

THE VALUE OF LITTLE THINGS.

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." Luke 16:10.

"And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou has been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." Luke 19:17.

"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Matthew 10:42.

People have the inclination to underestimate the value of little things. It is the big things that attract their attention. They are striving constantly to break all previous records -- to run faster, to swim farther, to fly higher and to build bigger than any one else has ever done before. They never realized that life is not a little bundle of big things, but a big bundle of little things.

Do the stupendous changes and events in the world tend to make your daily life seem trivial, inconsequential, and of little importance? Is your attention so captured by the big things that you forget the little ones? Do you feel helpless in the midst of vast forces you can neither understand nor control? Does your life seem to have very little importance in the midst of events of tremendous consequence? In that event, history tells you that the little and the unnoticed, rather than the conspicuous and the spectacular, in each generation have determined the wave of the future. Remember, too, that the outcome of stupendous happenings invariably hinges upon small and seemingly unimportant events, and upon those who are generally considered little people.

For thirty years the Lord Jesus Christ lived amid the happenings of the little town of Nazareth. He moved amid humdrum tasks, petty cares, village gossip, and trifling trade, but He was ever faithful in that which was least. Christ placed great emphasis on little things. After He had selected His twelve apostles, He took them upon the mountain for the purpose of giving them certain instructions for their life work. These instructions were in the nature of an exemplification of certain Christian principles which were to govern them in their lives and teachings.

Following the delivery of His Sermon on the Mount, Christ brought the apostles down into the valley, where they again came in contact with all types of human need. In every instance our Lord met that need. When they saw Him cleansing the leper, healing the sick, and casting out demons, they were discouraged. They realized that, although He had commissioned them to do these wonderful works, they did not have the ability in themselves to do them. Recognizing their discouragement, Christ said: "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." I can hear those men saying, "We can do that. We cannot do these things that He has done, but we can do that."

Because of our disposition to depreciate little things, the little kindnesses that might be rendered to others as we pass along the highway of life are neglected. We overlook opportunity after opportunity to do little deeds of kindness, to speak a word of good cheer, to lend a helping hand, to lift on the load that weighs another down. It is not because we do not want to help, but because we are deceived by the illusion that the little which we might do is not worth the doing. We assume an air of indifference and

are disposed to ignore the small deeds of kindness we might do each day. Tragically we seem to think that, if we cannot find something big to do, it is not worth while to try to do anything at all, so we fall into the ranks of the useless and cumber the ground rather than serve the Lord. A lesson which we so much need to learn today is that of the value of little things. We may not be able to do much, or to give much, but at least we can give a cup of cold water, or render some other small service, in the assurance that the deed will count in the eyes of the Lord.

Today our churches are emphasizing the world-wide implications of Christianity. Yet the root of the Christian faith is in the personal lives of millions of people who are "the least of these." Therefore, your greatest encouragement may come from small people who are doing the little things well. It is they who are lighting candles in our dark world. It is good to know that God is as truly interested in the little as He is in the much. The microscope shows this. He seems to have bestowed as much care upon the organization of the tiniest insect as upon the leviathan of the deep, or the behemoth of the forest. Every day He is nourishing the blade, feeding the insect, fashioning the leaf, and tinging some little plant with fresh hues of beauty. Do not neglect little things, because God does not.

Life has its least as well as its much. Great and small are relative terms. They are judgments of creature-reasoning, and they vary in their application according to the spirituality of the reasoner. There is the little in the lives of some as compared with the much in the lives of others. Some are much greater in what they are, have, and do than others. There is the little health, the little talent, the little possession, the little service, and the little influence of some as compared with the much of others. There is also the little in comparison with the much in the same life. We have greater energy, enjoyment, and opportunities at one time than we do at another. There is the little and the much in our every-day lives. However, our daily lives for the most part are made up of littles. Days bearing great events, supplying remarkable opportunities, and offering great prizes dawn but seldom in a man's threescore years and ten.

