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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 4 December 1929

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 prophecy is remarkable for the use of figures, figures obvious in themselves but in many cases mysterious as to their application, but it would seem that in the chapter before us, and in this text in particular, the work of God in building the church is set forth. That is to say, with respect to the church of God as a whole and to every individual member of that church there is but one way of being built, one religion worth the having, one teacher, one anointer and only one kind of oil, for salvation. And this meets difficulties, difficulties seen, difficulties felt. It meets, in the case of Zerubbabel, mountain-like opposition. Weakness in self, strength in the opposers, as in the case of Nehemiah, when Sanballat and his people discouraged the Jews in their building of the wall of Jerusalem, saying contemptuously: "What do these feeble Jews?" If but a fox go up upon the wall it will break down, so contemptible in their eyes was that wall which was being built. But God encouraged and gave a wonderful victory to Nehemiah and so, with regard to all troubles and difficulties, mountain-like opposition, this word stands: "Say unto Zerubbabel". God said it; mind that in the first place. If a thousand gracious people should say to a trembling saint, you will get through, God will help you, that saint might say to His friends, you do not know my case, you do not know my weakness. You are unacquainted with my sins and my besetments and my temptations and so proffered encouragement might have no effect at all. But if God were to come, if the Spirit whispered, if Jesus appeared, no discouragements, no violence, no mountains, no devils, no sins would stand, and this is the meaning, the spiritual intent of this word "Say unto Zerubbabel". It should say to us, listen to no voice with regard

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to salvation, but God's. No voice but God's can do good, effectual good. No voice but His can give true, proper encouragement, can move fear, can show the ground of fear not to be solid. No voice but God's can assure a doubting person that it is well with him. "By My Spirit", the unction from the Holy One. It was very remarkable as a type of the Spirit's work, that God ordered holy oil of ointment to be made of certain spices and certain quantities, and these were to be made an ointment for the anointing of the altar, of the laver, of the tabernacle, and of the priests, and if any Jew or any person confected a similar ointment to that, that person should be cut off from the people. And if we are led into the matter we shall see two things there. We shall see the peculiar sacredness that God put on that ointment and the special work of it, that it was to be used only in specified cases. The church represented there, the altar, the laver, the tabernacle, the priests, alone could have, were to have that ointment. Even the laver, the washing of regeneration, must be anointed with that ointment. The beginning of religion is by the Holy Ghost. The altar, that must be anointed. The Holy Ghost alone can lead to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. And everything connected with the worship of God and the upbuilding of His people had this peculiar blessing - the anointing of that precious ointment. There was also to be a perfume made and that alone, again could be used for the purposes of the Sanctuary. And so the only perfume that has the good savour that is acceptable to God and makes sinners acceptable is the perfume of the Name, the savour of Christ's Name. He is a savour of life unto life to all His people. And the second thing that I would remark on is this, that if we realise that, if we see the anti-type of that type, it will make us very fearful of having any religion that does not come from God the Holy Ghost into our hearts. O, all the anointing, all the schisms, all the religion, all the knowledge, all the zeal that men have and that we may be tempted to have, not of the Holy Spirit, can only bring the curse; that soul shall be cut off. An imitation of the Spirit's work, what a fearful thing it is. I draw your attention to this because it is exceedingly solemn. An imitation of the Spirit's work will bring to a soul what an imitation of that holy ointment would bring to the person who made it - death. What is the influence upon our spirits? What do we bring? What is brought to us? Is it of God? Is it of God? That is the great question. I make these remarks because of what the Lord here

says: "Not by might", not by an army, the united strength of men in an army. "Nor by power" No personal thought of your own can add to or build up the work of God, but only His Spirit. "By My Spirit". Therefore the Lord says "Who art thou O great mountain?" Who art thou O difficulty, insurmountable to the creature? Who art thou? The mountain might say, I am just what I am, a great heap and I stand in the way of these worms of earth. The mountain might say, you will never get over me, and you cannot move me. God says to the mountain, Who art thou? What are thy pretensions? What is thy bulk? What is thy power? One word from God makes it smoke. One commandment from God removes it and faith moves it when standing in the power of God. Thou shalt say to this mountain, be thou removed and cast into the sea, and it shall be done, because of the power of God. "By My Spirit saith the Lord".

