

Be Careful Not to Despise Your Day of Small Beginnings

S. Truett Cathy, founder of the Chick-Fil-A restaurant chain, passed away in 2014 at the age of 93. He started the first Chick-Fil-A restaurant in 1967 in the Greenbriar Mall near Atlanta, Georgia. Today, there are over 2,100 restaurants in over 40 states. Their restaurants are closed on Sundays to honor the Sabbath and to allow their employees to attend church. Cathy was listed among the billionaires on the *Forbes* magazine's 400 richest people in America. Ironically, the first restaurant Cathy opened in 1946 was called "The Dwarf Grill" because it was so small. Do not despise the day of small things.

Zechariah was a minor prophet with a major message for both ancient Israel and the modern church. In one of his classic quotes, he asked the rhetorical question, "Who has despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:10a) The historical context of this passage pertains to the rebuilding of Solomon's temple after the 70-year Babylonian captivity. The Living Bible reads, "Do not despise this small beginning." Solomon's temple had been an ancient wonder of the world, a magnificent edifice that inspired the awe of every visitor. It was the pride and joy of Israel and the centerpiece of Jewish culture and religion until it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's army in 586 B.C. The rebuilt second temple or "Zerubbabel's temple" as it came to be known (named after the governor of Judah at that time), was vastly inferior.

In fact, many of the old timers who had seen Solomon's temple in all of its glory openly wept when they saw this structure. "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not, in your eyes, as nothing in comparison?" (Hag. 2:3). God was saying, "It doesn't look like much now, but wait till I get finished with it." Then Haggai

uttered an almost unbelievable prophecy, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former" (Hag. 2:9). Surely his hearers were skeptical of these words. How in the world could this inferior building even compare with, much less ever be greater than, Solomon's temple? It sounded absolutely absurd!

Then, in a series of global events, the Persian Empire fell to Greece, and Greece eventually fell to Rome. In an effort to curry political favor with the Jews, Herod the Great spent 46 years enlarging and remodeling Zerubbabel's temple (John 2:20) using the wealth that Rome plundered and taxed from its conquered subjects to fund the project. Once again the temple—then called "Herod's temple"—became the crown jewel of Israel. But that is not what made it more glorious than Solomon's temple. It was who visited it—Yeshua the Messiah! Jesus was dedicated in that temple as an infant. He amazed the doctors of the law at His *bar mitzvah* there at age 12. Years later, He wove a whip and cleansed it by driving out the greedy moneychangers. He also taught, prayed and worked wonders in that temple. He said of Himself, "The queen of the South ... came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And now One greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42).

What started out as a small thing became a great thing. That is a pattern God often uses. The nation of Israel started with a 100-year-old impotent man (Abraham) and a 90-year-old barren woman (Sarah). When Jacob, their grandson, moved his clan down to Egypt, they numbered 70 people total (Ex. 1:5). When they left Egypt 480 years later, just the men numbered 600,000 (Ex. 12:37), not counting the women and children. God took a handful of people and made a great nation. Do not despise the day of small things.

Jesus started the church with a handful of handpicked fishermen. They were 12 ordinary men through whom He did extraordinary things. Later, He sent out 70 disciples (Luke

10:1). On the day of Pentecost, 120 believers gathered to pray (Acts 1:15). After Peter preached, 3,000 people were added to the faith (Acts 2:41). Some time later, when the crippled man was healed, 5,000 more believed (Acts 4:4). Plus, “The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47b). So, a conservative estimate of the size of the church through the first eight chapters of the Book of Acts, before Paul’s conversion and outreach to the Gentiles, would be around 10,000 believers. It all started with only 12. Wow! Do not despise the day of small things.

The ultimate story of humble beginnings is the incarnation of Christ. Jesus forfeited the splendor of heaven to be born in a smelly stable and laid in a crude cattle trough. As many preachers have observed, Jesus was born in a borrowed stable, preached his first main sermon on a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, shared the Last Supper in a borrowed upper room and was finally buried in a borrowed grave. But don’t let the humble beginnings fool you. When He comes back with all the angelic hosts of heaven, he won’t be borrowing anything this time around. He’ll own it all when He triumphantly returns as King of kings and Lord of lords. That’s how the kingdom of God works—it starts small, like a seed planted in the soil, but it grows rapidly.

Remember, the massive oak tree stems from a tiny acorn. Don’t despise the day of small things because small things can become great things. So, if what God is doing in your life seems small, remind yourself of this simple phrase, “Little is much if God is in it!” {eo}

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