



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

emmanuelchurchbillericay

P 01277 632120 E emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
W www.emmanuel-church.info T @EmmanuelCM12



God's Big Plan For A Struggling People 2/6
HG129: Laying The Foundations

Zechariah 3 and 4

Home Group Study Notes

25 September 2016 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Have you ever been called for jury service and had to give a verdict on a misdemeanor?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



God's Big Plan For A Struggling People 2/6
HG129: **Laying The Foundations**

Zechariah 3 and 4

Home Group Sermon Notes

25 September 2016 - Pauline Woolnough

A Courtroom Drama As we begin chapter 3 imagine you are in a courtroom as an observer. God is the judge, the Angel of the Lord is Counsel for the defence, Satan is the prosecutor and the accused is Joshua, high priest and mediator of his people and he stands before the Lord representing the nation. The decision, what to do with the sinful people whom the high priest represents but the story would be the same for any sinner, in fact it could be you or me standing in his place. As a priest Joshua's job was to represent all God's people and in this vision he symbolises the humanity that God loves and that he has called to serve him, yet here he stands in the presence of the Most High wearing filthy, contaminated clothes indicating that he is guilty of sin yet presenting himself for use in his service.

There is the Angel of the Lord, he appeared earlier in chapter 1:7-17 and its always very exciting when we see the Angel of the Lord mentioned in the OT because we can recognise him as Jesus before he was born. He is the pre-incarnate Christ and second Person of the Trinity. After all Jesus was there in the beginning, he has always existed so why would he not make appearances every now and then. Then there is Satan, our accuser and God's sworn enemy and his purpose in this vision as always, is to accuse and slander God's people who are represented here by Joshua. Joshua is obviously guilty as he stands before the Lord shamefully dressed in filthy clothes and unfit to serve. Surely God would reject him yet in verse 2 the Angel of the Lord steps in and defends His people against their accuser, "*The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan!"*" The accuser becomes the accused. Satan wants to deceive us, that is his mission, and many Christians can feel guilty when they are not. They fail to accept that Jesus has taken away their guilt when they confessed their sins.

There are others of us, probably all of us at one time or another, who are indeed guilty but we feel no guilt at all because we have listened to Satan who has told us we are not guilty. We are deceived into thinking that our sins are of no consequence in this day and age as he wants us to take a much broader view of sin, after all its a little old fashioned these days. Who talks about sin when we live in an age when anything goes? Therefore we fail to bring our sins to God for forgiveness. God's word will always tell us the truth and warns us against such self deception, 1 John 1 8-10, "*If we say we have no sin we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us, if we say we don't have any sin, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.*"

When Satan lures us into sinning, he seeks to shame us into hiding our sin and guilt from God and his stinging accusations of failure is the most difficult thing to deal with as we seek spiritual restoration. We stay distant from the Lord condemning ourselves and believing he will not listen to us, we think there is no point in praying and our guilt interferes with God's ability to bring us back to Him.

4: The temple remained unfinished, what have you/we started and not finished?

5: What substitutes do we use rather than rely on the Holy Spirit? WHY?

6: What obstacles do we put in His way individually and collectively? WHY?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: What is the difference between being sorry about sin and repentance?

2: Satan can manage to convince Christians to continue to feel guilty. What does he achieve by this?

3: How has God worked in your life to warn you when you were headed in the wrong direction?

God does actually want us to feel guilty about our sins because its only when we feel guilty that we can bring our guilt to him and be forgiven but one thing we all need to be reminded about God is that he will *never* defend the sins of his children but he will *always* them.

Guilt Absolved As High Priest Joshua waited and no doubt now aware of the filth he was covered in, the Angel of the Lord spoke and instructed other attending angels to remove his clothes and in doing so did what Joshua could never do for himself, he removed his sins and guilt. He then clothed him in fine rich garments indicating his restoration. He has been forgiven, cleansed, restored and made ready to resume his service and ministry as a priest giving us a picture of the salvation and restoration that God brings to us when we confess our sins and receive his forgiveness. God acquits not because Satan's accusations are false but because of God's love for His people. It's a graphic portrayal of how we receive God's mercy. We do nothing by ourselves, it is God who removes our filthy clothes, (our sins), and then provides new clean clothes for us, and brings us back to himself, all we have to do is turn to him and confess. So when you feel guilty about the things you do and have done, thank God for it. Accept and admit your guilt to God and seek and accept his forgiveness. Its a good idea also to confess your sins in the same way that you commit them, naming them one at time. We can be lazy confessors lumping them all together and asking for forgiveness of our sins but when we bring them to mind and confess them individually it indicates our seriousness about our need and desire to get right with God remembering that he is faithful and righteous and will always forgive and cleanse us from them.

