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Presentation Transcript
Small Is Good
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Our title today is *Small Is Good*.

Now, we're not talking about small is always best. For example, there are advantages to owning a smaller car than a Lincoln Navigator: better fuel efficiency, easier to park, etcetera, but cars can be too small. You can't carry your family, for example, and so a bigger car would be better in that case. So, we're not saying small is always best. Really, we're not talking about cars today either. We're talking about small is good as a biblical principle. And that is true when God is working with people. Small is not good, for example, when a universe is in need of creation. And we're talking about a warning about our attitude about small, around which we ought to order our lives. So, small is good – the principle – and an unstated warning about it.

Let's look at a Bible example of what we're discussing today. After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews were sent back to the Holy Land by God with a mission to rebuild the temple. In this story, there are three players we're going to focus on today. There were more people in the story, but these are the ones we need to think about.

The first one is Zechariah, God's prophet. He started it all. He made a prophecy. And then, there was a man named Nehemiah, who was the governor who was sent back to Jerusalem to govern it. God used this man to lead the people back to Jerusalem. And there was Zerubbabel, the high priest. He was to oversee the construction of the temple.

So, our story starts with God sending the prophet Zechariah to the elders of Judah, who were in captivity. My paraphrase of his message was, God was angry with your fathers because "they turned away from Me." And, "Are you guys going to do this again, or are you going to straighten up and fly right?" Well, fortunately for them, they opted to fly right. And with some political wrangling and God's hand involved, they were given a mandate from King Cyrus to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

So, Nehemiah was sent back to Jerusalem with a small contingent of freed Jews to do just that. When they arrived, they faced challenges that were unexpected and so far beyond their resources that they became discouraged and distracted. They were so discouraged, *they* became the problem rather than the solution. So, the project stalled because of that. And, in the midst of this great discouragement and chaos, they are reminded of what Zechariah, the prophet, had written before they left for Jerusalem.

So, let's read some of what God told him to say to Zerubbabel and the people with him. It's in Zechariah 4:8 – beginning there.

Zechariah 4:8-10 – *Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.*

We can just imagine what the people were saying and thinking. “The problems are too big.” “We’re too small.” “There’s not enough of us.” “We don’t have enough money.” “It’s impossible.” “Why did God give us this mission without enough resources?” Sort of repeat of when God took Israel out of Egypt – “Too hard, too hot, no food, no water, no help.” But then, it says in verse 7:

V-7 – *Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone – that would be the top stone of the temple – amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”*

So, for our purposes, the mountain represents the people who were resisting them – and who resist us. They were the Samaritans in those days, but in our day, they’re something else. So, God is telling His people He’s going to flatten out their problems. There’s a mountain they face. In modern day language, we might say, “God’s a lawnmower and our opponents are the grass.” So, God is telling His people He will flatten out their enemies and Zerubbabel is going to build the temple – he’s going to finish it. So, no need to worry about being few and weak. It doesn’t matter when we are with God, because He is with us. And just as He was with that contingent of Jews, who went home to Jerusalem to rebuild God’s temple, it happened.

Let’s think about how God did that. What strategy did He use? Well, God almost always starts small when He is about to do something great. Consider a few mentions in the Bible: Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like the seed of a mustard tree. Once planted, these small seeds are in a garden, and soon it becomes the biggest plant of all. When He wanted to work with a nation, He only worked with one man. When He fought a battle for Gideon, He told him his army was too big, not too small. So, they had to trim it down. When God needed a king, He didn’t pick a man who thought he was powerful. He picked a man who was, to quote the Bible, who was small in

his own eyes. When God needed to kill a giant, He didn't use an army or a military hero, He used a teenage shepherd. When God needed prophets, He didn't choose the famous, the Bible scholars, the powerful, the rich, He used unknowns. When He wanted a Savior, He didn't send a well-known, highly educated, wealthy person, a military man, He sent His Son, born in a smelly animal shed wrapped in a sheep's blanket – the child of an unwed teenage girl from a small town people made fun of. When He wanted to save us all from our sins, He didn't take over the Sanhedrin and create more rules, He sent a single Man to surrender Himself to an evil world to die for us. When He wanted to start a church, He ignored the theological professors of His time, and started with twelve mostly uneducated, working class guys. In the end time, when He wants to warn the world that the end is near, He will ignore big media and send two unarmed guys to spread His message. I think you get the picture.

