

T. Austin-Sparks:

Read: Zechariah 4

That whole chapter centers in one verse, and that is verse six. "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.'" I shall not take time this morning to remind you of the history in which this chapter is set. All I want to do is to mark the spiritual condition that is found here, because here is a spiritual situation which has often occurred in the history of God's people. The historic situation may only have occurred once in the history of Israel, but the spiritual situation has been repeated many times in the history of the Church. The spiritual features of this story are just these: Everything of the Lord had suffered a great setback. The house of the Lord, the place of the Lord had received many heavy blows and much damage. Because of that experience, many of the Lord's people had turned away. They had decided not to go on with this work of the Lord. They had given up faith and hope. The majority had said, 'It's all too difficult,' and they had decided that it was easier just to stay in the world.

A small number, however, had said this situation is not what the Lord intended. They said, 'This situation is all wrong, it is dishonoring to the Lord's Name, and something must be done about it.' This small minority were the Lord's instrument in recovering what was to the glory of God. There were some leaders among them who encouraged them in that. There were those who saw what ought to be. They saw what the Lord wanted to have, and they inspired these few people to get to work to have that which the Lord wanted. That is the spiritual interpretation of this chapter. And I am quite sure you will agree that this situation has occurred more than once. Now, because the things of the Lord have received much damage, and much dishonor has been brought to His Name, a lot of His people have just given up the fight. And like Peter after the Cross, they have said, "I go fishing. I am going back to my old life and my old work. This way of following the Lord is all too difficult." So this large company decided to go back to the business of this life in the world. That, of course, was the big number of Israelites which decided to remain in Babylon.

But here were these few, who did not feel like that. They had a great concern for the honor of the Lord's Name, and they said something must be done about this; we must do something to recover the honor of the Name of the Lord. And there were these leaders who knew what ought to be done, and who encouraged them to do it. You can read the whole story in the light of what I have just said. But there were some very great difficulties.

First of all, they were just a small number of people comparatively. That is indicated by verse ten. The Lord said, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" This was a comparatively small company. And the people were implying: 'Well, we are so small, we are so few, and this work is so great, we are not strong enough to do this.' When they looked at themselves, they felt completely discouraged. They did not say what we have just been singing. They did not say, 'I dare not be defeated.' They just said, 'Well, we are so small, what can we do?' The Lord said, "Do not despise the day of small things," because it has so often been that the Lord has used small things to do big things.

Now that opens the door to a very big consideration. I will give you one illustration. In Bethlehem one night, there was a stable and a manger, and in that manger lay a little new born baby. The great representative of the Roman Empire was wanting to destroy that little baby. And later on, the whole Roman Empire tried to destroy everything that belonged to that little baby. Herod was a very powerful ruler. The Roman Empire was a very powerful empire. And they were set against that little baby. Well, you know the rest of the story. You know what happened to Herod. He had a bad end. And you know what happened to the Roman Empire. You know that it is no longer in existence. But what about that little baby? God very often uses very little things to destroy very big things. So the Lord said to these discouraged people, "Do not despise the day of small things." The Apostle Paul said, "God has chosen the weak things and the foolish things." Well, the first big difficulty was their own smallness. And the Lord said, 'That is not really a difficulty with Me.'

Then the next difficulty was that there was a great opposition from outside. If you read the other books connected with this special movement, the Books of Ezra, and Nehemiah, you will see how much opposition there was to these people and to this work. That is what verse seven here refers to, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" There was a great mountain of opposition to what these people were desiring to do, and as they looked at that great mountain of opposition, they said, "It is all so impossible." But the Lord said, "Who art thou, O great mountain? What are you after all? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain, and people will look for the mountain, and they will find it is not there.' But to them at that time, it was a great mountain; it was another difficulty.

Then there was still a further difficulty. These people said, "We have no outward support. We have not got any soldiers to fight for us. There is no army to defend us. We are just a helpless, defenseless people." What did the Lord say to that? He just said this, "Not by might, nor by power" and perhaps in the margin of your Bible you will see a correction. Because, what the Lord actually said was this, "Not by an army, nor by power." You don't need an army; you don't need the great world power, because you have got more than all that. So the Lord said, over against these difficulties, "Not by an army, not by worldly power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Now we have got two things in that. The all sufficient factor is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is greater than all weakness, all mighty mountains, and all lack of outward support. If we have the Holy Spirit, we have all that we need.

You see, the Lord said, "Not all that which you think is necessary, not all that which the world thinks is necessary, not any of that at all." He put over all that: "NOT." And then He put on the other side: "BUT by My Spirit." And that is more than all the other.

