

The Best is Yet to Be

Tell God He Can Wait!

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Bible Text: Haggai 2:6-9
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Gracious God and loving heavenly Father, teach us to learn to love thee more. We ask now as the Scriptures are read and proclaimed by the power of the Holy Spirit, write it upon our hearts that we might not just be hearers but doers also of your word. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

Now we are studying together the prophecy of Haggai. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, the third from the end of the Old Testament and we come this morning to chapter 2 and verses 6 through 9, though I'm going to begin to read at the first verse. Haggai 2, beginning at verse 1.

1 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: 2 "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, 3 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? 4 Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, 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, 5 according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. 6 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. 7 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. 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. 9 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."

Amen. May God so bless this word to our hearts.

Now D. L. Moody, the famous 19th century evangelist in Chicago, made a trip to London and Charles Haddon Spurgeon asked him to preach at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He went to Scotland and Andrew Bonar of the Free Church of Scotland asked him to preach. And on the day he died, he died in 1899, just at the turn of the century, and on the flyleaf of his Bible were written these words, "If God is your partner, make your plans large." If God is your partner, make your plans large, and that's exactly what God is saying through his prophet here in the second chapter of Haggai. He wants them to think big or go home and that's part of the problem that Haggai is addressing, of course. This group of people in Jerusalem, some of them perhaps had been in exile, many of them perhaps had been in exile, some of them had remained in Jerusalem, some of them were old enough to actually remember the days when the former temple was still standing, they would be in their 70s, 80s, 90s now and Haggai addresses them and asks them what do they think of the construction process of rebuilding the second temple and many of them would say, "It's nothing in our eyes," and they were sort of poo-pooing the entire effort, saying that the second temple would never be as great as the first one. Well, Haggai has brought them to a conviction, a conviction of their sins, a conviction of their introspection, a conviction of the fact that they had looked after themselves, building fine houses for themselves while the temple lay in ruins. Indeed, called them, not only convicted them but he'd called them to live a life that was worthy of the name of God; to turn around from serving themselves and to serve the living God. He'd also comforted them with the promises that he makes that he will be with them, that his Spirit will be with them, that they need not be afraid because God was a God who made covenant, he made promises, and God's promises can be absolutely and totally relied upon.

Well, last week we saw the call to be strong, to not be afraid, and so now in verse 6 he gives the reason why they need not be afraid and it's important that we actually put some emphasis on that connective in verse 6, "For." You could translate it, "Because. You shouldn't be afraid because. You need to be strong because. I'm going to send my Spirit to you because and because I'm going to do a great work among you, greater than you can ever imagine, greater than these folk in Jerusalem had ever once imagined." The problem was that they were thinking too small.

J. B. Phillips, the translator, the Greek professor, Englishman in the early part of the 20th century, during the second World War and immediately after it, he discovered that children weren't able to understand the King James version of the Bible. Now whatever the merits or demerits of the King James Bible, J. B. Phillips introduced a translation, it was more of a paraphrase than a translation of the New Testament and still of enormous help to this day. I consult it fairly often if ever I find myself in a passage that's somewhat difficult to understand. I often go to J. B. Phillips for a sort of paraphrase to get the gist of what is being said. Well, he also wrote a book and he titled the book "Your God is Too Small." Your God is too small, and that's the challenge that Haggai is now bringing to the people of God in Jerusalem. They need to think big. They need to think much bigger than they have been thinking hitherto.

As we have the interns up here, I was reminded four or five years ago the elders embarked on a plan for the future of the church and ministries and so on, changing some,

adding some and so on, and a plan, a report was made and during the course of that, I was asked to address Dr. Randy Folks who was chairing it, our wonderful Randy Folks, and he asked me for my vision for what it was worth, and I said, "Well, one of the things that I'm amazed about that a church of our size doesn't have, are interns." We had no interns and I was amazed that we didn't have interns and I sort of proposed gently to him, "Two, we should have two interns," and he said, "No, no, no, no, we need eight interns." He quadrupled it there on the spot and here's the fulfillment of it and Dr. Folks, I know you're watching at home, that must have brought a tear to your eye that finally we have eight wonderful interns among us.

Think big or go home. Well, I have three participles that I want to emphasize. The first one is a shaking. Shaking. Verse 6, "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." I was telling the 8:30 service that I've only ever been in two earthquakes, and lo and behold, there was one as we were speaking, or maybe just a few minutes before I spoke. And I actually knew nothing about it so I made no allusion to it at the 8:30 service but I've had probably 35 texts since then of people saying, "There was an earthquake in North Carolina." Jimmy Herlong, who was listening in this morning, texted me and said his house was shaking and how appropriate this text was. God is perfect in his timing. But I remember being in the ministry house across the road the year I came in 2011, I think, and on the fourth floor, and we were swaying back and forth. I'm exaggerating a little now but an earthquake. God is going to shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land and the nations. Some of you will immediately think of Handel's "Messiah," the recitative for the bass voice that's based on this text, and if that melody now is coming into your mind, you'll remember that Handel does an extraordinary thing with the word "shake" because he moves it from one note to another back and forth, as though literally the person singing has to sort of shake this word back and forth. It's an extraordinary thing in music.

