

Encouragement for the Depressed

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon encourages believers struggling with weakness and small faith to trust that God values their humble beginnings and will nurture their growth in grace.

Scripture: Zechariah 4:10, Matthew 17:20, John 10:29, Psalm 34:18

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual Growth", "Encouragement"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon offers heartfelt encouragement to believers who feel weak or discouraged in their faith journey. Using the metaphor of 'the day of small things' from Zechariah, he reminds listeners that God cherishes even the smallest beginnings of faith and grace. Spurgeon exhorts believers to rejoice in their current spiritual state, resist despair, and seek continual growth, assuring them of God's loving presence and care.

Transcript

"For who has despised the day of small things?" Zechariah 4:10.

ZECHARIAH was engaged in the building of the Temple. When its foundations were laid, it struck everybody as being a very small edifice compared with the former glorious structure of Solomon. The friends of the enterprise lamented that it should be so small—the foes of it rejoiced and uttered strong expressions of contempt! Both friends and foes doubted whether, even on that small scale, the structure would ever be completed. They might lay the foundations and they might raise the walls a little way, but they were too feeble a folk, possessed of too little riches and too little strength, to carry out the enterprise. It was the day of small things. Friends trembled. Foes jeered. But the Prophet rebuked them both—rebuked the unbelief of friends and the contempt of enemies, by this question—"Who has despised the day of small things?"—and by a subsequent prophecy which removed the fear.

Now we shall use this question at this time for the comfort of two sorts of people—first, for weak believers and, secondly, for feeble workers. Our objective shall be the strengthening of the hands that hang down and the confirming of the feeble knees. We will begin, first of all, with—

I. WEAK BELIEVERS.

Let us describe them. It is with them a day of small things. Probably you have only been lately brought into the family of God. A few months ago you were a stranger to the Divine Life and to the things of God. You

have been born-again and you have the weakness of an infant. You are not as strong, yet, as you will be when you have grown in Grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the early day with you and it is also the day of small things. Now your knowledge is small. My dear Brothers and Sisters, you have not been a Bible student long—thank God that you know yourself a sinner and Christ is your Savior! That is precious knowledge, but you feel now what you once would not have confessed—your own ignorance of the things of God! Especially do the deep things of God trouble you. There are some Doctrines that appear to be mysterious, that are very simple to other Believers, but are depressing to you. They are high—you cannot attain to them. They are to you what hard nuts would be to children whose teeth have not yet appeared. Well, be not at all alarmed about this! All in God's family have once been children! There are some that seem to be born with knowledge—Christians that come to a height in Christ very rapidly. But these are only here and there. Israel did not produce a Samson every day. Most have to go through a long period of spiritual infancy and youth. And, alas, there are but few in the Church, even now, who might be called fathers! Do not marvel, therefore, if you are somewhat small in your knowledge.

Your discernment, too, is small. It is possible that anybody with a fluent tongue could lead you into error. You have, however, discernment, if you are a child of God, sufficient to be kept from deadly errors, for though there are some who would, if it were possible, deceive even the very elect, yet the elect cannot be deceived, for, the Life of God being in them, they discern between the precious and the vile—they choose not the things of the world—but they follow after the things of God! Your discernment, however, seeming so small, need not afflict you. It is by reason of use—when the senses are exercised—that we fully discern between all that is good and all that is evil. Thank God for a little discernment—though you see men as trees walking, and your eyes are only half opened—a little Light of God is better than none at all! Not long ago you were in total darkness. Now if there is a glimmer, be thankful, for remember where a glimmer can enter, the full noontide can come—yes, and shall come in due season! Therefore, despise not the time of small discernment.