Now out of this grow some particulars. There are yokes, there are mountains, there are sins, there are devils, all standing in the way to discourage, weaken, confuse, cast down and break to pieces God's people. In Nehemiah's case there were broken walls, a destroyed temple, the Ammonites, Sanballat, Tobiah and others, all to discourage, all to contemn and to pour contempt on the efforts, the work of the builders, and only God can give courage and say this to Zerubbabel: "Not by might"; though there be an army it has no effect. "Nor by power"; not by anything the person has or can do, or attempt to do. "But by My Spirit". God against the world, God against Satan, God against sin, and you get no enemies outside these three things - world, flesh, devil. And against all of them singly, against all of them collectively, this word stands: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts."

First of all, here is a poor creature with no religion in his own judgment. With desires to be right and quantities of things against him to make him wrong, to drive, to hurry, to confuse, to cast him down. He looks at his enemies, O how many, O how strong. He looks at his weakness, O how painful, ready to stumble at every step. He looks at his ignorance, he does not know things. I might just, by way, observe how intensely simply, to express it, Zechariah said to the angel, who asked him if he did not know these things: "No my lord". What a beautiful spirit to confess - Do not you know this. "No my

Lord". You look at your ignorance and see knowledge to be had and you have it not in your judgment. You see a God to know and you are ignorant of Him, a Saviour to know and you are distant from Him, a Spirit, to possess Him, and you feel full of ill and feel to have no Spirit in you, and these things are a great discouragement. The man who says sin does not discourage him because he believes in the covenant of grace is a man not to be envied. You need not envy anybody who feels strong on that ground. Better, O infinitely better, feel your weakness casting you to the ground continually than to say you are strong and are not afraid of yourself, not afraid of your sins. This is a burden. Now what is the sinner to do? A spirit of self righteousness will tell him to take that and make it better. The Jews went about to establish their own righteousness as if they felt it to be rickety and needing a little buttressing, and so they went about to do it. That won't do. Not by that. Get an army of good resolutions; not by their might. Get some feeling in your own soul - now I will pray more. It is good to pray, if you do pray. I will believe more, I won't question things as I have done. Good to question rather than to be like the simple man who passes on uninquiring, unthinking, until he is punished. But not by these things is any good done. Man's own religion belongs to himself, but it does not belong to God and does not take a man to God. A man's religion - can I not do this? Can I not read the Bible? Can I not resolve? You can, but it is not by that that your soul is built up. "Not by might". This then brings a sinner to a very close place, into a very narrow, narrow compass with respect to religion, with respect to his standing before God and with respect to his being built up on God, to be a temple, to be an habitation for God.

"But by My Spirit". Look at this, the energising work of the Spirit, the moving, impelling, drawing, attracting, teaching, melting influences of the Holy Spirit. These help a sinner, these build him up, these take him to God, these make Christ precious to his soul, and these say to him - no despair. "Who art thou O great mountain?" O my believing friends, you cannot be too jealous respecting your own natural religion, cannot be too fearful of having imitations of the Spirit's work and cannot be too earnest in seeking, for the Spirit is in the seeking, to have that alone that comes from God. Only what comes from Him will take you to Him; this blessed work

