

Words for Discouraged Workers

by A.B. Simpson

God encourages His people to trust in His power and plan, even in times of weakness and discouragement.

Scripture: Zechariah 1:12

Topics: "Encouragement", "Divine Intercession"

Description

A.B. Simpson delivers a powerful sermon titled 'Words for Discouraged Workers,' drawing from the prophetic messages of Zechariah to encourage those rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. He emphasizes God's presence and intercession through Jesus Christ, who prays for His people amidst their sorrow and challenges. Simpson highlights the visions of hope, divine protection against enemies, and the assurance that God will provide for their needs, regardless of their small numbers or feelings of unworthiness. He reassures the congregation that God's strength is made perfect in their weakness and that their humble offerings will be transformed into crowns for Christ. Ultimately, the message is one of hope, encouragement, and the call to trust in God's unfailing promises.

Transcript

Last week we listened to the words of encouragement from the old Prophet Haggai, as he spake to the band of captives who were restoring the temple of God in Jerusalem. About the same time there was another prophet named Zechariah, a young man, who perhaps at this time was just beginning his prophetic ministry, whose voice was also associated by the Lord with Haggai's in this ministry of help.

It was on the first day of the sixth month that Haggai opened his lips, and it was in the eighth month that Zechariah began his ministry, and in the eleventh month of the same year that he gave the next series of visions. So you see there was a great deal done between the sixth and the eleventh month. God compressed a great deal into a small space when His people were ready for it.

Let us, this morning, look at some of the messages of Zechariah. They are quite different from Haggai's but have in them the same spirit with a deeper poetry and a loftier inspiration. The first message that Zechariah gave to the people was not exactly one of reproof, but it was a gentle reminder of the warnings which had already been given and a very serious caution not to forget them.

But he does not linger long over the words of reproof. He just touches the canvas with a mere outline of the vision of judgment that, like a departing cloud, has gone and will never come again if they are faithful; and then he presses on to that which is bright and hopeful, and in a series of eight visions gives them a

succession of pictures of hope and cheer like, perhaps, nothing else in the sacred volume for beauty and encouraging power. They all came on the same night. It took many hours to record them and many years to fulfil them; but they all came before the mind of this young man perhaps in a single hour. It was on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, very near the close of the year, when sleep perhaps was beginning to throw its veil over his brain, there rose before him a panorama of strange scenes, peopled with moving forms from the heavenly world, and voices fell upon his ear, and God covered him with the cloud of His presence, and out of the glory came these wonderful visions.

I. ENCOURAGEMENT AGAINST THEIR DEPRESSION

The first was a vision of a low bottom, something like the banks of the river Nile, or the low bank of the Kedron, and on this low land were growing groves of myrtle trees, looking something like a city of the dead, for the myrtle was the tree of sorrow; and, as he looked upon the scene, the low valley and the dark green myrtle branches, the type of his people's sorrow and sadness, he saw in the midst of them a number of war horses of different colors with heavenly horsemen seated upon them, and he asked who they were. The answer came that these were God's messengers, whom He had sent abroad throughout the earth. As he watched, he saw another form, no longer an angel, but the angel of the covenant Himself--the Son of God. There in the midst of this dark, sad scene, beside these angel horsemen he sees Jesus Christ, the angel of the covenant, and He lifts his voice to Heaven and begins to pray for his suffering people; "O, Lord of hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years"--the seventy years of the captivity. It was Jesus praying for His people. It was the Great High Priest beginning His intercession for you and for me. Others had prayed, but there had not come any answer. But now Jesus clasps His hands and looks up to His Father, and utters just one prayer to God, and the shadow of seventy years passes away--the clouds are all broken. And the next verse contains the answer: "The Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words." The Father cannot turn away the pleadings of His Son. One prayer of Jesus is worth a million of the best prayers on earth. If you want to get your prayers answered, get Him to pray for you. All the years of this restoration began with that little prayer of Jesus to His Father. And is it not glorious to know today that He ever liveth to make intercession for us? For we have a great High Priest who has passed into the Heavens--Jesus the Son of God. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Then the answer goes on: "Cry thou, saying, thus saith the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy; I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies. My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad; and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem."

That is the first vision. It is the vision of the sorrow and depression of God's people--among the myrtle trees, in the bottom, low down and covering themselves with sorrow, with God's mighty angels moving among them, God's dear Son praying for them, and God answering: "I am returned with mercies."