God does not need big in the beginning. He wants small. He takes care of big later. Big comes *after* small – something we need to remember. So, why do you think God does it like that? Why do you think He starts small?

Well, the first point that I want to bring out is that it's a reality check for us. In Zechariah 4:6 and 7, He said:

Zechariah 4:6 – *Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. "Yes, Zerubbabel, you did build the temple, but you did it, because I did it through you." And when He starts small and does amazing things through people of weakness, it helps us understand that He is the one at work. His hand is there.*

Think about it. Peter and Andrew and James and John – they were fishermen. So, how did they start a church that eventually had billions of people in it? Well, they didn't. They couldn't have. God had to do that.

The second reason I think that God starts small is that that's the only way that we can contribute – perhaps, another reality check. We can only do small things.

There's an account in the Gospels of Jesus watching people at the temple as they donated money. And, at one point, He saw an impoverished widow drop in two mites – that's less than two cents today – and He commented that, since it was all she had, it was the greatest offering of all. Now, by Jesus reckoning, Elon Musk – the richest man in the world – to give half his wealth to God, his offering would be half as much as the widow, because she gave all she had. So, it's not so much what we do, but that our effort means a lot to God. It doesn't matter if you can't save the world all at once. I once heard Billy Graham say that he was a total failure, because his goal was to convert the whole world. Somehow, I just can't think that God is displeased with his effort, even though he was, in his own eyes, a failure. He was still small in his own eyes. He was one of the greatest preachers in the history of our country. The thing is, converting the whole world is

not our job. It's God's job. He's the one that is going to do that. I also read once that Mahatma Gandhi said, "Anyone who tries to change the whole world will feel like a failure." And yet, this man had massive impact on the entire world to this very day.

Listen to what Jesus says about what matters. This is in Matthew 10:40 through 42:

Matthew 10:40-42 – *Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.* Okay, so what's the reward of a righteous person? Well, it's eternal life, isn't it? So, if you receive a righteous person, you're going to receive a righteous person's reward. And He says in verse 42: *And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward, which is eternal life.*

So, God like small, when it comes to what we do. And He rewards small as though it were big. Giving someone a cup of cold water might be a small thing, or it might not be. Paul talked about entertaining angels unawares. I think the point is, we're supposed to receive everybody. We never know what will come from giving a cup of cold water, smiling at someone.

So, we're not supposed to despise the day of small things. And that was the warning that I was talking about. Do not despise the day of small things – especially, when you you're the one doing the small thing.

Look at another scripture on this account – Matthew 18:20:

Matthew 18:20 – *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*

Two or three – that's not a big group. So, you don't need to start a big church, or attend a big church, or pastor a big church. Big churches are not bad things, but neither are small ones. So, no need to start a big program to be able to serve God. If you can, that's great, but it's *not* necessary. Helping people, one at a time, is just as important to God as serving a whole church. Why is that? Because it's the wanting to help that's important to God – the willingness to start small – and not despise the day of small things and not get discouraged.

