

Division Among the People

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[0 : 00] Two sections of God's Word, first in the Old Testament in the prophet Haggai, it's the third last book in the Old Testament, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the prophecy of Haggai in chapter 2.

I'm going to read from the beginning to the end of verse 9 and then into John's Gospel, chapter 7 from verse 37 to the end. So the prophecy of Haggai in the ESV, that's on page 956957.

In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet.

Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehoshadak, the high priest.

Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt.

[1 : 36] My spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. For thus, says the Lord of hosts, yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land.

And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in. And I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.

The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts.

And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts. Let us turn to John's Gospel, chapter 7, and verse 37.

John's Gospel, chapter 7, verse 37. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

[2 : 51] Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.

For as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words, some of the people said, This really is the prophet.

Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?

So there was a division among the people over him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, Why did you not bring him?

The officers answered, No one ever spoke like this man. The Pharisees answered them, Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?

[4 : 01] But the crowd that does not know the law is a curse. Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to him, Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?

They replied, Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee. Amen. And may God bless to us these readings of his holy word.

I'm going to sing again from Sing Psalm, Psalm number 57. Psalm number 57, that's on page 74. I'm going to sing from verse 5.

Psalm 57 from verse 5. Above the highest heavens, O God, exalted be, And over all the earth below display your majesty.

My soul was overwhelmed, they spread a net for me, But they themselves fell in the pit which they dug secretly. My heart is steadfast, Lord, with music I will sing.

[5 : 15] Awake, my soul, wake, harp and lyre, My song the dawn will bring. Among the nations, Lord, to you I will give praise. Among the peoples of the earth, my songs of you I'll raise.

Great is your steadfast love, who it reaches to the sky. Your constant faithfulness, O Lord, extends to heaven high. Above the highest heavens, O God, exalted be, And over all the earth below display your majesty.

Psalms 57 from verse 5 to the end. Above the highest heavens. Above the highest heavens, O God, exalted be, And over all the earth below display your majesty.

My soul was overwhelmed, they spread a net for me, But they themselves fell in the pit which they dug secretly.

My heart is steadfast, Lord, with music I will sing.

[7 : 04] How in my soul, wake, harp and lyre, My song the dawn will bring.

Among the nations, Lord, to you I will give praise.

Among the peoples of the earth, my songs of you I'll bring.

Great is your steadfast love, which reaches to the sky.

You constantly promise, O Lord, And over all the earth below.

[8 : 28] O God, exalted be, And over all the earth below, This thing you're majesty.

Let's turn again to the second part that we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 7.

And it's a section from verse 37 to the end. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water, and so on. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out.

As we know, there's always a last day to everything. Sometimes when you're going through something that's really good, you want that to continue, to go on and on and on.

[9 : 44] There are other things, other experiences that we're going through, and we can't wait for them to stop. But here is the last day of the feast. Now, as we've been looking at this gospel, we've been through this gospel most mornings, but we were looking at here this feast, the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles.

And this, just to remind ourselves, this was a feast that God had established to remind the Israelites of their journey through the wilderness. And it was a time of celebration, a time of joy.

It was a great time, a time of festival. And for a week from, it was in the seventh month, which would correspond to our October, they would live, they would build little leafy booths out of palm branches and such like, and they would live in these.

They would be on rooftops. They would be in the streets of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem would be absolutely hoaching, packed full of people, because they came from all the rural areas of the land. And it was a time of celebration. And God had commanded this so that they would remember, so that Israel would remember the 40 years wilderness journey.

[11 : 02] They would remember God's dealings with them. This morning, remember how we were looking at the importance of remembering. God wanted Israel to remember their 40-year journey, just as he wants young people to remember their creator in the days of their youth.

How he wants us to remember this day, the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. How he wants us to remember his death until he comes again with the sacrament. There are many things the Lord wants us to remember.

And it's important for us, as we journey through life, sometimes people are saying, oh, we've always got to be, you've always got to just be looking ahead, moving ahead. Well, that's true.

It's very foolish not to remember. We've always got to remember, and we highlighted that this morning. We're to remember not just the good things, but also the tough things, the bad things, the things that hurt, the things we wish we hadn't done.

Because all of these things together make us what we are. And this is all, everything is ultimately in the purposes and in the hand of God.

[12 : 10] So God was wanting Israel to remember, always to remember, the wilderness journey. So this was a time of celebration. It was a time, kind of harvest time. The harvest was in.

