

The Day of Small Things

Rev. R.A.M. Visser – Zech. 4:10

Sing: Psalter 89

Sing: Psalter 109:1-2

Read: Zechariah 4

Sing: Psalter 176

Sing: Psalter 415:4

Sing: Psalter 187

Congregation,

The text for this sermon can be found in the Scripture passage which was read to you, Zechariah 4. We will focus on verse 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.”

The theme of this sermon is ‘The Day of Small Things’.

We will consider two thoughts:

1. An instructive question – the first part of the text;
2. A comforting answer – the second part of the text.

1. An instructive question

We consider The Day of Small Things. The text speaks about this in the form of a question. *“For who hath despised the day of small things?”* This question implies that you should not despise such a day of small things. But what is meant by that? Is it to be taken literally, or does it mean something else? Let's think about this together.

The text is taken from the prophecy of Zechariah. Zechariah is one of the Old Testament prophets. He worked as a prophet after the people of Judah had returned from exile in Babylon. In the year 539 BC, King Cyrus had given the people of Judah permission to return to Israel and Jerusalem. He also gave permission to rebuild the temple.

Now we know that there were many Jews at that time for whom all this was not so important. These Jews felt quite comfortable with the Babylonian culture and Babel's prosperity. Jerusalem, and the temple, and the worship of the Lord were of no real value to them. That's why they stayed in Babylon when Cyrus gave everyone permission to return.

But that is not so in the family of grandfather Iddo. Grandfather Iddo himself is still alive, even though he has grown old. Boys and girls, grandfather Iddo was there when the people were taken into exile seventy-five years earlier. He was still very young then. But

he too had to join the long line of people who had to walk to Babel. Back then, Iddo did not understand much of what was happening, but for sure he was very sad! But this one thing he understood very well: "Now I can no longer go to the temple where I was to become a priest. The sacrifices are no longer offered. And now I can no longer serve the Lord the way the Lord wants me to." And as Iddo grew older, he thought about how things used to be in Jerusalem. And how he would have had his job in the temple service there.

Later, in Babylon, Iddo had a son, Berechiah. He also told Berechiah: "Berechiah, the most important thing in your life is God and the temple in Jerusalem and the sacrifices that should be made there. That's the only way to make things right with the Lord in heaven. And remember, we as a priestly family ought to minister there."

In the meantime, Iddo was getting older. His son Berechiah got married. He received a son named Zechariah. And as Iddo had told his son Berechiah, so Berechiah told his son Zechariah. Zechariah also heard from his father that temple service and sacrifice were really the most important things. That he was supposed to have become a priest, but that things had turned out so differently. They were in Babylon and how could they ever go back to Jerusalem?

You can imagine how incredibly happy these people were when, in 539, King Cyrus gave permission for them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Excited and full of expectation, many people returned to Israel and Jerusalem. Boys and girls, they had been looking forward to this for so long! Now they would finally be able to rebuild the temple. They could bring sacrifices again. They could go to church again!

After a long journey, the people arrive in Jerusalem. But oh, what a shock! The walls of the city are all in ruins! The gate is half burnt and stands ajar. Hardly any house is habitable. And there is hardly anything left of the temple. So the people immediately set to work and they start working on the temple. First of all the rubble is cleared away. The site where the temple will be rebuilt is completely prepared. The foundations of the new temple are also laid. The people set to work with great zeal. That is to say, in the beginning.

Because at some point that changes. The enthusiasm and the fervour fade, because the people experience opposition from various sides. When the Jews returned, the Samaritans, the people currently dwelling there, were not at all happy with all that was happening. There are also various personal difficulties. We can read about this in Ezra and Haggai. It even reaches a point where the work on the house of God is stopped altogether! The returnees consider it more important to build their own houses first. So they stop building the temple. This goes on for years! Until the Lord sends two prophets to urge the people to finish the rebuilding of the temple. One of these prophets is Haggai. And the other one, you've guessed it already, is Zechariah, who works around the year 520 BC. The Lord speaks to Haggai and Zechariah. And they proclaim the Lord's message to the people.

Zechariah receives revelations from the Lord at night through what are called night visions. These night visions could be compared to a kind of dreams. Through them the Lord tells Zechariah how He will take care of His Church. The nations will be judged and His people will be saved. He will restore the city and the temple. The restoration of the temple is the subject of the fifth night vision in chapter 4.

