

Not by Might... but by My Spirit

Zechariah 4–6

Key Verse: Zechariah 4:6 “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.”

Do you ever feel burned out or discouraged in doing the work God has called you to do? The late Dr. Daniel Hong of Lehigh, Pennsylvania, once said, “Our UBF lay shepherds and missionaries have three full-time jobs: work, family, and ministry.” Perhaps you feel overwhelmed by the responsibilities God has given you. You are trying to build a career, care for your family, serve God's people, and remain faithful to God's calling.

Building something is hard. Rebuilding something is even harder. At some point, everyone has to rebuild something that has been broken. That is exactly where Zerubbabel found himself. Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah who returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple from its ashes. Imagine leading such a project—not only rebuilding a temple, but rebuilding an entire nation. Zerubbabel may have felt “I am burned out. I have nothing left.” When he hit rock bottom, he heard the Lord Almighty speak to him: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.”

This message is about how we can live a powerful and victorious life as leaders. Ultimately, this message points us to the true and heavenly Leader, our eternal King and High Priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus says: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28–30). May each of us hear Jesus' words of encouragement today!

I. The Golden Oil (The Fifth Vision: The Golden Lampstand) (Chapter 4)

After seeing the first four visions, Zechariah fell asleep, hit by a spiritual food coma. Look at 4:1–2a. The angel of the Lord woke him and asked, “What do you see?” Zechariah replied, “I see a lampstand all of gold” (2b). However, Zechariah could not understand the two olive trees beside the lampstand. So he asked the angel, “What are these, my lord?” Let us read verse 6 together: “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.”

Who was Zerubbabel? He was the grandson of King Jehoiachin of Judah (1 Chr. 3:17), who did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and was deported to Babylon as a prisoner along with his family. The prophet Jeremiah described Jehoiachin as a shattered and worthless jar cast into a foreign land and declared that none of his descendants would successfully

sit on David's throne and rule Judah (Jer. 22:28–30). Zerubbabel was born in Babylon during the exile. He was a third-generation Jew, and his name meant “seed of Babylon.” He probably spoke broken Hebrew. He returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, not as a king but as a Persian governor. Rebuilding the temple was an enormous task. When King Solomon built the first temple, he had about 156,000 laborers and all the materials prepared by King David. The surrounding nations cooperated with him, and it still took seven years to complete the temple.

Zerubbabel's situation was very different. He had only 49,897 returned exiles (Ezra 2), many of whom were old enough to be his father's or grandfather's generation. They probably reminded him often, “When I was your age...” He lacked materials. Enemies surrounded them. The returned exiles were not fully committed to rebuilding the temple. He probably felt like a failure and was ready to give up.

Through the prophet Haggai's message of repentance, the people began rebuilding the temple. But it was not long before opposition arose from surrounding enemies. Eventually the work was brought to a standstill by order of King Artaxerxes (Ezra 4). Only the foundation had been completed. And the foundation revealed that this temple would be much smaller than Solomon's temple, disappointing those who remembered the former glory and said, “Back then Solomon's temple was...”

At this point, put yourself in Zerubbabel's shoes. How do you feel as a leader when your work looks insignificant and your people doubt your leadership? Do you feel discouraged or drained? Are you thinking about giving up? But remember God's calling. Paul says in Romans 11:29, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” God has called you and placed you where you are today. So where can we find the strength to keep moving forward? The Lord Almighty gave Zerubbabel and his people strength to continue building the temple. The Lord encouraged them through Haggai: “Be strong, Zerubbabel... Be strong, all you people of the land, and work. For I am with you” (Haggai 2:3–4). The Lord also used Zechariah and the first four visions, “I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion.”

Now the Lord gives another word of encouragement. Look again at verse 6: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts. Some of us may ask, “What does that have to do with the golden lampstand?” The answer is found in the vision itself. The focus of this vision is the golden oil flowing through two golden pipes connected to the branches of two olive trees.

Let me ask you a Bible quiz. In the Holy Place of the temple, the lamps on the lampstand had to remain continually lit. Who supplied the olive oil? The priests! But in this vision, the oil is not ordinary olive oil. It is golden oil flowing directly from the olive trees[image]. The golden oil represents the Spirit of God. God's Spirit will enable Zerubbabel to continue

leading God's people and rebuild the temple. A work like rebuilding the temple cannot be accomplished by human might or human power. Only the empowering presence of God's Spirit can complete His work!

