

Help for Our Helplessness

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Date: 27 March 2016

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[0:00] What does God save us from? Well, he saves us from the penalty of sin. He saves us from the power of sin.!

See a new power to live. And then in chapter 5, it's going to be the presence of sin. He actually puts sin in a basket and then carries it off to the land of sin, to Babylon.

No more to live in the land. No more to be in the land. So chapter 3 was dealing with the penalty of sin. And for us, we feel that. We come to understand it as we feel guilt.

So how does God meet his people when they are stuck in their guilt? Well, we saw this on Friday with forgiveness, with justification.

And in chapter 4, it's the power of sin. And for us, that doesn't feel so much like guilt. Although it does lead to that. But we feel it more as despair.

[1:22] Never get over this. We don't have what it takes. And that's what Judah was looking at. Their failed attempt at rebuilding the temple was staring them in their faces.

Their inability, their lack of power, their spiritual lives were going nowhere fast. And that begins to feel like despair.

So I faced that challenge, that temptation in my life. You faced that temptation in your life. Going to work in a godly way, in a godless world.

It is hard. And it has a tendency sometimes to build on itself until it feels harder and harder and harder. Or going to school with lost and ungodly people.

And maybe you have fallen. Maybe you have fallen. Maybe you have chickened out. And now you are losing heart.

[2:24] You have tried and you have tried. Maybe it is difficult family situations. Maybe it is some stubborn sin. We probably each have a sin that so easily entangles us.

One that we wrestle with. And so we fought and fought. And perhaps you want to give up. Well, to despair in the face of our weakness.

That is a very human, normal response. A normal reaction. And the reason that we all have a tendency to do that is because we all have this same basic assumption that we end up making.

And it sounds something like this. If I can't do it, then it can't be done. And God is asking me to do something that is impossible.

And so we judge our potential by ourselves. And not by Jesus Christ. And not by the Holy Spirit. Now that is what Judah was doing.

[3:20] Little Judah was doing in the time of Zechariah. And that is what Zechariah chapter 4 is designed to confront. So remember, the people in Zechariah's day are stuck.

They're stuck in their sin. They're stuck in their guilt. They're stuck in the past. And all the rest. And this chapter comes with words of grace in the face of their weakness and their helplessness.

To challenge their sense of despair. Now, I've divided this chapter or this sermon into three basic questions. Three what questions. What does it mean?

What's the main point? And then what are some further lessons? So first of all, what does all this mean? Zechariah three times has to say, what are these?

What are these? And the angel says two times, well, you don't know what these are? Seems like there's a difference in the knowledge of an angel and Zechariah here. And Zechariah says, no, I don't.

[4 : 19] And so if you don't get this at first glance, either did Zechariah. So don't feel bad. Well, the vision begins with Zechariah seeing a golden lamp stand.

And now it's a golden lamp stand. And then there's a bull at the top. And around that big bull that's at the top of this lamp stand are seven light lamps.

Seven lights. It's either directly on it or there's channels going up to these seven little lamps. And what the NIV calls seven channels to the lights, it's probably better to go with the ESV here where it talks about seven lips on each of the lights.

And so there's one big bull. And then above the big bull of oil, there are seven little lamps with seven lips on each of those lamps.

So there's a total of 49 places where there would be a wick. So we have this big candlestick with 49 little candles or lights.

[5 : 25] Now the big bull is filled with olive oil. And so it's feeding all of these lights oil. So it keeps burning.

And then beside this whole thing, this whole lamp stand, are two olive trees, one on either side. And there's pipes and there's branches somehow joining the trees to the lamp stand.

And so you can see what's going on here. The oil, the olive oil, comes right out of the trees, through the branches, into the pipes, into the big bull. And then from the big bull, they're going up to all the lights.

And so it's this continuously burning, ever replenishing, bright light. Now that's what he sees. And the question is, what does that all mean?

Well, the book of Revelation helps us here. Remember in Revelation, John sees Jesus walking among seven lamp stands.

[6 : 31] And do you remember what those stood for? Stood for the seven churches scattered throughout Asia Minor. They are shining as lights in this dark world.

And so it seems pretty clear from Revelation and from just the context of Zechariah that this lamp stand, it's the people of God. It's the community. It's the family of God shining in the middle of a dark world.

So who is the light of the world? Who is the light of the world? Well, you probably instantly think Jesus.