Since God starts small with us who are weak, He can multiply our efforts – and frequently does. Have you ever seen the movie, *Mully*? You can watch this movie on Up Family & Faith, on Peacock, on Tubi. It's everywhere. I'm encouraging everybody to watch that movie. Mully is a Kenyan man. He saw an abandoned child in the slums of Nairobi one day. He himself was abandoned as a child. So, he picked up this child and took him home. He had empathy for this child and wanted to help. Now, one of the resources that Mully had was money. He owned multiple businesses. And a few years later, an interesting thing happened. They had 2,000

children! Mully didn't stop with one. Eventually, there was no place to put them all in his home. I mean they had taken up the whole yard and built metal sheds to sleep the kids in. He sold all his businesses and he used the cash to take care of the children. He was a wealthy man – a good organizer. They had to move in order to house them all, and the only place they could afford was a desert place, where it would get up to 110 degrees some days. The river had dried up, because they were in drought, so they had no water. They housed the kids in metal sheds, which was extremely hot. One night, Mully was awakened, and led to a place, and told he would find water there. And they dug, and water came up from the ground – enough for all 2,000 children and to far with. It was an Artesian well, apparently. Then they started planting crops in the open ground and in green houses. From the condensation on the tops of the green houses, they gathered several billion liters of water every year. They used this water and planted a million and a half trees in the area. In one year, they did that. They had a lot of labor, right? Kids everywhere. So, after a while, after the trees grew, it changed the micro-climate around their settlement, and it started raining. The river started to flow again. Because of the trees, and the shade, and the humidity in the air, the temperature was lowered in summer. With plenty of water, they then started farming on a grand scale. They had enough money to put all their kids to work building stone houses, instead of steel huts. They were cooler. Everyone had plenty to eat. And everyone had a family. All 2,000 of them called him Daddy Mully. When you see his face in the movie when he's working with the children, there's always this big grin on his face. He knew how to encourage them. Later, when natural disasters and tribal violence left more children in need, they would load up with big trucks and feed thousands of people. Years later, Mully's former street children were going to college and becoming doctors, and managers, and technicians. By the time the movie ended, there were five settlements in Kenya, housing multiple thousands of formerly abandoned children.

What is the point? Do not despise the day of small things. Be humble enough to do what you can, even if it's only a cup cold water.

Let's turn this in a slightly different direction now. What does God need of us? What does He need to be able to use us for small things? Well, in the Bible, it says that God selected Saul when he was little in his own eyes. But once he became big and powerful, he became arrogant, and he was useless to God, because he thought he knew better than God and didn't do what God told him to do.

We can think about Job, who said of himself, "Wretched man that I am!" He was small in his own eyes. Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, that it all begins with being poor in spirit. Poor in spirit means that you believe you don't know what to do in spiritual things and God does, so you listen to Him.

In the Lord's prayer, we're told to say, "Your will be done." – it implies, not ours. So He needs us to be small in our own eyes. He doesn't need us to feel knowledgeable, or powerful, or to be rich or famous.

And there's one other thing that He doesn't need us to be. He doesn't need us to feel too small. In the parable of the talents, there was one person who took what God had given him, and he buried it in the ground . When the master came back, he gave it back to him – the talent he gave him. And when he was asked why he didn't, at least, put in the bank and draw interest, he said, "I was afraid. I buried your talent. Here it is back."

So, why was this person afraid? Well, it doesn't really matter. There are many reasons to be afraid as there are people. And none of them count with God. We can ask Him, and He will dispel our fears with faith. Philippians 4:13 – He can cause us to believe:

Philippians 4:13 – *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

So, He will do what He wants with us – big or small – once we see that He is doing it through us. So, all we have to do is be willing to do something small – a cup of cold water; taking time to speak with, not to, the one of the children in the congregation; helping people move; helping people find the coffee, the bathroom, youth lessons room, whatever, if they're new; cleaning the bathroom. Humble attitude.

In Luke 18:10, Jesus told a parable. He said:

Luke 18:10 – *Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. So, the highest in society to the lowest. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' And then Jesus said: I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*

So, be happy to start small, but not too small. God says in Psalms 51:

Psalms 51:17 – *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

So, when we're used by God, it will be small at first – maybe even overwhelming or intimidating – but we should never be discouraged because we don't have enough or are not enough to do what God calls us to do.

