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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham on Sunday morning 17th. January, 1932

Text: Zechariah 4.10

"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."

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This remarkable prophecy was written under divine inspiration by the Lord's prophet, Zechariah, after the Babylonian captivity, when a number of the Jews had returned to their own land. The history of the Jews in connection with the writings of the prophets is very particular. Isaiah and Jeremiah wrote before the captivity; Ezekiel wrote during the early part of the 70 years captivity, and possibly about five years after they were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's prophecy was during the latter part of that captivity and these minor prophets appear to have written after the return of the Jews; Zechariah was contemporary with Haggai and others such as Ezra and Nehemiah, and he wrote in connection with the rebuilding of the desolated temple.

We find that Haggai was inspired of the Lord to encourage the people to work in the face of heavy opposition and other apparent discouragement. In the building of the second temple there were enemies who mocked them and scorned them and despised them, and yet these builders were encouraged to go on building in the face of all opposition and by a divine promise were told to "Be strong.... and work: for I AM with you, saith the Lord of Hosts." Therefore we find that the temple was built, and when the temple was built there appears to have been great grief in the hearts of many of the Jews when they saw it because of the contrast between the first and second temples. It is said that those who remembered the first temple in its glory said, 'This in comparison is nothing.' Yet we find the Lord saying "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former". So they had encouragement and were enabled to work and the Lord was with them though they had much opposition. How striking these words in the context are, are they not? "Moreover the Word of

the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it." It was under his management that the house was built, and Zerubbabel was a lively type of Christ in two particular ways, inasmuch as he was the servant of the Lord and governor in Judah, and Christ our heavenly Zerubbabel is the Lord's servant in covenant office, the servant of the Lord declared by the prophet Isaiah, "Behold my Servant, whom I uphold; mine Elect, in whom my soul delighteth"; and He is the Governor, the King, King of Judah, that is of His Church; "The government shall be upon His shoulder."

Now if you view this in a spiritual way you will see ground of encouragement here in respect of the Church of Christ, of which this literal temple was a type. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it." Though there may be enemies on the right hand and on the left, yet the Church will be complete, none will be left out; and with respect to every individual member of it, when the hand of Christ begins the work, His hand will finish it; though perhaps you may have many a shaking, yet if the Lord begins the work in your soul, He will finish it - "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

There were mountains in the way here; there was this point in respect of the building we may notice. They were a very insignificant company in the face of all those who were discouraging them, and yet we find the Lord says the temple shall be built. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of Hosts." The work was to be done by God; although He had His instruments, yet He was the guiding power behind and without that power the work would never have been continued. There were mountains in the way. At the time it must have seemed impossible that the work could have been finished, yet we find there is this strange word given - "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain". When we view the case with respect to experience, there are many mountains, are there not, in the way, which hinder the work? There is no power but

must fall flat before God - "Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." In your soul there may be mountains of sin, of unbelief, a tempting devil and many other things, which may rise at times as mountains in the way. You may say, I shall never come through, but remember this word, The hands of Zerubbabel laid the foundation - you did not lay it - and He will not lay the foundation and leave you to finish it. It would be a ruinous heap of loose stones if He did, but His hands will also finish it. "Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." That is to say, the last stone in that building will be fitted in, that building must be complete, not one piece of stone left lying outside. He shall bring forth the headstone, the final stone, with shoutings of victory, crying, "Grace, grace unto it." Begun by grace, carried on by grace and completed by grace, free grace.

Let us apply that to the salvation of the Church. How was that foundation laid? I answer, by sovereign grace; it was laid in the divine purposes of God in eternity. This was where the foundation of the house was laid, and it was in the fulness of time carried on with respect to the building, and it will be completed. It was grace in the heart of God that begun this great and wonderful scheme of redemption, it is grace in the hand of the Holy Spirit in the application of it to every favoured vessel of mercy; and it will be grace in the issue, it will be free grace that will land every ransomed sinner in heaven; and I believe that every one who enters that glorious place will say the same. They will bring forth the headstone crying, Grace, grace unto it. Here the whole Church of Christ, gathered from all quarters, from the four winds of heaven, every elect one in the divine purposes called in time and born again by the Spirit of God, is fitted for and taken to heaven, and there in eternity the Church will sing the same song - free grace, grace, grace unto it.

"It lays in heaven the topmost stone
And well deserves the praise."

This great and wonderful and blessed attribute of God, His everlasting

love and grace to sinners, well deserves the praise. The work will be finished, the world will stand until every elect vessel of mercy is born into this world. I believe that with all my heart, and I believe that God will have His people unto the end of time, and when every one is brought in, then the angel will say, "It is done" and time shall be no more.

What a mercy it will be to be among those who shall have a part in the first resurrection. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house" - see the security here. It is not in the hands of any man to carry on. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, His hands shall also finish it." It is very strengthening to faith at times to view this; I know it is. You may look around and see much to discourage. Those builders must have done when they commenced to build the second temple; they must have had much to discourage them, but they received that help and that power that was needed from God. He encouraged them in their work. So it is with the people of God; we may sometimes look around and say What will become of us? But if we are favoured to see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven, we shall rejoice. Yes, even though now it may be a time of sorrow. "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with yellow gold." Press on, there are better days to come than now.

