

Life in the Spirit

Zech 4¹⁻⁶ / John 6⁶⁰⁻⁶⁵ / Eph 6¹⁶⁻¹⁸

The book of Zechariah was written during the effort of the ancient people of Judah to rebuild the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Jews had returned 18 years before Zechariah's appearance to lay the foundation of the Temple, but then the work had stopped. 'For a full 18 years the Temple remained in ruins, unable to be used.

By the time of the arrival of Haggai and Zechariah, the enthusiasm of the pioneering and returning Jews was gone. Quarrels, particularly with the Samaritans, difficulties with the rebuilding of the city, and several years of poor harvests had dampened their spirits. Two months prior to Zechariah, the prophet Haggai had begun to encourage the people to resume building the Temple but that revival was very short-lived. So Zechariah took up the work of encouraging the people against enormous odds to rebuild the Temple and so after beginning the work in 520BC we end up only 5 years later with a rebuilt Temple being dedicated in 515BC.

What was it that caused such an explosion in creative energy from this small group of settlers who had lost hope and faith that they might be able to restore Jerusalem's spiritual heritage? I want to offer a suggestion in this regard which comes for the 4th chapter of Zechariah and which I hope will

help us to understand something about our own spirituality. In that chapter we have Zechariah recalling a vision in which an Angel explains what he is seeing and as a part of that explanation the angel says these immortal words.

⁶He 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. ⁷What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring out the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”

Zerubbabel was the governor – the leader of this rag tag army of returners from Babylon. It was through his leadership that the people would finally attend to the most important task of resettlement which was the re-establishment of a worshipping centre. And the most important thing they needed to hear at this very moment in history was that the Temple would be rebuilt but not because they were a mighty army – because they weren't - nor because they were rich or politically influential – because they weren't. Rather, the Temple would be rebuilt through God's Spirit. Today we must take this word deeply to heart and we must do so for two very simple reasons. The first is that nothing has changed for the community of faith. We do not establish ourselves by virtue of force. We cannot force people or ourselves for that matter into the kingdom of God. We cannot impose our will on nations or people. Rather

God works through His Spirit to bring spiritual truths to bear on spiritual problems. The heart of the human problem is spiritual and it must be dealt with at that level. Secondly, all of the resources promised to us by Jesus come through the Holy Spirit. Jesus said He would not leave us alone but would send to us what? Money? Power? Armies? No. He would send and did send the Holy Spirit to do two things: He would guide us into all truth and he would declare to us the things that are to come – John 16. The Holy Spirit is our great resource but we do not understand this yet.

We are a physical people aren't we? I mean no one here would deny a statement like that. And since we are a physical people we know that we must look after our bodies and that means

- i.) being careful about what we put into our bodies
- ii.) being careful about what we put on our bodies

and of course

- iii.) being careful about what we do with our bodies. In short, since we have bodies we need to care for them and if we don't terrible things happen...

We are all aware, aren't we, that we are people with minds – with the ability to think and to learn and so much that we do is directed towards these minds we have. We all know, don't we, that we must train these minds which means being careful to learn to learn and being careful to help children enjoy learning and, of course, being careful about what you learn. So we are

physical creatures and we are thinking creatures but the Bible would have us understand ourselves as something else entirely for throughout the pages of both the OT and the NT we are understood also as **spiritual creatures**. We are spirit.

From Job in the OT who confesses.

**¹² You have granted me life and steadfast love,
and your care has preserved my spirit. (Job 10)**

to the Psalmist who confesses.

**⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. (Ps 31)**

to the writer of Proverbs who will say

**¹⁴ The human spirit will endure sickness;
but a broken spirit—who can bear?**

We are left in no doubt as to both the reality of and the importance of the human spirit.

And the NT is no less sure on this matter.

**¹¹For what human being knows what is truly human
except the human spirit that is within? (1 Cor 2)**

We are, as individuals, spirit in that we have a spirit but more than this, as Christians we are a spiritual people.

⁴Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2)

We are spiritual beings created in the image of God who is Spirit... but what does that mean for us. How does that impact you and I at an everyday level?

We are, as Christians, a spiritual people. Our heritage and our identity come not out of what we look like or what we appear to be but out of the relationship we have with God, through Jesus **by the Spirit**. The Holy Spirit makes us into a people of God. The Holy Spirit is the person who gives us life as Christians. The question is, what does that really mean? I mean, how does the Spirit give life and what does that life look like?

1. The Spirit calls us beyond what is humanly possibly into what is possible in God

To be spiritual means to participate in a life that is beyond what we can see and in our case it means to participate in the life of God. But this is only possible if we are **open to** possibilities which are beyond what we can see. This is why marriage can be said to be a spiritual relationship. You see, to

be married means to be open to the possibilities that someone else can see – namely, one’s spouse. When I married Fran I agreed to be open not just to living with her and enjoying her company but to the way she saw things and the possibilities for our life that she could see and I couldn’t. In this way marriage should expand our experience of life considerably... **but only if we are prepared to trust someone else’s point of view – only if we are prepared to trust what we cannot see.**

And this is the kicker. It takes courage and trust and faith to do this. We cannot commune with God’s Spirit, we cannot be spiritual without being prepared to go beyond what we know.

2. The Spirit directs us towards the God who is above all things.

It is one thing to be able to trust in what we cannot see. It is quite another to make God that object of that movement. This is what faith means. It means making God to object of our trust. It means making His judgment ours; making His decisions ours. There are many in the world who direct their energies towards a world beyond our seeing but our spirits are formed in the image of God and so it is only in relation to Him that we will grow safely. We are spiritual in relation to the Holy Spirit.

Now you might question this. You might say ‘Well if we have spirits aren’t we spiritual in an off ourselves?’ Aren’t we spiritual creatures anyway?’ And yes that is the case but it is one thing to have a spirit it is quite another to give that the spirit the context in which it can thrive and truly be itself. A fish is a natural swimmer but take it out of the water and that means nothing. Only in the context of the water is it a swimmer. A bird is a natural flier but take away the atmosphere and this means nothing. Only in the air can we see the wonder of the bird’s natural ability.

The context of our spirit is the Spirit of God. It is with and in God’s Spirit that our spirit sours. God’s Spirit is our ocean and our atmosphere. We discover our true home when we discover God.

3. Finally being spiritual means to be directed by the Spirit – to add what we can to the spirit’s work and discover that in God whatever we can offer will suffice.

The remnants of the Jews who’d been exiled and then who returned were a beaten lot before Haggai and Zechariah began to remind them of their spiritual heritage. God has called them to complete the rebuilding of the Temple. It looked impossible and their response had been to agree with that assessment. And that agreement amounted to an anti-faith decision. God could do nothing with that decision.

But Zechariah called them back to God's direction which was to rebuild and no matter how impossible it seemed that was what they were called to do. Finally, under his preaching they moved in faith – they began to be a spiritual people again – they agreed with the Holy Spirit and they began to build. 5 years later – only a very few short 5 years later – they Temple was complete.

God is calling us to become a spiritual people; to cooperate with God in God's most amazing calling but we need to be prepared to take step in faith – to open our lives again to the Holy Spirit. Do you want to begin that journey anew this morning?