

Do Not Despise the Small Things
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Let's start with a picture, and it's a bit washed out with all the lights on, so you're going to have to work hard. It showed up better on my computer screen. But to help you a little bit, this is...that's me [*points to screen where there is a picture of Larry, dancing in a line with a bunch of kids*]. Ok, this is our summer vacation bible school for kids, and we are doing a Hebrew-style dance song. And we're kind of doin' this to a Hebrew rhythm, and we're singing; every once in a while you've got to stop and clap, and you sing this song. And I'm dressed up because this was kind of a drama type thing. I'm dressed up like a pirate. Anyway, that's me.

But you need to understand is that's something I never wanted to be. I never wanted to be a pastor. To my mind, church was a pretty small thing in the great scheme of things. In fact, even when I went to seminary I thought church was really kind of a bungling operation. And if I really wanted to do great things, if I really wanted to move things forward, I should probably teach in a seminary...the deep things of God. Or I was really kind of excited about some cutting-edge ministries out there, really exciting things...that you go out there and do really great things. In fact, the one that really fascinated, the one that drew my heart the most, was a ministry in Switzerland at the time; it was up in the mountains, the Swiss Alps. It was called L'Abri. And all that...that would be great! We could do that in Hatcher's Pass! It was this study center where people would come from all over the world, and they would discuss deep theology, and they would ski in the afternoons, and all that sort of stuff. I thought, man, that would be...*that would be ministry!*

I didn't want to be in one of those little churches. Even more, I didn't want to work with kids. Now, I like kids. I enjoy kids. I raised four kids. But I didn't want to work with kids. You see, I felt like, in the great scheme of things, children's ministry was on the bottom rung. Fact, I remember a discussion in seminary with a friend, and I was discussing with this seminary friend, and I told him, I says, "You know, if I ever end up in a church, and if I end up bein' a pastor somewhere, we're not gonna have a teen ministry. And we're not gonna do Sunday School. 'Cause we really gotta connect with the adults. We gotta deal with real theology, because people don't grasp the deep truths. And we gotta preach that; we gotta deal with that! And the kids will eventually get it from their parents." That [*pointing at the screen again*] is exactly where I did not wanna be—a pastor of a local church working with children.

The text we're gonna look at today is a verse in scripture that the Lord used to change me. It's one of the things He used to change me—not just in my thinking, but in my very heart. It's kind of odd that it's a verse we reach today. I just passed the thirty-mile marker—thirty-year marker...been here thirty years now. And I was ignoring this. Who wants to think that you've now been in the ministry in one spot for thirty years, which means you are now like fifty-eight years old, or something, you know. So I was just kinda, like, ignoring it. But when we were down in Oregon I spent an afternoon with a man who was my kind of mentoring support pastor the first five years I was here. He was a local pastor; pastored up in Palmer, Lazy Mountain Bible Church. Their church started our church. And he took me under his wing. The very first week I was here we met together. And for five years, every week, we would meet together...until he moved on to a mission field. And he was...he was kinda my mentoring pastor. He was a little older than me, but he had been in the pastorate longer than me. And I would ask him questions, and he would coach me along. We hadn't seen each other, now, in sixteen years. We spent an afternoon on the Oregon coast together. And it got me thinkin' about thirty years ago, and all the stuff that's gone on. And it got me thinkin' about how I changed, coming out of seminary. And then I come here.

And my first week back, my assignment for preaching is Zechariah. And in reading Zechariah, I come to this verse once again—one of the transforming, formative verses in my life. In fact, if there's any one verse that's shaped me as a pastor, this may well be it. It reads like this:

"For who has despised the day of small things? For 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."

Now, as you read that, your immediate thought may be, 'Larry, how did that have any impact on your life? It's just a strange verse, Larry.' Well, it is; and that's why you need some background. You need a sense of context for this verse to make any sense to you, let alone have any impact upon you. So let me give you a sense of context, a sense of the background behind this.

