't mean it isn't making a difference for God. What if we had a goal every day that we will not despise the small things and thank God for every small thing every day? What if along with that goal we asked God to show us one person we can encourage today? And what if through our encouragement to that one person they did the same for another? Do you think that would change us, maybe even mature us and grow spiritually? Which is God's goal for us every day.

We need to make sure we're not despising the small things God is doing all around us for sure, because we can guarantee we will experience, like Israel here did,

### ***Persecution on the outside (v.9; Ezra 4)***

Zerubbabel and Joshua as the leaders were the target of their neighbours' criticism as we read in Ezra 4. First they tried to sweet talk Zerubbabel into letting them have a part in it but Zerubbabel knew these people were not sincere and they would only be a snare to God's people. When their enemies were rejected we read in Ezra 4:4-5,

*<sup>4</sup> Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. <sup>5</sup> They hired counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

And when Cyrus died and Xerxes 1<sup>st</sup> took his place as king, the enemies sent him letters lying that if Israel built their temple and walls around Jerusalem they would rebel against Persia and stop paying taxes. Well, a new king has to show he's strong so he puts a stop to the temple rebuilding project and it sat for 15 years unfinished until Haggai and Zechariah came along.

When the government listens to the lies a minority of people make about you as God's people that can be very disheartening. And this lasted for 15 years until Xerxes died and a new king took his place. We shouldn't wait for governments to change so we can do God's work. We need to believe that God is always working (as Jesus said in John 5:17) even if we can't see it. Remember, we often don't see growth happening. We have to wait until it produces fruit; evidence of a maturing life. God promised Zerubbabel and Joshua that they would finish the temple. Therefore, knowing God is always going to do what He says, we too,

## **We Need to be Willing Servants of God** **(4:11-14)**

... ready to do the little or big things He's asking us to do.

Zerubbabel asked the angel to explain the two olive trees and the angel told him that these are *"the two who are anointed to the Lord of all the earth."* On the one hand this is a prophetic foreshadowing of the role of the Messiah, who will be both high priest and king. But for Zerubbabel and Joshua, the angel was also saying you and Joshua have been anointed (set apart by God) to do the work (even if it's small) for God's purposes and glory. This is a privilege.

God was going to use these two God-seeking leaders through whom He would pour out His continual flowing Spirit to help them complete a 'small' task so God's plan could continue. And we too are called anointed by God in the New Testament. Paul says to all believers in 2 Cor. 1:21,

*<sup>21</sup> Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, <sup>22</sup> who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.*

All of us are set apart by God, sealed with His always available Holy Spirit. It is a privilege to be used by God to do even the smallest tasks for His glory. Because every small task works towards a larger picture of God conforming us more into the image of His Son and of God slowly filling the whole world with His glory. Is God pleased because we only accomplish big things? What pleases God?

*Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

If we have a small task to perform in ministry and believe that God is using us to slowly change one person's life or 2, 3 people's lives and so we do it depending on God and to the best of the abilities He gave us, God is pleased. Leading a Bible study or Sunday School or Jr. Church and "only" 1/2/3 people show up, then that's what God has called you to do. Hosting a fellowship time at your house and "just" 6 people show up, praise the Lord that 6 people showed up and serve them and fellowship with them to the glory of God.

Zerubbabel was anointed by God to clean up a mess so that the people of God could enjoy an environment where worship could happen without hindrances. Joshua was in place to pray for and lead the people in that worship, reminding them of the goal that the cleanup crew was working toward.

Here's a great verse to memorize if you haven't already and apply to serving God faithfully, to remind yourself of every time you do a small thing;

*1 Cor. 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

What often 'moves us' away from serving God in the small things is a lack of faith that what we are doing matters or that we're letting people's criticism or negativity undermine God's purpose for us. We need to stop saying 'I was only able to do this' or 'Just 3 people showed up for ...' and start saying "Thank you Lord that You gave me this task that will help others serve You with less distractions' and 'Thank You Lord that 3 people came to ... and I was able to minister to them for Your glory and their spiritual maturing.'