

FBC Service Sunday April 21 2024 Zechariah 4:6-10 Don't Despise the Day of Small Things

Carol Eagles mail.

Niagara Falls is a tremendous sight! Thousands of tons of water gushing over the rocky ledge and free falling some 150 feet to crash into the white water below. No wonder people come from all over the world to see it!

Do you know though, if Canada and the U.S. were dependent on Niagara alone to meet their water needs, we'd all be in drought. **It's the thousands of little streams running throughout the land that are quietly providing life-giving water.**

I believe there's a lesson in this story for the church. It points us to several universal truths that are valid in any age - truths that can give us courage and make us rejoice when we feel insignificant and outnumbered - truths that tend to get lost in today's world.

Researchers tell us that in our society it's usually big people and big things that get the majority of attention and little people and little things get put down.

Consider sports. Except for horse racing jockeys, midget wrestlers, and gymnasts, small athletes usually don't last long - much less attain star status.

With perhaps just a few exceptions, you'd better not figure on a career in the NBA unless you are crowding seven feet tall. Look at the size now of players in MLB, NFL and the NHL.

Consider novels and movies. Who is usually the hero? The tall, handsome guy! The little guy with the glasses is often the object of all the jokes.

Researchers have concluded, time and time again, that in our culture, the mere possession of a towering physique usually means money in the bank.

They tell us large people receive higher salaries, occupy more important positions, and wield greater influence. In spite of our labour laws, it's a recognized fact employers will favour the tall person over those who weigh 100 pounds and wear thick glasses?

Look at advertising. We have jumbo eggs, jumbo soft drinks, jumbo detergent, jumbo jets, jumbotron if you like the Blue Jays, super oil tankers-- the list goes on and on! Giant this, extra large that, king size.

Why is it that the two most popular hamburgers today are the Big Mac and the Whopper?

We want it and we want it big. We measure all kinds of things by their relative size, success being one of the biggest (if you'll forgive my continued use of the word.)

Of course, it would be nice if we left that mega-mindset home when we come to church on Sunday. The fact is, we don't. Neither do our neighbours around us. This thinking sadly has now carried over into our churches where "**Bigger is Better**" is widely promoted.

Consequently, the church with the most people in the pews on Sunday morning is considered the best and the most influential.

And if a church is small for some reason (and it matters not what the reason!) there simply must be something wrong.

What do you think preachers talk about when they get together? After the intros, what do you think is the most frequently asked question? It's usually "How are things going there in the church," which translated usually means, "What is your headcount on Sunday morning?"

It's very easy today to become discouraged when a local church is small in numbers. Our culture's value system says that small is backward, insignificant, hokey. Consequently, many view the small congregation as an embarrassment. Out of step.

I think every small church shares the dream of someday being large, having an impact on the community around it, seeing more and more people coming to Christ.

I think to lose that dream would render us much less effective, spiritually lazy. God has not entrusted us with His precious gospel to hide it under a bushel.

But neither must we feel that if after the very best of our efforts, we have not yet arrived at that place we've been shooting for, and we are somehow useless.

Of course, the size of a group can be one factor when determining relative effectiveness, but it's only one factor among many. My purpose here is not for a moment to disparage or put down large churches who are faithful to God and make a significant impact for Him in their communities.

I wish every church were both large and consistently faithful to God. Wouldn't it be great to see standing room only in all our church buildings?

I am concerned though, with the prevalent idea that small is wrong when it comes to the church. The OT story of Gideon points out that God can and does use small groups of people to do great things in His name, and that small numbers are not insignificant to God.

You don't have to be a whiz at math to figure out that Gideon's little camp of 300 men must have looked pretty "hokey" when compared to their buddies God sent home. As for the odds of the enemy they faced, they were outnumbered 400 to one!

Not only that, but there they were out there, not holding weapons, but pitchers and trumpets! **What a joke!** At least that's how it must have looked like through human eyes.

But that's the lesson! Our God isn't dependent upon human strength or large numbers to accomplish His ends. Working through this small group of people in this case was His preferred means!