The work was over. The toil was finished. And in many ways, it's almost a picture of heaven itself. Because heaven is going to be permanent celebration.

It is going to be a place of permanent joy. It is going to be a place where the toil, the labors, the struggles, the battles, the temptations, all these things that, troubled in life, are going to be over.

And in fact, there is almost a something you can see in Revelation chapter 7, where we see the saints in glory, the picture that John had with pans in their hands.

You can always have this idea of them building their booths, as you have here of the time of celebration in the Feast of Booths. A great period, as we say, a time of celebration.

[13:14] Now this feast ran for seven days. And so this is the last day of the feast. And part of the ritual of that feast was that the priests would come with huge, great jars of water, massive pitchers full of water from the pool of Siloam, and they would pour them out in the temple.

And it would be in relation to the pouring out of the water that Jesus, on the last day, cries out. He stood up there in the temple, and He cried out to all the people who were there, where there would be pleading and there would be urgency in His voice.

And He says, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Now, the reason that we read Haggai chapter 2 there, was that this ties in so amazingly with this particular time, because the Feast of Booths ran from the 14th, 15th of the month to the 21st of the month, of the 7th month.

So, this day that Jesus stood would be the 21st day of the 7th month, the last great day of the Feast.

And where we read in Haggai, which is a prophecy of the coming glory of the temple, it says, In the 7th month, on the 21st day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai.

[14:57] And His prophecy was saying that the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former. You see, the people who had lived through, the people who had remembered the old temple, those who had been taken into captivity when they were young.

And they remembered the splendor. The temple that Solomon built was one of the most amazing, spectacular buildings ever built.

But, of course, you remember how Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire had, Babylonians had invaded the land of Israel and they had, and Judah, and they had demolished, they had broken down the walls of the city and they had broken the temple.

Of course, they had taken all the treasures away. And the people who were young at the time of captivity, those who had been taken into captivity, could remember the old building.

And here in that time of Haggai, they had started to rebuild it. But a lot of the people were disillusioned and they had kind of forgotten, they started looking after their own interests. And the old people were saying, ah, this new place is nothing like the old.

[16:11] I suppose, to a certain extent, that's kind of like the way that it often is, I'm not in any way finding fault with older people, but so often when older people, and we'll do it exactly ourselves, and probably I'm in that category now, we reminisce and we look back on the good old days.

It wasn't, they weren't always good old days, but we tend to, that's the way so often when we look back, we think, ah, it was better then than it is now. It's part of life. And that's how it was, nothing new in that, that's how it was way back then, way back in the 500 years before the time of Christ. Ah, they were saying the old temple was far better. But the prophet, the word of the Lord comes to the prophet Haggai, and he says, you go to the people, and that was the 21st day of the seventh month, and tell the people that the glory of this new house is going to be far greater than the glory of the old one.

And here we are, 500, 550 years later, fast forward, and again on the 21st day of the seventh month, exactly the same time, we find Jesus, who is the fulfillment of all the prophecy, standing in the temple, and truly the glory was far greater than ever it was in the former, because here is the presence of the living and true God, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead, standing there, and he cries out to the great crowd who are gathered there, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

And what a wonderful invitation that is. And that invitation still goes out tonight, if anyone thirsts, let him come unto me and drink. Now of course, we know that initially that is speaking specifically about anybody who is thirsting after Christ.

[18:14] And I would like to think that everybody in here is thirsting to one degree or another after Jesus Christ, because we might be at different stages of desire, different stages of need.

There might be some here tonight with a little sense of urgency. There might be some people who are simply here because of duty or whatever. Well, one thing I'll say, it is good you're here.

There is nowhere better that you could be. I don't mean that with regard to just the free church. I mean it with regard to wherever the gospel is preached. But there's nowhere better that you could be than under the sound of the gospel.

To be where the word of God is proclaimed and preached. Where it is read, where we come under its authority and its power. Because this is the word of the living God speaking to us.

Now as I say, people could be at different stages. And some people, as far as things have gone so far, you have dismissed this word. Although maybe deep down you know that you do need it.

[19 : 21] And so as I say, there are people at different stages. You might even be here tonight and you're kind of indifferent to the word. You're holding out for one day. Oh yeah, I hope one day to get to sort this out.

I hope one day that I will meet with the Lord. I want this for myself. But right now, not yet. Don't try and bargain with God because you're not in control of your life.

