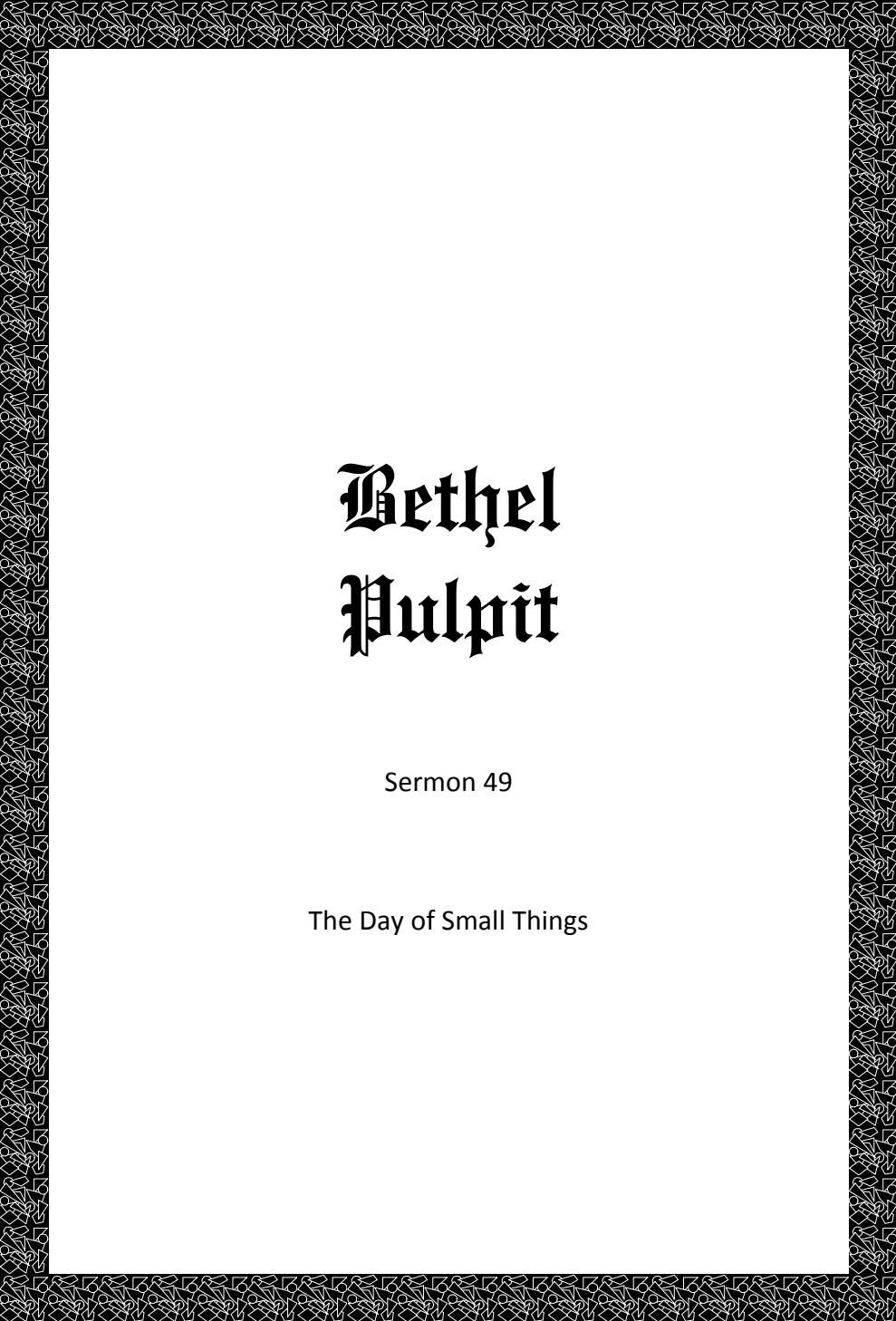




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 49

The Day of Small Things

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 8th July, 1982**

Text: *“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” (Zechariah 4. 10).*