It gave Him the opportunity to show His strength in a way that couldn't be confused with human strength. That's why He sent all those soldier's home.

Take a listen! The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her."

I wonder what the conversation must have been like among the 31,700 soldiers returning home that day before Gideon's little squad hit the field? Can you imagine?

"Humph! Those guys don't stand a chance against that army!"

"Yeah, they'll be dead before they start. There won't be enough left to feed the buzzards."

"Only fools would go up against odds like that! What chance has such a dinky little bunch."

Whether there was any intimidation like that I don't know. I do know it goes on today. The devil would have us believe that a small church is no more significant than a box kite on a radar screen!

But I'm here to tell you this morning that the view that God's word gives us is quite different. **If that box kite has His name on it, it's just as important as an F-35 Lightning fighter jet!**

Throughout history, God has worked through individuals and small groups, and small things to fulfill His purposes. That doesn't mean that He ignores large groups or doesn't work through them also.

He does. It's just that He works with what He has - with what is truly His. Through Bible history it hasn't often been large groups who were faithful to Him.

How many people were on the ark when He blew the whistle to board the ark for the last time? Only eight people listened to God.

It was only Abraham that God was working with when the rest of the world was miles away from Him after the flood.

Jacob and his clan of 70 people must have looked pretty ragged and insignificant when they first moved to Egypt from famine ravished Canaan. **Yet through them God blessed the world!**

And don't forget that it was the faithful "remnant" who carried the ball for 400 years during the inter-testament period. Elijah.

In the New Testament we're prone to look at the exciting things that happened in the Jerusalem church as our standard of success. **The 3000. The 5000. The multitudes.**

But what happened in Acts 8 when it became illegal to be a Christian in that city?

The church was fragmented and scattered to the four winds. **From there onward we find many small groups.** We don't know just how small they were, but we do know that many were so small that all of the Christians in a given city met in individual homes.

When we read about those churches, there is not a hint of God's disapproval.

The Apostles made no excuses for them. They were just as valid as anything else going on in the Kingdom. Just like the 300 men in Gideon's day. There should be no flinching and no apology needed.

Yet it was through those groups that the gospel spread to that generation.

Through the dark ages, those who didn't bow to the corruption of the Roman church were called heretics and had to meet in small groups in secret.

In our day, millions of Chinese meet covertly in small home groups.

Does all this mean that small is desirable and large is undesirable? Not at all! What I want you to see is that size does not always determine effectiveness or faithfulness.

There are churches large and small who are both faithful and unfaithful to God -effective and ineffective.

Size is not the sole measuring rod. We make a serious mistake when we view the "mega church" as blessed by God and the small church as though it were on the sick list.

Perhaps it's because we have entered the "megachurch" era, the small congregation has been derided as inferior. The stereotype of a small church is one that is backward, boring, and somehow a failure.

This may not be so at all. Actually, there may be several reasons why a congregation is small.

Was it not our Saviour who reminded his disciples, *"where two are three are gathered in my name?"*

This brings us to our text for today from the book of Zechariah. **Quote!**

Here we have the theme of "God blessing small things." It tells us how God started off with something small and then blessed those small beginnings in an extraordinary fashion.

As we study Scripture, we find that this is a consistent pattern. He wants to remind us of our dependence on Him and on His resources.

He constantly fights against our sinful tendency to exalt ourselves and boast in our achievements. **Our boasting should always be in the Lord who alone is sufficient to accomplish His purposes.** God makes sure He alone gets the glory as He begins small and then blesses abundantly.

In Zechariah's day, the rebuilding of the temple looked pitiful compared to its former glory in the days of Solomon; but God was at work to accomplish His purposes. **And make no mistake, accomplish them He will.** *"Despise not the day of small things,"* He says.

We should never despise or underestimate the importance of something that God considers important.

We tend to like the big scene, the big programme, the big building, the finished product, just as the people in Zechariah's day. They scoffed at the small beginnings of the rebuilding of the temple.

