

The God who builds

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Date: 19 September 2010

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[0 : 00] The reading today is from Zechariah chapter 4 and that's found on page 959.

And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. And he said to me, what do you see? 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 lamps on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one in the right of the bowl and the other is on the left. And I said to the angel who talked with me, what are these, my lord?

Then 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? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain.

[1 : 08] And he shall bring forward the topstone 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 through 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.

Well, welcome everyone. We're not actually going to have a second reading. I'm going to spend most of my time this morning on Zechariah chapter 4.

[2 : 15] We'll spend a little bit of time in chapters 5 and 6. It will be a bit of a whirlwind. But do read those chapters later on. Why don't I pray for us as we start.

Return to me, says the Lord Almighty, and I will return to you. Heavenly Father, we pray this morning as we look at Zechariah.

Please would you teach us. Please would your spirit instruct us, convince us of the truths about which we hear. And we pray, Heavenly Father, for grace to return to you in our hearts and minds and to line up our lives with what you are doing.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. I've turned off the microphone. The PA seems to be a bit booming today. If anyone can't hear, please just wave a hand and I shall try and boom a little bit louder myself.

Now, I wonder if you can relate to either of these two people. The first is Andy. He is not himself a Christian. He's looking into the claims of Jesus.

[3 : 30] And the thing that is kind of holding him back, really, is what he sees as the reality gap between what he sees in the Bible and what he sees in the world around him.

After all, he's been learning from the Bible that God is God over the whole world, that he is sovereign over everything, that nothing happens without him willing it.

Yet, as he looks at the world, it seems to be rather different. War, famine, disease. Surely, he reasons God could just put an end to any of these things, just with a word.

And he then goes to his local church, and that's hardly the most happening place either. He doesn't really look to Andy as if God is doing very much. The second is Amy.

She works in the city. She's been following Jesus since she was a teenager. But she, too, sees this reality gap between what the Bible seems to be saying and life as she experiences it as a Christian. [4 : 39] After all, the Bible tells her that God is at work throughout history, bringing people from all nations to himself. Indeed, that the gospel is powerful to do that. But as she looks at her colleagues in the office, people are simply uninterested.

As she looks at the country as a whole, Christians seem to be marginalised. Compared with her job, compared with the world of high finance, what God seems to be doing looks pretty unimpressive. Well, I wonder if we can relate this morning to either of those two people. This reality gap between what the Bible seems to promise and speak about, and on the other hand, the world in which we live.

And of course, when we do experience that reality gap, the question we're about to ask ourselves is, is it really worth being a Christian? Is it really worth serving Jesus?

The cause of Christ can look weak and unimpressive. Well, that is the issue, I think, in these chapters in Zechariah 4. Just turn back to chapter 1, verse 7, which sets the scene for us.

[5 : 57] Remember those of us who have been coming along these past two Sundays, it's 520 BC. God's people have returned from exile, but it all looks pretty unimpressive.

They're living in a country which is about the size of Greater London, 30 miles across by 40 miles the other way, just 50,000 of them. And look at chapter 1, verse 7. On the 24th day of the 11th month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, they are under the ruler of a foreign king, Darius, the emperor of the mighty Persian Empire.

But despite appearances, there are two great encouragements in chapters 4 to 6.

I put them on the outline, which you might like to turn to on the back of the service sheet, and the first is this, that God will build his church. Chapter 4.

Now, chapter 4 is the fifth of Zechariah's visions, and it's the vision in which the rebuilding of the temple features the most prominently. The temple in Jerusalem had been at the very heart of Jerusalem.

[7 : 12] It was the place where, symbolically, God dwelt with his people. Also, the place where, symbolically, God ruled the world and ruled the nations. However, in 587 BC, the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, and many of its inhabitants taken off into exile.

It's now 520 BC, 60 or 70 years later. They've returned to Jerusalem, many of them, and the rebuilding of the temple has begun. Let me just read verses 1 to 4 again as we look at the vision. Have a look at verses 1 to 4. And the angel who talked to me came again and waked me like a man who is wakened out of his sleep.

And he said to me, What do you see? 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, the other on its left. And I said to the angel who talked to me, What are these, my Lord?

