

The Power of the Spirit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 September 2021

Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[0 : 00] Well, please turn with me now to Zechariah, Zechariah chapter 4. We're going through selected parts of this book.

We were in chapter 3 yesterday, the vision of Joshua the high priest. That great passage that tells of the wonderful forgiveness of God towards this people, cleaning, cleansing the people of the guilt of sin.

And we come now to the next chapter, chapter 4. Again, a great, wonderful, encouraging chapter that very much tells of the blessing of the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people.

And let's read this whole chapter. 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? I said, I see. And behold, a lampstand, all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps in it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.

[1 : 16] And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right, and the bowl, and the other on its left. And I said to the angel who talked with me, What are these, my Lord? And 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 by Zerubbabel, not by might, not 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 you 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 through the whole earth.

[2 : 27] Then I said to him, What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand? The 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.

May God bless that reading from his holy word. We consider much of that chapter, that chapter, as we said, that really very much tells us of the power of the Holy Spirit.

And in that chapter that speaks of that power, on the one hand we see that power, and yet on the other hand we see a despondent people, people very much deflated through their own weaknesses, but deflated because of their perception that they are in a day of small things.

All they see is the smallness of their, well, their size as a population, their influence, forgetting who their Lord is, forgetting the Spirit, the Holy Spirit who makes that difference, that eternal difference.

[3 : 52] And we will come back to the day of small things in more detail towards the end of our thoughts. Because, you know, as we consider this passage, of course we have to see it in the immediacy of when these words were first written.

But of course we have to see it also in relation to our own present day. Because whether it's in our own day, or whether in the day of the prophet Zechariah, the Lord's people truly do have to listen to the voice of God, and not just listen to that voice, but act in it.

And in acting on the voice of God as we hear God speak to us through his word, to be encouraged to continue to fight the good fight of faith. Because remember what we reminded of on Wednesday evening, if you were at the prayer meeting, we're going through 1 John, and in 1 John chapter 4, we were reminded that he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

And we bring this even to a present context, because, you know, today we're hearing so many voices that are contrary to God's word. The verbal violence that we hear so regularly, that violence that seeks to, well, that seeks to silence the voice of our Lord in our own land, and in our own world.

It's incredible to say this, but just the other day, that was highlighted in the actions of a certain university in England. And that university actually apologized for hosting a Christian conference.

[5 : 32] I mean, we're living in strange and dangerous times. And yes, of course, we're going to grieve at that kind of anti-Christian mindset.

But our hearts are to be heavy and somehow, you know, burdened with gloom and despair. But instead, we're called to be continual in that confidence that we have in our Lord, that joy that we have in Him as we continue to trust in the power of Almighty God.

And don't look to yourself for the answer. Don't look to yourself for the answer to the problem of the human heart. And let's not admit any kind of defeat against all the powers of the evil one.

But look to God. Look to God, God who raises the dead. God who gives the increase. It's God who makes streams in the desert.

It's God who revives His church, who revives His people. It's God who's already won the victory, that victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to Him, look to our God and Savior, God who blesses His people with that oil of rejoicing, because we know of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 52] So let's be reminded to grasp the promises of God for His church. And look with hope to our God, the God of might, the God of power, the God who strengthens the hearts of His people through His Holy Spirit.

It's God who gives you and who gives me that comfort, that sure comfort, to know that He's sovereign. He's sovereign. So let's not be downhearted, but rejoice and continue to rejoice in the goodness of God.

And as we said, knowing that He is the God of power and that He empowers you who are His, He empowers you with the power of the Holy Spirit. And so come to Him with that renewed faith and that trust and that confidence to know that He's the one who gives the increase.

and yes, know that He is building His church. He's the one who builds and continues to build even here on earth.

And again, that sure, confident belief that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church that our Lord and Saviour is building.

[8 : 08] And really to help us to see that, we come to this vision, these great words that we find here in Zechariah 4.6. You've heard these words, I'm sure, quite often, but let's hear them again.

Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty. And as we particularly consider these great words, we're going to see parallels in the experience of God's people then with God's people now.

The parallels of the Lord's people who'd returned to Jerusalem what they faced, they'd returned from exile in Babylon, and we can see even parallels with them, from them, with the experience of God's people today.

These parallels that are there before us, the opposition. The people there in Jerusalem faced opposition to the building of God's church. We see it today, again, opposition to the building of God's church in our own land.

The people then had such low morale. It was there in their hearts. All they could see were the so-called mountains of opposition. These mountains that seemed just too high.

[9 : 21] A path that seemed just too steep to build there in Jerusalem. And bring that even to ourselves. Again, there can be that low morale, that perceiving the mountains of opposition.

Paths that seemed just too steep for the kingdom of God to be built. And seeing, again, parallels in the lack of resources that we have. I mean, at that time, the resources seemed so weak to build God's temple there in Jerusalem.

