

PM Zechariah 4 "The Day of Small Things"

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Preacher: Mr Cameron MacIver

[0 : 0 0] is from the prophecy of Zechariah. Zechariah is the second last book in the Old Testament. And we're going to read the whole of chapter 4.

Chapter 4 is a vision that the prophet saw. Let us then continue in worship as we hear the word of the Lord.

And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me like a man who's awakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, what do you see? And I said, I see and behold a lampstand all of gold with a bowl on the top of it and seven lamps on it with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.

And there are two olive trees by it one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left. And I said to the angel who talked with me, what are these my Lord? The angel who talked with me answered and said to me do you not know what these are?

I said, no my Lord. Then he said to me, this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel not by might nor by power but by my spirit says the Lord of hosts Who are you, O great mountain?

[1 : 3 6] Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain and he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of grace grace to it Then the word of the Lord came to me saying The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house His hands shall also complete it Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel These seven are the eyes of the Lord which range throughout the whole earth Then I said to him What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?

And a second time I answered and said to him What are these two branches of the olive trees which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?

He said to me Do you not know what these are? I said, no my Lord Then he said These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth Amen And may God grant us insight and understanding to his word and may he bless it to us Well to Zechariah chapter 4 I hesitate to preach on this chapter Wisdom is needed to understand these visions rightly And sometimes in our own reading and in our own study of the Bible perhaps we neglect or avoid these more difficult parts of God's word We know that some people are just bewildered by the imagery and these visions that the prophets saw long ago

It's strange It is difficult And we know that there are others who are fixated on coming to a definitive interpretation of each detail in these visions and that becomes a distraction and unhelpful and makes this part and these parts of God's word seem problematic problematic and difficult for us But let's not be discouraged in that way Let's seek to focus on the big picture which remains almost always plain and straightforward This is a series of visions as some of you will know very well A series of visions given to the prophet Zechariah for the purpose of encouraging

God's people at a time of great spiritual bleakness Zechariah and his contemporary Haggai are to bring God's word to those of God's people who had returned from exile in Babylon God's people had been under judgment and that judgment had been long foretold and finally fell and the prophet Jeremiah had foretold that for 70 years God's people would be in exile in Babylon and when that 70 years came to an end a remnant some people some of God's people returned and they returned initially with great rejoicing and great hope but as they began the task of rebuilding

[5 : 54] Jerusalem it became evident that it was a hard and difficult job that they had been given and many of their contemporaries chose to stay in Babylon where they were more affluent and of that remnant that came back to begin this work of building some became discouraged and some became indifferent and didn't see the work of rebuilding the city and specifically rebuilding the temple in order to reinstate the right worship of God they saw that as not such a high priority after all and so Zechariah is called to this difficult ministry to bring God's word to these people to call them to revive to be revived and so in chapter one of Zechariah we read these great words return to me and I will return to you it's a call to revival and throughout this wonderful prophecy there are these visions a series of visions some of them are quite well known in the way in which they're referred to in the

New Testament I just mention the three most well known in chapter nine we have a prophecy which is fulfilled when Christ enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey you'll see that in nine verse nine rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion shout aloud O daughter of Jerusalem behold your king is coming to you righteous and having salvation is he humble and mounted on a donkey on a colt full of a donkey what a great encouragement that the New Testament writers were able to look back and see how this prophecy was fulfilled another prophecy that has a straightforward interpretation in the New Testament is chapter 12 and there you will see in verse 10

I believe it is we'll pour out on the house of David and the habitats of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and please for mercy so that when they look on me on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and so on this prophecy that the one they would look to would be one who was pierced as specifically mentioned when our Lord is pierced on the cross and then also on the same page as it happens in my Bible in chapter 13 and at verse 7 strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered a prophecy fulfilled when the disciples abandon Jesus in his moment of need and so there's much of

