

Looking forward to Christ

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Date: 13 July 2025

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- [0 : 0 0] In the second year of King Darius, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai. Now, speak to Zerubbabel, son of Shiltiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people.
- Ask them, who of you is left who saw this house before its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?
- But now be strong, Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord, and work, for I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty.
- This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and my spirit remains amongst you. Do not fear.
- This is what the Lord Almighty says. In a little while, I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land.
- [1 : 1 7] I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come. And I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty.
- The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty.
- And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty. On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai.
- This is what the Lord Almighty says. Ask the priests what the law says. If someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of their garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, olive oil or food, does it become consecrated?
- The priests answered, no. Then Haggai said, if a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?
- [2 : 2 9] Yes, priests replied. It becomes defiled, yes. Then Haggai said, so it is with this people and this nation in my sight, declares the Lord.
- Whatever they do and whatever they offer, there is defiled. Now give careful thought to this from this day on. Consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord's temple.
- When anyone came to heap twenty measures, there were only ten. When someone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty.
- I struck all of the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail. Yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord.
- From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, I give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid.
- [3 : 3 0] Give careful thought. Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.

From this day on, I will bless you. The word of the Lord came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month. Tells the Rebabel, governor of Judah, that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.

I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers. Horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

On that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I will take you, my servants, the Rebabel, son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord. I will make you, my signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord Almighty.

This is God's word to us. So we're coming to the end of our two-part series in the book of Haggai this week. It's been a privilege to be among you these last two weeks.

[4 : 43] I've really enjoyed being here, getting to know you guys. It's wonderful to see the work that the Lord is doing in this church. Before we come to this chapter, let's just pray one more time.

Lord God, we thank you for your word. Lord God, we pray that as we come to your word, that you would open our hearts, make us soft-hearted so that we can receive your word and apply it to our lives.

May your word wound us and heal us. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. So last week we saw in chapter 1 of Haggai that the Lord's people had returned from their exile in Babylon.

They had returned to the city of Jerusalem, but they had already begun to stray. They had already begun to neglect the duties to rebuild the temple of the Lord, and they had shifted their priorities towards things that brought them comfort.

And we saw that God disciplined them for this, but that he also intervened and spoke through the prophet Haggai to call the people back to himself.

[6 : 00] And the people responded well. And the people responded well. They repented, they feared, and they obeyed. And above all, we saw the gracious heart of the Lord who generously granted his presence to his people.

And at the end of chapter 1, we saw that in response to Haggai's message, the people began to work on rebuilding the temple.

That was on the 24th day of the 6th month. And now as we come to chapter 2, we see we're in the 21st day of the 7th month. And Haggai enters the scene again to give another word from the Lord.

So at this point, we're now about one month into the rebuilding project. Now, although we saw that there was real heart change from these people, and that they've responded in the correct way to God's discipline, we see that there's also issues left to be dealt with.

And so Haggai is going to bring three words to these people from God, addressing the lingering issues that they are dealing with. And in these three words, I think we can see three things.

[7 : 13] The first is that God gives encouragement to a discouraged people from verses 2 to 9. The second is that God gives blessings to a defiled people from verse 10 to 19.

And the third is that God gives a throne to a captive people from verse 20 to 23. So the first issue we see being addressed is the issue of discouragement.

In the book of Ezra, chapter 3, we learn that all those years ago, when the temple foundation had been first laid, that many of the older generation, while many of the Israelites rejoiced at seeing the temple foundation being laid, many of the older generation who had known the old temple, the temple of Solomon, in all its glory, when they saw these new foundations being built, they wept because they knew that this new temple would never compare to the old one.

And it seems that all these years later, as they begin to get to work on actually building this new temple, that this same comparison between the old temple and the new is what's discouraging them while they build.

In verse 3, we see the kinds of things that these people may have been thinking. God says, Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory?

[8 : 43] How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? How easy it is for discouragement to creep its way in.