This was a very dark, trying time in Israel, both in the church and in the state. It was a day of small things. You remember that Solomon’s temple, with all its glory, had long since been destroyed by fire. The godly remnant had now started rebuilding it, but everything seemed to be going wrong. There was so much opposition to the building of the second temple from without, so many enemies, and Satan hindered. And then among themselves there seemed to be no heart to carry on. It was a day of small things. As the temple began to be built, the older men, who remembered the glories of Solomon’s temple, wept because of how mean this new temple appeared to be. So at length the work completely ceased.

In many ways, it was similar to our own day and with some of us, perhaps, similar to our own circumstances. But beloved friends, it was God’s purpose that the temple should be built, and did He not say that “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former”? It was this house that was to be for ever sanctified when the Lord Jesus, in the days of His flesh, honoured it by His presence. But you see, Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the prince of the house of David, the ruler of the people, were very discouraged, and well they might be. So the Lord raised up these two godly men, Haggai and Zechariah, to prophesy to them, to encourage them to carry on, and under the work of Zerubbabel and the preaching and prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, the temple was completed.

Now chapter four is a chapter of encouragement to God’s little remnant in Israel, who were so tried and so downcast because it was a day of small things. It seemed to them that the cause of God and truth, the church of God in Israel, was like a dimly-burning flame. Well, let that be as it may, the Lord gave Zerubbabel this wonderful vision. The Lord showed him this candlestick of gold with seven lamps and the flame was

not going out; and the secret is clearly revealed: on each side a living olive tree supplied a living supply of oil so that the candlestick could not go out. Israel could not be overthrown. God's purpose could not be overturned. For, "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel" (and unto you and me tonight), "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." This is the golden oil; this is the living supply, flowing from the olive trees to the candlestick. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

What then? You say, "What has the Lord to say about this mountain of difficulties that is in our way?" This is the word of the Lord: "Who art thou, O great mountain?" It does not matter how great, before Zerubbabel thou shalt be completely levelled. "Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

And then the very plain assurance that God's work will go on; it must go on. God's purpose must be fulfilled; God's work must be accomplished. No unfinished work with God! He does not begin and leave it unfinished. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it."

Then, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Do not despise them, Zerubbabel; do not despise them, Joshua. Do not look at the small things. They are small, but they are there. The foundation is laid; God's work is begun. Do not despise the day of small things. "For they shall rejoice." They were mourning now, sad. "They shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel" – the mark that God's work was going on to its completion. This plummet or plumbline, of course, was an instrument used in building. It was to make sure that a wall was perfectly straight, perpendicular. And you see there this plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel, the work going on to completion.

"With those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord." We read of those seven in chapter three, the seven eyes of the Lord. You have it again in one or two places in the book of Revelation, a Lamb slain in the midst of the throne having seven eyes. They always say that seven is the number of perfection. It is the perfect vision of God, His all-seeing eye.

“They are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth,” ever upon His people ever watching over them, ever protecting them, ever defending them, ever seeing each danger, each trial.

“For who hath despised the day of small things?” Of course, there is a very powerful application of this in the church of God today. It is a day of small things. You remember how our old deacon Mr. Watts years ago at the prayer meeting used to say, “What a mercy that they are not *dead* things.” But we are told that we are never to despise these small things. God does not despise small things: God uses small things. What did He do with Moses’ rod? What did He do with David’s stone? So you might go on right through Scripture. How was Jericho overthrown? By Israel tramping round the walls. How were the Midianites overthrown? By poor, trembling Gideon and his three hundred men.

“Small things.” You know, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” “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 not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence.” You see, we are never to judge by outward appearance. We are not just to look at the things that are seen; they are small things. We are to look at God and His eternal purpose and His promise and His omnipotence and His love. Now those are not small things. We are to “look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” It does not mean we are to rest satisfied with the day of small things; it does not say that for a moment. We are to pray on, to seek for great things and to expect great things, but we have not to despise the day of small things.

