

Zech 4
Building God's House
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William Henry Gates III dropped out of uni aged 20,
and decided to try to start a company out of his parents garage.
What advice would you give to young William?
Finish your studies,
there will be plenty of time to start a company when you graduate.
Maybe get some experience in your industry
before trying to start a company.
Well the year was 1975.
William Henry Gates III's friends called him Bill, Bill Gates.
And the company he formed was named Microsoft.

The word of the Lord came to Zechariah,
4:10 "Who dares to despise the day of small things ...?"
The point is that often when you are doing God's work,
it feels like your efforts are not making a heap of difference.
It feels like the forces arrayed against your efforts are overwhelming.
And yet, you never know what God might be building.
God has a regular practice of starting his mighty projects
with something insignificant and not on people's radar.
That's how he does things.

Think about Noah building his ark.
Do you think that building a great big boat in your back yard
when it's not even near the water,
looked like a history changing enterprise?
But God used it to save humanity.
Or what about poor childless Hannah
pouring her heart out to God in the temple,
laughed at by her rival because she was barren,
the priest thought she was drunk
and was going to boot her out of the temple.

Was she going to change history?
But God spoke to Israel through her son Samuel.

God's usual practice is to work through faithful people
who are operating out of sight,
and use their efforts to build his kingdom in quite remarkable ways.

Zechariah has another vision.

4:2 "I see a solid gold lampstand
and a bowl at the top and seven lamps on it,
with seven channels to the lamps.

Also there are two olive trees by it,
one on the right of the bowl and the other on the left."

And if you are thinking to yourself,

"Well that sounds very interesting but I haven't a clue what means."

Don't be dismayed,

you are in good company.

4:4 "I asked the angel who talked with me,

'What are these, my lord?'

He answered, 'Do you not know what they are?'

'No, my lord,' I replied."

Zechariah sees a vision.

He has no idea what it means.

But what we have in the rest of the chapter
is an explanation of the vision.

So the solid gold lampstand in the vision represents the temple.

4:9 tells us,

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple;"

That is what the lampstand represents.

The seven lamps on the bowl at the top represent

the seven eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth.

This is just saying that God sees everything that is going on.

And if Zerubbabel builds the temple,

then God will be living in it.
But he won't be confined to it.
He will be seeing everything that goes on in the world.

The two olive trees are two men who will serve God in the temple.
There is Zerubbabel who will build the temple,
and Joshua who will be the High Priest in the temple.
Why are they pictured as olive trees?
From olive trees come olives.
From olives comes olive oil.
And olive oil is the fuel for the lamp.
So these men are going to work for the Lord.
Zerubbabel provides oil for the temple by building it.
Joshua provides oil for the temple by serving as High Priest.

So that's the easy part done,
understanding the vision.
It's a vision of the temple being built.
Last week in Zechariah 3, we had the vision of Joshua the High Priest.
God cleansing a high priest to serve before him.
This week we have the temple being built.
The two go together.
You need both of them
so that God can come and live among his people.

Now for the really important stuff.
As well as a vision of the temple,
there are three words spoken
that tells us about how God is thinking about it all.
God's point of view is of great importance.
So these words are super important.
Here's the first word.
4:6 "Then the angel said to Zechariah,
'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel:
not by might nor by power,

but by my spirit say the Lord Almighty.'" Zechariah is given a special message for the one who is to build the temple. Prophet, go and tell the temple builder, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.'

Sometimes Christians hear those words and misunderstand them.

We often hear, not by might nor my power, and we think, 'Ah we don't have to do anything.

We can stop striving.

God is going to make it happen.

Let's relax and enjoy watching God do it all.'

That was not the message to Zerubbabel.

He was definitely not being told to relax.

The work of rebuilding the temple was mountainous.

It must have seemed impossible.

Not only was he among a community that was economically deprived.

Y'know, these people were struggling just to feed themselves.

How on earth were they going to be able to put the resources aside for a major project like building the temple?

But on top of that they faced opposition.

Under the Persian emperor,

there were governors of each of his 31 provinces.

The governor of the province that Israel was part of was named Tattenai.

And you can read in Ezra 5,

about how Tattenai the governor sent a delegation

to his boss the emperor Darius

trying to get the temple building blocked.

The odds of Zerubbabel ever finishing his temple building project looked long.

