

## The Religion of Little Things: A Sermon from Matthew 10:29

By T. V. Moore

### INTRODUCTION

Thomas Verner Moore was born February 1, 1818 in Newville, Pennsylvania. After graduating Dickinson College in Carlisle, he completed divinity studies at Princeton Theological Seminary. For about a year he worked as an agent for the American Colonization Society. His dissatisfaction with the work was relieved when a call to Second Church, Carlisle, was offered to and accepted by Moore. After just three years at Second, he briefly pastored the Presbyterian Church of Greencastle, then soon moved to Richmond, Virginia, in 1847 to lead worship at First Church, succeeding William S. Plumer. At the time he delivered his sermon, “The Religion of Little Things,” Moore had published several lectures, sermons, reviews, and articles as well as two books, *The Prophets of the Restoration, or, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 1856, and *The Last Days of Jesus*, 1858. Following the Civil War he moved from Richmond for health reasons having accepted the call to First Church, Nashville. T. V. Moore died, possibly of tuberculosis, in Nashville August 5, 1871.

“The Religion of Little Things” is first published below. The manuscript is a copy of Moore’s written sermon requested by a woman in the congregation named Frances Fielding (Lewis) Gwathmey. Through marriage with Howell Lewis she became a niece of George Washington, which Moore must have appreciated given his admiration for the president expressed in the discourse “Lessons from the Life of Washington” published in 1853.

Additional information about Moore is available in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, volume 7, in the articles “An Introduction to T. V. Moore through his Essay on Juvenile Delinquency,” “In Brief: T. V. Moore’s Twenty Hints for a Happy Family,” and C. N. Willborn’s piece appraising the fine book mentioned above about the period of the Lord’s life between the resurrection and

ascension, “Review: T. V. Moore, *The Last Days of Jesus*.” Also in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, volume 12, is the article, “Thomas Peck, T. V. Moore and Benjamin Morgan Palmer, Pastoral Letters on the Observance of the Sabbath.”

Copies of the manuscript were kindly provided with permission for publication by the Virginia Historical Society from the Bolling Collection, MSS 1 B6386 a81.

BARRY WAUGH

THE RELIGION OF LITTLE THINGS, A SERMON BY T. V. MOORE (DELIVERED IN FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, NOV. 28, 1858)

Matthew 10:29: *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father.*

Our minds are so constituted that we regard some things as great and others as small. This is a true and important law of our thinking which we should never weaken, or disregard. The mind to which all things were equally great and equally small, would be lamentably defective, as much so as the eye to which a mountain seemed no larger than a mole hill, or a man than a mote from a hewn beam. There is a real difference in things, whether material or immaterial that gives rise to these different conceptions and estimates of magnitude. But there is a fact regarding these estimates that we are prone to overlook, and it is that these are and must be relative. What is great to a child is small to a man, and what is a

---

THE EDITOR: Barry Waugh received the Ph. D. from Westminster Theological Seminary, PA, and lives in Greenville, SC, where he researches and writes about church history and authors the website, *Presbyterians of the Past: The lives, places, writings, and events of Reformed history*, found at <http://www.presbyteriansofthepast.com/>.

great event to a man is a trivial one to a child. What is great to one man, is small to another, and what is a great thing to a man in one situation, is a little thing to him in another; what seems to us when it is before our eyes to be a little thing, we find as we look back upon it to be a very great one in its relations and results. Hence, we are liable to be mistaken in our estimates, and should endeavor carefully to rectify our conceptions and bring them to a proper standard of judgement.

There is no department in which this danger is greater than in that of religion. Its workings are so secret and subtle, its relations are so far reaching and profound, and its mode of action so often at variance with our ordinary conceptions that we are very likely to err, at least in estimating the importance of little things. There is often a purblind shortness of sight that [2] dwarfs the great realities of religion into mere trivialities, and allows the trifles of time and sense to hide and eclipse the things that are unseen and eternal. This is an error often noted and reproofed. But the opposite error is equally common and equally injurious, that one by which we mistake the real significant moment of what are called, and in some sense are, little things, the little things of Providences in daily life, of religious duty, of danger and attainment, of the falling of a sparrow, the counting of a hair, the minutest unnoticed things that constitute the aggregate of human existence. It is to these things that Christ calls our attention in the text and declares a fact regarding them that we do not commonly consider, if indeed we believe it at all, and tells us that although,

*[Are not] two sparrows are sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father*

the merest trifle apparently, should happen, it cannot happen without the care and counsel, the purpose and providence of our Heavenly Father. Now in this fact and statement are several important lessons which are commonly overlooked, and which we desire to unfold.

