

My Promises Still Stand

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- [0 : 00] Be good if we had our Bibles open at Haggai chapter 2 and verses 1 to 9.
- Haggai chapter 2 and verses 1 to 9. And that's on page 948, 949 of the Church Pew Bible. And as we turn back there, let's seek the Lord's help.
- Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Our Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.
- Well, the story is told of a little boy who absolutely loved the sun. He loved the sunshine. He enjoyed being in the sun.
- He enjoyed feeling its heat and seeing its light. The boy didn't like when it was a cloudy day. So I'm sure he wouldn't have enjoyed living in Scotland so much.
- [1 : 03] He asked his dad on one of those days, Where does the sun go when it's cloudy? Where does it go? And his dad said, The sun is where it always is, high up in the sky.
- It's just hidden behind the clouds. The sun is where it always is, even on a cloudy day. And you know, sometimes this can describe the Christian's relationship with God.
- Sometimes we experience his presence in our lives, much like a warm, sunny day, When there is little cloud or rain to get in the way. But more often, perhaps, during hard times, our experience is a bit more like that cloudy day.
- When the clouds of worry, sin, illness, trial, doubt, almost seem to mask God's presence from us. We can't see him. At times, perhaps, we might even feel abandoned by God.
- But God promises to be with us. He promises never to leave us nor forsake us. And even when he seems hidden, It's also true that God is where he always is, Even on a cloudy day.
- [2 : 18] It's God's promises and his presence with his people that are the focus of Haggai chapter 2, verses 1 to 9. God, through Haggai, is encouraging his people in the work that he had given them to do.
- And just before we dig into that theme together, Let's remind ourselves of where we are in our study in the book of Haggai. Last time we remember, we saw that Haggai fits into the time period of the book of Ezra.
- In fact, if you were to go back to the book of Ezra, Right in between chapters 5 and 6, If you had a chronological Bible, That's where the book of Ezra would slot in. God's people had been carried off into exile in Babylon Because of their disobedience to the covenant That Phil was speaking of to the children.
- But God had promised them, Through the prophets such as Isaiah and Ezekiel, That you would return to the land. You will come back.
- I will bring you back again. And they did return to the land To rebuild the temple of God. But for 15 years, as we saw last time, Only the foundation stone had been laid.
- [3 : 29] The people had become apathetic in God's work. Vegetation was now growing on the site. Apathy had set in. And now God sends in the prophet Haggai To speak to his people.

To spur them on. To return them to work. And in this short book of Haggai, Haggai preaches four sermons. Four sermons to the people Over a five month period Between August and December 520 BC.

And the four sermons are challenges From God to his people To get about the work. To get about the work. You see, the sermons can be easily noticed.

We saw this last time in the pattern. In a particular year, In the reign of Darius, On this day, And in this month, The word of the Lord came to Haggai. You see that in chapter 1, verse 1.

Chapter 2, verse 1. Chapter 2, verse 10. And chapter 2, verse 20. So Haggai divides up very easily Into those four parts. And last time, We looked at the first sermon, Which is the whole of chapter 1, With the theme of, Put God and his work first.

[4 : 39] Put God and his work first. Well today, We're going to look at the second Of Haggai's sermons. In chapter 2, verses 1 to 9. And if we were summing up this message, It would be this.

God's promises still stand. God's promises still stand. Or perhaps we could use the words Quoted from Deuteronomy By the author to the Hebrews, Never will I leave you.

Never will I forsake you. This is the main message Of this second sermon. And the sermon seems to again Have three points to it. As the last one did.

In verses 1 to 3, We have a discouraged people. God's people are discouraged. Verses 4 and 5 Speak of God's encouragement. He looks back with them at their past.

That's verses 4 and 5. And verses 6 to 9 Also speak of God's encouragement. But this time, God looks forward with his people To what he would yet do. A discouraged people.

[5 : 43] God's encouragement looking back. And God's encouragement looking forward. So first then in verses 1 to 3, A discouraged people. And if we were summing up this, We could say that God's people were discouraged Because some of them Could remember the glory Of the previous temple.

Solomon's temple. And when they saw The foundation stone being laid, They did the measurements And they're thinking, This temple is going to be Nothing like Solomon's temple. It's tiny in comparison.

It will not have the same glory. Things would never be The same again. Or so they thought. And they were discouraged. Discouraged.

