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## God's Standard of Values (1956)

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*"For who hath despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10).*

*"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..." (Haggai 2:3,4).*

*"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" (Malachi 3:16,17).*

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 becomes necessary from time to time to stop and think again, to get our minds corrected, and to be freed from those influences that upset our balance and poise and our right appreciation. This matter of greatness and smallness is an important matter, and it is therefore very necessary for us to have it made clear in our hearts and in our minds, to have our mentality adjusted concerning it. There is a good deal of confusion on this subject, and that confusion can result in our missing the way entirely, or 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 heart, used this word as to their attitude and their reaction - 'despise' - "Who hath despised the day of small things?" And if you look carefully into these prophecies, you will see that from God's standpoint things were not as small as they thought. God

had 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 in 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 at all from the human standpoint, and yet 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 that may give trouble to some of our friends who are not familiar with the English language! But things *can* be quite small outwardly and yet of tremendous value. You would sooner have an ounce of gold than pounds of iron in intrinsic value.

You may have read the life story of Madame Curie, the discoverer of radium. If you have, you will remember how tons and tons and tons of byproduct from the gas-works were unloaded in her backyard, and how she worked upon this mountain of stuff and recovered from it the smallest particle of radium. There is your comparison between big and great: that almost imperceptible speck of radium, with its immense qualities, values, and potentialities, all extracted from this huge mass of stuff. There is the difference between bigness and greatness. That is why it is so necessary for us to get adjusted in our mentality about things, lest we go astray.

We may judge something merely in an outward way and say, 'Oh, it is so small!', and despise it. And yet this day of small things may be a day of tremendous potential. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). There is something little that is immensely potential: you have only to run your eye 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 had this mentality of bigness.

### **That Which is Precious to God**

Now you will see from these passages that we have quoted that there was something that was very precious to God, although the people in their natural judgment were calling it so small. The last passage which we read, from the end of the Old Testament, marking a dispensational end-time, finds God saying (in another translation): "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, a peculiar treasure". "They that feared the Lord" - just that little company who feared the Lord - "spake one with another", "thought upon His Name", were occupied with Him. There is something here so precious that our translation does not 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 that the Lord bent down, inclined. The Lord says, 'Here is something to take note of; here is something to which to listen; here is something to hold Our attention.' The Lord inclined, listened, heard. And then the picture is of the Lord saying, 'Get the book, the great book, The Book of Remembrance, and put this down; put the names of these people in it'. A book was kept, the Book of Remembrance of "them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." 'They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even mine own possession, in the day that I make, even a peculiar treasure'.

### **What the Lord Looks For**

What was it that made for this greatness, over against that which people were despising as so little? What does the Lord look for? Well, it is quite clear. This comparatively little company 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 because their captors demanded of them, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" 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 present position was a very much more comfortable one than it would be back there in Zion, and decided to stay. 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. There was a heart relationship to the Lord and to that which was dearest to His heart. And so they were always thinking upon His Name, talking about His interests.

They were a little company, comparatively - a despised people. I expect all those who stayed behind in Babylon thought they were fools. Well, be it so. What did the Lord think? That was the point. And we know what the Lord thought. Here was a chastened and disciplined people whose hearts were for the Lord. Small? If you like. Read the prophecies of Jeremiah. What a book that is! What a time it takes, and what patience it takes, to work your way through Jeremiah's prophecies! What a big book - and what little books these of Malachi and Haggai are. We call them '*Minor Prophets*' - but what have you got for the Lord in the people as recorded in Jeremiah? A '*Major Prophet*', if you like, but there is nothing in the people there for the Lord. But in these little '*Minor Prophets*', there is something very precious to the Lord. The discipline has taken place, the chastening has been carried out, the heart has been searched; the Lord has got something very great. That is what is precious to the Lord, that is what He is looking for; that is what *He* calls great. Although, looking at it with natural eyes and the eyes of man, judging by outward size and appearance, some may despise, there is much intrinsic value there; and with the Lord everything is a matter of intrinsic value, not of bulk.