

Title: Who would've thought?
Text: Zechariah 4.1-14
Theme: God's ways are not our ways
Series: Zechariah #5
Prop Stmtnt: God uses what appears to be small to accomplish that which is big.

Part of my task (and joy!) is to give you the tools to help you discover what the Bible says, and to help you to learn how to study the Bible. When I prepare a sermon, there are things that I have to remember so that I am not misrepresenting the Bible. For example, the Bible was not written in a day. It was written over 2,000 years. That means that it is **progressive**. There are truths, ideas and concepts that are introduced in the earlier parts that are developed. But the way they are developed is through **history**. History is a story. It is actually His story and the Bible gives us God's analysis of what is going on. The events in the Bible are not just parts of a story that people like to tell; these events are factual. What is fascinating to see is how often God reveals himself to individual people. God's revelation is **personal**. The Bible is organic. It is **living**. Each truth, idea or concept is like a seed. In the Bible we can see how that seed is planted in history and how it grows into a plant, a tree and sometimes a forest. The Bible is also **purposeful**. God orders the events of history in order to carry out his plan. Finally, the Bible is **practical**. God reveals himself to you/us. God tells us how we are to think about ourselves, what has to be done about our sin, how we are to live our lives, and what happens to us after we die. He tells us about family, marriage, relationships, forgiveness, money, sex, power, work, education, etc. In other words, God tell us who he is, who we are, what he is doing, what our part is, and where this whole thing is going.

Chart (where I try to illustrate some of this)

Layer 1 – God's revelation is **progressive** (creation to new creation, garden to garden, kingdom to kingdom, people to people, temple to temple) A better illustration would be to use a circle. (compare to flatline which has no real beginning and no end - no purpose)

Truth progresses from Genesis to Revelation. Every detail matters. There are people, places, events, doctrines, themes and ideas that are built upon over time. By the way, the new creation will be better than the first creation.

Layer 2 – God's revelation is **historical** (fall, flood, Israel, Church, Eternal Kingdom)

We are studying factual history. Just as creation, the fall, the flood, the founding of Israel, the 1st coming of Christ, the launch of the church all happened, so will the return of Christ and the Eternal Kingdom happen as well. It should not surprise you that the nation of Israel and the existence of the church are two realities that are hated and attacked. They are both reminders that this world is God's world and he governs history.

Friday morning I got a text message that said, "*Could you give me dumbed down version of how England leaving the EU will cause our stock market to crash?*" So, I attempted an answer and then got this response. "*My coworker's husband is in finance so she's*

freaking out. I didn't know how legitimate the freak out was." I wrote back and said, *"Well, eventually the whole thing crashes anyway. But, that's a reason to rest. Another kingdom rises that will never crash."*

Layer 3 – God's revelation is **personal** (Abraham, Moses, David, Christ)

God's works center upon his people. He expresses the glory of his mercy and joy through the gathering of a people unto himself.

Layer 4 – God's revelation is **living** (organic). There are many ideas and concepts that are planted like seeds at the beginning of the Bible and these grow into amazing truths and glorious realities. Redemption/Atonement, Covenant, Day of the Lord, Servant of the Lord, Law/gospel, Salvation unto the ends of the earth, People/race, Sacrifice, Worship, marriage, peacemaking, slavery, unfaithfulness, etc. As such there are various things that are emphasized; for example, the OT emphasizes promises made (and kept), while the NT emphasizes promises kept (and made) and the new creation will be where all promises are perfectly fulfilled. One of those subthemes is "Temple".

So, what about Zechariah? Zechariah is a prophet who lived in Israel after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity. The Jews were defeated, disillusioned and discouraged. God's plan to have a people that he would dwell with (Temple theme from creation to new creation) appeared to be in jeopardy. (Remember, they were at the edge of history at that time – as we are now) There was no place for God and man to be able to come together. There was no temple and there appeared to be no way for the temple to be built. But God has not forgotten his people and God has not changed his plan. In a series of visions, God reveals to Zechariah that there is a whole lot more going on than he realizes. All he can see is where he is at in history at that moment. But his story is part of a greater story. There was more to come. Keep this in mind because the biggest issue was not a rebuilding project. Yes, God would remove the obstacles and they would rebuild the temple. Yes, that would happen and it would be another reminder of the power of God. But that temple pointed to a greater temple – Christ, who would come in 500 years. And because of the life and death of Christ, he launched the church that is comprised of believers who become the temple of God. And these believers are being called and gathered from every nation into one nation, one people who will live in the eternal kingdom, the New Jerusalem which will not have a temple in it, because the entire creation will be the temple! So, when we study a book like Zechariah we need to remember where this book and how its events fit in the bigger picture. Then we can understand what God is saying and not saying. When we do that, we discover not only some amazing truths, but we also realize just how personal and practical they really are.

There is another story, another narrative. It is the anti-story. The anti-story is the attempt to tell history without God. This is the story that you hear in our world, but the story that you hear in our world does not tell you the entire story. There is conflict between these two narratives. For now, the real story is more hidden and is behind the scenes. Like a little no name carpenter working in a family business for 18 years in the dingy town of Nazareth, but who suddenly bursts into public as the Son of God, the ways of God remain

hidden, but always there and never failing. Who would have thought that by dying for us we would live?