My mind goes to Elisha and his servant when they looked through the window and saw the city completely surrounded by the enemy. To them it was a day of small things. The servant boy said, “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” All he could see was the small things. Now Elisha saw the small things, but he saw great things as well. “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” No small things there! “Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes.” “And he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” Do not despise the day of small things and do not look at small things.

Now it may be that some of you are fearful about the unknown way, especially in the church of God. Well, you have not to despise the day of small things, you are not to look at the small things. You are to look at the great things. You have to look away from people and things and circumstances and you have to look to God who is great and almighty. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” You have to look at the olive trees, not at the few stones that are laid in the building. You have to look at the seven eyes of the Lord, not at the unconcern and sin of the people. You have not to look at the plummet in your own hand; you have to see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.

“Who art thou, O great mountain?” How great is your mountain? You can make it as great as you like. It is going to be levelled before Zerubbabel. “Thou shalt become a plain.” Or to change the figure entirely for a moment, you have to go and blow the trumpet and walk round the walls blowing the trumpet with your eyes fixed on the Lord Jesus, and the walls of Jericho will fall down flat before 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.” Beloved friends, I want to speak of this word this evening especially personally. May we ever be kept from despising the day of small things in other people’s hearts and lives. “Nor meanly of the feeble think.” And we are not to despise the day of small things in our own hearts. Of course, there are the two extremes concerning the small things in our hearts. One extreme is to be completely satisfied with them and the other extreme is to despise them. To quote good “Rabbi” Duncan, “A *perhaps* of salvation, let no man despise it; let no man rest in it.” Never rest in small things; seek greater. But beware of the sin of unbelief. Beware of despising the day of small things. When the Lord begins His work in the new birth, often the new-born soul thinks it is a day of small things. You are not what you once were; you know you are different, but it is a day of small things. You feel so weak, and so feeble, and so small yourself. And you feel that the things you have, if you have them, are small things. Well, again to quote old Mr. Watts, “Bless God if they are not dead things.” It is a solemn thing if we have *no* things or if they are *dead* things. And it is not just at the beginning. There are many times in

the life and experience of a believer when he feels concerning himself that it is a day of small things.

“Who hath despised the day of small things?” Well, there was one thing that Zerubbabel had, one thing Israel had, the godly remnant had, however small the things were. That is, the foundation had been laid. There may not appear to be many stones, and the stones may not look very beautiful, but they could not deny this, that the foundation had been laid. Now tell me, have you a sweet hope that God has laid the foundation in your soul? Then do not despise it. You say, “I can’t see much built on it, or if there is anything, it seems to be wood, hay and stubble.” Now do not despise that foundation if it has been laid in your heart, the foundation of God’s work, teaching you your need and your sin, making you dissatisfied with the world and dissatisfied with just a form of godliness and dissatisfied with yourself, causing you to long for Christ, to seek after Christ. “Who hath despised the day of small things?” Now has the Lord laid the foundation in your heart? Tell me this, has He also brought you to Christ as your only Foundation? “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Tell me, has He swept away those old, false foundations: taking everything for granted, thinking there is plenty of time, satisfied with your repentance, your chapel attendance, your profession? Have those foundations all been swept away? And is it now, “None but Jesus”?

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

You say, “That is my *only* foundation.” Well, do not despise the day of small things. If God has laid His foundation, that is a great thing. It is a greater thing than the creation of heaven and earth, and it takes a greater power. So it is a great thing. In your estimation, it is small, but eternity will prove what a great thing it is.

But you say, “I feel so weak and I feel so feeble.” You look at your faith, and your faith seems to be very small. Your faith is weak; it is not very strong. You feel there is much darkness, much unbelief, mixed with it. Do not despise the day of small things. Cowper says,

“Our faith is feeble, we confess;
We faintly trust Thy Word;

But wilt Thou pity us the less?
Be that far from Thee, Lord.”