Proper evaluation of little things will enable us to learn some significant and important lessons. Among them are the following:

I. The Large is Composed of the Little.

Quite frequently the small is what makes the great possible. Can you believe that your heart, which is no larger than your fist, pumps enough blood every day to fill an ordinary railroad tank car. Tiny raindrops form our rivers, which in turn create the oceans. As Emerson said, "The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn." A teakettle singing on the stove was the beginning of the steam engine. A shirt waving on a clothesline was the beginning of a balloon, the forerunner of the Graf Zeppelin. A spider web strung across a garden path suggested the suspension bridge. A lantern swinging in a tower was the inspiration for the invention of the pendulum. An apple falling from a tree was the cause of the discovery of the law of gravitation.

It was not an accident that John D. Rockefeller became one of the richest men this world has known. It was because he saw the importance and far-reaching consequences of little things. To him, it was the small that made up the great, and the little things that made the large possible. You recall his habit of giving away dimes. Once when he found that he did not have a dime in his pocket he borrowed one from

his secretary, who told him to not bother to return it. Mr. Rockefeller was horrified. He said, "Do you think a dime is nothing? Why it's two whole year's interest on a dollar!" It is the little which makes the great possible and which frequently leads to far-reaching consequences. All the fuchsias in this county blooming on the windowsills of the poor, in the gardens of the rich and in the conservatories of connoisseurs can be traced back to a single fuchsia plant brought by a poor sailor boy from a foreign clime as a present for his mother. A little act of thoughtfulness has gladdened the eyes and hearts of millions.

II. The Little Things Cause Your Greatest Joy and Your Deepest Sorrow.

Homes are made or destroyed by little things. It is not the big things of the life that wear you out, but the little ones.

In a suburban community near New York City was a dentist who had extremely wealthy clientele. One day a classmate asked him, "What is the largest fee you have ever received?" He thought that the dentist would reply with a figure that would run into hundreds of dollars. Instead, the dentist beckoned him into the waiting room. There on a table was a small bouquet of wild wayside flowers. They were the gift of a little girl whose parents were so poor that they were not able to pay even the customary fee of an ordinary dentist. "There," he said, "is the greatest fee I have ever received." The small gift of that little girl, like the widows' mite, was the greatest of all gifts that had been cast into that dentist's treasury.

III. The Small is Composed of the Same Substance as the Large.

The tiny bay has the same kind of water in it as the great ocean. There is the same energy at work in the tiny leaf that there is in the thunderstorm. It is not so noisy in its behaviour, but it is the same in its nature. The small and the great and the minute and the vast are kindred in glory and worth. They express the same principle, are inspired by the same motives, and lead to the same consequences. Their only difference is in the measure of their influence.

It is possible for the least of us to stand for and represent the greatest things. Honesty, for instance, is indispensable in the highest places, yet a child can stand for it in a schoolroom, and a youngster can practice it in his first business transactions. Two boys stood side by side in a public market, one selling melons and fruit, and the other selling oysters and fish. The boy, who sold melons and fruit, sold all but one large melon, when a customer came admiring it and asking the price. the boy said, "The melon is the last I have, sir, and though it looks very fair, there is an unsound spot on the other side." The gentlemen declined to buy the melon, and turning to the other boy, he said, "Are those oysters fresh?" "Yes, sir, fresh this morning," meaning that they were put on his stall that morning. The man bought some of them. This boy then turned to his friend and said, "What a fool you were to show the gentleman that spot in the melon! He would never have looked at it until he had gone away." The boy replied, "I would not have told him a lie for twice what I earned this morning. Besides, I shall be better off in the end, for I have gained a customer and you have lost one." That man never went to that fish-stall again, but he was a regular customer of the boy who sold fruit.

