

No Small Things

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[0 : 00] For the day something extraordinary happened. People from all over the ancient Roman world were gathering in Jerusalem for the feast of weeks. And suddenly they heard a noise like the sound of rushing wind.

And from this obscure upper room around a hundred people started shouting with joy. And praising God in all kinds of languages. And as they began to spill out onto the streets speaking to the multitude about what God had done.

Some people thought they were drunk, some people thought they were confused. Until the apostle Peter stood up and he addressed the crowd. And he explained that this was the day that God had promised hundreds of years before.

The day when God would send his spirit to fill his people. And empower them to speak about the wondrous deeds that God had done. Just a few weeks before Jesus had been crucified.

And now Peter stands up and tells them that Jesus has risen from the dead. He is ascended into heaven. And he called people to repent and believe.

[1 : 04] And amazingly on that day around 3,000 people were told and Acts 2 were saved. Fast forward to the 17th of February 1739.

The famous preacher George Whitfield was on his way to lunch just outside Bristol. When he saw the coliers, coal miners coming out of the mines. They came out of their pits, their faces were blackened with coal.

And he pitched his voice to speak to some that were coming towards him from about 100 yards away. And he said, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

From a story that made them laugh, they'd never heard a preacher tell a joke. And about 200 men gathered as he spoke of hell and how God's judgment was as black as the pit that they had been in. As he talked about a savior Jesus who was a friend to both the rich and to poor, the righteous and to sinners. He spoke of the cross and he spoke of God's love.

[2 : 01] And as George Whitfield began to cry saying these words, he noticed the miner on his right. A young man beginning to cry and he spoke of how white furrows were made in the white, the tears were made white furrows in the black cheeks of the miners.

And soon he noticed it on more and more of these miners as they recognized what God had done as they recognized their need for a savior. Their men invited Whitfield to speak again next to next day to his, to their friends and families.

Two thousand people gathered. Two days later, five thousand people gathered to hear him again. And then 10,000 a few days later. And a few days after that he preached on rose green common to a multitude so big it covered three acres and people estimate around 20,000 people were there that day.

Those are amazing events, aren't they? And we could add to them, we could mention many more across the world. Some of you have told me stories of God's work and various and revival in this island, how these pews all around us and on these balconies used to be full, how times when it seemed like the gospel would race through communities like wildfire, changing peoples today is a day of small things in comparison.

We might look at the nation, you might look at the size of the church and you're discouraged. You might look at your own families, many of whom don't know Jesus. And we give thanks for every profession of faith we've seen over the past few years.

[3 : 35] Each one is a evidence that God is at work and bringing people from death to life. But there are many churches where no one is converted for years.

And they go years without anyone coming to Christ. Is this a day of small things? Not only that, the work of the gospel is tough. We're greatly outnumbered.

As Jesus says, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. The free church, I was watching a bit of the general assembly and the free church estimates that they'll need 70 new, wants to have 70 new churches.

Sorry, they estimate that they'll need 70 new ministers by 2030 for planting 30 new churches, fulfilling vacant pulpits, for stepping into the shoes of ministers who have retired.

And now we, but the vision of the free church is bigger than that. We want to see a healthy gospel church in every community in Scotland. And it's estimated that if we want to have a church for every 10,000 people in Scotland, we'll need 550 gospel preaching churches across the land.

[4 : 43] Now we give thanks that there are many other faithful denominations in churches in Scotland and planting churches. But that's a massive number that is needed. And you might think, you might look at that and think that's small things.

Zechariah lived at a time that could be described and maybe felt like a day of small things. Gone were the days of David, King David and Solomon, where there was peace in the land, where the temple gleamed at the, on the, on the heights of Jerusalem.

There where it was, that was the beating heart of the nation, God dwelling with his people, the king ruling with strength and with wisdom. But now Zechariah's people have returned from exile.

They're trying to scratch out a living amidst the rubble of Jerusalem. No king, no temple, no peace. And verse 10 hints that like today, people looked around and they thought today was a day of small things.

It was easy to despise the day as a day of small things. And it's into this day of small things that God gives Zechariah three visions. They're dramatic in style.

[5 : 50] They show God's eye view, the heavens eye view on this world. Each vision pulls back another part of the curtain as it were to show, to show God's work in this world, even when it looks small, to see that God is working.

And there's one clear lesson that this isn't a day of small things. We don't have time to look at all the visions in detail. I would love to, but we're going to spend almost all our time on that first vision in chapter four.

We have one big point and two implications. Our big point is that the Lord is building his temple. That is why it's not a day of small things.

Lord is vision in chapter four. It's the headline for Zechariah and for us. And like any good front page of a newspaper, we've got an eye catching picture in the vision and we've got a caption to go with it that explains it.

