

The Unshakeable Kingdom

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now to our Bible reading for this morning, and Kerr is finishing his short series in Haggai. So please do, if you don't have a Bible with you, we've got plenty of Bibles around the place at the side, so do grab a Bible.

And turn with me to Haggai. It's near the end of the Old Testament. If you are in Matthew's Gospel at the beginning of the New Testament, just flick back a few pages and you'll find yourself between the two Zs, between Zephaniah and Zechariah, you'll find tucked away Haggai.

So page 791, if you have a visitor Bible. So Haggai, and we're reading chapter 2.

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.

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, Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?

[1 : 18] How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? 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, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt.

My spirit remains in your midst, fear not. 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.

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.

The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts.

[2 : 22] And in this place, I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts. On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.

Thus, says the Lord of hosts, Ask the priests about the law. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priests answered and said, No. Then Haggai said, If someone who is unclean by contact with the dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?

The priests answered and said, It does become unclean. Then Haggai answered and said, So it is with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands.

And what they offer there is unclean. Now then, consider from this day onward, before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare?

[3 : 28] When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you, and all the products of your toil, with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord.

Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider, is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have yielded nothing.

But from this day on, I will bless you. The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth 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 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. On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Sheaziel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.

[4 : 54] Amen. May God bless to us his word this morning. Well, please do turn back in your Bibles to Haggai chapter two.

And as you turn there, let me tell you about an online shop called Wish.com. Now, Wish.com sells everything. And they sell everything at about the lowest price you could possibly imagine.

Some of it is just obviously too good to be true. For example, you can find a gold diamond ring for two pounds, twelve pence.

You see, the expectation of what you order online and what arrives on your doorstep is often very different.

We saw last week in Haggai chapter one that God was stirring the hearts of his people by his word to labor for his kingdom. The task they had ahead of them was huge.

[5 : 52] They were returning to a desolate, a ruined city to rebuild the temple, to restore right worship of God. And they'd been opposed in that work.

The people of the lands all around had conspired to see that work stopped. But, we saw that God graciously came through Haggai to bring his word to his people to stir their hearts.

He got them to see that their priorities were twisted and to get on with the building work to restart.

But, it's not plain sailing from there on in.

It's as though the people still have a lingering concern in their mind as they go about building. Is this going to be a wish.com temple?

Is this really going to be as glorious as the glory days of Solomon's temple? When people from all around the nations came to be in the midst of God's people, is it going to be like that?

[7 : 03] Or is it really going to be a bit of a disappointment? Well, the answer which God gives to such thoughts lifts the eyes of the people in Haggai's day and lifts our eyes today to see reality.

To see that the kingdom that God is building is eternally glorious. For, despite appearances, God is building that kingdom, his kingdom, through us, through his people, through the church today.

So, beginning verses one to nine, we see that we, God's people, are to fear not, for God is with us in building his eternally glorious kingdom.

Now, the date there in verse one means that it's been about a month since they restarted the building work. And if you've seen a big building site a couple of months in, you'll know that things tend to look a whole lot worse than when they started.

Foundations are being dug, there's materials lying all around, it's a bit of a mess. But the Lord's timing really is perfect. He speaks at this moment as things would have looked at their most messy, their least glorious.

[8 : 23] And this month, the seventh month as well, was the time of the Feast of Booths. The time when God's people remembered how they had been rescued from Egypt and how they had come to live in tents in the wilderness.

Remember last week we saw that the people's houses, they were finished, they were complete while the temple still lay in ruins. And so this, this ought to have been another encouragement to them to get on with the work in front of them, to do the work of rebuilding.

It should have reminded them why they were even doing this in the first place. It was so that God could come and dwell in their midst. Now look at the question asked in verse 3.

God asked this question. He gets to the very heart of one of the issues they faced as they went about the work. Verse 3, Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?

Who was alive? Who remembers the old temple? Well, there would have been a number who lived during the time of the old temple who remembered it. And many, many more would have heard stories from parents and grandparents.

[9 : 38] The question is, how do you see it now? How do you see it now? Haggai is addressing the very heart attitude of some. The heart attitude that said, the past, the past was so much better.

Solomon's temple, it was the real deal. Now we just have a weak looking ruin in the middle of a messy building site. I do notice that it's God who starts this conversation.

He knows the hearts of his people, he knows our hearts. And his words here, they cause the people to face up to how they actually feel. How they actually feel about the work that they're involved in.

And we do need to do that too. Does the work of the church sometimes feel a whole lot less glorious than we expect it to?

Do we sometimes worry that what we're involved in isn't the real deal? Where glory, where eternity are at stake? Well, we do not need to wish these questions away.

