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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 15 November 1922

Zechariah 4 v 6

"Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts".

This was an exceedingly important time in the history of Israel. Jehovah had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus who had proclaimed to the captivity that those who were the people of God and desired to do so, should go up to Jerusalem to build the house of the Lord; and in consequence thereof Zerubbabel, with a large number of the dispersed, had gone up to Jerusalem according to the prophecy of God by Jeremiah, and they had laid the foundation of the Lord's house. In the midst of this, as they had laid the foundation and were about to commence building, opposition arose in a remarkable way. The enemies that were about them sought to build with them, and these Israelites said, in reply, that they would build alone, that these enemies had no right to build with them. And this provoked, as a spiritual isolation of the Lord's people does provoke, the enemies of His people; and so they sought power to stop the building, which power they received from the king, who made a decree that the building should cease forthwith. And it was at this juncture that the Lord raised up Zechariah and Haggai to prophesy to the people, and the text we have read, as well as the chapters, are part of the prophecy which Zechariah brought to the Israelites in this, their trouble.

Now what is written, being the word of the living God and the Holy Scripture, is profitable for our learning. The Holy Ghost has caused this to be written, not that we should merely have a history of His work with His people of old, but that we might have for our instruction in our souls, His own word as it is applied by the Holy Ghost. Now there is a condition spiritually

similar to this literal condition in the experience of the Lord's people. Mark this, the foundation had been laid, and many of the saints at some time of their experience do find, that after the foundation has been laid in their souls, the foundation of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there are mighty enemies, subtle enemies, that work and seek and, alas, succeed in staying the building. These enemies, you observe, desired to build with the Israelites, and many a child of God, having had some true teaching by the Spirit in his soul and having been quickened into life, convinced of sin, brought to repentance and to some real faith in the way of salvation, does find in himself enemies, powerful, subtle enemies, against that work which has been commenced. The greatest of all these enemies is that in us which would desire to build with the Jews, not would seek to help on God's work, but would rush the soul into jerry building in presumption, leading to darkness and despair, which is the greatest enemy. Nature, as fallen, is the greatest enemy there can be in a child of God, for it is always at enmity with God and with God's work in the soul, and subtly will it seek, in precisely the same way as these enemies sought, to undermine the work of salvation, to undermine the building-up of the soul in the doctrines of Christ upon the foundation laid, and they succeed sometimes in stopping the work this way.

A man may have had in his soul distinct convictions of sin; he may have laid long under these convictions; he may have long repented of his sins; he may, in the Lord's own time, have been brought to some sweet hope in the mercy of God through Christ, so that he has found in his soul a foundation of hope laid; he has seen, to his comfort, though not full deliverance perhaps, but to his comfort and strengthening, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, the way to the Father, the way to heaven, and this is a gracious experience and a true one. Now, being ignorant, being ever naturally legal, such a man may find in his religious mind workings which, through the temptations of the devil and his own darkness, he may mistake for the workings of God and grace. He may grow up in some religion, even upon a good foundation, in a

kind of way as is described in the Scripture, and build upon that foundation wood, and hay and stubble. Rapidly he may grow to his own view of things, and he may indeed so grow as he thinks; he may think himself well, his mountain standing strong, and he may look down upon some who grow hardly at all, if at all as he thinks, and look upon them and think to himself "Well, I am getting on better than he is"; and all this time truly there is a stopping of the work. Exercise, solemn, close exercise before God has stopped; confession of sin before Him from an unfeigned, a convinced heart, has ceased. Those earnest petitions at the throne of grace, with prayer by which, and in which, he lived before; this has gone, as to any living exercise. The work has stopped; and a man may be here without knowing it - a solemn truth! You find it in the Scriptures shown distinctly, that men may be in an evil case of soul and be quite unaware of it. The Lord's people may be. Take a case or two; take the case of David. He had sinned terribly, though a man after God's own heart. But though he must have been conscious of having sinned in his own soul as before man, so darkened and hardened had he been by the deceitfulness of sin that he seems to have been unconscious of it, when he was charged with it. Mercifully the Lord did not leave him to this hardness, but thrust home His convincing light into his heart and conscience and brought him to repentance, and put away his sin, though he left a sword in his house all his lifetime. And of Ephraim it is said that grey hairs are here and there upon him yet he perceiveth it not. And of Samson it is said that his strength was gone and he wist not that the Lord had departed from him. A man may keep up formality in religion and yet the true work of building in his soul may have ceased, and that, where a true foundation is. If, and when, the eternal God makes this known to a man, to a saint, shows him his desolations, shows him what he has been doing, where he has been turning, upon what he has been trusting, what his aims and motives have been in his profession, then he is alarmed, and well may he be alarmed. Stripped of strength, convinced of the sin of some things in his profession, convinced himself of this formality and deadness in prayer and spiritual exercises, convinced that he has been weary of the Lord, convinced that he

