

How Will St Silas Grow?

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[0 : 00] I don't know if you saw the news this week as BHS, the blighted department store, some of the representatives involved in its downfall appeared before a parliamentary committee and it was extraordinary.

Claims of death threats, of previous owners having their hands in the till, several claims denied. But it's the latest high street store to disappear and there may be some that you miss.

If you rack your brains, some people fondly remember Woolworths, Comet, Blockbuster, MFI, there are many others.

Lots of them are missed because at one time they were very useful to us, but we're in a new age now. Retail has moved on, online shopping, greater competition and their places in the market kind of shrunk or disappeared and they've ultimately, they've failed as time has gone on.

I wonder as well when you think about failure whether you've ever personally experienced throwing yourself into a project with everything you've got and it failed. The feeling of disappointment in that.

[1 : 14] Lots of secular people today would think that's also the story of the church. The church is a bit like British home stores. It had its time, but we've kind of moved on now and they see it disappearing from the high street as over time church buildings that were once used as places of worship are sold off and used in different ways.

They think it's running out of steam, the church. And within the church in Scotland, there are people who would agree with that. People who've stopped trying.

They're still coming, but they've given up really on the church having a future. Or there are plenty of people who would think the church has a future, but in order to survive we have to change radically.

So we have to change our message so that it's more acceptable. We have to make ourselves more useful in society. We have to be more popular to keep going.

Now at St. Silas, we passionately believe that Jesus Christ offers true life. The only way to have life in its fullness is to know God through Jesus Christ and he offers that to everybody.

[2 : 26] And God tells us in the Bible that the biggest thing that he is doing in the world today is building his church all over the world. He is saving people to know him and gathering them into the family of believers as the church.

And the only reason the end of the world hasn't come is so that more people can join the church. That's what God is doing in the world. So we want to grow ourselves. We want to grow to maturity as Christians, knowing God better and living for him more wholeheartedly.

And we long to grow numerically at St. Silas as more people hear of Jesus, turn to him in faith and join our church family. But as we look around and think, how does the Christian message connect with the people I spend time with and the people I see on the streets today?

I wonder if you ever start thinking, this isn't really going to work. Maybe the church is a bit like British home stores after all.

And we might feel there are mountains of opposition in our path. There's the mountain of secularism. Secularism that says, be quiet. We don't mind if you're a Christian, but be quiet about it.

[3 : 40] So when it comes to schools, schools where perhaps historically, if it wasn't for the Christian faith, there wouldn't be schools in Glasgow. But now when it comes to us saying, could we come into school and talk about the Christian faith?

Some people who were heads of schools or who were on school councils would think, well, we can't have Christians come and do that. Because if we did that, we'd have to have every single person who believes anything come.

Because all views are kind of equally valid today. There's the mountain of materialism standing in our way of growth. That is that people live for what they can see around them.

And you do meet people, don't you, who are angry about the Christian faith and it provokes a very negative response. But in my experience, more often in Glasgow, we meet people who are just apathetic.

They don't care about what Christianity offers. Because life seems to work for them. They've got a nice house. And they're planning the next holiday.

[4 : 42] They go shopping on a Sunday morning. And they don't think they need God. In lots of parts of Glasgow today, there's the mountain of brokenness. People's lives are very messy and very difficult.

And it's difficult to get God on the agenda in that. When people feel so consumed by other problems. In other parts of Glasgow, there's the mountain of Islam standing in our way.

Another mountain that we have to overcome to grow is the state of the church today. Lots of churches in Glasgow have abandoned God's word as their authority.

They deny the fundamental truths of the Christian faith about who Jesus is. That he came to die to save us from our sins. That he rose again to rule and he's in charge.

They replace the gospel of salvation, which Christians have believed for 2,000 years, with a gospel of inclusion. Which says, it doesn't really matter what you believe.

[5 : 46] You're welcome. And all of that can be very discouraging. So what does God say? Well, I hope that this morning's passage, Zechariah 4, will be really significant for us as a church here at St Silas.

You see, Zechariah was written for discouraged Christians. The original audience of the book were living in 520 BC, so about 500 years before Jesus was born.

And they were really discouraged. Just like us, they'd been given a task to do for God. For us, our task today is to build the church with everything we've got.

For them, they'd been given a task by God to build a physical temple. Because it was before Jesus came. And that was how people came to worship God, was go to the temple. And they had to use all the resources they had to build that temple.

And they'd stopped building it. And you can see that they felt that one of the reasons it wasn't worth even trying was that there were mountains in their way.

[6 : 50] So if you look at verse 7, that gets challenged by Zechariah. Verse 7, what are you, almighty mountain? And God assures them that if they get on with obeying God, God will achieve his purposes.