The book of Zechariah is called one of the Minor Prophets, and it's found near the end of your Old Testament. I'm gonna give you...encourage you to be sure and find it today, and locate that verse—4:10. But the entire book is found right near the end of the Old Testament. And it was written at a really critical time in Israel's history. The situation was Israel had fallen apart as a nation. They had been conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and they had been spread out into exile. Jerusalem had been completely destroyed. The temple had been burned to the ground. And the nation was abandoned, and the people were spread out, living as refugees living in exile.

And then God had done an amazing thing—He had brought...He had brought the people back. The first wave was around 50,000 people, came out of exile, and started to rebuild Israel. Their first major project, the thing they focused on, the thing they said, 'We're gonna do this. God has brought us back. He said He'd do it in seventy years, and He did;' and their first project, their first focus, was to rebuild the temple—the place where God had honored them with His presence, where He had dwelt among them, where His glory had been in a very special way. And they began to build that temple.

But when Zechariah steps in, it's been about 10-15 years, and the temple is still not done. In fact, they weren't even working on it any more. They had laid the foundation; they had started to work on it. But then things had become busy. They had farms to get started again. They had businesses to establish. They had a government to renew. They had all sorts of things to get about and get doing. And so the temple project kept getting put off, and unfinished. And then the local people around them began to resist the project, and they began to back off in the face of resistance. And the project came to a complete standstill.

And after about a decade of that, God responded. And God's response to this undone project, this unfinished work, this total stalled effort...God's response was to send two prophets, two people who would speak His message to the nation at that time. The target was to stir the people up, to renew them in the project again. The first one was a man by the name of Haggai, and you studied him, or John took you through that Minor Prophet about two weeks ago. And that particular prophet—and it was probably very suitable that John was the one who taught you that one—he had four blunt message. I mean, he was just like a sergeant. 'This is it. This is the goal.' Ok. And that was Haggai.

But right after him, about two months after he started preaching, God sent another prophet. This one was named Zechariah, and he was a prophet who came...his book is rather long among the Minor Prophets; it's about twelve chapters long, and it's filled with visions and oracles. Where Haggai was very blunt, very specific, very 'get this done,' Zechariah stood back and said, 'These are visions God has given me.' And then he gave oracles, 'messages God has given me.' In fact, of all the books of the Old Testament, this is the one most like the book of Revelation. I mean, you get into this book, the first seven chapters of it, you're just almost overwhelmed with sensory overload—of visions and pictures of things in the unseen realm, and things in the future. And it's so confusing, even to figure it out there has to be points of explanation right within the text, where Zechariah is given a vision and there's an angel standing beside him in this vision. And he says, "What is that?" And the angel explains it, because it's so astounding that you can't even figure it out when you see it; you need somebody to say, 'Here's what's goin' on.'

And then the oracles that come, beginning at chapter 9 and running through chapter 12—it's an amazing outline of God pronouncing what is gonna happen in the future, specifically related with the Messiah. In the Old Testament this is the most specific section that describes the Messiah coming and being rejected, and then moving on and talking about the Messiah ultimately coming to be received, and crowned to rule forever. It's an astounding book. It's one of those books I think is best read with a study bible beside you, because it is so challenging, and it stretches you so much; but it's also so captivating and fascinating.

Among the visions that God gives to Zechariah is a lampstand and two olive trees. And this comes late at night for him. He had one night in which there were eight visions given to him; that he's just overwhelmed with, in the middle of the night, this vision comes, and he starts seein' these things. And he's tryin' to figure it out, and this angel beside him would explain it. We're told at one part of the night he was just exhausted, and he fell into a sleep. And then we're told a little while later that he's woken again and he said, 'hey, there's another vision,' and he gets another one. And it's such a visionary language that you wonder what in the world's going on with all this.

In fact, I think...I think he probably would have been just dismissed as a crackpot, or a really strange guy that had been eating or drinking something really different, except for two things. One—is he was a really high-ranking priest. In fact, he would become the high priest of Israel eventually. So he was a man of great respect and great leadership, and people held him in high regard. So when he started talkin' about 'I had visions,' they listened.

Secondly, over the years things began to ring true with those visions. They began to say, 'This is really something! It's strange, but it's real.'

