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Time

Re-Think Stewardship Series

Zechariah 4:1-14

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Well, Happy New Year everyone. My name is Clint Kirby. I'm one of your missionaries, and my wife and I, and our family, serve in Gdańsk, Poland. I think we have a picture of the crew there. And just in case you're wondering, "No, that is not my only outfit that I own." *(laughter)*. My wife, Missy, is from Pleasant Dale. She grew up in this church, was baptized, and discipled in this church. And on behalf of her and the rest of my family, I just want to say thank you for your prayers and support. I've been tasked this weekend to speak about time, which is good, because anytime we're back in the States, we get a lot of questions related to time. You know, "When did you get in town?" "How long will you be in town?" "When are you headed back?" "How old are your kids?" "How long have you been in Poland?" "How long do you see yourselves in Poland?" "When will the Dallas Cowboys ever make it back to the Super Bowl?" That's more of a question I ask myself, I guess. *(laughter)*

But it's a good weekend to think about time as we start a new calendar year. Maybe you have already set some time-related goals for yourself, and those goals are great. But don't worry; this is not a sermon about how you need to give more time to God this year. This is not a sermon about doing more. This is not a sermon about time management, because the title of this sermon series, as you just saw, is *Re-Think*, to *re-think* how we view time. And over the past 15 years in Poland, I've definitely had to change my thinking when it comes to time. So I would like to share some of those stories with you today as we open up God's Word together. It's an honor and it's a privilege to be here with you this morning. So, let's get into it.

If you have a Bible, please turn with me to Zechariah 4. Yes, I said Zechariah. It's towards the end of the Old Testament. I realize that this book is not taught very often. I checked the sermon archives just to make sure I wasn't doing a repeat sermon, and there wasn't a recent sermon on Zechariah. But I believe that God has something to say to you and to me today from this book. So, Zechariah, Chapter 4, beginning in verse 1:

> **And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep.** (*ESV, Zechariah 4:1)

So let me give you a bit of context here. Since we're sort of parachuting into the book of Zechariah, who is this angel speaking to, and what's going on? Well, Zechariah was a prophet to the nation of Israel after their time of exile in Babylon. So when Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem, they destroyed the temple, the house of the Lord that King Solomon had built. So the Israelites were in exile in Babylon, but eventually the Babylonian kingdom falls to the Persian Empire. There is a new regime, and under the new regime, the Israelites were given permission to go back to Jerusalem to

rebuild their temple, to rebuild their city. And so this begins to happen, and it's exciting. When the foundations of the temple were laid, there was music; there was singing; people were praising, it says, with a great shout! It's always exciting to start a new project, isn't it? Well, that's how it was for Israel. Everything had started. Everything was moving along until suddenly everything stopped. The nations around them had opposed the rebuilding, which brought the work to a grinding halt. For over 15 years, there was no progress on the rebuilding of the temple…over 15 years! That is a lot of time. All of that excitement and enthusiasm that was there in the beginning, was gone. The people of Israel were discouraged…disheartened. They had lost hope that the temple would ever be rebuilt, and after over 15 years of no progress, the people were ready to give up.

Maybe you know that feeling pretty well. You felt like the Lord was leading you to something new in your life, some kind of change, some kind of growth. Let's say some kind of rebuild, and the beginning went great. There was growth; there was movement; there was excitement. But, for whatever reason, over time it just ground to a halt, and there hasn't been any movement for years. It just sits there unfinished and incomplete, just like that temple.

Well, this is the environment where the prophet Zechariah did his ministry. The Lord sends Zechariah to speak to his people in the midst of disappointment, despair and discouragement. And at this point in the book—in the first three chapters—the Lord has given Zechariah four visions. And now he will give him a fifth vision, after rousing him. Look at verse 2 with me:

> **And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord."** (Vs. 2-5)

