

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT & WHAT DOES HE WANT TO DO? ZECHARIAH 4:1-6

Time for a little informal poll.... What's your favorite kind of movie? Western? Historical drama? Romantic comedy? Musical? Science fiction? Fantasy? Sports story? Animated kids' movies? Super heroes? Hallmark Christmas movies? I admit I love to watch suspense movies. Not horror, just "keep you on the edge of your seat" suspense. Some suspense thrillers belong to the science fiction genre of films. I can't remember ever watching the old classic "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," but I know the plot. Aliens take over the bodies of unsuspecting people while they sleep and turn them into emotionless, robot-like people. I did see the movie "Alien" and several of its sequels which was about these frightfully powerful and really ugly creatures that seek out human bodies as a way of reproducing their own species. In fact, there's this whole genre of science fiction films that focus on some outside, powerful creature invading the human body or mind resulting in control, death, or both. Come to think of it, I wonder if that's one reason why some people in our culture resist the idea of "letting Jesus come into your heart." Could it be when we use that image it awakens a kind of fear in some people that's been exploited by the entertainment industry: the fear of being taken over by an outside, powerful force whose intent is hostile and destructive?

Welcome to a brand new message series today! I'm calling it "Invasion From Above: Why the Holy Spirit Matters." The Bible isn't reluctant to compare the Holy Spirit's coming into your life and mine as a friendly, gentle invasion. Granted, it's not from outer space, but it's definitely from outside of us. And this invasion will not destroy your life, to be sure, but it will, by all means, be life-changing. Now our text today is from the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah. He lived about 500 years before Jesus. The people of Israel had returned to their own land after having spent 70 years exiled in Babylon. A man by the name of Zerubbabel had been appointed the governor over these returning exiles. Under his leadership, the enormous, challenging tasks of rebuilding the country, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple were started.

Let's read our text and the one verse I want to underline today. We just read part of a vision God gave Zechariah and central to that vision was the person of the Holy Spirit. Zechariah had an important message from God for Zerubbabel. It's the last part of verse six that I want us to reflect on today. "It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies." (Zech. 4:6 NLT) In other words, when God gives us a task to do – whether it was about 500 years before Jesus was born or whether it's April of 2019 – God gives us the power to accomplish that task through the Holy Spirit. I'm sure that message was a great encouragement to Zerubbabel, and it should be for us as well. Here's three facts about the Holy Spirit and His coming – this spiritual invasion from above and outside of us – that we need to know about. First...

THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO INDWELL ME.

Unlike those evil, dastardly aliens in all the movies we've watched, the Holy Spirit is courteous and gentle. He never invades where He's not first invited. Nor does the invasion of your life by the Holy Spirit result in you becoming some kind of programmed, robot-like creature. Instead, when the Holy Spirit invades your life, He gradually transforms you into a person who is full of God's life and power. The coming of the Holy Spirit – this gentle invasion from above – is nothing less than a mighty infusion of the very life and power of God Himself into a person's heart, mind, and life.

So when does this invasion take place? How does the Holy Spirit come into your life and mine spiritually? It doesn't happen by attending church services although that might lead to it. It doesn't happen when you're baptized. It doesn't happen by accident, without your consent, or without your conscious involvement. The Holy Spirit indwells you the moment you put your trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It happens at the moment you surrender your life to Jesus and become His follower. At that precise moment, the Holy Spirit invades you permanently and forever. But that initial invasion is only the beginning of what God wants to do in us. God doesn't send His Holy Spirit into your life and then just decide to leave you well enough alone. Every follower of Jesus is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but not every follower is controlled by Him. How can that be? Well, we still fear giving up control and losing our independence to an outside force even when it's God Himself. Being indwelt and being controlled by the Holy Spirit are not the same spiritual reality. Much more on that in our series.

What does God want to accomplish through this friendly, gentle, loving invasion? Oddly enough, here is where there might be a similarity between God and those nightmarish aliens found in the movies. God most definitely wants to be in control of your life and mine. God also desires your full, unconditional surrender to the Holy Spirit's invasion. But that's where the similarity ends. God wants to transform you, not destroy you. God wants to give you His life, not rob you of meaningful life. God wants you to discover true self-fulfillment, not dominate you or destroy whatever makes you unique. God wants to set you free, not enslave you. While His invasion is gradual, God's ultimate desire and intention is very clear. Ultimately, He wants to have a relationship with you based on His love and grace.

