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## "Here's Hope, Southern Baptists"

Zechariah 4:1-10

by Fred H. Wolfe

Zechariah was a prophet of restoration. His message was a message of encouragement and hope.

Sixteen years earlier a band of Jews had returned from exile to the land of their fathers with the hope of rebuilding the temple. Now sixteen years later the temple was still in ruins.

Zechariah came on the scene with a prophetic message of encouragement and hope. God gave him a series of visions and he spoke them to those discouraged Jews. Our scripture today is one of those visions.

"And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep. And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick, all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. 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. Who are thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." Zechariah 4:1-10 (KJV)

The building of the temple was far more than just a physical need. It carried great spiritual significance. It was the place for the Messiah in His glory to come and dwell.

God spoke clearly to this remnant that it was not by their might and power but by *His Spirit* the temple would be restored. What encouragement this was to them because they knew there was no way with their small number and meager resources the temple could be restored. They had no might and power.

Zechariah's message was, "You do not have to have great numbers, great resources, great human strength, if you have the Spirit of the Living God." Hope and encouragement came to the hearts of those people.

Our problem as Southern Baptists is just the opposite of that remnant seeking to restore the temple. We believe *we have the might and power* to get the job done in our world. We constantly speak of our might and power. We are the largest Protestant denomination in the world. We have over 14 1/2 million members. We have over 37,000 churches. We gave \$456,982,176 to Southern Baptist causes in 1988. We flex our muscles and say to the world and ourselves, "Look at our might and power." However, somewhere in the background I hear the whisper of God's voice saying, "it is not by might nor by power but by my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts!" Oh, that we would listen.

The truth is, with all of our might and power we are as bewildered and helpless as that Jewish remnant who could not restore the temple. The spiritual temple God wants to build by and through Southern Baptists is not being built. The mighty spiritual army of Southern Baptists God wants to raise up and release on this world is not yet in place and moving! We have been trusting in our might and power and we have failed. You say why have we failed? Because we failed to see:

### I. The Peril We Face!

"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. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shouting, crying, Grace, grace unto it." Zechariah 4:6-7 (KJV)

The peril is that we seek to knock down and flatten out the spiritual mountains before us with our might and power. The truth is, the spiritual mountains facing us as Southern Baptists cannot be leveled by our might and power. Even if they could, we would do well to realize that we really do not have the might and power we think we have as a denomination.

We speak of our might and power but we have a *problem of desertion*! We speak of our 14 1/2 million members but 7,250,000 are non-resident members or inactive resident members. Half of our army has deserted. They are A.W.O.L.—absent without leave. Of the 7,250,000 that are resident and active members, on any given Sunday about 60% or 4,300,000 of them will be present in their churches. On any given Sunday, we assemble little over 4 million. What is this number in a nation of 248,800,000, and a world of 5,192,000,000. I hear the voice of God saying "Not by might nor by power."

We speak of our might and power but we have a *problem of decline*. It is alarming. In 1988 our Southern Baptist churches had 35,101 new members. However, at the same time, we had 55,625 Southern Baptists who moved, did not join a Southern Baptist church and thus became non-resident members—A.W.O.L. That gives us a net loss of 20,524 resident members in 1988. To quote Glen Smith, consultant with the Baptist Sunday School Board, that is "growth that kills". The truth is that most of our Southern Baptist churches have plateaued or are now in decline. I hear the still small voice of God saying, "Not by might, nor by power."

We speak of our might and power yet we have a *problem of division*. Instead of marching united under the banner of the cross, we label each other moderates, conservatives, fundamentalist, liberals, and a host of other names that would not do for publication. We question each other's integrity, character, and motives. To use Paul's words, we bite and devour one another. God have mercy on us. I hear the voice of God through Zechariah saying, "Not by might nor by power. We must humble ourselves and openly confess to God and each other that the mountain facing Southern Baptists will never come down by our might and power. We will do well to hear and confess the truth of Jeremiah 9:23-24 (KJV)

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

Let us stop being like the church at Laodicea saying, "we are rich, increased with goods and have need of nothing." (Revelation 3:17 KJV). Let us cry out to God in humility. We have no might or power. We are a needy people. Our only hope is the Spirit of God, which leads us to look not only at the peril we face but:

### II. The Promise From God!

Zechariah 4:6, "By my Spirit saith the Lord of Hosts".

Zechariah 4:7, Who are you O great mountain ... you shall become a plain! Our hope as Southern Baptists is that God will so pour out His Holy Spirit upon us that the mountain will become a plain! Let us ask for, yes, desperately pray for and expect a mighty moving of the Holy Spirit in Southern Baptists.

Let us pray, cry out to God that the same *breath of God* that breathed on that valley of dry bones in Ezekiel's day and made it a mighty army will breathe on every one of us!

I hear the question God asked Ezekiel in 37:3 (KJV), "And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest." God answered his own question in Ezekiel 37:4-5, "Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live."

When the Holy Spirit of God moved and breathed upon them look at what happened. Ezekiel 37:10, "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." My heart cries, "Oh, God, do it again!" Breathe on us as individuals, as churches, associations, denomination. Breath of God breathe on our seminaries, foreign missionaries, home missionaries, W.M.U., Brotherhood, Oh, breath of God come and make us an exceeding great and powerful army. Let us pray, cry out that the *same wind* of God that blew on the church on the day of Pentecost will blow on us today as Southern Baptists. Listen to these words, Acts 2:1-2 "And when the day of Pentecost was fully

come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." One accord in one place! Southern Baptists, we can be of one accord. We can unite around an infallible Bible and exalted Savior. We can unite in the written word and the living Word. Today, this moment, we can be one, we can unite, in a virgin born, sinless lived, sacrificially died, bodily risen, gloriously ascended, and soon returning Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us heed the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-21 (KJV), "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Pray that the wind of God will blow on us and we will come together in Christ and His Word!

By my Spirit saith the Lord. Yes, by His Spirit seven million Southern Baptists can be reclaimed to active duty in the army of the Lord. Declining churches can begin to grow and division can be healed. Our only hope is a mighty movement of God's Holy Spirit in revival and restoration!

We, as Southern Baptists, believe right about the Holy Spirit. We do not have to apologize or be intimidated because of our theology and doctrine of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Our belief stands the test of the inerrant Word of God. The problem has been, however, that we have been satisfied to live without the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. No more! No more! We cry in prayer, come Wind of God, come Breath of God, come Holy Spirit, we need you!

Zechariah also points out that we need to give:

### III. *The Proper Response.*

How are we to respond to God's promise, "By my spirit saith the Lord."

As a part of the vision, Zechariah points out our proper response in 4:10, "For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth."

We realize the importance of small things because they are not really small in the eyes of God! We are to do the small things that really are not small for God is looking for them. What are they? Repentance - we must repent of our

pride. The pride of trusting in our might and power. The pride of failing to see how needy we are. The pride of thinking we can meet our own needs. The sin of self-sufficiency. Our might, our power. The Bible warns us in James that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Only as we repent of the pride of our might and power will God pour out His grace upon us. Life-giving, life-changing, grace!

We must repent of our apathy and lukewarmness. We have been content to live without a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God. Content to try to do it ourselves.

Do not despise the small things. Let us repent but also return to desperate prayer. These are desperate days in our denomination and our world. This calls for desperate prayer for the wind of God to blow, the breath of God to come.

I believe the prayer for Southern Baptist this very day is recorded in Isaiah 64:1-4 (KJV),

"Oh, that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." Isaiah 64:8-11 (KJV), "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever; behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

Let that be our prayer right now! HERE'S HOPE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS! BY MY SPIRIT SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS!

AMEN