This particular vision that came that night...it was about the sixth vision received that night, fifth or sixth vision...and in chapter 4 is the chapter that records that whole vision...I encourage you to turn to it in your bibles...in chapter 4 he describes what he sees. And the focal point of the vision is this huge lampstand with a huge bowl of oil. They burned oil in the lamps at that time, and there's this huge bowl of oil. And there's seven lamps off that bowl that are giving off light. And each one of those little lamps has seven wicks to it. So there's like forty-nine lights going on, all fueled by this one great bowl of oil. And beside that are two olive trees—types of trees that would provide oil for burning in lamps. And that's the core of the vision.

And as Zechariah is sitting there, he's sayin', 'What is this about? What is goin' on? What's the message here?' We're told, and we're given the message in verse 6, and it reads like this. This is a...I'm not gonna try and interpret every element of that vision. I'm just gonna give you the core, center, point of the message, the truth that the vision was meant to communicate. The angel explains that this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the man in charge of the nation at that time. He was the one who had ultimate responsibility for making sure that temple got finished. And the promise of the statement to Zerubbabel, the message to him, reads like this. It says

"Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD God of hosts.

And then he goes on, and he says to him...he says, verse 7,

What are you, O great mountain?

...speaking of the project ahead of them...

Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone of that temple with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"

It's a message to Zerubbabel, that, you know, it's not going to be strength and power that gets done; it's gonna be the Spirit of God. And what's the challenge ahead of you is really nothing. He repeats that same sort of message when we get down to verse 9. He says

The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will finish it. Then you'll know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.

'This is gonna get done! And Zerubbabel, you're gonna do it! And it's gonna be by a moving and a working of God's Spirit among you and through you.'

That's the heart of the message given in this vision. And then we come to the tenth verse, and this is the one that we started everything with, and you now have a sense of context. The opening line of verse 10 reads like this; he says

For who has despised the day of small things?

The reason the temple project had stalled, the reason the temple project had been put aside, is because, in the eyes of the people, it was a small thing given everything else that had to be done. In fact, we're told that when they first came to the land and they first resettled, and they set out the foundation for this temple, and they all stood around, that the younger people involved began to shout, and sing, and rejoice, and dance at the laying of the foundation of the temple and the renewal of the land. But we're told that the older people, the people that had actually seen the previous temple, the grand and glorious, magnificent temple of Solomon—when they saw this little...little footprint, they began to weep and wail because it was so meager in their sight. It was such a poor shadow of a glorious temple they had known in Solomon's day. They say that the noise was so mixed you could not tell—was the nation celebrating or was it grieving.

And when Haggai stepped forward, one of his first statements was, is, 'You guys think this is nothing. You despise the day of little things. Your business is bigger. Your field is more important. Getting the politics straightened out is more central. Dealing with the international powers—that's the big stuff. This little...this little hovel of a temple—it's a little thing. So God says you despised it. You thought little of it.'

But the next line goes on and it says

But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

Now, the Hebrew here is kinda complicated. The translators work with it. I'm goin' with the most literal translation, and it's the most difficult, but we're gonna stick with it. It says

But these seven will be glad when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

In other words, there's seven...seven *some things* that are gonna be excited, pleased, and rejoice when they see Zerubbabel pick up the tools and start the project again. Well, we know who Zerubbabel is, but the question is who are these seven? Well, they're the seven lights on that lampstand. You say, 'Well who are they? What are they?' And the next line explains. It says

These are the eyes of the LORD which range to and fro throughout the earth.

Now, don't say, 'Ok, does God have seven eyes?' We're dealin' with apocalyptic, prophetic-type imagery, and the idea of seven is the idea of completeness. And it's sayin', in essence, this is the complete eye of God that sees everything. He's totally aware of the big picture. He not only see's this little temple project, but He sees what's goin' on in the very core and courts of Persia. He knows what's goin' on all the way around the world; not only knows what's goin' on in the world that we see, but He knows what's goin' on in the unseen realm. He knows what's goin' on among the angels, and the powers, and the authorities, and the unseen. And not only that, He knows, He sees—not just the past, not just the present, but He sees the future. And this One who sees everything, who sees it all, when He sees Zerubbabel pick up the tool to start working on this little project that seems so insignificant, He rejoices—because He sees that that little temple is part of something grand and glorious.