[10:45] No, God raises these questions, he brings them to the fore because he has the answers which more than satisfy such doubt, such concerns. But, we must be prepared to listen to his answers.

To see that our kingdom work together as a church is no small thing. Verse 4, be strong. God is pledging that he is with his people in this work.

He's with us according to, verse 5, the covenant. According to the bond sealed in blood with his people. This echoes the language of Joshua when God spoke as the people were to go in to conquer the promised land.

God said then, be strong, fear not, as they went about that key kingdom work of going in and conquering the promised land. God. And so, he uses the same language here.

This is no small thing. This is a key kingdom work. And God is always, always with his people as they go about working for his kingdom.

[11:58] See, the great fear of the people was that God was absent. The temple lay in ruins. He couldn't possibly be here. But now, God is pledging even without the temple, he is in their midst.

With enemies and opposition all around, God's people can get on with the task in front of them, knowing that he is with them. And his answers to their concerns over a seeming lack of glory is a real answer.

kingdom work, church work, might not look all that glorious now, but God is in it. God is with us, his people, and that makes it eternally glorious.

It can be tempting for us, even for the young amongst us, to look back or hear back to the supposed glory days of the church. Like those in Haggai's day, they look to the glory of the first temple.

We can look back to the time when the church was supposedly respected in the world, when it was held in honour by society. Well, Haggai too teaches us that it is not our job to look backwards, but to look forwards in faith.

[13:14] To trust that perhaps despite how things look, the Lord has promised that he is building a glorious kingdom. we are to trust him.

We are to get on with the work in front of us knowing that any labour for his kingdom will never be in vain. And so as we meet here week by week, as we bring praise to the king of the universe, as the children are taught in junior church, as we witness together as a church, it may not look all that glorious all the time, but God is in our midst.

And that means that as people come into our midst, they are being saved for eternity. The work of the church is of cosmic, of eternal significance.

Because we are not building for ourselves, no, the creator, the sustainer, the king of the whole cosmos has given us the privilege of playing a part in his building work for his kingdom.

And verses 6 to 9 get some more of that glory across to us. Haggai takes us from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the shaking of all heaven and earth in the coming of God's kingdom.

[14:42] The picture is of God shaking all of creation. What will that look like? Well, verse 7, this shaking, it will affect the nations and it will, in fact, the whole universe.

Indeed, God will turn the whole of creation upside down. The nations who had plundered Jerusalem, who had taken all their treasures from the temple, who had claimed it as their own, they will be turned around.

Their treasure will come into the house of God so that it will fill the house with glory. Just imagine it, Buckingham Palace emptied, the crown jewels gone, the tombs of Egypt plundered, every precious museum piece in the world showing that the house of God is the eternally glorious place.

because it all belongs to the Lord. And this literally happened in a small way in Haggai's day as the people went about their rebuilding work of the temple.

Darius, the emperor of Persia, gave from his own treasuries to see that temple built. But the picture which is given here is far bigger than that. Not the treasuries of one nation, but the treasures of the whole world.

[16:08] And we know that because, verse 9, God promises the latter glory will be greater than the former. Remember, one of the great challenges the people had as they went about this work was

that they feared it looked so small.

They feared it looked so weak. It felt much less glorious than what Solomon had done. But the house of God here stands for the temple all the way through its history.

And the glory of the Lord was ever only seen partially in the temple. For how could a temple made of stone ever contain the fullness of God's glory?

Now the glory of the Lord is seen fully and finally and forever in the person of the Lord Jesus who is the true temple. Notice that we're told the temple will be a place of peace.

No longer will war and bloodshed and plundering fill its space. It will be a place of true peace. A place of restored relationship with God.

[17:20] And where do we see that? But in Christ himself. The writer to the Hebrews picks up exactly this theme as he writes in chapter 12 describing a final shaking of all of creation resulting in a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

The new creation, the heavenly Jerusalem. Therefore, says the writer, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship. friendship. And so as we go about our kingdom work, which often feels not very glorious, often feels small, we can fear not for God's kingdom.

God's kingdom is eternally glorious. But what qualifies you or I to be involved in the most glorious task in the world of serving God's kingdom together?

Well, that's what we're going to see in the rest of this chapter as the Lord shows us that it is only his blessing which can qualify us to enter this holy calling of being his people, of being the church today.

[18:37] Look at verses 10 to 19 where we see the need to beware for holiness is not contagious. It seems as though in verse 11 we've taken our hard hats off, we're off the building site and we're into some unhygienic kitchen.

The word of the Lord comes again to Haggai and he speaks to the people telling them to ask the priests, if someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

It seems like a bizarre riddle. What's going on? What is Haggai saying? What is the Lord saying? Well, let's follow the image together.