Jesus says, I am the light of the world. And that is true. In our Sunday school class, in my little Sunday school class on neighboring, I asked that question and everyone said Jesus.

And then I took them to Matthew 5 and the Sermon on the Mount. And there Jesus says, you are the light of the world. You are the light of the world.

[7 : 33] The city on a hill cannot be hidden. And we are so ingrained to think of Jesus being the light of the world that I asked them, well, who is the light of the world? And someone said, Jesus. And I said, look at what it says again.

You are the light of the world. And this is something that we have to feel the privilege of and feel the responsibility of. There is no other light in the world besides Jesus' disciples.

Not government, not education, not good economic policies. We are the light of the world. There's no plan B. There's no lesser light. There's no second best.

Everywhere it is dark. Except where Jesus' disciples meet. But again, Jesus does say, I am the light of the world. So how is it that Jesus is the light of the world and we are the light of the world?

Well, we would say it is Christ in us, isn't it? It is by his spirit that we become the light of the world. He fills us. He shines through us.

[8 : 36] He lives through us. And that's somewhat of what is pictured here. We have a lampstand that is shining. It's the people of God. It's us living as a witness to the nations.

The way that the people in Zachariah's day were going to do that was by building the temple. Remember, the temple was going to be a house of prayer for all nations.

They were the light. But where did the power come from? Where did that power come from? From the oil. And the oil here is the spirit of God. He's flowing out of the trees, into the bowl, into the lights.

And so as the spirit filled them, they caught on fire and they began to shine. And so that leaves the two trees.

And he tells us in verse 14 who these are. These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth. And everyone understands these to be Zerubbabel and Joshua.

[9 : 44] The leaders of the people. They lead the community. Literally, it says these two are sons of oil.

They're filled with the spirit. They're characterized by oil. They're characterized by the spirit. And as the spirit flows into them, they overflow into others.

They are going to lead the community. They're going to keep the community from going dark. And so the spirit in them will overflow to the rest of the community. And so the flames won't go out.

They won't sputter out. Now that's what Zacharias saw. He saw the lampstand. The people of God shining in the dark world. I don't think Judah saw themselves that way.

But God said, this is how you need to see yourself. Little, weak, but here's what you are. You're a lampstand. So they're the people of God shining in the dark world.

[10 : 43] And the oil is clearly the spirit of God. And the two trees are the leaders of the people who minister and lead the community. Now secondly, what's the main point?

What's the main point of the vision? Zacharias asked that very question. He clearly saw those things. But he doesn't know what it all means.

And instead of explaining it piecemeal, one piece at a time, like I just did, God goes straight to the main point in verse 6.

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel. Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord Almighty.

So it's not human effort. It's not human might. It's not human arm strength or human leg strength. It's not military might. It's not thoughtfulness, intellectual power.

[11 : 46] It's not by anything human that they are going to be able to build this temple, that they are going to be able to shine. He says it's going to be by my spirit. That's how they're going to build the temple.

That's how they are going to shine. And so the Lord says you can leave your despair because look at your power. Look at where your strength is coming from.

And so we aren't left to ourselves and you aren't left to yourself. So let's go back to those things that we talked about. The things that make it difficult and cause you to despair.

Bring those together in with this vision. And so you aren't left to yourself at work. You aren't left to yourself at school. If you belong to Jesus Christ, the spirit of Christ lives in you.

The spirit fills you. And so what is so daunting? What they felt so powerless to do to start again on the temple?

[12:44] To face their weakness. To face their poverty. To face their enemies. To face their smallness. And to finish what they began. The Lord is saying you can do it.

They could do. They could do. Because it wasn't going to be by might. It wasn't going to be by strength. It was going to be by my spirit. And so their weakness, their enemies, their smallness, their poverty.

Wasn't going to ruin the project. God wasn't going to let that happen. Instead the Holy Spirit wouldn't be sure to make sure that the temple was built. And so that's us. What do we find so daunting?

So difficult? It might be finishing the Great Commission. For us as a church. Or for us as the worldwide church.

Reaching the ends of the earth. It could be very small. Living as a faithful wife. Living as a faithful husband.

[13:46] And staying faithful in a crooked and perverse generation. And to shine in a world that is becoming increasingly dark.

Last summer we went to Mammoth Cave. And they take you down, down, down, down. 150 feet or so under the ground.

And you walk a while. And then you come to this wide open cavern. And you sit down and they turn off the lights. And darkness that presses in on you.