“Who hath despised the day of small things?” Pray for a sweet increase of faith. Pray that it might be strengthened, but do not despise little faith, because it will take a sinner to heaven. Great faith brings more comfort, more assurance, but little faith takes a sinner to heaven.

“Who hath despised the day of small things?” What about your love? Do you feel that your love is very small and weak? Is there anyone here tonight who feelingly says,

“Lord, it is my chief complaint,
That my love is cold and faint”?

Perhaps some of you wonder if you do love the Lord Jesus. “Who hath despised the day of small things?” Let me test your love by one point (not on a point of emotionalism or just feeling). How would it be if, when you went outside chapel, there was someone coming down the street speaking dishonouring things about the Lord Jesus? Would you walk past without thinking anything, or would it grieve you in your innermost being? That is because you love Him, and because you love Him you cannot bear His name to be dishonoured.

What about your prayers? You say, “My poor, prayerless prayers.” Do not despise them. Still pray on. Do not let Satan keep you from praying. The Lord gives some very wonderful answers to some very poor prayers. He does it on mercy’s ground; He does it for Jesus’ sake.

“Who hath despised the day of small things.” Now what about your hope, your little hope? A woman once said that her hope was not worth anything, and a godly minister present said, “If I were to give you a hundred pounds, would you for ever part with that little hope you have?” She said, “Not for a thousand pounds; not for a million pounds.” “Well,” he said, “It is not worthless.”

“Does Satan tempt you to give up,
And call no more on Jesus’ name?
Cast not away your little hope;
Come hither, and behold the Lamb.”

Do you say, “By whom shall Jacob arise? For he is small”? Now is it this that tries and tempts so many of you here tonight? What of your assurance? You say, “That is very small. I seem to have no assurance at all, no assurance that I am a child of God.” Well, do you seek for it? Do you pray for it? Is there anyone here who ever prays,

“Assure my conscience of her part
In the Redeemer’s blood”?

“Who hath despised the day of small things? There are millions who do not possess these small things, millions who do not want to possess them, millions who *would* despise them. You may be despising the day of small things in your heart tonight, beloved, but your God does not despise them. God the Father does not despise these small things in your heart. Neither does God the Son, the dear Lord Jesus. He will not break the bruised reed. That is a small thing. And He will not quench the smoking flax. That is a small thing. And God the Holy Ghost does not despise the day of small things, because He sees these small things as His own work. O do not despise the day of small things. Be thankful for them, an evidence that the foundation is laid, an evidence that the work is begun, an evidence that the new birth has taken place.

Why, with the most eminent of saints, their repentance and faith and hope and love and holy zeal, they feel these are small. Look at Paul: “Not as though I had already attained.” Even the great apostle thought so many of his things were small things. Now do not despise them.

But beloved friends, “A *perhaps* of salvation, let no man despise it; let no man rest in it.” This is to encourage you, not to satisfy you.

“Jesus Christ, your Father’s Son,
Bids you undismayed go on.”

Then what is the answer to this day of small things with a believer? What is the track that he has to pursue? What is the way that he has to walk? Well, there are three things here in this verse and in this chapter for your encouragement who have these small things – and we are bidden not to despise them.

The first thing is this, to encourage you to go on: that *the Lord will never leave His own work unfinished*. Has the Lord begun with you? Then He will carry on and He will complete. I have often told you what I

saw in my early days. Down in Kent there was an ancient house and they were appealing for funds. A wealthy benefactor had promised to finance the complete restoration of that house, so it had been begun. Then he had died, and had not left anything in his will concerning it. So the work came to an end. That will never happen with the Lord; there is no unfinished work with the Lord. These small things in the day of Zerubbabel were an evidence that the foundation was laid, that the work was begun, and as it was God's purpose to complete it, so it must be finished. And do you think the Lord would take such care about the completion of a temple and leave the work of grace unfinished in your heart? Hold it fast: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it." You did not start it yourself, did you? You did not take up with religion one day, decide you would give up the world and all your former things. Who brought you into that solemn, awful concern? "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it."

