

Haggai 2:1-23

"The Best Is Yet To Come"

To *get* God's people up and going is certainly a commendable task. To *keep* God's people up & going is on another level altogether. - It's been said that there's only one ability that God is truly looking for in us & that's *availability*... Beyond that, perhaps we should recognize that the greatest ability one could possess is *dependability*.

Last week we looked at a whole litany of excuses that we too often make as a justification or a rationalization as why it is that even though we *see* the need, we *personally* are too busy, or for some reason are unable to be the one to *meet* the need.

But as the Ch came to a close, we saw something wonderful. The prophet had hit them w/an accusation of procrastination. The fact that they had plenty of time to work on *their own* homes, but as for the house of God, well, it just wasn't time for that. Their priority was the pursuit of their own creature comforts. & While it's not wrong to appreciate & even pursue things that make life more enjoyable. There's something amiss when we have no heart for *God's* work, no zeal to see *His* kingdom increase & we content ourselves w/the bare essentials as it pertains to ministry, but we spare no expense when it comes to *our own luxuries*.

Our heart shouldn't be to please ourselves & if we can please God here & there along the way that's enough. But rather our priority should be upon the things that please God. Trusting that He will bless our obedience & that His grace is sufficient to supply all we need & beyond... So Haggai told them to consider their ways, think about what road they'd set their heart on & the direction it was taking them down... Is that really the road you want to be on? –

It was time to set their personal wants aside & pursue the priorities of the Lord... & That's exactly what they did! They *obeyed* the Lord; they *feared* the Lord & they worked on the *house* of the Lord! – As the curtain is drawn back on Ch 2, the stage is set approximately one month later...

Vs 1-3

Ch 1 comes to a close on the 24th day of the 6th month (September). Ch 2 opens up on the 21st day of the 7th month (October) & already they're being confronted w/& conflicted by discouragement.

You see; although they'd been taken into captivity some 85 yrs prior to this point, the total decimation of Jerusalem came in waves. Some were taken into captivity in 605 B.C.

The 2nd wave was taken into Babylon around 597 B.C. The final wave was taken in 587 B.C. & that's when the temple was destroyed... some 66-67 yrs prior to this point. So, there would've been some who'd returned (granted by now they'd have been in their 70's, maybe even 80's) who had seen Solomon's temple w/their eyes. They remembered how ornate it was, how elaborate it was. All the gold, the silver & meticulous craftsmanship that was on display for all to behold. An architectural wonder upon which no expense was spared.

So, he asks a series of 3 questions, who among you saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is this not in your eyes as nothing? Some of the older folks were polluting the environment through negativity. Listen, negative comments, disgruntled & disillusioned attitudes are toxic.

The same thing had happened 14 yrs earlier when they laid the foundation. Perhaps you recall last week when I told you that by the 2nd month of the 2nd year of their return, the foundation of the temple was laid. & The people shouted for joy, they sang & gave thanks & praise to God for the great work that was being done... But Ezra tells us, *"But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off."*¹ There was a mixed bag of emotions. The sounds of singing & sobbing intermingling. Excitement & wailing over the same work!

Why? It's rooted in this one word found in Vs 3, "Comparison". – The Ark of the Covenant was now missing. The craftsmen were fewer, the economy was weaker. Architecturally speaking, this temple was almost an embarrassment compared to the previous temple that Solomon had built.

They'd fallen prey to a familiar snare. They were stuck thinking of the *grandeur* of the *temple* in the past rather than the *glory* of *God* moving forward. Listen to me. Rarely (if ever) do these kinds of comparisons between "the good ol' days" & the present-day yield anything fruitful or beneficial. –

How fruitful was it for all the old timers to weep & wail & bring everyone down comparing *Solomon's* temple to *their* own work of rebuilding?

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ezr 3:12-13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& It doesn't have to be old timers. We all know (too well) how to throw a wet blanket of criticism over the celebration of a work of God in our midst because we perceive it as small or insignificant compared to something else.

There's nothing that will diminish & discourage the zeal of the workers like shrinking the significance of what *they're* doing by pointing out something *really great* in some other place or at some other time.

Listen, God's not stuck in the past. He's always looking forward to what's to come. It's dangerous to get stuck in the way things *used to be*. Or to be always looking back... Jesus warned against looking back, we're to grab hold of the plow & press forward. Paul said, "*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*"²

Getting stuck in the past is how we become old wineskins (Matt 9:16-17). The Lord is wanting to do something new, something fresh. It may stretch us, we may need to flex... & we'll be willing to do that if we're focused on the glory of God moving forward rather than getting stuck on the grandeur of the past. – Keep your focus on forward momentum.

Vs 4-5

"Be strong... Be strong... Be strong... & work. For I am with you, says the Lord of hosts; do not fear!" Don't let others who may be disgruntled, who may be disillusioned, discourage you or diminish the work of God in/through your life. "Be strong – & work."