Things would never quite be the same. Now to be discouraged, You lose the will To persevere in the work. That's what discouragement is. You lose your will To persevere.

And that was these people. God, remember, At the end of chapter 1, Had spoken to them. They feared the Lord And they said, Yes, we will be about The Lord's work. We will do it.

[6 : 49] But when they set their minds To the task, They saw how overwhelming This task was going to be. And they became discouraged. In verse 1, We read, On the 21st day of the 7th month, The word of the Lord Came through Haggai the prophet.

Now, By the Jewish calendar, This makes it mid to late October, 520 BC. And we're thinking, Well, What does it matter, That October, 520 BC, What possible relevance Does that have?

Well, It has a very, Very important relevance. Because this would have been The second to last day Of the feast of tabernacles. Which God's people Were to celebrate.

Tabernacle just being The word for tent or booth. This was the national reminder To God's people Of the time that they had spent In the desert. Even when they got Into the promised land, At least once a year, They would leave their homes, They would set up a tent In their back garden, And they would camp out For one week.

To be the reminder Of God's faithfulness to them In the wilderness years. To remind themselves That God had been with them With his presence even then.

[8 : 02] It was a reminder Of his faithfulness. And here they are Celebrating it again. But with a totally different focus. This feast was different.

They probably celebrated it With limited resources. Remember the Lord Had shown his displeasure to them By not giving them their crops And not filling them with wine And all that kind of thing. They didn't have enough resources To celebrate this feast.

They were also faced With the enormity Of rebuilding the temple. But God says to them The reason why they're encouraged In verse 3. Who of you is left Who saw this house And its former glory?

How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you Like nothing? You see some of the people There present Could remember The previous temple.

They could remember Solomon's temple. Now if you go back into Different books in the Bible In the Old Testament You'll see how splendid And how glorious It would put this Alexander Greek Thompson building To shame And this is a lovely building.

[9 : 05] But Solomon's temple Was nothing in comparison. It stood out In all its splendor and glory. And people could remember that. The older among them Could look back And remember time spent Worshipping God There.

What was this new temple Going to be like In comparison to that? What was it going to be like? Well they thought nothing. The foundation stone Was a lot smaller.

They were downcast And they were discouraged. What was the point Of really getting to work? Things were never going to be The same anyway. What's the point Doing the Lord's work When things are not going to be As good as they once were?

Ezra chapter 3 verse 12 Actually tells us What happened When the foundation stone Was laid. But many of the older priests The Levites The family heads Who had seen the former temple Wept aloud When they saw the foundation stone Being laid.

They weren't in celebration. They were weeping For what had been lost. Because of their own sin And disobedience Against God's covenant.

[10 : 10] It was a deep sorrow And discouragement Because things Would just not be the same Or so they thought. Are there ever times That you have felt like that As a child of God?

Perhaps you look back In the past And you see a fuller church On a Sunday. Maybe it's work You used to do for the Lord Which is now being left undone. Things just don't seem To be the same today As they were in the past.

And if you think like that And look back on the past like that You'll get discouraged. And it stops you Wanting to work for God In the present time. You lose your zeal You lose your will To persist in the work.

And we often withdraw From God's work And get stuck To comparing it To the past. But God is teaching His people And us today A very important lesson here.

Because you know something I think God was doing Something very important By not making this temple Quite as glorious Or so it seemed As Solomon's temple. Physically It would not be as glorious.

[11 : 18] But isn't it true That God often uses The weak things of the world To shame the strong And the foolish things To shame the wise. This temple was nothing In comparison to Solomon's.

It wasn't as big. It wasn't as glorious. It wouldn't have The same articles. It wouldn't even have The Ark of the Covenant. Which had been taken away In the Babylonian exile as well.

It would never be the same. But God promises To do something Far greater with this temple Than he had done With Solomon's temple. This temple would have a glory That even Solomon's temple Could only look And dream about.

And we'll come to this A bit later on. But it's true That we can often Be fooled by appearances. Even as God's people. As the people here Were looking at this temple And being fooled By its appearance.

Remember the story Of King David. The prophet Samuel Comes to all the brothers They get paraded One by one. And the big tall Oh you're really strong. Surely it's him Lord. Is he not going to be king?

[12 : 23] No it's not him. Next guy comes along He's got degrees And letters after his name galore. Is it going to be him? No it's not going to be him. Samuel gets through them all And says Lord Who can it be?