of the Spirit. Take these points respecting it; first faith. Faith in the bleeding Lamb, faith that cries weakness and ignorance and emptiness and worthlessness on yourself, and faith, the same faith, that says, Christ is the Friend of sinners. Christ came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Christ came to work out a righteousness for the unrighteous, to open a fountain for sin and for uncleanness for those who are polluted. Christ is the throne of grace. "A glorious high throne from the beginning ", and the Spirit's gracious anointing says all that, through faith, in the sinner. 'Tis His anointing that clears the misty vision. 'Tis His anointing that opens and draws out faith into a lively exercise on Christ. 'Tis His anointing that gives faith its courage and its boldness and its persistence. O this is the Spirit's work in a sinner's heart respecting Himself. The Spirit's work says, it is not by what you are, by what you can do, by what you can accomplish in any particular; it is wholly and alone by the Spirit. O then, one says, what is the use of trying? Not a bit, if the trying is your own, but if you be a drowning person and one should cast a rope out, and that rope should be within your reach, you won't hesitate, in that case, to attempt to clutch it, to get hold of it, that by it you may be pulled to shore. And when a poor, helpless, convinced, weak, ignorant creature feels his condemnation and feels that he has nothing and can do nothing by himself to avert the deserved wrath of God, that sinner, seeing by faith, the Lord Jesus, lays hold of Him. Well, one may say, I try to pray. Well, if you only try and have no Spirit of God in you, no spirit of prayer, then trying will end in trying and in getting nothing. Not by anything in the creature, but by the Spirit of God. Very humbling, and one may say, very discouraging. I do not see that point, except to say this about it, it is an invention of the devil to make you think it is discouraging. There is nothing but encouragement in it for a poor, helpless creature who feels his utter helplessness, who realises his utter destitution, weakness and ruin. What a great thing it is to have the Spirit with regard to that one grace I have named, the grace of faith. Now take another grace, the grace of confession. I would not like to leave that out of my creed, the grace of confession. God has put it into His Word: "Only acknowledge thine iniquity" is His word to His people. Confession. But a proud man does not want to do this. He no more wants to do it than a disobedient child who has taken something into his hand which

he was told not to touch and would fain put his hand behind him and hide from his parent what he has done. A proud man does not want to confess his sins, and a religious man says he has got little or nothing to confess, and some people say they have got nothing at all. "If we say we have not sinned" - that is what some say - If we say we have no sin, we are both deceived and we make God a liar. But now when you come to the Spirit's anointing, when He shows a merciful God to your faith, when the purity of God and the justice of God and the love of God are all united as in one glorious beam coming down upon the eye of your faith, O the unworthiness; how you feel it. Your sins; how you see them, how you mourn over them, and now you go to God and confess them. Confession, confession, confession. Well, dear friends, the Spirit is in this. He leads a sinner and the way of His leading is in this Book of Zechariah. Says the Lord in a later chapter: "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for Him as for an only son and be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." And then every family shall mourn, the family of the house of David and their wives apart. There is the work of the Spirit, and a sacred work it is. Take another work of the Anointer, the blessed Holy Ghost; the work of prayer. "Heal me O Lord for I have sinned". "Lord, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil". "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs", said the Lord Jesus to that woman. "Truth, Lord". O, the arguing of the Spirit wrought prayer. "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table". If you get the anointing of the Spirit in you, O sinner, you won't give up praying; you will be seeking the Lord. "Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face evermore." Not by might. One may say, I will pray about it, and he may forget it. At least he will forget to pray. One may say, I am going to make this a matter of prayer. He does not pray; has no prevalence, if he uses words. But if the Spirit comes, he gets hold of God. Jacob got hold of God and Jacob prevailed. And take what is spoken in the Acts of the Apostles, when they were exhorted to cleave to the Lord and follow them and they did so with purpose of heart. That seems easy to people, but what of John the Baptist who, not hearing from Christ or seeing Him for a time, wondered if he had preached a false thing. "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" Jesus,

sending an answer, by those two disciples, to John, said to them, now go and tell John what you see and hear; the blind receive their sight, the dead are raised to life, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And He added this, an important addition: "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me". There is cleaving in the face of difficulties, of doubt; in the face of an absent God, that is an absence that puzzles and pains and distracts; in the face of all discouragements. "And blessed is He who shall not be offended in Me", who shall not say, I am unkind, I am unjust, I am not as good as My word, but who, by faith and prayer, cleaves fast to Me and follows hard after Me even though I should be going away again and again from him. Ah, it is a great thing to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and the purpose is to be united with Him. The purpose is to get to heaven; the purpose is to have a victory of grace in the soul.

