

From Rubble to Royalty

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Date: 10 June 2018

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[0 : 00] Good evening. We're going to turn to our Bible reading now, and we're finishing off the little prophet of Haggai this evening. So please turn that up in your Bibles. It's the third last book of the Old Testament, just before Zechariah. And we're going to read the last four verses, Haggai chapter 2, reading from verses 20 to 23.

The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the 24th day of the month. Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdom of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders shall go down, everyone by the sword of his brother. 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.

Amen. This is God's word. Do turn again in your Bibles to Haggai chapter 2.

When I look at a beaten up piece of property, I can only see how terrible it looks. I don't have the vision to see what it once was, or more importantly, what it could become.

Now, I do love seeing a property that has been transformed from a shell that's needed serious attention through to a beautiful restored building. But some people can walk into a building and think instantly about what they would do to improve it. They've got a vision of what they would want it to look like. They can see through all the work that needs to be done, all the mess that there is, all the wallpaper that needs to be scraped, the disheveled ceiling that needs to be fixed, what walls ought to come down, all the rest. And they know how to turn what is drab and dreary into something delightful. They have a vision for what can come of it.

[2 : 25] Whereas others like me will walk in and be dispirited by the state of things. And the potential of it is lost on us. Without the vision of where it's heading, the work seems too much.

And that's what we need at points. We need to have our vision extended beyond the immediate to see what is going to happen. What the future is going to look like. And that's how Haggai comes to a close. The word of the Lord speaks again and the restoration community are given a grand vision of what lay ahead, potentially in the immediate future, but certainly in the ultimate future.

Before we look at the two parts to that grand vision, let's just remember the setting that Israel found themselves in as this restoration community. Israel's glorious past where God's kingdom was obvious and flourishing when they were under David and then Solomon, the days of the great temple, the great prosperity in the promised land, that had all fallen apart. The land divided between a northern kingdom under Jeroboam and a southern kingdom under Rehoboam. And from there, it only spiraled even more as eventually both kingdoms are taken into exile and there's no king in Israel. The temple was destroyed, the people captured, and it was a disaster. The kingdom of God on earth looked like it was finished. What about all those great covenant promises? Had Israel's rebellion, their constant refusal to listen to God, had that voided God's covenant promises? It certainly seemed that way until the restoration community had this opportunity to rebuild, thanks to Cyrus and Darius. There was hope once again that God's kingdom might be established, even if that hope was just flickering. For Israel to be truly restored, there were great obstacles. We've seen that the temple being rebuilt was one of those, but there were other obstacles too. There was, they were under the rule of the Persians. They were not their own nation, and there was no king, only a governor. And so the people needed to have a vision of what the restoration was achieving, because to them it looked pretty average, pretty disappointing.

They need to see what they're building for and building towards, just like the person who sees clearly the potential of a property. The vision of the end is what aligns each step of the process.

The vision of what it will look like is what keeps you going as the project is undertaken. And we too need to know that our hope and that our labors to spread the gospel are not in vain.

[5 : 09] And so the vision that Haggai gives the people of God, both in his own day and to us, is firstly, verses 20 to 22, the enemies of God defeated. The enemies of God defeated. And then secondly, in verses 23, the enthronement of the greater David. So first, verses 20 to 22, the enemies of God defeated, there can only be and will only be one winner at the climax of history. It will be God and with him his people. All the great acts of God rescuing his people in history are pictures of what God will ultimately do in overthrowing this world. Israel were still subjugated to a foreign power, and so this was a necessary hope for them. When the world seems to be against God's kingdom, we can often think, will it continue, never mind flourish? And that's the hope that we need to live as aliens and strangers in this world that's determined to dismantle anything in our society that has God at its center. And so verse 20, the word of the Lord came again to his people through

Haggai, and that comes on the same day as the prophecy we looked at last week. The great culmination of that prophecy in verses 10 to 19 is that God is waiting to bless his people. He spelt out to them how things were when they went their own way and ignored him. It was curses. But from the very day that they nailed their colors to the mast, from the day that they turned to God's way and listened to him, from the very day that they heard and responded to God's word, verse 19, I will bless you from that day on. And that was imminently about the harvest that they were anticipating. But now we see that that blessing will, what that blessing will mean in the fullness of time. It will look like verse 21. God shaking the heavens and the earth. God is going to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. He's going to destroy the strength of kingdoms, overthrow the chariots and the riders, the horses and the riders shall go down, everyone by the sword of his brother.