You could get better odds

of the train line from Stony Point being electrified.

So the message to Zerubbabel is not,

"relax, get out your banana lounge and watch God do it all."
It's, "Don't be dismayed
that the task God has assigned to you seems impossible.
Work at it with all your might.
And see if God doesn't organise things
to make the impossible become possible."
Don't think, "I'm not strong enough."
Not by might, not by power.
Think, "God can make it happen."
But by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty.

Well this is a word for Zerubbabel building the temple.
But it is also a word for anyone
trying to undertake a difficult project for the Lord.
Robbie has it on his heart at the moment,
to start a time of prayer
and discussing a few verses of God's Word together
for those who come along to Trinity Tucker.
And it seems a difficult job.
Did you know they don't train you
in how to start a little Christian community
as part of an electricians apprenticeship?
Astounding, isn't it?
And people say they will be part of it.
And then they back out at the last minute.
Or they are here one week and not the next.
Sometimes the task seems too difficult.
We don't seem well enough equipped for it.
The message is,
Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty.
If God wants it to happen,
it will happen.
Does that mean Robbie can just sit back and watch
and it will happen by itself?
No, not a bit of it.

If there's good training available we will go to it.
 We're not going to back out of doing the work God has called us to.
 But even when we've done everything we possibly can,
 we still rely on the Spirit of God to make it happen.

Here's the second word.

4:7 "What are you, mighty mountain?"

Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground."

The obstacles in Zerubbabel's way seemed just too big.

A small under resourced and dispirited community.

And the opposition of the governor Tattenai.

It was enough to make a determined man give up.

But God has a different perspective.

"What are you, mighty mountain?"

What is a mountain anyway?

No doubt those of you who have done geography at school

could tell me what a mountain is

in terms of the earth's crust getting folded.

That's not the point.

What is a mountain?

A mountain is a big thing that God made.

And if God made it,

then God can flatten it.

Whatever the obstacle is,

God can remove it.

That happened for Zerubbabel.

Tattenai sent his delegation to the emperor Darius

to ask that the Jews be stopped building their temple.

What was Darius' reply?

"Tattenai, I want the Jews to be able to build their temple.

You use your governor's resources to help them."

God flattened the mountain of opposition

and turned it into assistance.

How do we appropriate that word as Christians?

Well we can't take it as a cast iron guarantee
that our endeavours for the Lord
will have their opposition removed and we will succeed.
Zerubbabel was given specific instructions to build a temple for God.
God promised him that the opposition to his project would be removed.
I've got a project I want to do for God.
I want to build a new Op Shop and foyer for Holy Trinity.
But I don't have a command from God
to complete that project like Zerubbabel did.
I think it's a good thing to do.
But that's a long way from a direct divine command.
So I need to be a bit careful.
The mountain in my way
is the massive increase in building costs with the pandemic.
I would like it if God flattened that mountain.
God may well flatten that mountain.
But he hasn't promised to flatten that mountain.
It's quite possible that at some point in the future I may have to give up.
God may be teaching me a lesson in humility
rather than building a new structure at this church.
I certainly hope that's not his plan.
I'm praying that we can get this building project done.
But I have no word from the Lord on that.
What do I have a word from the Lord on?
Whatever the mountain is,
it is nothing before the Almighty God.
30% cost increase because of the pandemic.
God solves 13 problems bigger than that before breakfast.
It doesn't phase him.
The question is not 'Can God make it happen?'
Yes he can absolutely.
The question is 'Does God want to make it happen?'
And for that, I can only work away diligently,
and see what God does.

Here is the third word given to Zechariah.
 4:10 "Who dares despise the day of small things,
 since the seven eyes of the Lord that range throughout the earth
 will rejoice when they see the chosen capstone
 in the hands of Zerubbabel?"

It was easy for the mockers and scoffers to get stuck into Zerubbabel.
 We've already noticed that it was a hard task that confronted him.
 The naysayers could have a field day predicting doom and gloom
 because of the parlous economic conditions that faced them
 and the opposition of Tattenai that faced them.

"What do you think you are doing Zerubbabel?

Opposing the governor?

You and whose army?

And you want us to come and work with you?

Are you nuts?"

"My kids have got empty bellies, Zerubbabel.

Your grand dreams of a new temple would be great,
 if they were realistic.

Maybe my grandchildren will see it.

