

By God's Spirit

Zechariah 4:5-7 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.

Do you despise the day of small things? Zerubbabel, the prince of Judah, did. He lived in a day of small things. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia (c. 538 BC), Zerubbabel led the first wave of Jews that returned from the Babylonian captivity, back to Jerusalem. Those who returned with him numbered approximately 50,000. They returned with the blessing of Cyrus and with the specific directive to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

Stirred by the Spirit of God, Cyrus had declared, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel. (Ezra 1:2, 3)

The rebuilding of the temple was something that the Jews longed to see. However, they had not reckoned with the day of small things. Upon their return to Canaan, they found that Jerusalem had been virtually demolished by the Babylonians. The city lay in ruins. All that remained was a collection of burnt out buildings. Nonetheless, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the governor and the spiritual guidance of Joshua, the high priest, the Jews embarked upon the restoration of Jerusalem.

Progress was made.

In the second year following their return, they erected the altar of burnt offering and laid the foundation of the new temple on the site of the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. However, no sooner had the foundations of the temple been laid than trouble emerged in the form of the Samaritans. When the Jews refused to accept the assistance of the Samaritans in the reconstruction work, the Samaritans successfully set about to bring the work to a halt. Zerubbabel was powerless to do anything about it. Consequently, the Jewish remnant became disheartened. These were days of small things.

We live in the day of small things. The Church of God is small. The cause of God seems frail. Interest in spiritual truth is luke-warm. The number of those attending Church is declining. Obstacles to the proclamation of the gospel and the establishment of the kingdom of God are frequent. Nominal Christendom has prostituted itself with a form of Christianity that appeals to the modern man. It appears impossible for the church to sustain itself, let alone grow.

Like Zerubbabel, Christians are liable to become disheartened and to despise the day of small things. Why is that? Because we equate the establishment of the Church of God, with human might and power. The greater the power, the greater the wealth, the greater the influence, the more the Church of God will grow. But is that so? Is the development and strength of the Church dependent upon might and power? The message of the LORD unto Zerubbabel and to us is to the contrary. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."

God gave a vision of a golden candlestick to Zechariah.

And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. (4:2,3)

The candlestick was a seven branched candlestick, having three arms on either side of a central shaft. There were seven lamps in all, one on the top of the central shaft and three either side. Above the lamps stood a bowl. From this bowl ran seven pipes or tubes, one to each of the seven lamps. On either side of the bowl, stood an olive tree, the branches of which extended over the bowl. The mechanics of the vision are reasonably easy to understand. The two olive trees supplied oil to the bowl through the overhanging branches. The oil then flowed down the seven pipes and served as the fuel for the seven lamps. As a result, the lamps were kept burning by the continuous and abundant supply of oil.

What is the meaning of the vision? The candlestick in the vision was similar to the candlestick located in the Holy Place of the tabernacle/temple. Neither the tabernacle nor the temple had windows in the Holy Place. Hence, artificial light was required. That light was supplied by the golden candlestick, that burned day and night. Every day, morning and evening, the priests came and trimmed the wicks of the lamps and replenished the supply of oil. The candlestick, along with the table of shewbread and the altar of incense all symbolised differing aspects of the relationship that existed between God and His people. The candlestick symbolised the covenant relationship between God and His people. The people of God, lived, not in the darkness of sin and death, but in the marvellous, inexhaustible light provided by God. The light of the Christ to come!

What was the purpose of the vision?

This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. (vs. 6)

"This", that is, the vision, was "the word of the LORD" to Zerubbabel. What was "the word of the LORD", to Zerubbabel? It was this, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit." Just as the candlestick was supplied with oil, from the two olive trees by the side of it, without the help of any man to pour in the oil and trim the lamps, so the temple would be rebuilt by Zerubbabel, not through the strength of men, but through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, animating, exciting, encouraging, and strengthening the people to go forward with the work. God, through His Spirit, would supply all that the Church needed. He would be the source of its life. He would build it; He would preserve it, without the assistance of men.

The work that Zerubbabel had to carry out in building the temple would not be accomplished by human strength or earthly power. This was the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel in his discouragement and in his inability and his hopelessness. He thought that the work depended on might and power. Therefore, he feared that the temple would never be rebuilt. But God says to him, "Not by might, nor by power." God's word to Zerubbabel was that Judah's spiritual life, her shining as a light in the world, the building and restoration of the temple, would not come about by human might or endeavour; nor by the pooling of their resources.

How then? By the irresistible power of the Holy Spirit, who works when and where and how He pleases. Breathing life and vitality into the hearts of men; resurrecting them from spiritual death unto spiritual life; enlightening their minds; making them spiritually alive. God would build His Church in exactly the same manner that He does today.

Those difficulties that seem insuperable, God would overcome. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (vs. 7). There was a host of obstacles that stood in Zerubbabel's way with respect to the reconstruction of the temple. But God would remove those mountain-like obstacles. "Who art thou, O great mountain?" Who or what was "the great mountain"? In Zerubbabel's day, the "great mountain" was the Persian monarchy. Zerubbabel and the children of Judah were constrained by the decree of Artaxerxes. The "great mountain" also symbolises those things that stand in the way of the building and gathering of the Church of Jesus Christ in every age, including the mighty world power, the final manifestation of which will be the anti-Christian kingdom; the Babylon of the book of Revelation. No obstacle, no matter how great, not even the great mountain of the Persian monarchy would be allowed to hinder the progress of the work. The highest mountain, the greatest obstacle, God was able to make a plain; to make it dissipate.

That is precisely what happened. Darius, having uncovered the original decree of Cyrus declared, Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail (Ezra 6:6-9).

The great world power served the church of God; something Zerubbabel could never have achieved. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."

Even the greatest mountains will not be allowed to hinder the building and gathering of the Church of God. All opposition will prove futile. Ironically, and contrary to their intentions, the great mountains will serve the Church of God. The building of the Church is a gracious work of God by His Spirit.

Rev Mark Shand
(The Evangelical Presbyterian, June 2007)