

SERMON: When a Small Thing Is Actually a Large Thing

TEXT: Ezra 3:8-13; 5:1-2; 6:14-16

Introduction

- A. We are a small gathering today, due in large part to our people traveling to various destinations over this holiday weekend. The vast majority are worshipping this very hour at Davidson River campground in NC. I pulled Annette Hemming's attendance record from 9/4/11. This is the only Sunday of the year when she logs two worship attendance numbers. Here at "TRB East" we had 73 worshipers last year on this holiday weekend. At "TRB West" we had 134 worshipers.
- B. So it was predictable that our numbers would be relatively small today. Yet our small gathering is no less significant than last Sunday's gathering of 232 worshipers. God wants us to understand that God does not despise small things that magnify the infinite greatness of His being. Therefore, neither should we despise, diminish, discount, devalue such small things, but seek to honor and imitate Jesus in every way.

I. The reason God does not despise small things.

- A. When what we do reflects the image of the Lord of glory, it is no small thing. Because every virtue of Christ is of infinite worth and glory, no replication of His virtues can ever be considered a small thing. Examples of small acts that reflect, honor, magnify the infinite virtues of Christ (A reflective moment in the YMCA men's locker room, a cup of cold water at last visitor's luncheon)

Matthew 10:42 "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones **even a cup of cold water to drink**, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

- B. God is pleased to use small things so that the glory will be obviously His.

Judges 7:2 The LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, **for Israel would become boastful, saying, 'My own power has delivered me.'**"

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, **so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;**

- C. Because God's purposes for Christ and His people in Christ are fulfilled in every Spirit-enabled small as well as large thing we do in conformity to His Son.

Romans 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, **He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, so **that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;**

II. The evidence of God's favorable attitude toward small things that honor Him.

- A. Yahweh teaches His people through his prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

- 1. When around 537 BC the returning Jewish exiles from Babylon completed the foundation of the second temple that would replace Solomon's temple which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed in 586 BC, many of the older priests and Levites who had seen Solomon's temple wept rather than rejoiced with the rest of God's people. The second temple in their eyes was small in comparison.

3:10 Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD according to the directions of

King David of Israel.¹¹ They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, saying, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.¹² **Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes**, while many shouted aloud for joy,¹³ so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people

2. Due to intimidation and force of arms from the surrounding peoples, the work on the temple was delayed for years, but was resumed again by 519 BC under the encouragement of the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah. How did these prophets encourage the work to move forward?

Ezra 5:1 When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them,² then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

3. We see some of the same attitude from several years earlier was still present - the despising of the smaller temple, which would be nonetheless challenging to build. The prophets correct this attitude by saying ...
 - a. This temple is the work of the Lord Who works with you in restoring it.

Haggai 2:1 On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying,² "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying,³ **'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?'**⁴ 'But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and **work; for I am with you**,' declares the LORD of hosts.

- b. What those older Israelites diminish and despise is what makes the Lord glad.

Zechariah 4:8 Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying,⁹ "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.¹⁰ **'For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven will be glad** when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel-- **these are the eyes of the LORD** which range to and fro throughout the earth."

- B. The Lord Jesus teaches His people in this restored temple.

Mark 12:41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in **large** sums.⁴² A poor widow came and put in two **small** copper coins, which amount to a cent.⁴³ Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, **this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury**;⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

III. Why we must affirm and do those small things that reflect, honor, and magnify the infinite virtues of Christ.

- A. Faithfulness in small things indicates our true heart toward Christ.

Luke 16:10 "He who is faithful in **a very little thing** is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

- B. Since most of life's activities is the sum of small things, one cannot draw near to Christ apart from conformity to Him in the every day small things of life. God encourages us to seek Him by knowing Him in the small things of life, humbling ourselves before Him and others, trusting Him to exalt us at the proper time.