And, then, do you note the Name by which He calls Himself. "BY MY SPIRIT, SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS." Whenever there is a big, big piece of work to be done, that is the Name by which the Lord comes in. You go back to the Book of Joshua. The Lord had brought His people, Israel, out of Egypt; He had brought them through forty years of the wilderness, and now they were to go in and possess the land. But the land was full of mighty nations, you know that there were ten nations in that land, and they were very strong. You have only got to look at the first city, Jericho, to see how strong they were. And Jericho stood right at the entrance of the land. And all these other people were strong in the land. When the spies were sent into the land, they came back and they said, "We were like grasshoppers in their eyes. We were poor little creatures of the earth in comparison with them." But "Joshua lifted up his eyes and he saw a Man standing with His sword drawn." And not knowing Who He was, "Joshua went up to Him, and he said, 'Are You for us, or are You for our enemies?'" And this One answered, "Nay, but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I come." Joshua bowed himself to the earth. In effect, Joshua said, 'It is all right. This thing is not left to me. The conquering and occupation of this land is not my business. The Lord of hosts has taken on this business.' "As Captain of the host of the Lord am I come." I wonder who that was. Might it have been the Lord Jesus before His incarnation? Because He is the Captain of the host of the Lord. One of His New Testament titles is Captain. He is called: "The Captain of our salvation" (Heb. 2:10b).

So the Lord gave the answer to all their problems by just saying, "Whatever you may lack naturally, I am going to make up spiritually. You may be a small people. There may be a great mountain of opposition. You may feel that you have no army to support you, but I, the Lord of hosts, I am with you, and I am with you by My Spirit." Well then, if we have the Holy Spirit and the Lord of hosts, anything can be done. Did you notice a rather strange verse in this chapter? It spoke about the seven eyes of the Lord. And it said that the seven eyes of the Lord would rejoice. When they saw the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel, they would rejoice. Of course, that is only symbolism. Seven is always the number of spiritual perfection. So this just simply means, the perfect spiritual vision of the Lord. The Lord sees everything perfectly. There is nothing wrong with the eyes of the Lord. He takes in the whole situation. He knows all about it.

Now it says, when the Lord sees the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel, His eyes will rejoice. Well, what does that mean? The Lord is very glad and happy when He sees a people who are set upon His honor. And there is nothing more inspiring than to know that the Lord is quite pleased. You know, dear friends, that if you have any sense that the Lord is pleased, how full of joy you are! What a strength it is to us to know that the Lord is pleased with this! We can do anything if only we know the Lord is in this. In that other book to which I have referred, the Book of Nehemiah, you will remember that Nehemiah was rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, and there were all these enemies opposing the work, and Nehemiah said to the people, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). The thing that will give you strength is to know that this is something the Lord wants done and something that will please Him. I repeat, it is always a great strength to know that the Lord is on your side. As the Lord looks out upon everything, as the Lord takes in the whole situation, there is joy coming into His eyes. There is joy on His face. He says, "This is the thing that I want." There is nothing that takes the strength away from us more than knowing that the Lord is not in it. When the Lord sees what He wants, that means strength for us.

Now we come to the inclusive message of this chapter. In the light of all that we have just said, if this thing is going to be done at all, it is to be something that only the Lord can do and will do. Supposing these people had been a vast multitude, it had been a day of big things so far as numbers were concerned, supposing they had a great army to support them, and then they had turned to do this work, what would have happened? They would have simply said, "Well, you see we were so many, and we had such strong support. That is why we were able

to do it. So, we did it, it was ourselves that did this." The Lord will not have anything like that. The Lord wants that which will bring all the glory to Himself. So, here we have a testimony to that which is wholly of the Lord, and not of man. Do remember, dear friends, that that is an abiding truth for ever. There is not one thing, not one thing in relation to the Lord that you and I can do by ourselves. There is not one thing that a great multitude of people can do by themselves. If it is something that relates to the glory of the Lord, nobody but the Lord can do it. Did you ever try to save yourself? Did you ever try to work your own salvation? Well, you know how impossible that is. It had to be the Lord or it would not be anybody at all. Have you tried in your own strength to stand up against the difficulties and oppositions of the Christian life? You have learned that you cannot do it. If the Lord does not put the strength into you, then you will break down. And it is true also in the work of the Lord. The Lord's work can never be done by natural strength. The Lord is going to have all the glory, or He is not going to have anything. And that is what this chapter tells us. It is not this and that and something else, but it is My Spirit, saith the Lord. This thing is going to be of Me, or it is not going to be at all. That which brings most glory to the Lord is that which can only be attributed to Him.