You're not in control of your days or your future. You don't know how many days you have. None of us know. Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. But Jesus is saying, if anyone thirsts, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Now, of course, if a person was naturally thirsty, you go to where water is. And if anybody is spiritually thirsty, you go to where there is spiritual water, spiritual nourishment.

And that, of course, is to go to Jesus Christ. If a person is naturally thirsty, if you're really thirsty, you don't sit there talking to somebody and say, oh, you know, I'm absolutely parched.

[20 : 32] Do you know what I'm going to do? In a wee while, I'm going to go and get something to drink. But not just now. I can hardly swallow I'm so thirsty. I'm intending later on to go and get something to drink.

You wouldn't do that. When you're really thirsty, you go, get up, and you go to where you can get something to drink. Immediately. Because it's a pressing necessity upon you.

And so it is here. If tonight you are thirsty, it's not something you're planning in your mind to say, oh, I'm going to deal with this later on. Tonight, you are here.

Tonight, Jesus is passing by. Tonight, you must go to him and say, Jesus, I'm thirsty. I see this great invitation you've given. You've said to me, if you come to me, that's the great invitation here.

If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. whoever believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. That's a great declaration.

[21 : 37] And it fills out, whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. I think this is looking at a prophecy of Isaiah chapter 58, and it says there, you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

That's in Isaiah chapter 58, one of the promises given to the church. And so, this is how the believer is. When you come to faith in Jesus Christ, you're not like a sponge that just takes in and takes in and takes in.

But, you're somebody who takes in in order to give out again. It's like it's an in-out, it's a flowing. It's like a stream, a fresh stream, a bubbling stream of living water.

It's not something that becomes stagnant. Christian is never with a pool of stagnant water. There is a constant flowing of renewing. And that is something that should not only impact yourself, but impact others around you.

that is one of the wonderful things about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, as it says, he said this about the Spirit, for as yet the Spirit had not been given.

[23 : 01] That doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit hadn't come at all into this world. The third person of the Godhead was always involved in the activity of the Godhead.

And the Old Testament was full of the work of the Holy Spirit. and the Holy Spirit resided in the heart of every believer. But it wasn't until Pentecost, after Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, as he had prophesied before and said that one of the things that would happen was when he returned to his Father, that there would be the sending of the Holy Spirit in power.

And of course, this is what happened at Pentecost. And there was this great, as it were, global spread of the gospel, where the Holy Spirit has come in power and reaching out and affecting and touching all the nations of this world.

So we actually live in the days of the fullness of that promise. And so, as Jesus is speaking and giving this great invitation, we read there in verse 40, when they heard these words, some of the people said, this really is a prophet.

Others said, this is a Christ. But others said, has not the scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David and so on and comes from Bethlehem? So there again, there's a division.

[24 : 26] That's one of the themes that we see when we follow the life of Jesus, the division amongst people. At one stage, remember, a couple of weeks ago, we saw that they were muttering, there were mutterings about Jesus.

It's still the same. It doesn't matter where you go, people are divided about the Bible, about God, about the scriptures, about Jesus. There is, there's always division.

People have different ideas and different thoughts about things. My friend, let's not formulate our own opinions, but let our mind be molded by God's word.

It's very, very dangerous. And that was a problem with the religious leaders and the rulers that they worked out in their own thinking how things were.

And then they tried to fit the law of God and bent it and twisted it and took it out of context and molded it to fit their opinions. We must never work out our own ideas and then say, right, I'll find a wee bit of, a bit of God's word that will fit in the way I think.

[25 : 35] That's dangerous. We must allow God's word to mold and shape our thinking. That is the way it has to be. And so there was this division.

Some said he's a prophet, some said he is a Christ. Now, this follows on again from what we were looking last week, which is really quite extraordinary. And they're saying, has the scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?

And they're saying he can't be the Christ because he has come from Galilee. Now, this is what I find, and I think we said this last week if I remember rightly, this is what I find quite extraordinary.

There was no group, there was no people on the earth who were more obsessed with their ancestry, who were more taken up with who they belonged to.

If there was any nation in the world who could follow their family tree, it was a Jew. It was almost an obsession that they had to know exactly their lineage, who they came from, who they belonged to.

[26 : 47] And I find it quite extraordinary that nobody ever went to Jesus' mother, to Mary, and said, could you tell me where was your son Jesus born?

