

Chapter 22

“The Day of Small Things”

“For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel *with* those seven; they *are* the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” (Zechariah 4:10)

Zerubbabel, who was chosen of God to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, was a great type and picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Builder of his church and temple.

Shortly after the foundation was laid and the work was begun, many began to despise it. They looked upon the work the Lord God had trusted to their hands as a small, insignificant thing. Remembering the greatness, grandeur, and glory of the house Solomon had built, many of the old men looked upon the rebuilding of the temple as a despicable thing. Israel’s enemies despised them and the work they were doing. Even Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the prince seem to have doubted whether the work would ever be completed. For a time they appear to have given up the work altogether. The Jews were few in number. The laborers among them were fewer still. They possessed no wealth, strength, or ability by which they could overcome the obstacles before them and build the temple. The whole thing seemed impossible. The enterprise was just too great for them. Having laid the foundation and raised a portion of the walls, they simply gave up and despaired of ever completing the work. The people of God trembled and their enemies jeered.

Then the Lord God raised up two prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) to stir up the people, to encourage the faith of his servants, to lift up the hands that hung down, and to strengthen the feeble knees. These two prophets spoke as voices of thunder and lightening, rebuking the unbelief and indolence of Zerubbabel the prince, Joshua the priest, and the people, calling all to repentance.

Haggai’s Message

Haggai’s words are scorching to read. We can only imagine what it must have been like to hear them. The Jews considered nothing too costly or demanding in the building of their own ceiled houses, and found time to build them (Haggai 1:4); but they said, “*The time is not come that the Lord’s house should be built*” (Haggai 1:2). Why? Because, in their eyes, it was “*as nothing*” (Haggai 2:3).

Yet, scorching as his words were against Israel’s unbelief and indolence, Haggai was sent to comfort and assure God’s people of his faithfulness. He gave God’s people this assuring, comforting, encouraging word from the Lord their God, though “*I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail...from this day will I bless thee*” (Haggai 2:17, 19). And he assured God’s servant, Zerubbabel, that God had chosen him for the work and that he would make his work successful (Haggai 2:23). To Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people, God’s word by Haggai was, “*Be strong, for I am with you...According to the word that I covenanted with you...my Spirit remaineth among you. Fear ye not!*” (Haggai 2:4-5). — That is God’s word to his church today as well!

Zechariah's Message

Zechariah came behind Haggai and said, "Amen. Bro. Haggai has given you the very word of God." His was also a message calling Israel (and us) to repentance, assuring us of our God's unfailing faithfulness, assuring us that that which he has begun, he will complete to the praise of the glory of his grace, assuring us that the whole work of building his house, the whole work of salvation, is the work of his hands alone.

"Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This *is* the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. Who *art* thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel *thou shalt become* a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone *thereof with* shoutings, *crying*, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel *with* those seven; they *are* the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:6-10)

"*Who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.*" — Of course, Zechariah's words specifically referred to the building of the second temple at Jerusalem; but his message is altogether spiritual. — The work of God our Savior in building his temple, in saving his elect by his almighty grace often appears small, but is never to be despised.

Small Beginnings

Everything great began small. The fields of corn we see in August began with small seeds in May. The most bounteous harvests of fruits and vegetables in the Fall are first seen as small shoots out of the ground or buds on the trees in the Spring. The huge old oak tree began with a small acorn. The mighty, rushing river begins as a small, trickling stream. And in spiritual things great things always have small beginnings. The Protestant Reformation began with a single man (Martin Luther) writing out a few of his heart's convictions and nailing them to the door of his church house in Wittenburg, Germany. The Great Awakening began with a few college students meeting together for prayer and Bible study at Oxford University in England. The modern missionary movement began with one man's (William Carey) determination to preach the gospel to barbarian tribesmen in India.

It is usually God's way to begin his great works in this world with small things. The human race began with one man, Adam. The nation of Israel began with one old man by the name of Abraham. The Church in this world began with just twelve men; and one of them was a devil. Soon its number was 120. Then, in one day the Lord added 3000 souls to his Church.

God has chosen to give birth to great things by insignificant things, so that no flesh may glory in his presence, so that he who glories will glory in the Lord. He begins his great works in

“*the day of small things*” to show us that the instruments he uses are nothing in themselves, to show us that the work is his alone, and to try and prove the faith of his people.

Let us never despise the day of small things. Though ours may be “*the day of small things*,” this is the day the Lord has made for us and the day for which he has made us. This is the day of our appointed service and the day of God’s appointed work in us, for us, and by us.

