

Haggai 1:12 - 2:9

Persevering In The Work

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I am sure that you have heard of the 18th century preacher, John Wesley...the father of the Methodist Church. He was really a remarkable individual...he was definitely persevering. Listen to the following notes from his diary.

Sunday, A.M., May 5 Preached in St. Anne's. Was asked not to come back anymore.

Sunday, P.M., May 5 Preached in St. John's. Deacons said "Get out and stay out."

Sunday, A.M., May 12 Preached in St. Jude's. Can't go back there, either.

Sunday, A.M., May 19 Preached in St. Somebody Else's. Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return.

Sunday, P.M., May 19 Preached on street. Kicked off street.

Sunday, A.M., May 26 Preached in meadow. Chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service.

Sunday, A.M., June 2 Preached out at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway.

Sunday, P.M., June 2 Afternoon, preached in a pasture. Ten thousand people came out to hear me.

Wesley was a man of perseverance...and we need to learn the art of persevering.

We see it in Haggai. The foundation of the temple was laid, but things stalled for 16 years until Haggai came challenging them to finish the work. This task of rebuilding the temple was vitally important. The temple was where the manifest presence of God resided. So, when God instructed the people to build, or prepare, the temple, He was in essence instructing them to prepare for the presence of God. There are several things that must be in place if they were to adequately prepare themselves and the temple, for the presence of God.

Last week, we saw that the first thing that had to be put in order was their priorities. They had turned inward. Now, we see that not only did their priorities need to be re-ordered, but now their perseverance needed to be addressed.

Carrying out their Responsibility

(v.12-15)

They stirred themselves up and obeyed the Lord in action and attitude.

In Holy Performance

(v.12)

The leaders rise up and lead. The people rise up and follow. They obey the voice of the Lord. They do so because they fear the Lord. Fearing the Lord is a good thing. A holy fear of the Lord is one of the great motivations for holy obedience.

With God's Promise

(v.13)

As the people move to build the house of God, He declares that He is with them. This has to do with His presence. But it more has to do with His poise. He is alongside them, for them, helping them.

By God's Power

(v.14)

God moves to stir up their inner man, their spirit so that they will go the work with a good heart. This is God's grace to them. He stirs them up by the power of His Spirit. They are building a house for the Lord. The Lord takes pleasure in dwelling in and among His people. He will exhibit His glory there.

In our day, God is at work putting the living stones in place so that there is growing up the spiritual temple in which He dwells, in whom He delights and through whom He displays His glory.

That is what this is all about. The present work of ministry in all we do is the work of building up the house of the Lord, His spiritual temple, His people. And there is a present application. We have a work of ministry given to us. We are building up the house of God both through evangelism and through edification. This is work we ought to be doing. But often our own priorities are wrong. We are focused on what we think is important. We spend our money, time and energy on things that seem good now but leave us empty and wondering why.

Folks, we have need to be stirred up by God and enabled by His Spirit to do the work he commands. We need to repent of our false beliefs and wrong treasures. We need to fear God and obey Him.

Yes, there is much that needs to be done. There are lost souls right across street, right across I-75, and right next door to your house. There are believers here who need encouraged, equipped and enabled towards maturity. There are works of ministry to be done here. There are financial needs and ministry strategies and growth hopes.

Are you saying in your hearts, "Not now. I just don't have time or energy or money. After all, I need to get... I have to finish... My children want..."

May God give us the grace of adjusted priorities.

Encouragement - Stop Judging the Work

Ch. 2:1-9

Now it is October. The people have been working hard to obey God and build His house. Now it is the 7th Day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This is an important note. We know from the book of Ezra that the people discovered this feast in the Scriptures and recovered its celebration. It is significant that this feast is pointed out. Israel, having returned from exile, but now living in the times of the Gentiles, is remembering the exodus and anticipating the dwelling of God with His people. All the prophets before, during and after the exile point this indwelling to something greater than a building in Jerusalem. It will be a glorious day for the Messiah will dwell among His people and they in Him with all the Gentiles being gathered in and going up to worship at the holy mountain of God. On the day this is being celebrated, this text takes place. So, in a time when there ought to be rejoicing and anticipation, there is mingled sorrow and discouragement. What is wrong?

Stop Comparing with the Past

(v.1-3)

There are many discouragements in the work. It can be hard work. It can be challenging work. It can be tedious work. People can fail to follow through. There can be a shortage of resources. All of these can make the work of ministry difficult and discouraging.