That's why Zechariah's book is so different. It's God trying to get us to see things that we don't normally see...the workings that are going on not just in the courts and the centers of government, but in the very heart of God, the very center of the heavens, among the powers of evil and the powers of good that are unseen. He wants us to see that. And He wants us to see the future. And one of the pictures He gives of the future, one of the grandest glimpses He gives of the future comes way in chapter 12 [*should be chapter 14*], when He pictures this day, and God sees it! He says

The LORD will be king over all the earth;

Someday there'll be a day like that!

And on that day the LORD will be the only one,

He'll be the only authority; He'll be the only power. In fact, His name, the *only one*, His name will be the only one that is named over all other names. God sees that. He sees that that little temple in Jerusalem was gonna be part of making that happen.

Don't despise the day of little things, 'cause with God they're a part of something...something much bigger.

They didn't get it very well. They really didn't. They did rally around, and they did build that temple, but it was kinda small. And so they decided, 'It needs to be bigger.' And so they kept building that temple bigger, and bigger, and bigger; until, by the time that Jesus came about 530 years later...by the time Jesus came, that temple was the grandest temple you can imagine. In fact, it was one of the great wonders of the world. Huge, magnificent, white stones, and ornate gold all over it. In fact, it was said that as you rounded the shoulder of the Mount of Olives and you would look at Jerusalem, if the light was just light it would go off the gold that glittered on that temple, and it would be blinding—as if the sun was just rising in front of you. Thirty acres laid out in magnificent glory that just dominated the city, dominated the nation—it was big, it was glorious! That small temple was far in the past.

You know what Jesus said when He walked into that temple? He says, 'This is a den of thieves. And there is not gonna be left one stone on top of another. It's comin' down.' And seventy years later the Romans came through and they did not leave one stone on top of another.

It wasn't just that they got infatuated with the big thing. They continued to miss the small thing. Zechariah probably gave...of all the Old Testament prophets, he probably gave the clearest, most undisputable picture of the Messiah you'll find in Old Testament prophecy. He describes the Messiah as coming like this. I'm gonna give it to you. Zechariah 9:9—he tells the people of Israel...he says this...he says

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

...speaking here of Jerusalem. He says

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!*

'People of the land, people of that city, rejoice, and triumph, and celebrate!' And here's why; here's the prophetic picture. He says

Behold, your king is coming to you;

'The Messiah, the One who will set all things right, the One who is God is raised up to rule forever in peace and righteousness—He's coming to you! Rejoice and celebrate! And

He is just, and He is endowed with salvation.

He is the One who will do things right, and fair, and equitable. And He will deliver people, He will deliver nations, He will deliver the world!'

Humble, and mounted on a donkey,

Not just a donkey, but it'll be

...a colt, the foal of a donkey.

When Jesus came and He entered Jerusalem on a donkey...not just a donkey, but a colt of a donkey that had never been ridden...the people of Jerusalem said, 'Crucify Him! He's not the royal conqueror we're looking for. He's not the conquering Messiah that will devastate the Romans that we want. He's not the king that will come in and will build a palace that matches the temple and rule with righteousness. He can't be it. He is a country preacher from Galilee who performs some miracles, but we don't know how He does it, what His power is, and He keeps callin' us to repentance. He cannot be the Messiah. Crucify Him!' And they did. And they despised the day of small things.

You know, we struggle to get it, too. We really do. In the great scheme of things, the church—I'm not talking about the building at all; I'm talking about the people, the people that God has called together, the young and the old, the strong and the weak, the wise and the simple, the learned and the ignorant, all the people that God brings together around Jesus, this thing called the church—is a pretty small thing compared to everything else we see around us. The governments, the armies, the athletic teams—I mean, who would be more excited about seein' the Green Bay Packers reunited with Favre, or seein' the church reunited with Christ? Our world would be more excited with Green Bay Packers; church—small thing.