What we witnessed from these people last week was nothing short of a revival in their spirit and a renewed zeal to be obedient to the Lord and to seek his presence in the temple.

And yet here we find ourselves only one month on, and discouragement has already gained a foothold into their work. Why? Why? It's a bit like building a jigsaw puzzle.

And I'm terrible at jigsaw puzzles. But if you've ever tried building a jigsaw puzzle without using the picture on the box as a reference point, it can be quite challenging, can't it?

You know that all these little pieces are supposed to come together to make a big picture, but you can't seem to make sense of how it all comes together, especially when you're just getting started. But now imagine as you try to build that puzzle, you're actually using a completely different reference point, a completely different picture.

[9 : 53] And as you see your own picture coming together, wouldn't you find it confusing when you compare these two pictures to find that your picture looks nothing like the reference point?

And that's why these people have become discouraged. They're comparing their work to the beauty of what was there before, and they know that their work can never compare.

And do you find this to be true of you? Do you find that you're easily discouraged? Like these people, it's easy to become bogged down by how small and how futile our own work seems to be.

I mean, look at us. What could we ever possibly do that could please the Lord? What could we bring before him that could ever be worthy of fitting into his great plans?

So how will the Lord respond to this discouragement? Look with me in verse 4. But now be strong, Zerubbabel, declares the Lord.

[11 : 04] Be strong, Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. And work, for I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty.

The Lord responds by bringing a word of encouragement to these discouraged people. Three times he emphasizes to them to be strong.

Now these words, be strong, might be better translated as take courage. This is God's heart for discouraged people. He's not unsympathetic to us when we become discouraged.

And God grounds his call to these people to take courage by reminding them of what we saw last week. That his spirit remains among them.

He is with them. And he has always been faithful to them. He is their God. And they are his covenant people.

[12 : 09] They may have been exiled for a time. But the Lord is still their God. And he will be faithful to the promises he made to their forefathers.

But then as we look to verse 6 to 9, we see God revealing something of his plans for this temple to the people. He provides a sense of that bigger picture that this jigsaw puzzle that they're building will one day turn out to be.

Let's read from verse 6 to 9. This is what the Lord Almighty says. In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

I will shake the nations. And what is desired by all nations will come. And I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty.

The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty. And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty.

[13 : 20] Wow. What an encouraging image that is to a discouraged people. Let's just think about this for one moment.

Imagine you're one of these Jews working away at building this crummy little temple, which you know is going to look absolutely pathetic in comparison to Solomon's temple.

You wonder, is it really worth all the effort that you're going to? Is this insignificant little building really going to be all that important to God? And then you hear what the Lord has planned for this new temple, that he intends to shake the heavens and the earth.

God is revealing that he has some pretty significant changes scheduled down the line. This shaking implies that there will be upheaval and transformation taking place in this world.

And the results of him shaking the heavens and the earth is that what seems to be small and insignificant now will end up being far, far greater than what they ever could have imagined.

[14 : 29] What is desired by all nations will come to this very temple, and that their work will surpass even the temple of Solomon?

If that is not an encouraging thought to these people, I don't know what could be. But what does this mean for us today? Well, when we become discouraged, when we feel as though our work could never be good enough for God, these words remind us that our work belongs to the Lord.

When our labor seems to be in vain, when we can't see how the Lord could ever be impressed by what we do in his name, we need to be reminded that he is the one who works.

He is the one who shakes the heavens and the earth. He is the one who can take your labor, which may seem small and worthless to you now, and he can make it bear fruit like you could never imagine.

Don't despise the day of small things. Offer your work up to the Lord. Let him use you as he pleases. You may never know how the Lord has used you in this life, but you can trust in him that he can use you and he will use you.

[15 : 53] All the Lord is asking from us is humble, ordinary, everyday obedience and service, and he will establish the work of our hands.

He is the one who will make it bear fruit. He isn't asking us to be Superman. He just wants you to be you. But he wants you to come to him with open hands, willing and eager to serve his kingdom.

