

The Day of Small Things Not to Be Despised.

by Edward Payson

We should not despise the day of small things because it is the initial or early stages of God's work, which may appear weak or insignificant, but is of unspeakable value and the commencement of a day of great things.

Scripture: Zechariah 4:10, Luke 16:10, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Topics: "Faith Growth", "Humility Before God"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on the importance of not despising the day of small things, using the example of the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonish captivity. He emphasizes that in God's works, especially in works of grace, there is usually a humble beginning before greatness. Payson warns against despising small beginnings, as they are often the foundation for greater things to come. He highlights that even God, angels, and Jesus do not despise small beginnings, as they see the value and potential in them. Payson urges individuals to appreciate and cultivate the small beginnings of faith and grace in their lives, as they are the seeds for future growth and blessings.

Transcript

"Who hath despised the day of small things"

Zechariah 4:10

words were addressed by Jehovah to his ancient people, soon after their return from the Babylonish captivity. They were then few in number, poor, feeble, and on the point of being swallowed up by their enemies. But notwithstanding all these discouraging circumstances they proceeded, almost immediately after their return, to lay the foundations of a temple for the worship of God. It may well be supposed that, as it respects richness and magnificence, there would be a wide difference between such an edifice, as these poor captives could build, and that which had previously been erected by the wisest and wealthiest of monarchs.

There was so; and those among them who had seen the temple of Solomon, wept aloud when they saw the foundations of the new temple laid, on account of its comparative meanness. Indeed, they seem to have felt as if such a temple were not worth finishing; and their unreasonable, ill-timed contempt of it, combined with other circumstances, so much discouraged their brethren, that for several years little was done towards its completion. It was with a view to reanimate them, and to encourage their exertions, that the message contained in this chapter was sent.

In this message God reproved those who had regarded the new temple with contempt, and those also who thought that they were unable to finish it. He informed them that the work was his, that it was to be effected not by human might nor power but by his Spirit; that Zerubbabel, who had laid the foundations, should live to place the top stone, shouting, Grace, grace unto it; and that those who had despised the day of small things, or, in other words, the feeble commencement of the work, should witness its completion.

In farther discoursing on the passage before us, I shall endeavor to show, That in all God's works, especially in his works of grace, which are effected not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit, there is usually a day of small things; That many often despise this day; and That it ought not to be despised. I. In all the works of God, and especially in his works of grace, which are effected not by might, nor by power, but by his Spirit, there is usually a day of small things that is, in other words, there is a season in which his work makes but a very small and unpromising appearance.

All that is necessary to convince you of the truth of this assertion is to refer you to some of God's works. Look at his works of creation. It was a day of small things with this world, when it lay a wild chaotic mass without form and void, and shrouded in darkness. Look at his works of providence. The oak was once an acorn; the mightiest rivers may be traced back to an insignificant rivulet or spring; the philosopher, the warrior, the statesman, the poet, was once an infant; the powerful civilized nation was once a horde of savages.

But it is especially to God's works of grace, that the remark under consideration refers; and to them we must especially look for illustrations of its truth. It was a day of small things with the Old Testament church, when Abraham and his family were its only members. It was a day of small things with the New Testament church, when all its members could assemble in one small room, and sit down at one table. And every branch of this church, wherever planted, and however flourishing it may now be, has had its day of small things.

It was such a day with the church of Christ in New England, when all its members disembarked from one vessel, and worshipped God on the barren shore, without a sanctuary, and without even a habitation to shelter them. And probably there is not a church in this country, which was not for a time small and feeble, and obliged to struggle with many difficulties. Similar remarks may be made respecting all the societies and institutions which have been formed for the promotion and diffusion of Christianity.

Look, for instance, at the British and Foreign Bible Society, at the Baptist Missions in the East, at Sabbath Schools, and at all the National Societies which have been formed for the education of ministers, for sending missionaries to the heathen, and for the distribution of tracts. Compared with what they now [1824] are, they were originally but as the acorn compared to the oak. Similar remarks may be made respecting God's work of grace in the hearts of individuals. Every Christian has his day, and almost all Christians, alas, much too long a day of small things; a day in which his love, faith, and hope, knowledge, usefulness, and comfort are small.