Now the verb "to shake" here is a verb that's implied elsewhere in the Old Testament whenever God makes an appearance of himself, what we call a theophany. Passages like the angle of the Lord passages in the Pentateuch, especially in the book of Genesis and so on. And so this shaking is code language for saying that God himself in all of his greatness and majesty is going to come and the effect of his coming is going to be like a shaking, the entire world is going to be shaken. You may be wondering who is in control in the course of history. You may be wondering just now as you read the news every day and every day there seems to be something that just makes you say something bad. You begin to wonder where is this country going as you see what's going on in some of our cities, as you hear the siren voices wanting to cancel the entire culture of our country and nation and world, and it looks as though it's not just here, it's the same everywhere. No matter where you go, you can pick up world news in various countries in the world and they're having a collective moment, and this pandemic, of course, has almost crystallized everything, turned everyone a little bit crazy, and it's as though God is shaking the world. It's as though he's shaking the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land.

Some of us are trying to project when will we ever get back to normal, and somebody chastised me, you know, people do chastise me in this congregation, somebody chastised me after last week's sermon and said, "You know, we will never get back to normal and maybe that's what God's plan is. We don't want normal, we want to grow, we want to improve, we want to do better as God's church." Of course, I agree with all of that. I wonder as we navigate our way back for church, I wonder if one of the things that will happen is that we might lose folk, folk who really didn't have a solid faith. They had a social kind of Christianity and after six months or a year or, God forbid, longer, they may never come back. God is shaking. He's turning everything upside-down. He's saying to little old Israel, tiny little Israel, surrounded as it was by Babylon in the past and now Persia and in the future Greece and Rome, and he's saying to little old Israel, "I've got this. I'm going to shake the heavens and the earth. I'm going to do a work. I'm going to turn the world upside-down and you haven't even got a clue as yet as to the greatness of what I'm about to do." Jesus will say at Caesarea Philippi to Peter, broken Peter who will deny him three times, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Don't you think sometimes as you read the news that the gates of hell have opened up? As you see the riots? As you see the antagonism? As you see the false guilt? As you see the hatred and the accusations? Don't you think the gates of hell have opened up? Well, of course, in some sense this is not new. We've been here before and we'll be here again, but here's the word Haggai is saying to Israel in 520 BC in October of 520 BC. God is building his church. He's shaking everything but he's building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

You've got to think big, so Jesus in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, "Go into all the world." He's saying this to a group of disciples, broken disciples, perishable disciples, and he's saying, "I want you to go into all the world and preach the gospel. I want you to think beyond the borders of Jerusalem. I want you to think beyond the borders of Israel. I want you to go into the whole world." And within 200 years Christianity had conquered the Roman Empire. From a handful of men.

"I'm going to shake the world." It's tempting, isn't it, as we think of this pandemic, whatever you think of it, as you think of it, it sure looks like God is doing a little bit of shaking, don't you think? He's shaking our belief, our faith, our courage. Well, look up and behold your God. Maybe that's your problem, your God is too small. You've gotten into a little foxhole and you're angry and fearful and timid, and you're turning in upon yourselves and Haggai the prophet and God speaking through Haggai the prophet is saying, "Think big or go home."

Have you seen those almond shakers? You know, the nuts? Maybe I pronounce the word "almond" differently from you. I had trouble at the 8:30 service. I'm talking about the nuts they grow in California, billions of dollars worth of almonds. And you can see there's little movies of machinery, I love watching little movies of machinery, they fascinate me. And so this machine comes in, it's like a tractor, but it comes in and this skirt, this curtain thing goes all the way around the tree to catch the almonds, and then it grabs hold of the limb of that tree and then it just shakes it, and all those almonds just drop down. Well, that's what God is doing. Some of you know what I'm talking about.

God is shaking. I've been reading Al Mohler's "The Gathering Storm." Well, it's depressing so don't read it if you don't want to get depressed, but it's also terribly terribly realistic, and the analysis of what's going on in the world of politics and education and free speech and the First Amendment and civility and marriage and many other things, God is shaking the world and he's shaking this country right now.

Now this verse, verse 6, it's quoted in Hebrews 12 and the author of Hebrews says that there are things that are shakable and they're going to be removed, and there are things that are unshakable that can never be taken away. What kind of things? Things like the gospel. Things like Jesus. Things like the forgiveness of sins that is to be found by faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. Things like the kingdom of God. Things like the church that Jesus is building. There are things that are unshakable, that can never be shaken, and so what is the conclusion of the author of Hebrews in verse 28 of Hebrews 12? "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken." That's it. Let us be grateful when everything around us is being shaken, when the world of politics and education and the family and gender and everything else is being tossed into the air, there are things that are unshakable. Our faith in Jesus Christ. The God who is and was and is to come. The rock-solid unshakability of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us be grateful amidst all of this shaking. Let us be grateful for things that cannot be shaken.