On Probation The Angel of the Lord instructed Joshua that if he walked in God's ways and kept his requirements then he would be fit to serve the Lord. Note that although Joshua's cleansing and forgiveness was unconditional, his service to the Lord was not. All Joshua had to do to be cleansed was to confess and receive the free gift of forgiveness but his usefulness to God had conditions he had to meet. He had to be obedient to walk in God's ways, to live a life of personal righteousness and to be faithful to the duties he had as High Priest. Only then is he fit to be used in God's service.

Hope for the Future Towards the end of this vision the Lord gives Zechariah a hint of things in the future telling Joshua that he and those with him are a sign of things to come. The name Joshua is a sign as it is the Hebrew name for Jesus. Joshua the High Priest points towards the Great High Priest to come, Jesus Himself. Then 2 titles are used in v6 to describe the coming Messiah, the "Servant" and the "Branch." The "Servant" is the most common used title for the Messiah in the OT and emphasises his work, and the less commonly used title, "the Branch" used only 4 times in the OT is used to indicate an aspect of Jesus character as revealed in the 4 Gospels. Then in v 9 a "stone" is set before Joshua, a further image of the coming Messiah who is identified as the "cornerstone" Ps 118:22 and Zech 10:4, "the rock that causes stumbling" Isa 8:14, "the stone the builders rejected" Ps 118:22-23 and "the stone that strikes and crushes evil," Dan 2:34-35. The redemptive inscription on the "stone" states that God will "remove the sin of the land in a single day" accomplished for all of course by Jesus at Calvary. Through the Messiah who is the Servant, the Branch and the Stone, God will make the way for his people to overcome the accusations of Satan and the condemnations of sin. Zechariah's 4th vision tells us that we may be a guilty sinner or a backslidden saint but either way we have an advocate in heaven who will take our case and defend us, all we have to do is turn to him and ask him to represent us. We can also be sure that he *has* never and *will* never lose a case. No matter what we have done, if we will bring our guilt and our sin to this great advocate, He will take, plead and win our case and commute our sentence from death to life.

Our Greatest Need In Zechariah's 5th vision the angel shows him a "solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lamps on it, with seven channels to the lamps. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."

The duty of the High Priest would have been to fill the lampstands in the temple each evening in order for them to keep burning but here in the vision there is a bowl of oil suspended over the lampstand and oil pours out into the lamps. There are olive trees on either side of the lampstand and these are tapped in order for the oil to flow into the bowl in abundant supply.

The imagery is clear, the lampstand symbolises God's people and the oil placed above the lampstand represents the Holy Spirit as he empowers Israel to be a light to the nations directing them to God. When Zechariah asks what the meaning of his vision is the angel says, *"Not by strength or by might, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of Hosts.*" God is telling us that there is an endless supply of His power through his Spirit for us to accomplish his work. His power is something that he sends down and it is freely and abundantly available when we are open channels to receive it. He is always ready to send down everything we need to do his work. The message of Zechariah 4 is that our greatest need is for God's Spirit. Its not our own strength or our ingenuity, its not about the size of our congregations or our financial assets or education, our greatest need is the Holy Spirit. As a Christian we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, we receive him when we accept Christ as Saviour but Ephesians 5:18 tells us to *"be filled with the Holy Spirit"* indicating that he can fill us with more of himself which speaks of his power and influence in our lives.

Foundations Laid God tells Zechariah to take this vision's message to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah as he had been tasked with completing the temple rebuild. He had laid the foundations but work had stopped. The temple was not simply bricks and mortar, it represented God's presence among his people so the fact that work had stopped would have been a huge discouraging burden for Zerubbabel and for the people. It seemed a hopeless task and the longer time went on the more discouraged the people would have become. It highlighted their helplessness in being able to complete the build. So in the midst of their discouragement God sent a message of hope to be given to Zerubbabel. He says *"Not by strength, nor by power but by my Spirit," says the Lord. What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground.*"

Zerubbabel would have had strength and might in the form of military power and manpower available to him but neither the military might nor even by motivating the people and getting them to put all their effort into the rebuild would accomplish the work, all human effort was useless. Only God's Spirit could accomplish the task ahead. As he looked at the huge mess of rubble, stones and dirt Zerubbabel must have thought, *"where on earth do I start."* It was a massive task but one that he had to be actively involved in because v 9 tells us that the *"hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation and his hands will complete it."* Simply by claiming God's word to him did not mean that he stood by and waited for something to happen. Zerubbabel had to get up to his elbows in the mess, and carry out the stones himself before the mountain of rubble standing before him would become level ground.