Whether that means serving teas and coffees later, whether that means being kind to a stranger sometime this week, or whether that means reaching out to someone that you haven't heard from in a long time.

Don't think that the Lord can't use these simple, everyday things to bring glory to his name. But let's look now from verses 10 to 19.

We see the next word from Haggai would be brought to the people on the 24th day of the ninth month.

[17 : 01] So they've been building the temple for some time now. And we can assume that good progress is being made, that this temple is beginning to take shape. There must have been great excitement as the prospect of having a temple finally finished after all this time.

But it's at this time that God chooses to speak through the prophet Haggai, yet again to bring a word of warning this time as the temple begins to take shape.

And Haggai brings this message in the form of a parable from which he draws from their law to teach them something about their own spiritual state.

In verses 12 and 13, Haggai approaches the priests and asks them two questions. The first is that if something consecrated, which means to have been blessed or have been made holy, touches something that is not consecrated, does the unconsecrated thing become consecrated?

And the second question is that if something defiled touches something consecrated, does the consecrated thing become defiled?

[18 : 15] Now these questions are quite relevant because they're relevant to temple worship. Part of temple worship would involve offering meat as part of a sacrifice to God.

And this meat was considered holy or pure. And the priests knew the law and so they knew that this holy meat could not transfer its purity to other objects, but that objects that were considered defiled could transfer their defilement to other objects upon contact.

Okay, this can seem kind of tricky. What's the deal with all these laws about consecrated meat and defiled objects? The principle at play here is quite simple, and it's this.

Clean things don't make other things clean, but dirty things do make other things dirty. For example, would you ever put your dirty dishes back in the cupboard?

Or what if you got gravy all over your dirty dishes and ketchup all over your dirty dishes, would you put them back in the cupboard? Or what if you got gravy and ketchup all over your shirt, would you put it back in the wardrobe?

[19 : 33] No, because it would get all your other clothes and all your other dishes dirty. And that is what Haggai is getting at with this message.

Clean things don't make other things clean, but dirty things do make other things dirty. And he uses this demonstration from the law like a parable, and he tells the implications of this in verse 14, saying, So it is with this nation and these people in my sight, declares the Lord.

Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled. If these people do not continue to live, in repentance and obedience, if they turn back to their sinful ways, then all that they're building will be in vain.

The very offerings that they will bring to the Lord in the temple will be defiled in his sight. Sin defiles.

Sin defiles us. All of us have been defiled by the stain of sin. Sin defiles us. It doesn't matter what you do to try to make yourself pure.

[20 : 54] There is nothing we can do by ourselves to take away our own sin. No matter how many good works we have to offer, even those very good works become defiled in the Lord's sight as a result of our sin.

And all it takes is one sin to make us fall short of the glory of God, who is perfect in holiness. Now we saw that these people repented in chapter 1, and as a result of their repentance, God generously granted them his presence.

But here God is warning them, if they do not continue to walk in repentance and obedience, they will become defiled in his sight. Repentance is not a one-time thing.

Everything the Christian does in life is done by the power of the Holy Spirit. But you don't just repent once and put your feet up and go into spiritual cruise control for the rest of your life.

Repentance is an ongoing process that we must be actively engaged in. The reality of the Christian life is that all of life is repentance.

- [22 : 10] You cannot afford to allow sin to gain a foothold in your life because sin will destroy you if you let it be your master.

Do not hold on to any of your sin. It will lead you to death and separation from God. All it takes is one sin willfully unrepented of, willfully clung onto, to be defiled in his sight.

Do you have a sin that you are not willing to let go of? Please consider the warning that we're seeing in this passage. The writer John Owen famously said, Be killing sin or it will be killing you.

Right now, everyone here in this room is either killing sin or being killed by sin, along with everyone else in the world. Killing sin or being killed by sin.

Which one are you? Romans 8 verse 13 says, For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

- [23 : 24] If you are in Christ, you have been empowered by the Holy Spirit dwelling in you to put sin to death in your life. You do not have to allow sin to have any power over you.

