

# ***The Little Things***

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

It doesn't matter how old we are...

we're all influenced in one way or another by the subtle messages of this world which whisper in our ears lingering questions like,

*"What have you accomplished in your life?"*

*"What great things have you done?"*

*"What's your legacy going to be?"*

The assumption behind these accusatory thoughts is that...

our worth, our value, is based upon whether or not we've accomplished  
**"amazing" things in our lives...**

on whether or not we've made an "impact" on society...

Commercial sales and marketing, along with numerous online platforms, amplify the illusion that you too should expect amazing results in your life!

Our young people especially, but adults too, are bombarded with images

- of smiling, happy people
- of action/adventure shots of people having fun, "living the dream"
- of people experiencing *unending* success and pleasure...
  - success and pleasure in their relationships
  - success and pleasure in their work
  - success and pleasure in making an "impact" on society...

Of course, what is conspicuously *absent* in all these carefully staged "photo ops" are the less glamorous parts of life...

**- which, ironically, are the more important parts...**

What we're talking about are the "little things" in life, the things that get no fanfare, no shout-out...

- like people working...
  - sitting behind their desks, putting in a good day's work
  - of people toiling away outside in the fields, or in factories...
  - building things, fixing things, creating things...

These images are missing because they "don't sell." They're deemed...

- unimportant
- uninteresting...
- unrelated to the "fun stuff" in life

For example, when was the last time you saw...

- a picture advertising people concentrating or thinking & studying, or reading a report, or sitting in a meeting?
- an image showing people experiencing the *pain* and *suffering* of failure, setback, disappointment?

**No, the little things in life like...**

hard work, commitment, sacrifice, perseverance, delayed gratification - these tend to lie hidden from the world **and yet these little things are the unsung heroes, the real "successes"** in life...

This is why the Lord says in the Gospels,

*"He who is faithful in the little things will be faithful in the big things."*  
(Luke 16:10)

**Today, I invite you to explore w/me a spiritual principle from the Lord's Word that helps us measure "success" in a different way...**

- **in a way that soothes and feeds the soul**
- **in a way that leaves us more peaceful and content about whether or not we're making an impact in this world**

There are a number of examples in the Scriptures of people measuring success in earthly terms.

Think of Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, who expected a big, dramatic show for the healing of his leprosy who was told, instead, to wash in the Jordan seven times. Naaman was furious. He was insulted. He felt it was beneath him to do such a simple, little thing (2 Kings 5:1-19).

Or think of James and John who requested of Jesus that they sit at the left and right side of His throne in heaven (Mark 10:35-45).

Visions of grandeur were clearly on their mind.

The Lord defines "success" very differently.

For starters, we're taught that:

"Life from the Lord [can] only flow ***into a humble and submissive heart***...the reason being that when the heart is truly humble, nothing of selfishness or material concern stands in the way." (AC 8873)

Humility is the leading idea behind all that follows in this exploration of the "little things" in life.

**Without humility** we are going to have difficulty understanding why the Lord would say that we...

- need to become like little children again (Mt. 18:3)
- or that we need to be "last," not "first" (Mt. 20:16).

But **with** humility in our hearts we will start to understand it when...

...the Lord says, "*little by little*" I will drive out your enemies (Exodus 23:30-33)

- that our battle against evil can't be won overnight...

We will start to see why the Lord says, "*man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7)

- that we must be on our guard not to get fooled by the appearances of this world...

We will start to appreciate why the Lord says, "*My peace I give to you: not as the world gives...*" (John 14:27)

- that we might be looking for peace in all the wrong places...

### **Yes, the Lord encourages us to look at the world differently...**

We need these reminders from the Lord's Word because the "little things" we're talking about are always under attack, always being made to appear unimportant, irrelevant, even "childish," in comparison to the important, "adult business" at hand that we feel in a hurry to attend to...

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Christmas Story itself...

