

Haggai 2/3: Haggai 1:15b-2:9

Introduction:

Well, friends. We're back in Haggai this morning. Last week we heard the first Chapter of Haggai; it was a message calling those in Jerusalem to focus on God's Temple, and its rebuilding, which they had neglected for 15 years while they built their own homes. We didn't actually talk much about Chapter 1; we talked about Haggai's historical and social situation much more deeply. I'd recommend, if you're up for it, go back and read what God gave us there, because I think we can find ways it connects to our life today.

This morning we're moving quickly, first of all. We only have a few verses to talk about, and in a short service, I'm not going to mine them for all the meaning that they might have for us. What we will see is a message of encouragement that is perfectly relevant for us, I think. I'm excited about it.

Let's pray!

Prayer:

An Outline of Haggai:

One thing we didn't do last week is outline Haggai. It's not a hard thing to do, really. Whatever outline you'll find will almost certainly break Haggai down into the oracles Haggai gives. Here's what I want to offer you:

First Oracle: 1:1-15a:

"Build My House"

Second Oracle: 1:15b-2:9:

"Greater Glory For This House Than The Old One"

Third Oracle: 2:10-2:19:

"From This Day On I Will Bless You"

Fourth Oracle: 2:20-23

"I Have Chosen Zerubbabel"

We saw the first Oracle last week: God says "build my house." And people do; God "stirs up their Spirit." The rebuilding is re-launched. Haggai gives a second Oracle, this time around, say, Early October, promising that the Temple everyone is building will be more impressive than the one that most of them have forgotten. Then Haggai gives two more oracles on the same day. The first is a promise that the general lack of fruitfulness they've experienced will end. It's an interesting Oracle; we'll talk about it next week. The Second, which we'll also see, talks about Zerubbabel's role in Israel in Messianic terms.

Today, then, our focus is on this second Oracle, which came after the Israelites had re-engaged with building God's Temple.

It's really two statements; we'll look at each one by itself.

First Statement: vv1-5:

As we've already seen, God addresses Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the People directly, and says:

3 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? 4 But now be strong, Zerubbabel,' ... 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, 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 came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'

Look, this is just beautiful. It's beautiful. It's exactly what people need to hear when they're embarking on an enormous task.

It's been, you know, a month and a half, give or take, since God stirred up the spirit of all these folks, and they set to rebuilding the Temple, and it doesn't take long, I think, for the excitement of doing God's work to burn off when you're hauling rocks, hauling Timber, thinking about how much of your cash this might take when, as we saw in chapter one, you might not have much to give.

They need to hear "Be strong and work for I am with you." They need reminded of what their people have done in the past, and how God was with them then. They need to hear, "My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear."

God says to this group, after two months of lifting rocks and timber and no end in sight: "Be strong and work for I am with you. I promise. My Spirit remains among you. Don't be afraid."

"Be strong and work, for I am with you. I promise. My Spirit remains among you. Don't be afraid."

Here's what this proves for me. This proves that God deeply understands we people whom He made. God

understands us. Because this is exactly what people need assured of when they are doing what they know God wants them to do, but it doesn't seem like much accomplishment, or actual achievement is happening on account of all their work.

God speaks to all of those engaged in this work, and he speaks specifically to those in charge of seeing it through. And that makes sense, too, because those who are responsible for organizing what God has called a community to do, they need to hear what God says here, too.

A Reminder For Each of Us:

We in this room know that ministry--the work of God--happens outside the church building just as much as it happens inside. We go here and there in the world, spending time in all sorts of places, praying, living, offering ourselves in positions of faithfulness to those around us. We bear witness to the Kingdom of God as we become like Jesus and offer our work to others. We each need to hear what God says to these workers here:

“Be strong and work, for I am with you. I promise. My Spirit remains among you. Don't be

afraid.”

A Reminder For All of Us:

And as a congregation, as Smoky Row Brethren Church, we need to hear this, too. We aren't "building God's house," we are God's house, God's Temple, built together by the Holy Spirit.

But just as God has seen us through so many different times in our collective, shared life, so God is with us now, and as we work together to live up to God's hopes for us, we need to remember God's covenant faithfulness, God's Spirit among us, and that whatever situations we face, we must resolve to face them together without fear.

So many of us have so much responsibility, serve so faithfully, offer our time together in the work of our congregation to organize, lead, and direct our shared efforts. Those of us in such a position need to hear what God says here, too.

Second Statement: 6-9:

But Haggai's people's situation was different than ours; they had nothing in front of them to build on; the foundation was (as near as we can tell) in place, but

perhaps not even fully finished. They weren't remodeling, you know? They were taking less than nothing, disaster and mess, and creating a place for God's presence to be at home in.