Well, the second word. If the first word is "shaking," the second word is "in-gathering," and I'm referring now to the second half of verse 7, "so that the treasures of all nations shall come in." Now there's a little bit of a dispute here about the translation because in the Hebrew text the noun "treasure" is actually in the singular, but the verb "shall come in" is in the plural, and we won't go into all of the details but some interpret this therefore and translate this that the treasure of all nations shall come in, and that the treasure here refers to Jesus. Think of Charles Wesley's Christmas carol, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," and there's a stanza in that Christmas carol that refers to Haggai 2:7 and it interprets the treasure as the coming, the Incarnation and coming of the Lord Jesus. The problem with that is that Isaiah 53 seems to be saying the very opposite, that when Jesus came he was not the desire of the nations, "He has no form, no comeliness that we should desire him." John 1 in the prologue tells us of the initial ministry of Jesus, "He came unto his own and his own received him not." So he wasn't looked at as the treasure of the nations and therefore others interpret this, and I think correctly and it's the ESV translation, it puts it in the plural in the form of a collective. What is the treasures? What does it refer to? Well, it's you and me, the Gentiles of the world. He was talking to little old Israel 520 years BC in ravaged Jerusalem. They were nothing. They were just a dot on the map and God is saying, "I want you to think big or go home. The treasures of the nations are going to come in. Go into all the world and preach the gospel." Do you know where the gospel is growing fastest right now, where the church of Christ is growing fastest right now? It's in places like Africa and in the Far East in places like Indonesia, places you wouldn't even imagine. God is shaking the world but he's bringing, he's in-gathering, he's gathering his elect, he's gathering his people, all those whose names are written on the book of life. He's gathering them in. The treasures of the nations.

I love that hymn, I know you do too. It's one of our favorite hymns here. We didn't sing it today but William Walsham How's hymn, "For All the Saints who from their Labors Rest," and those closing verses,

"But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on his way.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Alleluia! Alleluia!"

Do you see the picture? It's the picture of all the saints from all the ages, from all over the world, from different ethnicities, men and women and boys and girls, and they're streaming through those gates of pearl to sing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost, "Alleluia! Alleluia!" An in-gathering.

"Ask of me and I will give you the uttermost parts of the world for your inheritance," Jesus says. Think big or go home. Think beyond the boundaries of First Presbyterian Church. Think beyond the boundaries of Catawba Presbytery. Think beyond the boundaries of the AARP. And think of God's purpose in the entire world throughout all of time. God is going to do a shaking but in the course of that shaking he's going to gather together his fruit. There's going to be a harvest and a mighty harvest beyond your imagination.

Well, if the first word was "shaking" and the second word was "in-gathering," the third word is "filling," and you see it there in verse 7, "I will fill this house with glory." Then in verse 9, "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." You know, the second temple when it was completed round about 516, four years or so into their future from where we are right here, and there was something about the second temple that never matched the glory of the first temple. There was no Shekinah glory in the Holy of Holies. The ark of the covenant was not there, it had been taken by the Babylonians. Who knows where it went. The contents of the ark, the two tablets of stone containing the 10 Commandments given to Moses. The Urim and Thummim, whatever they were, were no longer there. There was something lacking about the second temple. It's as though God purposed it to be so that they would long for greater glory, but that greater glory was not by looking back to the first temple, it was by looking forward.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory." In the Incarnation of Jesus, in the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity something of the glory of God shone through him. The glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ, that glory. This word "glory" is code for God's

greatness and majesty made, put on display. That's what glory means. It means something of the greatness of God, the transcendent greatness of God is put on public display. "I'm going to put it on public display."

Yes, I think he's thinking of the coming of Jesus but I think he's thinking beyond that, the glory that will be part of the new heavens and new earth. You haven't seen anything yet. Some of you are old enough to remember, goodness, it would be the late 1950s, early 1960s, Frank Sinatra, "The best is yet to come." Do I have one taker for that? The best? We have two, three. Good. The best is yet to come. Or you ain't seen nothing yet.

Do you see what Haggai is doing? Do you see what God is doing to little old Israel? He's saying to them, "I need you to think beyond the boundaries of what you're doing now. This is part of a great redemptive plan that God has but it's going to end with glory. It's going to end with magnificence. Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those that love him." Imagine next time you're watching the news and you hear something and you just want to break the television, imagine the choir, imagine our wonderful choir singing,

"God is working his purpose out,
As year succeeds to year,
God is working his purpose out,
And the time is drawing near;
Nearer and nearer draws the time,
The time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,
Wherever feet have trod,
By the mouth of many messengers
Goes forth the voice of God,
'Give ear to me, ye continents,
Ye isles, give ear to me,
That the earth may be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea."

Let's grab our despondency by the scruff of the neck and throw it where it belongs, and see what Haggai is saying to us, "Open your eyes to what God is doing. Don't look at the horizontal. Look up and behold your God in all his greatness and power. He is coming again. He is coming again on the clouds and the glory that he brings will make everything else that you've seen or ever experienced pale into insignificance."

Father, we thank you, thank you for this eye-opening vision that Haggai gave in that year 520 BC. May it be ours today and in the week ahead. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.