See that little boy Out there in the field Looking after the sheep? That's who I want to be my king. The one that you would Never have chosen. And that's the one That God chose. Remember as well When a great army Surrounds the prophet Elisha His servant is terrified But Elisha's not.

And Elisha prays And the eyes of his servant Are opened And he sees the army Of the Lord Surrounding the army Of the enemy Because appearances Can be deceptive. You see there is a wrong way To look back at our past.

Now I'm a historian. I love church history. I love history with a passion. But there is a wrong way To look back at our past. And these people were doing it here In Haggai.

We absolutely should know our history. And we can often repeat mistakes Because we don't know our history. But we can also know it in a wrong way. You see if we look back at the past only.

[13 : 33] And only look at the past itself. We start to walk by sight And not by faith. And we start to think Things were better back then.

You know church decline today Makes us look back and remember The land of the book. But when we actually think about it Were things actually better in the past? Or are we conveniently rewriting our history To make it seem so?

I think it's often the latter. It's often the latter. We can look back at the past With rose tinted spectacles. Maybe our churches were a bit fuller. But it was tradition to come to church Where people actually saved.

We don't know. All nostalgia does Is to make our present circumstances Seem worse than they actually are. But instead of focusing on the past alone You need to remember How God worked in the past.

It's the same We do it with the future. We say we don't know what the future holds So we look at the God who holds the future. Well it's got to be the same with our past. You need to look back and see What God has done in the past.

[14 : 39] And that's what he would do with them In the second point in verses 4 and 5. Look what God was doing in the past. How he worked in the past And how this is the same God That we worship today.

We shouldn't just look at the past itself. And certainly not just for nostalgia. But to understand that the God who worked in the past Is the same God who works today. And this is the true way To look back at our past To help us.

And just as we are to walk by faith And not by sight In our Christian walks We're to read the past in the same way. The God who worked for us in the past Is the same God that we worship today.

And his promises still stand. God's people were discouraged Having lost the will To persist in building the temple. And God now moves in to encourage them.

Second, God's encouragement looking back. This is interesting. We've just said God says Don't look on the past nostalgically. And what does God do with his people here? He takes them back and looks at the past.

[15 : 43] But in the right way Verses 4 and 5 The people become discouraged By looking at their past. God is now going to teach them How to read the past Through his lens.

Because history is his story. His story. And that's a very interesting solution Is it not? God is going to take them Looking at the past.

The people were looking at the loss of the temple. How the second one was smaller than the first. And they got discouraged. But what was the significance Of the temple?

And that's what God wants to take them back Into the past To remind them of. The whole point of the temple Was God's presence With his people.

That was the whole point Of the temple. God who had promised to be with them Said I will be with you here On Mount Zion I have chosen Zion as a place That's why we sung Psalm 132 That was Solomon's temple Being built When God's glory cloud Would descend upon it Being at the heart of his people And this is what God's people Had forgotten The temple itself Was not that Which was of the utmost importance It's what the temple pointed to God's presence With his people God illustrates this For his people In verses 4 and 5 By reminding them Of Egypt He says Be strong Be strong Oh Joshua Son of Jehozadak The high priest Be strong All you people of the land And work For I Am with you This is what I covenanted with you When you come out of Egypt And my spirit Remains among you Do not fear God is asking them to look at the past.

[17 : 33] He says, do you not remember what I promised in the past? I promised that I would be with you. That's the promise I made. And this was the experience of God's people all along.

Let's go on a journey from Egypt right down to the present time. Has that not been your experience? When you set foot from Egypt, did not my pillar of fire and cloud descend by day and by night to lead and to guide you on the way?

And even when the Egyptian army came on your tail, I moved behind you to guard your rear, to stop the enemy getting to you. When you built the tabernacle, the temporary place of worship, did not the presence cloud of my glory come down upon it?

Did not the same thing happen with Solomon's temple? I am the God who dealt with a hard-hearted Pharaoh. I am the God who dealt with King Cyrus to move him to help you as my people.

And I am the same God who is with you right now. Haggai, Zerubbabel, and Joshua. And Glasgow City Free Church in 2019.

[18 : 39] This is how we should look at the past. We need to see how God worked in it. He promised to be with us, and he was. And I'm sure there are times when you can look back and remember what God has done in your life.