Look at the references to building in verse 7. Then he, that's their leader at the time, will bring out the capstone to shouts of, God bless it, God bless it. Verse 9, the hands of Zerubbabel, that was their leader.

His hands have laid the foundation of this temple. His hands will also complete it. In verse 10, it says men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

God is assuring them, I will accomplish my purposes. They will succeed in building this temple. And God assures us today, he assures us that he will build his church.

Jesus promised that. So how will he do that? How can we at St. Silas be part of that? The big question that our passage this morning answers is, how is our church going to grow?

[8 : 03] And we get three answers from the Lord. The first answer is the growth of God's church is achieved by his spirit. Zechariah has a vision. Have a look with me at verse 2.

The angel asked me, what do you see? I answered, I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights.

Also, there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left. It's a strange picture. We've got a picture of it on our screen to help us.

The lampstand, though, was symbolic of God's people in the Old Testament. So it's just a picture of God's people. And the trees are providing oil for the lamps.

So they're keeping the lamp alive. So it's a picture of provision and life for God's people. So what's going to give life to God's people? Well, the first answer comes in verse 6.

[9 : 03] If you have a look at verse 6. So he said to me, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord Almighty.

God's not saying that he won't use their efforts. He's described, as we've already read, this leader, Zerubbabel, and how God will work through him. Before Zerubbabel, he says in verse 6, before Zerubbabel, you will become level ground to the mountains.

And God uses our efforts today. He works through us. It's one of the extraordinary privileges of being a Christian, that God works through us. As we speak God's word to each other and to the people around us.

But ultimately, it is God who works by his spirit. I don't know what you think about that, but I think that is a great encouragement. If it was down to us to sort out the church and grow the church, to reach, grow, and send, to make disciples, we'd be heading for extinction.

We may as well just give up. But because of God's spirit, we can know that God will keep his promises and build his church. But this reassurance from God is also a challenge for us, because so often we put our trust in other things that we think that's what will make us grow.

[10 : 26] If only we could have that. Or things that we have, and we get terrified of losing them. If we lost that, we'd be finished. We might put our trust in our buildings and think, now that we've got a really good church hall, we'll grow.

It's great to have a good church hall, but we put our trust in it. We might put our trust in our history, thinking we've been so well established in the West End of Glasgow for a long time.

That's what's key to us growing. Or in our gifts, thinking we've got some really charismatic people, and we've got some really skilled people and talented people, and that's what's going to draw people in.

Maybe we put our trust in being Anglican, part of a global family of churches. We might put our trust in our advertising, in our website.

We might put our trust in our music, in our tech. We might think, now that we've got a better sound desk, the crowds are going to come in. If we just get those better speakers that we like, that's what's going to make our church grow.

[11 : 33] But God says, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit. He builds his church.

And it's really important for us to remember that when the church grows, so that he gets the glory. And we don't attribute it to anything else. And as we look around at St. Silas, God is clearly at work here.

He's been at work for a long time at St. Silas. He's brought people to faith in Jesus. And that's a miracle that God has done that. And he's helping us to grow. So trusting in his strength, let's be people who continue to step out in faith for him.

Attempt great things for God, and expect great things from God. I don't know, but maybe there's a group of people in Glasgow that you feel burdened by.

Maybe colleagues who don't know God. Maybe a people group within our communities. And you'd love to reach them for Christ, but it just seems impossible. It's such a big task, you don't know where you would start.

[12 : 40] Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit. And I wonder whether verse 6 is a great verse to memorize when you have a new rector, when you get a new minister.

Because it's easy to think, well, I wonder what Martin will do that's different. I wonder what new program he will bring in that will make the church grow. What will be, maybe he knows a new technique.

Maybe there's a silver bullet that the new minister knows that will be the key to growth. And we just need to get going with that. But real church growth doesn't come by a technique or a program.

It just comes by the Spirit of God breathing new life into people and changing hearts to make us more like Jesus Christ. So as well as stepping out in faith, trusting God to be at work, let's also be people who are encouraged by verse 6 to pray.

Ask the Lord to bring us growth because we know otherwise we're just wasting our time. That's why we've started our monthly central prayer meeting here, the first Wednesday of every month, so that we can gather to pray.

[13 : 54] It's an enormous encouragement to me and hopefully to you as well that there is that committed group of people who gather every Wednesday morning to pray at St. Silas, asking God faithfully to be at work.

Perhaps you could get together with friends from St. Silas and pray, pray for each other, pray for St. Silas, for God to be at work here and to grow his church. Pray for that on your own.

I don't know whether you've come across the phone app Prayer Mate. This is what I use every day to pray. It's a great way. It's a free app to download and it just gets you praying and gets you praying for different things as you set it up.