Christ in this prophecy much to encourage the original recipients and much to encourage us but chapter 3 and chapter 4 are two of the most important and they speak of the gospel and the church in different ways we don't have time to go into these in as much detail as we might want but I would encourage you to reflect on chapter 3 this vision of Joshua the high priest is a famous one which speaks of this vision in this vision the high priest is seen wearing these filthy garments and in a wonderful picture of what Christ does for us he has given clean clothes to wear but it's chapter 4 and the vision of the golden lampstand that we're considering tonight and this is a vision which speaks of the work of the church and the way in which the work of the church is guaranteed success and will continue as it were to shine the light of the gospel because it is sustained in a reliable and sustainable way which is not going to be disrupted understanding this vision does take effort usually when we're using the

Old Testament we sometimes need the Old Testament to help us understand the New Testament but in this case we can use the first chapter of Revelation to help us understand this vision because in Revelation chapter 1 there's a very similar vision of a golden lampstand and there it's evident and it's explained to us clearly that that is a picture of the church and so these seven lamps that are spoken of here are a picture of the church shining as I say the light of the gospel out into the world and sustained by this renewable and continuous flow of oil from these two trees the two olive trees the commentators have different interpretation as to what these trees represent but I would see them as being having a parallel and again a parallel in Revelations where we read of these two witnesses!

[12 : 37] and I would understand them to stand for the witness of the church the ongoing witness of the church fuelled by the work and influence of the Holy Spirit which in some senses is pictured in this continual flow of oil what about the mountain that is spoken of then as we're just covering some of the features of this vision what is this mountain well I picture it that you know what has been spoken of here is this character Zerubbabel he's a princely figure who is the kind of civil leader at the time when these exiles have returned to Jerusalem and it's his task to rebuild the temple or at least to supervise the rebuilding of the temple and there's probably a sense in which he stood in front of a mountain of rubble the temple had been destroyed and it can be if you've ever stood in front of something that's collapsed and been destroyed it can be a dispiriting thing to stand in front of a mountain of things that need to be cleared away and so there's one sense in which the mountain that Zerubbabel faces is just all of the obstacles physical and political and so on that stand in the way of progressing the job of rebuilding the temple but there's a couple of other references

I want to highlight that we should bear in mind as we try and get every aspect of what this mountain might be Jeremiah 51 25 compares Babylon as a great mountain and Babylon in the Bible is often a kind of a metaphor for the world system standing in opposition to God and his ways rule and the other mountain that is worth mentioning is Isaiah 40 verse 4 that's a passage made famous of course by Handel with his Messiah where we read there that every mountain will be laid low and every valley lifted up to make straight the way for the Lord and so when we see that reference there to that mountain perhaps our minds go to that prophecy speaking of preparing the work of John the Baptist in particular but preparing the way for Christ to come last thing I want to mention in the vision is the capstone if you were here this morning you'll know that straight away this capstone brought forward should make us think of the

Lord Jesus Christ the crowning element in this spiritual building so that's some of the kind of building blocks that we need as we come to think about this vision and as we do that I want us to focus our attention on verse 10 verse 10 is a verse that many people might have heard before and be familiar with for whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel in the context of this vision I just want tonight for us to think about what is meant by this day of small things we'll have a think about what it means to despise that day and we'll have a think about what that rejoicing that is spoken of in this verse could be so what is meant by the day of small things what does this word small mean well I'm not a

Hebrew scholar but I do have access to some great websites and apps which help track down where certain Hebrew words occur in the rest of the Bible and this is a help for me and I've seen when I've looked up this word for small that it can mean young or it can just mean small or little or unimportant one place where it occurs in the Old Testament is Isaiah 11 verse 6 which is speaking about the new heavens and the new earth and there there's a vision or a picture of a lion and a calf being led by a little child and the emphasis there is on this little child will be able to lead the king of beasts because there'll be no aggression in the new heavens and the new earth in that sense another place where this word small occurs which might help us understand what the day of small things means is in 1st

Samuel chapter 16 and there verse 11 we read of the experience of Samuel as he goes to meet with Jesse he's looking to anoint someone to be a replacement king for God's people and he's met he thinks all of Jesse's sons but this is oh no there remains the youngest that's the word the youngest the word for small the least important brother the one who's still out looking after the sheep and that of course turns out to be King David as you know last place where this word small occurs 1st Kings 18 44 the word small occurs in many places but just to pick these examples in 1st Kings 18 Elijah's servant has been sent several times to see if there's anything on the horizon and in verse 44 of that chapter he comes and reports a little cloud like a man's hand someone has spoken of the arithmetic of the kingdom kingdom the things that are small in the eyes of us in the eyes of men are often things of great significance in