And the picture is a vision of a lampstand, all of gold, with flanked by two olive trees feeding golden oil to this lampstand. Now we might think that's just a bit strange, but for the Zechariah's readers, they would have recognized that lampstand.

[7 : 01] That was the lampstand that stood in the temple, representing God's presence with his people. We see that confirmed in verse 10 of chapter four, where a second part of verse 10, we're told these seven lamps are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.

So we have a vision of a lampstand, but that would have been strange, because when Zechariah is speaking, there's no temple. Why is there a vision of a lampstand when there's no temple?

Well, that's exactly the point. The vision of the lampstand is a promise that the temple will be rebuilt and God will once more come to dwell with his people.

And we see that explained then in the picture caption in verses seven and verses nine. We see there, God says that the Zerubbabel, the governor, will be the one who builds the temple.

Verse seven, who are you a great mountain before Zerubbabel, you shall become a plane, and he shall bring forth the top stone, that's like the final completion stone of the building, amidst shouts of grace to it.

[8 : 08] And then the word of the Lord came to me saying, the hands of Zerubbabel have annual note that the Lord of Hosts has sent me to you. Zerubbabel was actually the descendant of King David.

He was qualified to build God's temple. But before we move on, you might be wondering, well, what's the big deal about the temple? What's the big deal about why is the temple so important?

Well, there's three big reasons that were given about why the temple was important. First, God's presence. God promised to dwell with his people in the temple.

It was where God promised to meet with his people. God's presence, God's rule. The temple was God's throne room, as the meeting place of heaven and earth described, and the innermost part of the temple, the most holy place, had the Ark of the Covenant, which was described as God's footstool of his throne.

It is from the temple that God ruled over his people through his law. God's presence, his rule, and finally his blessing. The temple was the place where sinful people came to be forgiven.

[9 : 13] As we thought about last week, this is the place where unclean people, people who were dirty with sin, could be cleansed of all their sin. And they could worship God there, have relationship with the God of the universe, and be blessed by him.

So the temple was the center of life for any Israelite. And just to a brief history of the temple, the first temple was Eden, where God dwelt with Adam and Eve, where God dwelt with man.

Then later on, a cycle several hundred years, after God rescued his people from Egypt, God dwelt later David and then Solomon finished this temple of stone.

But that temple was destroyed in 586 BC, and that's important to keep in mind. That was 70 years before Zechariah wrote. That's the temple that is now in ruins. But God prophesied and promised through prophets like Ezekiel and now Zechariah, that he would build a new temple, a new place to dwell with his people.

And you know what? God keeps his promises. Just about four years after this, God spoke through Zechariah in chapter 4, the temple was completed. Zerubbabel laid the final stone on the temple.

[10 : 32] However, the prophet Haggai, who spoke at the same time as Zechariah, said that as that temple was built, it was a bit of an anti-climax. In fact, some of the people who had seen the earlier temple, Solomon's temple, 70 years before, started crying, because it looked so weak, so rubbish and unimpressive in comparison.

It looked like a day of small things. And there was a sense in which they were right. The temple was nothing like Solomon's temple. But they were also wrong.

Verses 9 and 10, Zechariah speaks to the people to tell them not to despise the day of small things. Because what was happening?

Well, as Zechariah hung up his plumb line against the walls of the temple, Zechariah says that's a sign that God is at work, that God is building his temple just as he promised.

Zechariah's temple was a wonderful sign of God's faithfulness to his promises. But it ultimately pointed beyond itself. That temple was destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans after being given a makeover by Herod.

[11 : 44] But what, and you might think, well, what happened to God's promises? If that temple was destroyed, what about God's promises? Well, God's promise to build his temple was much bigger than just the rubble's temple.

The temple, the tabernacle, they were only ever temporary. They served a purpose, but they were inadequate. After building the temple, Solomon says in 1 Kings chapter 8, 27, that he says, will God indeed dwell on earth?

He said, behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you. How much less this house that I have built. The temple was only ever temporary.

God could never dwell in a building of stones. It pointed forward to something greater, and it would be Zerubbable's great, great, great, great, great, great grandson who would build the promised temple.

And we see that in Matthew chapter 1 in the genealogy of Jesus, because Jesus is the great, great, great, great grandson of Zerubbable. And in the person of Jesus Christ, God came to dwell with his people.

[12 : 56] John begins his gospel in verse 14 by telling us the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, literally tabernacled among us, templeed among us. Later in John, Jesus speaks of his body.

He says, destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. We'll think a bit more this evening about Jesus as the temple builder. But for now, let's just focus on this, that Jesus is the perfect temple.

We thought about God's presence, God's rule, God's blessing. That's what was important about the temple. Well, in God's presence, Jesus was fully God and fully man. When Jesus came to, when the Son of God took on human flesh, well, God came to dwell with man and in Jesus Christ, we can truly meet with God.