For God says, not by might nor by power but by my spirit. And as well as praying, let's also be encouraged to unleash the word of God as a church as we look at verse 6.

You see, God tells us in Ephesians chapter 6 that the sword of the spirit is the word of God. It's the Bible. In Colossians 3, the mark of being filled with the spirit is that the word of Christ dwells in you richly.

[15 : 05] Again, picking up that image of the spirit using the word of God as the sword. In Hebrews 4, it says the word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. We unleash the word. So, church growth isn't about techniques and programs, but inevitably, any organization, once it gets to a certain size, has programs.

And the ones that will bring growth to us at St. Silas are the ones in which we're depending on the word of God. Programs through which we enable the spirit of God to be at work as we unleash the word of God prayerfully, where we open the Bible with people.

So, none of this is going to be easy, but if we can look to multiply the ways that we are praying and speaking and hearing God's word depending on him, it's him that brings growth.

That's our first point. Secondly, the growth of God's church often starts small. Have a look with me at verse 10. The Lord says through Zechariah, Who dares despise the day of small things?

[16 : 24] Then he mentions the seven eyes of the Lord that will rejoice and if you've been here in the last few weeks, you'll remember the seven eyes are a way of God describing the Holy Spirit, God's spirit. That he will rejoice as his people accomplish his purposes.

God's people needed to hear that. It was the day of small things in Israel. They'd gone back to the land. It didn't seem worthwhile anymore living for God and they were giving up.

And the same is very true for us in Glasgow. We feel that this is the day of small things. Don't you feel that? I feel that. But that's okay because that's almost always how God has been at work throughout the history of the church.

He starts small. Jesus told us it would be like that. He said this is what the kingdom of heaven is like and he chose the smallest seed any of them knew, the mustard seed. He said it's like a mustard seed and it grows to be the biggest tree, the mustard tree.

God starts small. A man on a cross with eleven frightened disciples in a despised backwater of the Roman Empire. you and I wouldn't have started there.

[17 : 44] A monk on his own nails ninety-five complaints to a church door in a remote town in Germany and God uses it to wake Europe up to the truth about him in the Bible.

A manufacturing apprentice in this city applies to go on the mission field to go abroad to tell people about Jesus and they turn him down different organizations because he's not well educated enough.

So he stays in Glasgow and he founds the Glasgow City Mission and the worldwide network of city missions begins. Next summer we'll have Peter Adam come to preach here at St Silas.

He's a guy I've met through conferences and I've invited him to come because he's over in the UK from Australia Australian guy and he's agreed to come next June and speak for us on a Sunday Peter Adam is a great man he's an older guy he's gentle he's godly and the Lord has used him terrifically in his life as a Christian he became pastor of the largest Anglican evangelical church in Melbourne in Australia where he is and that church grew enormously and planted other churches he then became the principal of the theological college in Melbourne and has had a huge impact through book writing and through teaching upon evangelical leaders in the western world today Peter Adam told me how he became a Christian he was from an atheistic home parents weren't Christians they didn't believe in God and he had a friend at school when he was a teenager who whose father and mother whose parents were Christians his dad was a minister and his parents were Christians but he wasn't a Christian

Peter Adam's friend and his friend did something for Peter that was so amazing that Peter realized the only reason you've done that is because your parents are Christians and he was so struck by it he went home and said to his parents I'm going to start going to church he went to church after a while someone talked to him about how to invite Jesus into his life he became a Christian it's a great story because that friend of his who wasn't a Christian his parents may well have thought that they'd failed in that they had a son that they tried their best to raise a Christian and their son had rejected that they had no idea that their son's friend Peter Adam would see something in their son that would ultimately lead him to faith in Christ and the Lord has used him enormously since then there was a young boy in Zimbabwe called Stephen Lungu he was rejected by his parents when he was three years old he went into the care of his aunties and he was so fed up with them and the way they treated him that when he was ten years old he went onto the streets he had a knife he had a gun and he formed a gang as a teenager they started making petrol bombs the black shadows they were called this gang and they decided one day that the next public gathering they see they'll blow up with these petrol bombs the next one happened to be run by a mission and so

[20 : 59] Stephen Lungu was the gang leader said I'll go in first and he said let's just listen for five or ten minutes before we blow the place up and Stephen was converted in the meeting he got mentored by a missionary who realized that he'd become a Christian he couldn't use a knife and fork he couldn't read and write but this missionary patiently sat with him and brought him up really and after about five or six years he'd made such progress he was in Christian leadership he eventually became the leader of an organization called African Evangelistic Enterprise he is being used dramatically by God today he was preaching in a Methodist church years later and two old ladies interrupted his sermon and they showed him their diary and he said when I finished and they said can we talk to you now we really want to show you something he said no when I'm finished okay and they opened up the diary and one of the days it was marked these two ladies today we prayed for the conversion of a gang leader and it was the day that he became a