II. ENCOURAGEMENT AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES

We come now to the second vision. "I lifted up mine eyes and saw four horns." He knew what they meant. They were the symbols of those cruel earthly powers that had pushed against Judah and Jerusalem, and pierced her heart and crushed her under their ruthless feet--the horns of earthly power, the figure by which God always represents the evil powers of the world. But he says, "I lifted up mine eyes again, and I saw four carpenters," with saw and hatchet and plane, coming to meet and fray these sharp horns. "What are

these?" he asks. "These horns," he says, "are the horns that have scattered Judah, and these carpenters have come to fray them"--that is, to peel them down and take the sharp points from them, and soften them as you would soften the end of a broom, so that they should have no power to harm. This second vision means defense against the hostility of enemies. The four horns mean that there are enemies on all sides--north and south, and east and west. Look where you will there are horns, but look where you will there are carpenters to meet them. There is just as much protection as there is opposition, and greater is He that is for us than all they that are against us. Cheer up then, again, beloved; don't mind the horns, but remember God has got His tools to take their sharpness all away. No harm can come to those that serve and follow Him. "For I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children."

III. ENCOURAGEMENT AGAINST THE SMALLNESS OF THEIR NUMBERS

Then we have the third vision. He sees a young man with a measuring line in his hand, and he is very busy and important. He is a contractor, or a clerk of works, or some official in connection with building operations, and he has a long tape line in his hand, and he is measuring off the ground. And Zechariah comes up to him, and he says, "where are you going?" And he says, "I am going to measure Jerusalem to see how long it is and how wide it is. We are going to build walls, and we want to lay out the work;" And then there comes a voice from the angel: "Run, speak to this young man that is laying out the work and measuring off the ground for the walls, and tell him to stop; tell him there is no need for his measuring line; tell him there is no need for his work; tell him that God is undertaking the business and going to build all the walls Himself, and man's measuring line is too short for God's plan. Tell this young man that his ideas are too small and too petty for this great work; tell him that Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein."

You are going to make a little town for thousands of people, and God is going to have millions of people, and when he gets them together he says: "I will be a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of them." What a glorious promise! What a glorious reproof to our little faith! Man is always getting his hand on the work in some little way, and God is always waiting to get us out of the way, so that He may do larger things for us. Their enemies were saying: "What is the use of building Jerusalem? Where are you going to get your people? You have only got a little handful there. Your building this temple with a few hundred of people, it is all nonsense." They had only 50,000. There used to be 9,000,000, and 50,000 was a very small nation compared with 9,000,00. It would not make one good-sized city. And so they were all discouraged about their small numbers, and this vision came to encourage them in this respect, and tell them that God had the people in His hand like the sands of the sea and the stars in the Heavens--if they only had faith enough to rise to His perfect will, then He would protect them and guard them Himself; and just as the shepherd builds his wall of fire round his folds at night, and it is better than any wall of masonry to keep the wolves out, so God will shine forth in their midst with His fiery presence. And then He adds, "He that toucheth you will be just the same as if he touched the apple of my eye," so that as your eyelids fall when a grain of dust comes near, or the sand-fly touches against the tender organs of sight, down comes that little trap door and shuts out the intruder, so God says He shall be just as sensitive to your dangers. And then He says, "Many nations will come, and gather to you, and I will make you a blessing to the nations of the earth."

Beloved, is not that a good and comforting word for us--a little band thinking sometimes about our lack of power and numbers; but God says if we will trust Him we will not need any measuring line. I have always been afraid to number people. I used to be able to tell just how many I had on the communion roll, and how many I had talked with about salvation, but since God has called me to this work, I have kept no

figures except such as are necessary for church order. I don't know how many I have talked with; I don't know how many I have prayed with. When I try to use the measuring line, God seems to say: "My child, let me measure, or rather let me bless without measure." If we can be humble enough to forget the numbers, if we can stop man's glorying, and sitting at the feet of Jesus see Him only, and glorify Him only, God will see that His promises are exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

IV. ENCOURAGEMENT AGAINST CONSCIOUS UNWORTHINESS

Now we come to the fourth vision. The people took courage from these blessed words and went on with their work. The temple was at last so far finished that they were ready to worship in it, and they came through the person of Joshua to worship before the Lord; and they had no sooner come there than on the right hand of Joshua there came another character. "Joshua stood before the Lord, and lo, Satan at his right hand to accuse him." There he is pointing with his finger to poor Joshua, who is covered with filthy garments, and looking up to God as much as to say: "This is a pretty sight in your holy temple, to see this man here, representing the nation, defiled with sin and unfit to appear before you." That is just what Satan always does. His very name means "the accuser;" and his business is to point his finger at your filthy garments and remind you of your unworthiness. Sometimes you will find him standing at your right hand in the very house of God, and perhaps here this morning to accuse you. How often, when some work for God has been laid upon you, has he come to you, and with his foul whisper saying: "You are not fit for this." How often, when you have wished to speak to someone, has he come to you to repress you with the reminder of something that is lacking in yourself! How often, when you kneel in prayer to ask great things of God he says to you: "How dare you claim this with your unworthiness." And so he holds you back and keeps you down.

