

Sermon “The Covenant Stands”

Zechariah 1:1-6; 4:1-14 – Introduction and the first vision

Rev. Bruce Stanley

www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

III – The fear of building

PPT – Have you ever built a sand castle on the beach? As soon as you build it, you know that either the waves are going to come in and knock it down, or someone’s going to walk over the top of it! And as we get older, we tend to stop building sand castles on the beach. It seems nearly futile. Silly. Childish. Pointless. Because we know it’s just going to wash away.

PPT – My question for us today is “Are we afraid?” “Are we afraid of building *God’s* kingdom?” When we go to work in God’s church, when we speak to people about Jesus, when we reach out to our community or go about our ministries, do we feel like we’re just building sandcastles on the beach that are going to wash away? Do we want to give up? Do we feel sometimes like it’s just not worth it? Or it’s just too difficult?

Zechariah is a prophet who wrote about 520 BC. Here’s a brief recap of where Israel are in history:

PPT – TIMELINE:

1000BC – Solomon’s temple was built. A beautiful temple. Imagine this temple. Built when Israel was the richest and most powerful nation in the world. The temple was 28 metres long, 9 metres wide and 14 m high, lined with cedar, cypress floors. The sanctuary - 9 metres wide, deep and high, lined with GOLD. Nations from all over were contracted to bring materials. Cherubim, sculptures of angels, reaching 4½ metres across, carved out of olive wood, and overlaid with ...gold! A golden altar, a golden table, TEN golden lamp stands, gold lamps, basins, wick trimmers, dishes, gold sockets for the doors, ...7 years in the making!

922 BC – Israel splits in two – into the North and the South

721 BCF – Northern Israel is destroyed and taken captive by Assyria

587 – Southern Israel – also known as Judah, the people Zechariah is writing to, is completely ransacked and destroyed by the Babylonians, and God’s people are taken captive. Solomon’s beautiful temple is destroyed. Just 70 years before Zechariah wrote, everything was GREAT! Judah were all worshipping God in a beautiful temple, and now they have nothing.

520 BC – Prince Cyrus comes from Persia and takes over Babylon. He lets the Israelites return to Judah. And Zechariah tells them that God wants them to build a *new* temple. And they start building this new temple. It takes them *two years* JUST to build the temple foundations. But then they stop. They’re afraid. They start to wonder – there are a lot of nations around us who don’t like us. If we build this temple, they could think we’re a threat and we could be attacked – they could destroy the temple again! It’s not like it was back in Solomon’s time. They aren’t a great political power. There are wars happening all around them. And they lose heart. They want to give up. They feel like they’re building sandcastles that are going to be wiped out. What’s the point?

Today we’re looking at Zechariah’s *fifth* vision. This vision is central to the message of the book. Let’s open up our Bibles to Zechariah 4.

PPT – READ 4:2-3

PPT (picture) – Here is the picture we have:

The lamp stand is Israel. They are a light to the world. And there are two olive trees on each side of the lamp stand which are pouring golden oil into the top of the main bowl to keep the lights burning. These branches are the two leaders appointed by God – the *Priest* of Israel, Joshua and the *King* of Israel, Zerubbabel. And the golden oil used to keep the candles burning, comes from God himself.

PPT – From verses 6-10, the vision continues to tell us 3 important things – and they don't just apply to Israel in Zechariah's time. They apply to us as well, although in a slightly different context:

PPT – 1. First, verse 6: *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord almighty.”*

In other words, it's all God's work. God is the one who makes things happen. God is the one who leads Israel and appoints their leaders and the temple will be rebuilt by the power of the Spirit of God.

What does this say to us today? Will WE build God's church? No. **God** will build his church. He will build it by his Spirit, and he will use US as his instruments in that work. But it will be HIS work. So we don't need to be afraid of the work ahead of us. Because God has a plan and God can make it happen. And because God wants it to happen, because it's his work, we know we're not building silly sandcastles. We know what we're doing is important because God has called us to do it. God makes kingdoms out of what we often think are just sandcastles.