has been carrying on in his own strength that which could not be carried on but by the strength of the Lord; and now, weak in his apprehension, painfully weak, guiltily weak, he is alarmed and troubled. Must not those fifty thousand that came up from their captivity have felt a solemn, painful alarm, and trouble when this building ceased. Would they not have looked back to their captivity and have thought of the pleasant times that they experienced there. Would they not have thought, too, that the expectations that were raised in their hearts as they came down from the captivity, those who had the fear of God in their hearts, looking for the glory of God and desiring to worship Him in His own appointed way and place again, must they not have been troubled as they saw this work stopped by the decree of the king? And so there are several mighty motives moving in the heart of a child of God which trouble him, when he is brought face to face with this condition.

First, his own guilt. We may impoverish our souls; we may cause the Lord to hide His face far from us, provoke Him to leave us to our own formality, but to get back to Him, to get His smile again, to have our desolations removed, this is no work for nature, it is impossible to nature, and the soul feels it, and is filled with alarm and shame. Then another thing, the word of the Lord may be thrust in upon his soul and he may say to himself, in effect, in the spirit of it - "Didst thou not procure this to thyself in that thou forsookest the Lord, when He led thee by the way?" And He may show you how you rebelled against that dependence upon Him, which cried continual weakness upon yourself, and folly upon your wisdom, death upon your own religious life. You may see how rebellion wrought, and now feel the barrenness that comes, in which you dwell, as it is written "The rebellious dwelleth in a dry land". Another thing will bring trouble here, and in it is this - a disappointment. You may have had, when the Lord led you by the way, some sweet anticipations of good days to come, you may have felt some comfort in the gospel, some light into it, have felt some touches of the goodness of the Lord, have seen some beauty in Christ, and in the church and the ways of the Lord, and now the anticipations you then had of

entering more fully and personally into those enjoyments, these are like stings to you as you see from whence you are fallen. O the enemies that come against a child of God are parts of the child of God. The old nature, the religious flesh, the independent flesh, the rebellious self, they want to build with the Jews, with the gracious spirit that is in the heart. But, says the Lord, - "Say not a confederacy with those who say a confederacy". And you will, as the Lord is with you, be brought to this sooner or later, that no more can nature mix with grace than oil can mix with water or fire mix with water. The two are diametrically opposite, having different aims and aspirations. A conflict is necessary because the ends are different; and this, nature hates, and seeks to patch up a peace, a false peace. The devil will set you on this, and you may fall into this state of trouble. Now at such a time, blessed be the eternal God, a refuge there is at such a time, an instruction brought; indeed through such an experience as this men learn things, and one thing more than any other they learn is this what is in the text "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

In the third chapter you have blessedly set forth, the dealings of God with a sinner under the type of Joshua, who was a type of the church. He had been brought to stand before God. The devil withstood him, and the Lord rebuked the devil, and commanded that his filthy garments should be removed, and pronounced forgiveness to Joshua; then spoke to him again in a charge. Now that experience is an experience which is wrought by the power of God the Holy Ghost, which this fourth chapter teaches. The prophet was asleep, but he had had this set before him of Joshua and the dealings of the Lord with him. Now the angel of the Lord wakened him out of his sleep and taught him in this chapter throughout, the necessity, the absolute indispensability, of such an experience as the building-up of the temple spiritually, the building-up of the church, of the believer, the absolute indispensability of the Holy Ghost. And at such a juncture of experience in a saint, this teaching is very solemn, yet very precious. It is solemn, because, as it is