In this night vision Zechariah sees a lampstand. This large lampstand consists of an oil stand surrounded by seven lamps. Each of these seven lamps has supply tubes for seven wicks. So there are forty-nine lamps in all. The oil for the lamp comes from the olive trees next to it. Pipes carry the oil directly from the olive trees to the lamp. Normally, priests were always needed in the temple to tend the candlesticks. But this lampstand needs no human care. The Lord is showing Zechariah that the temple service is fundamentally God's work! You read it in verse 6: *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."* The Lord Himself will see to the completion of the building of the temple. So you read in verse 9: *"The hands of Zerubbabel have built this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you."*

Congregation, do we notice? The Lord tells Zechariah that He Himself will take care of it. He will use people to do it, including the political leader Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel had laid the foundations of the temple. And he will now finish it too.

The Lord knows that there will be people for whom things are not going fast enough. There will be older people for whom the new temple will be disappointing. For these people still remembered what the temple was like, that this new temple will not be the same in splendour as the old one. But then the Lord comforts Zechariah in our text, verse 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."*

So the Day of Small Things is what you might call the early stages of the rebuilding of the temple, when everything is still small. You may have serious doubts about these small beginnings. But take heed, says the Lord. Who despises the day of small things? In the future you will marvel and rejoice! For out of these small things will come something great!

I think we all feel the spiritual significance of this Day of Small Things. Boys and girls, the temple in the Old Testament is the place where the Lord chose to dwell. There He spoke to the people, there He distributed His grace, there was life with the Lord. It is the image of the spiritual temple in the hearts of boys and girls, young and old, where this grace is received. There, also today, a life with the Lord is born.

Just as there is a day of small things in the rebuilding of the temple that we must not despise, so it is also true in a much deeper, a spiritual sense! The day of small things. The very beginning of spiritual life, one could say. The beginning of coming to Jesus Christ. When the heart starts yearning for Him because one feels the need to be saved by Him.

Young people, if I ask you what the beginning of spiritual life is, you all know the answer. It starts with regeneration, when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell and work in your heart. This is a work of God's grace, you will say. And that's true. The Lord works it in us without our aid, as we say with the confession.

Here the Lord works in a youth, there He works in an elderly person. And the Lord may find us in very diverse places and having very different lives. The way the Lord works in us also often differs from one person to another, even though we know from the Bible that there's a certain order in which room is made for Christ. Quite simply, congregation, we need to be taught in the law of God and in His grace so that people today can learn what it means to come to Christ in order to be justified and saved by Him.

But congregation, are we like that? Have we already been born again? Is the Lord working in us through His Spirit and through His Word yet? Is there a beginning of spiritual life in our hearts yet, like a day of small things that we should not despise? Have you come to Christ yet? Or has it become a struggle for us how we can know this? Has this become the most important thing for us?

Let me use a familiar example. Young people, maybe you know what it means to be in love. When you are in love, you think about your boyfriend or your girlfriend all the time. You're longing to be with him or her. You're longing to talk with each other. You want to have a good time together and you don't want to hurt each other because you love each other.

But it gets a little tricky if I were to ask you, when did this feeling of being in love start? When exactly did you feel that first strange tingling inside? How many confusing emotions did you experience before you realised: I love him or her, I long for him or her! We can't really answer that very well, can we? Because we have so many feelings and emotions that we can only label them afterwards.

In a way this is also true in a much deeper sense, in a spiritual sense. When the Lord comes to dwell and work in you through His Spirit and His Word, these first workings of the Holy Spirit do so often take place silently and noiselessly. Just like when you pour some oil from a bottle: silently and noiselessly, the oil pours from the bottle. The same is true in spiritual life.

There may be circumstances in your life that prompt you somehow to start wondering what the Lord is saying to you. Someone is passing away or things that happen at work or at home. Maybe a dream you had. And the Lord uses it. Either way, He takes you to the Word or brings the Word to you. You read it by yourself or with others, you hear it in a sermon. And it is beginning to exercise power in your life! You begin to experience it! You know: what I read is true, absolutely true, experientially true: God is God and I am human! Deep inside you are experiencing what you will later learn to put into words: I am lacking something essential. I'm craving something which I don't have and yet desperately need. Do you notice that in this stage the words of the Bible cause

you to stop in your tracks? You can't really put into words what this is. But deep inside you feel the majesty of God in the Bible and in contrast you feel your own insignificance and smallness and sinfulness!