"The work which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen,
And never was forfeited yet."

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it" – not your hands or mine. Sometimes Satan tempts us as if we had to carry on and complete it ourselves. We realise we cannot start it, but Satan almost tempts us to believe we have to finish it. The same hands that began, the same hands will complete. "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." "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of Thine own hands."

"For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice." "Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." "For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel" – the mark, the evidence that the work is being completed, the work is being carried on. Beloved, may you see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.

“The work begun is carried on,
Nor hell can it deface;
The whole elect with Christ are one
And must be saved by grace.”

“Who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.” In a word it is this – hold it fast – “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Now that is the first thing for your encouragement, those of you who are troubled about your small things, that the Lord will not leave His work unfinished.

Now the second thing brought before us here is this: that *the Lord’s all-seeing eye is upon His own work*. “Those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.” That is, the almighty eye of God is watching for every danger that may assail His people. The loving eye of God is watching the work being carried on, the building of the temple, however slow. It is God’s work; His eye is upon it and He dearly loves it. Sometimes we are tried about Zion, aren’t we? Well, the Lord loves Zion much more than you and I do and His eye is ever upon it.

And concerning these small things, His work, that work begun in your heart, your little hope, your little faith, your little love, the Lord’s all-seeing, almighty, all-loving eye is upon it. He knows those feeble desires.

“Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
’Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you still seek;
His Spirit will cherish the life He first gave;
You never shall perish if Jesus can save.”

The Lord’s eye is upon you and upon that work in your heart, and He sees those desires, however feeble. He knows your desires; He knows your thoughts and He says, “I know the thoughts that I think toward you . . . thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”

“Those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth,” watching that work of grace as a loving gardener watches the plants in his garden. He will not let anyone harm them; he will keep the slugs away from them; he will not let the birds come down

and peck them. “I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” The Lord never slumbers; He never sleeps; He is the Keeper of Israel, and His watchful, loving, all-seeing, almighty eye is ever upon you and ever upon that work of grace in you, watching over you for your good.

And then the third thing to encourage those who are tried about the day of small things. Not so much in this verse, but in the teaching of the whole chapter, there is *the living supply of oil* that continually flows from the two living olive trees to the lampstand. It does not matter how weak and feeble you are. “All my springs are in Thee.” Full resources, full supplies in Christ! Living supplies, the two living olive trees, the two anointed ones, Christ and the Holy Spirit. And the golden oil flows; it is there in Christ. It is this:

“Whate’er I need in Jesus dwells,
And there it dwells for me.”

And it is continually flowing.

Well, your religion, that work in you, may seem to be just a dimly-burning flame, so feeble, so small. “Who hath despised the day of small things?” But it will never go out; it cannot go out. Why? Because the golden oil freely flows from the olive trees, from Christ, to keep that dim flame alight, to keep alive His own work in your soul.

I have often referred to this, but it is so beautiful. You remember Christian in the house of the Interpreter, the many strange things he saw, and he was shown a dimly-burning flame. The mystery of it was that he saw a dreadful person, Satan, pouring bucket after bucket of water over it, to put it out, yet it did not go out. He could not understand it, but the Interpreter showed him a glorious, hidden Person adding oil to the flame so that it did not go out; it burned more brightly. “He giveth more grace.”

Well, remember, beloved, with all your fears and the smallness of your faith, remember that the Lord never begins and then leaves His work unfinished. Remember that His loving eye is ever upon you to do it for you. And then remember those full supplies of grace, unmerited grace, not in you but in Christ, so that although sin and Satan and unbelief daily strive to quench that sacred flame, yet the golden oil flows, though you cannot see it, and,

“His grace shall to the end,
Stronger and brighter shine;
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Shall quench the spark divine.”

“For who hath despised the day of small things?”