brought to a man in such a state, he will perceive, and he will, sooner or later, be brought to confess, that he has grieved this blessed Spirit who, by His gracious dealings, laid the foundation. Zerubbabel laid the foundation; the same shall finish the building. God lays the foundation by His Spirit in regeneration, conviction and in revealing Christ; He lays the foundation of hope; and to have grieved One, the eternal God, God the Holy Ghost, the only teacher of righteousness, the only One by whom we can know God and the way of salvation and be brought into union with Christ, this is a very solemn thing to be convinced of. That He does mercifully. When the Lord convinces a sinner guilty of it and brings him to confession, enabling him to humble himself under the mighty hand of the Lord in this, to lie prostrate before Him and to confess that he has grieved the blessed Spirit, his kind, patient, gracious Teacher - and it has a very kind look to a fallen creature, this word - it is as though the Lord pities a poor sinner now looking upon the foundation, as it were, the beginning of the work and no stones laid on it, no building going on, but just a bare foundation, desolation all round it; it is as though the Lord pities such a one that has grief over it, one who says "I thought by now I should be established in the truth; I thought by now I should be walking with the Lord in peace and equity; I thought by now I should have in my heart that song of the redeemed, in the beginning of it at least and find rest of faith in the atonement of Christ; but here I am desolate, distant, fearful, bondaged, dark, troubled;" it is as though the Lord pities such a one, as this and says "I know your sorrows; I know your temptations; I know your despair, that is, I know the vehement desire, the grief that is in your heart; now, this is the comfort I would bring: It is not by might, it is not by power, but by My Spirit you shall be restored. He who began must restore; He who began must finish.

Now this comfort will have an effect in the soul, and that not to allow the soul to sleep; you wont blind your eyes to your desolation, you wont sit down and say "O well, the Spirit has failed me and I cannot be fruitful, and I must accept to be in

this state. It will have an effect, yes it will have an energising, quickening effect in your soul when the eternal God speaks such a word as this into your heart. Comfort does have an energising effect. Despair has a paralysing effect; sorrow has a weakening effect; guilt has a very painful weakening effect. Comfort, God's comfort, has a strengthening, an invigorating effect. What will it do? It will make you seek and beg for the exercise, the gift, the pouring out upon you of this blessed Spirit, and as He is spoken of in the Holy Scripture, and as you may remember that you have had some experience of His gracious power in you, you will beg for a renewal of that and for His coming to you as is described and promised in the Word of God. Men do pray for the Spirit by the teaching of God in their hearts, as well as by the teaching of God in the Holy Scripture. That is a very gracious word of the Lord Jesus Christ where He said "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall My Father which is in heaven give the Holy Ghost to them that ask Him." Perhaps you say "O I am too guilty to ask" You will have to ask. The Lord will bring the pride down and make you willing to ask, make you long for an answer to your petition, that the Holy Spirit may again move in you so that the building may be commenced. Well if you find this in your heart in true and solemn and unfeigned earnestness, one may say that the building has commenced.

The result of this prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah in the Jews, was that they prospered. It is said they did "They prospered", and they prospered to the completion of the building. It was soon completed, notwithstanding the decree of Artaxerxes, and notwithstanding the devil's charges which are true. Charges of grieving the Holy Spirit, and he does sometimes charge a person and then plunge him into despair. Notwithstanding, I say, all this, the Holy Spirit comes and brings His own comfort, and His own testimony into the soul and enables him to commence again, and how does He do it? He does it by exercising in the soul His covenant offices. First it may be He will bring the testimony of the Scripture. You may read about the Holy Spirit in the Word of God, and be unmoved by it; but if the Spirit should lead you

to the testimony of the Word of God, to Christ's own testimony concerning the Holy Spirit and His promise of Him, that will move you, powerfully move you to seek for the very experience that is promised.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ said that He would not leave His children comfortless, but would send to them another Comforter who should guide them into all truth, and who should take of the things that were His and should show them unto them. Now you may say "Well, that is the first work surely" Yes, but who does the first work must do all through, as the teaching is in this word, and as the teaching will be in your souls, for renewal; for renewal of prayer must come by the Holy Ghost. That is a promise to be pleaded, and is pleaded by the Lord's people sometimes, who feel the slackness of their spirits, the death of their souls with regard to prayer, where the Lord has said that He would "pour upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the house of David the Spirit of grace and of supplication" and it is your only hope. Look at the prophecy of Zechariah where is described a condition of barrenness, a wilderness condition, and it is said that it shall remain like that until the Spirit be poured upon you from on high. Implied in that is this, that though barrenness be, though a wilderness be, provoked by your own action, yet the Holy Spirit will be poured out when you are brought to seek Him, and the diligence will arise from this comfort. Yes, guilty and ashamed you may be, yet not only is comfort, sweet heavenly comfort brought by the Word of God into the soul, but also a diligence in seeking for this Holy Spirit, a watchfulness as to prayer, and as to access to God. "Not by might, nor by power."

