

I have been eagerly waiting to preach from this passage for 26 years!

In the spring of 1993 I visited Westminster Theological Seminary

and heard Ray Dillard give a lecture in the Prophets class on this passage.

Ray Dillard died the following fall, so this was the only lecture I ever heard from him.

Perhaps that is why it stuck with me!

After giving a brilliant exposition of these chapters,

Ray stopped, and looked at the young men sitting before him and said:

“Do you know what these words mean?”

‘Do not despise the day of small things – of small beginnings.’

Most of you will be pastors of small churches.

You will be tempted – like Zerubbabel –

to wonder whether all the effort is worth it!

Your whole ministry could be devoted to small, struggling churches –

and during your lifetime, you may never see anything more.

But do not despise the day of small things – the day of small beginnings.”

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts!

Whether planting a church in Elkhart –

rehabbing a house in South Bend –

whether in parenting, or in business –

whatever you do – wherever you go –

your confidence is not in your great ability –

your wisdom, your power, your connections or wealth –

but in the Spirit of our God!

Visions of the Restoration of Jerusalem [chapters 1-8]

As we saw last time, from 1:7 through chapter 6 all comes under one “time stamp.”

All of the “night visions” of Zechariah came on the night of February 15, 519 B.C.

(the 24th day of the 11th month).

And tonight we are looking at the conclusion of the two visions of chapters 3-4.

Last time we looked at chapter 3 on Joshua and the Forgiveness of Sins –

the high priest, Joshua, had filthy garments – garments stained by his own filth!

We saw how we *need* a high priest with *clean garments* –

a high priest who can enter the presence of God on our behalf –

and *bring us with him!*

Now in Chapter 4 we hear about Zerubbabel and the Gift of the Holy Spirit

These two visions come together at the Day of Pentecost when Peter declared, “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

1. The Vision of the Lampstand (4:1-3)

4 And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep.

Zechariah falls asleep again – and is wakened again by the angel.

This interlude signals the center of the night visions.

So we should not be surprised to find that the vision of chapter 4 complements the vision of chapter 3 (as the twin centerpieces of the passage).

² 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. ³ And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.”

I want you to see the picture before you try to understand it!

When you hear of a lampstand with seven lamps,

you are probably tempted to think of a lampstand with seven branches.

But listen more carefully to the description:

“a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it...”

So the bowl is on the top of the lampstand.

“and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it.”

This is a very good translation.

The picture here is that this lampstand has a bowl with seven lamps – each lamp having seven lips!

That means that there are seven lights on each lamp!

Archeologists have found several examples of seven lip lamps.

A lamp with seven lips means that you could have seven wicks, each sharing from the same bowl of oil.

But Zechariah sees a lampstand with seven lamps –

each lamp having seven lips –

which means that this lampstand has *forty-nine* lights!

And there are two olive trees – one on each side!

This is not the sort of lampstand that you would find in the temple.

(nor would you find olive trees growing in the temple!)
But then again, we saw last time that Joshua
 was not clothed in the garments of a high priest!
What is needed is not merely a restoration of the old covenant!
We need a new priesthood – a new temple – a new lampstand!

Now – seeing the vision aright –
 we ask with Zechariah, “What are these, my lord?”

2. The Completion of the Temple “By My Spirit” (4:4-7)

⁴ And I said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵ Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.”

The question of verse 4 is “what are these two olive trees?”
 That question will not be answered until the end verse 10.
 But we need to understand the rest of the vision in order to understand “these two.”

And the point of the vision is found in the word of the LORD in verse 6:

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.

Israel’s temptation had always been to think that they could accomplish the purposes of God
 by following after the political agendas of their day.
If we ally with Egypt – we can further God’s kingdom!
If we make friends with Babylon – we can save Jerusalem!
If we trust in Persia – we can rebuild the temple!

(And likewise, we are often tempted to trust political power!
 If we can only elect a candidate who will do what we want...!
 But putting our trust in political power *always* backfires!)

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”
 God may use Egypt, Babylon, and Persia for the sake of his kingdom –
 but it will not be by the might and power of the worldly politics
 that Christ’s kingdom will be established!
 It will always be “by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”

The Holy Spirit is the one who energizes the renewal of the Kingdom of God.
 The Holy Spirit is the oil that flows through the lamps –
 that powers the shining forth of the church of Jesus Christ!