"They shall rejoice". "For who hath despised the day of small things?" It was a day of small things then, when those Jews had returned to their own land. Some who saw that temple had known the temple in its first glory. What a change there was! Therefore it was, comparatively, a day of small things - a day, that is a season or a period of time, in which there was an apparent withholding of the power of God and of the manifestation of His presence in the Church - a day of small things. Yet they laboured on. they prayed on. There were some who despised them in their work, there were Sanballats and Tobiahs who despised them and made fun of them and declared it an impossibility - and yet they laboured on. But it was a day of small

things in the land compared to what they had seen in days gone by.

Now let us come closer home. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" It is a day of small things with us now, it is a day of small things in the Church, that is to say, there is not at the present time the power of God manifestly that there was in days gone by. We have in this our beloved land been exceptionally favoured; God has greatly honoured this country and He has exalted us above other nations. There has been a chain of godly, eminent ministers in numbers unknown to any other country, and He has given us an open Bible. There have been many in this our beloved land brought to a knowledge of the truth savingly. There have been good days, God has honoured us in this, and there have been days when God was honoured by those in authority in the land, and honoured by those upon the throne. But when we compare the present day with the days that have been in the past, we have to say it is a day of small things comparatively. Queen Victoria, when asked the secret of England's greatness said emphatically, The open Bible. She gave that noble answer, and so we may say the secret of our greatness even nationally lies in the gift of an open Bible to us. Therefore we have a great responsibility in connection with it, in reference to our treatment of it. But it is a day of small things now. The people of God are few in the land compared to what they were fifty years ago. Many of our chapels in those days were filled with people, with hungry hearers, and there was power in the ministry, but there has been a great decline since then and we are declining now, and what the will of the Lord concerning us is, we know not. But it is a day of small things.

It is a day of small things in respect to the presence of Christ in the Churches. When I speak of the Churches, I mean the Churches of our own faith and order, of our own denomination, who love the same truths, and where we believe God has still a people united together in Church fellowship. Christ has promised His presence to His people, before He ascended into heaven we find Him giving this great commission to His Apostles, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,

baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I AM with you alway, even unto the end of the world, Amen." Again in another place in the gospels, "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of you". That is a very wonderful promise, because if we meet together rightly in the Name of God He will be faithful to His promise. He will never forget His promise. Moreover, the people of God have the privilege of citizenship, to plead that promise before God, saying Thou hast said that Thou wilt be present, Thou hast promised Thy presence. He has declared in this prophecy that He will be with His people and when we view this I feel it is a ground of great encouragement. He will be with His people unto the end of time, Churches may rise and perhaps may fall, may become extinct and die out. They have done and are doing so now, yet still the promise of God stands. He will be with His people where He has a people met together in His Name.

But what of this presence? It is a day of small things in this particular, the presence of Christ is felt in less measure than in days gone by. But what is this presence? We might say that it is the sweet, softening, efficacious influence of the power of divine truth upon the soul. That may be described as the presence of Christ. Now let us view an assembly that has met together professedly for public worship. There may be one in that assembly whose heart may be drawn out sweetly and blessedly in communion with his Lord; there may be another who may be feeling the spirit of grace and of supplication; there may be another being favoured with a faith's view of the Lord Jesus Christ; there may be another favoured with the grace of repentance. The presence of Christ is in that building; the Holy Ghost is there at work unseen in the souls of His people - the presence of Christ is there. O, that presence is very wonderful. The Psalmist said, "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." Those of you who know God and have tasted of the good things of the kingdom will understand me when I say that

this presence is inexpressibly sweet. You may have your morsel alone. One may sit in the pew and say, 'Why this is all for me', and another may say, 'This is all for me', and so there may be a sweet flowing together from heart to heart. This is the presence of Christ. View it like this; true religion is Christ formed in the heart, the hope of glory. If you have a real religion given you by the Holy Ghost, you have virtually the Lord Jesus Christ in your heart, formed there by the Holy Ghost. That is a very wonderful truth, and therefore if there are living souls in a place gathered together, the Lord is there in truth in that particular - He is there to bless, to succour. He may be there to reprove, He may be there to condemn, but He is there. He is there to do His own work in the hearts of His people.

O this presence of Christ! It is a day of small things; in that we must agree. Christ's presence in its sacredness is not often felt by a body of people collectively. How many there may be in a congregation - some perhaps whose heart and mind is upon their daily business or what may be before them in the coming week; perhaps you may be reckoning up your accounts and seeing how much you will have to meet, and perhaps saying, 'I shall be able to meet this and have something over', and it may be your covetous heart is at work in this. The presence of Christ is not there. You may say, I have always been brought up to attend a place of worship, and my conscience is not easy unless I am here for the form and therefore you may come perhaps largely by a round of custom. The presence of Christ is not there. You may come perhaps saying, 'Lord, I need something for my immortal soul, in Thy mercy condescend to speak to me, even if by a reproof, and bring me near to Thyself, give me a good day in the courts of Thy house', and you come with prayer and confession of sin. The presence of Christ is there. You may say, 'I feel to be very distant from Him; you may say, If only I could get near to Him, "O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat". The presence of Christ is there giving you those desires; your seeking His face is all of His grace - the presence of Christ

is there!