And another thing, you take love, love that all defects supplies, that makes great obstructions small, that is prayer and praise and sacrifice, 'tis holiness, 'tis all. Take that grace. Jesus found fault with the church at Ephesus and this was the chief of reasons He had for finding fault with that church. "Thou hast left thy first love." Except there be one in the chapel who has recently got first love and finds the warmth of it in his soul, I wonder if there is any one of us here who is free from that reproving word. But O what a mercy that the Lord, by His good Spirit, revives it; the oil, the beautiful and the pure and the plentiful oil from the two olive trees that pour their golden oil into the bowls. And so the light is kept burning as, in the tabernacle, the light was never to go out. If it went out all would be darkness because there was no window in the tabernacle; it depended upon a light within itself. And so the church of God and every saint of God, in the same way, must depend on an inward teaching and light, for there is no light in the world to assist God's saints. "Ye are the light of the world", the world is no light for you. And so it must be this great thing kept going by the anointing of the Spirit. Love; it is greater than faith, it is greater than hope. It endures longer than them both. "Now abideth faith, hope and charity but the greatest of these is charity". "Not by might". How often you may feel the lack of this love and say: O O, could I love the Lord; O that I could love His Name, if I could love

His Person, if I could love His grace, if I could love Him for Himself and be thankful that He is what He is, and find just the opposite, a cold heart, a frozen love that seems to be no love. Then the enemy would set you at work. Self-righteousness would set you lighting a fire and compassing yourself about with sparks. God keep you from doing it. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit". The Holy Ghost is that glorious One that must give love, shed it abroad in the heart and maintain it by His constant operations.

And again, with the grace of hope, it is just the same. Hope that lives as long as a Christian lives, for a Christian in this world needs hope. He is saved by hope; his heart is kept up by hope; his head is held up by hope; his eyes are kept looking toward God by hope. We are saved by hope. Hope looks out for something not at present possessed. If you have got a thing in your hand you cannot hope for it. "What a man seeth why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not", do not at present possess, "then do we with patience wait for it". And what do we hope for? We wait for the hope of righteousness which is from heaven. We wait for fresh help and sustenance, we wait for guidance, we wait for support, we wait for deliverances to be commanded for us. We wait till the day of deliverance comes when we shall leave this world and enter into endless bliss, because it is endless holiness. Now hope looks out for these things. Hope has a ground and the Spirit reveals that ground, the Person and work of Christ. Hope has a spring and that spring is the Spirit's work in the heart manifesting a Saviour. Hope has an object. Various are the objects really, but all gathered up into one - "O Thou the hope of Israel", that is the grand Object including all else.

"Not by might". You may one day say, "O God, my soul is cast down within me" and everything may appear to be wrong. Feelings wrong, circumstances awry, God not helping you, the Spirit distant from you, the Comforter, which should comfort your soul, far from you. And then to maintain the battle, then to hold fast, then to go on building up yourself on the love of God, then to keep yourself in that love, then to build upon the foundation, the Lord Jesus, that, that is by the anointing of the Spirit, the oil, the precious oil, that God has in such abundance provided for His people.

