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God's Standard of Values (Transcript)

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in February, 1955.

In the prophecies of Zechariah, prophecies of Zechariah chapter 4, the first part of verse 10: "For who hath despised the day of small things?"

First piece of Haggai, chapter 2, verse 3: "*Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing yet?*"

And the prophecies of Malachi, chapter 3 verses 16 and 17: "Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even Mine own possession in the day that I make, and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him".

"Who hath despised the day of *small* things?" This is among many matters which it is very necessary for us to have made clear in our hearts and in our minds - to have our mentality adjusted. Just as a ship, after a long voyage, spends some time in having its compass adjusted, because of interferences and variations, so it is with us, on our way. It does become necessary from time to time, to stop and think again; to get our minds corrected and to be freed from those influences that upset the balance and the poise and a right appreciation.

This matter, then, of greatness and smallness is an important matter. There is a good deal of confusion about this, and that confusion can result in our missing the way entirely and being found in an altogether false position.

We need to know what we mean by 'greatness' and what we mean by 'smallness'. It is quite evident, from the Scriptures which we have read, that a certain kind of appraisal, a certain kind of observation, resulted in a false judgment, which brought the people perilously near to calamity. The Lord, reading their hearts, used this word as to their attitude and their reactions - "despised"! "*Despised* the day of small things." And if you look carefully into these prophecies, you will see that from God's standpoint it wasn't as small as they thought. It was an altogether different point of view about the matter.

You see, we have a way of confusing 'bigness' with 'greatness', and they are two entirely different things. 'Bigness' may be in outward dimensions and bulk and the impression that a thing makes upon your senses. 'Greatness' may have none of those characteristics at all. You may not even be able to take its measure, or see any measure in it from human standpoints. And in God's sight it may be very great. There is a lot of difference between bigness and greatness from God's standpoint, just as there is a great deal of difference between 'littleness' and 'smallness'. I know that's going to give our friends who are not familiar with the English language a good deal of trouble. But you know, you can be a *little* person - those can be so little, so petty, so paltry, so mean, so despicable - little! But they can be quite small, and of *tremendous* value. You would sooner have an ounce of gold than a ton of iron! It is intrinsic value.

Some of you may have read the life story of Madame Curie, the discoverer of radium. If you have, you will remember that tons and tons and tons of byproducts from the gas-works were unloaded in her backyard. Working upon this mountain of stuff and out of it: the smallest particle of radium. There's your comparison: 'big' and 'great'. In that almost imperceptible speck of radium - the *immense* qualities, values, potentialities, all subtracted, extracted from this great mass of stuff. There is a difference between 'bigness' and 'greatness' isn't there?

Well, you see what I mean when I say it is so necessary for us to get adjusted in our mentality about things lest we go astray. Smallness we may judge merely in an objective and outward way. And say: "Oh, it is so small!" and despise it. And yet, here, this 'day of small things' may be a *tremendously* potential day. "Fear not, *little* flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom". There is something little that is immensely potential. You have only to run your eyes through the Bible, to see again and again what God made of apparently little things, that would have been despised and set aside, overlooked, scorned, by those who always have this mentality of bigness.

Now look at these passages and you will see that there was something here that was very precious to God, although in their natural judgment, the people were calling it so small. The last passage which we read, from the end of the Old Testament, an end-time, finds God saying in another translation and version: "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in the day that I do make a *peculiar treasure*". "They that feared the Lord" - just that little company who feared the Lord, spake upon His Name, thought upon His Name, were occupied with Him - something so precious, that our translation doesn't convey how valuable it was to the Lord.

You notice two words: "The Lord *hearkened*, and *heard*". That is not just a repetition of two words or the same word in two different forms. The first word signifies: The Lord 'bent down', 'inclined'. The Lord said: "Here is something to take note of! Here is something to which to listen! Here is something to hold Our attention" - *God's* attention! The Lord *inclined*, *listened*, *heard*. And the picture is the Lord saying: 'Here, get the book, the great book, the Book of Life, and put this down, put the names of these people in.' A *book* was kept, "A book of remembrance... for those that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord... in the day that I do

make, even a *peculiar* treasure". And that was right in this same setting, as you know, this section of the Bible including Haggai and Zechariah.

What was it that made for this 'greatness', over against what people were calling so 'little', and despising as such? What *does* the Lord look for? Well, here it is quite clear. This little company, comparatively, was a disciplined and chastened company. They had come out of the fires of Babylon. They had been through all the discipline of those years in exile. They were of those who had hung their harps upon the willows, and said: "How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land?" The songs of Zion - you can see where their hearts were. And then the day came when the proclamation was made: "You can go back - you can all go back to Zion!" The vast majority, decided that their position was a very much more comfortable one than it would be back there in Zion, and decided to stay. And this little company, with all the hardships, the difficulties, the sufferings, the toil, and much more involved in going back, went back, because their hearts were in Zion, and Zion was in their hearts. See the heart relationship to the Lord, and to that which is dearest to His heart. So they were always thinking upon *His* Name, talking together about *His* interests.

They are a little company, comparatively, a despised people. I expect all those who stayed behind thought they were fools. Well, be it so. What did the Lord think? That was the matter, that was the matter. And this is what the Lord thought: a chastened, a disciplined people, whose hearts were for the Lord. Small? If you like. Read the prophecies of Jeremiah: what a book that is! Oh, what a time it takes, and what patience it takes to work your way through the whole of Jeremiah's prophecies! What a big book, and what little books these are: Malachi and Haggai - we call them the 'Minor' prophets! But what have you got for the Lord in Jeremiah? A 'Major' prophet, if you like, but there is nothing for the Lord in it. The little, 'Minor' prophets, but something very precious to the Lord.