Darkness that feels like it's going right up under your eyelids. That's the dark world. There's no light anywhere. It's the darkness of a dead world.

And if it were up to us. We could never do it. If it was just left up to us and our strength and our ability and our power. We don't have what it takes.

[14:48] We would curl up and die. Imagine being stuck down there in Mammoth Cave all by yourself. And saying somehow you've got to get out.

Maybe that's how you feel. The challenges are so real and so daunting and so relentless. And it would be impossible to go forward. But into that growing despair.

If we just look at that situation and keep our eyes on that. Into that growing despair. The Lord gently says. Remember it's not up to you. It's not.

You shouldn't be measuring. Your potential by yourself. Measure your potential by my spirit who is with you. And through him. We can do all things.

Everything that the Lord calls us to do. And so in verse 7. The Lord taunts the mountains. The great difficulties standing in their way.

[15:49] So what's your mountain? What's your challenge? What's your difficulty? Yourself? Your circumstances? Maybe it's your own slow heart? What's standing in your way?

Well the Lord isn't surprised at the mountains. He brings them up. And he's not worried. He taunts the mountains.

What are you oh mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a level ground. You'll become a plain. So Zerubbabel is going to walk right through you. All the mountains. All the other peoples.

Who are trying to stop Judah from building the temple. All the poverty. Everything that's facing them. Everything that's confronting them. God says it's going to. You seem like a mountain. But you're going to be a plain.

And so before the spirit's power. Mountains turn into plains. And obstacles become floor mats. The Lord is saying Zerubbabel is going to finish the temple.

[16:50] And there is nothing that anything or anyone can do to stop it. And verse 10 says men will rejoice. Rejoice. They're going to. When he puts the capstone up.

They're going to rejoice. Men will rejoice when they see the the plumb line in his hands. It's literally. It's literally the tin stone.

It's probably the capstone. That seems to be. That's probably what is. That fits in with what is going on here. It's probably the capstone. The last stone of the temple.

And so he's saying what is so embarrassing. And so small. And everyone is despising now this little work. It's going to be finished. They're going to see the capstone in Zerubbabel's hands.

And all the mountains that used to stand in their way. Are they going to. They're going to be flat behind them. And what is so small now is going to be finished with shouts of joy. And then in the second half of verse 10.

[17:47] You see the strange parenthetical statement. These seven are the eyes of the Lord which range throughout the earth. And again.

We say what is he talking about. And. This could be a real head scratcher. Remember in chapter 3. I didn't talk so much about it.

But remember in chapter 3 when we read it. He said see the stone I have set in front of Joshua. There are seven eyes on that one stone. And I think what is going on here is we are seeing the same stone again.

One time it was in front of Joshua. It's teaching the same lesson in both visions. But it was in front of Joshua. Now it's in Zerubbabel's hands.

And he's going to put it on top of the temple. And so over all the temple is the stone with seven eyes. Which range throughout the earth. And again.

[18:47] What does that mean? Well we get a significant clue. In 2nd Chronicles chapter 16. Now you don't have to turn there.

Just listen. 2nd Chronicles 16. Asa the king of Judah is under threat from the king of Israel. And instead of trusting in the Lord. That's the real question in Zechariah 4.

And it's the question in 2nd Chronicles 16. Instead of trusting in the Lord. He actually takes gold and silver out of the temple. And sends it to the king of Aram. It's a bribe to help him.

We need your military might. We're not strong enough to take on the king of Israel. We need human power. So he takes money. Sends it to the king of Aram. And at the same time.

After this happens. At the same time. A prophet came to Asa and said to him. Because you relied on the king of Aram. And not on the Lord your God. The army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand.

[19:47] Were not the Cushites and the Libyans a mighty army. With great numbers of chariots and horsemen. Yet when you relied on the Lord. He delivered them into your hand.

Now listen to this. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth. To strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

So Asa trusted in might and strength. Not God. And God says. My eyes. My spirit. Ranges throughout the whole earth.

To strengthen those who are committed to me. Who trust me. Who say I don't have what it takes. But Lord I need you to do something. And so what are these seven eyes in Zechariah?

Well it's God's spirit. Who goes around the earth. Looking to strengthen those who trust him. Now. So the seven eyed stone.

[20 : 46] Is reinforcing the main point of the vision. God's spirit is with you. He is with you. And so build the temple. Go to work.