Because you see that the religious leaders, they knew that Jesus was going to be born, that the Messiah, the Messiah, when he came, was going to be of the lineage, of the line of David.

He was going to be born in David's town in Bethlehem. That's what the prophecies had said. But they had seen Jesus grow up, and he grew up in Galilee, in Nazareth.

But all it took was one question to ask, where exactly was Jesus born? And that shows us that they didn't want to know the truth.

Because Mary would have said, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The reason was, although we lived in Nazareth, we are actually, our people were from Bethlehem.

[27 : 56] And it was that time when Caesar Augustus gave this decree, where there was this census being taken, and everybody had to go back to where the roots were.

And Joseph and I had to go back to Bethlehem, because that's where our roots were. And that, of course, was at the time when Jesus was born. It didn't take, it wouldn't have taken more than two questions at the very most to find out where Jesus had been born.

But it would appear that nobody asked, because nobody wanted to know. See, that's what prejudice is. Prejudice does not want to know the truth.

It's already blinkered. It's made up its mind, and it's not prepared for anything else. And so we read that some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, you see, they had sent, that's what we saw back last week, they had sent officers to arrest Jesus.

[29 : 04] Verse 45, the officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, why did you not bring him? See, the officers have come back empty-handed.

And the officers answered, no one ever spoke like this man. In many ways, I admire these officers, because they didn't try and get out of what had really happened.

They were, it would have been, I suppose, quite easy for them to say, oh, we didn't manage to get hold of him. There was too big a crowd around him. If we had taken Jesus at that particular moment, we would probably have been stoned.

There would have been an uprising, so we didn't take him. No, they just said, look, never, no man ever spoke like this man. Isn't that amazing?

Now, that's one of the truths that has been dotted throughout the New Testament. It says this on different occasions, that he spoke as one having authority, not like the scribes and Pharisees.

[30 : 13] No one ever spoke like this man. Moses, that great leader of God's people, the one who wrote the first five books of the Bible, no one spoke, not even Moses, spoke like this man.

David, who penned the Psalms we sing, not even David, spoke like this man. Isaiah, the most marvelous Hebrew scholar, whose writings are unsurpassed in Hebrew literature, who has given these wonderful prophecies regarding the Messiah, not even Isaiah spoke like this man.

John the Baptist, who everybody went out to hear, not even John the Baptist spoke like this man. Nobody has ever spoken like this man.

they came to arrest Jesus, and Jesus arrested them. They went back empty handed. And we've always got to remember that, that the word of Christ is able to arrest anybody.

He is able, through a word, to come into your heart, to change your heart, to change your life. You could come in here tonight on a run from God, and you could go out tonight walking with God, through the voice, through the word, through the Jesus speaking into your heart.

[31 : 43] And that's what I would want, that's what I pray for, that you will hear the voice of the living God, that these word, because there is no more beautiful voice in the whole universe.

There is no sweeter voice than Jesus inviting people to himself, and he means it, he wants it. You might be saying to yourself, I don't know if I'm fit.

Of course you are. You're qualified, because you're a sinner. I'm a sinner. And if you and I are sinners, which we are, then it's for sinners Jesus came to save, that's what he says, that he has come to seek and to save those who are lost.

He says, I didn't come for the righteous, but I came for sinners. So that's the great and wonderful news. The officers answered, no one ever spake like this man.

The Pharisees answered them, have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.

[32 : 55] You see the kind of people they were. They had put themselves up on a pedestal. here they were. They were the authorities. They're saying, what does the crowd know?

These are ignorant, stupid people. We are the elite. We know what is right and what is wrong. Unfortunately, for them, the crowd, I think, understood far more than they did.

Despite all their learning, despite them spending years in these rabbinical schools, they could explain a tiny little letter of the law.

Some of them had learnt the whole law. They could repeat it blindfold, but they didn't know the one who gave the law. They didn't know Jesus at all.

They were blinkered, they were blind, they were lost. And they had this air of superiority, which is an awful thing, in the sight of God, particularly when you're wrong.

[34 : 01] Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd does not know the law, and is accursed. Then we have this lone voice, Nicodemus. Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, who was one of the Pharisees, one of the higher rulers, he said to them, here's the one voice of reason.

Nicodemus doesn't come out, as it were, 100% on the side of Jesus. It's a voice of caution, it's a voice of reason. But Nicodemus, we know, is on our journey.