Now, in a moment, I am going to read our text. This text is the 5th vision that Zechariah the prophet has in which God reveals, what appears to be, some weird stuff. And like we would, Zechariah is asking questions. “What’s this? What does this mean? Who are these?” It doesn’t make sense to him. But, it will. God gives us what we need in the moment, even if we don’t understand everything about it. It will make sense.

Read Text:

This unusual vision is the occasion for three messages from God. Zechariah sees the vision. Then the Lord uses the vision to tell him what he and the others (including us) must understand. So, from this one vision, God tells him and us three very important and deeply encouraging truths. God is saying (preaching) to and through the prophet:

1. **Your problem is no match for my Spirit.** (1-7)

What was their problem? It is 520 B.C. The Jews, were essentially reduced to beggars. There was no glory in Israel. They certainly did not look like the people of God and it did not appear that all of the promises of God were going to be fulfilled for them. They appeared to be at the mercy of powerful forces that they had no control over. They had started to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, but ran into opposition, so they quit. They had not standing, no influence, no resources, and basically no power and no means to acquire any. Zerubbabel is the governor of the land and appears to be at a complete loss as to how this project is going to get completed.

Compare that to the time when the first temple was built. Solomon ruled over the most powerful empire in the Ancient Near East. He was wealthy beyond belief, organized, powerful, wise and respected. The world came to him for counsel. The world bowed before him. So, of course they could build the Temple. In fact they were using craftsmen and workers from other countries they had conquered to do much of the work. They were on top of the world. Not now. If this enormous project (like a mountain that needed to be moved) was going to get accomplished, then they had to have help because they couldn’t do it. Here is what Zechariah needed to understand, what Zerubbabel needed to understand and what you need to understand. Your problem is no match for God’s Spirit.

What was the point of the vision in chapter 3? You cannot rescue yourself from sin? Your solution has to come from outside of you. That vision in chapter 3 pointed to Christ. Christ is the only means by which you can be forgiven of your sin and declared righteous in the sight of God. You cannot save yourself. You cannot even help. Only Christ can make you a Christian. But, there is more to it. Not only can you not cause yourself to become a Christian, you cannot live as a Christian in your own strength (chapter 4). God consistently puts us into situations where we do not have the strength to withstand the adversity. We do not have the power to stay strong. We don’t even feel like we have the faith to press on. Guess what? We don’t! But He does. That is the point.

Zechariah has an unusual vision that centers on a lampstand (*Heb. Menorah*). This would fit with the Temple project. The lamps are supplied with oil from a bowl and the bowl is supplied with oil from two olive trees that stand on either side of the lampstand. In contrast to the Temple, which required the priests to consistently supply the lampstand (10 in Solomon's Temple) with oil, this lampstand does not need our oil. It has its own source of power. As his habit, Zachariah is looking to "*the angel who talked with me*" for some help and asks him, "*What are these?*" The angel responds as if Zechariah is expected to have this figured out, but he doesn't.

Now, normally when we are dealing with visions, there is a similar pattern. There is the vision, then the interpretation/meaning and then the application. That was the case with Pharaoh's dream, Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the earlier visions that Zechariah had. But not here. Here, the angel skips the interpretation and goes right to the application. The truth is clear: There is no mountain and no problem that is a match for my Spirit. (...says the LORD of hosts). Do not overlook that "LORD of hosts" since it is the consistent designation of Yahweh in this book (53x) and speaks of God's authority over the entire angelic realm. This is the one who says that his Spirit, not your might, not your power is going to get the job done. His Spirit is going to do it and he is going to do it through Zerubbabel. Why does God choose to work through people, like Zerubbabel, or like you?

Do you remember that saying, "if you want a job done right, you do it yourself."? There may be some truth to that, but when you live that way, the job may get done right, but nobody else learns how to do it. Amazingly, God chooses to carry out his plan through us. His job is going to get done and it will get done right, but he is going to do it through us, not because he needs us, but because he chooses to call us to enter into a partnership with him so that we can learn what it is like to hear and feel his heart beating in our chest and feel his warm blood of compassion flowing in our veins.

So, Zerubbabel, what is this impossible job that you are facing? What is this mountain that is before you? (v.7) God says that he is going to turn it into a plain. In other words, he is going to remove it and when the final stone is set in place of the Temple, when the final part is done, then people will shout "Grace" because it will be obvious that God's power is what made this all take place. Grace is God giving you what you do not deserve (faith for salvation and salvation) and giving you what you do not have (faith for strength, faith for obedience, strength and obedience).

What is the situation you are facing that you fear will never change? Is it a difficult person at work? Is it destructive patterns in your marriage? Is it personal habits that grip you? Do you fear that you never get out of bondage to this addiction? This relationship will never heal. There is no problem that you can face that is a match for the Spirit. You see, your biggest enemy is sin and death, and God conquered that. Everything else is chopped liver. There is a second message from this vision. God says...