It seems hard. But you're going to do it. And he is going to do it through you. He is going to strengthen you. As you trust him. And so don't despair. So what is the remedy for our despair?

When confronted with our weakness. And our helplessness. It's moving our trust. It's moving our trust. Off of ourselves. And onto God.

And into God's spirit. Who is in us. And you'll never feel better. About your weakness. As long as you're thinking. And living.

Like it's up to you. Like. You're the only hope. But no one ever. Despairs. When they're trusting in God.

[21 : 47] Because why would they have to? He's the maker of heaven and earth. He's the sovereign king. He's our glorious father. Who loves us. He's our loving savior.

He's the spirit of holiness. Through which. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. He has power to go into the. Into the grave. And pull out. The dead.

Paul was saying. I don't want you to be. Unaware of how much we were suffering. In that Asia. Province of Asia. It got so hot. He says.

We despaired even of life. We felt the sentence of death. Written against us. We felt this close to dying. He says. But this happened.

So that we would not rely on ourselves. But on God. Who raises. The dead. So how can we despair. When God says to our difficulties.

[22 : 45] It's going to be level ground. You'll walk right through it. With my power. And my strength. Now that's the main point. It's not might. Nor strength. It's by God's spirit. Now third.

I want to just draw out. Very briefly. Some further. Lessons. And they're just sort of building on. The main point. Just four very brief lessons.

Number one. When God calls you to do something. He doesn't make you do it alone. He gives you his spirit. To help you. So bring your trial.

Bring your sorrow. Bring your temptation. Bring whatever God is calling you to do. Sometimes there is a will to do. And sometimes there is a will to suffer.

What is he calling you to? Well just know this. He doesn't call you to do it alone. But by my Holy Spirit.

[23 : 40] By my spirit. So maybe God is calling you to live alone. And it's hard. It's lonely. It's difficult. And it seems like it's too much.

And we would say. And it is. It's too much. It's too hard. But remember. Along with the trial. You have the spirit of Jesus Christ. And he is able to work in you.

All the fruit of the spirit. Love. Love. The opposite of crashing in on yourself. And selfishness. And despair. Love to go out.

And joy. Yes even joy. And peace. And patience. And so on. Could you produce any of those things. If it was just left up to you. Oh no.

And thank God you don't have to. The spirit of Christ is in you. So you can shine even in your loneliness. And so. If you feel like you're empty.

[24 : 40] And you just feel like a lampstand with no oil. Remember you are a lampstand. But you're this ever replenishing. Ever renewing. Lampstand. The spirit is in you.

That's lesson number one. Lesson number two is this. It's impossible to live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. It's impossible to live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit.

And what I mean by this is. There is no substitute for living the Christian life. There's no substitute for the spirit. His life. His love. His power.

His grace. In us. There's no substitute for it. And so I am more and more convinced. That God puts things into our lives. Again and again.

To show us. That we just can't do it ourselves. We just can't. Now our initial. My initial reactions. To trials and to difficulties.

[25 : 37] Is to say. Okay. I got to figure out how I need to work this out. I can do this. I can handle this. And then what happens. We fall down. Now maybe you learn a lot quicker than I do.

But I imagine probably not. But what I do is I brush myself off. And I try to do it again. And I try another door. And the door gets slammed in my face. And I try again. And I fall apart there.

Again and again. Until. It's like I come to my senses. And realize this doing it by myself. Is not working. And what you have to do then.

Is humble yourselves under God's mighty hand. He put his hand upon me. To humble me. And now. We are desperate.

And we say. I can't do it. It's not just hard. It's impossible. It's not just requiring a little more oomph in my life. It's not going to happen.

[26 : 33] It's impossible. Now why does God do that? So we learn to not rely on ourselves. But on God who raises the dead. And so that we learn. There is no substitute. For divine help.

And oh that we would learn. That lesson quicker. To cast all of our anxiety on him. All of our troubles. All of our worries on him. Because he cares for us.

To make prayer. The first thing. Instead of the last thing. And so what fools. We are. And I can say this from experience.

I ran my head into the wall again. And again. And again. Months on end. Trying to do things in my own strength. And then when I finally sit down. And cry out. Lord please. Just teach me.

I don't even know what I need. Everything changed. In days. And I kicked myself. What a fool. What a fool I was.

