

“The Day of Small Things”

Long ago, the ancient people of God returned from years in captivity and began to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed. It wasn't long though, when that work came to a stop. Consequently, it took years to build the second temple. But a series of visions came to the prophet Zechariah during that time, and one of them is recorded in our text for today's study.

Zechariah 4:8-10 “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.”

Well, this is an interesting prophecy that actually teaches a timeless lesson about God and His word. I want to consider the question posed by Zechariah in this passage: ***“For who hath despised the day of small things?”***

Israel had been carried away into captivity by the Babylonians and spent seventy long years there. The glorious temple of Solomon had been destroyed. But now, more than a half century later, Israel begins to return home, and as you can imagine, there was a lot of excitement as Zerubbabel led the first wave of nearly fifty thousand Jews back to Jerusalem. There was a lot of work to do because Jerusalem had been utterly destroyed and laid waste. One of the first things they did was to resume the worship of God, which they did immediately. The next year, work began on laying the foundation of a new temple.

There were mixed emotions among the Jews about that: the old men who remembered the beautiful temple of Solomon actually wept, because as they built this temple, it paled in comparison. It was nothing like the glorious temple of Solomon. Nonetheless, Ezra tells us in his prophecy that others shouted for joy to see work on the temple get underway. Of course, there are always people who discourage the work of God, and you'll find that even today, and it was no different back then. Eventually, the people who were opposed to construction of the temple got a government order to stop the work. So, the people instead started working on settling back into their homes, building their own houses and farms and so forth. But the temple foundation that they had begun just sat there for about fourteen years.

Then, along came the prophet Haggai. He preached and got the people all stirred up and they started back to work on the temple, but it just wasn't the same. They worked for about a month and they realized they were short on resources, and that no matter what they did, this new temple would just not measure up to the glory of Solomon's temple that had been destroyed nearly a century before. It was very demoralizing. The Jews were hated, they had been beaten down, their land was still in ruins, their wealth was plundered and gone, and only a small portion of their population even returned to Jerusalem. They were working, but the problems were great. They just didn't have the wherewithal to put things back like they were.

About this same time, the prophet Zechariah came along and he began to prophesy. He had a series of visions, one of which is recorded in our text.

Zechariah 4:8-10 “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.”

Do you know what God was saying in this vision of Zechariah’s? He was saying that they were not to be discouraged over their circumstance. The temple that their fathers had built was constructed using the enormous fortune of Solomon, but now they had virtually nothing. The temple they were building would never rival the first one in that respect. Even after Herod the Great renovated it before the birth of Christ, it did not rival Solomon’s temple. But, you see, there is a wonderful Messianic prophecy in what Zechariah is saying here. He was telling them that one day, the temple would be built, and God would fill it with His glory. What they were building here in Jerusalem was a *type* or *shadow* of the great and spiritual temple that our Lord Jesus would one day build: it was a picture of the church of Christ.

Keep in mind that the temple was central to Jewish life and it was the ultimate pride of their nation. While these people were downhearted and murmuring over their lack of resources and this pitiful temple that they were building by comparison, God was telling them that something far greater was coming. So, they may have despised the day of small things, but God was using those small things for a great, great purpose.

That’s a principle that is seen all throughout the history of God’s people. When God destroyed the world with the great flood of Noah’s day, He used one family of eight people to save and replenish the earth. Out of all the people who lived in the antediluvian age, he chose eight people to save the world.

I Peter 3:20 “...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

We read about the story of Gideon and his army, who were sent to war with the Midianites. There were more than a hundred thousand Midianites and God ended up only letting Gideon put together an army of three hundred men to fight them, and he didn’t even give them any weapons! That’s a thrilling story in **Judges 6**. God used an ingenious plan to trick the more than one hundred thousand Midianites using just three hundred Jews armed with nothing more than torches and their loud voices. Go back and study that story. That little ragtag army ended up sending those strapping Midianite soldiers running into the night screaming like children into each other’s swords.

Later, in **II Chronicles 20**, we read about King Jehoshaphat and how he got word that a vast army of the Moabites and the Ammonites were coming to wage war with him. He didn’t have much of an army and he was unarmed, so he asked the Lord what to do. He declared that Israel fast and pray and he cried out to God:

II Chronicles 20:12 “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.”

Well, God dispatched the Holy Spirit to Jehoshaphat with this message:

II Chronicles 20:15 “Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s.”

In other words, God is going to win this battle for you and the size of your army doesn’t matter because, you see, God does great things with small things.

Isaiah 31:1 “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!”

What does he mean in that passage? Horses and chariots were great tools and resources and implements of war that were used by mighty armies, and Israel had a tendency if they weren’t careful to trust in those things. When they did, they were defeated. The armies around them were larger, more powerful and better equipped than the Israelites. When they won, it wasn’t because they were trusting in horses or chariots or whatever weapons that God might’ve placed in their hands at the time; they won because God was on their side. They were strong not because of their implements of war, but because of their heavenly captain.

Well, what does all of that have to do with us today? We’re not fighting any literal battles like the nation of Israel had to do way back then. God’s kingdom today is not a nation or a literal kingdom like the kingdom of Israel was. God’s economy has changed in that and other regards. But there is a great application of that principle, because in a spiritual sense, it is yet a day of small things. Consequently, there are many people who despise it. That is, they discount the work of God because it appears to the world to be small and insignificant. Sometimes people—even religious people, I hate to tell you—make fun of God’s way. They make fun of God’s plan of salvation. They ridicule the church. They may not think that they’re doing so, but by their arguments, they do. They mock the simple and scriptural New Testament worship of the church. They deride righteousness and holy living. Some refuse to accept the tenants of ‘primitive’ New Testament Christianity because they say it’s too simple, too primitive, too narrow, too dogmatic, too exclusive and not acceptable to the worldly and educated affluent crowd. In fact, you might say they’re ashamed of it. They think the church has to be something flashy and showy, and that we have to make it relevant to the carnal and worldly-minded people of our day. They think we have to make it impressive and palatable to the pagan culture around us. That’s why we have a lot of so-called “churches” today that are more like nightclubs than places of worship.