Sorry mate, I'd love to help, I really would."

It was a hard task,

but that was only half the battle for Zerubbabel.

There was also the response of those who saw his work.

The temple he was building was not a patch on the one it replaced.

You can imagine why.

The temple the Babylonians pulled down was built by Solomon.

Solomon was king of the whole of the united Israel.

The northern 10 tribes

who had been scattered to the winds by the Assyrians 150 years earlier
 as well as the two tribes

some of whom came back from exile in Babylon

and were helping with the rebuilding project.

Solomon could enlist the help of Hiram King of Tyre
 in his building project.

And he ruled over a prosperous and stable nation.
It's no wonder that Solomon's temple was far more elaborate and ornate than the one Zerubbabel built.

Ezra 3 puts it this way.

"Many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid." Zerubbabel's temple was not a patch on the old one.

That is no shade on him.

He was a different man operating in different conditions.

But it underlines that this was a day of small things.

But God's word is,

"Who dares despise the day of small things?"

Did Zerubbabel work as hard as Solomon in building his temple?

Probably harder.

When God came to live in Zerubbabel's temple

was he just as much present with his people?

Yes he was.

Was God just as happy with Zerubbabel

for doing what he commanded him to do as he was Solomon?

Sure, he was.

Probably happier given Solomon's idolatry towards the end of his life.

The point is that sometimes being obedient to God does not look as impressive as it does other times.

No doubt the people who built St Paul's Cathedral

got more pats on the back than the people

who built the old weatherboard church that burned down at Holy Trinity Hastings.

But were the people who built the weatherboard church any less faithful than the people who built the cathedral?

I have actually no idea.

I haven't done the history.

But I can see a plausible argument

that the people who built St Paul's Cathedral
 might have been partly motivated by art
 and partly motivated by community acclaim
 and partly motivated by a desire to provide a space to worship God.
 But the people who built the old weatherboard church.
 Well I'm guessing
 but I'd say it was purely about a place to worship God.
 There might have been the odd bloke
 who joined in the work because his wife told him to.
 But the general motivation would have been to serve God.
 Was God more pleased with the people who built St Paul's Cathedral
 than the people who built the first Holy Trinity Church?
 I wouldn't have thought so.
 Who dares to despise the day of small things?
 The seven eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth.
 That means that he sees everything.
 He sees what is happening out of sight in the back blocks
 as well as what is happening in the centre of town.
 And he was just as present
 with those who worshipped him in the old weatherboard church
 as with those who sing fine choral anthems in an ornate cathedral.

Don't despise the day of small things.
 I've heard plenty of folk in my time
 looking wistfully back
 to the days of Sunday Schools bursting at the seams,
 and churches being the centre of community life,
 and disparaging the efforts of those who work today.
 Do you think those in the past were more faithful?
 Maybe.
 But remember it was on their watch that things declined.
 It takes a generation or two
 for the full effects of poor ministry practice to come home to roost.
 Jeremiah's generation were far less faithful than Zechariah's generation.
 But Jeremiah's generation had the more splendid temple.

In many ways the church is just in a different era now.
This is largely a day of small things.
The community we live in has changed.
The general affection for the church
among those members of the community who aren't members
has plummeted.

That obviously has an effect on ministry.
No amount of nostalgia for the past will bring the past back,
just as no amount of nostalgia for the old temple
could change the new temple Zerubbabel built.
But is the God who works in the church today
the same God who was at work in the church 100 years ago?

Yes.

Is he in charge of whether it's a day of small things
or a booming revival?

Yes he is.

Does he have his plans for the church he loves
in taking it through a season of struggle?

Yes he does.

Does he require his people to be faithful
whether things are booming or struggling?

Yes he does.

Don Carson's dad laboured in French speaking Canada
in a church with 40 people in it for 3 decades.

He was faithfully doing an excellent job.

And the church didn't grow.

Ministry in French speaking places
has always been harder than English speaking places.

The missionaries from the US would arrive.

They would tell Carson's father how he wasn't doing things right.

They would labour for 3 months and when they got no results,
they would go home.

But God is at work in the day of small things.

In that pastor's house in Quebec,

one of the outstanding NT scholars who is still alive was being brought up.

And after three decades there was a bit of a revival and the church grew to over 100 members.

Don't despise the day of small things.

You don't know what God is doing.