We can truly know God's presence with us through Jesus Christ. What about God's rule? Well, Jesus is God's king, the perfect king, and he establishes God's rule on earth.

And in terms of God's blessing, well, through Jesus, he offers forgiveness of sin, cleansing sin through his death on the cross, through his bloodshed.

[14:06] In Christ, Paul says that we can have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God has built his perfect temple.

Jesus has ascended fully God, fully man to the right hand of God, and there he rules before one day he will come again. Again, this is not a day of small things because Christ rules as the perfect temple on God's throne.

And through Jesus, God continues to build his temple in Eden, his dwelling place to extend throughout the whole earth. And Adam and Eve failed to do that when they rebelled against God and they were cast out of Eden, but God's plan didn't change.

It just changed person because through Jesus, the second Adam, God is building his temple, not out of stones, but out of people who trust in Jesus.

In 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 4 and 5, Peter writes, As you come to him, as you people come to him, a living stone rejected by men in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.

[15:29] God is building his temple as people are being brought to Christ and cemented into his temple. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are part of God's temple. This is not a day of small things.

When you put your trust in Jesus Christ, you were like a block of stone that Christ carved out from this broken and decaying world and placed into his eternal temple.

As you are cemented into the stones on either side, you are joined into his local church, into the global church, into God's people throughout space and time, who belong to Christ, who are in Christ.

And together we rise, being built higher and higher into a holy temple of the Lord that will one day be completed when Christ comes again. And then Christ's dwelling, we're told, will be with man, his people.

Can I ask you, are you part of Jesus' temple? Have you put your trust in him? Have you asked to be part of his eternal home? You don't need to be a perfectly cut, polished block of marble.

[16:42] Jesus takes us as we are. He chips off all of the rough edges. He shaves off all the sin. He digs it out of our hearts and he makes us new. A perfect piece of marble eventually to place inside his eternal temple.

None of us comes sorted. All of us are messy. But Jesus takes us, forgives us in and cleanses us and changes us to be like Christ and makes us part of his eternal home.

Well, that's our big point. God is building his temple. This is not a day of small things. Two implications of that. First, God is building his temple and so we're called to build with him.

Just like God called Zechariah's readers to build the temple 2,500 years ago. He calls us to be part of his building project today. Jesus commissioned his disciples to go out to make disciples of all nations.

Baptizing them and teaching them all that he has commanded. Evangelism and discipleship. Bringing to people to faith in Jesus and growing them in their faith.

[17:50] Reaching and teaching. That's the task of the church. Taking people, new blocks to Jesus's temple and cementing them in. And that happens in lots of different.

As you read a children's Bible with your child or a niece or nephew or grandchild. God is building his temple. As you send someone a text to encourage them to keep going in their faith.

As you come along to someone, come to someone's house who's grieving. And you grieve with them and point them to the hope that is in Christ. God is building his temple. Christ is building his church.

As you open up your Bible, God's spirit is speaking. And Christ is building his church. As you fight sin, as you strive for Christ's likeness. God is building his church. As you commit to loving your husband, as you lay down your life for your wife.

Christ is building his church. As you speak to others about Jesus, even with all the ums and nerves and not knowing how to answer questions. Christ is building his church.

[18 : 54] As we gather to worship, as we hear God's word preached, God is building his temple. And Jesus calls us to dedicate our lives to this task. The thing is that often temple building can look small.

It can be discouraging. We can look at the church and think, what's going on? It doesn't look like 10,000, 20,000 people on a hillside.

Weeping mine is coming. It doesn't look like Pentecost. But God works through things that look small. Things that look weak. People that look weak. We heard that in our memory verse.

And we were reminded of that most of all in the person of Jesus Christ. What looks smaller than a king but then bleeding on a cross. If you're part of God's temple project, this isn't a day of small things.

God has worked. God always works through weak people, through things that look small. And it's through that that God and through them and through us.

[19 : 55] That God is building his church. The text you send, the prayers you say, the children's Bible with the strange pictures. That discipline of reading your Bible, that unseen fight against sin, that faithful love.

That word about Christ. All those are things are massive in God's eyes. God uses those things to bring people from death to life. To bring people from hell to heaven.

To transform people from heaven to heaven. To transform people from cracked and broken image bearers. And to transform them into polished and gleaming reflections of Christ himself.

To display his glory to the world. This is not a day of small things. Don't despise it. God is building his temple. Let's build with him.

The reality though is that temple building is hard. Whether you're trying to bring rocks into a temple or bring people to Christ. It is hard. Which is why God gives a wonderful reminder to Zerubbabel and to Israel.