And that spurs you on. And so you're not discouraged, but encouraged in the future time. He promised to be with us, and he was. And this is the encouragement that his people needed.

Not to look at the past and say, oh my goodness, this temple is nothing like the one that's going to be built, or the one that was there before. But what has God promised? God's promise is still that he would be with us.

He is with us, even still. We don't look back at the past for past's sake, but we look back at the God of the past. That way, we will not get discouraged.

And it's always the presence of the Lord with us that should spur us on in the work. He tells his people here with Haggai to be strong. Now, if we understand the Old Testament, these words should ring in our ears.

[19 : 44] Because this was God's message in the past to all his great leaders. Remember what he said to Joshua, when Joshua took over from Moses? Be strong and courageous.

Do not be terrified or discouraged. Why? For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. It's the presence of the Lord, so we're not discouraged.

He says something very similar to Solomon through King David, when the work of the first temple was begun. In 1 Chronicles chapter 28, verse 20.

Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged. Why? For the Lord God, my God, is with you.

You see, it's the presence of the Lord in our midst that encourages us to be about his work. He is with us. Or, remember the contemporary prophet Zechariah, who preaches at the same time as Haggai?

[20 : 44] How does he phrase it? I don't have the reference here, but I think it's Zechariah 4, maybe verse 10. It's not by might, and it's not by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.

The presence of the spirit in our midst. And if we are Christians, God has been helping us in the past. Helping us to do his work by the power of his Holy Spirit.

And all we're asked to do in the present time is to do his work by the same dependence on that Holy Spirit who is within us. Who is within us.

So we can look back at the past and see how the Lord was helping us to be strong and courageous in the work. And this should spur us on to work for him in the present time.

Something very similar happened to the people under the prophet Malachi. They were discouraged then as well. Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. God's last word to his people before the coming of Jesus.

[21 : 48] They're discouraged. But God says through Malachi in Malachi 3.16, But then those who feared the Lord talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard.

A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. The people looked at their past and they wrote down all of God's faithful acts to them.

And this spurred them on in the work in the present time. You know, there's so much paperwork today in schools, in jobs. Everywhere you go, you're filling out a form for something or other.

Even in the church, we've got Kirk Session minute books and Deacons Court minute books and Congregational minute books and everything else. But you know something that would be so helpful for us to have? It's a remembrance book of the Lord's faithful acts to us in the past.

A remembrance book. How has the Lord helped us as his people? When we get discouraged, we can read from it and say, God helped us then in doing this and he is still with us today.

[22 : 54] I think we need to do that. Or even individually. I know some people keep a journal and they can look back and say, Lord, or a prayer diary. I know not everyone does it. Some of us have got good memories and can remember all these things.

But I know when I've done that and look back, it encourages you. It spurs you on and keeps you going. Maybe that's a practice we could do just like the people in Malachi's time.

We're to be strong and work. The world tells us, be strong. I know you have it in you. I know you have it in you. That's not what the Bible says.

The Bible says, be strong. I know you have it in you. The Bible says, be strong. For God is with you. That's the difference. Recently, I saw a poster and it said, a poster of David and Goliath with the tagline, sometimes the Lord brings a Goliath across your path so you can find a David within you.

Yuck. Yuck. That is not biblical. Not at all. The whole point of King David was, he looked to the Lord for his strength.

[24 : 04] That was the whole point if you go back and read that account of David and Goliath. The Lord my God is with me and I can fail a Goliath. And that is a Christian, that's how the Christian views it.

Be strong and courageous for the Lord is with you. It's nothing to do with our own personal reserves of strength but everything to do with him and him alone. God's encouragement looking back and more briefly, God's encouragement looking forward in verses six to nine.

And if we were summing up this point, we could say that God was telling his people what he would yet do among them. Again, for their encouragement. God had been faithful to them in the past just as he'd promised and now he tells them a future blessing.

In verse six we read, this is what the Lord Almighty says, in a little while. Now, when he says in a little while, God's little while have to be understood, not the next minute, not the next hour, not the next day.

They could be, but they could also be at the end of time. In a little while, I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the dry land and the seas. Now, this probably refers to the shaking of the nations around Haggai's time.

[25 : 17] The Babylonian empire had already fallen to the Persian empire. Persia would soon fall to the Greeks and the mighty Greeks would fall to the Romans. God would shake the empires and his people would be preserved in the midst of it.