I have kept most of the time with this one thing. The difficulties that arise in self from sin, they are the chief. Other things, more or less, are small comparatively. Though they are important they are comparatively small. But take providence. Some trying providence comes and a man's own spirit rises. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity. It will move him to say to himself, I will bear this as well as I can and I wont let my friends know. I will carry it by myself, and he tries to keep his head up. And the more he tries to do that the further he gets away from God, until God gives him a wound, until the Spirit comes and in some way says your sins have procured this, and the man is broken, weakened, brought to the dust. And now what is he to do? He needs one special thing - submission to the will of God. He needs to say and desires to say "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven". And perhaps, smiting on his breast, he may say "Thy will be done" here Lord, "as it is in heaven". Let my heart be submissive, supple my will, bend it and put it straight with Thy will. And when this is wrought in him by the Holy Ghost it has this effect among others. It moves him to leave off trying to carry it alone. He is tired of trying to carry it alone and now he brings it to the Lord and is submissive and says to the Lord, here am I. I cast this care, this trouble, this burden on Thee. "Not by might" is this, "nor by power". The rebellious will is stiff, stubborn, won't give way, and in some of us it is particularly stiff and stubborn. O the wickedness of man. But the Lord is more than a match for a man, and when He takes the man in hand He won't leave the business until it is finished. Say unto Zerubbabel, the hand of the Lord has started this work, His hands have laid the foundation, His hands also shall finish it. This is His good work, this is His blessed work, and so it brings a sinner to this state of mind. He says: "Thy will be done". He casts his burden on the Lord and it is very wonderful that though affliction may continue, it has gone as to its bitterness, as to what seemed intolerable in it. It is gone and the man can take up his cross, he can learn of the Lord Jesus who is meek and lowly in heart and he finds rest to his soul. He rests in the Lord; he rests in the will of God; he delights himself in the Lord. And one wonderful thing is - O it flashed into my mind today one - to rejoice in the Being of God, glad and thankful that there is a God in heaven; that this great God rules, governs, manages, directs

everything to His own end and purpose and to the good of His people, and the sinner then comes to this "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose".

And now I have one or two observations to make in conclusion of a more general character. There are today in the world enemies. There ever have been since the fall of man, but particularly perhaps today, enemies of a different sort from what there have been in the past. The whole of opposition to the Lord is couched in that solemn Scripture in Genesis where God Almighty, speaking to the deceiving serpent, said "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed", that is the seed of Eve, the seed of the woman, and there never has been, since that moment until this, an enemy, an inveterate doomed enemy to Jesus Christ that has not had its origin in that word. And what do we see today? Here is a poor church in the world, dwelling solitarily in the wood, a church built on the Rock of Ages against which the gates of hell are hurling all their counsels and their arms. And the modernist, the Sanballats, ministers opposing the Bible as to its inspiration, and opposing Jesus Christ as to His miraculous birth, opposing His atonement as to its vicarious nature, making Him a mere example, a great good man, but only an example. And when the poor people of God at any time direct their attention to these things, they are of a kind to greatly, gravely discourage, but God says to all: "Who art thou O great mountain?" The modernist, when his eyes are opened by Christ - for they will be opened by Christ - when he sees Christ coming in the glory of His Father and with His holy angels, when he sees Him for whom he had no respect, for whom he had no love, when he sees Him coming, I say, it will be a solemn thing. You read that in the Revelations, when the kings of the earth and the great men and the captains see God coming and the wrath of the Lamb, then they will flee to the mountains and into the dens and caves of the earth and say to the rocks and to the mountains, fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that cometh and from the wrath of the Lamb. And then these poor people, around whom the world in its enmity has encamped, shall see, not their own upbuilding only, but the destruction of all their enemies. And this must be again, one would say, by the alone anointing and work of the Holy Spirit. "Who art thou O great mountain?" Not by might, but by the anointing of the Spirit, by the

manifestations of God by the Spirit, by the revelations of Jesus Christ by the Spirit. By the applications of the scriptures to the heart by the Spirit is the upbuilding of every soul on Christ and the building up of the whole church together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. And, dear friends, that is the only religion worth having, as I said at the beginning. I want it for myself, and I have no doubt a goodly number of you wish for the same, that Holy Spirit's work. The revelation of Jesus is by Him. The sealing of the soul unto the day of redemption is by Him, and the sanctification and offering up of the Gentiles to be acceptable to God is by the Holy Ghost. The offering up of the Gentiles is acceptable being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

Now this should be, and I believe God makes it as a truth, apart altogether from what I say, an encouragement to every feeble, discouraged saint who, by this very word, shall hear God saying, your own is nothing, your strength is weakness, your wisdom is ignorance, your goodness is corruption, but do not despair for I am thy righteousness, I am thy life, I am thy holiness, I am thy strength, and thou shall know this by My Spirit. And therefore strength comes into the weak, life revives the seeming dead, and God is glorified in all.

AMEN.