This hearkens back to what we were speaking about last week. It's not that we don't need to pray over the work, but some people prefer to pray *rather* than work. But rarely will something great get done apart from getting to work! God has chosen to partner w/His people. Accomplishments occur through action. "Be strong... & work."

& I love that God gives His people a foundation to stand on. He doesn't just give us pious platitudes or common cliché's to hold onto as though we're grasping for the wind. Listen, when you tell someone to "be strong", or to "hang in there"; what's that word of encouragement resting on? "Be strong, things will turn around!" That sounds good, but is there any real substance to it? How can you know things will "turn around"? You can't, it may go from bad to worse until we see Jesus face to face. So, I can't really give you genuine encouragement through the words, "things will get better".

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Php 3:13-14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But what I can tell you as my brother/sister in Christ is, “Be strong, the Lord is w/you.” You see, God not only told them “what” to do “Be strong... & work”, but He told them *how* (that is, the source of their strength) & *why* they were to do it, “For I am with you.”

“Be strong & work, for I am with you says the Lord.” In the NT vernacular we read it like this, *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”*³ Keep going, keep growing, keep plowing forward. For God is w/you. Heb 3:5-6, *“For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”*⁴

You have the promise of God’s presence w/you. It’s guaranteed by His unchanging word. “...so My Spirit remains among you.” The idea is that not only will God never abandon His own, but as we’ve said before, if God calls you, He’ll equip you. If He enlists you, He’ll enable you. As God said through Zechariah to these same people, *“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the Lord of hosts.”*⁵— However, you & I have one more distinct advantage. As for you & me, not only is the Spirit of God w/you, through the new covenant, He dwells *in* you. & I’m just telling you, better to be a part of a “small” work whereby God is w/us, than have an *enormous* work where He’s not.

Vs 6-9

You see? God is continuing to set their sights on what’s ahead of them, rather than allowing them to focus on what was behind them. & He assures them, “The best is yet to come”. “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former.”

Now; Vs 6 we find quoted in the N.T. (Heb 12:26) & by that we discover that God is giving us another glimpse through Haggai of the coming judgment that precedes the millennial kingdom. God will shake the present order of this world in His coming day of judgment...

But not only will He shake things up eventually, historically as well. We see in Vs 7, “I will shake the nations”. The Persian Empire (of which they were under) would be conquered by the Greeks, the Greeks would be conquered by the Romans, God would shake the nations.

& They shall come to the Desire of All nations, & I will fill this temple w/glory, says the Lord of hosts...

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Eph 6:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Heb 13:5-6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Zec 4:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Some may not agree, but I personally believe the “Desire of all nations” is a direct reference to J.C. The Savior not only of Israel, but of the world. Only J.C. truly satisfies the deepest need, the deepest desire in the heart of all mankind. There is a universal void in heart of every man. A “God shaped vacuum” that people try to fill w/all kinds of things (power, pleasure, money, fame... the list goes on). **But nothing ever fills the void, it’s all a temporary fix to what seems to be a permanent problem. That because God has placed that there as a sort of “homing device”. It sets us in motion to seek to find answers, to search for fulfillment & nothing every truly satisfies until we come to know J.C. He’s truly the Desire of all nations. In Him we find fulfillment.**

BTW, *knowing* that Jesus is what the human heart is truly searching for, that should inspire greater boldness on our behalf to share the gospel. They don’t know it, they can’t see it, but Christ is what is lacking in their lives. Their “desire” isn’t truly satisfied in the things of this world & you & me... we have the answer, J.C. The Desire of All Nations.

God says, “I will fill this temple w/glory.” So; in truth in Vs 6-7, (& 9) we have reference to both the 1st & the 2nd coming of J.C. Solomon’s temple had the shekinah, the manifest presence of the glory of God. But this Temple would house God Himself in the flesh (our Creator), Jesus would in this place, touch hearts, change lives, teach God’s word & bring healing & wholeness. Remember Jn 1:14, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*”⁶ The glory that Jesus brought to this temple was greater than any glory that belonged to Solomon’s Temple.

& Again, looking down the prophetic pipeline, God says in Vs 9, “& In this place (that is Jerusalem) I will give peace.” As the Prince of peace rules & reigns for 1,000 yrs. Jerusalem has historically been a place of unrest, there’s been no peace. But God promises that the city of peace, will be granted its peace when the Desire of all nations is upon the throne.

& In Vs 8 God says, “The silver is Mine, & the gold is Mine.” A not so subtle reminder that God is the One Who put the ore in the earth. If He wants an elaborate temple filled w/gold & silver, the idea here is that He could take care of that.

They didn’t need to be discouraged if they didn’t have the money for the building project. They had to boldly trust God who owned every resource & give generously, willfully to honor the Lord.

Let me just say this & then we'll move on. – When we truly trust God, we will give more generously, not less. If we truly believe that God owns every resource & will provide for our needs, there's no fear in honoring Him w/our 1st fruits & beyond. We want to see God glorified, His kingdom moving forward, the gospel going forth, disciples being made, more people being reached. We want to be the best stewards w/the things He's entrusted us w/to the very best of our ability.