And so all kinds of feelings arise within you. What does all this mean? Again, compare it with your feelings when you fell in love. Just as you couldn't understand those first feelings, so it is here in a spiritual sense. You cannot name them, and yet they are true: the Word has touched your heart with its love. And that causes a change. Silently and quietly, a godly sorrow, a longing for God is born in your heart. You miss Him and you can no longer miss Him. You long for God, but how can you come to Him and dwell with Him? You experience within yourself something of what we sometimes call 'the sorrow of love.' I have sinned against a good-doing and merciful God who has always had my salvation in mind. Who has waited for me and is still inviting me to come to Him. It is my own fault that I miss God; I am an outsider. How can my relationship with Him be restored?

You no longer want to be part of the world; but at the same time you do not dare to consider yourself as one of God's children. Inwardly, you experience a hand pulling you towards God. And at the same time there's another hand that keeps you back. You are wrestling with it: What is this I'm experiencing within me? Is it all my imagination or is it the work of the Lord? And so we continue to struggle.

I would like to share with you what I read in Prof. Wisse's well-known book on godly sorrow. With pastoral feeling he says that our need will become so overwhelming that we want to get rid of the misery, of our wretchedness, sinfulness, and condemnation. In this way you will realise that only the Lord Jesus can make things right between you and God. In other words, you can no longer bear your misery; you can no longer do anything but take refuge in Him. Even in these days of small things, our heart secretly yearns for Him, because of the need we experience to be saved by Him!

I'm not saying that we must wait for these feelings before we flee to Christ. We shouldn't postpone going to Christ till we have sufficient knowledge of sin on the basis of our own standards. We shouldn't postpone going to Christ till we feel enough sadness about our sins. If we did we might never turn to Him and secretly imagine ourselves saved because we're missing Him and because of our conviction of sin!

Congregation, and particularly those who are standing afar off, do not postpone your coming to Christ, even if your knowledge of sin is small in your own eyes and your sorrow for sin lacks depth. On the contrary, let your coming to Christ be accompanied by supplication for the continuing and deepening work of the Holy Spirit. Do not ask the Lord for a specific date or time. Do not ask the Lord for a particular way or degree of conversion. Ask Him for the essence and substance of coming to Him as we find it in the Bible. This then is the day of small things, of heartfelt sorrow for sin, of childlike fear of the Lord. We may not be certain about many things, but this we know: that we have

come to love the Lord, to love Him with unspeakable love. Therefore we flee from sin and wish to live in the way the Lord asks us. And what we sing together from Psalter 415:4 will become true in our lives:

Good and upright is Jehovah

In his dealings evermore.

Sinners are by Him instructed

In the way untrod before.

He will ever guide the meek

In His judgments true and holy;

Teach His ways to those who seek

With a contrite heart and lowly.

2. A comforting answer

Congregation, the theme of the sermon is: The Day of Small Things. First we looked at an instructive question. Now we will consider the comforting answer.

This is what the second part of verse 10 is about: *"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."*

To better understand this passage, let's go back to the story of the rebuilding of the temple. We imagine seeing Zerubbabel at work. Together with many others he is working at the site where the temple is to be built. On the left and right, you can see piles of rubble that have been cleared away and the foundations of the new temple is being laid.

Zerubbabel is working hard. It's hard work and the progress is slow. We see that he's using a tin weight, as you can read in verse 10. It's a plumb line to see if the walls are straight. So Zerubbabel obediently builds the temple. Without much noise. In silence, he faithfully does his work. And the Lord is pleased with this. The text says there were seven eyes of the Lord. That is, of course, just an image. The marginal notes of the Dutch State Translation call it the unfailing providence of the Lord. Zerubbabel has the Lord's full attention, so to speak. Of course, this applies to everything that happens in the world, also today. But here it refers specifically to His holy dwelling place in Jerusalem, the temple. And in line with the image, the Lord's eyes are shining with joy, where this place is concerned! The LORD rejoices over His work as it takes shape through the hands of Zerubbabel.

If the Lord is pleased with it, who are we to think little of it? Take the temple building. What is it, this building somewhere in Judah? What is it in comparison with the glory of the previous temple? And what is its significance? It's nothing in the context of the great events of the world.

By the standards of the world and in unbelievers' eyes, it means nothing. Small things of which the world and unbelief say, "Never mind, it is of no significance." But Zechariah says, "Take heed, do not despise the day of small things! For this is how the

Lord works. Let this man, Zerubbabel, build a house among the ruins of Jerusalem, for thus the Lord will make it known that He is glorified in this day of small things!