What does Joshua do? He cannot do anything. He knows that the filthy garments belong to him--only too well he knows it. But O, the blessed Lord steps in and answers for him, and says unto Satan, without giving Joshua time to answer, or even to get confused: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. The Lord rebuke thee, even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." "Is not it enough that I have chosen them, and that they are like brands plucked from the burning fire--but they are not in it now; I have torn them out and saved them, and though they have the mark of the flames upon them they are mine, and I have chosen them." And then God makes the answer more emphatic still: "Take away the filthy garments from him." And then He says, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." And so God takes off his old robes, covers him with the beauty of Jesus, and then He adds: "Let them set a fair diadem upon his head." And they set a fair diadem on his head, and crowned him as an accepted king and a pure priest, a holy worshipper through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the way God will comfort you when the enemy reminds you of all your imperfections, if you will put them away with a true heart and take Jesus for your righteousness. The Lord not merely accepts you, but He crowns you with His blessing, and He says those great words: "If thou wilt walk in My ways, and if thou wilt keep My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts, and I wilt give thee the places to walk among those that stand by." "I will give you a place of honor even among the heavenly thrones. Sinner though you were, I now cover you with My beauty and glory through My precious blood."

V. PROVISION FOR THEIR WEAKNESS

They were conscious of being very weak. Now, it is a very sad thing to be without human power, and also without divine power; and that was their position. So, now, another vision comes--a fifth. This figure represents God's strength in their weakness. Zechariah beholds a golden--a seven branch--candlestick,

and on each side of this seven-fold lamp there was a living olive tree; and, as the olive tree grew and ripened its berries, he saw the berries pressed out--not by hands of men, but by some unseen force--and pouring their oil into a pipe which connected the tree with the lamp; thus pouring in their oil as fast as they made it, and so keeping the lamp burning without the touch of human hand--without the least human machinery. I don't know anything so exquisite and delicate in the imagery of the Bible. Joshua looked with wondering eyes, and remembered how the temple had to be supplied with oil by snuffers and vessels, and the hands of 30,000 Levites, and he says, "What does this mean?" And the answer comes back: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." That is the way the work is going to be carried on. This is God's candlestick, the true church of Jesus Christ. It is not going to be supplied by man's wisdom, but the Holy Ghost is going to be its life and invisible power. On each side of His church there are two living trees; one of them on the Heaven side, the other on the earth side. The one on the Heaven side is Jesus, the High Priest, the one on the earth side is the Holy Ghost that dwells within us; and so we stand between the two--Jesus on this side, the Spirit on this side--both of them, with living and constant supply, pouring into us their very life, and keeping the lamp burning "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

Beloved, that is God's way of nurturing His church. God wants man's hands put aside. Just as the measuring line must go, so must the snuffers and the tunnels go, too, and God must be constantly breathing life to the throbbing pulses of the church that He has redeemed and loved. And now, He adds, "Since this is so you will say, Who art thou, great mountain? Thou shalt become a plain, and ye shall bring forth the headstone of the work with shoutings: Grace, grace, unto it. Not man's doings, but all Christ's. And the work shall be finished. And then He adds, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" That is just the day that God uses and blesses.

I remember well the cold and desolate afternoon, years ago, when a little band of humble, praying Christians met in an upper room to begin this work for God. There were less than a dozen, and we asked the Lord to give us His Word for this work; and we opened our Bibles, and these words were just before us: "Who hath despised the day of small things; not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." And we knelt before Him there and thanked Him that we were poor, and thanked Him that we were few, and thanked Him that we were weak, and threw ourselves upon the might of the Holy Ghost, and He has never failed us and if we keep little enough, and lowly enough, and humble enough, and trustful enough, He will love and bless us more and more. O, beloved, cherish this vision! I know God wants us to remember in our work, above everything else, the might of weakness which is the might of God.