[20 : 08] God's plan in God's purposes Jesus would speak of the kingdom of heaven being like a mustard seed small it would seem or like yeast in a heap of dough so how do we understand this day of small things then with bearing that definition in mind well for Zerubbabel this was a day of small things in the sense of small beginnings it's been famously said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step and not long before this was written we know that Nehemiah and his colleagues had been working to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and they were mocked weren't they by Sambalat and Tobiah and all these guys and when you read Nehemiah's first person account of his feelings and his experiences as he was rebuilding these walls you have a sense that the enormity of the task must have seemed overwhelming at times how could he ever complete such a big task and it's the same for Zerubbabel building this temple rebuilding this temple the job just doesn't seem achievable!

And yet it begins with small beginnings you make small progress in building a temple maybe a small dull job like carrying some of the rubble out of the way to make a smooth place to begin building but it's also a day of small things for Zerubbabel in terms of its significance God's people had in their heyday in say the reign of Solomon had had a seat at the table with all of the world's superpowers trading to their advantage with the Egyptians and the Syrians and the Hittites an important and wealthy nation and now they were small insignificant not really enough of a threat to anyone and perhaps that's why humanly speaking they were allowed to return from their exile in Babylon there seemed little harm in letting this small and insignificant nation re-establish a small and insignificant foothold a day of small things well what about us today tonight here well this rebuilding of the temple is just a picture of the building of the church a temple made of living stones as we reflected on this morning and yet here we are tonight and let's be honest we're quite a small gathering and somebody might say well you're you're not very significant there's only a few of you maybe you don't have plenty of money you don't have plenty of people and humanly speaking seeing a root for us as such a small group to become a flourishing and successful and healthy church seems out of reach for us perhaps it feels small at times maybe we we start to wonder if it's achievable at all it seems overwhelming and then for us as

Christians individually it might feel like a day of small things because of the small things we do somebody has to print these sheets or remember to give someone a lift or bring a tea and biscuits down to the church and these are all perhaps small things perhaps you mention a friend in prayer and you wonder does your voice reach higher than the ceiling as it were it's only a small thing you wonder will God take notice and there's the smallness that we feel in our own personal significance those of us who are Christians in our day are small in number mostly not influential mostly not wealthy not full of energy few of us are captivating characters or communicators we're not attractive to the world out there and so we are small and so in a sense it's a day of small things for us too well if it is a day of small things what does it mean to despise the day of small things this word despise is mentioned most often in the book of

Proverbs to belittle or scorn or scoff or mock we're called to have faith in God and yet throughout biblical history and throughout church history very often God's plan has looked as if it's going wrong imagine what it would be like to be one of God's faithful people in Egypt during the time that God's people were in slavery your situation hasn't changed for 400 years and you're called to hold on to the covenant promises handed down to you from Abraham but you're badly treated as a slave or think of the time of the judges how difficult it would be to be a faithful follower of

God in a time when most of the rest of your nation have gone off to worship other gods think about Elijah how he thought he was the only one left very small and even though Elijah was given the encouragement of knowing there were 7,000 who hadn't bowed the knee to Baal that's not a lot of people is it in the big scheme of things small group a remnant you could say and that's what Zechariah was ministering to in his day a small remnant who had returned and even within that small remnant not all of them enthusiastic and full of energy for the things of God and that's been the same all through church history and biblical history as I say think of the persecution that broke out during the time of the acts of the apostles and at each and every subsequent point in church history

[28 : 15] God's faithful people have been a small remnant and yet just like the cloud the size of a man's hand or the youngest and least significant seeming brother God's ways are not our ways and we're called to remain faithful like little children to have trust in our heavenly father and to despise the day of small things is to lack faith in what God has ordained for us and to forsake the small and routine tasks that he's given us to do believing that they don't achieve anything who will rejoice well it turns out that that's not such a straightforward question to answer either because not all the even the translators agree on exactly who it is that rejoices but it does seem that our translation here is the favoured one that it's still those who did actually despise the day of small things like us we do don't we if we're honest we we tend to despise that day of small things it is a sin and yet we don't always have faith and confidence that God is accomplishing his purposes through the ordinary and sometimes dull everyday jobs that we have been given to do and faithfully serving

