

When God Says, 'I Will'

Tell God He Can Wait!

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Heavenly Father, as we turn now to the Scriptures we are once again mindful that holy men wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. We pray that as we study this passage, that you would speak to us, Lord, open our ears, open our hearts, open our eyes, grant us the willingness not simply to hear but also to do what you ask of us. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated.

Turn with me for the last time in this season to Haggai 2 and the closing verses 20 through 23. Next week, God willing, we'll begin our new series on the life of Peter. But this is the seventh and final study of Haggai 2 and beginning at verse 20.

20 The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, 21 "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, 22 and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. 23 On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts."

Well, in the first service over in the Family Life Center, it was as hot as could be and as I was sitting there feeling sorry for myself, I recalled that in the 1800s, early, mid, late 1800s before electricity that that is how our brothers and sisters worshiped every Sunday, in the heart of a South Carolina summer. Soldiers in wartime in the Civil War, wearing woolen uniforms in 98% humidity, unimaginable, unimaginable. Some of you have been following our shenanigans with Fun Friday in the churchyard and if you haven't seen this week's yet, it's probably the best, or at least one of the best. But it has brought to light the fact that history here, good history and bad history, that these are people who lived and who had stories and Zerubbabel 2 ½ thousand years ago in the year 520 BC on December 18, God spoke to him. God gave him a message. It took place in real space and time. This is not, you know, we've got four dates in Haggai beginning in mid-August and ending on

the 18th of December, and on this occasion, Haggai preaches two sermons, on the three other occasions it was just one sermon, so five sermons preached in the course of four months. But this is not fantasy. This is not "Lord of the Rings." This is not "The Hobbit." This is not the "Narnia Chronicles." This is history. This actually happened. It happened to the people of God and it happened for a purpose.

You notice in verse 20, "The word of the LORD came." In English we need a verb, came to be, "The word of the LORD came to be." As Haggai spoke, he was a prophet, he was one of God's prophets and as he spoke, God spoke through him. His words were God's words. God's words were Haggai's words and when Haggai wrote them down, they became part of Scripture that is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Five times in these few verses you have the verb "I will." God says five times, "I will do something." Five times. It's like a hammer striking a nail. There is this situation, there is this context. It's not a good context. It's something of a depressing context but God is about to do something.

You see there in verse 23 a reference to "that day." It's a fairly typical term that the prophets would use. The prophets would spend some of their time looking into the future. They would talk about future events, what we sometimes call eschatology, and sometimes "that day" would still be within the history of the Old Testament. Daniel, for example, speaks of "that day" when there is empires, empires like Persia, and empires like Greece, and empires like the Roman empire will collapse. On other occasions, "that day" refers to the coming of the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies and the birth and life and death and resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus and the inauguration of the new covenant when the old will give way to the new. The law came by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. On that day, but sometimes "that day" refers to the very end, the day of retribution, the day of judgment, the day when the just will be separated from the unjust; the day when the new heavens and the new earth and the fulfillment of all of God's promises will come into effect. There is a day coming, that's the message of these closing verses of Haggai. All of these things may be true but there is a day coming.

He effectively has two things to say. The first is that he will overthrow earthly kingdoms. He will shake the heavens and the earth. We've seen it once before in verse 6 of chapter 2, "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." We interpreted that to mean the coming in of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God, that in the Acts of the Apostles as soon as the apostles turn away from the synagogues, they cross the borders of countries and almost the entire empire of Rome is Christianized, and on and on it goes as God calls his people, his elect, his chosen ones, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." It was a positive message about the ingathering of God's people. But here the message is a little different. "I will shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders and the horses and their riders."

These were intimidating forces to little old Judah that had no army, it had no navy, it had no chariots, it had virtually no horses, it had nothing, it was just a tiny little country and it wasn't an independent country. It was under subjection to the Persian empire. It sounds a little bit like the second Psalm, "Why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain?" And the Psalm goes on to speak of the coming of the Messiah, that God in heaven will laugh against these plotters and schemers against the purposes of God. Well, there's a context here, of course, of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel, and the entire message is given to the governor, Zerubbabel. Little old Judah surrounded as it is by these massive forces, Persia, Greece, Rome, it's as though Zerubbabel was reigning over almost nothing. He was just a little blip on the horizon and facing these gargantuan forces of evil all around him and God is saying, "I am going to shake the heavens and the earth and these forces are going to come tumbling down."