Look at Nicodemus. It was such a time with him when he came to Jesus by night. Look at the twelve disciples. It was such a time with them until after the day of Pentecost. They were foolish, and slow of heart to believe; they were altogether in an error respecting the nature of that kingdom which Christ came to establish, and there were frequent strife among them who should be the greatest. Look at the Corinthian Christians. I, brethren, says St. Paul, could not speak unto you as spiritual, but as carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

This language intimates, not only that the Corinthians had made little progress in religion, but that babes in Christ or young Christians generally, are in many respects carnal, and by no means distinguished for spirituality. Look too at the Hebrew Christians. Ye need, says an apostle, that one teach you what be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

If we turn from the primitive, to modern Christians, we shall find at least equally striking proofs that, generally speaking, they all have a day of small things. With many who, we hope, are Christians, this day continues through life. Indeed, in comparison with what Christians will be hereafter, in comparison with the spirits of just men made perfect, the attainments of the most eminent Christians in this world are but small things, and their whole life but a day of small things.

It was St. John who said, It doth not yet appear what we shall be. It was St. Paul who said, I have not attained; I know but in part; we see through a glass darkly. In fine, the kingdom of God here below, whether we contemplate it as set up in the world, or in the hearts of individual Christians, is at first but as a grain of mustard seed, sown in the earth, or as a stone cut from a mountain. II. Many persons despise the day of small things, which attends the commencement of God's works.

His enemies do so. What do these feeble Jews? said some of his ancient enemies. Will they fortify themselves? will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the Stones out of the heaps of rubbish that are burnt? If but a fox go up, he shall break down their wall. With at least equal contempt was Christianity regarded both by Jews and Gentiles, while its day of small things continued. And the same contempt is felt and expressed by multitudes of its enemies at the present day, with respect to the attempts which are making to evangelize the world.

You need not be informed that ridicule is thrown with liberal hand upon the hopes and labors of missionaries among the heathen, and upon the expectation which Christians entertain of the conversion of the world. Because it is now a day of small things with respect to this work, because comparatively few of the heathen have as yet embraced Christianity, many of its avowed and secret enemies look with scorn upon all attempts to extend its influence, and gravely tell us, that the conversion of the heathen is impossible, and that even if it is to be desired, which they seem to doubt, it is not to be expected.

With at least equal contempt do many of them look upon the commencement of God's work of grace in the hearts of individuals around them, and stigmatize it as the effect of weakness, superstition, or enthusiasm. In the second place, not only the enemies, but even the friends of God, sometimes despise the day of small things, which attends his work during its infancy. They did so in the instance referred to in our text. They have done so in many instances since. We do not mean that, like his enemies, they regard his work with absolute contempt.

But they think too little of it; they undervalue it, and they are by no means sufficiently thankful for it; and may therefore be said, comparatively speaking, to despise it. This for instance, is sometimes the case at the commencement of a revival of religion, especially when it commences and proceeds in a gentle and gradual manner, and is confined to individuals of little weight in society. In such circumstances, a considerable portion of the church, which is thus favored, are often guilty, in a greater or less degree, of despising the day of small things.

They wish to see the wealthy, the learned, and the great brought to the foot of the cross; or, at least, to see great numbers converted; and because they do not see this, they will scarcely allow that there is any

thing to encourage exertion, or call forth thankfulness. I leave it with your consciences, my professing friends, to decide whether a considerable part of this church has not more than once exemplified these remarks. Still more frequently, perhaps, are Christians guilty of despising, or too lightly esteeming the work of God in their own hearts.

Forgetting that the Christian must be an infant, a child, and a youth before he can arrive at the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus, they wish, and seem to expect to become men at once; and when these unscriptural expectations are disappointed; when they find that with respect to their knowledge, faith, comfort, and usefulness, their day is a day of small things, they are too often ready to feel as if nothing had been done for them; and as if so small a portion of grace, as they possess, were scarcely worth cultivating.

Hence, while looking for great things they overlook small things; and neglect those means and exertions, by which alone small things can ever be made to become great. Others go still farther, and because they do not find in themselves so much religion as they wished and expected, will not allow that they possess a particle. Hence they will not unite with the friends of Christ, will not confess him before men, will not commemorate his dying love; as if these duties and privileges were reserved exclusively for mature and eminent Christians.