A man named Derek Summer tells how he felt one recent summer when a blue swift made a nest in a large urn that sits outside the front door of his house. In that nest is his urn, she laid six eggs. This beautiful, shy creature had made her home (almost) in his house. He felt privileged and honored by her presence, even if his cat viewed the matter entirely differently. Some people take photographs of distinguished guests who visit their homes. They might even have a "Visitor's Book" they ask these folk to sign. But none of that compares to having the Holy Spirit permanently dwell in our hearts. If we feel privileged when a bird nests by our door, or when some well-known person stays at our home, how much more privileged should we feel knowing that God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in me? Our hearts should well up with gratitude at the mere thought of it. It's staggering. The Holy Spirit wants to indwell me. Second ...

THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO EMPOWER ME.

Who is the Holy Spirit? If we took the time today look up a lot of Bible verses, we'd discover these key facts about Him. The Holy Spirit is a Person – not a force or an “it.” He is God. He is a member of what Christians call the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He is a being of immense, unfathomable power. The very first reference to the Holy Spirit is in Genesis 1 at the dawn of creation. The Holy Spirit was and is the creative power of God. Throughout the Old Testament we find Him filling the lives of chosen leaders with God's power to lead and to serve God's people. Then, in the New Testament, after Jesus was severely tempted by the devil, it says Jesus “returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.” (Lk. 4:14 NIV) After Jesus rose from the dead, He instructed His followers to remain in the city of Jerusalem. Why? “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere.” (Acts 1:8 NLT) That happened on what Christians now call the Day of Pentecost. You can read all about it Acts 2. And from that day nearly 2,000 years ago right up to the present moment, the Holy Spirit has been powerfully energizing and empowering God's people both for ministry and to witness to Jesus before a dark and dying world.

Zerubbabel, the governor of Israel after God's people had returned from years in exile in Babylon, and the people of Israel needed fresh power. They were facing formidable obstacles. Rebuild the country. Rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Rebuild the temple. The people themselves had become economically affluent, but their attitude toward God was apathetic. The non-Jews living in the area were skeptical and suspicious of Zerubbabel's efforts which just added to an overall challenging and discouraging environment. Zechariah's message for Zerubbabel was both succinct and powerful. “This is what the LORD says to Zerubbabel: ‘It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.” (Zech. 4:6 NLT) Zerubbabel was a gifted leader. He was surrounded by capable, intelligent, dedicated people. But that wasn't enough to get the job done. The one and only necessary factor was the Holy Spirit.

The same is true today. When God wants to get something done in this world, in this community, in this church, or in your life and mine, it only ever happens because the Holy Spirit shows up. That doesn't negate the need for smart people, gifted people, or godly people. It's just simply the fact, however, that only when the Holy Spirit is working in and through those people, do great things begin to happen. It's not so much the people as it is the Holy Spirit. So we need to welcome any and every fresh, new invasion from above. Ultimately, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is the key. “It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.”

It's very likely that you are facing some big challenge in your life at present. If you're not, wait a day or two and a challenge is likely to find you! Maybe your marriage is under stress. Perhaps a relationship with one of your children is broken. It might be your job is dumping tremendous stress into your life right now for some reason. A serious health issue might be looming over your life – either for yourself or for someone

you love dearly. Perhaps you're facing a big financial challenge. Or, it could be a bad habit, a sinful pattern of behavior, or an addiction that's got the best of you right now. We all need to hear and apply Zechariah's message to our lives today. The answer isn't the latest self-help scheme. The answer isn't learning how to think more positively about the challenge. The answer isn't in discovering some hidden ability or talent you never knew you had before. The answer is the Holy Spirit. How many of us here today could use – for some great challenge we're facing – a fresh, new invasion of the Holy Spirit's power and presence into our lives? My friend, "It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies." (Zech. 4:6 NLT)

The fastest land animal on the planet? The cheetah, of course. It survives on the African plains by running down its prey. The big cat can sprint 70 miles per hour. But, did you know that it can reach and sustain that pace for only a brief period of time? Within the long, sleek body of the cheetah is a disproportionately small heart which causes it to tire quickly. In fact, unless the cheetah gets its prey in its first burst of speed, it usually has to give up the chase. You and I can have a cheetah approach to life and living. We can speed into life's challenges with great energy and effort. But, frankly, we lack the heart and the spiritual resources for a sustained effort. That's why so often we fizzle before we finish. Sometimes we think the answer to everything is to start faster and run harder, but maybe what we need is not more speed, but more staying power. Endurance. We need the stamina that comes from having a bigger heart spiritually speaking. And that bigger heart is given to us by God and then filled by His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to indwell me. The Holy Spirit wants to empower me. Here's a third fact about the Holy Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO ENCOURAGE ME.

