

Not By Might

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 2nd June 2013

Intro & Background

- Two leaders- Joshua the High Priest (spiritual leader) and Zerubbabel the Governor (Prime Minister, political leader).
- Israel had sinned against God and gone into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. The Babylonians destroyed the temple.
- Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and sent Jews and other captive people groups back home. He gave a decree which also permitted them to rebuild their temple.
- Zerubbabel leads the people:
 - They rebuild an altar for sacrifices in the first year (but no temple)
 - Then they start rebuilding the temple. Cedar logs are ordered from Lebanon
 - Next 6 years they start work on the temple. The foundation is laid amid great rejoicing and wailing. Some rejoice because of the success, some wail because it looks nothing compared to Solomon's previous temple.
- The people groups surrounding (Samaritans) offer to help but the help is declined as the Jews want to remain free from idolatry and compromise. The peoples around become suspicious and jealous and write to the new king of Persia, Artaxerxes.
- The letter to Artaxerxes accuses the Jews of rebuilding 'that rebellious city'. The king looks in his annals and sees that Jerusalem is known for resisting foreign powers. He sends an order that the work is to stop immediately. The surrounding peoples enforce this and the work stops.
- For 10 years nothing happens- the temple foundations are there; people go about their everyday business and start to spiritualise the situation saying that it isn't God's 'time' for the temple to be rebuilt. Instead people concentrate on beautifying their own houses. Joshua and Zerubbabel as leaders get discouraged and give up the work.
- After this 10 year period God raises up two prophets to speak into the situation- Haggai and Zechariah.

Read Haggai 1:1-12

Finish what you start in God

- Smaller plates are recommended to lose weight as we all like to clear our plate and finish what we are eating- how much more should we be keen to finish what we start in God.
- We should develop the 'Mastermind' mentality of 'I've started so I'll finish'.
- The two leaders needed these two prophets to motivate them back to the work. Both they and the people had become apathetic, not in faith for it, and fearful of the power of the enemy- this had led them to a lack of fruitfulness and blessing- everything was 'hard work'.
- Plateau effect- new Church, new leader, new project- there is the honeymoon period at first, but when this feeling subsides we are still to press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of us.
- What have you started in God and not finished/continued with? What things from His Word and from sermons etc has God spoken to you and inspired you to do, or touched your emotions with and yet you have not continued in?
- Jesus said 'No man who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God'- we show we are fit for service by looking forwards and continuing the work we start in Him.

- Fruitfulness comes from obedience- Jesus said

'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.' (John 15:7-8)

and

'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed' (John 8:31).

When we obey what Jesus says we are truly allowing His words to abide in us and the result is fruitfulness. The parable Jesus told about the person who built their house on the rock, rather than sand, indicates the person who both hears and obeys Jesus' words.

- Integrity- If you says you are going to do something do you do it?
- Spiritualising- have we 'spiritualised' any areas we are not obeying God in and said 'it's not the right time' or a similar excuse?
- Laziness/apathy- How passionate are we for God's glory? How passionate are we to see His gospel transform our region? Have we lost some of the zeal we initially had, like those in this situation who had started a work and got sidetracked?
- Fear- The people had to break the King of Persia's rules in order to obey God here- this could certainly have meant death. What fears do we have regarding obeying what God is calling us to do?

Read Zechariah 3

Consecrate yourself to God's service

- We all like to look our best and dress appropriately for the situation we we go out. How long do you take to get ready? Have you ever had that horrible dream where you go to school and look down and have forgotten to get dressed? It's a common dream about our anxieties concerning situations, but illustrates that we all like to wear the right things for the right occasions.
- Here Joshua has got dressed ready to go into God's presence but he is dressed in filthy rags rather than the right clothes to be able to worship the king. He must have felt terrible- a bit like Adam and Eve felt when they realised they were naked and tried to hide from God's presence and cover themselves up.
- It was no good going to all the trouble of rebuilding the temple if it was going to be filled with a corrupt people who had no heart for God- this would be pointless. God had to get the people cleaned up if they were not going to lose the temple again and be scattered once more, and it needed to start with the spiritual head- the High Priest- he was responsible for governing the 'house' (temple)- see v6.
- The High Priest would wear a turban on his head which had written on it 'Holy to the Lord'- but Joshua was not in reality holy at all- he was only too aware of his own sin (in fact the records indicate, sadly, that his descendants intermarried with the pagan peoples and Ezra eventually had to sort this out- see Ezra 10:18). In this vision of Zechariah's Satan tries to condemn Joshua for his sin, but under God's direction Joshua's filthy garments are replaced with clean ones and God promises to send the Branch (Messiah- see Is 11:1 -the Hebrew for 'branch' is thought to be the same word for 'Nazareth') who is also named Joshua (Jesus in Hebrew is 'Yeshua' which is a variant way of spelling the name Joshua). The promise is that in a single day God would remove not only Joshua's sin, but the sin of the whole land. That day was when Jesus declared 'it is finished!' having paid for our sins on the cross.
- The cross of Christ must always be the source for our justification before God. Justification is a legal term used by Paul to describe the fact that as Christians we are declared righteous before a Holy God. If someone appears before a judge and they are found guilty then they are condemned, which is the opposite to being justified. However, if after analysing the evidence they are found 'not guilty' and