God and yet his promise is for us that we will rejoice there there is this slightly mysterious second part to verse 10 which speaks about the seven eyes of the Lord ranging through the earth but I think the commentators are right who say that this relates back to a part of the vision in chapter three which speaks of a stone with seven eyes on it which seems to be a metaphor for Christ for the work of God and so God's spoken of here as having perfect understanding of what is happening in the world his seven eyes seven being a perfection the Lord understands exactly what is happening in this world he knows what he is doing it is not for us to question his ways it may seem a day of small things but that is not our not what we are called to be concerned about because the promise that is given to Zerubbabel here is that the task that he's been given to do will be completed it will be successful the promise is that having begun with these small tasks laying foundation stones success is guaranteed he will complete this it has been spoken by the

Lord himself that this will be accomplished and so all of these dull tasks that Zerubbabel and those working under him have to get on with are tasks which are guaranteed success and I hope you can see that that's the same for us this rejoicing that is spoken of is guaranteed it may seem like we're just here tonight and maybe it doesn't feel significant but that's not our concern our concern is to remain faithful to look to the Lord for blessing and look forward to this time of rejoicing that's spoken of what does this mean for us then?

as I say Zerubbabel lived at a time of incredible bleakness spiritually and some would say do we live in a day of small things well I wonder what Zerubbabel or Zechariah would say if they were here tonight they would say you live in a day of great things the gospel age imagine they would say we lived in a time when our enemies had defeated us utterly we had a puppet king those who saw our feeble efforts to rebuild our walls mocked us those who saw the efforts to rebuild that temple some of them wept because it was so unglorious compared to the original temple it seemed like such a day of small things for them the end of an era it didn't seem to achieve anything and then if they were here tonight they would say and look what happened after that centuries of spiritual winter no word from the

Lord and we we live in the gospel age a time when the Holy Spirit has been poured out into the hearts of every true believer the dazzling gospel light has been fulfilled our king has come riding on his donkey all of these prophecies have been fulfilled so gloriously we can read about how they have been fulfilled and what that means for us in glorious definition and we see it in Romans and Ephesians and Galatians a day of great things Zechariah and Zerubbabel saw these things dimly afar off they're here for us in glorious and rich detail but yet there is a sense in which we live in a day of small things spiritually times are dark we live in the last days and it's been foretold and it's happened that scoffers have come and mocked our word and mocked the work of

[35 : 57] Christ and even in amongst our churches there are those who are false teachers and we can look around this town and the surrounding countryside tonight and say who has believed our message very few people but we tend to be thinking when we think like that in a man centred way we don't see the significance of what we're doing here this evening our shared life as a community of those who believe the gospel to be true and seek to live that out and so it is a sin to despise the day of small things sometimes we think we deserve sympathy for living in such bleak spiritual times but we need to listen to the perspective of God's word to give us that divine perspective that we should be rejoicing to be taking part in a task which is guaranteed glorious and permanent success and value the seven eyes of the

Lord are seeing and superintending all that is happening this building that is being built is the church of Christ as I say built of living stones with Christ as its capstone its success is guaranteed and yet a lot of the time it just won't feel like that it doesn't feel as if tonight we're doing anything of lasting cosmic significance does it but God's promises are true and the proclamation of the gospel and to live as Christians living our lives going out from this place to live our lives as sincere and honest

Christians and to witness to those around us is of lasting significance so what will the outcome of this Sunday be what will you achieve this week as a Christian well the ultimate outcome will be rejoicing we can be sure and certain that our service for Christ will accomplish God's purposes the gospel age is revealed to be an age of conflict but the outcome of that conflict is certain and our victory is certain he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion the gates of hell will not prevail against the building of

Christ's church so let's be encouraged tonight by this vision let us not forsake what God has ordained for us to do let us not forsake what God has promised to bless let's not trust in appearances but pray instead that we would be granted the faith to see with eyes of faith this light of the gospel shining in a way that can never be extinguished his kingdom will be built amen let's say pray Thank you.