For most of my life, I have depended on others or myself. As a youth, I depended on my family or teachers. At the same time, I learned to trust my own determination, wisdom, and money. I thought, "I can do it." But failures eventually crushed my self-reliance. Eventually, I felt that I needed a degree. So I earned one. But did that make me a good shepherd? As an associate pastor for the past three years, I have seen challenges and difficulties; I often became fearful, hiding behind Pastor Mark or Kevin. But while struggling with this passage, I heard the Lord rebuke me: "Not by might, nor by power." At the same time, I felt greatly encouraged with his words: "But by my Spirit." If I wanted to live a comfortable life, I would not need God's Spirit. But since God has called me to serve as a leader in rebuilding His church and His kingdom, He promises to give me His Holy Spirit. If you are tired and burned out from doing the work that God appointed you to do, listen to the voice of the Lord Almighty: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."

How then can we receive the Golden Oil? It comes from the two olive trees through the golden pipes. Scripture repeatedly teaches us that God's Spirit is received through repentance, faith, and prayer. The Apostle Peter says in Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Jesus said in Luke 11:13: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" The heavenly reservoir is connected to us through the golden pipe of repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, and persistent prayer. The Holy Spirit continually fills our lives as we pray according to God's will and obey his word. When we pray based on the gospel, the Holy Spirit pours every spiritual blessing, all wisdom into our lives like a fountain and a river. Is your pipe clogged? Do you need a plumber? If so, come to Jesus with repentance! Ask him to reopen your pipes so that you may hunger for his word, and pray persistently with faith!

When Zerubbabel was empowered by God's Spirit, the impossible happened. Look at verses 7–9. "Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it." When God's Spirit empowers His servant, mountains become plains. Obstacles that seem impossible become possible. The work that God begins, He finishes!

Practically how do we live by God's Spirit daily? Do not despise the small things. Look at verse 10: "For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice and shall see

the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.” The foundation that Zerubbabel laid seemed small. But that seemingly insignificant temple—the second temple—lasted much longer than Solomon's glorious temple. More importantly, it became a foreshadow of the true and ultimate temple that our Lord and King Jesus would build through His death and resurrection.

When you look at your ministry, do you despise the small things, the few one-to-ones? Your small fellowship? The insignificance of personal devotion to God in daily bread and prayer? Jesus says in Matthew 13:32: “It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” Jesus died and was buried like a kernel of wheat. But when He rose from the dead, that seed became a mighty tree. Since then, countless people weary and burdened by sin have come to Him and found rest.

May God by his Spirit empower us to keep moving forward, leading God's people and rebuilding His temple without burning out, and keep being faithful to the small things God entrusted to us.

II. Purity of the Land (The Sixth and Seventh Visions: The Flying Scroll and the Woman in the Basket) (Chapter 5)

In Part I, we learned that a spiritual leader must depend on God's Spirit to accomplish what seems impossible. Now we come to the sixth and seventh visions. These visions teach us what else a spiritual leader must do.

Look at 5:1–2. [image] Zechariah saw a large flying scroll. Then he heard the angel's message in verse 3: “This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land. For everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cleaned out according to what is on the other side.” Who will be cleaned out? Every thief and every perjurer. Raise your hand if you have never stolen or sworn falsely. Hmm. None? If this vision were carried out literally, none of us would be here. Why then are only these two sins mentioned? These two sins represent violations of the Ten Commandments. The vision is not limited to theft and false swearing. Rather, it shows that all violators of God's law stand under His judgment.

In biblical history, we see examples. Do you remember the man who stole and hid the plunder after the victory at Jericho (Joshua 7)? Achan and his entire household came under judgment. Do you remember the couple Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit and were confronted by the Apostle Peter? They died on the spot. (Acts 5:1–10).

Does it mean that spiritual leaders should root out every thief and fraudster? No. The point is that spiritual leaders must teach the law of the Lord to God's people and help them obey it. A spiritual leader should cultivate purity in the hearts of God's people while they build the temple. Why? Because God's people are the very temple of God. Your heart and my heart are the temple of God. God cares about our purity. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5:8).