We sang in the last hymn, God is spoken by his prophets. It spoke of God being the God of all the nations. He is sovereign over every nation, whether they acknowledge him or not.

And that's what the phrase, the Lord God Almighty means. Or if you have an older version, you might know it as the Lord God of hosts, the Lord God of armies.

It appears five times in verses six to nine and indicates the Lord's sovereignty overall. Now, of all the occurrences of this phrase in the Old Testament, 44% of them occur in Malachi and 31% of them occur in Haggai.

And these two small books, the people are at their weakest point. At their weakest point in history, King David was long dead. The glory of Israel had long faded.

[26 : 26] And the Lord is saying at your weakest point, I am the Lord God of hosts. I am the Lord God of heaven's armies. Jesus said that his father had 12 legions of angels at his command.

And the commander of those 12 legions of angels still has 12 legions of angels at his command. He has never been conquered and he never will be, no matter who rises against him.

The Lord repeats these words in verse seven, and it's clear that they have an even greater meaning. I will shake all nations and the desired of all nations shall come and I will fill this house with glory.

Now, this is very interesting because we never read in the Old Testament of the glory cloud of God coming upon the second temple. It doesn't come.

It fell in the tabernacle. It fell in the first temple. It doesn't come in the second temple. So what does it mean? How can the glory of this house be greater than the one of Solomon's house, which knew the Shekinah glory of God descending down upon it?

[27 : 40] Well, it's looking forward, isn't it? It's looking forward to when another glory would come and even greater glory than the temple of Solomon knew. It's looking forward to the time when God would shake the heavens and the earth, when he would rend the heavens and come down.

Jesus Christ, his son, came to earth and through his life, ministry, death and resurrection, the world was turned upside down and would never ever be the same again.

And this Jesus calls a people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation to worship this awesome God. And doesn't the apostle John say of the apostles, we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the father full of grace and truth.

And the author to the Hebrews says similarly, the son is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of his being. This temple would be greater than Solomon's because Jesus would be presented in it as a baby.

Remember when Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to fulfill the law, Jesus was there. Jesus would teach in this temple as a teenager, correcting people who should have known a bit better in their law.

[29 : 01] They could look forward to this. He would go through this temple with a cord and drive out the false worshippers, not once but twice. And he would die and rise again so that in the new heavens and the new earth, there would be no temple because the lamb and God are the temple.

That's why the glory cloud didn't descend on the second temple because the lamb, it was looking forward to the glory of God and the presence of Christ and looking even beyond that to the final day when Jesus would return in glory and in strength and in might and every knee would bow and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord to the what?

To the glory of God the Father. That's where Haggai is pointing. And for us today, it's the same encouragement for us today. It's so easy to become discouraged in the Lord's work, but we too are to look forward to this glorious day when everything is sorted out and we will be with the Lord forever.

His promise, I will be with you on that day is finally fulfilled. There'll never even be a sense when we're not in the Lord's presence because we'll be in that new resurrection body, unhindered in worship and in praise.

What a thing to encourage us with as his people. He promises his presence in a new way. As Phil was saying about the new song, it's really an old song, but revealed in a greater way.

[30 : 36] And it's the same with this promise. They could look forward to this and we too as Christians look forward to that as well. Does this not encourage us? Just as the people of Haggai could look forward with anticipation to a greater glory, we do as well.

We do as well. And we will experience the greater glory of the nearer presence of God before his throne. That's how you look at the past and that's how you look at the future as a child of God.

And in conclusion, the words of that great hymn come to mind. Let's pray.

Our great and wonderful God, we bow humbly in your presence. We thank you for these words the prophet Haggai spoke in 500 years before the coming of Jesus.

And yet they speak so powerfully of him, his presence with us in the current time through the power of the Holy Spirit. Looking forward to that great day where we will be in your presence forevermore.

[32 : 07] Lord, but our prayer and desire is that you would encourage us to be about your work in the here and now. That we would be so heavenly minded to be spurred on to do the work of heaven here on earth.

And Father, may ours be the joy of seeing many people come to know Jesus as Saviour and as Lord. We pray for families, we pray for friends and work colleagues, those who we know, who are as of yet out with your kingdom.

We pray that today may be the day of salvation for them, and they might become co-laborers and co-workers as we join with you, as you give us the privilege of joining with you in the building up of your kingdom.

Lord, hear us now as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.