In our text, I don't know that I've ever seen an experience that could rival it. There was crying so loud that people could hear it from a far distance away. The crying was strange though, it was mixed with happiness and lament.

The exiles had returned and had laid the foundation for the new temple. The older folks were wailing with lament because they had seen the previous temple in all of its glory. The younger folks who had grown up in exile were excited and full of joy as they looked ahead to this new temple.

The strange chorus of weeping and wailing punctuates the epic scene in Ezra 3 as the foundation for the new temple is laid.

But up steps Zechariah and brings to this party a statement about what God is doing, and the fact that people are not to despise the day of small things. (*Zech. 4.6-7,10*)

8. *“So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.*

9. *“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you.*

10. *“Who dares despise the day of small things?”*

What is smaller than a group of 40,000 exiled rejects returning to a God-forsaken land, embarking on a building project to bring a kingdom?

How about a king being born in a manger amid the sounds and odors of farm animals? That seems like a pretty small thing too.

Don't you dare despise it.

There's more. How about that same baby growing into a man and then preaching and teaching the message of a kingdom while himself being poor, homeless, and rejected?

The culmination of that preaching is to become a data entry in the long spreadsheet of Roman crucifixions. He was a small thing to them. Just another crucified rebel.

But these small things add up. **Small things are ordained by a very big God.**

The message of Zechariah is still true today. Instead of despising and becoming discouraged with the small and the ordinary, rejoice! God is working in and through them for His everlasting glory.

Here are some examples:

Don't despise the small things of prayer, by means of which God changes people's hearts.

Don't despise the small things of service in the local church, by which God is glorified and people encouraged.

Don't despise the small things of working in the seemingly insignificant place like the church nursery, by which you reflect Christ like love and compassion.

Don't despise the small things like daily bible reading, by which your heart is transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Don't despise the small things of daily obedience and sacrifice through which your heart is trained and molded after the Saviour.

Don't despise the victory Christ has won for you.

Don't despise the small things like a true measure of the joy of the Lord, these things indicate you are spiritually alive, and you can sing with the Psalmist, "all that thrills my soul is Jesus."

Don't despise the small things like not being grumpy and bitter, and walking in the Spirit, by which you show the genuineness of your faith, and your love to fellow believers.

Don't despise the small things like loving your wife or husband, through them you begin to more clearly reflect Christ's love for the church.

Don't despise the small things like honouring your parents, by them you demonstrate that there is a God who is bigger than you, whose authority you value.

Don't despise the small things like working hard at your job every day.

Don't despise the small things like speaking of Christ to others, by which unbelievers may come to trust and treasure Jesus.

Don't despise the small things of corporate worship, the singing of songs and preaching of the word.

Don't despise the day of small things!

Through a rag-tag group of disciples, there are believers all over the world who trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ: His death and resurrection. The Spirit of the Lord was at work in them building His kingdom.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6)

May we never despise the day of small things, because the Lord Jesus never despises that day! He delights in even the slightest glimmer of desire for His mercy and grace.

We are all a part of God's work as long as we remain faithful to Him. We will continue to add to His kingdom whether it is visible to human eyes or not. That is our calling. That is our goal.

There is a tree that grows on the extreme edge of the timberline on the side of a steep mountain. Its roots go deep and spread out widely over a large area. It should be tall, perhaps a hundred feet, but it is only nine feet tall. The reason is found in the place where God has caused it to grow.

Far above the area of heavy topsoil that supports the 100 footers in the valley below, it must struggle daily for existence. Beneath its lean and twisted branches, a whole community of life is gathered. It's roots hold just enough topsoil to sustain their growth and prevent erosion from eliminating their existence.

No. The logging companies will never compete for its wood. Few will ever even realize that it's there. But it plays a significant part in the overall ecosystem of its world.

Praise God for the hundred footers! But praise Him too, for the nine footers on the hillside!

What we're attempting to do this summer. Park services. VBS and Fall youth may seem small etc.