You can see that even to this day. But, you know, with all these so-called, with all these parallels and all these apparent problems, remember, God is sovereign in his power.

And that power is demonstrated in overcoming these hurdles, conquering these apparently impossible barriers. And God will continue to equip those who are his as faithful ones to triumph, triumph in adversity, to scale heights that, humanly speaking, seem impossible to scale.

And yes, to rejoice, to know that, yes, our Lord, our Savior, is building his church, even when it appears barren and empty. And as we're considering these parallels with today, remember, it's the same God who worked his power there in Jerusalem two and a half thousand years ago.

[10 : 55] It's the same God whose power is made available to you and to me, to all who are building his kingdom even today. And as we're going to consider this great truth of the power of God, the enabling power of God, let's pray that this is seen in every congregation in our land that is wholehearted in its service for the Lord.

And that everyone who's of the Lord, every believing Christian, you be his workman, his labourer, his servant, his warrior, his missionary, even in the immediate environment, even overseas, but certainly in an immediate environment that might seem so hopeless with such intense opposition.

But be strong, be strong in the Lord, the power of his might. We seek to be builders here in his kingdom. Well, let's look more closely then at the passage that really brings out these truths, because, yes, when we come to this passage, we come to find a despondent people, in fact, even generally in this whole time of this prophecy, because we have to remember the context in which this fifth vision was given when Zechariah was given this vision.

He was given this vision to encourage the people there in Jerusalem. And what was the time? Well, the exiles, as we said, they'd returned home, the prophecy of the returning back to Jerusalem had been fulfilled.

The 70 years of exile were over. God had worked an amazing work of providence to enable them to come back to Jerusalem, because the people had been taken from Jerusalem, from Judah, to the superpower of the day, the Babylonian empire, the empire that seemed absolutely invincible.

[12 : 55] Israel, it's that empire that had conquered Judah, it had taken the cream of the people of Judah into exile. But in God's providence, that empire, that seemingly invincible empire, that empire had been defeated by another empire, the empire of the Medes and Persians.

And because of that, because of the one who came on the throne, Cyrus, the Jews were permitted to return to their homeland. And yet, even the return of the people, the exiles, there was so much concern, so much despondency from these people.

Because, certainly for the older ones who'd returned, the great days, the days of plenty, these days just seemed a distant memory. I mean, the once great nation of Israel, the nation that had numbered several millions, well, after Solomon's reign, that nation had been divided into two.

And the two parts conquered by pagan powers. There was the northern kingdom of Israel, that was conquered by Assyria. And then, as we said, the southern kingdom of Judah, conquered by Babylon.

And those who returned from Babylon to Judah, well, it wasn't in the millions, it's reckoned to be around about 50,000. Tiny number in comparison with the millions.

[14 : 21] A day of small things. And then, when you think of the land north of Judah, it was a very much hostile part of the land, hostile to Judah.

In fact, it wasn't even called Israel anymore, it was called Samaria. And then, when you think of it, the Jews who'd returned from Babylon, they didn't have a king, no longer a King David or a King Solomon, and they didn't even govern themselves.

They were still part of the empire of the Medes and Persians. Yes, they're governors. We read of one there in the passage, a man called Zerubbabel, he was governor there in Jerusalem in Zechariah's time.

But Judah was still part of a greater power, you might say, a day of small things. And then, when you think of the temple, the temple there in Jerusalem that had been destroyed by the Babylonians, certainly when the exiles came back, the foundations were laid.

But then, as the foundations were being laid, the people were weeping profusely because they were comparing the great temple that was built by Solomon, the magnificence of that temple, and all that people could see now were just ruins or just a foundation where the former temple had been laid waste and ruined.

[15 : 43] A day of small things. And then, spiritual zeal was really very, very low. You read the contemporary prophecy of Haggai, contemporary to Zechariah.

People, it seems, were more concerned about their own homes than building the temple. A day of small things. And so, the people needed to be really shaken out of their spiritual complacency.

They had low morale. And God, in His grace, sent to the people these two very different prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. and God sending these prophets to shake the people out of their spiritual sloth.

These people were in many ways half-hearted in their commitment to service for the Lord. But they had to be builders, builders of God's house, builders of God's work.

But how were the people going to be shaken out of their spiritual sloth? How were they going to be encouraged to do God's work? How were they not going to despise the day of small things?

[16 : 52] And bring that even to ourselves? How are we going to be shaken? How am I going to be shaken out of our reluctance to be simply more than hearers of God's word? More than that.

But not just hearer, a hearer, but a doer. And not just a doer of God's work, but a doer with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. How are we going to do that?

Well, the answer's found right here. It's found in God's word. It's found in God's infallible and reliable true word. Because the answer was made clear through Zechariah.