1. The Lord is near to those who humble themselves to attend to small things for His sake.

Psalm 34:18 **The LORD is near to the brokenhearted** and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, **"I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit** in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Isaiah 66:2 "For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. **"But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.**

2. No apostle achieved more than Paul, yet he didn't attain this status by seeking what was considered honorable and great in the eyes of the world, but by seeking what the world despised - to know Christ in his humiliation and sufferings.

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, **being conformed to His death;**¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

1 Corinthians 4:13 ... **we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things,** even until now.

3. Unlike Baruk, John the Baptist recognized the need to relinquish greatness for the glory of Christ.

Jeremiah 45:2 "Thus says the LORD the God of Israel to you, O Baruch:³ 'You said, "Ah, woe is me! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and have found no rest."⁴ "Thus you are to say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, what I have built I am about to tear down, and what I have planted I am about to uproot, that is, the whole land."⁵ **"But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them;** for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,' declares the LORD, 'but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go.'"

John 3:30 "He must increase, but **I must decrease.**

"Nowhere more than in America are Christians caught in the twentieth-century syndrome of size. Size will show success. If I am consecrated, there will necessarily be large quantities of people, dollars, etc. This is not so. Not only does God not say that size and spiritual power go together, but He even reverses this (especially in the teaching of Jesus) and tells us to be deliberately careful not to choose a place too big for us. We all tend to emphasize big works and big places, but all such emphasis is of the flesh. To think in such terms is simply to harken back to the old, unconverted, egoist, self-centered Me. This attitude, taken from the world, is more dangerous to the Christian than fleshly amusement or practice."

Francis Schaeffer, No Little People, 1974, p. 18.

4. Ask God to grant us the faith to believe that if we humble ourselves before the Lord, imitating Him in all things, including little things, He will exalt us at the proper time.

Luke 14:7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them,⁸ "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, **do not take the place of honor**¹⁰ "But when you are invited, **go and recline at the last place**, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you.¹¹ "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and **he who humbles himself will be exalted.**"

1 Peter 5:5 ... **all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another,** for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.⁶ Therefore **humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.**⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

C. The consequence of living contrary to the image of Christ in small things is huge.

1. When what I do is contrary to the command and image of Him who created me, it is never a small thing, for it despises the Lord of glory, and devalues His great sacrifice for our "smallest" sin.

Luke 8:5 "The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and **it was trampled under foot** and the birds of the air ate it up.

Hebrews 10:29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has **trampled under foot the Son of God**, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

2. Our smallest sin was large enough to require God to pour out His righteous wrath on His sinless Son, that we, through faith in Christ, might be delivered from that wrath when Christ returns. Christ died to deliver us from the guilt of dishonoring Him, not only in large things, but also in small things. To say small things don't matter is to despise and devalue His sacrificial death.

Isaiah 53:5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him

3. No sin is small enough that, if left uncovered by the blood of Christ, it will not hurl us into eternal hell.

James 3:4 Look at the ships also, though they are so **great** and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very **small** rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.⁵ So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how **great** a forest is set aflame by such a **small** fire!⁶ And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

D. The reward of living in conformity to the image of Christ in small things is immeasurable.

Matthew 25:20 "The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.'²¹ "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a **few things**, I will put you in charge of **many things**; enter into the joy of your master.'

John 13:3 **Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands**, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. ...¹³ "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.¹⁴ "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.¹⁷ **If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**

- E. Christ died, not only to deliver us from the guilt of failing to obey Him in the many small things of life, but to enable us by His Spirit to break free from such failure and to imitate Him in the many daily small things of life.

1 Peter 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, **so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness**; for by His wounds you were healed.²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Conclusion

- A. Therefore, we ought not to devalue, dismiss, or despise small things that honor and magnify our great Lord, but be careful and faithful to honor Him in all things in our lives, the vast majority being small things.
- B. Our gathering today is small, but it is not insignificant, for it magnifies the character and worth of the Lord Who is infinitely great. Whenever we reflect the image of the Lord of glory, it is no small thing.