[8 : 24] And we may well think to ourselves, Well, that's a jolly good question to ask. Well, let me say, this is a vision of the completed temple.

Not the building as such, but what the temple will represent. So, the lampstand of gold is most likely a picture of God's people, just as it is in the book of Revelation.

As for the seven lamps with the seven lips, we're told in verse 10 they represent the eyes of God. This is a vision of what the completed temple will signify.

That God will once again plant his people in Jerusalem and that he'll be there with them watching the world from Jerusalem.

And then in verses 11 to 14, if you look down at those verses, we're given a little bit more explanation that the two olive trees represent two anointed ones.

[9 : 29] In the Old Testament, many of us are, I guess we'll know, it's the kings and priests who were usually anointed. So, these are most likely, I think, Joshua, the high priest who we met last week, and Zerubbabel, the governor of Jerusalem, who has been given the task of rebuilding the temple.

However, I want to spend most of our time as we look at this vision on verses 6 to 10, where God gives Zachariah two messages about the rebuilding of the temple.

And I take it that it's these two messages where we're meant to focus our attention. First of all, verses 6 and 7, that God will rebuild the temple.

God will rebuild the temple. Have a look at verse 6. 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? Before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plain, and he shall bring forward the topstone amid shouts of grace, grace to it.

[10:39] I hope we can see here that although Zerubbabel is given the job of overseeing the work of rebuilding the temple, in fact, it is God by his spirit who is the master builder.

The building of the temple will not be achieved primarily through their hard work and energy, although it will require all of those things, but supremely by God himself.

And the mountain in verse 7 is a promise that God will overcome any obstacle that threatens the rebuilding of the temple. They faced very significant obstacles, the size of the task, the small resources they had available, but verse 7, what will people be shouting as the final stone is laid on the temple?

Grace, grace to it. All God's doing. God will rebuild the temple. But secondly, verses 8 to 10, God will complete the rebuilding of the temple.

Verse 8, 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.

[12:02] For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hands of Zerubbabel. Now, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the foundations of the temple have been laid.

And as you all know, if you've ever seen the foundations of a building, the foundations look pretty unimpressive and they don't really give much of a clue, do they, as to what the finished building is going to look like. Even the most magnificent building, the foundations, it's just kind of concrete and diggers and that kind of thing.

And therefore, God is promising here that this great temple building project will be finished. You see, have a look at verse 10. What does God say to the cynics who perhaps kind of look at the building site that is the temple, wagging their heads and saying, muttering in lowered tones, it's never going to happen, God's not powerful to do it, it won't get finished.

God says, don't despise the day of small things because one day you'll see his rubble with his tape measure, measuring out the building that is the new temple.

And historically, we know that five years later, in 515 BC, that is exactly what happens and this temple was finished. Now, I hope we can see what a tremendously exciting vision this was for God's people in 520 BC when all they could see around them was the foundations, God promising that he will rebuild the temple and he will complete the rebuilding of the temple.

[13:39] But what are we to make of it two and a half thousand years later? Well, the New Testament's teaching on building and the building work that God is engaged in today is summarized in Jesus' words, the Apostle Peter, I will build my church.

God doesn't dwell in buildings, whether temples or church buildings, but with his people. And the thing he is committed to doing is building his people.

Now, I put a couple of New Testament references on the outline. Why don't we just turn to page 1,220 to 1 Peter? 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 4 and 5.

And just see as I read these verses how Peter describes Christians, those who have put their trust in Jesus. verse 4, as you come to him, that's Jesus, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.

You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

[15:10] Christ. In Ephesians 2, the apostle Paul similarly describes Christians in the same way as a spiritual house or temple.

So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

So what is the building project that God is committed to today? Building his church, building his people. That is where the Old Testament temple building finds its fulfillment in the New Testament.

It's why, of course, when we read through the New Testament you don't find the apostle Paul building temples or building physical church buildings. No, you see him planting new congregations, starting new churches.

So then, that is the message of this fifth vision in Zechariah. God is committed to building his church. And therefore, of course, we need to be committed to it as well.

[16:35] remember back in chapter 1, verse 3, return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I'll return to you. It's a book about returning to God. It's a book about lining up our lives with what God is doing in his world.

One of the hallmarks of having returned to God is that we are committed to what God is committed to, building his church.