You may have a mountain in your own life that seems unsurmountable and the mountain may even have questioned your faith and dared you to trust God to help. You may even have read this text and thought *"I tried that and nothing happened, the mess is still there."* The people of God in Zerubbabel's time may have felt the same as they moved a few rocks, cleared a bit of earth. They may have looked at the mess, and felt the pile was too big, the obstacles too huge, the pain too great, the work too much but they dared to trust God just as we can. We too can confront the mountains in our lives. It may take time and you may face opposition and at times it may even seem as if the mountain is getting bigger, nothing is happening and you will never overcome it, and you on your own can't, but the Holy Spirit can, he can overcome and eradicate the biggest obstacles but sometimes it takes time and very small beginnings as we see here.

Size does not matter Zerubbabel had laid the foundations a number of years ago, he had made the smallest of starts, and now God says in v 9 said that he would complete the work.

The angel then asks the question *"Who despises the day of small things?"* referring to the day when the work was started and foundations laid. After years of decay when nothing happened many would have held Zerubbabel and the work in contempt, but when the Spirit touches something that looks small and meagre he transforms it into something mightily significant. The word, *"Not by strength not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord"* would have reminded the people that when the presence of the Lord was with them great and miraculous things happened and that is probably what they would have been hoping for now, and perhaps we do too when we face mountains in our own lives but as we see here God doesn't relieve us of all responsibility and do all the work for us. He empowers us, and we get started. And maybe it is a small start. A few boulders moved, a few shovels of dirt thrown to the side leaving you to look on in despair at the never decreasing mountain, your efforts look small, insignificant even. The passage speaks to this! Don't despise a small beginning! Don't start digging and then give up! Don't allow discouragement to prevent you from completing the work God has set you because, after all, the end result is not up to us. We aren't supposed to shoulder the burden and assume the responsibility. It is not about our *"might and power"* so never despise a small beginning, because to God size does not matter. He likes to start small, think of the mustard seed that will eventually grow into a tree where birds will nest and Jesus started his kingdom on earth with a band of 12 now there are over 2 billion of us. Small becomes big when the Spirit moves.

Unlikely Heroes Finally Zechariah asks what the two olive trees or branches are from which the golden oil flows and the angel says they are the two anointed ones, two men set apart and anointed by God to be his special representatives and the although the text does not specifically say they are, the context indicates they are Joshua who personifies the peoples spiritual leadership and Zerubbabel representing the political leadership of Judah. Two unlikely men to be used by God, which is great for us. Zerubbabel was a governor under the authority of a pagan king, his name means descendant of Babylon, conjuring up everything wicked about a kingdom. Joshua was a priest without a temple serving a little known governor but he reminds us of the coming Joshua, - Jesus Christ. Neither men were anyone special in terms of conventional wisdom which tells us we don't need to be clever, smart or rich either in order to accomplish great things. Thankfully that is not how God works, he has the resources, the brains and abilities to accomplish anything, all we have to be is willing. We all have a task to accomplish but too often we think we are not good enough and not up to it. Too often we like Zerubbabel get discouraged and fail to continue, we give up, we lay foundations and then fail to complete, but God assures us that by the power of his Spirit he can accomplish anything, he can take the small beginnings and make them significant. Those projects we dreamed about and gave up on, God is challenging us to complete them with him. Those dreams we had of where and who we wanted to be, - resurrect them. What are we doing at the moment, what did we hope we would be doing by now, what have we started and given up on? It can be hard work, it takes time and effort and we need to be encouragers of one another and united even when we have different views because as D.L. Moody once stated *"I have never yet known the Spirit of God to work where the Lords people are divided."*

The Challenge God always wants to work and interact with his people. He leads, He directs, He empowers, but He does it in cooperation with us. Without God, we are powerless and ineffective. Without our cooperation God will stand by and wait until we are willing to follow before he leads and empowers us. We cannot be observers, we must be participants always recognising that it is not by our might or power, but by the might and power of the Spirit of God working in and through us, so that the glory all belongs to God. Like Zerubbabel we must roll up our sleeves and get active, we have to attack any pile of rubble called discouragement, apathy, or contentment and begin to, by the power of the Holy Spirit, remove it, rock by rock and build on the foundations we stand on and realise God's purpose for us collectively and individually.