Everything about the Lord's birth and life on earth *defied* earthly expectations

- beginning with His birth in humble, poor surroundings
- and ending with the realization that He was a very different kind of Savior than people were expecting...

### **From something little came something great...**

This brings us to our text from the prophet Micah which is the famous Christmas prophecy of the Lord's birthplace on earth...

and notice how Bethlehem is referred to:

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah...**though you are little** among the thousands of Judah; yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel."* (Micah 5:2)

Though you are *little*...yet out of you...shall come a ruler...

Of course, this is referring to the Lord Himself. It's also connected to another Christmas prophecy, the one from the prophet Isaiah, that predicts that a "*little child shall lead them*" (11:6), which again is a prediction of the Lord's birth on earth and how from something "little" and innocent will come something "great" and powerful.

*AC 4594 says "the place where the Lord was born involves secrets that have not yet been revealed (until now)..."*

The passage goes on to explain the fact that Bethlehem was the town where Rachel gave birth to her second son, Benjamin and where, later, David was born and anointed King.

There's much to be "unpacked" in terms of the significance of this Divine birthplace but here we will just mention the connection between "little Bethlehem" and "little Benjamin," who was the youngest of Jacob's sons and is referred to as such (Psalm 68:27).

Spiritually speaking, little Benjamin can be thought of as a **connector**.

You might remember that Joseph in Egypt refused to reveal his identity to his brothers until his youngest brother Benjamin arrived on the scene.

The spiritual reason for this is given in AC 4592:6

*"Joseph could not be conjoined with his brothers, nor with his father, except by means of Benjamin, **for without an intermediate no conjunction is possible.**"*

Benjamin represents this "intermediate," this connection between heaven and earth. Specifically,

*"Benjamin represents the innocence of the natural mind" (AE 449:9)*

You can think of Benjamin or Bethlehem (they carry the same correspondence) as representing a "new response" in our mind...

which joins the ideals of heaven with what's going on in the natural level of our life.

This is one of the interior reasons why the Lord chose to be born in little Bethlehem.

He too represented the innocence of the natural mind, so much so, that unlike us, even...

*"the natural (level of His mind) was eager for good and filled with a longing for truth." (AE 449)*

The fact that Benjamin is the "youngest brother" symbolizes how this new, innocent response is the last thing to be born in us (AC 5688).

It may be the last thing to be born in us, but it also promises to produce the greatest blessings, the greatest rewards...

**It is a "little thing" worth waiting for, worth holding onto...**

So when we let "little things" like...

humility and innocence grow in us

true peace and happiness will follow for:

*"heavenly delight is not the delight of being great or being preeminent over others - it is the delight that comes from humility, and the delight that comes from serving others" (AC 3417).*

Humility and innocence are not something we can conjure up on the spur of the moment...

- we can't force these "heavenly impulses" into existence
- we don't wake up one morning and say,
  - *"Now I'm going to be really humble, really innocent!"*

Rather, this re-birth comes as a result of us staying true to the "little things"

- it comes from not worrying about making an impact in this world
- it comes from not worrying about our legacy, not worrying about how the world, society, judges our character, our worth...

Instead, the Lord encourages us to be "*faithful in the little things*" (Luke 16:10).

He encourages us to continue...

- working hard, faithfully, and diligently in our work, in our uses, in what we feel we have been called to do
- staying true to our commitments and responsibilities
- making those sacrifices
- not shy away from the pain, the suffering, the grief that comes from battling our evils, from doing the right thing

This can feel like a lonely, isolated journey at times because the world doesn't notice us doing these things.

That is, of course, the point - to become like a little child again is a private matter, between us and the Lord.

However, as one teaching says, loving the Lord and our neighbor will give us a...

*"sense of well-being"* although it is often *"dulled by the cares of this world"* (HH 401).

This Christmas season, let us go back to Bethlehem...

- let a humble, willingness to be led by the Lord be the "little thing" that counts the most.

**AMEN.**