III – You know the first person on a building site is often people like plumbers. They put in drainage and lay pipes and all that boring stuff. And when they've finished, it's doesn't look like much. It doesn't look impressive. The pipes are covered up and you hardly know a plumber has been. Then the foundations are laid, and it doesn't look like much either. Just a few bricks sticking out of the ground. But the construction manager knows what he's doing. He's co-ordinating everyone working on the building. He's in control of it all. He's orchestrating the whole event. And he's the one who has the plans. No-one is there building sandcastles. Everyone is given work to do that's important.

PPT – 2. Second thing, verse 9: *“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it.”* God chooses the people and God chooses the timing. God says that the temple will be *finished* while Zerubbabel is still King. That's hard for Israel to believe. It's taken 2 years just to lay the foundations! But it doesn't matter what WE think. What matters is what **God says**. **HE** will build his temple. And **HE** will do it in **his** time with **his** people.

As we grow as All Saints, what do you think would happen to us if we were to face great obstacles and huge struggles in the years ahead? Perhaps we will face some really tough times. Or what if times were unbelievably fruitful and relatively easy? What if we went from strength to strength in God's work here? You see, if it's God's plans we're following, if it's God's timing and God's way, then it doesn't matter what we face, as long as we follow! If the building work here takes 6 months or 20 years. If the youth group has 6 people or 600. If we have 7 people on staff or 1 person. If we have a million dollars or a million cents. What God says is that **HE** makes the plans. **He** chooses the timing. **He** raises up the people. **He** calls us, his church, to build according to **his** plans.

We can often feel uncomfortable about how God works. But are we still able to follow, even when it's difficult?

We will see God move mountains to build his church when **we** think there are no resources to do anything. God will make plans that defy **our** understanding. Will we follow? Even when we are afraid? Even when we think we're just building sandcastles? Even when we think it's impossible, or even pointless?

PPT – 3. The third and final thing is in verse 10: *“Who despises the day of small things?”* Israel felt weak. They were building a temple that wasn't like the beautiful and lavish temple of Solomon. It didn't look like God was doing much. But what God was doing was huge. Because this temple was preparing them for the arrival of Jesus.

You see, this is all about **the temple of God**. The temple was the place where God lived on earth with his people. When there was no temple, God was not living with his people. Through Zechariah, God is saying “build the temple!” In other words, God is saying “I want to be with you again! Return to me and I will return and live with you again.” But to Israel, it just didn’t look BIG enough. They weren’t a powerful or rich nation. They were afraid any temple they built would just be knocked down by their enemies again. It felt like they were building sandcastles. What’s the point?

The point is this: God wants to be with his people. Just the presence of the temple signified God’s presence with them. But more importantly, this temple pointed to the temple of the future: the temple of Jesus.

500 years after Zechariah, God came and lived among us in the person of Jesus. He was the last and the greatest and the *eternal* temple of God. And now that Jesus has gone to heaven, he has sent us the Holy Spirit who lives IN us. Now, God is present with his people personally through the Holy Spirit, and WE are the temple of God. WE are where God lives on earth. Not in a building. But IN US!

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul says: *“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”*

Here we are. A small church in Waitara. A small handful of people. 150 people out of 8000 people in our suburb. A small youth group. A small Sunday school in comparison with some churches. A small income. Small staff team. Let me ask you – do you ever think that what God is **doing** here is ***small***? Or what about that next door neighbour you’ve talked to a few times. Or the person at work. Sometimes you get to talk about church or God. Not much. It doesn’t seem like you’re really make any impact in their life with the gospel. Do you ever think that those conversations you have with them are small? Or our small giving to mission work, or our small contributions to buying bibles for the persecuted church. Do we think these things are small? Are they insignificant sandcastles?

Sometimes we despise these days of small things. For Israel, a small temple was a small thing. A sandcastle. Israel were AFRAID to build the temple. Afraid of hard times. Afraid of their enemies. Afraid of being attacked. Afraid of things not being as good as they used to be. Afraid of God’s control. Afraid of God’s timing. **Afraid of trusting God.**

We still live in the days of small things. Israel was waiting for a saviour. We are waiting for the **return** of that Saviour. While we wait, while we do what seems to be small things, remember, God will build his church by His Spirit, in his way, with his people, and in his time. The question Zechariah asks is this: Will you follow? Even when they seem small? Or uncomfortable? Or even impossible? Will you follow?

Let’s pray.