Take this point with regard to the Holy Spirit, the Remembrancer. O how desolate you may feel to be sometimes. And in the desolation you cannot recall a single dealing of God with you, cannot bring back a single feeling of a gracious kind that you have ever had, and it seems as though all is gone, covered over, and even, it may be, the foundation seems grown over with nettles and briars. Now the Holy Spirit is said to be the Remembrancer, to remind the people of God of the truth of God,

not only the truth as it is written in the Scripture, but the truth of what He has done in the soul. This is very sweet, this is very precious. A promise He has made; He will bring it back and strengthen you by it. It may say to you "According to My word when I brought you out of the land of Egypt, so I am with you" O, and how comforting that will be; the Lord with you in this desolation; His promise not forfeited, though self-procured desolation now pains you. No, and when the Lord brings it in, it will strengthen you, as the word is "Be strong, therefore, O Zerubbabel and build and work; be strong, for according to my promise when I brought you out of the land of Egypt, so I am with you. My Spirit remains among you, fear ye not." Well, only God can enable a poor, ashamed, guilty sinner not to fear, and be strong, to build and to work for eternity in such a case. It wont lead to slothfulness, and it wont lead to a legal striving, but it will bring you to a diligent desire to be found in a humble dependence upon the God of all grace for salvation, and a diligence with respect to communion with that God, and it is in communion that the Spirit's work is mostly known. It is by Him, poor sinners have access to God the Father through the Incarnate Son, and this is communion. This is the way in which poor souls, living stones, are built upon the eternal Foundation Stone, built into Him, brought to Him in experience.

Now in this let us notice one or two of the things which the eternal Spirit does. He brings a sinner with all his guilt, with all his shame, with all his fear, to the Lord, and shows to him again that that efficacious atonement which the Lord Jesus once made in His sacrifice upon Calvary, has undiminished virtue, and that is a wonderful comfort. It is one thing to see that, and it is another thing for a poor, pained, weary, ashamed sinner to be brought to feel it with a divine freshness by the Holy Ghost. Every time you believe that truly, there is some exercise of the power of the Holy Ghost in your heart. Faith works, not by the power of nature, nor by the might of brains, but by the power of the Holy Ghost. We believe by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Then again, in regard to appearing before the great White

Throne, you may feel this, that there is so much to be done. You may feel that you have gathered to yourself so much guilt, that your life has been one of so many failures, so many disappointments, so many mortifications to yourself and to the dishonour of the Lord. Many appearances that you have had and hoped would mature, have not matured through your slothfulness, and temptation and carnality, and this depresses your spirits and you may feel "Well, time is going on, and the day must soon arrive when I must stand before God and how can I stand in this wretched condition? And it may not be, and will not, just merely the first alarms of a conscience newly awakened, but the alarms, and the grief, and the sorrow of a conscience now afresh awakened to this desolation that has been procured. And O how wonderful, how precious, how strengthening it is to enable a poor sinner to come on in his weakness, and in his ignorance and in his mortification and shame, only leaning on, and looking to, and seeking to be clothed with, the garments of salvation from sovereign grace, the robe of ^{the} righteousness of Christ. The Holy Spirit shows this afresh, shows you whose it is afresh. "Why" says a poor professor, "I know whose righteousness is sufficient" Yes, you may know it and you may, if you are a true child of God, feel it and admire it, but you will want it on. It is one thing to know, it is another to feel, and another to experience. You will want to be covered in it, and to be sure you are covered in it, if you are the Lord's. There is no standing before God apart from that perfect righteousness of Christ. Now the Spirit's work is to show this, to bring it, to bring it, not merely to the memory, but into the heart, and enable the soul to look with affection upon the Person who wrought it out; to admire Him and to value it, and to seek with diligence sometimes, - The Spirit will give diligence in this, to have it put upon you. It is "unto all and upon all them that believe", the Scripture says. But, says a poor sinner - "Though I fain would believe that, I want to be brought to the full assurance of it, to have the seal of the eternal Spirit on my conscience, the satisfactory experience in my soul that I am sheltered under the merits of the dear Redeemer. And you will flee to Him to hide you in the energy of faith, by the Holy Ghost; flee to that covert; Yes, you may not reach it yet,

but O, you will be fleeing to it as seeing it. You will say "Let me hide in Thyself O Lord! Let me hide beneath Thy wings and plead Thy righteousness." It is sweet to be after this; it is safe to be in it. And to be after it it is by the Holy Spirit, and not by might, nor by power, and to reach it is by the same blessed Spirit bringing it, by a further act of the Holy Spirit bringing it, and satisfying the soul that he shall stand in it; that he does now really stand in it.

