
PROPHETIC FOUNDATIONS FOR MINISTRY BREAKTHROUGH

Zechariah 4:1-10 and Mark 4:31-32

by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

There is, of course, a world of difference between natural wisdom and spiritual truth. They relate to entirely different dimensions of reality, but sometimes, folk knowledge and popular truisms echo spiritual principles—and make scriptural truth a bit easier for us to remember. For instance, we all know the saying, “*Great gifts come in small packages.*” The size of a box doesn’t correlate with the gift’s value; diamond earrings, an iPod, or the keys to a new car DO NOT come in large containers.

Another example we’re all familiar with is that “*keys are not the same size as the doors they unlock!*” And the keys only work when slipped into the lock. Using them to scrape and scratch at the wood, or holding them like a set of brass knuckles while pounding our fist (or shoulder) against the door won’t accomplish much. When used correctly, though, very small keys can open doors of unlimited size. Many solutions in daily life are puny compared to the problems they answer.

Exactly the same is true, and even more so, with issues in the spiritual dimension: things that do not catch the natural eye, or stand out by virtue of their size, usually hold the key to spiritual breakthrough. They are “*things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man.*”¹ Even for spiritual leaders, it takes a practiced eye to keep looking for

¹ 1 Corinthians 2:9a

answers among the small things that a “*natural man*” discards or dismisses as irrelevant or insignificant.²

As sincere servants who care deeply about the Kingdom, and who want our churches to flourish, we can easily become so desperate for answers and breakthroughs in our congregations that we forget to focus on invisible, weak-seeming, or naturally foolish solutions. Forgetting the keys Jesus gave us, we try to address what we face, just like the world does. We tend to look for big answers for big results...at least I often do!

SMALL IS BIG

But Jesus began His instruction about the Kingdom of God with a parable of the seed falling on different types of soil.³ “How will you understand all the parables,” *Jesus* asked, “if you do not understand this one?” Why was He so concerned that His disciples grasp the truth of this parable? Jesus was aware that spiritual dominion almost always begins with tiny seed.

In another of Jesus’ better-known parables, He uses a mustard seed as an analogy for *spirituals* (words/truth originating in the unseen dimension) that ultimately transform and have dominion over the natural arena of life.⁴ Like seeds that will eventually sprout into full-grown plants or trees, *spirituals* usually enter our world as faintly whispered promises; still and small promptings that must be *discerned* (because they are so softly articulated) and *embraced* BEFORE they loom large enough to capture other people’s notice.⁵

Actually, one of the ways to measure spiritual maturity is how *eager* and *experienced* someone is in choosing to stay focused on *spirituals* when they are too faint or too small to be attention-grabbers themselves. When circumstances seem to declare one thing, and *spirituals* speak another—which statement do we believe?

² 1 Corinthians 2:14-15

³ See Matthew 13

⁴ Matthew 13: 31-32 and Mark 4:31-32

⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:14-15

GETTING A TESTIMONY

This is what it means to “*stand in faith*” on one of God’s promises: despite how things appear in the natural arena, we choose to believe the seemingly inconsequential, invisible word of the Lord that bespeaks a different reality.

“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” ~Hebrews 11:13

The process for getting a testimony begins when we receive a word, promise or prompting (*a spiritual*) from God. This is God’s way of testifying to us about all He is going to do. That word is all the evidence we need to believe that things will happen exactly as He says, just as the very worlds themselves were formed by His word.⁶

This is the process by which we end up with our own testimony. We can testify to others about what God did—but only after we have chosen to believe His initial testimony to us.

Following the same pattern whereby the physical dimension originated from the spiritual realm, prophetic promptings from God’s word are so powerful for solutions to our personal and congregational dilemmas. *Spirituals* shape, create and change realities in the natural arena—and in the spiritual arena—because they superimpose God’s will/way on ways that are not His. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “*Your Kingdom come; Your will be done...*”⁷

By all means, continue to pray and intercede for God’s rulership to exercise dominion over the circumstances you face. But remember, the point of prayer is to ask for God’s will to be done. But not in a *fatalistic* “*do-whatever-You’re-going-to-do*” surrender, as though your requests fall on deaf ears unless you’ve figured out exactly what He was going to do anyway. Rather, prayer invades the natural arena by introducing God’s over-riding power coming like a mighty river to sweep aside supposed impossibilities. He can change anything! And He does, as His people pray.

⁶ Hebrews 11:1-3

⁷ Matthew 6:10

AN EARLIER ANSWER

In a dry land, when we need breakthrough, when we need a rush of living water to flow majestically and mightily around us and before us, realize that He might have *anticipated* our need before we ask.⁸ There might already be a stream nearby. Of course, it won't look very majestic. It will barely be a trickle of living water coming from a small verse in the Bible. As you are reading God's word and a verse or passage catches your eye and stirs something inside of you, stop and take a closer look for some clue hinting at His future for you.

Scripture quickened to your heart can be the beginning—the spring water—the early source-water of a mighty river. Get in the current. Believe that His words to you will create a way into your future. In that river, God's will is already being done; if you and I get in it and trust it to carry us along, we'll find ourselves in a great new place.

We could also consider a biblical example of how this process works, looking at how Zerubbabel and the exiles had grown discouraged in rebuilding the *temple*. What began with inspirational fervor had dragged on for too many years, with incomplete results. They faced opposition from (spiritual) rulers; they had been accused, threatened and marginalized. Things were at a dead standstill.

What was God's solution? Instead of calling them to a prayer meeting to intercede against the opposing forces, He sent them two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. According to Scripture, their prophetic words alone, "supported" the rebuilding in the face of all the opposition, and their prophecies caused the rebuilding to be "*successful*."⁹ God reminded Zerubbabel that his efforts, strength and power would not be able to complete the task. Instead, the final capstone would be put in place through God's grace and Spirit.¹⁰

And by the way, remember that the Spirit of God got excited when Zerubbabel picked up the small string, the plumb line. It didn't look like a completed temple, and the string was too weak to lift

⁸ Matthew 6:8

⁹ Ezra 5:2; 6:14

¹⁰ Zechariah 4:6-7

rubble, but it was a prophetic promise in which Zerubbabel put his trust. The string was the tiny seed for Zerubbabel.

IT STARTS WITH GOD

Notice, as well, that truly spiritual activity originates with the Lord, not us. Jesus said and did whatever He first observed the Father doing and saying.¹¹ He made quite a point out of the fact that His teaching wasn't His, but His Father's.¹² Ministry is an unequal partnership; the Lord prompts us with *spirituals*, then we believe and speak/do them. Like all 'keys of the Kingdom,' (indeed like Messiah Himself) they enter into the natural world inconspicuously.

But when met with faith ("*Be it done unto me according to Thy will...*"), and when given time to mature, *spirituals* are powerful seeds of change in the world around us. *Spirituals* are tiny, easily disregarded opportunities for leaders to believe that we serve a risen Savior who's in the world today!

¹¹ John 5:19

¹² John 7:16