So let me ask you a question. Why have you come to Grace Church this morning? If you're a regular at Grace Church, why do you come to Grace Church any Sunday morning? Well, I hope you're here as a builder.

I hope you're here as a worker to build this congregation, because that is what God is doing here. seeing new people come to Christ, seeing each other built up in Christ, equipped to serve God, giving, praying, serving.

I hope that's your plan for this congregation, because it is Jesus' plan for this congregation. In fact, it's what God is committed to doing across the world.

[17:56] That's why we have mission partners in Asia, in Africa, in London. And therefore, of course, if that's something we're not committed to, or if we just see ourselves as a passenger, or if the real focus of our lives, if we're honest, is elsewhere, then of course it begs the question, doesn't it, have we really returned to God?

And may I say that if we're here this morning and we're just investigating the claims of Jesus, and it's always wonderful to have one or two here like that on a Sunday morning, week by week, then can we see what actually being a Christian involves?

If we were to turn to Christ, if we were to follow him, we'd be committing ourselves to being workers, building his church, because that is what God is committed to.

Well, it's a great task, but how will it be done? Well, God will build his church by his spirit. That's the message, isn't it, of chapter 4, verse 6 of Zechariah.

God's spirit works through his word, so we need to ensure that we are teaching God's word to each other faithfully, formally, as now, or as in a growth group, and informally, as we talk with each other about God's word and what God has been saying to us.

[19:19] And we need to pray that as his word is taught, so God will be powerfully at work by his spirit. Next week, Grace Church will be five years old.

Now, I take it we can be full of thanks to God. It is wonderful to see how he has established and built his church, how his spirit has been at work.

So, can I encourage those of us who make our monthly prayer gathering, and make it a priority to continue to do so? The church is only built, Grace Church will only be built and continue to be built as God works by his spirit.

And as for those who don't make it a priority, can I urge you to do so? The implications there, isn't it? Actually, if we're not, if we don't make it a priority, it shows either we're not committed to building or we think that it's all down to our own effort.

And as in Zechariah's day, it can look as if the opposition is mountainous, verse 7. Just think of our culture. Church buildings being turned into flats and warehouses, Christians being mocked or written off in the media or thought of as dangerous fundamentalists, even if Eric Pickles is making warming noises.

[20:52] Church leaders who it seems often are more concerned with fitting in with a culture rather than being clear on what the Bible teaches. And those are just the things out there which oppose the building of the church, let alone things in our own hearts, our own busyness, our own wrong priorities, our own obsession often with work.

See, there are lots of problems, aren't there, as we think about building the church, as we think about advancing the cause of the gospel. But God assures us that by his spirit, he will build his church.

Which means, of course, we're not to despise the small, and we're not to despise the insignificant. Zechariah 4.10 is a great verse, and I think an important verse for all of us, because of course we

do despise small things, don't we?

We do think things need to look big and impressive. I take it it's one of the reasons why people can be drawn often to big churches, because we want to feel we're part of something big.

But of course the point is that every genuine church, regardless of its size, is already part of something big, because God is building his church.

[22 : 14] That is what he is committed to doing. And of course, if you despise the small, you'll never see it, will you, when God grows the small into the big.

See, perhaps there are just one or two of you who are Christians in the place that you work, or in the school gate at which you stand, or in the school classroom in which you sit.

And it would be very easy, wouldn't it, to think, well, God doesn't seem to be doing very much. But don't despise the day of small things. When CMS, the Church Missionary Society was founded in 1799, just over 200 years ago, they had five principles they were committed to.

And one of them was this, begin in a small way. Begin in a small way. In other words, don't wait until you can send a hundred missionaries to India, just send the one you have.

don't wait until you feel you're a Biddy Graham or a John Chapman before you begin to talk to people about Jesus. Just speak now, as you are.

[23 : 37] Begin in a small way. Don't despise the day of small things. And I take it they're lessons too, aren't they, which we will need to learn and relearn. As a church family, we work towards a church plant.

We need confidence that God is committed to building his church. We need to pray because it is he who will build his church. And we need to make sure we don't despise the small.

God will build his church. Secondly, let's look at chapters five and six. As I said, we'll spend less time here.