Zerubbabel needed the Holy Spirit's encouragement. There was a lot to be discouraged about. The rebuilding of the temple was minimal. The Jewish exiles had returned to Jerusalem 14 years earlier and only the foundation of the new walls for the temple had been laid in all that time. God's people were distracted. They were focused on building their own homes and getting ahead economically. Building the Lord's house – the temple – wasn't a big priority, to say the least. I appreciate what God said to him a few verses beyond what we read today, "Zerubbabel is the one who laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will complete it.... Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin." (Zech. 4:10-11 NLT) By the way, the temple did get rebuilt and it stood for the next 500+ years.

Encouragement is so important in the life of this church or any church. People we love and care about in this place face tremendous personal obstacles. Or, sometimes our best efforts as a congregation appear to achieve only very meager results. Or, sometimes people just come in each and every Sunday feeling defeated by life's challenges. May I encourage you as your pastor and friend today to make it an intentional point to encourage one another as much as possible. Encourage your leaders. Encourage the staff. Encourage people wherever they're serving faithfully.

Encourage people who look and act discouraged because of whatever they're dealing with today. Take a moment and pray with or for someone. Put your arm around someone and speak a word of encouragement into his or her life. Let the Holy Spirit work in and through you. Let Him invade others by first invading you.

On a personal level, we all need fresh, new invasions from above on a regular basis. Life with all of its challenges can easily discourage any of us. Like Zerubbabel, it's easy to focus on the obstacles we face in life and get paralyzed by feelings of fear. Sometimes our personal efforts seem so small, so insignificant, and so irrelevant. Can you hear the Lord whispering into your heart today saying, "Do not despise your small efforts"? The Holy Spirit certainly doesn't. There's a little poem I came across years ago that speaks well to this whole issue of the value of little things and small efforts when we place them in God's hands and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us.

"Master, where shall I work today?" And my love flowed warm and free! And He pointed out a tiny plot, And He said, "Tend that for Me."

But I answered quickly, "Oh, no. Not there – not anyone could see. No matter how well my task was done; Not that – that LITTLE place for me."

And His voice when He spoke, was not stern, but kind. But He answered me tenderly, "Friend, search that heart of thine."

Are you working for you, for them, or for Me? Nazareth was just a little place, And so was Calvary." (Meade MacGuire)

How many of you have learned that this old world we live in can be a discouraging place? How we need the encouragement only the Holy Spirit can provide on a personal and daily basis. When we get focused on ourselves, the devil is very good at pointing out and reminding us of our inadequacies, our sinfulness, our seeming irrelevancy, and our sheer littleness. All the more reason to be in God's Word often and regularly, because God uses it to encourage us. What we find there is that God actually prefers to use insignificant people, weak people, and imperfect people to do His will and get His job done in this world. For example, consider this passage in God's Word: "Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of 'the brightest and the best' among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies'? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God." (1 Cor. 1:26-29 MSG) The Holy Spirit wants to indwell me, empower me, and encourage me.

Back in 1985 there was a disastrous earthquake in Mexico City. Hearing all about it, a little boy started going door to door in Los Angeles selling picture postcards for 25 cents each. He told everyone he was going to give the profits for earthquake relief. One man bought some of his postcards and then asked the boy how much he hoped to raise.

The boy answered quickly and firmly, "One million dollars." The man smiled down at him and asked, "Do you mean to tell me you're trying to raise a million dollars to help those earthquake victims all by yourself?" "Oh, no, sir," the boy replied, "My little brother is helping me!" Well, when Jesus, the Son of God, comes into your life and mine at that moment when we put our faith in Him, along with Him comes God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. That's when the opportunity to live our lives full of God's presence and power every day begins. It's then we can become and do what we'd never be able to do in our own strength. The Holy Spirit wants to indwell you, empower you, and encourage you. Every day. All day. Are you ready and willing to be invaded – that gentle, loving, friendly invasion from above?