So what can we do to kill our sin? I think we can see two helpful practices from verse 15 to 19 that help us with this. The first is looking back and the second is looking forward.

In verse 15, we see that God calls the people to set their hearts to look back and remember what things were like before they began rebuilding the temple.

When they were living for themselves and not for God. He reminds them of the barrenness and economic hardship that he used to discipline them.

How nothing they ever did seemed to bear any fruit. They need this reminder to look back at how things were so that they are not tempted to slip back into the same sinful behavior that brought God's discipline upon them.

- [24 : 38] We are forgetful people. We need to constantly remind ourselves of what our lives were like before we knew the Lord, before the Lord changed our lives.

Our sinful hearts try to make us think that life would be better if we did not have the Lord. But when you find yourself thinking in this way, just take a moment to remind yourself of what your life was actually like before you knew the Lord.

what was it like? What was it like? And would you really ever want to go back to that? And then at the end of this word in verse 19, the Lord calls the people to look forward.

He says, from this day on, I will bless you. God blesses those who are obedient to him. God is not mean.

He is eager to bless those who are willing to put him first. But we cannot presume to receive his blessing if we are unwilling to live in obedience and repentance.

- [25 : 50] The more of our sin we knowingly cling to, the more of our sin that we stubbornly, hard-heartedly remain in unrepentance of, the less grace he can show us.

He wants to take all your sin away. Will you hand it over to him? God wants all of you.

He wants your very heart, your affections. He wants to be first in your life. And what's more, he is the only one that is worthy of being first in your life.

So don't hold any part of yourself back from God. You can experience the fullness of his blessing that is eternal life with him by putting aside your sin and setting your heart upon him.

He will not hold any of his goodness and mercy back in any way from those who don't hold anything back from him. Why would we ever want to hold on to anything that separates us from the living God?

[27 : 10] So now as we come to the final section, the final three verses of the book of Haggai, he gives his final prophecy. But unlike his previous messages, this is not directed to the entire population but just to one man, Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel. So who is this man Zerubbabel? Well, we know he's the governor of these people but he was actually their rightful king.

He was a descendant of the royal line of David. And God had promised David that he would establish his royal line forever.

And yet here we have Zerubbabel, his descendant, but he is not a king but just a governor. So we must ask, has God's promise to David failed?

Because these people were under the rule of a foreign nation, they could not have a king of their own. The best title that they could give their leader was governor. And in fact, no king from the line of David would ever be crowned in Israel again due to the rule of foreign nations over them.

[28 : 25] But why is this? In Jeremiah 20, the prophet announces that the Lord has cast off King Jehoiakim who's Zerubbabel's grandfather.

He has cast Jehoiakim off as his signet ring. A signet ring functions as a royal seal of approval. from royal authority.

And when the Lord cast off Jehoiakim as his signet ring, he showed that his divine approval was no longer on him or his descendants. You can imagine that for these people and for Zerubbabel, it would be disheartening to be back in the promised land with your temple almost rebuilt but still no one seated on the throne of David.

But, God has something new to say about the line of David. Look at me at verse 21 and 22. Tell Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.

I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms. I shall overthrow chariots and their drivers. I shall overthrow chariots and their drivers. Horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

[29 : 49] So again, we're seeing the imagery of the shaking of the heavens and the earth that we saw earlier in this chapter. But this time, it's not just about the temple.

It's about the power structures established in this world. It's about the nations. The imagery, for example, of chariots being overthrown calls to mind the story of the chariots of the Red Sea being submerged, of the chariots of Egypt being submerged into the Red Sea, where God's people were finally cut off from Egypt and freed from slavery.

God has delivered his captivity, his people from captivity before. So will he do it again? He will do it again. And what will happen on that day?

We get the tiniest little glimpse in the final verse of Haggai. Look with me in verse 23. On that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel, son of Shelteel, declares the Lord, and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord Almighty.