Remember, this is a man who went to Jesus back in chapter 3, he went at night, full of questions. Remember, he's a religious leader, he's one who was teaching the people, one who was instructing the people in the way of truth, and he didn't know the truth himself.

He didn't know anything about the new birth, he didn't know anything about conversion. these things when Jesus spoke were a mystery to him. He said, I don't get it, I don't understand. How do you mean a person must be born again?

You mean he's to go back into his mother's womb? She didn't understand basic gospel truths. It's a fearful thing when spiritual leaders are in total darkness, but Nicodemus was on a journey, and his meeting with Jesus had obviously lingered with him and impressed him, and he had thought long over it.

[35 : 27] And I believe that here he's beginning to come on the side of Jesus. But he doesn't say much, only says a little, and some people are quite condemning of Nicodemus, and they're saying, he should have really stood out in the side of Christ.

My friend, we're all on a journey, and we go at different speeds. And we've got to remember the words of Jesus, that every disciple of Jesus doesn't bear fruit a hundredfold. Some do, but some only bear fruit sixtyfold, and some only thirtyfold. Got to remember that, because when the church of Jesus Christ is not full of people who are absolutely ablaze, full of the Lord all the time, love.

We wish the church was like that, but the church of Jesus Christ is full of people who love the Lord, and some love him in a way with a hundred percent zeal and fervor and passion, but others, as Jesus said, it's sixty percent, and others thirty.

The important thing is that there is love there. And we've got to remember on our journey, and we mustn't condemn those that we look on who might be further behind, because before the journey is over, those who might be further behind might be ahead of us.

[37 : 03] That happens. In my short time, I've remembered Christians who were very condemning of other Christians, and they've gone quite far away today.

We've got to be very, very careful. And so we find that here's this man, Nicodemus, and he comes out a wee bit on the side of Jesus, and he argues a very, very basic, simple thing, and he says, does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?

Nicodemus was speaking the absolute truth. He was testifying what was true regarding the law. And of course, they turned on him right away. Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.

They weren't interested in the very law they were seeking to adhere to and to honor. They only took the bits of the law that suited themselves.

This man, Nicodemus, who spoke a wee bit about Jesus but didn't say very much, is the same Nicodemus that we'll meet later on.

[38 : 14] When there's no sign of Peter or James or Andrew will excuse John because Jesus told John to take his mother home.

But there's no sign of the other disciples as Jesus' body is taken down from the cross. Jesus' were told in fact that they were meeting behind locked door as Joseph of Arimathea with this man Nicodemus come out into the open and take down the body of Jesus and bury him in a grave. the most dangerous time to identify yourself with Jesus. And they came out and identified themselves with Jesus.

Nicodemus was on a journey. I hope tonight that all of us are on that journey. Although we might not be in the hundredfold, might not even be in the sixtyfold, might be in the thirtyfold, but I hope you're on that journey.

If not, you need to get onto that journey. And the only way you can get onto that journey, to journey with Jesus, is to accept him as your Lord and Saviour.

[39 : 38] Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray that we may indeed identify ourselves with Jesus. We pray that we might not be ashamed in any way of our Lord and Saviour.

May we be prepared to stand on the side of Jesus and to show that we love him. And we give thanks for that love, a love that went all the way, that held nothing back, a love that gave completely.

Watch over us, we pray, and take us to our home safely. Bless all whom we love. Watch over us, guard us, and keep us, and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Our concluding psalm is from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 63, and we sing verses 1 to 5, Psalm 63, verses 1 to 5.

It's on page 295, Lord, thee my God, I lerey seek my soul to thirst for thee.

My flesh longs in a dry, parched land wherein no waters be, that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place.

[40 : 56] Since better is thy love than life, my lips thee praise shall give. I in thy name will lift my hands and bless thee while I live. Even as with marrow and with fat, my soul shall filled be.

Then shall my mouth with joyful lips sing praises unto thee. Psalm 63, Lord, thee my God, I lerey seek. Lord, thee my God, I lerey sing, my soul of death for thee, my flesh longs in that dry, our child dreaded no waters be, that I may thy fire may be o'er, and bright days of thy face, as I have seen thee here to pour forth within thy holy place.

Since better is thy love and life, my lives thee brave shall give, thy end, thy men will live my hand and bless thee while I live.

If not with mar love and with heart, my soul shall fill it be, then shall my mouth with joy for lips and graces unto thee.

[43 : 40] Amen. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.