Works of Grace

In all God’s works of grace that work which is performed and accomplished “*not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts*,” there is usually a day of small things. In the experience of grace there is usually a season in which the work of grace in us seems very small and unpromising. Indeed, there are often such days of small things; and sometimes they are very long days, by which the Lord God both proves our faith and his faithfulness. Faith, hope, and love, strength, knowledge, usefulness, and comfort all appear to be very small things. That is exactly what our Lord Jesus tells us in his parable.

“And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? *It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*” (Mark 4:30-32)

Conversion

That work of grace we call “conversion” might be called a “*day of small things*.” By the mighty operations of his grace, our Savior brings us out of night into day. He translates us who groped about in darkness into the kingdom of light and makes us children of light. And we thank God for this “*day*,” in which “*the Dayspring from on high hath visited us*” (Luke 1:78). It is called “*day*” because it is “*the day of salvation*” (Isaiah 49:8; 2 Corinthians 6:2), “*the day of his power*” (Psalm 110:3), “*the day of his (Christ’s) espousals*” (Song of Solomon 3:11), “*and the day of the gladness of his (Christ’s) heart*” (Song of Solomon 3:11).

Yet, it is a “*day of small things*.” The work itself is great, indescribably great! But the beginnings of grace in the soul is a day of small things. Those earliest days of grace are days of small faith, small knowledge, small experience, small strength, and small hope. All the graces of God the Holy Spirit planted in the new born soul are as “*a grain of mustard seed*.” The blind man our Savior healed in Mark 8 at first only saw “*men as trees walking*.” The man in John 9 knew very little; but he knew one thing with certainty. He said, “*One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see!*”

The beginning of grace is a “*day of small things*,” and our entire experience of grace in this world is “*day of small things*.” The most mature saint readily acknowledges that his faith is but small faith, his knowledge is but small knowledge, his experience is but small experience, and his strength is such small strength, so small that it is utter weakness.

Not to be Despised

Yet, “*the day of small things*” is not to be “*despised*.” It is not despised by God our Father. Your prayers may be only the cry of a newborn babe before him, but they are the cry of his baby. He hears the cries of his children, takes them by the hand, leads them, and teaches them to walk by faith. He gives us strength as it is needed day by day.

The day of small things is not despised by our Savior, the Lord Jesus. He receives every child of grace that comes to him in faith, be that faith ever so small. He regards the beginnings of grace as buds of the vine in his vineyard, needing his constant, special attention and care. He carries the lambs in his flock in his omnipotent arms, up next to his tender heart. The bruised reed he will not break. The smoking flax he will never quench. The thirsty soul he will refresh. The hungry soul he will feed. The broken heart he will heal.

God the Holy Spirit, our Divine Comforter, does not despise “*the day of small things*” in us. No, he helps our infirmities, makes intercession for us with groans unutterable and promises that he will carry on his good work of grace in us, and perform it till the day of Christ.

Let us never despise what seems to be a day of small things in others. Every believer is the temple of God; and every temple has its beginning in “*the day of small things*.” And, as long as we are in this world, we shall be in “*the day of small things*.” Even the most well established and most mature believer in this world is in a very low condition (Philippians 3:13-14; Romans 7:14-24; Psalm 73).

Often God’s saints in this world, like Joshua, Zerubbabel, and all the people of Israel in that day, behave as people who do not know our God or his grace. Yes, God’s people often behave as people who do not know our God or his grace, just like you, and just like me! When they do, they need help, not flogging (Galatians 6:1-2). Let us never despise God’s little ones, for those who despise Christ’s little ones will be despised by him (Matthew 18:6).

Do not despise “*the day of small things*” in others; and do not despise “*the day of small things*” in yourself. If you trust Christ, cherish his gift of faith and his work of grace in you. Do not despise your day of small things. He who began will finish the work (Isaiah 42:3-4).

You may think, “But I have so little grace, so little faith, so little love for Christ that I dare not call what I have grace, hope, and love.” Our Lord Jesus says to you, Bro. Smoking Flax, that he will not quench the smelly, smoldering, smoking wick of an oil lantern that has been blown out. It may not give off any light, but it still has the life of fire in it, or it would not be smoking. It may be incapable of sending forth any flame; but it emits smoke, smoke ever rising upward to heaven. That is a pretty good picture of our weak desires and aspirations after our Savior. They may be weak, there may be nothing attractive in them to the eye of man, much less your own eye; but they ascend up to him and he smells nothing but sweetness in them!

We must not be satisfied with “*the day of small things*” in our souls; but we must not despise it, as though it is not the work of our God. To despise “*the day of small things*” is to despise his work. It may seem like humility; but it is really pride and self-righteousness. We must ever look

away from ourselves entirely, look away from both great things and small things, and look to Christ alone (Hebrews 12:1-3; Colossians 2:6). Let us see even “*the day of small things*” as his day, and rejoice and be glad (John 8:56). Rejoice in his finished work. Rejoice in his present work (1 John 2:1-2). Rejoice in his promised work! — That which he has begun he will finish by his own hands alone, by his own free grace alone (Philippians 1:6; Jude 24-25).