So we see that the signet ring, or the royal stamp of approval from the Lord, taken from Jehoiakim, has been placed back on Zerubbabel.

[31 : 18] The curse has been reversed. But what does that mean for Israel? What does it mean that the signet ring has been restored?

There are very clear messianic implications in this verse. Could this man, Zerubbabel, be the promised Messiah from the line of David?

Will he establish the eternal throne of David and rule the nations with truth and justice forever? Zerubbabel did not end up being the promised Messiah.

But in these verses in Zerubbabel, we catch a glimpse or a foretaste of what to expect from the coming Messiah.

Zerubbabel points the way to someone who will be far greater than himself. It's significant that the Lord describes Zerubbabel as my servant, Zerubbabel.

[32 : 19] Zerubbabel was the rightful heir to the throne of David and yet for his people he functioned more like a servant. The prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier had spoken of the Messiah as a suffering servant who would be pierced for their transgressions and bruised for the iniquities of his own people.

In Zerubbabel, the people of Israel are given a glimpse of how the promised Messiah will be both a mighty Davidic king as well as a servant who suffers in place of his people.

So who does Zerubbabel point the way to? Jesus. We know that Jesus was a descendant of Zerubbabel from the genealogies recorded in both Matthew and Luke but better than that Jesus was the servant king who came to suffer for his people.

Although he was their rightful king he did not come to take power for himself he came to serve. He lived a completely selfless life putting aside his needs always and always looking to the needs of others and he ultimately showed his servant heart by dying and submitting himself to death on an agonizing cross which he didn't deserve to die but that we all did and he rose again and defeated death so that we could have eternal life with him.

He has established a new kingdom his church a kingdom that is not of this world a kingdom that no earthly power could overcome a kingdom whose people are not defined by any earthly measure of greatness but by their own recognition of their own weakness and their sin and their obedience to God.

[34 : 35] Christ's work was not just for the Jews but for everyone. Jesus is the servant king that the world needed. He is the desired of nations which we read about all the way back in verse 7.

Through Christ the Lord has shaken the heavens and the earth. He has flipped the power structures of this world so that one day everyone who ever has and ever will live will have to answer to Christ.

He was once the servant of the world now he is the king reigning over it. And one day he is coming again in glory as king and as judge of the world and on that day he is coming to overturn royal thrones and shatter royal kingdoms like we read in verse 22.

We have another glimpse into what that day will look like recorded in the book of Revelation chapter 19 which says I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called faithful and true.

With justice he judges and wages wars. His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.

[36 : 01] He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the word of God. The armies of heaven were following him riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen white and clean.

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations he will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God almighty.

On his robe and on his tie he has the name written King of Kings and Lord of Lords. How awesome is that?

If you are discouraged today look to Christ. This is the bigger picture that we are working towards. Continue with your ordinary everyday obedience to him and await eagerly his coming on that day and your obedience will be vindicated.

If you are struggling with your battle with sin again look to Christ. Look back at what he has done for you and look forward to what he is coming again to do.

[37 : 24] There will be a day where sin will no longer have any power over you and we will have eternal rest with our Savior. But until that day keep on fighting.

Keep on killing your sin by the power of the Spirit and when he returns you will hear him say well done my good and faithful servant.

Let's pray. Lord God we thank you for Jesus. What an amazing person he is.

What an amazing Lord and God we serve. Lord God we thank you for the work of Christ who died an agonizing death on a cross on our behalf and who ever lives now to intercede and advocate for us.

Lord God encourage our discouraged hearts. Help us to see the bigger picture that you have provided. Help us to work towards building your kingdom here on this earth.

[38 : 38] Though our work is feeble you are the one who establishes it. Lord God heal our sinful hearts.

Help us to put sin to death in our lives by the power of your Holy Spirit. Help us to actively be engaged in fighting and resisting and killing our sin.

We do not want to have anything in our lives that holds us back from you. We do not want anything to come in between us and Christ our King and it is in Christ's holy and precious name that we pray.

Amen.