

Power Partners

Part 5, Zechariah 4

Zechariah 4:1-14 (NIV)

¹ Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep.

² He asked me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights.

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

⁴ I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?"

⁵ He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied.

⁶ So 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 Almighty.

⁷ "What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it! God bless it!'"

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me:

⁹ "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.

¹⁰ "Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. "(These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth.)"

¹¹ Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?"

¹² Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?"

¹³ He replied, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I said.

¹⁴ So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."

*Let the ruins come to life
In the beauty of Your name
Rising up from the ashes
God forever You reign
(Glorious Ruins: Hillsong)*

Some of you may remember that a few years ago I was struggling with anxiety and the first Sunday I came back after a few weeks off this song; Glorious Ruins, was sung in our church for the first time, and as someone who felt a little ruined at the time it ministered powerfully into my Spirit. Yet I have always been struck by the dissonance of the title. How can ruins, things that have been broken down and destroyed, how can such things be glorious? In the secular world this makes no sense at all but in the spiritual world it is an incredibly powerful reality. Ruins can be glorious when their restoration reveals to us the glory of God. In the same way that ruined lives can be glorious when God's restores people to wholeness.



John the gospel writer wrote that it was in the ruining death of Jesus that God's son was glorified (John 12:23), that in a moment of deep and darkest evil, God created incredible restoration and life for the whole world out of the ruins of our sin.

This image of ruined Jerusalem and its restoration has become a powerful symbol of the restoring power of God. Last Sunday Paul preached a wonderful sermon on one of the promises God gave to the prophet Jeremiah that in buying a field, in soon to be conquered Israel, he was trusting the promises of God to restore the people, and Jeremiah demonstrated his trust in God by buying the field and investing in God's future.

This is what the gift of prophecy is about, God firing up the imagination of his people with His alternative reality. The value of prophecy should not be underestimated. Israel was one of thousands of people groups absorbed into the great empires of Assyria, Babylon and Persia, but one of the very few to emerge with its faith and identity intact, and much of this had to do with the unique impact prophecy had on the people during the distressing and chaotic experience of defeat and exile. The apostle Paul explained that what prophecy does is strengthen, encourage and comfort God's people (1 Corinthians 14:3) as they go through stuff and that same prophetic spirit is with the church today.

Today we are finishing our Power Partner series with another prophetic vision given by Zechariah, 70 years after the fall of Jerusalem and during the period of the return and rebuilding of the city. During that time the rebuilding stalled in the face of strong opposition from Samaritan and Syrian interests and God's people began to wonder if it would ever happen at all. Many of us know that feeling. Many of us have prayed over a long period of time, to see loved ones restored to God, to see the church filled in the power of the Holy Spirit, to see people coming to faith and giving their life to God, to see breakthroughs for people suffering and in difficult circumstances, and yet nothing appears to be happening and we wonder what God is doing.

In the vision in chapter 4, Zechariah goes to sleep with one reality, the reality of a half re-built city with all its problems and he wakes to a very different reality.

In a vision he sees a strikingly beautiful gold lamp between two olive trees and hears a stirring declaration from God. Let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves, how can a spiritual vision and declaration from God be an antidote to doubt and discouragement in the real world in which we live?



During the Second World War, General Charles de Gaulle, was the leader of the free French forces and from his base in Algeria he was invited (some would say summoned) by Winston Churchill to return to England on the second of June 1944,

because, in the words of Churchill; “great military events were about to take place”. De Gaul was a profoundly proud Frenchman who had watched helplessly as the glory of France was repeatedly trampled underfoot by the Germans. Even worse he was beholding to the English who he did not trust and he was becoming increasingly suspicious of the Americans who he suspected wanted to be the new colonial masters of the world after the war. The allies for their part had not told De Gaul about the plan to invade France because French military codes had been cracked by the Germans and they didn’t want the Germans catching wind of their plans. So De Gaulle was underwhelmed and sceptical to be told that France was just about to be retaken and he was not proving to be particularly cooperative. Then one of Churchill’s aids was instructed to drive De Gaul to an airfield being used to stockpile equipment for the invasion.

As De Gaulle got out of the car and gazed upon a vision of endless rows of tanks, trucks and guns, something shifted in his Spirit. That vision ignited his imagination, because it is in our imagination that hope arises. When De Gaulle climbed back into the car he was a new man, ready to work towards the restoration of France.

When all that we see in this world is ruins we need our imagination to be ignited by the Holy Spirit to believe in an alternative future. The prophetic gift in the life of the church draws our vision away from the struggles in our life and in our church that cause doubts and gives us an alternative vision of what God is doing. Many times I have been the one struggling with self-doubts and someone has ministered to me prophetically re-engaging my spirit with a vision of what God is doing. On one such occasion a friend emailed me. She said God had been speaking to her over and over again the following message and prompting her to send it to me; *have courage, remember the mighty army of God* and a song which God kept bringing to her mind.