Unselfishness is important in the lives of the great, but it can be demonstrated and

be just as glorious in the lives of the little. When Christ said, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," He meant that the smallest act is made up of the same substance as the greatest. That is why God especially notices little things, the sparrow that falleth, the cup of cold water, and the widow's mite. That is one of the great things about each of the Lord's churches, namely, that it stands for the greatest things in the world. Its glory is that it affords an opportunity for the least of us to live for the same great things that have claimed the devotion of the noblest souls in the world, and proclaims to us in our corner of the world, small though it may be, that we can do what otherwise could not be done. A lantern can represent the same cause of light that the sun stands for, and in its corner of the world a lantern can often do what the sun could never do.

The importance and value of a small life well lived or a small part well played cannot be exaggerated or praised too highly. Too many people sigh for the wealth, the position, the character, or the personality of someone else and minimize the importance of the life they can live. It is a great day for the world when any Christian says to himself, "I shall be a lamp in the chamber if I can't be a star in the sky." It is a tragic mistake to do nothing simply because you think you can't do anything except a little.

"It's not what you'd do with a million
If riches should e'er be your lot,
But what are you doing at present
With the dollar and a quarter you've got?"

Sir Henry Irving, the theatrical authority of another generation, used to attach the greatest importance to the performance of small parts in his plays. Unless a small part is played well it will mar the most brilliant performance. He once said, "I can get anybody to play a big part, but it is very difficult to get an actor to play small parts the way I wish to see them played." Nothing is so fatal to personal character as half-done tasks. Most responsibilities in our churches are considered as commonplace by members. That is the reason many members do not do them well and thus miss half the satisfaction and joy of doing them, to say nothing of the fatal effect upon personal character which they suffer.

IV. The Difference Between the Little and the Large Is Sometimes So Small that God Alone Notices It.

Most successes are built upon the smallest of margins. Do you realize that the fastest runner can run but five per cent faster than the ordinary ones? To be sure, the five per cent difference is important, but it is a tremendous encouragement to know that there is only a five per cent difference between those who are privileged to do great things and the rest of us who must do the little things of life. The little lives we live and the little things we do have a greatness about them of which we ourselves may be quite unaware. When Ida M. Tarbell, a biographer of great men, was asked on her eightieth birthday to name the greatest people she had ever met she replied, "Those nobody ever met." In every generation there have been people who lived and died without knowing that their lives had greatness for all generations.

Our Lord put a premium on faithfulness in little things. He continually stressed the nobility and worth of fidelity. He delighted to call attention to some unrecognized ministry and to

commend some faithful, though unknown, worker. The poor, afflicted, shrinking woman who touched the hem of His garment received His approval. The lone widow who gave into the Lord's treasury her two mites was observed and commended by Him Who looks upon the heart and judges motives rather than deeds alone.

We can estimate the real value or virtue of a thing more from its quality than its magnitude. We entertain and cherish thoughts in our minds without a due regard to their importance and influence on our lives and the lives of others. They give form and shape to our words and acts. It is only by fidelity in little things, that we can hope to be faithful in the large things. Neglect of minor things will insure defeat in great things. A faithful use of all our little opportunities will make life a success. The woman who brought her mites and cast them into the treasury was unobserved, perhaps, by all except those who were inclined to ridicule the act. But Christ saw in it a principle which reaching to heaven, so He commended her instead of commending those who had cast in of their abundance. Great events often turn on little hinges. Chemists say that one grain of iodine will impart its color to seven thousand times its weight in water.

Character is formed little by little. The thoughts, words, and deeds of life are woven into a fabric of character. A beautiful Christian character reaches its climax by progressive development.

God cares for the little things, or we would not be cared for. The wings of the butterfly are more exquisitely painted and richly adorned than the drapery of earth, or the cloud-curtains that festoon the sun when it dips its golden rim behind the western hills. His providence accompanies us every step of the distance from the cradle to the grave. When we feel our insignificance in the sight of God, we are more than ever the object of His notice and care. We shall be called before the Great Judge, not only to answer for our conduct on great occasions, but for every thought, word, and deed of our lives. If we have been faithful, in the little things, we shall hear Him say, "Well, done, thou good and faithful servant!"