Then again it is a wonderful relief to a poor weak soul to find this testimony of God, the Holy Spirit, with regard to temptation. Temptation will keep you from building for eternity; that is so if the Lord prevent it not. It threatens to utterly weaken you and as it were to drive you away from the building. It is difficult to fight and to build at the same time as one has said, but the eternal Spirit it is that enables a person so to do. And how does He do it? Why, this way, by lifting up a standard against him. Not by might, not by the power of argument. No, not by the penetration of your mind, but by the Holy Spirit; by Himself lifting up the Lord Jesus Christ, putting Him before you, giving you to see His power to succour you, to feel His compassion in your heart, bringing His compassion, His very heart compassion to you in your temptations. This will put the devil to flight. "When the enemy cometh in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." How dispirited the Lord's people are sometimes by the fear of further temptations, the sins, the weakness, and liability to fall; even the apprehension of possible temptation makes a poor child of God sometimes very fearful. But this will encourage and strengthen him and he will say "I will go on in the strength of the Lord, I will lay my case before Him" And you may go and say to the Lord, in your simplicity, "Lord, do for me and in me what Thou didst in Joshua; do rebuke the enemy for me, for Thy voice is authoritative and effectual. I have no power against him; do rebuke him; take his charges Lord and answer them." This is the Spirit's work.

Another thing with regard to the Holy Scripture; we may say

the understanding of the scriptures of truth is alone, as to any life, unction and profit, by the Holy Spirit. "By My Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts." Good as it is to have an external, literal knowledge of the holy scriptures, there is no life communicated from them to the soul, but by the Holy Ghost. You may admire the letter of the word and exercise your judgment and intellect upon it and be as dry and dead as a stick, though I would not deprecate intellect. Those who have a keen intellect should be thankful to the Lord, and seek that it may be sanctified, but with regard to all true living experience, communications, life, guidance, all conviction, reproof, instruction and comfort, these must be all by God the Holy Ghost. Then you wont sit down and say, "Well, I wont believe the Scriptures" If you believe this, if the Lord says to you "But by My Spirit" you will say, "Lord, wilt Thou condescend to send Thy Spirit to teach me?" O it is a relief to get this blessed Book, feeling full of darkness, and ignorance and evil, having a bad memory may be, and only a puny mind, and all those things. The devil will say "Well it is no use for you to read the Scripture, you cannot understand the letter of it; how can you expect to understand the spirit of it? Or, if you understand it, you cannot retain it; why read?" Well, the Holy Spirit will lift up a standard against him; He will show you how that the holy Lord Jesus has promised to send a Teacher, the Comforter. He teaches and He comforts; He convinces: He reproofs: He leads and guides and enlightens His people by the Holy Scriptures. How many of the saints have had the Scriptures, some verse in the Scripture, so illuminated, so as it were made to live, that it has been like a living truth communicated into his very soul, and like the voice of God and the presence of God with him. It has engirded his soul. A promise has filled him with hope; a reproof has filled him with shame and confusion. And this is a great relief, that He has provided all in the matter of salvation. Zerubbabel laid the foundation; The Lord Jesus Christ laid the foundation in His death. The eternal Spirit lays the foundation in the child of God by quickening him, and the Spirit of Christ shall finish it in the experience of the saints and the Lord Jesus shall bring forth the headstone. The whole business will be done by God; God the

Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, known through the incarnate Son by the eternal Spirit, and this is the only true religion. I mean this way; I do not mean that I have preached all about a true religion, but this is the only way you can have life and living communion with the Lord; this is the only way you can know the way of life and walk in it; this is the only power that can bring life from a risen, once crucified, Lord Jesus into your soul, and bring you everlastingly through death up to that living Christ in heaven. It is the eternal Spirit. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by the Spirit that dwelleth in you." O then, what we owe to God, the Holy Ghost! May we, through the mercy of the Lord be brought to a diligent search for the power of the Holy Spirit to be exerted in our souls continually.

"Then he answered and spake unto me saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power" - that is human, your human power - "but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts". No might of human righteousness or wisdom, but the might of divine righteousness communicated, heavenly wisdom exerted in your behalf, by the might of divine merit in incarnate Deity communicated and covering the soul by God the Holy Ghost. This is the way. May the Lord bring us to walk in it and give us a gracious experience of it for His Name's sake.

AMEN.