It's the same answer that we're going to see is with us today. It's the answer that comes from the very word of the living and true God. As we're told elsewhere in Scripture in times past, in other words, before the coming of the Lord Jesus, God spoke through his prophets.

God spoke to his people through these prophets. And through the coming of the Lord Jesus, God has spoken to us through him. And has spoken to us in power.

[18 : 00] That's what we will become to in verse six, not by might, in other words, not by human might, nor by power, not by human power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.

That's the difference. That's the difference. Because it's the Holy Spirit who empowers you. It's the Holy Spirit who makes all that difference in your heart. Hearts that so often sag with doubt and fear and despair.

But through the power of the Spirit, your heart raised to new life and a new commitment and a renewed joy. Join the Lord to serve him with all that you are.

And that really takes us to this whole central aspect of the Spirit of difference that you read there in verses seven to nine. Because in this fifth vision that Zechariah has given, this vision is a vision of hope.

It's a message of hope. It's a message of encouragement, as we said, centred on the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who makes all the difference. Because by God's Spirit, seemingly impossible barriers are laid low.

[19 : 13] You see that in the words of verse seven to verse eight. These mountains, these figurative mountains, these so-called impenetrable mountains of despair, the half-heartedness, the lack of resources, as Zechariah is informed through the vision, these mountains are going to be leveled, leveled to a plain, a leveled ground on which the people can move.

And this is a picture, a beautiful picture, we might say a poetic picture, telling us of the difference that the Holy Spirit makes, and makes in the lives of each and every one of his people.

And the Spirit that enables you to witness for him, to witness in the work that he's given for you and me to do for as long as we are on this side of eternity.

Yes, so often we see these mountains before us and we perceive them to be great and as we said, just unable to be traversed. We see them in our hearts, we see them in our minds.

You know, to God there is nothing. Remember what Jesus said of these mountains. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes what he says, will come to pass.

[20 : 37] It will be done for him. It's that mountain moving, mountain moving through spirit, the spirit given grace and faith that the Lord's people have.

It's that what makes the difference. And it's that faith that the people here will be encouraged through this prophecy, this vision. Faith, faith to trust, faith in the power of the Holy Spirit and to truly believe what the people were being given.

These words of prophecy that were going to be fulfilled that were told there in verse nine of this governor Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel who laid the foundations of the temple some years before and the prophecy given.

The same hands that laid the foundations are going to build the temple. Now at that time that would have seemed a distant reality. But because this is the word of God, what God says is as good as done because the promises of God are sure and certain.

The rebuilding of course of the temple, yes, would be accomplished not by human might, not by human power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 53] Now of course the people's hands would lift the stones and their resources would be given to enable the temple to be built, yes, but the success of that building would be entirely through the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Because as the people lived by the Spirit, they would act in the Spirit's power and do mighty things for the Lord. And for you and for me and the work that God has given us, each one of us to do in building his church, it's for you and for me, the more to walk in the Spirit and to pray in the Spirit and to worship in the Spirit, to love one another in the Spirit.

You who know him, you've been made alive by the Spirit, will live by that same Spirit and display the fruit of the Spirit as you live that life and the power that God gives you to do mighty things for him.

Don't live by sight, but by faith. Yes, you'll see challenges and obstacles in the way, but don't stare at them. Look to the one who's above all.

Look to the power of God to remove these barriers and for the Lord's people to continue in the work of the kingdom. And yes, we may well seem and appear to be weak in the eyes of the world, but remember you're strong in the Spirit.

[23 : 24] That's what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

And then you read further on in that same chapter, 1 Corinthians 1, and Paul a few verses later speaks of his own weakness. when he wrote, writes of his coming to Corinth, my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

The work that God has given each one of us in building his church, building that church, pray that you'll be empowered by that, the Spirit to, yes, power and weakness, and yes, witness, witness, that you know that power and exercise that power because of the Spirit who makes that difference.

It's a great work that God has given to his people. That work is a great work that testifies to the greatness of the Lord Jesus. And yes, even in this day and age, this day of small things, well, yes, it is a day of small things.

Even this day we can be encouraged in, even as the people there in Zechariah's time were encouraged, even in that day of small things that we read there in verse 10.

[24 : 57] For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. There's no doubt the people were at fault.

I mean, they were despising the circumstances that God had placed them in. They weren't looking above their circumstances, they were looking directly at their circumstances. They weren't seeing God and his sovereign power and might.

The circumstances that they were living in seemed to confirm this notion of the day of small things. They felt, well, we're in a day of small things, therefore let's just keep sinking in our despair.

As we saw right at the start of our thoughts in this passage, yes, they were few in number. Certainly they lacked the resources that Solomon had when Solomon built his temple.

They lacked the military might that David and Solomon had to protect the people. Humanly speaking, we could say they were very, very weak. And the people in Jerusalem, they were slumped in their faith.