We've already seen that God will shake the world at the start of chapter two, as he plans to elevate the latter glory of the temple. But the shaking is more than that. I once heard a preacher describing where he came from and explaining that it wasn't a particularly nice part of the country. I shan't say where that is. But he said that there was once a small earthquake and because of the state of where he was from, the earthquake actually improved it.

That is tongue in cheek, of course. But when we think of tremors and great shaking, we think of its destructive and chaotic aftermath. Of course it didn't improve his town or city. But what we read here is that God is going to shake the world and bring not disorder, but order.

That's what the shaking in verses six and seven was ultimately going to do. And with all the other descriptions here, it is again what will happen. God shaking the earth will be to establish his unshakable kingdom. The shaking will get rid of all that is corrupt, all that is wrong, all that is in opposition to God and his people. And the rest of the language that we see in these two verses is used deliberately to hark back to historic triumphs that God has brought.

[8 : 51] There's a recap of God's previous triumphs for his people throughout the Old Testament. Look at verse 22, the use of the word overthrowing. This harkens back to Sodom, a city that was set on wickedness, that was in complete and absolute opposition to God and his ways, and one in which they couldn't even find ten righteous men.

So God overthrew the city. He defeated those who were enemies to him and his people. So too will God ultimately overthrow the throne of all kingdoms that oppose him and his people.

Verse 22 again, he says, I'm about to destroy the strength of the kingdom of nations. The words used by God to Israel in Deuteronomy, when he was promising to give the land to his people, he said, God would give them over and throw them into confusion until they were destroyed.

No one will be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them. The Lord your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you.

Just as God was the conqueror of the promised land, just as he promised to destroy his and his people's enemies, so he did. As he began the conquest, he appeared as their commander and ensured victory over the Canaanites.

[10 : 15] He promised this and he delivered it, even though the Canaanites had great chariots of iron, even though they looked mighty. And God says, I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders.

But it wasn't just the Canaanites who had faced this. You might recognize the phrase, the horses and the riders will go down, just like the massive army of Pharaoh that was sent down into the depths of the sea so that Israel could sing this song.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. This is my God and I will praise him. The Lord is a man of war. Pharaoh's chariots and his host he has cast into the sea. The floods covered them. They went down into the depths like a stone. In the greatness of your majesty, you overthrew. And finally, the last phrase in verse 22.

Everyone will face this by the sword of his brother. Just like when Gideon and the day of the judges oversaw victory over Midian, comrades turned upon each other with their own swords.

[11 : 27] The same thing happened with Saul and the Philistines. What Haggai is telling us here is that God has a history. A rich history. And it is a history of defeating his enemies.

And bringing victory for his people. It's a history of bringing victory for his kingdom. And what Haggai is saying is that all of these past victories are shadows of the great overturning, the great shaking, the great establishing of God's unshakable kingdom.

That is what God is going to do. And now as the remnant faced up to the reduced status of Israel and this restoration, as they lived life at the whim of a global superpower, this was a necessary reminder that God holds all nations in his hand.

God holds all nations in his hand. Even when God's people are put under the most intense or severe persecution, that will not change the outcome of history.

Just as the reduced and meager circumstances of Israel here didn't void God's purposes. Israel might have asked, will we live forever as subjects of this foreign power?

[12 : 44] Well, this is God's emphatic answer. Now there are glimpses. Now they've already seen glimpses that God has been working to this end already.

There's been minor shaking, we could call it. The Babylonians have been replaced by the Persians. And that's what's allowed them to return to the land at all. But this is a much grander promise than just their immediate situation.

God holds the fiat of nations in his hands. And ultimately, all who oppose him, all who stand in the way of his kingdom progressing, all who stand in the way of his people, are his enemies.