Well, let's bring it into our context. We are surrounded by all kinds of evil forces, atheistic rulers, Marxists with an agenda to obliterate everything that we hold to be precious, scientific humanism, media moguls with agendas, godless pleasure seekers, a network of pedophiles and sex traffickers, and on and on we could go. It seems as though we are perhaps in a moment in history in this country when the very essence of Christendom and its influence upon society, its influence upon the arts, its influence upon morals, its influence upon the rule of law, its influence upon justice in the courts, and everything seems to be at the brink of being wiped out. Do you see what Haggai is saying? A day is coming. He isn't telling us when that day is but he's saying a day is coming, a day of reckoning, a day when the giants of threat against the purposes of God are going to come crashing down. The first time he speaks in chapter 2 in verse 6 of shaking the heavens and the earth, it's a positive thing. Here it's a negative thing. And those who would do harm to the purposes of God, those who would do harm to the church of Christ, those who would do harm to the people of God, those who are bent on destroying everything that is godly, a day is coming, a day is coming.

"I will shake the heavens and the earth." It's the same message that Daniel. Daniel, of course, is before Haggai. He was in Babylon and he's speaking of the Babylonian empire and he sees the various kingdoms that are to come in the next 200-300-400 years and he's saying a day is coming. It's the second half of the prophecy of Daniel. It's the same message that Jesus preaches on the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13 and Luke 21 and Matthew 24 and 25, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed for the end is not yet." But there is an end. There are wars and rumors of wars. Jesus is warning us in the Olivet Discourse. It's the same message that John gives us in the book of Revelation in exile as he was to Patmos, and he sees the tumbling of the beast and the red dragon and Babylon and all the forces of godlessness against the purposes of God, and in the end Jesus is triumphant. That's the message of the book of Revelation, that Jesus wins.

There is mutiny at work to destroy the purposes of God, to obliterate everything that is godly. It's nothing new, of course. In October 10 in 1793, revolutionists entered into Notre Dame in Paris, removed the statue of the virgin Mary and erected a statue to the

goddess of reason. It only lasted a year because the goddess of reason could not agree on the basics of morality and ethics and Napoleon saw that and Napoleon instituted Roman Catholicism as the state religion and, of course, it was entirely under his control. But he understood that without God, without the very basic elements of the 10 Commandments there would be chaos and anarchy.

I've been telling you about Al Mohler's timely book, "The Gathering Storm," and the title, of course, is taken from Churchill's speeches in the early 1930s and speeches that went unheeded with the rise warning of the rise of Nazism and so on and totalitarianism in Germany. Well, we're facing a gathering storm of sectarianism, of secularization, of issues with gender, and issues with sexuality, and issues with power and control of social media, and the courts, and a whole lot else, and what we need, you and I, what the message that is given to this governor in Zerubbabel, interesting that it's the governor that's being singled out here, what we need is faith. What we need is faith. Faith in God. Faith in the only God there is. Faith in God's word. Faith in God's promise. Faith in God's purpose and plan. That's what we need. That's what he's saying to Zerubbabel. Things may look terrible, things may be crumbling all around you, the progress that's being made in the rebuilding of the temple, it's pathetic. In 520 BC in December, it was pathetic. It would take another four or five years to finish this construction, and even then it would look nothing like the temple of Solomon. Things may look dark and dismal, but a day is coming, a day of reckoning.

You need to believe that. You need to believe in God, that God has this, he has it in his control. "Jesus shall reign wherever sun doth it's successive journeys run/ His kingdom stretch from shore to shore until moon shall wax and wane no more." We sing that, Isaac Watts's rendition of the Psalm. But do you believe it, my friend? Do you believe it? You need to interpret the present in the light of the future and not the other way around. If you interpret the future in the light of the present, you will end up with dismay, you'll end up with discouragement, you will end up with disbelief. But you must see the future that God has planned. You must see the future that God has written about and told about again and again and again.

One of the basic fundamental aspects of Christianity is that it says history is linear. It's not cyclical, it's linear. It's heading towards a goal. It's heading towards the eschaton. It's heading towards the regeneration of all things, the demise of the beast and the false prophet and Babylon and all of those aspects that John refers to in the apocalypse, and Jesus will reign. You need to understand that you are on the winning side. When you're on the side of God, you're on the winning side. That's not just a cliché. It's true. Isn't it strange that clichés are often true?

Well, that's the first thing, the demise of the kingdoms that are opposed to God, and then secondly, God has a special word for Zerubbabel in verse 23. God is going to raise up his own servant and he talks about it in this way, "On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring." A signet ring was something that a ruler would have, and when he would write his official documents, pour some hot wax, he would press that

signet ring, it would be like a seal and that whatever that document said was the word of the king. It gave him authority. And he's saying to Zerubbabel, "You have my authority." Now Zerubbabel is nobody. He's a governor, to be sure, but he's a governor of Judah and Judah is almost nothing in comparison to Persia. And he's saying to Zerubbabel, "You may be small in the eyes of the world but I have a special place for you. I have a special plan for you." Isn't that what God often does? He takes the little things of this world, the mean things of this world, the things that the world scoffs at and regards as trivial and of absolutely no consequence, and God comes to them and he says, "You're special." And he's saying that to Zerubbabel.