So Zechariah sees this vision, and there's a lot of elements to this vision. We have this golden lampstand with seven lamps and seven spouts. We have these two olive trees on either side. So try to imagine a menorah, which is a lampstand you might see around the holidays in Jewish homes, sitting on the window sill. So you have this lampstand. There are these seven candles coming out of this menorah. And how are these candles staying lit in the vision? Well, in the vision on the left side and on the right side of the lampstand, there are olive trees. These olive trees are producing oil that comes down these seven spouts, which helps keep the lampstand candles burning. In other words, the olive trees are providing the oil to keep the candles burning. Why is that significant? Well, back in the days of the tabernacle and the temple, the priests and the Levites were given instructions on how to keep the lampstands burning. They needed to go get the olive oil, pour it into the lampstand, so that it would keep burning. And when the oil would be close to running out, the priest would need to go get more oil and pour it in. In other words, it required human intervention. That's how it worked in the temple. In this vision, though, no human intervention is needed. Instead, there is a constant flow of oil from the olive trees to the lampstand. No middlemen

are required, like in the temple. Instead, there is this constant stream of oil from the olive trees to the lamp, which keeps it consistently lit. The oil keeps coming and it doesn't run out. So that's the vision. What does it mean? Look with me at verse 6:

> **Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel"** (Vs. 6a)

Well, really quick, so you don't get confused, we have two names in this chapter that start with the letter "Z". There's Zechariah, the prophet who's receiving this vision, and then the other Z name is Zerubbabel, who was the governor of Judah at the time. Now, normally, the nation of Israel had kings like King Saul, King David, and King Solomon. But since they were under the Persian Empire, they didn't formally have a king at this time. Instead, they were under a governor, and his name was Zerubbabel, and he was tasked with this rebuilding project of the temple. So think about it this way: God used Solomon to build the first temple. God is now using Zerubbabel to rebuild the second temple. It's his project. And God used Zechariah, and another prophet named Haggai to encourage Zerubbabel in the project. And let's face it. I think Zerubbabel probably could use some encouragement. I mean, it's been over 15 years since there was any progress on rebuilding this temple. The project started strong, but over the last 15 years, there was nothing. God had led them to this work, but seemingly now nothing is happening. I'm sure that, in many ways, time had defeated Governor Zerubbabel. So, God sent Zechariah to speak to Zerubbabel, to encourage him, to get him going. Let's look at verse 6 again:

> **Then he 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.**

The LORD speaks. Instead of interpreting the vision piece by piece, He jumps straight to the spiritual application. So how will this temple finally be rebuilt? Will the project get going because Governor Zerubbabel needs to pass new laws forcing people to do the work? Will the project get going again if he involves the military to ensure that the people rebuild? And we see in verse 6, "No". This rebuilding project will not be completed by **might**. It will not be completed by human **power**. Rather, it will happen by the **Spirit** of God. The vision of the oil and the lampstand starts to make more sense. Often in the Bible, oil represents the Holy Spirit. And so the thrust of this vision is that this temple will not be rebuilt by human effort, like when the priest would go and get more oil to put into the lamp when it ran out. Rather, it will be accomplished by the Spirit of God, with the constant flow of oil from the olive trees to the lamp. It won't be accomplished in human power. It will be accomplished by the power of God.

You know, it's taken me some time to learn this in ministry. Back when you sent our team to start churches in Poland, you know, we went out with a great plan. Essentially the plan was, "Let's try to speed up the timeline of planting new churches." So, instead of taking 20 years to plant a church, let's try to speed it up and do it faster. And to our American ears, this plan sounds amazing, right? We love efficiency. We love optimization. And I think the intentions of the plan were good. I mean, who wouldn't want to see more churches planted faster? That means more people reached for Christ. Who could argue with that? In our heads, it sounded good. But once we landed, once we

got there, once we were on the ground, in fact it was within the first five minutes of sitting in language school learning Polish, our timeline started to fall apart. You know, we had budgeted one year to learn the language, but in those first five minutes in Polish class, I realized, “Oh, this language was much, much tougher than we expected!” And other events happened as well, early on, that sent us back to the drawing board. So we would try to build an alternative plan, an alternative timeline, and then that would get blown up again. So, then we tried to build a new timeline, and so on and so forth. And it wasn't that our plans were bad. It wasn't that our timeline was bad. They weren't bad; they were good. It just took me time to understand that God wasn't beholden to my plans…that God wasn't under my timeline. ***The heart of man plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps*** (Proverbs 16:9). It took me time to get onto God's schedule and realize that His timing was perfect. So we started learning the language. We started to make friends and share the gospel with our Polish friends, and I started to realize there's a good reason that the Bible compares spiritual growth to fruit, because you can't microwave fruit. Fruit takes time to grow. We might want it to grow faster. We might want it to mature faster. We might want to speed it up. But you have to let fruit grow. As much as I want to, I can't control time. We plant; we water; but it's God who gives the growth. You know, when I think about being in ministry, the moments I regret are the moments I tried to make something happen in my own power, in my own might, and in my own strength. Maybe I was feeling impatient. Maybe I was feeling insecure. Maybe I felt like it had been a while since I had written a good newsletter to send back to you guys. And so I tried to make something happen, and more often than not, whatever I tried, it failed. And part of me knew that it was going to fail because I didn't have any peace about trying to make those things happen. But the moments I look back in amazement, are the moments in ministry when God showed up in a way that I didn't plan and that I didn't expect.

