

## “Only By The Spirit”

*Minor Prophets, Major Implications – sermon #10*

Zechariah 4:1-14

Fuel is important. While my dad and I were clearing hiking trails at Spirit Mountain at Lake Louise on Friday, my chainsaw ran out of gas. The work was hard enough with a working chainsaw, but it was impossible to try to cut a 24” log with a hand saw. I needed to refuel the chainsaw in order to finish the project.

Of course, our bodies need fuel, too. I made sure I had a good breakfast and lunch on Friday, because I knew I would be spending a lot of energy. I knew as I was working that when I got too exhausted, I had to sit down and let my body rest. I had to stay hydrated.

The truth is, like chainsaws and bodies, our souls need replenishing, too. Our world is full of people running on empty, exhausted, anxious and afraid: afraid of failure, afraid of not finishing, afraid of what others will say of us, afraid of not meeting someone’s expectation of us. Many of us are under great burdens, and we are exhausted just from living!

I have good news for you this morning. God has a way to refill our spirits. And to remind us, we are going to sing an old song.

### **SING - Give Me Oil in My Lamp**

The song is partly inspired by the book of Zechariah. Similar to our waxless candles on the altar, people in Zechariah’s time used oil lamps for lighting.

Picture Aladdin’s lamp. Imagine a long wick sticking out on one side. These are the lamps they used. To keep them lit, they needed oil.

To understand why we are talking about oil lamps, we need to know what was going on in Zechariah’s day. Like Haggai and Malachi, Zechariah was a prophet during the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple. This was a critical time in the life of the Israelites. They were returning from Babylonian exile, and they were not only rebuilding their temple, they were reestablishing their nation and society. They had to reclaim their identity as people of the Lord. They couldn’t just go back and live like they did under the kings; they were now under the colonial rule of Persia. Like the church today, they said to themselves, “We can’t just do this like we’ve always done it!”

Last week, we learned that God sent the people two leaders, the priest, Joshua, and governor, Zerubbabel. They heard the Word of the Lord from the prophet Haggai, and they responded; then the people obeyed and feared the Lord and resumed work on the temple. But while Haggai’s message seemed to be directed at the people, Zechariah’s message appears to be directed to the leaders Joshua and Zerubbabel. In Zechariah chapter 4, which we just read, Zechariah has a message of encouragement specifically for the governor, Zerubbabel.

Can you imagine being in the governor’s sandals? Imagine for a moment that you had to lead the people in rebuilding the temple of their God. If you’ve ever been in leadership, you know it is stressful. It feels like everyone is watching you, expecting perfection. If you don’t know that experience and would like to preach one Sunday, please let me know!

Leadership requires many things. Organization. Vision. Creativity. Perseverance. Patience. Endurance. Self-awareness. Leaders cannot lead if their

tanks are not full. It appears that God knew Zerubbabel’s tank was getting low. And just like Zerubbabel, we all need oil in our lamps to keep shining for God.

If you ask me, I think the book of Zechariah is a little strange, frankly. It is filled with visions and symbols. Look at verses 4-6. Zechariah asks a specific question, “What are these?” meaning the golden lamp with seven lights and the two olive trees. The angel’s answer is rather whimsical. “Don’t you know?” Instead of answering the question directly, the angel seems to go off on a tangent...Zerubbabel this, Zerubbabel that. The answer finally comes four verses later, “These seven are the eyes of the Lord.” (v. 10)

Why this sudden emphasis on Zerubbabel? Our clue is, this emphasis, or oracle, comes in the center of the whole passage. The whole vision in chapter 4 is about what God will do for Zerubbabel. The angel basically says, “Before we get to the interpretation of your vision of the lights and trees, let me tell you what you need to say to Zerubbabel. The interpretation of the vision is not nearly as important as what you need to say to your leader.”

If you take out the oracle to Zerubbabel, chapter 4 has a straightforward flow. “What are these, my lord?” “Do you not know?” “No, my lord.” “So he said to me... ‘These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the earth.’” The angel wants Zechariah, and by extension, Zerubbabel to know, God sees everything. God knows. God knows the tremendous pressure Zerubbabel feels.

So what are the words given to Zerubbabel in this central oracle, and how do they encourage him and refill his lamp? First of all, look at verse 7, at the phrase, “What are you, o mighty mountain?” Zerubbabel faced a mountain of

opposition. Israel’s neighbors bullied them. He felt the weight of the leadership of his people, the expectation to make the temple great and perfect so that they could again connect in worship to God.

“What are you, o mighty mountain?” God will level the mountain, so that the way is clear to build the temple. Then Zerubbabel will personally put the capstone on it, the sign that the temple is finished.