The apostle Paul wrote to a church that was situated in a place like that. Corinth was an affluent, educated, arrogant, sensually wicked city: in many respects, like our present culture. Those people—consequently even some in the church—looked down on Paul and they despised what he preached

because it was 'below them.' All of God's Word is as fresh as the morning dew, but the fact of the matter is that the book of I Corinthians especially is very applicable to our age today. Sometimes we get to thinking that the world is just so rotten and wicked and is worse by the day. Well, the Bible does say that evil men will wax worse and worse (**II Timothy 3:13**), so that is true. But at the same time, our modern culture doesn't have anything that they didn't have in Corinth. Corinth was a very wicked, wicked city. The result of the lifestyles and the mindset of those in that city and how its pagan culture even influenced people in the church who had come out of sin and obeyed the gospel: they still had the influences of the culture out of which they had come. It was very tempting to them to see the gospel as foolishness, much like a lot of people today see it. In their minds, it couldn't be right because someone so great as God wouldn't inspire a man to preach something so simple and so crude. Listen to how Paul answered them.

I Corinthians 1:25-28 "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:"

Now, why would God do that? Look at the next verse.

I Corinthians 1:29 "That no flesh should glory in his presence."

God, in other words, shows His strength by using our weakness. Our great and awesome God is found in the little things of life!

Allow me to ask you some questions. Do you attend a church congregation perhaps because of its size? Is that a big influential factor in your choice of where you go and assemble for worship? People say, "Oh, it must be right. Look at ALL of the people it attracts!"

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

I remind you that Noah was in the overwhelming minority when he went INTO the ark, but he was certainly in the majority when he came OUT of it.

Another question: Do you attend a congregation because of the *kind* of people it attracts? Maybe there are doctors and professors and lawyers and noble people...sometimes that thought process even becomes a little subconscious. We get to thinking, "Those people down at that little church in the country or on the corner don't amount to much. They can't be right. Look at all of the successful, smart, educated and affluent people who attend here at the (fill in the blank)." Or, "Look at all of these culturally sophisticated and relevant people who attend this new cutting edge church in town. Surely, that's what's right!" Remember what Paul said:

I Corinthians 1:26 “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise...”

The experts of Noah’s day scoffed and ridiculed him because of his doom and gloom predictions of rain and a flood. That boat that he was building looked ridiculous to them, and his theology was backwoods and unbelievable. But that’s not what they were saying when God shut the door of the ark and the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were opened up.

Maybe you attend a congregation because of its flashy and titillating worship. The strobe lights, fog machines, rock bands, coffee cafes and daycares and so on...that’s the appeal for you. “This must be where Jesus is because look at all of the excitement and the outpouring of emotion!” I remind you of what Jesus once said to a woman at a well:

John 4:22-24 “Ye worship ye know not what...But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

But, you see, to some people, a cappella singing isn’t enough. It’s not exciting. Yet that’s the kind of singing the early church offered in their worship to God.

Ephesians 5:19 “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;”

Colossians 3:16 “...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Simple and plain gospel preaching that convicts and instructs and edifies seems outdated, boring and irrelevant to some.

I Corinthians 1:18 “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

The simple observance of the Lord’s Supper, with one loaf of unleavened bread and one cup containing the fruit of the vine is base or even gross to many, even though Jesus said, when He used those very symbols as He instituted the very sacred feast with His disciples, “*This do in remembrance of Me*” (**Luke 22:19, I Corinthians 11:24,25**).

Do you attend a congregation because of its large, impressive building or facility? “God must be in here because it took millions of dollars to build it!” Yet Paul said that God doesn’t dwell in temples made with men’s hands (**Acts 17:24**).

On and on we could go. Listen to what Paul said about the church:

Ephesians 5:25-27 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

The church of Christ is a glorious thing! But its glory is not found in the size of its crowd. In fact, God is more likely to be found in a small handful of humble people than in a crowd of thousands of worldly, unsanctified even though ‘religious’ people. The glory of the church is not the social status of its crowd. Most of Jesus’ disciples were common and poor people even. The church’s glory is not in the size and opulence of its building. Many first-century congregations met in homes or even in places of hiding. The glory of the church is not found in any other standard or worldly measurement! The glory of Christ’s church is found in Christ Jesus Himself and in His truth, which His church believes and follows.

Elijah the prophet learned that lesson in a dramatic way. Remember what happened to him?

I Kings 19:11-13 “And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave...”

The point of this passage is not about literal voices. God speaks to us through His word today—not through inner voices and so forth. But the principle is that God is not found in the things that people think He would be found in. For some reason, we always look for the BIG things: the BIG crowds, the BIG ministries, the BIG deeds with BIG impacts. But the religion of Christ, if you’ll look a little closer at the New Testament, is a religion of small things: one cup of cold water given in His name, two mites thrown into the temple treasury by a poor widow, a simple chat with one Samaritan woman at a well, a couple of loaves and a few fish...small things. But here’s the thing, as we have so often sung, little is much when God is in it! My friend, despise not the day of small things.