- even found to be a good person then they are 'justified'- declared righteous.
- The Bible is clear that we are not justified before God by any amount of good works on our part- we cannot clean up our act and deserve admission to Heaven- we have to receive the abundant provision He has made for us on the cross- we have to, by faith, receive forgiveness of sins and the free gift of Christ's righteousness which He offers us freely.
- The Bible is also clear that the cross of Christ not only enables us to be seen as righteous before a holy God, it also enables us to live righteously. This is known as sanctification- living like we are saints, which is what in fact we are- living like we believe God has already made us holy- which He has.
- Paul encourages us to 'take off' and 'put on'- take off the old sinful garments and put on the new- as we really are. The act of taking off and putting on is the act of consecrating ourselves to God's service- we believe the Gospel and live our lives in the light of it.
- Joshua needed to know that there was a righteousness available from God (Rom 3:22) for him to get the job done which he was called to do- we need to know the same. We are saints (Ephesians 1:1).

Read Zechariah 4

Succeed by the power of God's Spirit

- Have you ever felt disempowered? Deflated? This must have been how the governor Zerubbabel felt when the letter came back from the King Artaxerxes ordering the work to stop.
- Grand Designs- whole projects are put on hold by the planning authorities, sometimes properties are ordered to be taken down.
- Famous house built on green belt property and hidden behind haybales for what they considered was the amount of time needed to get through loopholes in the law, built like a castle, but now it has been ordered to be taken down.
- The key aspect to this vision is to show that Joshua and Zerubbabel are not in fact empowered by the king of Persia but instead by the King of Kings! It is by His Spirit they will succeed! It also doesn't matter what the people who are doing the rebuilding think- they may think the temple is nothing compared to Solomon's but God is able to make the latter temple greater than the former.
- Analysing the picture:
 - The picture symbolises the completion of the temple- hence the Menorah candle is now in place.
 - Olive oil was used by the priest to keep the lights going and the priest was also to make sure the wicks were constantly looked after- the light was not to go out.
 - In this vision the difference is that rather than having to replenish the oil there was instead a constant supply. Two olive trees were seen in the picture to be passing olive oil through their branches into a bowl and from the bowl seven channels passed oil to each of the seven lights on the menorah (seven-branched candlestick). The oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit (as was the light from the candlestick- see Rev 1:4, rev 4:5). Oil was used for anointing Kings and the High Priest for service, indicating the anointing of God's Holy Spirit.
 - Joshua and Zerubbabel are seen as the two anointed to do the job of this temple becoming a reality- they are the two olive trees and everything they need to get the job done will come from what God has already placed within them- they are indeed anointed for the job God has allocated them.
- God has anointed us to do the things He has called us to do. He has not left us as orphans- destitute and without the basics needed for living, but rather, through His

Spirit in us He has wonderfully equipped us to be His witnesses. We are empowered by the King of Kings- sealed with His Spirit

- In verse 7 perhaps the mighty mountain opposing Zerubbabel was the decree of the King to cease the rebuilding. What mighty mountains are before you which threaten to stop you fulfilling what God has called you to do and disempower you? These mountains are overcome by faith. Jesus said that faith involves speaking to the mountains and telling them to be uprooted- what mountains do you need to speak to today?
- All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Jesus and we go in this authority to do what the King has called us to do- there is a greater decree over our lives than that of Artaxerxes or any earthly ruler. We need to know the authority we have in Christ.
- We are all empowered by the Holy Spirit- not just an anointed leader or anointed head, but rather in Christ we are an anointed body- when Aaron had his head anointed the oil flowed down to the body. We are 'in Christ'- Church is not a one-person ministry but rather an anointed body to get the job done. Jesus is the Messiah, anointed one, and because we are 'in Him' we are the anointed ones- 'You have an anointing from Him' (1 John 2:20,27).
- We need to take the word of 'not by might, nor by powerer but by My Spirit' concerning all situations God calls us to build in- Church plant, building project, Gospel impact etc.
- **The result-** In the end Joshua and Zerubbabel believed the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and they restarted the work, risking their very lives. The result? The surrounding peoples complained again to the new king of Persia (or Media, as it was a coalition) called Darius. They asked the king to check the annals again as the Jews said a previous ruler, Cyrus, had told them to initiate the work. The surrounding peoples were really thinking this was the end of the rebuilding and also the end of the Jews for disobeying the king. The king looked and found Cyrus' decree. He then ordered that not only should the work go ahead, but that it should be funded from the surrounding peoples' treasury provided to them from the king. Also if anyone disobeyed the king he would lose his life and his home! God was rewarding the bold steps of faith the Jewish leaders took when they chose to obey God whether it meant life or death.
- The temple was completed four years later, and its glory surpassed that of Solomon's temple because not only would a foreign King greatly extend its footprint and bring great riches and ornamentation to it, but the very King of Kings Himself, Jesus, would visit in person this actual temple. God keeps His word!

Summary

- Finish what you start in God
- Consecrate yourself to God's service
- Succeed by the power of God's Spirit

Song: *This is my desire*