*First, God cares for little things.* Every advance that science has made has tended to show the wonderful care that God has lavished on the minute parts of his creation. He has tinted the plumage of the tiniest insect, and polished the invisible scales of the smallest infusoria as gorgeously as the robes of the peacock, and the involutions of the seashell. He has provided the minutest arrangements for the continuance and growth of animal and vegetable life, arrangements so marvelous in their very minuteness that we are filled with amazement as we attempt to explore them. These minute things are those on which the power, the wisdom and care of God

seem most lavishly expended. When we look at a great tree with its stalwart trunk and spreading branches, we admire its majesty, but we [3] begin to wonder when we see that huge trunk diverging into roots, that divide and subdivide until they become invisible to the naked eye, and learn that it is through these minute and microscopic channels that the great tree lives, and that if they were not kept in constant and unobstructed action, this gigantic monarch of the forest would soon die, and this huge mass of wood, leaf, and fruit was once a little acorn.

Little by little each day it opens,  
Little by little it sipped the dew;  
Downward it sent out a thread-like root,  
Up in the air sprang a tiny shoot.  
Day after day, and year after year,  
Day after day the leaves appear,  
And the slender branches spread far and wide,  
Till the mighty oak is the forest's pride.<sup>1</sup>

Now it is in this wondrous process of developing the great from little things, these countless and unseen fibers each drawing its infinitesimal particle of nutrition from the earth and carrying it along its little canal and pushing it upward to take its place finally in leaf, or wood, or bark, or fruit, it is in this minute and unceasing mechanism rather than in the mighty and majestic whole that we see the most amazing illustration of the wisdom of God. So, it is in all the branches of nature that God could shake the earth daily with an earthquake, or sweep it with a hurricane, or send flaming through the heavens the fiery trains of a hundred comets, and these things would make us stand in trembling awe before Him. But often all of them could not be as wonderful as the noiseless ongoing of the chemistry of nature far down in the deep laboratories of the earth, or far up in those of the sky, and ceaseless flow of the little fountain [4] that twinkles on its untiring way from century to century, the nightly distilling of the dew that glitters in its refreshing beauty in the light of the morning, or the silent growth of the grass and the herbs that are wondrously preparing food for man and beast and in filling the lungs and warming the veins of the tiniest insects that swarm in the innumerable tribes of living things. These are not only the real wonders but the real great works of Jehovah. Let these minute and warm fountains of life be obstructed or stopped and the whole vast

1. The poetry appears to be an adaptation from "Little by Little" which was published in *The Ohio Valley Farmer* 3 (April 1858), p. 61.

organism must stand still. Hence, we see not only that it is a wondrous thing, but also an indispensable thing that God should exercise precisely that care of the minutest things, that is implied when it is said,

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father.*

When we pass from the natural to the moral world from matter and nature, to man's history, the same thing is true. The actions and the Providence of God include the minute as well as the vast, and are ever acting on the little as well as the great. And not only so, but the wisdom and glory of God are seen in the little, and to say the least as much as in the great. When we look at Joseph on the throne of Egypt and the way he played so important a part in the world's history, the event seems to be vast and worthy of the interposition of God. But when we look closer, we see that all these great things, are connected indissolubly with 10,000 small ones each of which contributed its part to the result, and all of which were working out that wondrous chain of events that had the fair-haired dreaming boy of Canaan sitting second to the proud and powerful Monarch of Egypt. The same thing is true of every man's life. It is not only made up mainly of what we call little things, but its great events are the aggregate of many little ones, as [5] the river flows from the immeasurable fountains and dripings in the rocks of the earth, and the tree grows from the innumerable fibers of the roots which supply its life. The same Providence that extends to the great changes and events of life must extend to these little things, for the great is made up of the little, as the whole is of its parts. The great fact brought out in the text is that all these things are cared and provided for by God, and that minute and trivial though they seem to us to be, they are not too much so to be included within the decree and Providence of God for,

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father.*

*Secondly, Little things have an importance that is not commonly assigned to them.* When we remember that little things constitute the greater part of human life and happiness, this fact invests them with some of the importance of life and happiness. Most of the days and weeks of life pass away without any great events, they

2. Benjamin West (1738–1820), see, John Galt, ed., *The Life and Studies of Benjamin West, Esq.* (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1816), p. 10.