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you
The hope of glory in our hearts
He lives! He lives!
His breath is in you
Arise a mighty army, we arise!*

*God is at work in us his purpose to perform
Building a Kingdom of power not of words
Where things impossible by faith shall be made possible
Let’s give the glory to him now*

*Though we are weak, his grace is everything we need
We’re made of clay, but his treasure is within
He turns our weaknesses into his opportunities
So that the glory goes to him.*



Like De Gaulle, I remember returning from that vision a changed person

Returning to Ezekiel's vision we can see that the lamp had a number of unique features that were not part of the lamps Israel was familiar with, and this detail drew the people into a deeper engagement with what God was saying; igniting their imagination.

- The lamp stand represents the light of God flowing through God's people out into a dark and desperate world.
- The seven lights tells us that this promise is for all God's people as seven is the number of completeness because God completed the task of creation in seven days.
- That there are seven lights instead of one speaks to the nature of God's people being both diverse while at the same time united in the one light of God's Spirit, in the same way that the seven churches of Revelations 2 represented the diversity of the churches at the time.
- That each of the lights has a channel through which the oil flows, is about God's people being dependent on the flow of God's Holy Spirit to be light in this world
- That there is a bowl at the top which feeds oil to the lamps that are in turn fed with oil from the two olive trees means that this whole arrangement functions without human intervention and is entirely the work of God
- The Two Olive trees represent the important role anointed leadership has in supporting the work of God's Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:14).

Then God follows this imaginative encounter with a powerful declaration that sums up the vision; *'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.* (Zechariah 4:6), going on to prophecy that the opposition to the building of Jerusalem, described as a "mighty mountain" will be overcome and the temple will be completed – which is in fact what happened in 568 BC. The Hebrew words for might and power refer to military resources and human determination, so God is saying that restoration of God's people will not depend on military power or human effort (which at the time were in short supply) but by the spirit of God at work in the world.

As members of the church we are faced with the same challenge as Israel; what is our attitude towards the Holy Spirit in the restoration of our church? About 15 years ago in the life of this church a large group of young adults experienced a fairly intense period of the presence of the Holy Spirit and built a large and vibrant evening congregation. As young adults do, many have moved on over the years, but many have also stayed in this church and married and had children and migrated to the morning service. This group has been the strength of our church over the last ten years. It gave us good numbers and a good spread of ages and we have been pretty much coasting on the back of it ever since.

It is worth considering at this point what happens to a church's attitude towards the Holy Spirit when it appears that it's doing well. The church generally can be guilty of relying on its own resources and effort. For you see the church is never more in

danger than when it is doing well because its consciousness of its need for God's power is low. The whole sorry history of Israel's exile was to shake the people out of just such a complacency and re-awaken them to their absolute dependence on God's power and draw them closer into God's heart.

My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart. (Jeremiah 24:6-7)

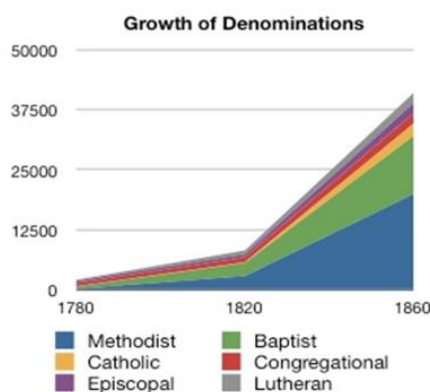
I tell you that the days when we as a church could coast on our resources and our effort are gone. That particular group of young adults I spoke about has been growing older and reaching the same critical point in family life when kids are heading off to high school and decisions about the future of the family have to be made. With the real-estate market as it is in the Northern Beaches it is just too expensive for many of our people to live here and some have had to move away and others will also need to make that decision. Which means that for the first time in a while we are facing the challenge of a shrinking congregation. Now we can let that challenge discourage us or we can remember who it was that grew this church in the first place, that it is the Holy Spirit who makes a way where there is no way.

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

That is the faith that grows churches, people firm in their hope that God has something more for us, something better, something greater. Now this is not a passive do-nothing waiting around for something to happen hope, because the people energised with God's hope continued to re-build the temple. This is an active hope in which we continue to live out our discipleship in Jesus believing and confident that God's spirit will fill our wings and energise our muscles.

One of the things I have been sharing in our Spiritual Gifts workshop is the history of revival over the last 200 years and how revival has occurred when society has been in chaos and the church has been really struggling. If you have ever wondered why the church is so much stronger in the US than in other western country the answer is that successive revivals brought hundreds of thousands of people into the family of God.

This trusting our future to the reviving power of God's Holy Spirit is not about wishful thinking. This is the power that restored the people of Israel. This is the power that launched the early church, this is the power that has returned again and again to renew the life and witness of the church and this is the power that will reignite our church. The only question is how



badly do we want it? How much do we believe that; *'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.* (Zechariah 4:6)

I want to leave you with an interview I watched during the week with Lew Engel, the leader of the prayer movement "the call" and Bill Johnston; senior pastor of Bethel church in Redding, northern California. They were speaking on the influence of the Azusa street revival in LA in 1906, in the lead up to country wide rallies marking the 110th anniversary. I was particularly taken by their unabashed hunger to see revival.

Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling." (Zechariah 2:13)

¹ *You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.*

² *I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?*

³ *Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*

⁴ *Have you suffered so much for nothing--if it really was for nothing?*

⁵ *Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?* (Galatians 3:1-5)