You know, earlier, not this year, but earlier last year, there was a moment where I felt like I needed to make something happen in terms of our financial support. So I got online. I started Googling things. I had all these tabs open, but I didn't have peace about it. I felt like I was just trying to do something in my own power. So one day, I just closed out all the tabs, and I said, "Okay, I'm just not going to do this." And the next day I got an email from someone I hadn't talked to in ten years, and they said they felt led by the Lord to give to us generously. The next day, I got an email from someone I'd never met who wanted to give to our ministry as well. And it was a reminder to me that God is in control, that He cares for me, that I don't have to make something happen in my own might and in my own strength, but that I should trust that the Spirit of God is at work, and that His oil does not run dry.

You know, maybe that change, or that growth, or that step of faith in your life that God has led you to, you know, maybe it's taking longer than you expected. It's not happening as quickly as you wanted it to, like the rebuilding of the temple. The temptation will be to try to take control of it. The temptation will be to try to manage it. But if the Lord is in it, the work of God won't come about by you seizing and grabbing and trying to take control. Rather, it will come about by you letting go and trusting that the Spirit of God will accomplish it. Now you might be thinking, "Yes, this sounds good, Clint. I agree with all this, but you don't understand my situation. You don't understand what I'm up against. I've been trying to trust the Lord for years in this one area of my

life, but it's not happening. I keep banging my head against the wall! The obstacles are real and insurmountable." Verse 7:

> **Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!**

Now there wasn't a physical mountain that Zerubbabel had to contend with. Maybe there was a pile of rubble somewhere, but this **great mountain** was more likely a metaphor for the opposition that they were facing. The great mountain was a metaphor for their discouragement and disbelief that the temple would ever be rebuilt. The LORD speaks to Zerubbabel and says that with the LORD, no mountain is too big, no obstacle is too much…that nothing is impossible with God. That mountain which seems giant, God says, **shall become a plain**, will be level. Jesus said something similar in the Gospels. He said *that if you have faith like a tiny mustard seed, he will say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.* (Matthew 17:20)

Let me ask you, "What is that mountain in your life, right now, that is blocking you from doing what the Lord is calling you to do?" You know it might be external. There might be people around you who are making it hard for you to walk by faith. It might be external, but many times that mountain is internal. It could be doubt. It could be guilt or shame from the past. It could be discouragement, feeling like you've been stuck in the same place and not moving at all. It could be disbelief that God will get you through it and, over time, that mountain has seemed to get bigger and bigger and bigger. And you think, "I just can't beat it. I can't do it. I've been trying for too long. I can't overcome it." And the LORD says, "You're right." To Zerubbabel He says, "That's right. You can't do it. You can't overcome it in your own might and in your strength". But through the LORD, by the power of His Spirit, the LORD looks at those mountains and says, "Those are nothing to Me. This is light work." These mountains might seem insurmountable to you, but the LORD can level these mountains in an instant by the power of His Spirit. The question is, "Do you believe Him? Do you trust in His power to get you through?"

Not only here does the LORD tell Zerubbabel that he will remove any obstacles, He gives him a glimpse into the future. He says that Zerubbabel will put the capstone on the finished temple, and the people will rejoice and be glad and say, "**Grace to it**…g**race to it.** The Lord bless it." God gives Zerubbabel a glimpse of the finish line, even though they're still at the start of his work. He goes on in verse 8:

> **Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.** (Vs. 8-9)

So, God used Zerubbabel to begin this project over 15 years ago, and God will use Zerubbabel to finish this project. How encouraging do you think that message was for Zerubbabel? He was down; he was discouraged. But God comes along and says, "That work I started with you, I am going to

finish it through you. Does that language sound familiar? Does that sound a bit like Philippians, chapter 1 verse 6 …*that we can be confident that God, who began a good work in you, will carry it on to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

You know, back when I was a college student, one year I worked construction, and my boss at the construction site, let's just say he wasn't a perfectionist. Sometimes I would show up to the job site, and he would be late, or he would show up a few hours later, if he was going to show up at all. But whenever he was there, whenever we were actually working, the phrase he used all the time when we were building was, "That's good enough." Even though I didn't think it looked so great, or there were some problems with it, he would say, "That's good enough." And then we would move on to the next project. He was saying that our work wasn't necessarily great, but it wasn't necessarily so bad either, that someone would know it. It was just good enough, so no one would complain.