Now who is Zerubbabel? Ralph Davis somewhere said, and only Ralph Davis could say this, that Zerubbabel and Presbyterianism have one thing in common, that both are hard to spell. That was a typical Ralph Davis quip.

Who is this Zerubbabel? Well, he's the grandson of King Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was the last official king of Judah before they went into captivity in Babylon. Now I know there was another king called Zedekiah but Zedekiah was just a puppet king. He wasn't really a king, he was a puppet king of Babylon, and Zedekiah's two sons were murdered and his eyes were put out and he was led away to Babylon and was never heard of again. Jehoiakim bore much of the blame of that and God said to Jehoiakim, Zerubbabel's grandfather, and it's mentioned in Jeremiah 22, "I will take away from you my signet ring." The same word. Zerubbabel would have known that. He would have known of the prophecy of Jeremiah before the Babylonian exile. He would have read the prophecy of Jeremiah.

What's so important about that? Well, God had made a promise to David that his descendants would always rule and reign over the throne of Judah. He said so in 2 Samuel 7, the so-called Davidic covenant. What happened to that promise? When God said to Jehoiakim, "I will take away the signet ring from you," when God sent Zedekiah off into Babylon never to be heard of again, what happened to that promise? And God is saying to Zerubbabel, "I haven't forgotten the promise that I made. You are my signet ring." He's of the line of King David and what Zerubbabel could hardly have known was that God had a special place for him and a special plan for him.

Turn with me to Matthew 1. Matthew 1 is the genealogy. Matthew 1, Luke 3, the genealogy and Dr. Fluhner was preaching on this genealogy just a few weeks ago, and I've forgotten now which position he takes, there's a difference in the genealogies between Luke and Matthew, we won't go into all the details here, and one possible explanation is that one is the genealogy of Mary and one is the genealogy of Joseph, and I've been studying this for 40+ years and I'm still not sure what to make of it. All I know is that this is the authoritative inerrant word of God. That doesn't mean to say that there aren't difficulties in the Bible.

But turn with me to verse 13. You know, this is the kind of chapter you wouldn't read in your devotional time, you'd just skip over it. "And Zerubbabel," there he is, he's right there, "And Zerubbabel, the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and

Eliakim the father of Azor," and then drop down to verse 16, "and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ."

"Zerubbabel, you may be absolutely nothing in the eyes of this world, in the eyes of Persia you are just a blip, but you are my signet ring." He's giving him an extraordinary blessing that in God's eyes he is special, more special than he ever realized, in fact.

As we've been studying Haggai together, one thing has come out again and again, the providence of God, that God is in charge of history, real history, history of names and rulers and governors and clerics and ordinary people, that kind of history. And Haggai is like Romans 8:28, that God orders all things together for the good of his people. You may be surrounded by forces of gargantuan evil, so big and so large you can't ever imagine how these forces are ever going to be conquered, and God says, "It's just part of my plan. It's just part of my purpose. These may not be good times, these may be bad times, these may be difficult times, these may be testing times, these may be trying times, but I've got this."

You know, outside of that doctrine of providence, what is there? Insurance companies. Confusion. Hostility. Hatred. Death. Disease. Cardboard cities. Tin hut structures. And a hurricane is coming. Did you watch some of those movies of that latest hurricane? How it formed in the Gulf as it moved inexorably towards Louisiana? Powerful. Powerful. Did you see that moment when there were five water spouts just off the coast? Incredible. Never seen anything like it before. Such power, such extraordinary power. But inside in the eye of the storm and some of you saw little movies of when suddenly the wind stopped and the moon came out because they were in the eye of the storm where everything is calm and certain, and inside that doctrine of providence, that's what you've got. No matter what's happening on the outside, on the inside there is certainty and peace and calm and assurance and truth and purpose. Purpose. Yes. "Zerubbabel, I have a purpose for you. There's a purpose in your life."

It's one of the saddest things of all to come across people who have no sense of purpose. They have no idea why they are here or what they're supposed to do and everything is arrayed against them and they're almost suicidal. That's the most difficult thing to imagine and experience and God is saying to Zerubbabel, "I have a plan for you. I have a purpose for you." And sometimes that plan and purpose comes to people in very ordinary and very quiet circumstances and God says to you, "I have a plan for you and you need to trust it, and you need to believe in it. You need to walk with me and talk with me. You need to take my hand and I will lead you through this inexorable evil because a day is coming."

We have lost sight too often of the majesty and sovereignty of God. Every morning I read the headlines, I've been telling you this now for weeks, you probably do the same and you have your app or your news feed or whatever, and you can't bear to read all the details but you just read the headlines and you think, "Can it get any worse?" Oh, it's been worse than this but we are, I think, in a difficult time and I think Haggai has a message for us, to trust in the majesty and the sovereignty of God. There's a day of reckoning coming and you need to be on the winning side. You need to be on God's side.

You need to be on the side of truth, the side of the Gospel, the side of Jesus, the side of Scripture. Well, may God grant it.