In these and various other ways, which time will not allow me to particularize, Christians are often guilty of despising the day of small things. I proceed now, as was proposed, III. To state some reasons why it ought not to be despised. 1. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because such conduct tends to prevent its becoming a day of great things. If all the Jews had despised the foundations of the temple, as some of them did, they would never have exerted themselves to finish it.

So those who despise the day of small things, where missions are concerned, will do little to promote them. None who despise a small revival of religion will make the exertions which are necessary to render it great. And the Christian, who despises or overlooks the blessings which he has already received, will not seek and pray with proper earnestness for greater blessings. Besides, despising the day of small things always involves much ingratitude. It is practically saying, we have nothing to be thankful for.

It leads us, instead of blessing God for what he has given, to murmur because he does not give more. And this directly tends to prevent him from giving more. It is a very trite but a very just remark, that the way to obtain much, is to be thankful for little. As it respects the attainment of blessings from heaven, this remark is especially true. Thanksgivings are at least as efficacious as prayers. And ingratitude will shut the ear of God against the most fervent prayers. Let none then despise the day of small things, unless they wish to prevent it from becoming a day of great things. 2.

We ought not to despise the day of small things, because the inhabitants of heaven, whose judgment is according to truth, do not despise it. Angels do not. No, they rejoice over one sinner that repenteth. Though it be a poor sinner, an ignorant sinner, a despised individual, still they rejoice. They rejoice, though the work is just begun, and though its glory is obscured by many remaining defects, weaknesses and imperfections; evils which they see incomparably more clearly than we do.

Now there is not, I believe, a single protestant missionary establishment in the world, which has not been the means of converting at least one individual. There is not then a protestant missionary establishment on earth, which has not occasioned joy in heaven. Of course, there is not one which is despised in heaven. Again. Our Savior does not despise the day of small things. It was said of him, The bruised reed he will not

break, and the smoking flax he will not quench; he will bring forth judgment unto victory.

In this prediction young and feeble Christians, who have but little grace, are compared to the wick of an extinguished lamp, in which but a spark of fire remains. It does not burn brightly, it sends forth no flame; but it emits smoke, and that smoke mounts upward,--a fit emblem of the weakest Christian, whose desires, though faint and few, ascend to heaven. Yet even such a disciple as this, the compassionate Savior does not despise, and will not reject. No, he feeds his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs with his arms and carries them in his bosom.

See these remarks verified in his treatment of Nicodemus. Instead of despising him for his cowardice, ignorance, and slowness to learn, our Savior received him kindly, and gave up his own necessary rest, for the sake of communicating instruction to his mind. Look too at the manner in which Jesus treated his twelve disciples, and at his interview with Thomas, with Mary Magdalene, and with Cleophas after his resurrection; and you will be convinced that while on earth he did not despise the day of small things.

Nor does he now despise it. Even so small a gift as a cup of cold water to the meanest of his disciples, if given for his sake, he does not despise. The feeble minded and the weak he commands his ministers to support and comfort. Them that are weak in faith he commands his churches to receive. Hear too what he says to one of his feeble churches; I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; and I will make thine enemies to come and worship at thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee, for thou hast a little strength.

Once more. Our heavenly Father does not despise the day of small things. Hear what he said of a child, the son of Jeroboam; In him is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel; therefore he alone of the house of Jeroboam shall come to his grave in peace. Look also at the parable of the prodigal son. When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. In fine, as those of you who are parents do not despise, but are pleased with the first stammering accents of your children, especially when they lisp the words, father, mother, so our heavenly Father listens with pleasure to the first feeble, imperfect prayers of his children, when, guided by the Spirit of adoption, they come lispng, Abba, Father.

Now if angels, if our Redeemer, and our heavenly Father, do not despise the day of small things, surely it does not become us, imperfect creatures, to despise it. 3. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because these things, though small, are of unspeakable value. Inspiration styles faith precious faith, and declares that it is more valuable than gold tried in the fire. Indeed it is so; for it is the gift of God, and who shall despise his gifts? It is the work of God, and there are no works like his works.