are filled with what are called little ones. Now although each event is a trifle, the aggregate of the whole is a human life, and the happiness and misery of that life, these are not trifles. Hence were they so many isolated and disconnected events, they would be important because of the aggregate, even though they were individually unimportant. But they are often momentarily important in their results and relations, as we afterwards see, though at the time of their occurrences they seem to be unimportant. A casual remark from a friend or a stranger, a visit, a walk, a turning down one street rather than another, a thousand things of this kind are seemingly trifles, yet they have changed in many cases the events that follow in a man's life. There is not one of us that cannot look back along our lives and see that their whole course had [6] been changed by what seemed at the time to be a mere trifle. It was but a pebble in the channel of the fountain, but it changed the whole course of the river. There are periods in every life when the future hangs in balance, when the stream reaches a water shed, and a mere trifle will turn the balance or direct the stream to results that involve the whole future. A smile, a frown, a word, an act, a casual encounter have a thousand times done this in a life. A smile of his mother made West<sup>2</sup> to become a painter; a tear of his mother prevented Washington from being a midshipman and thus saved him for the world; a word of cheer has saved a man from suicide and a word of noble principle has saved another from wine; the mistake of a guide saved the life of Augustine from an assassin who waylaid him; the flight of a bird saved the life of Mohammed and changed the history of the world; a spider nearby did the same thing for a distinguished Huguenot in St. Bartholomew's Massacre; and thus these seeming trifles are just as momentous as the things they either preserve or prevent.

And this is a truth that must be recognized by all who would be successful in any work of life. The most successful men in every department of life are those who not only attend to the great things of their pursuit, but also to the little ones. The merchant, the manufacturer, the professional man, the statesman, who are most eminently successful are those who have the minutest knowledge and the most complete mastery of the details of their work, as well as of its general principles. It was said of Cromwell that he could use the obscurest man in England [for great things], and it is known that the prodigious success of Napoleon was owing greatly to his wonderful mastery of detail, that he could not only plan vast schemes of action, but also embrace the minutest details of those schemes so as to have every

battalion, company, and man in the right place, at the right time. It was this that made him so fearful a master of the art of war. So, it is in every department of human action. The success of the whole depends on attention to the parts, and these parts are composed of what we call little things. If then there is this importance that belongs to them, we can readily see why it is that Christ says of our heavenly Father that,

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father,*

for these seemingly little things, are often great in their relations and results, and always great in their ultimate aggregates.

*Thirdly, These little things have an importance in religion that is not commonly assigned to them.*

There are many Christians who seem to narrow their religion to mainly the great things of life and conduct. They are willing like Naaman to do some great thing, to make some great sacrifice, to bear some great troubles, to perform some great duties, but the smaller ones are too trifling to be of interest. This is a most common and injurious error, and one which stunts the growth and diminishes the joy of very many Christians and greatly hampers their usefulness. By neglecting to apply their religion to little things they at last have but little religion to apply to any thing.

The little things of religion are those which are the truest tests, and hence the finest discipline of principle. So, it is in every department of human action and affection. Any husband will walk into fire or water to save a wife's life, but this will not provide as true a test of faithful affection as the [8] nameless and countless duties of daily life. Anyone will rush to save a child's life in danger, but only a mother's nurturing love can bear the daily and nightly care that is needful to meet the wants of the little helpless nursling. So, it is easy to make great sacrifices, and perform great acts in religion before men on a stage of public observation where we are sustained by the gaze of the world, for then pride as well as principle, love of applause as well as loving Christ will sustain us in these acts. But it is a much more difficult thing to perform patiently, privately, and silently the little, unknown, and uncared for duties of the Christian life, when there is no reward but such as faith anticipates from the promise of God, and where there is nothing to sustain but Christian principle. It is easy to be found at the sacramental meeting; to contribute time and means for some longer, larger, and exciting enterprise; to battle some great social evil, or mingle

in some crusade of noble endeavor; to make speeches on platforms; but to attend the humble prayer meeting; to be always prayerfully in the closet; to be humble, simple, and truthful in the family; to master the temper and control the tongue from hurtful, impatient, or angry words; to bear patiently the nameless vexations of children, servants, and meddling friends; to submit to the disappointments and hopes of little things; to forbear repeating a gossiping storm against one who has injured us; to abstain from fretting, scolding, and complaining about frivolous annoyances; to bear with the stupidity, folly, and unreasonableness of foolish men; to patiently teach a Sunday school class of unmanageable and ungrateful children; to speak a kind word to one who does not deserve it; to let pass by an unkind, sarcastic, and immature remark [9] or act without resenting it; to perform secretly the thousand little charities of daily life unnoticed and un-thanked by those who receive them; to bear sickness and pain patiently with gratitude for every service rendered to us; this demands far stronger principles than a few great duties and lives as a finer discipline for it. Moreover, it is in these little things of life that human happiness consists more than in the great things, and hence [it is] these things that should be brought under the control of religious principles. The things that inscribe wrinkles of care on the brow, and make threads of silver in the locks,<sup>3</sup> are not the great calamities of life, but the smallest annoyances, irritations, troubles, and difficulties that meet us every day. Now these things are regarded as worthy of being dignified by the application of religious principles, then this power to disquiet would be gone. Could we feel that the little troubles of life were from God in the same sense as the great ones, not only would we bear them better, but they would be a more constant culture to our graces than they ever can be now, for they would be daily and unceasing. Now it was for the very purpose of teaching us this fact, and furnishing us with this discipline that Christ taught,