(Think about the seven lampstands in John's vision in Revelation!
The seven lampstands are the seven churches.
The divine light of the Holy Spirit is held forth by the lampstands.)

It's the same in Zechariah 4.

Verse 7 introduces a new figure:

⁷ Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'

What mountain is this?

Throughout the OT there are references to the jealousies of the mountains against Mt. Zion.

Psalm 68 speaks of how the mountains of Bashan were jealous of Zion – because the LORD determined to dwell at Mt. Zion.

Mountains often represent temples (since shrines and temples were usually located at the “high places”).

The Ziggurats of the ancient world were “man-made mountains” – and so the “great mountain” that opposes Zerubbabel would represent the opposition of the nations and their temples.

But before Zerubbabel the great mountain becomes a plain – the opposition to the rebuilding of the temple melts away – and Zerubbabel finishes the temple – bringing forth the top stone amid shouts of “Grace, grace to it!”

If the great mountain refers to the opposition of the nations, then we can see mountains in our lives – whenever we see opposition to the gospel.

In our day, the “temples” of the nations include the shopping malls – the sports arenas – the entertainment industry – with its quest to keep you so focused on the pleasures of this age that you ignore the kingdom of Christ!

If we are seeking *first* the kingdom of Christ – what does that mean for how we use our time?

I'm not saying that there is *no* place for entertainment in the Christian life!

I'm suggesting that if our hearts and minds are preoccupied with entertainment – if our “default mode” is to focus on our screens – our stuff – our ‘fun’ – then we are not seeking *first* the kingdom of Christ.

But have no fear!

No weapon forged against you can stand!
No opposition to the gospel can possibly succeed (in the end).
Sure – in the middle of history, things can go very badly!
When a church forgets her Lord – her first love –
 then Jesus himself may come in judgment against her –
 to remove her lampstand!
But the church cannot be conquered by outside forces!

And indeed, the people of Zechariah's day needed to hear this no less than do we!

3. Do Not Despise the Day of Small Things! (4:8-10)

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁹ “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. ¹⁰ For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

We know from the prophet Haggai
 that many of those who saw the foundation of the second temple
 wept because of how small and feeble the second temple was going to be.
They despised the day of small things – the day of small beginnings.

But God is merciful!
He doesn't condemn us for our doubt and despair!
He doesn't reject us because we could not see through the feebleness of our efforts!

He says that *whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice*.
 Even the one who wept at the dedication of the temple –
 even the one who thought that it looked like *nothing* –
 “shall rejoice.”

At first I was puzzled by this.
If someone despises the day of small things –
 are they not rejecting what *God is doing*?
And then I realized that the answer is:
 Not quite!

Because the one who despises the day of small things has enough faith *to be present!*
 The one who weeps over the feebleness of the church –
 at least is *there* to weep!
And has enough of a sense of what *should be* –
 to mourn *what is!*

God does not despise the one who despairs of what he sees in this age!

No! Far from it!

God promises to such a one – that you will rejoice
and that you will see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel!

The plumb line is used in finishing the work –
to make sure that everything is plumb – everything is level.
And so the people of God will rejoice to see the completion of the temple.

You will rejoice to see the completion of God’s heavenly temple!
You may be discouraged at times at how long it takes!
But take heart – because the Spirit of God is still working!

After all – that is the answer to the question : “What are these?”
“These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth.”

“These seven”

Which seven? – the seven lamps? Or the seven lips on the seven lamps?
Or, for that matter, the seven eyes on the single stone
set before Joshua back in chapter 3, verse 9?

Yes!!

Zechariah connects the eyes of the LORD,
with the lamps in the temple,
and the seven eyes on the single stone –
all of which connect with the sevenfold Spirit of God (Isaiah 11).

In Isaiah 11:1-2, we hear of the sevenfold Spirit:

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom (2) and understanding (3),
the Spirit of counsel (4) and might (5),
the Spirit of knowledge (6), and the fear of the LORD (7).

The eyes of the LORD range through the whole earth.

God sees all things.

His eyes range through all the earth.

He sees all that happens.

He sees – he knows – he understands!

Now – you might wonder – if God sees, if God knows, if God understands –
then how come I’m still going through this...?

Yes, I know – right now, we see the day of small beginnings.

We see the day of small things.
And yes, in many ways, we only make a small beginning in this life!
But again – not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit!