Of course, you, my dear Brother or Sister, have little experience. I trust you will not fake experience and try to talk as if you had the experience of the veteran saints when you are as yet only a raw recruit. You have not yet done business on the great waters. The more fierce temptations of Satan have not assailed you—the wind has been tempered as yet to the shorn lamb—God has not hung heavy weights on slender threads, but has put a small burden on a weak back. Be thankful that it is so! Thank Him for the experience that you have, and do not be desponding because you have not more. It will all come in due time. "Despises not the day of small things." It is always unwise to get down a biography and say, "Oh, I cannot be right because I have not felt all this good man did." If a child of ten years of age were to take down the diary of his grandfather and were to say, "Because I do not feel my grandfather's weakness, do not require to use his spectacles, or lean upon his staff, therefore I am not one of the same family," it would be very foolish reasoning! Your experience will ripen. As yet it is but natural that it should be green. Wait a while and bless God for what you have.

Probably this, however, does not trouble you as much as one other thing, you have but little faith, and that faith being small, your feelings are very variable. I often hear this from young beginners in the Divine Life, "I was so happy a month ago, but I have lost that happiness." Perhaps tomorrow, after they have been at the House of God, they will be as cheerful as possible, but the next day their joy may be gone! Beware, my dear Christian Friends, of living by feeling! John Bunyan puts down Mr. Live-by-Feeling as one of the worst enemies of the town of Mansoul. I think he said he was hanged. I am afraid he, somehow or other, escaped from the executioner, for I very commonly meet him—and there is no villain that hates the souls

of men and causes more sorrow to the people of God than this Mr. Live-by-Feeling! He that lives by feelings will be happy, today, and unhappy tomorrow—and if our salvation depended upon our feelings, we would be lost one day and saved another, for they are as fickle as the weather and go up and down like a barometer! We live by faith, and if that faith is weak, bless God that weak faith is faith and that weak faith is true faith! If you believe in Christ Jesus, though your faith is as a grain of mustard seed, it will save you, and it will, by-and-by, grow into something stronger. A diamond is a diamond, and the smallest scrap of it is of the same nature as the Koh-I-Noor, and he that has but little faith has faith, for all that! It is not great faith that is essential to salvation, but faith that links the soul to Christ, and that soul is, therefore, saved! Instead of mourning so much that your faith is not strong, bless God that you have any faith at all, for if He sees that you despise the faith He has given you, it may be long before He gives you more! Prize that little, and when He sees that you are so glad and thankful for that little, then will He multiply it and increase it—and your faith shall mount even to the full assurance of faith!

I think I hear you also add to all this the complaint that your other Graces seem to be small, too. "Oh," you say, "my patience is so little. If I have a little pain, I begin to cry out. I was in hopes I should be able to bear it—bear it without murmuring. My courage is so little—the blush is on my cheek if anybody asks me about Christ—I think I could hardly confess Him before half a dozen, much less before the world. I am very weak, indeed." Ah, I don't wonder. I have known some who have been strong by reason of years and have still been lacking in that virtue. But where faith is weak, of course, the rest will be weak. A plant that has a weak root will naturally have a weak stem and then will have but weak fruit. Your weakness of faith sends a weakness through the whole. But for all this, though you are to seek for more faith, and consequently for more Grace—for stronger Graces, yet do not despise what Graces you have. Thank God for them! And pray that the few clusters that are now upon you may be multiplied a thousand-fold to the praise of the Glory of His Grace. Thus I have tried to describe those who are passing through the day of small things.

But the text asks, "Who has despised the day of small things?" Well, some have, but there is a great comfort in this—God the Father has not He has looked upon you—you with little Grace, and little love, and little faith—and He has not despised you! No, God is always near the feeble saint. If I saw a young man crossing a common alone, I would not be at all astonished, and I would not look round for his father. But I saw today, as I went home, a very tiny little tot right out on the Common—a pretty little girl, and I thought, "The father or mother are near somewhere." And truly there was the father behind a tree whom I had not seen. I was as good as sure that the little thing was not there all alone! And when I see a little weak child of God, I feel sure that God the Father is near, watching with wakeful eyes and tending with gracious care the feebleness of His newborn child! He does not despise you if you are resting on His promise. The humble and contrite have a word all to themselves in Scripture, that these He will not despise!

It is another sweet and consoling thought, that God the Son does not despise the day of small things. Jesus Christ does not, for you remember this word, "He shall carry the lambs in His bosom." We put that which we most prize nearest

our heart, and this is what Jesus does. Some of us, perhaps, have outgrown the state in which we were lambs, but to ride in that heavenly carriage of the Savior's bosom—we might well be content to go back and be lambs again! He does not despise the day of small things.

And it is equally consolatory to reflect that the Holy Spirit does not despise the day of small things, for He it is who, having planted in the heart the grain of mustard seed, watches over it till it becomes a tree! He it is who, having seen the new-born child of Grace, does nurse, feed and tend it until it comes to the stature of

a perfect man in Christ Jesus. The blessed Godhead despises not the weak Believer! O weak Believer, be consoled by this!

Who is it, then, that may despise the day of small things? Perhaps Satan has told you and whispered in your ear that such little Grace as yours is not worth having, that such an insignificant plant as you are will surely be rooted up. Now let me tell you that Satan is a liar, for he, himself, does not despise the day of small things! I am sure of that because he always makes a dead set upon those who are just coming to Christ. As soon as ever he sees that the soul is a little wounded by conviction. As soon as ever he discovers that a heart begins to pray, he will assault it with fiercer temptations than ever! I have known him try to drive such a one to suicide, or to lead him into worse sin than he has ever committed before. He—

"Trembles when he sees

The weakest saint upon his knees."

He may tell you that the little Grace in us is of no account, but he knows right well that it is the handful of corn on the top of the mountain—the fruit of which shall shake like Lebanon! He knows it is the little Grace in the heart that overthrows his kingdom there.

"Ah," you say, "but I have been greatly troubled lately because I have many friends who despise me, because though I can hardly say I am a Believer, yet I have some desire towards God." What sort of friends are these? Are they worldly friends? Oh, do not fret about what they say! It would never trouble me if I were an artist, if a blind man were to utter the sharpest criticism on my works. What does he know about it? And when an ungodly person begins to say about your piety that it is deficient and faulty, poor Soul, let him say what he will—it need not affect you! "Ah," you say, "the persons that seem to despise me, and to put me out, and tell me that I am no child of God, are, I believe, Christians." Well then, do two things—first, lay what they say to you, in a measure, to heart, because it may be if God's children do not see in you the mark of a child, perhaps you are not a child! Let it lead you to examination. Oh, dear Friends, it is very easy to be self-deceived and God may employ, perhaps, one of His servants to enlighten you upon this—and deliver you from a strong delusion! But, on the other hand, if you really do trust in your Savior, if you have begun to pray, if you have some love to God—and any Christian treats you harshly as if he thought you a hypocrite, forgive him—bear it! He has made a mistake. He would not do so if he knew you better. Say within yourself, "After all, if my Brother does not know me, it is enough if my Father does. If my Father loves me, though my Brother gives me the cold shoulder, I will be sorry for it, but it shall not break my heart. I will cling the closer to my Lord because His servants seem shy of me." Why, it is not much wonder, is it, that some Christians should be afraid of some of you converts, for think what you used to be a little while ago? Why, a mother hears her son say he is converted. A month or two ago she knew where he spent his evenings and what were his habits of sin, and though she hopes it is so, she is afraid lest she should lead him to presumption. And she rejoices with trembling and, perhaps, tells him more about her trembling than she does about her rejoicing!

Why, the saints of old could not think Saul was converted at first! He was to be brought into the church meeting and received—I will suppose the case. I should not wonder before he came, when he saw the elders, one of them would say, "Well, the young man seems to know something of the Grace of God—there is certainly a change in him. But it is a remarkable thing that he should wish to join the very people he was persecuting—perhaps it is a mere impulse. It may be, after all, that he will go back to his old companions." Do you wonder they should say so? I don't! I am not at all surprised. I am sorry when

there are unjust suspicions. I am sorry when a genuine child of God is questioned. But I would not have you lay it much to heart. As I have said before, if your Father knows you, you need not be so broken in heart because your Brother does not! Be glad that God does not despise the day of small things!

And now let me say to you who are in this state of small things, that I earnestly trust that you will not, yourselves, despise the day of small things "How can we do that?" you ask. Why, you can do it by desponding! I think there was a time when you would have been ready to leap for joy, if you had been told that God would have given you a little faith!

And now you have got a little faith and, instead of rejoicing, you are sighing, and moaning, and mourning! Do not do so. Be thankful for moonlight, and you shall get sunlight! Be thankful for sunlight, and you shall get that Light of Heaven which is as the light of seven days! Do not despond lest you seem to despise the mercy which God has given you! A poor patient that has been very, very lame and weak, and could not rise from his bed, is at last able to walk with a stick. "Well," he says to himself, "I wish I could walk, and run, and leap as other men." Suppose he sits down and frets because he cannot? His physician might put his hand on his shoulder and say, "My good fellow, why, you ought to be thankful you can stand at all! A little while ago, you know, you could not stand upright. Be glad for what you have—don't seem to despise what has been done for you." I say to every Christian here, while you long after strength, don't seem to despise the Grace that God has bestowed, but rejoice and bless His name!

You can despise the day of small things, again, by not seeking after more. "That is strange," you say. Well, a man who has got a little and does not want more—it looks as if he despises the little! He who has a little light and does not ask for more light, does not care for light at all. You that have a little faith and do not want more faith—do not value faith at all—you are despising it! On the one hand, do not despond because you have the day of small things, but in the next place, do not stand still and be satisfied with what you have! Prove your value of the little by earnestly seeking after more Divine Grace! Do not despise the Grace that God has given you, but bless God for it—and do this in the presence of His people. If you hold your tongue about your Grace and never let anyone know, surely it must be because you do not think it is worth saying anything about! Tell your brothers, tell your sisters, and they of the Lord's household, that the Lord has done gracious things for you! And then it will be seen that you do not despise His Grace.

And now let us run over a thought or two about these small things in weak Believers. Be it remembered that little faith is saving faith, and that the day of small things is a day of safe things. Be it remembered that it is natural that living things should begin small. The man is first a baby. The daylight is first of all twilight. It is by little and by little that we come unto the stature of men in Christ Jesus. The day of small things is not only natural, but promising. Small things are living things. Let them alone, and they grow. The day of small things has its beauty and its excellence. I have known some who in later years would have liked to have gone back to their first days. Oh, well do some of us remember when we would have gone over hedge and ditch to hear a sermon! We had not much knowledge, but oh, how we longed to know! We stood in the aisles, then, and we never got tired! Now we need soft seats and very comfortable places—and the atmosphere must neither be too hot nor too cold! We are now getting dainty, perhaps, but in those first young days of spiritual life, what appetites we had for Divine Truth, and what zeal, what sacred fire was in our heart! True, some of it was wild fire and, perhaps, the energy of the flesh mingled with the power of the Spirit, but, for all that, God remembers the love of our espousals and so do we remember, too! The mother loves her grown-up son, but sometimes she thinks she does not love him as she did when she could fondle him in her arms. Oh, the beauty of a little child! Oh, the beauty of a lamb in the faith! I dare say the farmer and the butcher like the sheep better than the lambs, but the lambs are best

to look at, at any rate! And the rosebud—there is a charm about it that there is not in the full-blown rose. And so in the day of small things there is a special excellence that we ought not to despise. Besides, small as Grace may be in the heart, it is Divine—it is a spark from the ever-blazing sun! He is a partaker of the Divine Nature who has even a little living faith in Christ. And being Divine, it is immortal! Not all the devils in Hell could quench the feeblest spark of Grace that ever dropped into the heart of man! If God has given you faith as a grain of mustard seed, it will defy all earth and Hell, all time and eternity ever to destroy it! So there is much reason why we should not despise the day of small things.

One word and I leave this point. You Christians, don't despise anybody, but especially do not despise any in whom you see even a little love to Christ. But do more—look after them, look after the little ones! I think I have heard of a shepherd who had a remarkably fine flock of sheep—and he had a secret about them. He was often asked how it was that his flocks seemed so much to excel all others. At last he told the secret—"I give my principal attention to the lambs." Now you elders of the church, and you, my matronly Sisters, you that know the Lord, and have known Him for years, look up the lambs! Search them out and take a special care of them! For if they are well nurtured in their early days, they will get a strength of spiritual constitution that will make them the joy of the Good Shepherd during the rest of their days! Now I leave that point. In the second place, I said that I would address a word or two to—

II. FEEBLE WORKERS.

Thank God there are many workers here tonight, and maybe they will put themselves down as feeble. May the words I utter be an encouragement to them, and to feeble workers collectively! When a Church begins, it is usually small and the day of small things is a time of considerable anxiety and fear. I may be addressing some who are members of a newly-organized Church. Dear Brothers and Sisters, do not despise the day of small things! Rest assured that God does not save by numbers, and that results are not in the Spiritual Kingdom in proportion to numbers! I have been reading lately with considerable care, the life of John Wesley by two or three different authors in order to get, as well as I could, a fair idea of the good man. And one thing I have noticed—that the beginnings of the work which has become so wonderfully large were very small, indeed. Mr. Wesley and his first brethren were not rich people. Nearly all that joined him were poor. Here and there, there was a person of some standing, but the Methodists were the poor of the land. And his first preachers were not men of education. One or two were so, but the most were good outdoor preachers—head preachers, magnificent preachers as God made them by His Spirit—they were not men who had had the benefit of college training, or who were remarkable for ability. The Methodists had neither money nor eminent men, at first, and their numbers were very few. During the whole life of that good man, which was protracted for so many years, the denomination did not attain any very remarkable size. They were few, and apparently feeble, but Methodism was never so glorious as it was at first—and there were never as many conversions, I believe, as in those early days.

Now I speak sorrowfully. It is a great denomination. It abounds in wealth—I am glad it does. It has mighty orators—I rejoice it has. But it has no increase, no conversions! This year and other years it remains stationary. I do not say this because that is an exceptional denomination, for almost all others have the same tale. Year by year as the statistics come in, it is just this. "No increase—hardly hold our ground." I use that as an illustration here—this Church will get in precisely the same condition if we do not look out—just the same state! When we have not the means, we get the blessing—and when we seem to have the might and power—then the blessing does not come. Oh, may God send us poverty! May God send us lack of means and take away our power of speech if it must be, and help us only to stammer, if we may only thus get the blessing! Oh, I crave to be useful to souls, and all the rest may go where it will. And each

Church must crave the same. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord." Instead of despising the day of small things, we ought to be encouraged! It is by the small things that God seems to work, but the great things He does not often use. He won't have Gideon's great host—let them go to their homes—let the mass of them go! Bring them down to the water—pick out only the men that lap—and then there is a very few. You can count them almost on your fingers— just two or three hundred men. Then Gideon shall go forth against the Midianites! And as the cake of barley bread smote the tent, and it lay along, so the sound of the sword of the Lord and of Gideon at the dead of night shall make the host to tremble and the Lord God shall get to Himself the victory! Never mind your feebleness, Brothers and Sisters! Never mind your fewness, your poverty, your lack of ability! Throw your souls into God's cause, pray mightily, lay hold on the gates of Heaven, stir Heaven and earth, rather than be defeated in winning souls—and you will see results that will astonish you! "Who has despised the day of small things?"

Now take the case of each Christian individually. Every one of us ought to be at work for Christ, but the great mass of us cannot do great things. Don't despise, then, the day of little things! You can only give a penny. Now then, He that sat over by the treasury did not despise the widow's two mites that made a farthing. Your little thank-offering, if given from your heart, is as acceptable as if it had been a hundred times as much! Don't, therefore, neglect to do the little. Don't despise the day of small things. You can only give away a tract in the street. Don't say, "I won't do that." Souls have been saved by the distribution of tracts and sermons! Scatter them, scatter them! They will be good seed. You know not where they may fall. You can only write a letter to a friend, sometimes, about Christ. Don't neglect to do it! Write one tomorrow! Remember a playmate of yours—you may take liberties with him about his soul from your intimacy with him. Write to him about his state before God, and urge him to seek the Savior! Who knows?—a sermon may miss him, but a letter from the well-known school companion will reach his heart. Mother, it is only two or three little children at home that you have an influence over. Despise not the day of small things! Take them tomorrow—put your arms around their necks as they kneel by you—pray, "God bless my boys and girls, and save them"—tell them of Christ now. Oh, how well can mothers preach to children! I can never forget my mother's teaching. On a Sunday night, when we were at home, she would have us round the table and explain the Scriptures as we read, and then pray—and one night she left an impression on my mind that never will be erased, when she said, "I have told you, my dear children, the way of salvation, and if you perish you will perish justly. I shall have to say, 'Amen,' to your condemnation if you are condemned." And I could not bear that! Anybody else might say, "Amen," but not my mother!

Oh, you don't know—you that have to deal with children—what you may do! Despise not these little opportunities. Put a word in edgeways for Christ—you that go about in trains, you that go into workshops and factories. If Christians were men who were all true to their colors, I think we should soon see a great change come over our great establishments. Speak up for Jesus! Be not ashamed of Him! And because you can say but little, don't refuse, therefore, to say that, but rather say it over 20 times, and so make the little into much! Again, and again, and again, repeat the feeble stroke, and there shall come to be as much result from it as from one tremendous blow! God accepts your little works if they are done in faith in His dear Son. God will give success to your little works! God will educate you by your little works to do greater works—and your little works may call out others who shall do greater works by far than ever you shall be able to accomplish! Evangelists, go on preaching at the street corner! You that visit the low lodging houses, go on! Get into the room and talk of Jesus Christ there as you have done. You that go into the country towns on the Sabbath and speak on the village greens of Christ, go on with it! I am glad to see you, but I am glad to miss you when I know you are about the Master's work! We don't want to keep the salt in the box—let it be rubbed into the putrid mass to stop the putrefication. We don't want the seed

forever in the corn bin—let it be scattered and it will give us more! Oh, Brothers and Sisters, wake up if any of you are asleep! Don't let an ounce of strength in this Church be wasted—not a single grain of ability, either in the way of doing, or praying, or giving, or holy living! Spend and be spent, for who has despised the day of small things?

The Lord encourage weak Believers, and the Lord accept the efforts of feeble workers, and send to both His richest benediction for Christ's sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ZECHARIAH 7; 8:9-22.

Verse 1. And it came to pass in the fourth year of King Darius, that the Word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu. God's Prophets were not always in the spirit, and when the Word of God came to them, it was a notable day, and they marked it in their diary! I think that we, too, who are not Prophets can remember some special time when God's Word was peculiarly precious to us. We can put down "the fourth day of the ninth month."

2, 3. When they had sent unto the house of God, Sherezer and Regem-Melech, and their men, to pray before the LORD, and to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of Hosts, and to the Prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? On that day the Jews had kept a fast to commemorate the terrible calamity which happened to the Temple in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Now these people were living away in Babylon and it occurred to them that, as the Temple was now being built and Jerusalem was restored, it was a question whether they ought to keep that fast any longer since it was not kept by Divine command. It was a fast of their own inventing—and the question was whether they ought not to abandon it when things had so changed. So they sent messengers to the Temple to inquire of the priests and of the Prophets, and to pray to God, Himself. When we have a difficult question lying on the conscience, it is well to settle it, and not allow it to rest on the heart unsatisfied.

4, 5. Then came the Word of the LORD of Hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did you at all fast unto Me, even to Me? There is the point! You can fast to self. You can fast to your own pride. If we have no thought of honoring God in our fasting, there is nothing in it. The question is, "Did you at all fast unto Me, even to Me?"

6. And when you did eat, and when you did drink, did not you eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? If a holy feast is not kept with a view to God, it is not kept at all! It is a feast to yourselves. You have missed the mark altogether.

7. Should you not hear the words which the LORD has cried by the former Prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain? Well, what was that word? Zechariah has it fresh from God, and he states it.

8-10. And the Word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaks the LORD of Hosts, saying. Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion, every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. This is what God said—most just, most fit for God to require of His people.

11, 12. But they refused to listen, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, so that they should not hear. Yes, they made their hearts as an adamant stone lest they should hear the Law, and the words which the LORD of Hosts has sent by His Spirit by the former Prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of Hosts. And well there might! When God requires what is so just and so commendable, and men will not yield and will not even hear about it, they deserve that God should grow wrathful with them.

13. Therefore it is come to pass, that as He cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear; says the LORD of Hosts. The punishment of sin seems to be according to the sin itself. If men will not hear God, neither will God hear them!

14. But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate. Now, in the next Chapter, the Prophet goes on to speak not so much of the people's sin as of God's resolve to have mercy upon them. He speaks with gentle warnings and with loving promises.

Zechariah 8:9-22.

Verses 9, 10. Thus says the LORD of Hosts: Let your hands be strong, you that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the Prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of Hosts was laid, that the Temple might be built. For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor. See into what a state sin brought Israel? There was no bread, no work, no wage, no peace. Every man was the enemy of his neighbor!

11. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, says the LORD of Hosts. He would change everything and give them happiness and prosperity.

12. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. God can turn our estate as easily as a man turns his hand.

"The Lord can clear the darkest skies, Can give us day for night." As the wheel revolves, so can the whole fortune of a man change speedily under the kind hand of God!

13. And it shall come to pass, that as you were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong. The Jew had become the very model of a curse. "You are as cursed as a Jew," said the enemies of Israel! But God would make them to be the very model of a blessing, so that men would say, "You are as blessed as they of Israel."

14. 15. For thus says the LORD of Hosts, As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked Me to wrath, says the LORD of Hosts, and I repented not: So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear you not. It is a very instructive and encouraging passage. When God threatened to punish His people, He did it. He did not play with words. He punished them and repented not. And so when God promises to bless His people, He will not run back from His Word, but He will carry out every jot and tittle of it in the blessing of His people!

16, 17. These are the things that you shall do: Speak you every man the truth to his neighbor: execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates. And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, says the LORD. He will have His people true, even if they swear to their own hurt. They must not change. They are to speak the truth, though a thousand calamities should be let loose thereby! May God make us a truth-loving, truth-speaking, truth-doing people!

18. And the Word of the LORD of Hosts came unto me, saying—This is the point that I call your attention to. You had the question when I began to read—here is the answer.

19. Thus says the LORD of Hosts, The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah, joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace. Here is an answer to more than they asked for! The messengers only inquired about one fast—what they should do with it—namely, the fast of the fifth month. But they get instruction upon three other fasts. If you come to God's Word upon any point, you will not only be resolved upon that point, but you will be guided in many other ways, for God's Word is full of instruction—and they that are willing to be taught of it shall become wise in all ways. So now they are told that these fasts were to be turned into feasts.

20. 21. Thus says the LORD of Hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities. And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of Hosts: I will go also. It is a fine thing when we invite other people and can always say, "I will go also." There are many people who say, "Do as I do, not as I say!" But if our example keeps pace with our precept, there will be power in our precept. "Let us go," they said—and he that said it added, "I will go also."

22. Yes, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. And it is so, even now. We have received our religion from a Jew. We believe in One who was of the seed of Abraham. We rejoice in Him as also the Son of God, and many nations come crowding about the Christ of God.

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