But there is another point here. There are seasons when the presence of God is distinctly felt by a community collectively. Yes, so that if an angel were to enter the place he would have to fall down and say, 'Surely the Lord is in this place.' The atmosphere is spiritual, God is there. It would be wonderful, would it not, if there were that distinct power in this building, so much so that the power of God was felt upon our hearts distinctly? Truly we might say the presence of Christ was here. We hope it is here, we believe it is here. The Lord has a people here and He is maintaining the cause; but my point here is this, that there are some seasons - I know what this is - when there has been a sacred influence pervading the whole place. I have known one or two occasions when one has been blessed in a place, it has seemed to shed a fragrance over the whole building and has affected both pulpit and pew and the hearts of all have been alive. The presence of Christ has been there. That is very sweet. But this is a day of small things and we have to lament this. It is cause for sorrow, great sorrow. It calls for mourning, for lamentation and woe, that the Lord is comparatively absent from us - I say comparatively. There is not that distinct, outward and manifest sign of His presence among us as a professing people that there has been in days past. True religion will never wear out, never; true religion is not what a man takes up for a time and gets tired of; he may have a natural religion and treat it in that way, but that is not the work of Christ. True religion will never wear out. When the Lord leaves, in a great measure, a nation and a people and does not work amongst them, then many professors fall away and the people of God become fewer and fewer; still He will have His people and will be amongst them too, will be present with them even to the end of time.

It is a day of small things in respect of mighty conversions. In the days gone by we have seen the hand of the Lord work manifestly in calling one and another out of the world in a remarkable and open way; but in this day in which we live we seldom hear of one being powerfully and effectually wrought upon independently of any outward

means whatever. The Lord, for the most part, seems to be working tenderly in the hearts of some who have been brought up under the sound of the truth, in a gentle and gradual way, which is a great mercy and for which we should be truly thankful. But He does not in this our day work in a particular way as He has done in days gone by. Take the case of Saul in his wonderful call and conversion - and speaking of conversion we mean that effectual change turning a man round, putting his feet in the opposite direction - yet I was glad to hear of a case in the past week where a man down in Essex who had been a leader and a very prominent man among the Socialists and who apparently hated religion, has been wrought upon by the Spirit of God and brought to a sense of his state and condition, and now his Bible is his companion; and I was told there is reason to believe that the work is real in him. There are some occasional instances, but it is a day of small things with us. At the same time we believe that the Lord does do this, call one here and another there by His grace.

It is a day of small things in respect of those in whom we hope and believe the fear of God is, in the clear revelation of Christ. There are many of whom we would hope well and have reason to believe that they possess the fear of God, yet there is not that clearness, not that distinctness in their case we would like to see; and moreover they appear to be held in bondage, there is not that bringing forth into liberty, that rejoicing in a sweet assurance of faith in Him that there was in days gone by - it is a day of small things in this; but there are still instances where the Lord does bless His people and bring them forth into the liberty of His blessed gospel. There are some instances still, but it is a day of small things.

It is this in respect of the ministry. There is a great decline in the power of the ministry too. Ministers we believe the Lord still has and will still have, but there is not that power and authority in their preaching that has been manifest in years gone by. There is a decline in this, and it is because the Lord to a great extent is absent from us. It is very wonderful to feel power in the ministry of the gospel, to feel that power in your soul in hearing. I have felt

it in one or two particular instances. The Lord will use His own servants to this end, to feed His people, and they shall be for the gathering in of the elect to Christ; but He does not use them as once He did, and this is a cause of grief and sorrow to many, and it is well for us, if enabled, to humble ourselves under this chastening, to confess our sins before God and implore Him to return to us again.

It is a day of small things, but we are not to despise this. We are not to despise the least ground of hope that the Lord is still working in the hearts of His people and in our own hearts. We are not to despise the least tokens that we may receive from Him upon which we have a ground to hope. You may say, 'I feel sometimes to be left out altogether, I never have that clearness of teaching and those distinct things that others have had.' You know what you have had; do not despise it. If ever you had a spirit of prayer given to you, do not despise it. These things are not small things in themselves. Whatever you may have received from the Lord, hold fast to it. Hold fast the profession of your faith, cast not away your confidence. I believe this, that we may sin and grieve the Holy Spirit of God by slighting what He has done. I believe that some may be disposed to cast away what they have had because they have not had what they want. But that is not right and is displeasing to God. For whatever He has done, however small in its measure, the Lord will own that and will honour it; ask Him to give you more. Do not despise what He has done. There may be many who will despise it. The devil will despise it, your own unbelieving heart may despise it, sometimes even the people of God may be slighting with respect to it, but the Lord will never despise it; the Holy Ghost Who gave it will never despise it! He will never forsake the work of His hands. Therefore despise not the day of small things with respect to any individual cases, or with respect to the Church of God; and may He grant us a reviving if it be His heavenly will. Amen.