We shouldn't be surprised that our weakness – our frailty –
is an important part of what God uses to bring about his kingdom!

4. The Two Sons of Fresh Oil (4:11-14)

¹¹ Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” ¹² 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^[d] is poured out?” ¹³ He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” ¹⁴ Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones^[e] who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

But Zechariah still has one more question!
Look at verses 11-12.

Again – start with the picture:

On either side of the lampstand there is an olive tree – one on the right and one on the left
Further, there are two branches and two golden pipes
from which the golden oil is poured out –
not *drips* – but *pours* –
into the bowl at the top of the lampstand

In other words, there is an abundant supply – an inexhaustible supply of oil!

The Holy Spirit will be fully poured out upon the people of God
in order to accomplish the completion of the temple!

So what *are* these two olive trees? and these two branches?

The angel says:

“These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

The phrase “anointed ones” is somewhat unfortunate –
since it would make most English speakers *think* that the word here is “Messiah” –
but it's not.

The footnote points out that in Hebrew it is “two sons of new oil.”

Admittedly, that's a very odd phrase,
so I can sympathize with the translators!
What on earth is a “son of new oil”?!!

In the context of Zechariah 3-4, it probably means that these are Joshua and Zerubbabel.
But Joshua stood before the LORD in filthy garments!!

How can he now be a source of the Holy Spirit to the lamps!!

This is why some would prefer to say that the two sons of new oil are Haggai and Zechariah – the prophets who proclaimed the word of the LORD to Joshua and Zerubbabel.

But either way, the two olive trees are not the source –
the sons of new oil are not the source of oil
(you might use the term *mother of new oil* to talk about a producer –
but not *son of new oil*).

The olive trees – and the golden pipes –
are the vehicles for – the means of transporting – the oil to the lampstand.

In the same way, the book of Revelation will speak of the Two Witnesses
that are the “two olive trees” that stand before the Lord of all the earth (Rev 11:4).

But since Joshua and Zerubbabel are both “signs” that point to the coming Messiah –
and since Haggai and Zechariah are both prophets who proclaim the coming Messiah –
I’m not sure that you can go wrong with either one!!

The whole point of these two central visions of Zechariah 3-4 is that the restoration of the temple
and the salvation of the people of God
will come about through the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom of God will come when God forgives their sins in a day –
and pours out his Spirit upon them.

This is what Pentecost was all about.

This is what the Gospel is all about!

Without Pentecost there is no good news.

Think about it.

If Jesus died and never rose – there would be no good news! –
because that would mean that death always wins!!

If Jesus died and rose again, but never ascended into heaven – no good news! –
because as much fun as it would be
to see the risen Christ walking around today,
it would just be a freak show!

Come, look at the guy who rose again from the dead 2000 years ago!!

But if he does not sit at the right hand of the Father,
then the kingdom of God has not been established –
in the ascension of Jesus,

one who bears our nature sits at the right hand of God.

But in the same way,

if Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, but never sent the Holy Spirit,
then all that he accomplished for our salvation would never reach us!

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts.

Without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit,
there is no way that the gospel goes forth to the nations.

And because we have received the Holy Spirit –
we now bear witness to Jesus.
And all those who bear witness to Jesus become signs pointing to the Messiah –
we become conduits – “golden pipes” –
through which the Holy Spirit comes to the nations!

When you read the book of Acts, what does the Holy Spirit do in the book of Acts?
When the Holy Spirit comes upon someone what do they do?
They start talking about Jesus –
they start bearing witness to Jesus.
In the book of Acts, it’s arguable that Peter and Paul are the “two witnesses” –
the two ‘sons of fresh oil’ who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

And in the same way, the Holy Spirit continues to do this today!
The Holy Spirit has been given to *us* so that *we* might bear witness to Jesus.

Because we too (like Zerubbabel) are engaged in *temple building*.
We are building up the body of Christ.
Paul says in Ephesians 4 Christ has given pastors and teachers
“to equip the saints, for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ” –
so pastors and teachers are specially called to “build up the body” –
but then just a few verses later, Paul says that the whole body participates in that!

“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head,
into Christ, from whom the whole body,
joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,
when each part is working properly,
makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Eph 4:12, 15-16)

Your pastors and teachers are engaged in temple building – through the ministry of the word.
But then you also, in how *you speak to one another*
are engaged in temple building – body building.
How do you speak to one another?
How are your words designed to edify? to encourage? to build up?