Yes, this day of grace is, for us, “*the day of small things*.” In fact, in this gospel day, in our experience of grace, the smaller the day the better. In all things spiritual we are highest when we are lowest. — We are richest when we are poorest. — We are most full when we are most empty. — We are strongest when we are weakest. — We are most useful when we are most useless.

Do not despise “*the day of small things*.” The plummet is in Zerubbabel’s hands. He knows what he is doing. I rejoice to see the plummet line, not in my hand or your hand, but in his hand. He declares that we are “*meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*” and “*complete in him*” (Colossians. 1:12; 2:10). He says, “*Behold, thou art all fair, my love, my dove, my undefiled!...There is no spot in thee!*”

Christ’s Cause

The cause of Christ in this world often appears as “*the day of small things*,” just as it did in Zechariah’s day. Because it appears as a “*day of small things*,” it is despised by many; but those who despise the day of small things understand nothing of God’s things! We measure greatness and success, or smallness and failure in terms of numbers, impressive buildings, dollars, and fame. God measures success or failure in terms of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. Throughout the Book of God, those who were ignorant of God and the things of God despised the work of God because it lacked grandeur in the eyes of men (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

When Sanballat heard that Nehemiah was building the walls of Jerusalem, he mocked the Jews; but Nehemiah was not deterred from his work (Nehemiah 4:1-6). When David came out to the valley of Elah, his brother Eliab denounced him as an irresponsible boy; but David was committed to the cause of Christ, his glory, and his people, and replied, — “*Is there not a cause?*” (1 Samuel 7:28-29). When the Son of God began to manifest himself to Israel, he was denounced as the carpenter’s son, a glutton, a wine-bibber, the friend of sinners, and the Nazarene; but he finished his work and redeemed his people! He who said, “*Lo, I come to do thy will, O my God,*” cried with a loud voice, “*It is finished!*” When Paul came to Mars Hill, he was ridiculed as a babler and a dreamer; but he turned the world up-side-down with his doctrine (Acts 17:16-23).

I realize that in the eyes of the world, especially in the eyes of the religious world, God’s people are looked upon as an insignificant, rag-tag band of fools. Most faithful pastors have no credentials. God’s churches are few and few in number. We have no religious organizations to back us. There is nothing about us to impress men. But our God has established his people and his churches in their place. He has given each a work to do. And he is with us! Do not be discouraged by “*the day of small things*.” Put your shoulder to the work God has trusted to your hands for his glory. Eternity will tell what God has done for us, in us, and by us.

In that day, we shall rejoice to see the plummet in the hand of our great Zerubbabel. He will accomplish his work in us and by us, for “*the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth.*”

The Plummet and the Eyes

There is a day of rejoicing around the corner! Today, Jacob is small; but there is a day coming called “*the great day of Jezreel*” (Hosea 1:11). Then, what rejoicing there shall be in that great day! We will rejoice as we see the plummet in the hand of Christ, our great Zerubbabel! The plummet is that instrument used by masons and carpenters to judge the uprightness of a building. It is a cause for great rejoicing to see that Christ’s work in us is upright, marked by his own plummet. It is a matter for great rejoicing to see that Christ is building his church, his holy temple, by the line of his plummet: — His Purpose! — His Righteousness! — His Covenant! — His Everlasting Love! What a matter of rejoicing it shall be when we see the work complete, in ourselves and in the whole Church of God, marked by his plummet! Yes, this is but “*the day of small things,*” when compared with “*the great day of Jezreel*” (1 John 3:1-2; Romans 8:17-18).

There is one more thing in Zechariah 4:10 that I must not fail to mention. Along with the plummet, revealing the perfection of Christ’s work and the perfection of his people in him, made perfect “*not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit,*” we shall see with the plummet “*those seven. They are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.*” — “*Those seven*” are the seven eyes of Christ the Foundation Stone laid before Joshua in Zechariah 3:9. They are the eyes of his perfect wisdom, running “*to and fro,*” throughout the ages of time, “*through the whole earth.*” They tell us that everything in providence is performed according to his great purpose of grace. And they tell us that when he has finished his work, when all his people are saved by his grace, when his temple is finished, we will see that the whole of his creation and the whole of providence has been engaged to accomplish that which our God purposed before the world began (Ephesians 1:9-12; Romans 8:28-30; 11:33-36). In that great day the Lord God our Savior will lay his “*judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet,*” and sweep away every refuge of lies (Isaiah 28:14-19, 29).