But note this next thing. If it is going to be like that, if the Lord is going to do it, if the Lord is going to have all the glory, if it is going to be something that no one but the Lord can do, it must be in a vessel of pure gold. That is why the lampstand or candlestick comes into our chapter. The prophet saw a candlestick of pure gold. That is a symbol of the vessel of the Lord's testimony. The light which that candlestick will give, is the testimony of the Lord; and the testimony of the Lord has got to be in a vessel of pure gold. We are not talking about material things now. We are talking about the symbolism here. What is this pure gold? It is a vessel that has no mixture in it! It is not something of the Lord and something of man. It is not some of the Lord and some of the world. It is not some of the Lord's will and some of my will. No, it is only the Lord, with no mixture whatever - a candlestick of pure gold.

How did this candlestick come into being? If you follow the instructions to make the candlestick for the tabernacle, the Lord said two things about it. One, it must be of one piece, and it must be of beaten work. Now here we have two principles of that which serves the Lord, that which will really bring glory to the Lord, that which will make the Lord pleased. The vessel must be of one piece. That simply meant that you are not to bring a lot of pieces and try to join them together from the outside. You are not, by your hands, to take hold of people and say, 'Now, you come and join us.' You are bringing all the pieces from the outside and joining them together. That is what they do in factories. The Lord does not work on that principle. Now, take very careful notice of what I am saying. I am giving you the fundamental principles of anything that is really of God. And God says this about the vessel of His testimony. It must not be so many unrelated pieces just brought together. There must be a basic fundamental oneness about this. Man must not just join others to this. The oneness must be the result of something that God has done in all. All concerned, must have one vision. All must see just that one thing that God wants. What the Apostle Paul called, "The eternal purpose of God." It is essential that all who are going to serve the Lord in this way, must have one vision. If two brothers, only two brothers, who hold responsibility, are not one in vision, it may divide the whole work. This oneness must relate first of all to those in responsibility. They are seeing the one thing. They have one mind and one spirit. And that must apply also to all those who are concerned with the Lord's testimony. It is absolutely essential that we all see the same thing. We all have the same vision. And we all have the same spirit, that we are one piece, not just so many pieces joined together, but one piece.

Now you notice the second thing that the Lord says. This candlestick must be of beaten work. Here is a large piece of gold. It has got to be formed into a candlestick of testimony. How are you going to do it? There are two instruments or tools that are going to be used. One is a chisel to cut, and the other is a hammer to hit hard. It is going to be of beaten work. That means, it is going to be formed out of discipline, and suffering. This vessel of testimony will be the result of a good deal of hammering, that is, of suffering. That is what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "That I may know Him, and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). Now Paul was a great vessel of testimony, but see how the chisel and the hammer were put to work on that man. It seems that he was knocked all over the place. He was picked up and knocked down again. A great deal of hammer work was done on him. Now these few people in this chapter were people who had gone through sufferings. They had had many hammer blows in their lives. But the Lord was going to make them into a vessel of living testimony. That may explain a lot to us. You understand what the Lord is doing with us? What He is doing with you and with me? We have had many hammer blows. Sometimes we thought we were going to be knocked to pieces. But really, the Lord has only knocked us together. Instead of breaking us up, He has made us one. That is the effect of suffering and discipline. It must be a vessel of pure gold, and it must be a testimony that has been brought out of adversity.

Now I will just close with this. Do you remember in the chapter, the two olive trees? I think that is a very beautiful picture, a very helpful one. On either side of the candlestick was an olive tree, and these two olive

trees were pouring their oil into the candlestick. This was not just some reservoir of oil, not just some container that held just so much oil, these were living trees, and they had an unending supply of oil. And that is what the Lord meant when He said, "By My Spirit." 'For a vessel that has gone through suffering, for a vessel that has been hammered out, for a vessel that has been made pure in the fires of adversity, for a vessel for My glory only, I have an inexhaustible supply. My resources will never come to an end.'

The living olive trees will go on pouring their oil out for all times. I am quite sure you believe, that you agree that this is a very beautiful picture in this chapter, and how true it is to spiritual experience. The way which the Lord is working to get what He wants, and the inexhaustible resources of His grace, **THAT IS FOR US**, dear friends. So here we have represented a testimony of the greatness of the power and the grace of God. That is what the Lord wants with us. That is what the Lord wants with His people that He should have a candlestick of pure gold, one that has been formed for His use through sufferings, one that has come to know the great resources of His power and of His grace for what He wants. "Not by might, not by an army, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."