[20 : 58] And to us today. It's our second implication. God is building. And so let's rely on him. Verse six. We read this. Then 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 of hosts. We are told to build. But we're also reminded that it won't be by our strength.

And power, but it's by God's spirit. It's both those things in tandem that we have to remember. We're called to build, but we're also called to rely on God. And that's a humbling and uplifting truth.

It's humbling because it's a reminder that we can't rely on our own strength. It's so easy to do that, isn't it? To rely on our own energy, to rely on our own passion.

To be like, okay, I can explain this. I can, I know these answers. I'm easy to think, well, I can persuade this person. If only they heard this sermon, if only they came along to Christianity to explore, if only I could convince them that science and faith aren't opposites.

[22 : 00] And all those things are good and important. But we don't rely on these things. God's temple won't be built by our strength. God will build.

God will build, as Psalm 127 says, unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain, we must rely on God.

It's a humbling truth. It's also an uplifting truth. It's an encouragement for those who feel weak. Do you feel weak? Are you struggling in the Christian life?

Are you struggling to be motivated, to keep going forward, to keep building the church? Well, this is an uplifting truth. It's not by your strength. It's by God's spirit.

You might feel totally inadequate to share the gospel. You might think I can't answer people's questions. You might think I'm really struggling to grow my faith, to read God's word at all, to feel joyful, to keep fighting nor by power.

[22 : 57] But by my spirit says the Lord of hosts. He's the Lord of hosts. He's the Lord of heavenly armies. He has all the power in creation. He has all the power in heaven on earth.

And he empowers his people by his spirit. After Jesus' resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, his followers numbered just 120 people, 120 scared and terrified disciples, hiding in an upper room for fear of the Jewish authorities.

And then something world changing happened. God sent his Holy Spirit into these people. And they went out and began boldly telling people about Jesus.

And we have that same spirit, the same spirit that filled the Apostle Peter to preach a sermon to 3,000 people, the same spirit that empowered George Whitfield and stirred the hearts of all those people listening.

That's the whole point of Pentecost, is that God's spirit comes not to a select few, but to all believers, all who trust in Christ. And he's the spirit of power.

[24 : 06] God builds his church by his spirit. It is by his spirit that he softens people's hearts so that they, hearts and minds, so that when they hear the gospel, they respond in repentance and belief.

It is by God's spirit that he works in the lives of believers like you and I so that we can bear the fruit of the spirit, throw put-offs in and put on Christlikeness.

And one of the main ways that God works behind the symbolism of the olive trees on either side of the lampstand. Remember that the lampstand symbolizes God's presence in the temple, the olive trees on either side are fueling the lamp.

And the olive trees represent God's prophets, probably Zechariah and Haggai. There is a number of views of this, but that seems most likely because the prophets are often described as those who stand alongside, stand in God's presence beside the Lord of hosts, those who are anointed by God. And so these anointed ones are the ones who, it's through the word of the prophets that God, well that God's presence goes out, that God's word goes out to his people.

[25 : 13] It's through the word of the prophets that God's temple is built. God builds his temple through his spirit filled prophets who preach his word as people respond to obedience and build.

And God continues to build his church today through his spirit inspired word, pointing us to Jesus, encouraging us in the truth, emboldening us to share the faith, writing his law on our hearts.

One theologian Jonathan Lehman writes that God's word, working through God's spirit is God's primary instrument for growing God's church. God's word, working through God's spirit is God's primary instrument for growing God's church.

And that is true for us as we hear God's spirit inspired word. That is also true though as we speak God's word. When we speak God's word as his prophets, it is the Holy Spirit that goes out with those aren't God's word in people's hearts to bring them to faith and grow them in their faith.

When God calls us to build his temple, his church, he's not calling us to do it in our own strength. He's given us everything we need. He's given us his word. He's given us his spirit to transform us into the prophetic messages that he needs to bring his message out to the world.

[26 : 36] The message that has the power to bring people from death to life. God is building his temple.

Christ is building his church and the effects are life changing. The effects are also world changing and we don't have time to look at the final two visions in chapters five and the first half of chapter six.

But essentially I'd be happy to talk to them about talk with you about them after the service. But essentially they show the ripple effects of building God's temple. How evil is driven out. How the world is brought to rest.

It is through God's church that he is building his new creation. And it'll be a place where there'll be no evil. A place of perfect peace. A place of rest with God as we were created for.

John sees that vision of a finished temple in Revelation. It's the people of God, the bride of Christ. God will build his temple. That's certain.

[27 : 38] The end is certain. Jesus wins. Do you want to be part of one of the, not one of, of the biggest building project the world has ever seen?

Do you want to do something that will love? Well God calls us to join him in building his church. It may look small, but it's of cosmic significance. It might feel possible, but God gives us his spirit by whose power we labor.

God is building his church for his glory forever. Oh man. Let's pray.