[27 : 34] That just to say. The Christian life. Is not just hard. To live without the Holy Spirit. It's impossible. There's no substitute for him. And so let's make prayer.

The first thing. And not the last thing. Lesson number three is this. If the spirit makes all the difference. If he is so essential to our life.

And to our godliness. And to our light shining. Then we need to be extra careful. Not to grieve the spirit. Now Paul gives that command.

Do not grieve the spirit. In Ephesians chapter four. And it's right in the middle. Of all of this commands. And instructions. About how we are to act.

And to treat one another. That's what he's talking about before. That's what he's talking about afterwards. He's talking about all the ways. That we can destroy one another.

[28 : 28] How we can sin against each other. And so how do we grieve the Holy Spirit? Well one way. And probably the primary way. That Paul is thinking about.

As he's writing Ephesians chapter four. Is how do we grieve the Holy Spirit? By mistreating each other. By holding grudges. And not forgiving. And gossiping.

And malice. And envy. That is the kind of things. That grieves the Holy Spirit. Because he's not only in me. He's in you.

And doesn't that go very well with Zechariah four? The spirit lived in the whole. Lives in the whole community. He's the oil. That gives life and light to everyone.

And so when you mistreat your brothers or sisters. When you hold grudges. When you're envious. And malicious.

[29 : 24] The spirit will be grieved. And quenched. And the light will dim. I don't know. But I would imagine.

I think. Fights and quarrels. Have destroyed more lamp stands. Than persecution ever did. When we. Fighting against each other.

The light will go out. Eventually. So do you want. His power. The Holy Spirit's power. In life. Here. Watch how you treat.

Your brothers and sisters. Now finally. The fourth lesson is this. And it sounds very familiar. Very similar to the second one. But I mean something different by it. Don't try to live the Christian life.

Without the Holy Spirit. Don't try to even begin. To live the Christian life. Without the Holy Spirit. So many people want to be right with God. And so they think. What I need to do.

[30 : 23] To be right with God. Is to live like a Christian. So they start. They try. To do it. By living the Christian life. And then they can't do it. And then they lose heart.

And then they despair. And then they call the whole thing rubbish. And they quit. All together. And then they say. Why does that happen? Well.

Because you can't live the Christian life. Without the Holy Spirit. You can't live the Christian life. Without Christ in you. By his Spirit. You just can't. And so. My word here is.

Don't try. Don't try. Instead. Come to Jesus. You have to come to Jesus. First. He gives the Spirit. Remember. He's the one who.

Isn't going to baptize with water. He's going to baptize with the Holy Spirit. And so you go to Jesus Christ first. He is resurrected. He is ruling on high.

[31 : 19] To grant faith. To give repentance. To pour out his Holy Spirit. And so the Holy Spirit is this crowning gift of resurrection. It is the greatest gift.

He is the greatest gift. He is the greatest gift of Christ's love. To his people. Because by him. Jesus Christ comes and lives with us.

And by him. The power and the life of God. Lives in the soul of man. And things that are impossible. Now become possible. And there's new hearts. And new desires. And new.

Life is turned upside down. Behold. The old is gone. And the new. Has come. Because the Holy Spirit comes. But he comes as we come to Jesus Christ.

And so don't let your weakness and your helplessness. Keep you from Jesus Christ. Jesus says. Come just as you are. And I will save you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.

[32 : 18] We thank you. For. Pouring out your spirit. In response to Jesus prayer. Lord Jesus. Thank you for giving your spirit. To us.

And Holy Spirit. Thank you for coming. And invading our hearts. And washing us. And renewal. And rebirth. And resurrection. Thank you for being such a faithful.

And kind. Guest. In our houses. Forgive us for being so. Dirty. And thinking.

Or in. Just forgive us. For not being more careful. And not remembering. That we are the temple. Of. The living God. That he lives in us.

By his spirit. So help us not to. Grieve. The Holy Spirit. In anything that we do. Anything that we do.

[33:17] To one another. Help us to be careful. And thank you. That you meet us. In our despair. In our weakness. And.

That you help us. So remind us. Again and again. This week. That we aren't. Left to ourselves. You've not. Told us to make bricks. Without straw.

You've given us. Everything we need. And so help us. To live in that. And enjoy that. And then stretch out. To do more. More than what we say.

Is possible now. To say. No. All things are possible. Through Jesus Christ. Who gives me strength. Pray that we would be. A happy people. And a holy people. We ask this in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.