I want you to know that when God looks at you, He never says, "That's good enough." He never says, "That's all I can do with you. Let's just move on to the next person." He doesn't look at you and say, "Oh, man, I'm so tired of dealing with you; that's good enough." That's not our God. He never writes you off. He never gives up on you. Maybe you've been going through five months of struggle; maybe you've been going through five years of struggle. Maybe you've been going through fifty years of struggle, and you might want to give up. You might be tired; you might be discouraged; you might be at the end of your rope. But God hasn't given up on you. He's not finished with you. He started it in you, and He will finish it in you. *He began a good work in you*, in salvation, and *He will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ*. Philippians 1:6 says, "Know that; believe that; be confident of that." God doesn't look at you and say, "That's good enough." He looks at you and says, "I have so much good work I want to do in you and through you." God tells Zerubbabel this to keep him going, and He tells us this to keep going through the struggles of this life. Verse 10:

> **For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.**
>
> **"These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range through the whole earth."**

We see here that there were some people mocking the rebuilding project. They were saying, "Look how little has been done. All you have is the foundation. It's nothing." But God says to them, "Don't listen to them. Don't despise the small things. Don't have contempt for small beginnings." Because the truth is, you have to start somewhere, and many times the beginnings are humble and small. You know, sometimes we get an idea and before we've ever done anything, we make it big in our head, and it's this big thing, and we immediately start thinking big. You know, when I've done that in ministry, usually whatever idea I have in that regard, doesn't work out. The Lord is gracious to keep me humble. And what I've realized over time is that God doesn't want me to fast forward through time and skip all of these steps and fast forward the process. No, God loves me and He wants to teach me things within the steps of the process. But the times in which I start small, the

times in which I don't think big, I get to see God do amazing things. He exceeds my expectations because I have no expectations.

I was reminded of this last summer. I felt this pull just to get out of the city, to get away for a couple of days, to spend some time with the Lord in prayer. And I was telling a friend about this, and he said, "Hey, you should invite people from the church. Maybe they would want to come too." And I thought a couple people might be interested, so I casually mentioned the idea during the sermon. I posted about it once, but I didn't push it because I was content if it was just me and the Lord. On the day I sent the message, five people signed up. A couple days later, five more people signed up. The next week, even more people joined. And when we eventually held the event a few days later, over 35 people came to turn off their phones and just spend time sitting at the feet of Jesus. It was amazing. And the beginnings of that event were small. I wasn't even thinking about other people coming, but the Lord was in it. The Lord was moving these 35 people in the same way. It was His Spirit at work. He blessed it, and it was an amazing time. You know, one of my takeaways from that event seems obvious, but I concluded that spiritual people want to do spiritual things. You know, of course there's a place on the church calendar for barbecues and movie nights and other get-togethers. There's a place for that. But as believers, our hearts long to spend time with our Savior, to hear His voice and to seek His will.

You know, as I look around the room, I believe that all of you want to have a spiritual year. I don't believe that all of you want to try to do things in your own power, in your own might in 2025. I honestly believe that you want to see God at work in your life in the next 12 months. So where do you start? Well, the best place to start is the beginning…to start small. Jesus said, "*Whoever is faithful with a little will be faithful with much.*" (Luke 16:10) What has the Holy Spirit put on your hearts these days? You know, in my experience, in my journey with Christ, typically the Holy Spirit doesn't put 100 things on my heart at once. Usually it's just one thing at a time. So a couple of days ago, I was getting my hair cut, having a nice conversation with the man cutting my hair, and I felt led to do just one thing, invite him to church this weekend. “Howard, if you're here somewhere, welcome.”