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father.*

Furthermore, our Christian life grows or declines by the action of these little things. Character in every form, like a tree grows not by great bounds, but by little and little, and the same thing is true of religious character. It is by the ceaseless and silent sanctions of holy emotion and endurance through the ten-thousand minute

3. Gray hair.

facts of a holy life, that the Christian character grows in gifts and stature. It is by the silent and ceaseless action of little sins, working like little worms beneath the bark, that the noble tree is so weakened that it at last falls before the sudden squall of temptation. It is by the ceaseless working of the coral insect [10] slowly building up its wall until it emerges from the sea to become a resting place for soil and seeds, islands and continents are even now coming slowly up from the ocean. So it is with the mightiest forms of Christian character. To neglect or under value these little things, or to neglect the very agents that are the primary and potent causes of spiritual vigor and growth on the one hand, or decline and fall on the other. It was to impress this fact that Christ said,

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father.*

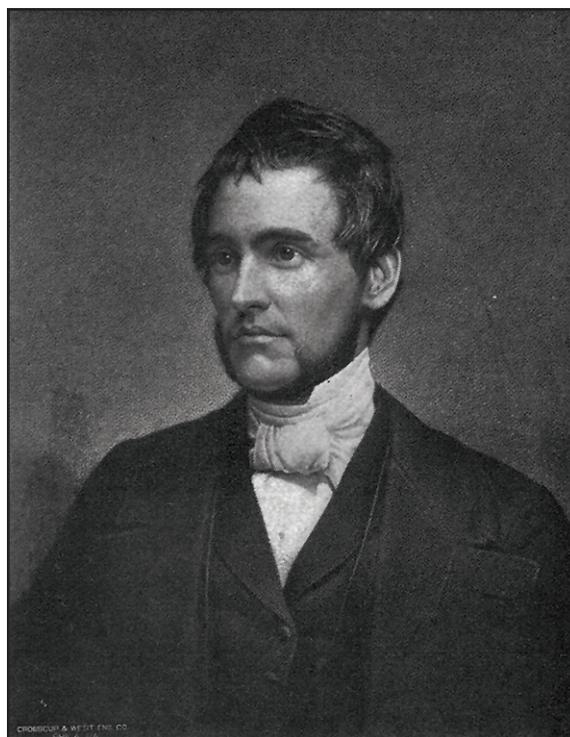
We learn then from this verse the importance of religion in little things. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" [Luke 16:10]. "He that breaketh one of the least of Christ's commandments and teach men so to do shall be least in the kingdom of Heaven" but "he that shall do and teach shall be great" [Matthew 5:19]. Let us then try to bring religious principle to bear on little duties, little troubles, little sins, and we will be amazed to find in the end how great the result will be in our power and strength. How calming a view does this text give of life. Oh, if God only noticed the great and mighty things and great events of life, how much of human sorrow would be left untouched by the high support of religion. But when we know

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father,*

that not a tear drops in secret, not a sigh, not a hair that is not numbered, then we can go calmly forward to the future for we are of more value than many sparrows. This is the lesson of high and holy courage that Christ draws from as he says,

*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without our Father.*

And if so, how vain the hope that we shall escape in a crowd, and though you deem yourself obscure and unknown that flaming eye [the Lord] sees and knows you and will in the end require [11] an account of every



T. V. Moore, Southern Presbyterian minister and author (1818–1871). This portrait was published in *The centennial memorial of the Presbytery of Carlisle: a series of papers, historical and biographical, relating to the origin and growth of Presbyterianism in the central and eastern part of southern Pennsylvania*, vol. 2 (Harrisburg: Meyers Print. and Pub. House, 1889), after page 233. Moore served as moderator of the PCUS General Assembly in 1867 and for a time owned and edited the *Central Presbyterian* with M. D. Hoge.

event of life as trivial as a fallen sparrow. How hopeless then are expectations of escape. Oh if the little sparrow cannot be hidden how can you, who are of more value than many sparrows?

Then come to Him who has so wondrously dealt with you, and then you shall feel that you can go calmly about your ways knowing that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

Richmond Dec. 7th 1858. F.F.G  
[Frances Fielding Gwathmey.]■