But God still calls us to be faithful. The need for the moment is endurance and perseverance, just keeping on because God is enabling.

But the word that comes through the prophet to the leaders and the people is not about all these discouragements. There is a kind of discouragement that comes when hopes, expectations, strategies and results are not what as desired. Thus it is a heart issue. It is beliefs framing wants that are not being met. So there were those who were looking with disappointment on the Temple they were building. They remembered the glory of Solomon's Temple.

What was going up now was smaller and lowly and not nearly so grand and glorious.

They were downcast. They were unfavorably comparing past glories with present realities.

Think carefully about this. The very work God commanded and empowered by His Spirit was being disdained because of its smallness.

An only a few were around who remembered, but they were spreading discouraging words with disheartening affect. It is a serious thing to look down on the work God is doing.

And I would suggest that even here at the Chapel. We may not be as big, or flashy or cool as many churches around us.

We may not have the programs some of you would like us to have, or what other churches have.

We must no become disheartened and dissatisfied because we are not what they are.

Solomon's Temple was grand but often filled with carnal worship and corrupt practices. The external greatness or size does not and in fact rarely translates into spiritual maturity. So let's not become discouraged with our work of ministry. Let us be careful that discouragement does not lead to dissatisfaction ending in disdain. Can we do more? Yes, thus the Haggai 1, get to work. Must we watch our hearts for false expectations, hopes and idolatrous desires? Yes, thus Haggai 2, stop disdaining the work.

Continue Working in the Present

(v.4-5)

Here is the exhortation. "Be strong."

- It is said to the leaders.
- It is said to the people.
- But interestingly, it is recorded as being spoken to Joshua, the current high priest.

Anyone familiar with their Old Testaments would have remembered that the former Joshua also received the same exhortation, "Be strong. Be of good courage. For I am with you." He was preparing to conquer the land. Here, they are needing to rebuild the temple.

Jesus comes doing both. He enters the promised land of ministry and begins to call out and build up His house. The promises of God and Spirit of God who enabled the conquest after the deliverance from Egypt, came upon Jesus as He was baptized. He then entered the wilderness testing and then began the conquest.

What a good word for us. See the redemptive-historical trajectory? Israel - to Christ - to us.

"Be strong" to Joshua the warrior, to Joshua the high priest, to Jesus the Messiah, to us, the servants of Christ doing the work of the ministry. So, not only must you turn away from discouraging

comparisons, but you must turn toward your Lord for encouraging words. The communication of God's Word is how God instills what He is providing. When we hear, "Be strong", when we believe that this is God's precept and promise, then we are strong in the Lord to continue to do the difficult work over the long-haul.

Anticipate the Glory of the Promise

(v.6-9)

Now a faith building hope focusing reason to be strong is given.

There is a glory to come for this house that could not compare to the former. There will be glory that is unimaginable to the human mind and unattainable to human effort. God will shake the heavens and earth. He will bring all the nations into His house. For there will come a day when Jesus will walk on earth as the new temple and the fulfillment of the feast of Tabernacles.

What a good word for us. We will focus our faith working through love on a hope set before us. This is a good work of ministry we do. We must be faithful to it and joyful in it. We must be strong in our hearts and in our labors, not discouraged that it is not as grand as others nor as great as we hope.

For this important work is growing into the fulfillment of the promise. The wonder of all God's people coming in, matured through transforming grace and finally one day being glorified and gathered home energizes the hard work now.

So, look forward with hope in such a way that you will work hard and endure much. Do not disdain the day of small things. Long for and lean forward to the day, the glorious day, when all God's promises will be fulfilled.

So, let me leave you with some concluding thoughts.

- God is less interested in our personal comfort than in the ministry's completion.
- We need to carefully evaluate our priorities and engage God's work of ministry. Use your gifts. Be willing to sacrifice. Obey God.
- We must never evaluate God's current blessings with the glories of the past. If He is with us, if He is fulfilling His promises to us, then we must accept it however it appears.
- We must not disparage the work He has given us. We must do the work of ministry by faith through grace for the good of others and His great glory.
- Go to the work. Stop looking down on the work. Anticipate the future glory of the work. Be patient until the fulfillment of the promises. And then, God will fill His house, His people with His glory and bring peace in this place.