They were doing something impossible. They needed to know not only that God was with them, but that God would offer them what they needed in order to do the work that God called them to. They needed to know God would give them what they needed in order to do what He asked of them.

Haggai's second statement makes this clear:

6 "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. 7 I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,'... 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,'... 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,'... 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty."

The Resources They Need:

God's promising, through Haggai, that the wealth of nations, the resources of the nations around them, will come their way. That they'll have what they need to complete this work. Upon returning to Israel, many people had donated cash, treasure, to see this Temple to its completion; they had believed in their work. And yet...it had stalled out. It had turned into nothing.

This is important to hear, right? I mean, they're barely into a five year job. They've been rebuilding the Temple with bits and pieces from the old. They've been clearing out stuff. They've got to wonder: Do we even have what we need to do this?

And God promises: They will. "The gold and silver are mine," he says. And this isn't a statement without context; it's a statement about resources, cash, the stuff that they'll need not only to get building materials, but to decorate the Temple. In promising that this Temple will be more glorious than the first one God is giving a crazy promise...but honestly, by the time Herod builds this Temple to its completion, the whole thing is incredibly grand, expansive, impressive.

Right now, though, what they see around them seems

like nothing, and kind of is nothing. There's a foundation and some hopes, room for imagination. And yet: God promises that the First Temple will have nothing on this Second One.

More than this, in claiming all gold and silver as His, God is not just letting them know they'll have what they need, but for those who have donated their own treasure to see this Temple through it's completion, it's an affirmation that they are on God's side. God is on their side.

A Worthwhile Work:

And just in case they're worried about anything from the nations coming their way, because, you know, the nations around them have destroyed them over the past few centuries, God promises "In this place I will grant peace." Peace, here, means more than the absence of violence, of course; it's "shalom," it means rest, peace, freedom from fear. And for people who have been hauling boulders and timbers for a couple of months, the idea that this nothing rubble will be a place where peaceful rest happens, free from the fear of destruction and work both, is a motivating thing.

God is ultimately telling them that this will be worth it

to them. They'll have shalom through this; wholeness, peace, healing, rest. The work will be worth it.

"I'll give you what you need. Your work will be worthwhile. When it is finished it'll bring shalom."

Summary:

So. God is talking to people hauling timber, moving rock, counting cash, organizing volunteers. People who are constantly on the edge of discouragement because their work feels like nothing. Their imaginations are exhausted. Their hope is small. The energy that they had a few weeks ago is starting to be used up.

God says this:

"Be strong and work, for I am with you. I promise. My Spirit remains among you. Don't be afraid. I'll give you what you need. Your work will be worthwhile. When it is finished it'll bring shalom."

Comparing the Present with the Past:

Can we relate to the situation the people were in?

Here's how you can check: Where are you comparing the present to the past right now?

When it comes to your family, or work, or congregation, or neighborhood, or club, or...society, nation, do you find yourself comparing the present situation you face with some remembered past?

The past might be good; it might be recent or not so recent, but it's past, right? We work right now, in the present, in the situation in front of our hands.

Haggai's audience looked at the work of their hands, and found it wanting, found it lacking, despised it--a little--in comparison to what they remembered.

They had lost their ability to imagine something brighter and bigger than what was what in front of them, and the reason that they lost it, is because they had become focused on what was behind them.

They were faithful, like you all. They were working, giving--time, resources, effort, skill. But their faithfulness needed encouraged, because their work seemed ineffectual to them.

Relating?

So, again: Can we relate to this. When it comes to work, to church, to the communities we are a part of, does the present feel weaker than the past? Are we discouraged about what is in front of us? Have we lost our ability to imagine a bright future? Does this, whatever it is, feel like nothing?

Because, the truth is that if we are listening to God, if we are acting with faithfulness, then while the details might look different, this side of Jesus, this moment in history, God says the same things to us:

“Be strong and work, for I am with you. I promise. My Spirit remains among you. Don’t be afraid. I’ll give you what you need. Your work will be worthwhile. When it is finished it’ll bring peace.”

Do you hear this? Do we hear this? God is saying this to us, Smoky Row, and God is saying it to each of us who looks at what is in front of our hands and says, “This is nothing.”

“Be strong and work, for I am with you. I

promise. My Spirit remains among you. Don't be afraid. I'll give you what you need. Your work will be worthwhile. When it is finished it'll bring peace."

One more time, and hear it said to you, and to your congregation, and let this promise of God stimulate your imagination, let it help you believe in the work of your hands, let it remind you of God who is with you, among us, alongside you, and doesn't get tired of being faithful to you.

"Be strong and work, for I am with you. I promise. My Spirit remains among you. Don't be afraid. I'll give you what you need. Your work will be worthwhile. When it is finished it'll bring peace."