The man, whose faith is but as a grain of mustard seed, is interested in all the promises of the gospel; he is a child of God, a joint-heir with Christ of the heavenly inheritance. In fine, grace, the least particle of grace, is glory begun; and all the figures which man ever made, were they placed in one line, with worlds for units, could not express the ten thousandth part of its value. How irrational then to despise what is so infinitely valuable. Finally. We ought not to despise the day of small things, because it is the commencement of a day of great things.

It will become so, because these small things are the work of God; and as for God, his work is perfect, and what he doth shall be forever. He never leaves his work unfinished; for his language is, I will work, and who shall let it? When I begin, I will make an end. These predictions will be verified in the future success of missionary exertions, and the final universal prevalence of Christianity. The stone cut from the mountain

without hands, shall itself become a mountain, and fill the whole earth.

The streams of divine knowledge, which now flow in scanty rivulets, shall become broad and deep rivers, and overflow the world; for the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth, even as the waters fill the seas. A little one shall become a thousand and a small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it. These predictions will also be verified with respect to God's work of grace in the heart of every believer; for he who begins a good work in the heart, will perform it to the day of Christ Jesus; so that the weakest disciple may boldly say, with the psalmist, The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me; he will guide with his counsel and afterwards receive me to glory.

Yes, that tender plant, that bruised reed, which trembles before every breeze, is the planting of the Lord, and shall become a tree of righteousness. That smoking wick shall burn bright. That poor, despised, ignorant, feeble Christian, who is now but a babe in grace, shall become a youth, a perfect man in Christ Jesus; for God will strengthen him, yea, he will help him; yea, he will uphold him with the right hand of his righteousness. In a word, the weakest Christian now on earth, shall one day be among the spirits of just men made perfect; shall be equal to the angels; shall shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of his Father; for the path of the just is as the rising light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Permit me now to apply the subject, 1. By asking every individual present, is it with you, in a religious sense, even so much as a day of small things? In other words, have you any religion? Have you faith, even as a grain of mustard seed? Has the light of heaven dawned within you? Unless you have been converted, regenerated, born of God, this is not the case; for if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; he has been created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works; and if he be not in Christ, he is not a Christian, he has not a particle of faith, he is yet in his sins.

If any ask, how may I ascertain whether I have become a subject of this new creation? I answer, every one who is a subject of it can say, Whereas I was once blind, I now see. Every subject of it loves and finds his happiness in those religious employments and pursuits, which he once hated or neglected; and has in a great measure lost his relish for those worldly, sinful pleasures in which he once delighted. Every Christian, though but a babe in grace, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and desires the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby.

If this is the case with any of you, beware how you deny what God has done for you; beware how you despise the day of small things; beware how you ungratefully neglect to thank God for the inestimable blessings which he has bestowed upon you. I call them inestimable; for they strictly and literally are so. No man, no angel can estimate their worth, or the greatness of your obligation to him who bestowed them. O Christian, Christian, did you but know what God has done for you; could you see the end of the path into which he has guided you; could you behold the meridian brightness of that day which has dawned within you; how would you rejoice, and exult, and call upon your soul and all that is within you, to bless and extol your benefactor!

How would you watch over and cultivate and labor to increase the seeds of grace which he has sown within you? And how would this church exert itself, how would it bless God for every instance of conversion, for every token of his presence, did it duly estimate the day of small things! Seek and pray then, for this attainment; and if you would obtain greater blessings from heaven, send up more numerous and fervent thanksgivings for the blessings which it has already bestowed on us.

One caution, and I have done. There is an opposite error, or mistake, into which many professors fall. Instead of despising the day of small things, they trust too much to it, and are satisfied with it. They conclude too hastily, that the work of grace is begun in their hearts and flatter themselves that it will advance to perfection, without any additional exertion on their part. Nay more, they perhaps fancy that their attainments are great, and indulge in self-complacency and pride.

This mistake is far more dangerous than the former. Better despise the day of small things, than be proud of it, or rest satisfied, or make it an excuse for sloth and presumption. That you may be guarded against this error, remember that the day of small things is a day of increase; that every one who has any grace, desires and labors to obtain more grace.

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