2. **I use little things to make big things happen.** (8-10a)

When you read v.2 carefully, you realize that this lampstand is not an ordinary menorah. There is the lampstand that holds a bowl. The bowl supports seven lamps, and each lamp has seven lips. Now, a lip is a little spout that allows a wick to lie in the oil on the one end and be lit on the other. Because there are seven lamps, each with seven lights, that means that this menorah has 49 lights. This menorah is more like a blowtorch. Something like this would attract a lot of attention. That is the point.

The people of God thought that they were insignificant and that they did not matter to God. They were the forgotten ones. They did not matter anymore. No one was paying them any attention. They were at the mercy of the powerful empires; which did not make sense, right? If your God is the God of the universe, then why are you at the mercy of other people whose gods are dead and worthless idols? Their dead and worthless idols give them more power and wealth and success than your “God of the universe.” What good is your God of the universe, the Creator, when you live at the mercy of others?

God’s ways are not our ways. We think that if we are going to do something big for God then we have to build something really big, or we have to be somebody who is really big. Wait a minute! Why is God giving this message to Zerubbabel? It was because Zerubbabel was not big, was not powerful, did not have connections, did not have a plan or the resources to finish this job. He looked like a failure. If you were on a pastoral search committee, you would not pick him. If you were picking a manager or vice president at the company, you would not pick him. If you were writing an article on movers and shakers in the community, you would not write about him. He was not getting the job done. It appeared that he did not have what it takes to get the job done. But God saw that there was more to it. The fact that Zerubbabel was incapable of getting the job done, made Zerubbabel a prime candidate for the job. Look at this text again (8-10). Do you see the point? No one thought that it was possible for Zerubbabel to finish the job. That impossibility created a scenario where God’s glory would be displayed. When the Temple was finished, through Zerubbabel’s leadership, then everyone would know that it was God who had done this. And even those who despised the insignificant work that Zerubbabel had started would be forced to admit that God was in this. In fact, they will have a change of heart. It will be undeniable that God is in this.

God used Moses’ staff to lead 2 million slaves out of Egypt and destroy the world’s superpower’s army. God use David’s sling to kill a giant and change a nation. God use a boy’s lunch to feed up to 20,000 people in one sitting. What is in your hand? You may think that if you could just speak in front of people that you would love to be a teacher. If you had a million dollars that you would be generous to gospel causes. If you were healthier you would serve. God does not need powerful people to do powerful stuff. God already has the power. But God loves to use people as a means to put his power on display. So I ask you? What’s in your hand? What are you doing with abilities that you have? Oh, they may not appear to be grandiose in your eyes, but God prizes faithfulness. You may not have a million dollars, but what are you doing with the 10 dollars he gave you? You may not be as strong and as healthy as others, but how are you serving him with the strength that you have? God uses little things to do big things.

There is something that each of these stories has in common. In every case there were people who thought that this was crazy! Moses, how on earth are you going to lead a nation of slaves out from the most powerful empire in the world? You do not have anything but a staff! Moses, you are an idiot! David, you seriously think that you can kill Goliath with a sling? Are you crazy! You are going to get yourself killed and we are going to suffer for it. And, what is this little boy's lunch among so many people? Ok, it is a nice gesture, but he might as well keep it to himself. It will never work. People will never go for it. It can't be done. He will never change. She will never believe you. When enough people throw cold water on your life and ideas, it is tempting to join them. This had to be an incredible encouragement to Zerubbabel and Zechariah. That foundation will hold the Temple. My plan will happen and it will happen through you. Zerubbabel, your hands laid the foundation, your hands will finish the job. Matthew 13 – mustard seed

3. I use little people to do big things. (10b-14)

Zechariah is given some interpretation of the vision. The “seven” (probably lamps) symbolize the eyes of the LORD. He sees everything. He sees everything in the entire world and yet he chooses to reveal all of this to Zechariah. Isn't that amazing? Zechariah then asks about the identity of the two olive trees. The olive trees each appear to have a peculiar branch that are beside or perhaps support the pipe (golden pipe) through which the olive oil flows from the trees into this bowl that fuels the 49 lights. Zechariah wants to know the meaning of the trees. No answer is given. So he asks a second time but changes the question up a bit. “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?” The angel asks him the same question (v.13) as he did in v.5. Don't you know? These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth. So, who are these two anointed ones? I would guess that it is Joshua (high priest) from chapter 3 and Zerubbabel (chapter 4). Joshua was a high priest without a Temple, which is sort of like being a captain without a ship, right? And Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, but he was not a king. He had no court, no throne and no palace. In fact, Zerubbabel means “descendant of Babel.” Every time someone mentioned his name they were reminded of Babylon. How would you like to be the mayor of Jerusalem with the last name of Hitler? Joshua and Zerubbabel may appear to be insignificant minions in the shadow of the world empires. In reality, the empires are the minions. The people of God (little people) are the truly powerful, but only because they are part of the kingdom of God and his kingdom cannot be stopped.

Conclusion

- Prayer
- Preaching
- Witnessing