God owns every resource, & the way we give demonstrates (in no small measure) our ability to truly trust Him to provide for our lives as we place our priority upon His kingdom.

Vs 10-14

How many of you know that it's possible to do the right thing w/a wrong heart? & A wrong heart will spoil an otherwise righteous or holy work. (Btw, you'll note that Haggai's prophecies were in the 7th month & the 9th month. When you read Zechariah, you'll discover the word of the Lord came to *him* in the 8th month. They were ministering in conjunction w/one another).

But Haggai asks another series of questions to the priests regarding ritual or ceremonial cleanness as to the nature of transmission. Any meat that was offered on the altar was considered holy. & The priests were appointed a certain portion of it (along w/their families) to eat. – So the question was asked, "If you're taking this holy meat home in the fold of your garment & along the way it brushes against another piece of meat or bread or whatever, will that other piece of meat or bread suddenly become holy?" The answer or course is, "No." "By the same token, if someone who is unclean (maybe they've touched a dead body or something) if they touch a piece of meat/bread, will it become unclean?" The answer is, "Yes".

So, in a ceremonial sense, holiness cannot be transferred, but impurity can. Uncleanness is communicated through contact. We see the same today, right? If you're sick (say you have a cold or the flu) & I come up & shake your hand. Can you "catch" my health? No. Can I catch your sickness? Yes.

Unclean water will contaminate pure water, but clean water won't cleanse contaminated water. Transmission really only goes one way. From clean to unclean.

That's what God is trying to remind them of in Vs 14. Just because they're serving & sacrificing for the Lord, that doesn't make them clean. Just being in Jerusalem & building the temple doesn't make them holy.

Today we might say simply going to church or being baptized won't make you clean before God. & It's not that serving isn't important, or that baptism isn't right. It's that those things won't change your heart. You can do the right thing w/the wrong heart.

God wants us to do the right thing, *w/the right heart*. (You could read Zech 3 in conjunction w/this section of scripture). If we're not walking in purity, that is, leading a life set apart to God from the heart, we begin to pollute everything around us. God goes beyond "what" we're doing & searches "why" we're doing it. & A little unchecked sin in our lives spreads like a virus... it can even begin to "infect" others. To the Galatians Paul said it like this, **"A little leaven leavens the whole lump."**⁷ Again, that doesn't mean we walk around perfect, but it's always coming back to the heart.

& What God is getting around to here is that He wants to bless. The work they're doing is commendable, it's what God has told them to do. But He can't bless because their heart is amiss... God doesn't respond to simple outward obedience. That's called legalism, jumping through hoops, dotting "I's", crossing "t's". You can do what's right legally or morally and not have a 2nd thought toward honoring God from the heart. & God is always searching our heart...

We might say that willful sin will void our sacrifice & service before the Lord. He won't honor it. – Just because they lived in the "holy land", that didn't make their service holy. An unclean heart renders unclean service, unclean sacrifice.

Vs 15-19

"Remember when you were doing the work, but your grain harvest yielded only ½ of what you expected, & your grapes only 40%? That's because I was chastening you, yet you did not return to Me." Do difficult times drive us to God? Not necessarily. Sometimes we get mad at God instead or dig in our heels & question God.

But we love how the people have responded in this book. It was common that the people would rebel against the rebuke of the prophets. Here, they respond appropriately. They take the message to heart & have a change of heart. God sees their repentant hearts & promises that the harvest in on the way. – As the Psalmist has said, **"Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the Lord, And righteousness from the God of his salvation."⁸**

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ga 5:9–10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 24:3–5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What's the take home? Sin will always hinder the *work* of God & rob us of the *blessings* of God.

Vs 20-22

Here's this little remnant of people in the middle of world powers feeling like pawns in the big picture. But God reminds them, that you & God make a majority. God will shake heaven & earth, overthrow kingdoms & world powers. If God be for you, than who can be against you? You're on the winning side.

Vs 23

The signet ring was a token of royal authority. In the same vein as a throne, or a crown, or a scepter. God was telling Zerubbabel that he held a special place in His plan.

& When you get to the genealogy of Jesus who do you find in the history of both Mary & Joseph? Zerubbabel. We might say that God had chosen Zerubbabel to leave His "mark" on this world.

Listen, God has chosen you as well. & He wants to use you to leave His "mark" on this world. He has a plan for you. Don't allow difficulties to derail you. Don't become indifferent & discontinue the work. Remain dedicated to God. Be strong... & work. For the Lord is w/you & He will bless you. Forget that which is behind you, the best is yet to come...

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for Your unrelenting love for us! That Your word is always right on time for us. Help us to honor You from the heart, to be flexible, yielded & looking forward. I pray for any who may be feeling discouraged, down-trodden or overwhelmed. We pray for Your restoration, rejuvenation & healing touch.

Just going to church or jumping through religious hoops won't save you. We're called to believe on the Lord J.C. who has loved us & given Himself for us. Salvation is by grace through faith for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Turn from your sin, trust in Jesus today.