There is an interesting parallel to this passage in the history of the Washington Monument. For one thing, the Monument took a long time to build, 37 years, actually. The cornerstone was laid in 1848. In 1885, they placed a pure aluminum pyramid at the top as a cap. The pyramid was so expensive at the time, (the equivalent of eight month’s wages,) it was displayed in Tiffany’s in New York City for several days before installation. The Monument was an impressive sight when finished, and still is today.

Zerubbabel is given a vision of himself with a precious capstone in his hand. The angel says, the same hand that laid the foundation of the temple will finish what he started.

On Friday, my dad and I could not clear that trail all by hand. We needed something outside of ourselves – in our case, a tractor with a big engine and a rake. It was not by human might that we finished. It was because of something much more powerful than us.

How did Zerubbabel finish the temple? How did he keep from going empty? The key is verse 7. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.” Zerubbabel faced tremendous pressure. This was no ordinary building project. This was the Lord’s house: the place where people

worshiped God and felt God’s presence. I can see someone saying, “Seriously, no pressure, Zerubbabel, but you’re dealing with the Almighty, All-Powerful, All-Knowing God here. Don’t screw up.”

It was not by Zerubbabel’s power that the temple was finished, even if he was a great leader. It was by the Spirit of God. In Zechariah’s vision, he saw olive trees by the lamp. Why? That meant that the lamp would have a constant, steady, and nearby source of pure olive oil.

Light comes from fuel. Power comes from gasoline. Energy comes from food. But most importantly, true replenishing of life comes from the Holy Spirit.

We need the Spirit today. Like Zerubbabel, we cannot do anything eternal or praiseworthy by ourselves. We cannot change our lives or the lives of other people without the Spirit.

If you are in a place where you need hope, where you need energy, there is someone you can turn to. We have the Holy Spirit to refuel our souls, to give us the energy to complete the mission of worshiping God and making disciples of Jesus Christ. Let me just walk us through a few scriptures of what the bible says the Holy Spirit does.

Jesus said in John 14:26, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (NIV)

We do not have the prophets anymore. Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi are gone. But that is intentional, because Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to do the same job. The Holy Spirit teaches us, directs us, and reminds us of the truth of God.

Later, in Acts 1:4-5, 8 – Jesus gave this command to his disciples: “...Wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about....In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.... You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV)

The Holy Spirit gives believers power. Power to overcome. Power to carry on. Power to preach the gospel to the whole world. The battles we face may be great, but God is greater. If a group of twelve fishermen can change the world by the power of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit can do anything in our lives.

Romans 8:26-27 says, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” (NIV)

Zerubbabel had his moments of weakness. All leaders do. All people do. But the beautiful thing is that the Holy Spirit is our help in times of weakness. The Spirit even intercedes for us in prayer when we don’t know what to say. That is good news. The Spirit will sustain us.

Why do we try to fill our lamps on our own? We spend so much time and energy, which we can ill afford, to fill our lamps with consumerism, or substances, or food, or spending sprees. We try to fill our lamps with cut-downs and putdowns, criticism, and gossip, thinking it will make us feel better. It doesn’t. That is just temporary, cheap oil. It burns out too quickly, leaving us more empty than when we started.

The Bible tells us what is supposed to happen. God provides the leadership. God provides the resources. God provides the oil, the fuel, the Spirit. The very temple Zerubbabel completed gave light to all who hoped in the Lord and worshiped the Giver of all good things. It was the very temple Jesus himself worshiped in. If God can do that, imagine what God can do with us.

I know as a church we are rebuilding ourselves. We need encouragement. There is much work to do, and it seems, few resources to do it. We face a mountain sometimes. We need a prophetic word. We need rejuvenation.

Our lives may look like meager heaps of rubble, but God will make them beautiful. Not by our own determination or resources, but through the Spirit and prayer.

So who needs their oil refilled? Who needs light, encouragement, and hope? I have times when I go dry. I can see myself in Joshua’s and Zerubbabel’s shoes. Maybe that is you, too. If it’s not, praise God! But I know there is someone in your life who suffers under a heavy load of expectations and needs your kindness. Will you fill their lamps? Will you tell them about the power we can access through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit?

There are many roles that we all fill. Leader and encourager. Builder and resource giver. We have oil to share. So let’s all commit to believing in God’s promise to do great things in us and through us. Let’s keep our lamps burning, with the oil of the Spirit, and give that light to others.

**Memory Verse:** Zechariah 4:6 –

“‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”

**Reflection Questions:**

- 1.) Describe a time when you felt “burnt out”?
- 2.) What places do you go to replenish? What things do you do?
- 3.) What are the burdens a leader suffers under? Do you feel them?
- 4.) How did God provide for Zerubbabel? How does God provide for Christians today?
- 5.) How does the Holy Spirit keep you connected to Jesus? What practices (prayer, fasting, meditation, serving, giving, etc.) keep you lamp burning with the love of God?