The discipline has taken place; the chastening has been carried out; the *heart has been searched*: and the Lord has got something. You say 'small'? Oh, no, not in the eyes of the Lord - it is something very great. That is what is precious to the Lord; that is what He is looking for, and that is what *He* calls 'great'! Although, looking at it with natural eyes - and the eyes of man always judging by outward size and appearance may despise - from the Lord's standpoint there is much intrinsic value. And with Him, everything is a matter of *intrinsic* value, not bulk!

The Lord Jesus has put His finger upon that principle in another connection. 'If the salt has lost its saltiness, what is the good of it?' Bulk - tons of it - useless; you had better throw it out in the street. A teaspoonful of salt with its savour in it is of more value than tons of savourless salt! It is intrinsic value. It is the Divine element, the sting of God, the vital quality! And unto that, there has to be suffering; there has to be chastening; there has to be discipline; the heart *has* to be searched; the work has to go very deep - a people in line with God's abiding intention.

What was there in figure and type in the Temple, represented God's heavenly and abiding, age-long thought: the place of His dwelling amongst His people. It's an eternal thought; before the world was, it was in God's mind to dwell with men; all the way through the Bible it is just that - God with us. Right on to the end of the Bible it is - "The tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them... and be their God" God's everlasting thought concerning His House, His dwelling-place in the midst of His people - there's the figure, there's the type - we know the *reality*, the spiritual reality.

Here are people in line with God's thought. In Babylon God's thought did not obtain at all; that was *not* His place, here it is.

And the Lord always calls that spiritually great, when you are wholly centred on the thing that He has ever had in mind; a people right in line with His eternal thought; a people right in touch with Himself as to what it is that He ever desires to have. When He has got that - let that people be 'small' from outward standards, and despised by men of distorted judgment - God says: "That's great! And don't you despise that." "*Who hath despised, who hath despised the day of small things?*" It's a rebuke that's in that interrogation; it's a correction: "Pause! And adjust your judgment and your standards!"

A people still, still with a vision in their hearts of what God intended and would have. They may have been discouraged, greatly disheartened, perplexed about it all as to the possibility of it, and very, very tried as to the realisation of it. Nevertheless, it was in their hearts! They wept! Look at the context, they wept over this situation! They were *distressed* that what was, was so much less than what they knew the Lord wanted. A troubled people about this and their perplexity and their distress even led them sometimes to drop their hands in despair, and, for the time being, suspend operations.

There was plenty, plenty there as a ground for discouragement; plenty there to give point to saying it was hopeless. But you know, you can never *feel* hopeless if you have never had hope! A person who has never known what hope is, does not know what hopelessness is! They are just dead things. These people were troubled, heartbroken, distressed; and even if they did despair for a time, and say: 'It is no use, it is no use!' - that was simply because they were, in their hearts, troubled about it, if you like: disappointed. And you cannot be *disappointed* unless you have had a kind of appointment! Same point.

There, deep in their hearts, was the vision; and they were suffering in relation to the vision. And that is what God is looking for! People who in their hearts, through all the trial and testing, still have the vision of what God is after, and are suffering in their hearts concerning it, that's something precious to the Lord. He lights upon that, and says: 'We take note of that! Put that down in the Book; don't let *that* be forgotten; have *that* in remembrance. It is going to come up in the day that I make - I'll have *that* then!'

So we must revise, must we not, and get away from these temporal ways of viewing things, to the eternal standards and standpoints. Yes, for all this leads us to what? To the Lord Jesus! To the Lord Jesus.

Here, in this very fourth chapter of the prophecies of Zechariah, has a recurrence in the book of the Revelation: the two olive trees, standing before the Lord of all the earth. You know where that comes in the book of Revelation. There is something here of *eternal* significance. The Lord Jesus is brought into view in these prophecies.

It is here in Haggai that the prophecy is first uttered: "Yet once again and I will shake the heavens, and the earth... and the desire of all nations shall come". That is quoted in the letter to the Hebrews isn't it? 'The things which can be shaken' - the temporal things; the 'big' things, according to man's mind - they will be shaken to their foundations. But the things which *cannot* be shaken shall stand. And you know that the letter to the Hebrews is *all* centred upon the Lord Jesus, and His heavenly kingdom. "Receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken". That comes out of Haggai.

As for Malachi, why, Malachi dwells much upon the Lord Jesus - the very Messenger of the Covenant - and His forerunner. Malachi, the last book of the Bible, of the Old Testament, introduces the Lord Jesus in a very real way; it is all focused upon Him. And you know that when God sees things focused upon His Son, He is all alert and alive, listening and watching and recording. It amounts to this:

value, from God's standpoint, is always a matter of how much of His Son is in anything. There wasn't much of Christ in the major prophets as they looked on toward the captivity, anything of Christ in the major prophets looked *beyond* the captivity. Now these minor prophets are beyond the captivity, for these end prophets are beyond the captivity and Christ is in full view and God is all alive again about this matter.

And so we sum it all up by saying: the test of everything is how much it represents Christ - how much of Christ is there; not how 'big' and impressive it is, from man's standpoint. Let us get a balance again.

Of course, God is a great God, and we expect a great God to do great things. A slogan was introduced with the great Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910: "Attempt great things for God: expect great things from God". Yes, alright, alright, but be sure that you know what 'greatness' is from God's standpoint, and that you are *not* confusing 'greatness' with 'bigness', or intrinsic value with outward bulk. See what the *Lord* is after: the values of His Son. They are the eternal values.

"Who hath despised the day of *small* things?" *But* - "these seven shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel..." and from that point you are moving on the positive line of recovery!