VI. DEFENSE AGAINST INIQUITY IN THEIR MIDST

The fifth chapter gives us the next vision. He sees a flying roll, with curses written on it, touching the house of this one and that one as it passes by, and he asks, "What does this mean?" And the answer comes: "This is God's curse that strikes the willful and wicked." You don't need to curse anybody. God will judge. If men and women will sin and go on unrepentant, God has His flying roll. And then, in the same vision, He sees an ephah, and in it a woman's form as the type of iniquity; and he sees two angels taking the measure and putting the lid upon her head and just shutting her down in the measure, and then carrying it away to the land of Babylon, putting it in its own place. He asks again, "What does this mean?" And the answer is, "God is going to take the evil away Himself in that way. He is going to smite that which will not turn to Him, and then He is going to lift up and turn out of your midst all that offends, and put it out of your way, so that you don't need to do anything but trust Him, and God will keep His work pure." That was their

fear. They say, "How can we be sure that we shall not be hindered by elements coming in among us that are not pure?" He says, "God will do that Himself." And so, beloved, we will take God to guard the purity of His work. How wonderfully has He guarded and kept us here. How many times it has seemed that evil and dangerous elements were trying to break in; but God, without any human contrivance, almost without speaking a word has just kept us; and, as we trusted Him, guarded His work, making it simple, and Scriptural, and heavenly, and holy, and so that He can bless us to the fulness of His love and will.

VII. DEFENSE AGAINST THE POWERS OF THE WORLD

Then comes the next vision, "He looked again and saw four chariots, and these four chariots were going out in different directions. One was coming north, another was following after it; another was going south, and another was following in its train.

He asks, "What are these?" And the Lord says, "These are the spirits of the heavens, and they go forth into the kingdoms of the world, and they keep things under God's control in the mighty empires of earth." One is going away north into the Grecian empire, the other is going away south into the Persian, for these were the two great empires of that day. And He says, "They have quieted My Spirit in the north country and in the south country, that is, they have taken My powers with them to hold in check all evil that would hinder My kingdom; and so you need not fear the power of the northern kingdom or the southern throne. I have got armies there who are encamping in the clouds and around about the thrones and camps of earth. And you need not fear. And today God says to you and me, He has His chariots in the north, and in the south, and in all lands, and He is overturning, restraining and controlling all things for the glory of His name and for the advancement of His Church. Remember this vision of providence and of God's controlling power in all human affairs, and be sure the wrath of man shall praise Him, and the remainder thereof shall be restrained. God wants us to take the place of faith and know that at the throne of prayer we can touch the mightier hands, and thus bring about the coming of the Messiah.

These are the seven visions which Zechariah saw; and as he closes them, he adds another beautiful incident, with which we shall close. It is the last incident in the sixth chapter. It is one of exceeding beauty, and very comforting. I think, to us today. Just at this very time there came a little deputation away over from Babylon, from the captives that had not returned to Jerusalem, and they brought along with them some presents of silver and of gold. Though they could not return, they sent what they could to help; and from afar their gifts were carried by the living hands of these three men--Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah. They brought their money to Joshua, and as soon as it was received, God spake through Zechariah, and gave this direction, "Take this money that these men have brought; God does not need it in His temple, because He has got all the money. What God wants is their love; but take the money that they have brought and forge it into crowns, and then take the crowns and put them on the head of Joshua, the high priest, and let him wear them there on the day of some public service in the temple of the Lord; and let him tell the people and you tell them, Zechariah, that he is but the type of another great One who is to bear the same name. Tell them that there is another Joshua coming--Jesus of Nazareth, that He is to be the great High Priest, and that just as Joshua wears the silver and gold for a crown, so the day is coming when Jesus will take the gifts of His people, the little sacrifices that they have brought, and make them into crowns, and wear them on His head before all heaven, and will say to the angels of glory: "These are the gifts of little children; these are the gifts of poor men and hard working women; these are the dollars and half dollars, the gifts of My children and I wear them in memory of their love for Me."

So God will take your gifts and make crowns out of them, and wear them for you, and then hang them up as your memorial forevermore. But O, I am so glad that He wears the crown first Himself. Yes, it is not you that is crowned--it is Jesus that is crowned. He wants you to bring your gifts, your sacrifices, your services, and give them to Him. He only is worthy. It was He that died for you. It was He that redeemed you. It was He that forgave you. It was He that took you back again. It was He that blessed you, lifted you, laid aside His crown for you. Now crown Him Lord of all. Be like the dying woman who, when she could only say one word, gasped out the word "Bring." And they brought her water, and they brought her medicine, and they brought her her friends, and they brought her her children, and they brought her her husband, but she waved them all away, and mustering up her last strength, she sang, "Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all." And then, with her last breath, she just went up in a chariot of praise to His blessed arms.

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