Do we realize that this is still true for everyone who, like Zerubbabel, is working on God's building, God's Church of all times and places around the world, God's Kingdom? Even if it is so insignificant in our own eyes or in other people's eyes?

Think about it. What is a little shepherd boy's sling in comparison with the giant Goliath? What is the importance of a manger in Bethlehem compared to the emperor's throne in Rome? What can the preaching of a fisherman at the Day of Pentecost avail in the totality of world events? What does the smallness of God's church mean in the midst of all the nations of the earth? What is the possible impact of a father praying for the conversion of his children? How can the prayer of a mother have any effect? Or her reading of the children's Bible to her children? What is a lunchroom where on Monday you can't help but share about the joy of the Lord's day? What is the bus, the train or the plane, where good things are said about the Lord? What is a hospital bed where an elderly man or young woman is made to trust in the Lord's good providence? What is a minister of the Word who tries to bring the message of the Word and sows the seed in all weakness, knowing that only the Lord can provide the fruit? What is an elder who serves in the congregation? What is a deacon who serves with heartfelt love? What is our work in and around the worship service or when we try to lead a church society? What is a missionary who preaches the Gospel in a foreign land, in a foreign culture, in a foreign language, in the face of millions of people who do not know the Lord? What does it mean to be an evangelist among all those people who have become alienated from the Lord and His ministry? What can a man who trusts in the Lord do in the face of a hostile army? What is the value of the inner room where a man wrestles with God?

Congregation, all these things may seem so small, so insignificant. But they are not futile, they matter! Notice the comforting answer. They are not small in the eyes of the Lord!

Perhaps it is your prayer that the Lord will use you in His service and Kingdom as an instrument in His hands. On the one hand, do not make too much of it. For we are but weak instruments in His divine hands. But on the other hand, do not think too little of it. For no one is more powerful than when the Holy Spirit fills him and makes his hands strong in battle. Even though the world may shrug its shoulders, the Lord says, "Do not make a mistake! For this is where things happen! This is how My House is being built. And this is also how My Spirit works, after there has been a day of small things first! For at God's time it will prosper and bear fruit!

The Lord uses people as instruments in His hands to start working in people's hearts after such a day of small things. We sometimes call it a breakthrough in the heart. We long for it, we always pray for that work of the Holy Spirit, also in our church. And what is this so-called breakthrough? That the Lord, through His Word and His Spirit,

makes us see more and more clearly that He gives us the victory in our wrestling with God. He removes the dark clouds, the fog of unbelief, fear and despair, and through the Word makes us see the Lord Jesus and His work of reconciliation and renewal with the eyes of faith. He gives this so that as we see Him more clearly, our love for Him will increase too.

Owen puts it so beautifully in one of his works: "An awakening, a growing faith, and an increase in grace will lead you first of all to appreciate the person of Christ. The Lord gives you so much instruction in the righteousness of God and the grace of God that you increasingly see more of the glory, excellence, holiness, and grace in the way sinners are saved by the Lord Jesus. You learn deep in your heart that although there may be great power in sin to condemn, yet there is more, infinitely more power to save in Christ. And so people go to Christ to be justified and saved by Him. These then are what we call blessed encounters with Christ by faith.

This is the picture: Something that begins small grows into something great and beautiful. That something great and beautiful is that the Lord gives us eyes of faith to see all that Christ has done in His life, suffering and death. All that Christ has done in His resurrection from the dead, His ascension and His sitting at the right hand of God. It is a comfort to know through faith that He lives and is always praying for His Church. And here is the miracle: it is for me too. The more you experience this, the more you want to know Him. The more you receive of it, the greater the longing to receive more of it. It becomes your deepest desire, in fact the practice of your life, to walk worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ in all things (Philippians 1:27). For this is part of it: an inner joy in obedience to God through Christ, a life lived entirely according to the Lord's beneficial commandments! Receiving the words of salvation in your soul always leads to a life of godliness. Congregation, what is our life like?

We will now conclude the sermon. It dealt with the day of small things. Firstly, an instructive question. Then, a comforting answer. Do we know of these things in our own lives? Let us sing then:

*"With joy the meek shall see my soul restored,
Ye saints, no more be sad;
For lo, Jehovah hears the poor
And makes His prisoners glad." (Psalter 187:3)*

Amen.

Singing: Psalter 187