**DO NOT DESPISE SMALL BEGINNINGS**

January 3, 2016

Zechariah 4:6-10

Key Verse 4:10 “Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand. (The seven lamps represent the eyes of the LORD that search all around the world.)” (NLT)

Happy New Year! Occasionally, we all wonder if our efforts are making a difference. It is easy to grow discouraged thinking that our acts of kindness are insignificant. But what seem small to you might be huge to someone else. During World War II, Sam Fawkes piloted a B-l7. On one mission he sustained flak from Nazi anti-aircraft guns. Even though his fuel tanks were hit, the plane did not explode, and Fawkes was able to land it. He asked his crew chief for the German shell to keep as a souvenir of his good fortune. The chief explained that not just one, but eleven shells had been found in the gas tank, none of which had exploded. Technicians opened the shells and found that it was empty of explosive. They were harmless. Where the explosives charges should have been, one of the shell contained a carefully rolled piece of paper. On it a message had been scrawled in the Czech language: “This is all we can do for you now.” A courageous assembly line worker was disarming bombs and scribbling notes. He couldn’t end the war, but he could save one plane. He couldn’t do everything, but he could do something, and he did it.

People need to know that what they are doing counts. The Israelites faced a similar problem when they returned from the Babylonian captivity and began to rebuild the temple as they fell victim to hopelessness. The people were discouraged because their numbers were small and their efforts seemed weak when compared with the accomplishments of their ancestors. The initial stages of temple rebuilding looked insignificant, unimpressive (Ezra 3:12), and some treated it contemptuously. But not only was this small start going to be a great temple but Zerubbabel’s rebuilding foreshadows the great messianic rebuilding of God’s dwelling place, his living Temple. Little is much if God is in it. God rejoices in what is right not necessarily in what is big. Zechariah encouraged his people by God’s word, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: Now hear these words, ‘Let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built…I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.’” (Zech 8:13)

**First**, we have been commissioned by God. Zerubbabel was of the lineage of David, the grandson of King Jehoiachin (Ezra 3:2) thus he was a king or heir to the throne (Jesus was his descendent Mt. 1:12). He had led the remnant back from captivity to the land of Israel (537 BC), and shortly thereafter laid the foundation of the temple. God chose Zerubbabel and Joshua to rebuild the temple. Like Zerubbabel we have been chosen by God to serve him in this generation. John 15:16 says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” We are called by God to serve him within the Body of Christ, the church. 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

What a picture for us! We have been called to shine forth the light of the gospel. The church’s task, as his chosen people, is to be his lampstand, shining forth with his glory and grace in the midst of a sin-darkened world. The light will shine within the church the Body of Christ as long as we stand allowing the oil of God’s Spirit to flow through us. We must be faithful to stand in spite of adversity, smallness, opposition, discouragement or any other obstacles that the world or the devil may hurl at us!

**Second**, God’s work should be done by his Spirit. Look at verse 6. “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.” Zerubbabel could not in his own strength accomplish the task before him. The work was strenuous and the opposition fierce. When Solomon built the temple which the Babylonians destroyed, he had almost unlimited resources at his disposal. His father David had fought many battles and collected spoils over his lifetime to be used in building the temple (1 Chron. 26:20, 27-28), but the remnant didn’t have an army or a prosperous nation to enlist. Solomon was a king of a powerful kingdom that ruled over many Gentile nations and took tribute from them, but Zerubbabel had no such might or power.

God’s work must be done by God’s Spirit. It is by the supernatural enabling of God alone that men can accomplish the work of the Lord in the world. God’s Spirit is the only absolutely necessary resource on which we must depend. From first to last, God’s work is a spiritual work. It is only through God’s Spirit that anything of eternal value is accomplished. The power needed for spiritual victory is of God and not of man. “Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord.” God’s work is not done by our resources, of intellect, of wealth, of enthusiasm, nor by resoluteness of effort or by cleverness. Though all these are necessary, none of them, not all of them together, nor any human endeavoring can do God’s eternal work. As Jesus was born of the Spirit, baptized of the Spirit, led by the Spirit, and proclaimed the Kingdom of God in the power of the Spirit, as he offered himself through the Spirit to God, so should we! For the Spirit of God calls, equips and works through the people of God. God’s Spirit is paramount, if God’s people are to do God’s eternal work. These words, “not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit” brought the needed empowering to the feeble handful of discouraged people surrounded by the enemy. We too should hear God’s word, “Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit,” in the face of great obstacles and discouragement.

**Third**, obstacles like mountains will rise up and seek to discourage us. The work was great and the opposition was fierce both from within and without. It was so great that the obstacles are called in verse 7 a “mighty mountain.” When the enemies of God heard that the Jews were going to rebuild the House of God, they expressed contempt and mocked the Jews saying “What are these feeble (pathetic) Jews doing? Can they restore it by themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they ever finish it? Can they bring these burnt stones back to life from the mounds of rubble? Even if a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.” (Ezra 4:2-3 Paraphrased) They were afraid of the political and religious implications of a rebuilt temple in a thriving Jewish state. They therefore opposed the project vigorously and managed to stop the work for 16 years until Darius the Great became king of Persia. Also there were those older Jews who recalled the splendor of the first temple and criticized and put down Zerubbabel’s work as nothing and insignificant. Work on the temple had made little progress not only because of opposition but also because they despised their work as insignificant.