You know, your calendar of things to do this year might already be full, but God's plan for you is simple. *His yoke is easy, His burden is light.* (Matthew 11:30) What does the Holy Spirit put on your heart these days? What is God calling you to trust Him with? Perhaps it's something regarding your marriage or your children. Maybe it's something related to your finances or your health. Maybe there's an addiction or destructive behavior that God wants you to bring to light. Maybe it's letting go of guilt and shame from the past. Maybe it's time to forgive that person who hurt you, or maybe it's time to seek forgiveness from the person that you hurt. Maybe it's time to step out on faith and trust the Lord by serving. Maybe it's something else, and maybe right now, this feels overwhelming, and you don't know where to start, and you don't know how to start. Well, you start by starting, no matter how small it seems, because God would never call you to do something that He hasn't given you the resources to accomplish. Just start.

The end of verse 10 talked about the **seven eyes of the LORD roaming the earth**. Basically, the point is that God is watching over Zerubbabel. God is aware of what's happening in the rebuild, and the same is true for you. Whatever happens this year, God knows it, and He is watching over you. He will make your path straight, just like the **plumb line** of the temple that's mentioned here in verse 10. Look with me at the last verses. Verse 11:

> **Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" And a second time I answered and said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?" He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth."** (Vs. 11-14)

So, earlier, the angel had skipped the interpretation of the vision. He jumped straight to the spiritual application. But Zechariah says, "Hey, hold on. Can I get some more details about what I saw?" And he asked about the olive trees. "**What were these two olive trees?**" And the angel doesn't answer. He says, "Okay, **what are those two branches on the olive trees**?" And the angel tells him that they represent God's **two anointed ones**. Well, we aren't told who the **two anointed ones** are explicitly. It could be Zerubbabel and the high priest, Joshua. It could be the prophets, Zechariah and Haggai at the time. We aren't told here, and the Lord was as clear as He wanted to be. But here is what we do know. We do see Zerubbabel again in the New Testament, in the Gospels, in the genealogies of Jesus Christ. Through Zerubbabel and the rest of the Davidic line, God brought about His Son, the King of kings, the Messiah. And what does Messiah mean? It means the "oily" one, the anointed one, the cornerstone upon whom we build our lives.

And as Bryan preached last weekend, after Jesus' death and resurrection, He sent us the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, who leads and guides us. 1 John 2 says that we have been anointed by Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. To use the imagery of Zechariah chapter 4, the oil is now within us. The oil lights our lamp. Or to say it another way, the Holy Spirit enables us to shine brightly for Jesus in a dark world.

You know, I said at the beginning of this sermon, that this was not a sermon about how you need to give God more time this year, and here's why. Because in this chapter, with this unusual vision of olive trees, of golden lampstands with the bowl on top, seven lamps with seven spouts—all of these unusual images for us today—I don't think the message is for you to try to do more. In fact, verse 6, which we read, speaks against that, speaks against trying to do more in our own power and strength. I think the message is to trust that the Spirit of God is at work in your life, that He is the true source of power and change, no matter how long it takes.

Let me encourage you to think about it this way or *re-think* about it this way. I believe that you have all the time you need this year to do what the Spirit of God has called you to do this year. It doesn't matter if you work 80 hours a week or if you're jobless. It doesn't matter if you're an empty nester or a young family with kids making a mess all over the house. It doesn't matter if you're

single or married. It doesn't matter if you're 16 years old or you're 85 years old. It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian for one week or you've been a Christian for 50 years. It doesn't matter if last year was a disaster, or last year was the best year of your life. You have all the time you need this year to do what the Spirit of God wants you to do.

Now, having said that, it might not happen how you expect it to. It might not happen how you want it to. It might not happen in your timeline. I mean, why did it take over almost 20 years to rebuild this temple? I don't know but, spoiler alert, they got it done. The temple was indeed rebuilt under Zerubbabel's leadership. So when we begin, let us start small. Maybe it's a new step of faith that the Lord is calling you to, or maybe the Spirit wants to finish that work he began a long, long time ago that's been sitting there unfinished and incomplete, just like the temple. Whatever it is, don't give up. Keep the faith. Our God can move mountains. His oil does not run dry. He started the work in you, and He will finish it in you. Amen! Let me pray for us.

> *God, we thank You that You are with us. We thank You that Your oil does not run dry. May we not trust in our own power and our own might this year, but may we trust in Your power and Your strength. It's in the name of Jesus that we pray, Amen.*

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