And the day is coming where God will finally shake the world and overthrow those enemies. We might look around and despair at the world around us, a world that revels in abortion to the point there's wild celebrations when it's legalized.

We might look around and see that our society wants to unman man in any way possible, and so with it, de-God-God. We might look further afield and see the growing physical hostility that our gospel partners around the world face, like in Delhi.

[14 : 00] We might see others who have to go to church with armed guards in Pakistan. We might look around and see that Christianity in the West is in serious decline.

I was talking to someone just this week at the conference who told me that a change in legislation in the country they were working in meant that their church was reduced by two-thirds because persecution was now a real possibility.

In the face of all of this, what hope do a small number of gospel churches in Scotland really have of keeping going, never mind expanding and building?

What hope do we have, as no doubt legislation will come soon that makes life more difficult for us as Christians? Maybe down the line, it might even make it excruciatingly hard.

Well, any power, any government, any group or person that sits in opposition to God and sits in opposition to His people will ultimately come to nothing.

[15 : 03] We aren't the people who need to fear. The world is. The testimony of all that God has done in the past in faithfulness to His promises and faithfulness to His people is drawn together here in Haggai and harnessed as proof, as evidence of the coming fruition of the greater salvation that is to come, of the final defeat of all that is evil.

This is not just ancient history for Israel or for us. It is the model through which we can see a bright future. All those ancient victories that Haggai cites here are a model through which we can see what will happen in a grander, bigger, better way.

Wickedness, evil, corruption, all that is wrong will come to a very drastic end. God wins in the end. No matter how unlikely that looks now, the might of Pharaoh was put down, the chariots of Canaan were crushed.

None of those stand a chance. He will stand in victory over all His enemies. He will eradicate all evil. He will overthrow all that opposes Him. And as He does this, His people will be with Him, sharing in all that it means.

He will raise His grace upon His people so that they will have rescue and resurrection and rest. We might feel like we're clinging on, like we're dying out, like we're going to be overcome, but our future is as sure as the exodus and the conquest and all the other great saving acts of history as real as they are so is this wonderful future when the lord returns and just as the enemies of god are defeated so too will there be the enthronement of the greater david verse 23 the enthronement of the greater david israel might have wondered if the covenant with david had been trampled underfoot that was the cry of the psalm we began singing this evening how long oh lord is it forever that you have turned away israel is now but a little backwater there's no throne where is the king of israel all we had now was as a descendant of david was a puppet governor but god assures his people that the greatest david will rule the world ultimately forever god's covenant with david still stands of course it does look at verse 23 on that day declares the lord of hosts i will take you o zerubbabel my servant and make you like a signet ring for i have chosen you now israel might have good reason to question the restoration in the place of the king after all back in jeremiah it looked like the descendants of david would be cast off forever coniah king of judah was called a signet ring on god's right hand and god said that he would tear the ring off and give coniah into the hands of the babylonians and it was through the babylon through the babylonians that the line of david was cut off from the throne that had happened there was no king there was no descendant of david on the throne but now god says that this has been reversed god reaffirms his commitment to his covenant with david through his descendant through zerubbabel look at how zerubbabel is addressed in verse 23 oh zerubbabel my servant that's a title that was used regularly of david and god is making clear that he is again setting up david's line it is no surprise that the restoration of david's line is linked to the temple when the covenant with david was made it was as david declared his intention to make a temple for god that god promised that his line would reign forever zerubbabel is proof that the line of david stands as sure as zerubbabel is in the midst of israel so sure would there be a king that reigns forever from david's line that's what god's promising here and turn over to matthew chapter one this is the genealogy that leads through to the birth of jesus look at verse 12 and 13 there is zerubbabel smack bang in the middle of the family line of jesus there's zerubbabel smack bang in the line of the greater the ultimate king in david's line the lord jesus himself israel could be assured that through zerubbabel god's covenant stood they were not aimlessly going about their work god was still very much in it god was still very much committed to his kingdom zerubbabel was another significant cog in the history of salvation that leads all the way through to jesus