Christian many years later he was preaching in Zimbabwe and he made an appeal for people to come forward if they wanted to give their lives to Jesus a thousand people came forward one of the first who came forward was a lady he prayed with her she said at the end there's one more problem I want to share with you before I go from what you've said I'm your mother he preached at her funeral and nearly 400 people came to faith at her funeral two old ladies praying together one day that a gang leader would be converted so I wonder where you feel today that it's the day of small things where you feel so discouraged you think it's barely worth trying to grow the church today I feel it a little bit about our evening service my first Sunday here just 19 people committed people who are working hard but that's small isn't it our evening service is small

I feel it about St Silas when I look at Glasgow that just the sheer number of people who live here the needs not just Glasgow but the towns around our city that need to hear of Christ in language they can understand we've just got one church and I feel like we need to plant hundreds of churches even to scratch the surface of Scotland and of Glasgow maybe you feel it's the day of small things in your workplace maybe you look around and think nobody here seems to know God but maybe there's a Christian colleague who you could just start to pray with about it maybe pray with somebody at the hospital you work at or the university or the school just get praying and see what God might do two old ladies praying that a gang leader will be converted so we've seen that the church will grow in God's strength we've seen that the growth of

God's church often starts small and thirdly the growth of God's church depends on the anointed ones in that picture of the lamp stand remember Zechariah said there were these two trees providing the oil so that the lamp would stay lit would stay burning and Zechariah now turns to them to ask well what do they mean these trees just have a look at verse 11 just notice as well how there's tension because the narrative slows down it keeps us waiting for the answer if you have a look then I asked the angel what are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lamp stand again I asked him what are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil he replied do you not know what these are no my lord I said so he said these are the two who are anointed to serve the lord of all the earth it's the two anointed ones the two christs the two messiahs they are the king and the priest we've been introduced to them already in Zechariah that's what the people need to have life and to grow now by this stage in the history of

God's people God had given them these two office holders he'd given them a king and they knew what they needed was a faithful king who would lead them by being faithful to God and he'd given them a priest and a priest is like your lawyer before God he's there to represent you and ask God to forgive you for your sins praying for you and then in chapter 6 Zechariah gets told to make a crown and in verse 11 Zechariah's told take the silver and gold and make a crown and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Josedach it's a sign of one who will come five centuries later that in one man these two officers of priest and king will be brought together that there will be an anointed one how will we recognize this king who will also be our priest well just flick on to chapter 9 over the page and verse 9 and we see the prediction so that God's people will be ready for this king rejoice greatly daughter Zion shout daughter

[26 : 41] Jerusalem see your king comes to you righteous and victorious lowly and riding on a donkey on a colt the foal of a donkey and of course king Jesus on that first palm sunday rides into Jerusalem a week before his death on a donkey fulfilling this promise how will this king be our priest and take our sins away well just flick on again a couple of pages to chapter 12 of Zechariah and verse 10 God's grace is his undeserved kindness towards us chapter 12 verse 10 some of the most unfathomable words ever spoken by God verse 10 that's God speaking

God himself promising that he will be pierced a reference of course to the cross where King Jesus the eternal son God in the flesh dies in our place to bear our sin and the result is verse 1 of chapter 13 just down from there verse 1 on that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity and so the cleansing we need from the priest we need God provides by coming into the world to be our priest in our place King Jesus is now in the throne room of heaven standing before God in the words of the modern hymn to him now you stand before the father interceding for your own from each tribe and tongue and nation you are leading sinners home so we might have to be very inventive today in Glasgow to reach people I'm sure we will be we'll certainly have to devote ourselves to the task with everything we've got but above all the message we bring the message we must bring is about

Jesus Christ that he is God's promised rescuing king he is our source of life and at St. Silas we must build our life on him how is St.

Silas going to grow well it will be hard work it will be hard work but we do it in his strength by his spirit we don't despise the day of small things we keep going trusting watching expecting and everything depends on the anointed one the Christ who is both king and saviour we trust him we proclaim him with our lives as we live for him we proclaim him with our words so that people know of him and we wait and see what he will do to build his church let's pray together father in heaven we're sorry for the times when we thought we can do it on our own and we ask father may your spirit be at work father please in your strength build your church sorry for the times we've given up hope because of the mountains that stand in our way and because we despise the day of small things thank you for the encouragement that you can begin with something small and we trust you to build your church in your strength we ask that in your mercy you will use us in your plans and we will see great gospel growth here at

St Silas and we want to praise and thank you for your anointed one may everything we do honour him we thank you for Jesus amen you to not um so