These next few visions in chapters, chapter five, one to six, eight, really cover very similar ground to the first three visions of the book. Chapter one, seven to thirteen.

But let's look nonetheless at these briefly. First of all, chapter five, verses one to four, a scroll. God will punish sinners. Now, the sixth scroll is a, the sixth vision is a huge flying scroll.

[24 : 47] Too big to have a visual aid this morning. thing, but an enormous scroll, perhaps like a sort of advertising billboard. It's flying. It symbolises the Old Testament law.

You'll notice it has two of the ten commandments written on it in verse three, the eighth and the ninth, do not steal and do not swear falsely. And Zechariah is saying God's word is still powerful.

Like a heat-seeking missile, it seeks out those who refuse to acknowledge God. God will punish sinners. Then the next vision, chapter five, verses five to eleven, a measuring basket.

God will remove sin. Let me read verses five and six. Then the angel who talked to me came forward and said to me, lift your eyes and see what this is that's going out.

And I said, what is it? He said, this is the basket that is going out. And he said, this is their iniquity, their sin in all the land.

[25 : 54] Again, the interpretation shows us the meaning of the vision. The basket represents the iniquity, the sin of God's people. The woman inside, it's called wickedness. In verses nine to eleven, the basket is removed and taken away.

And then chapter six, verses one to eight, four chariots. God will defeat the nations. And this final vision, for those of you who are here two weeks ago, it's very similar, isn't it, to the first vision, with these horsemen surveying the earth.

But unlike the horsemen in chapter one, these are war horses pulling chariots behind them. The nations are defeated and finally the land is at rest.

Not the complacent rest of a world ignoring God in chapter one, but rather a rest because God's purposes for his world have been accomplished.

And then chapter six, verses nine to fifteen, God will send a ruler. Now, Zechariah's visions are now finished and God speaks directly to Zechariah in these verses and shows whom God will use to accomplish his purposes.

[27 : 09] They're wonderful verses, just look at them with me. Zechariah is told at verse 11 to make a crown and to put it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. And this is what he is to say, verse 12.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, the man whose name is the branch, for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord.

It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the council of peace shall be between them both.

Now, we first met the branch last week in chapter 3, a technical name for the descendants of King David, the greatest of kings. And here in chapter 6, God is using Joshua, the high priest, as a visual aid.

He says, I'm going to send someone who is a priest like Joshua, but he's also a king with a crown on his head. He'll be a descendant of David, and he is the one who will build the temple.

[28 : 24] In other words, God is saying, if you want to know who will accomplish my purposes for my world, you want to be looking for a descendant of King David, who is a priest, and who is a king. And the crown is then put in the temple, verse 14, as a reminder of this great promise that God had made. And wonderfully, when we come to the New Testament, we discover that Jesus is all of those things.

A descendant of King David, a priest, and a king. Now, we began this morning by saying that there can at times appear to be a reality gap between what God promises to do and what we can see in the world around us.

It can at times feel as if the action is perhaps somewhere else, at which point the great temptation is to give ourselves to other things and just to get on with our lives in the same way that everyone around us is just getting on with their lives.

But Zechariah is teaching us, and God is telling us this morning, that to be a disciple of Jesus is to be fired by a far greater vision than simply getting on with our lives like everyone else.

[29 : 44] God is building his church. And of course, you and I have the terrific advantage of Zechariah in that we live two and a half thousand years later. Jesus has risen from the dead.

He is Lord of all. He is building his church across the nations. through a number here this morning, from the nations. He has done that no more so dramatically than in the last hundred years.

The work can at times look slow and discouraging. There are many difficulties. There is much opposition. opposition. But it's what God is committed to.

God will build his church. Obviously, the question for each of us is, are we also committed to what God is committed to?

Let's pray together. this is the word of the Lord, it's rubble, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

[31 : 01] Heavenly Father, we want to thank you that you are committed to building your church across the world. Thank you for the privilege of living in this particular part of history.

When we know for a fact that Jesus has risen from the dead, that he now sits at your right hands, when we can look even over the last hundred years and see the staggering growth and progress of the gospel.

gospel. And we're sorry, Heavenly Father, when we are committed ourselves to other things, and we pray that this would be the one thing that we are wholeheartedly committed to as a church family and as individuals.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.