[20 : 25] god's choosing of zerubbabel in this way is not a mere token thing it wasn't simply to fix eyes to the ultimate future although it certainly does that but it was another reassurance of god's commitment to the people there and then that what they were doing was paving the way the signet ring was a seal of god's authority of god's presence with his anointed it was the thing that would authenticate the true king of the true people of god and here in this day of small things when the situation looked bleak zerubbabel was faithful in doing what god asked he led the people in repentance chapter one he has overseen the foundation being laid as they rebuild the temple and that obedience was not wasted even when it looked like nothing was going to happen because god is committed to his work and this passage assures israel that the work of the kingdom is always of eternal significance no matter what external circumstances look like zerubbabel in his present faithfulness was playing his part in the unfolding story of the gospel and as israel responded to god's word he reminds them and reassures them that their faith is looking forward to the day of the final gospel declaration the declaration of god's final victory in battle satan and all the powers and principalities of this world will be overthrown and they'll be overthrown by the one who was ultimately spoken of in the covenant with david the lord said to david your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me your throne will be established forever and jesus is the king who is going to reign forever so how much more can we be sure of what awaits how much more can we be sure that god is in the work that we have to do that god is committed to his kingdom the shaking has begun the earth was shaken at his death through an earthquake it was shaken at his resurrection as a stone was rolled away but when he returns to claim his final victory that is when the great shaking of kingdoms and thrones will take place and nothing will stop him no liberal ideology no atheistic manifesto no rival religious state no government no king no dictator no alliance of nations will stand in the way of jesus claiming a victory that we can share in jesus has been raised up to sit in the place of highest honor he is the great king the fulfillment of all that the prophets spoke of and not only is he now the true temple but he's the true king at the end of jesus

earthly ministry he was given such a title he was given a crown he was bowed down to he was clothed in purple robes in a palace before taking to his earthly throne but that was all in mockery his title was king of the jews as they mocked it was a crown of thorns and his earthly throne was a cross but Jesus is coming back as the true king and it won't be in the humble state of as erubible or even as his first coming he is coming back in glory and the whole world will know it there will be no mockery at that point and no appearance of weakness only victory it will be the denouement the zenith the climax of all of world history

and all that God has promised to do Jesus will sit on the forever throne that was promised to David and in so doing he will turn the oppression that his people knew he will turn the feelings we have when we're marginalized mocked opposed he will turn them all upside down ending them forever the Israelites of Haggai's day had the task of rebuilding a temple that was going to be a shadow of what had gone before struggling to believe that what they were doing mattered because there was no king perhaps that's how we feel about life now as a church as we seek to reach Scotland with the gospel or even just the street we live on the world overwhelms the struggle to get through another week seems too much well Haggai has given us a vision of what we're building towards and the work of the kingdom is always of eternal significance no matter what external circumstances look like for Zerubbabel it was through clearing rubble it was through getting bricks ready to lay that he was told that he would be the person through whom the royal line of David would be restored it was through faithfulness with rubble that God turned his people's eyes to see the final picture maybe when you think of serving the church you see it like I see a dilapidated building when you think of what you do to share the gospel it just seems like it has little potential how can I never make a lasting difference in this world that's so against us perhaps you think that the size of the task is too big and our tools are too limited well God gives us here a glimpse at the final masterpiece of what he will do what he will do in the end and so he invites us to take part assured that it will happen and that any obstacles any opposition will be dealt with the small and at times we might even think puny work that we do now in faithfully serving the Lord will be proven to be cosmically significant in the end every hour lovingly devoted every person invested in every conversation conducted that carries the aroma of Christ every book bought and given away every child taught every painfully slew translation of a verse of the Bible attempted every pound sacrificially given every ministry prayed for every act of service for brothers and sisters every lift offered every welcome lavished are all investing in this future which can't be touched which can't be spoiled which can't be done away with and all of these things display our faith in what God is going to achieve

God gives us a vision of his masterpiece so that we can be assured that all that is done for him will not be shaken away but looks ahead to his coming Amen let's pray Father we thank you for the magnificent grace that you've displayed through these verses and all that you've promised that at the last day on that day you will achieve victory for all those who belong to you that will share in all that Jesus has done and all that Jesus has won so encourage us with this we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen