

THE LITTLE THINGS

Sermonette given by Paul Vaughan at Noosa Feast 2003

Have you ever noticed that, with God, things often start small?

- God's Kingdom, for example, is described as beginning like a small grain of mustard seed.
- God's Church is described as a 'small flock'!
- God's Spirit is given to us, as a small deposit!

In many ways God starts small but He does so with the bigger picture in mind.

- That small mustard seed grows, to become the greatest of all herb trees!
- The Church of God, one day will encompass the entire earth!
- The deposit we're given of God's Spirit, eventually makes way for the fullness of our spiritual inheritance!

God starts small but always with - the bigger picture in mind! With God, the small things don't stay small – they grow and develop to become, the great things!

Now as we know we're being trained today for future roles in God's Kingdom. Those will be fairly major roles! We'll have big responsibilities! We'll be charged with caring for a very large number of people! So how is God training us today, in order to prepare us for those future roles – those big responsibilities?

Well today I hope to remind us, that as in most things, God starts small. God gives us small ways and opportunities today, to help us develop spiritual skills – the skills we need. He gives us small opportunities to practice His way of outgoing concern. He even gives us a small bunch of people to practice on!

As trainees for the Kingdom of God, we need to ensure we make the most of these small opportunities, because they play a key role in preparing us, to become effective members of God's Family in the World Tomorrow! God gives us small opportunities today, but always with the bigger picture in mind!

To illustrate just how seriously God views these small opportunities, I'd like to have a brief look at a parable today! It's the parable of the *sheep* and the *goats*, and it's found in **Matthew 25:31**.

Now this parable is well-known in the Church of God so we won't look at every verse but as we know, the setting of this parable is Christ's return. **Verse**

31 pictures Christ returning in great Glory, and as all nations are gathered before Him, He makes a distinction between two groups.

He sets what He calls *'the sheep'* on His right hand, but what He calls *'the goats'* on His left. Comparing **verse 34** with **verse 41**, we see that those judged by Christ to be *'sheep'* are given eternal life, but those judged to be *'goats'* are condemned to eternal death!

So Christ sets these two groups apart for a reason. There's an issue being dealt with here, and it's one which leads to eternal life on the one hand, eternal death on the other! Verse 34 identifies the issue:

“Then shall the King say to them on His right hand, 'Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! For I was hungry and you gave me meat, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you took me in! Naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me!’”

So the issue is - actually putting God's way of outgoing concern into action! The *'sheep'* demonstrated by their actions, care and concern for the needs of others - whereas the *'goats'* didn't!

Now we know from the next few verses, the sheep didn't actually perform these actions to Christ Himself, but **verse 40** tells us that doing them for the brethren was as good as doing them for Christ. So those who made the most of their opportunities to serve their brethren, were judged by Christ to be ready to inherit eternal life.

And notice they were small opportunities. The actions listed here aren't major, world-changing events – they in fact appear to be minor! Something as small as, sharing a meal, giving someone a drink, visiting someone in need, or welcoming a stranger! These small acts of service are the difference here, between inheriting eternal life and missing out - between being prepared for God's Kingdom, and not!

So why is this the case? How do today's small actions, prepare us for a future inheritance in God's Kingdom? Well there's a major spiritual principle at work here. It's the principle which states that, “He who is faithful in little, will also be faithful in much! And He that is not faithful in little will not be faithful in much” (**Luke 16:10**).

God can tell a lot about us, by how we handle the little things! How we handle small opportunities to serve others - reveals what's in our heart! It reveals what's really most important to us, because what's most important - is what we'll be

giving our time and attention to. He who is faithful in little will be, faithful in much. God can also tell how ready we are, for eternal life in God's Kingdom because in reality, eternal life in God's Kingdom is all about service. It's about outgoing, out-flowing care and concern for others - for the rest of eternity!

Christ said the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, was the greatest servant. By definition that makes God the Father the greatest servant, because He's the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. God the Father, serves! Eternal life, is all about service - it's about considering, and then making provision for, the needs of others! It's out going, out-flowing loving concern!

Therefore, the person whose ready to undertake that future - will be the one who's proven they're capable of serving and caring for others now. It makes sense, that the person who cares enough now, who takes the time now to action God's way of outgoing concern - even if only in small ways - shows a capacity to do the same thing on a larger scale in the future! They're prepared for that future role, because they've learned and developed the skills today.

On the other hand, (the goats) if we can't action God's way of outgoing concern - even in small ways with the small bunch of people we're given to practice on now (our brethren) - how can we hope to be able to step up a grade, and achieve it on a much larger scale in the World Tomorrow? Well the reality is, we won't! We won't be prepared for what's required of us! We won't have developed the skills required for that future role! "He who is faithful in little, will also be faithful in much!" Making the most of the small opportunities today, properly prepares us for the bigger things in the World Tomorrow!

It's interesting to consider what constitutes little acts of service because a small act of service really is a matter of perspective. It's not necessarily a small thing if you're on the receiving end!

When you are one who's hungry, and someone shares a meal with you. When you are the one who's visited when you're sick or incapacitated. When you're the stranger - standing at the back of the hall for the first time looking at this big group of people - it doesn't seem such a small thing when someone comes up and makes you feel welcome. It actually seems pretty great! These small actions aren't that small when they affect you!

There was a time in my life when someone did a small thing for me – at least it would've seemed small to him at the time I'm sure. It came at a crucial point in my life, and it had a profound effect on me!

When I was 21, my Father died of a massive heart-attack. It was totally unexpected – he was young, he was only 50, he was active and otherwise

physically fit. Nevertheless this is what happened. This was, of course, a hugely traumatic time in my life. My world was shattered, I was numb with the pain! I was at a loss to know what to do! I wasn't coping very well! But at that very difficult time, I had a great friend – a mate I'd grown up with in the Church. Now clearly he didn't know how to handle the situation any better than I did. He didn't know what to say to me, he didn't know what to do! I'm sure he was overwhelmed by the situation. Yet he was courageous enough to do - the little things. He came over to my house the next day, and sat by me – for as long as I needed!

He didn't try to say anything, he didn't try to do anything. He just sat there, with me. He was there for me when it counted. He was just there. Now I'm sure that in the magnitude of the situation, being there for me probably seemed like a small thing to him – nothing great, nothing significant. Yet to me, it was profound! You see his actions demonstrated to me, that he really cared!

The support and strength his presence gave me was exactly what I needed at the time. Just being there for me, helped me get through the days leading up to my father's funeral. It helped me to cope, at a time when I wasn't coping very well. I'll never forget what that friend did for me! Just being there, doing and saying nothing had a profound effect on my life – it made a difference!

You see the small things aren't so small when they affect you! They may seem small or insignificant to others, but when they effect you, they can actually seem pretty great!

We don't have to be anyone, or do anything big to serve our brethren – to make a difference! We just have to be willing and courageous enough, to put ourselves in someone else's situation, to action God's way of outgoing concern, and seek to provide those small things that are needed!

So at the close of this, I'd like to issue each of us here with a challenge. The challenge is simply this - that by the end of the Feast, each of us might have found one 'small act of service' to perform on behalf of our brethren. Now no-one's going to know whether you accept this challenge or not – except you of course, and Christ. But I encourage each of us to take up this challenge. Because from God's perspective these small acts of service are important.

They're important because 'he who is faithful in little will also be faithful in much' They're important because, small acts of service don't seem that small when it's you on the receiving end! And they're important because these small acts of service play a key role in preparing us to become effective members of God's Family in the World Tomorrow! God gives us, small opportunities today - but always with the bigger picture in mind!