We can easily become discouraged by our smallness and seeming helplessness. Hostility, lack of financial and moral support along with internal criticism lead to discouragement. Zerubbabel was given a commission by God, but succumbed to discouragement and disheartenment by all the obstacles and opposition he encountered. The message that Zechariah was to give Zerubbabel was a message of encouragement to not fold and quit under the weight of the enormous difficulties he was facing, or to give in to discouragement but to stand firm and persevere in the work he was called to do. If you are going to live for Christ and serve him, you will face mountains of trials, testings, oppositions and obstacles which will seek to discourage and defeat you in your spiritual walk and service for Christ. But we are not to give in or give up. Neither mountains nor smallness is an issue with God. There is no mountain that God cannot level. Look at verse 7. “What are you, mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’” God’s power is infinite and through Christ we can be victors over every obstacle we face. There is nothing insignificant with God.

Here the capstone is the last stone to put in place. It signifies the completion of a structure, it is the last one fitted, the crowning stone. Then people will shout “God bless it! God bless it!” People realize that it was not something they completed but that God’s grace had completed it.

When our work is finished, it must be thankfully acknowledged that it was not by might nor by power of our own that brought it to completion but it was God’s Spirit and his grace that did it.

**Fourth**, do not despise small beginnings. Look at verse 10a. “Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin.” If we realize that working by God’s Spirit is the guarantee for the success of work done for God, we can avoid the mistake of measuring the importance of things by their size. Be faithful in the small opportunities. Begin where you are planted and do what you can, and leave the results to God. Big things come out of small things. He that is not willing to work at small things will never accomplish great things. Jesus says to us in Matthew 25:21, “You have been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things.” Don’t despise starting small, despise not starting! The day of small things done by the Spirit is the day of precious things and will be the day of great things in that great day!

The attitude that our work is insignificant is common to students and countless others who serve quietly. When our efforts go unnoticed, we may feel like little people, filling little places, performing little deeds. God strongly rebukes us, “Who dares despise the day of small things?”

It is a challenge to anyone who would look down upon anything small in which God is glorified. Little is much if God is in it. God rejoices in what is right not necessarily in what is big. So let’s stop excusing our part in God’s plan by thinking it is too small or by saying our talents are too insignificant. Our limited ability and God’s unlimited power make an unstoppable pair. Little things can become great things when done in God’s power.

In his book, No Little People, theologian Francis Schaeffer wrote: “In God’s sight there are no little people and no little places. . . .” The world loves the sensational and stunning, but God loves to work through the ordinary and insignificant. In his Kingdom, bigger isn’t always better. God sometimes uses little things and seemingly insignificant people to display his power and grace. Zerubbabel is a clear example of this. God encouraged Zerubbabel, the civic leader, to finish the temple. Although it would not have the grandeur of the one Solomon built, it would be completed by the direction and power of the Spirit. A small group of people with limited resources, led by two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua, were going to see the Almighty hand of God working on their behalf. As a result, this little group did great things for God.

When Jesus saw 5,000 people, he asked Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” Philip answered, “It would take more than 8 months wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” When he saw the situation, he said, “impossible.” But Andrew brought 5 loaves and 2 fish from a child’s lunch box to feed 5,000 people. Jesus blessed the small things to feed all of them. Jesus compared God’s Kingdom to a mustard seed, the smallest there is, yet it grows into a massive tree. He also likened it to yeast that’s barely discernable, yet it can raise an entire batch of dough. Jesus said, “Anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” (Mt 10:42) Even greeting a newcomer on Sunday makes a big difference to that person. D.L. Moody said, “There are many of us that are willing to do great things for the Lord, but few of us are willing to do little things.”

Look at verse 10 again. “Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand. (The seven lamps represent the eyes of the Lord that search all around the world.)” A plumb line was used to test whether the wall being constructed was straight. God is not concerned that things be small but he is concerned with the straightness or righteousness of the work done. The plumb line is in the hand of Zerubbabel which indicates he is super-intending the work of the builder. The seven eyes are God’s perfect vision which eagerly searches to and fro for devoted hearts. “For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” (2 Chron. 16:9). The continuous activity of those seven eyes, that symbolize the all seeing, and always present, and all knowing God depict his continuous active search to seek out even the smallest of things done for his glory.

Are you doing “small things”? Be encouraged! God’s eyes scan “the whole earth.” He notices the little things done for him, and he will use them mightily in his way and in his time. Remember the dewdrop does God’s work as much as the thunderstorm. Does the place you are called to work seem so small and little known? It is great if God is in it, and he will not forget his own. Men might look with contempt on the humble work of God through his humble people, but there are other eyes, God’s eyes, that gaze upon their work with joy. Even our minor activities are under the observation and examination by God. He is not so concerned as to its initial size as to see if it was done to give him glory. So let’s not despise small things; despise not starting. Let’s serve God in small ways in our given situation for his glory.