Now, there are a couple of questions to ask in any situation when we're faced with a difficulty or a challenge – as, sometimes, God's calling is. The first question is: What needs to be done? And the second one is: What can I do to help? These two questions are small people questions. And

that is what God needs of us. They are also the questions we need to ask when facing any problem or challenge in our lives – not just God’s calling. If you run into difficulties, you ask, “What can I do?”

But I remember – I’m not boasting here – this was a big revelation to me in my life – I remember when I had finished my masters’ degree in counseling, and I was getting ready to take the counseling test to become a fully licensed counselor, and my mentor told me that it is a very difficult test and you should just go take it the first time just to see what it’s like and not worry about passing it. So, I didn’t really want to do that, so I thought, “What can I do?” Well, I got on Google and I researched help sites to help people take that test. I found one that worked the same way the test works. In the test, they give you a scenario, and then ask you what you should do in this case. Depending on the answer you give, they send you to different pages in the test. Everybody has a different experience taking it. There are several ways to get a high score on each one of those and several ways to score low. So, I found this Website and what I could do, I did. I spent two months, every day, spending about an hour a day studying that Website until I started seeing the same scenarios over again, and was getting really high scores on it. So, then I went and I took the test. You had to have a 75 to pass, and I got a 94 – not because I’m brilliant. If I hadn’t asked that question – What can I do? – I probably would not have passed it. Because it’s not about being intelligent. It’s about what you know.

So, I ask that question, pretty much, every time I get in a bind these days. So, these questions, by the way, are small people questions. And that’s what God needs. We can ask those questions – they’re very helpful – everywhere in our lives. If we get in the habit of asking them, we’re taking the first step to cast out fear and anxiety, and take control of our lives. And that helps us feel small, but not too small – not paralyzed by fear. If we look at our lives that way, it’s easier to apply these questions to lives of others in our congregation and our community, etcetera.

I once had an opportunity to pastor a congregation that was the first congregation I ever attended in the church. And I came back as a pastor 19 years after I left. And it had grown large. There were 500 people on the roles and well over 400 every Sabbath. It was an extremely active group. Many of the same people I knew as a teenager were still there. As we settled into the congregation, it became obvious to me that this congregation worked like a well-oiled machine, apart from the pastor. There were a staggering number of activities that just seemed to happen automatically. After I’d been there for some time, one of the men that I had known from early on, when I first started attending church, approached me and asked me if Elaine and I would like to come to lunch with him and some friends. I remember being there, but that’s all I remember about it. I also remember that I gradually realized they were all widows and their children. Those were his friends. That’s because this man and his wife, along with two or three other couples, just started taking care of the widows. And every couple of months, the words would quietly spread – no announcements necessary at church – that there would be a luncheon at this or that restaurant. And that was how this man and his friends learned what the various widows needed. The people who needed help had semi-regular, face-to-face informal contact with the ones who would help

them. And from there, these women got to know others like them, so that created an informal support group, organically formed. And this man and his friends asked both of those questions: What needs to be done? and What can I do to help? There was no big press, no commendation, no ordinations, no announcements from the pulpit. It just happened.

What did Jesus say was the reward for caring for the righteous? Well, it's the same reward that the righteous get. Right? What is that reward? Well, it's eternal life. So, if we do something to help one of the righteous, it moves us toward that goal. It's one of those free pass kind of behaviors. Do it and gain eternal life.

Why does it work that way? Well, when we do something small to care for and help others, we're showing love for them, aren't we? So, we're then operating within the will of God. And our own behavior is moving us in the right direction. It doesn't have to be a long way in the right direction. It only has to be a small move in the right direction. Even our spiritual growth begins with small, doesn't it?

So, you see, it's like we said at the start today, small is good.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.

We are a youth advocacy ministry. So, don't forget to ask, "What can I do to help the children in my congregation?" They might not, to some of us, be worthy of our time and effort, but to God, well, they're close to His heart and He's close to them. And, if you contribute to these efforts, then you will be providing the children with the things they need most from their congregation, which is peace and inclusion, to go into a strong relationship with Jesus Christ.