[Image]The seventh vision is also about the purity of Zerubbabel and his people. Zechariah saw a basket that was going out, representing the iniquity of the land. Then the lead cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting inside it. The angel said, "This is wickedness." I do not know why wickedness is personified as a woman. Men are certainly wicked as well, aren't they? Look at verses 9–11. Two women, who were likely angels, lifted the basket and carried it away to the land of Shinar, another name for Babylon.

What does this vision mean? The returned exiles had lived in Babylon for half a century. Some had married Babylonian women. They had been deeply influenced by Babylon's culture, values, and sins. Although they had returned to Jerusalem, they still needed to be cleansed. That was exactly what the holy and jealous God desires. Wickedness has to be removed from the Holy Land. Our holy and jealous God purifies His people. How does he do it? Again, it is through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin (Jn 16:8). He applies the work of Christ to our hearts and washes away our guilt and shame.

At the same time, we have a responsibility in the process of sanctification. We must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Ro 6:11). We are engaged in a spiritual battle, and we fight it with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:13: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

A spiritual leader cares about the purity of God's people and helps them grow in holiness through the work of the Holy Spirit.

III. The Branch: God's Eternal Leader (The Eighth Vision: The Four Chariots and Joshua the High Priest Crowned) (Chapter 6)

Thus far, we have learned that a spiritual leader depends on God's Spirit and cares for the purity of God's people. Now Chapter 6 shows us where all of this is leading—to the Branch, God's promised King and Priest.

Now let us look at the eighth vision. [image] Zechariah saw four chariots coming out from between two bronze mountains. Each chariot was pulled by powerful horses—red, black, white, and dappled. Like the horsemen in the first vision, these chariots patrol the earth.

However, they do more than patrol. Look at verse 8: “Then he cried to me, ‘Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country.’” Here, the north country refers to Babylon, the long-standing enemy of God's people. To set God's Spirit at rest means that God's victory and reign have been fully established. The Spirit of God is at rest.

What does this mean for us? A spiritual leader is someone who rests in God's victory. A spiritual leader bears the fruit of peace even in difficult circumstances, saying, “If God is for us, who can be against us? We are more than conquerors.” A spiritual leader plants confidence in God's ultimate victory in the hearts of God's people rather than a sense of defeat. No matter how difficult your rebuilding work may be, may the Holy Spirit fill you with the confidence, peace, and joy of God's victory!

The rest of chapter 6 beautifully points us directly to the coming Messiah. Look at verses 9–11. Zechariah received the word of the Lord to make a crown and place it on the head of Joshua the high priest. Here is another Bible quiz. Who is normally crowned by a prophet in the Bible? A king. Yet Zechariah was told to place a crown on Joshua the high priest. What? Let us read verses 12–13: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.’” Joshua the high priest points forward to the Branch. The Branch is the One who will build the eternal temple as King. The Branch is the One who will serve His people forever as High Priest. This is fulfilled only in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus cleansed the temple he said, in John 2:19, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” After His death and resurrection did His disciples understand He was speaking about His body (Jn 2:21). From the beginning to the end, Jesus lived and was empowered by the Holy Spirit. He was even led to the cross and was raised by the Spirit (Ro 8:11). Through his broken and then resurrected body, Jesus built the eternal temple. Not only did He build the temple, He now serves there as our heavenly High Priest by becoming the Lamb of God who entered the Holy of Holies with His own blood. And now, those who have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus may enter God's throne of grace with confidence. We may worship God in spirit and truth. There we receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Now the Branch—our King and Priest—invites those who are weary and burdened to come to Him. The Branch calls people near and far to receive rest from their guilt and shame. Praise Jesus our Branch, our King and High priest!

What then does this teach us about spiritual leadership? A spiritual leader acknowledges the Branch—the King and Priest—as the ultimate heavenly Leader. When a spiritual leader comes to Jesus, he finds rest, takes up Christ's yoke, and learns to labor alongside Him.

As we conclude, let us summarize what we learned. A spiritual leader depends on God's Spirit. A spiritual leader helps cultivate purity in God's people. A spiritual leader lives in the confidence of God's victory. Above all, a spiritual leader fixes his eyes on Jesus Christ, the Branch, our eternal King and High Priest.

May each of us be filled with the Golden Oil—the Holy Spirit—to build purity, faith, and victory in the hearts of God's people. And may we keep our eyes fixed on our ultimate, heavenly, and eternal Leader, Jesus Christ.