[26 : 08] All they could see was smallness. Smallness in comparison to the great task of rebuilding the temple. And they were saying, well, it just can't be done.

We're so few, we lack the resources, we lack the manpower, we don't have what our forefathers had. And they were being utterly unrealistic. They were denying the power of God, God who gives the increase.

They were denying the reality of the power of God's Spirit to give, to give that increase, to give that success in the work that God has given his people to do. And because the people then had such weak pain, they were downhearted, they were despondent, they were thinking, well, this day of small things, that's all it's ever going to be.

But hear the voice of God as the people heard that voice speak through Zechariah. God's telling the people, yes, you were despondent, but you're going to rejoice.

they're going to see the governor of Jerusalem, they're going to see Zerubbabel, they're going to see him with a plumb line, with a tool in his hand, he's going to measure the progress of the rebuilding of the temple.

[27 : 26] The work is going to carry on, and the temple will be built, that place of worship, that place of sacrifice, that temple's going to be built as a beacon to tell others that God is Lord.

Lord, and you know, bring this to today. We can so easily sink in the sea of pessimism, and really sink in that sea of, you might say, defeatism.

You know, we cry out with all these excuses. We've got no money, we're few in number, there aren't these many men to lead the church, there are few co-workers in the kingdom, things aren't what they were like in the days of us.

our fathers of previous generations, we can look back and see the so-called glory days, and compare them to our own day. Yes, we can fall into that trap of thinking that we can't plant or build or harvest when we're living in a day of small things.

And we see by sight and not by faith. And yes, we might see by sight the apparent weakness of church. We're called to look to the one who gives that increase, who enables you and me to tell us, to show us that his grace is made perfect in our weakness.

[28 : 55] And he will work through even weak individuals such as ourselves. And so the call here is clear. Don't despise even this day of small things.

Because even, as it were, small things don't prevent the work of building the kingdom of God. God will use even the widow's might to extend his kingdom.

God's going to use jars of clay for his glory, for his name's sake. He'll give the increase. It's what the 19th century Scottish churchman Thomas Chalmers spoke of when he spoke of the power of littles.

You know, the accumulated strength of these tiny contributions that he was asking the people to contribute to, just to give their pennies to build the church there in Glasgow.

The power of littles. The accumulation of even the work of God's people together to build this church, that church that God will bless richly. And it isn't by might, and it isn't by power, but it's by his Holy Spirit.

[30 : 08] You know, think of Jesus' words that he gave to his disciples after his resurrection. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes in you. And you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

11 disciples. Littles, the power of littles. That little group of disciples. They would be empowered, they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

They would build God's church on earth. And you go on in Acts, Acts chapter 9, and we're told, well, the promise had been made, the building of the church.

Listen to these words of Acts 9, 31. The church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened, encouraged. The church grew in numbers.

Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, the church grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. So we don't despise this day of small things.

[31 : 10] But see the fields. Yes, the fields are white unto harvest. The harvest that's out there. I was in Edinburgh last night and saw the sway, the humanity, this desperate humanity that needs a saviour, a humanity that seemed just so lost and helpless.

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. So pray to the Lord of the harvest. Yes, to send out workers into the harvest field and workers who will go out in the power of the Holy Spirit.

That's power and strength of God. So that souls will be brought back. Souls come into the kingdom. Yes, pray that God will use weak individuals such as ourselves.

Humanly speaking, what we do is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. And look at the opportunities then that God gives you. Yes, even in this day of small things.

The work will continue. The power of littles will happen through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. Great things can be done and will be done even in this spiritual wasteland that we're living in.

[32 : 25] Rely on his strength and his power. Even when you, as it were, know your weakness. And so, as we come to the close then of these thoughts, be encouraged from this vision.

It was a vision that was given, yes, so long ago in one sense. But this is God's word. And it has absolute relevance today. God bless the people there in Jerusalem despite their despondency.

And we pray that God will bless his people today even despite their own despondency. And remember, these words be close. Not by might, not by power, but by the Holy Spirit.

So give thanks to God. He does give that encouragement even through his word. Even in this day of small things. It's a day of small things, yes. But we have a great God, a great King, and a great Saviour.

I know that yes, the mountains may be there. But know that he's given you that power to be mountain movers in his strength and for his name's sake.

[33 : 36] Amen. Let us pray. Lord, forgive us when we despise this day of small things. Lord, build your church.

Be with those who are building your church. Lord, we pray for those who are going out into the harvest field. We pray, Lord, for those who are being trained so to do. We pray, Lord, for our seminary sending out men and women to proclaim the good news through word and witness.

Lord, bless, we pray, that sending. Bless, Lord, your church. Bless your church in our own land and elsewhere. Lord, may we not despair, but rejoice to know that you're God, that you're Lord, that you are building your church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.