And we look at what we're called to do to build that church, and those are very small things—worship together, serve together, learn together—nothing complicated, nothing grand and glorious. Those are little things. And it doesn't seem impressive. It doesn't.

Now, sometimes we see in scripture that yeah, there's something really big that we're a part of. One of my favorite verses is Ephesians 3. There's a verse there where Paul is talkin' about the church, and he introduces it this way. He says...he speaks about the wisdom of God right now, in our time, being made known, being made visible, being made manifest. And then he adds this phrase, and this is the one that really catches me up. He says "...through the church..." In other words, it's sayin' that, you know what? If you look at the church you're gonna see the wisdom of God made evident. You look at a group of people like this, and you look closely, and you will see the wisdom of God, God getting the best things done, in the best way, at the best time. You'll see wisdom if you look at the church.

But he isn't concerned about us seein' that wisdom. He says we're the manifestation of God's wisdom

...through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

I mean, this astounds me! Paul is saying that it's like God is saying, 'You know what? Any angelic creature, any power, any being in the unseen realm that wants to see the wisdom of God...' God calls 'em over and says, 'Look at that thing called "the church," and you will see My wisdom.' That astounds me. And I see it in scripture that yeah, this little thing is part of something much bigger.

And sometimes I sense it. When I do...last week I'm down in the nursery. I did four-year-olds first, and that was a kick. That was good. But then I got into the toddlers. That is...that is the best gig down there! They got vanilla wafers! And the kids can't count, they don't know what's goin' on, so you get the big jar of vanilla wafers and you go to the kid—'one for you, two for me. One for you, two for me.' And the kid's just 'yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!' You know?

So I'm down there, 'one for you, two for me,' and this young mother comes up. And she's got a little toddler. And as she hands him across the door to me she goes, "Now, he's gonna fuss a little bit. In fact, he's gonna turn blue. But don't worry. He'll eventually breathe and you'll be ok." I went "Ok" and so I grab this kid. And I'm at the door and I'm figuring, ok, this kid is gonna explode. And so I right away turn and I head for the far corner of the room. And I figure I'll go over there and as quick as I can, and he's gonna be wailing; I'll hold him over there until he settles down, then we'll come back and everything will be ok. So I'm over here and I start...I start goin' like this, and I don't hear any noise. And I'm thinkin', "I've got this! I got this!" And I'm over in the corner thinkin', "I nailed this! I've got this kid, it's perfect!" I look down, he's blue! And then he takes a gasp of air, and then just *explodes* with noise. But she's right. Eventually he settled down and we ended the hour really good buddies. It was 'one for you, two for me. One for you, two for me.' And we went through all the vanilla wafers, almost. Just a few left. Ok?

In the middle of that there was a moment when I heard singing going on up here. It just hit me—I'm down here feedin' wafers to this little kid...no big thing. And his mom and dad were able to be up here in worship, bein' strengthened in their faith, and their hope, and their love. This is a big thing. And then, later that day when church is over and everybody's leaving, and I'm headed out the door, that couple has gone, gotten lunch, and they're coming back with their two kids. And they're meeting with a youth group leader meeting because they are now gonna invest themselves in some teenagers. And I'm sittin' there thinking, "This is so cool."

You sense that. You see it in scripture. You sense it when you're a part of it. But it's so easy that we drift from it. And we think this is really a small thing, and it doesn't matter much. Listen...it was this verse that called me to a little thing called the church—not just to be in it, but to do the little things that are involved in a church. This is the verse that called me, and it's the verse that sustained me. And this morning I want you to hear it as God's call to you, and to sustain you. Don't be somebody who despises the little things. Because if God's in it, it's part of something that's very, very big. And it's not gonna be the strength and might that we bring to the table—it's going to be the Spirit of God working in us, among us, and through us.

I'll ask you to stand.

Let's sing that blessing, and sing it as a blessing upon you as we go in, as we go forward as a church, enjoying the presence of our God among us.

[Congregation sings "The Lord Bless Thee."]

Amen. Go in grace.