Someone, anyone, one of the people is carrying holy meat. That's likely meat that was to be used in sacrifice. And so you can imagine them going up to the temple.

And the hypothetical situation is set up. The meat is touching the fold of the garment and it perhaps flaps. and touches some bread or some stew or some oil or any kind of food.

[19:46] What happens to what it touches? Does it catch the holiness of the meat? Does it become holy? Well, look at the end of verse 12.

The priests answer, no. holiness, the set apartness for God of the meat is not contagious. It doesn't spread by contact.

Now, this is a Q&A; which is building. We need to stick with it. Verse 13. Haggai asks another question. If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?

Now, at the time, to touch a dead body made one unclean, made them unable to enter the temple until proper cleansing had taken place.

And again, the end of verse 13, the priest answers, it does become unclean. And I think we can track with that logic. Imagine you've got a clean white shirt.

[20:52] If it goes in a bag and rubs up against a mud stained football strip, it doesn't make the strip clean. No, it's much more likely to get mud on it itself. And yet the people, they have to ask the priests these questions.

The suggestion is that the priests have not been teaching the people. They've not been teaching them how holiness and uncleanness work, how to approach God rightly.

And that is a terrible thing. When those God has given his people to teach them fail to do so. Very often it's when the priests fail to fulfill their duty that God sent a prophet like Haggai to speak to his people.

And the church today, it becomes weak, it becomes ineffective if it's not properly taught from God's word by those given that responsibility. So Haggai, he was seeking to reestablish the right duty of the priests, to teach God's law, to teach the people how to approach him.

And the summary of this Q&A; has brought out this key teaching which the people needed to grasp. And the headline is this, holiness is not contagious.

[22 : 13] Holiness is not contagious. Verse 14, Haggai says, so it is with this people and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands.

And what they offer is unclean. See, the people think that by engaging in religious activity, by being involved in building the temple, by bringing offerings that they will be made holy.

But an unholy people do not become holy by merely being near holy meat, near holy places, near holy people. Israel, God's people, had been chosen by him.

They had been set apart by God. But now the nation and everything it touches is unclean.

They thought that by rebuilding everything would go well, that they would become holy just because of that. But holiness was then and is today always a matter of the heart.

[23 : 25] We can think that we'll become God's people merely through religious activity, merely being in and around the church, hearing, reading the Bible.

Now, wonderfully, wonderfully, these are the normal things that God uses to bless us, to be gracious to us. but they work only because God is in them and God has chosen to bless us through them.

They don't work on their own apart from God, as if holiness is some contagious thing that you catch like a cold. God is in God. And how often we can be like the people in Haggai's day, having divided hearts, giving much of our time and talent and treasure to serve God's kingdom, but then withhold a particular aspect of our life, thinking that what we withhold will not taint, will not impact, will not ruin the rest.

It could be a romantic relationship that drives everything we do, and we think that God's word about who we should marry, well that doesn't matter, we can ignore that.

It could be our money, which we say is none of God's business. It could be a whole host of other things, careers and hobbies, some corner of our life which we mark off and say this is just for me.

[24 : 55] I'm willing to give lots, willing to serve lots, but I'm withholding this, this is for me. But if we do that, if we act like that, then it shows that our response to God can be divided, not wholehearted.

No, we do not want some lucky charm religion where we hold on to some practice, some ritual, somewhere we go that we think on its own will make us God's people. By God's grace, he does give us things and people and places to encourage us in the Christian life, to keep us going, to extend his grace to us.

But these things in and of themselves, they don't make us his people. No, the Lord wants the people to again see reality, to consider how are things going.

verse 15, how are things going? Well, the picture is of a frustrating and of a fleeting life. They come to draw wine and there's less than half what there should be.

The Lord, verse 17, has struck his people with blight, with mildew, with hail. You see, the people continue to think that their proximity to religion will be enough.

[26 : 15] after all, these are God's special people. He stirred their hearts. They came back to Jerusalem. They're special. Well, that doesn't seem to be the case.

Consider again, verse 18, even with the foundation of the temple laid, how are things going? Well, there's no seed in the barn.

The vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, the olive tree are fruitless. even with the temple foundation laid, things are not going well for these people.

And the reason is that they are still trying to go their own way. Consider the disastrous picture of this way, of going their own way.

Everything is tainted. Everything is polluted. When we do not go the Lord's way, it ends like this.

[27 : 13] It ends in frustration. It ends in curse. And this makes the very end of verse 19 even more astonishing.

Because there is another way. There is a way of blessing. God is wanting to bless His people. To see them turn from trying to go their own way, which leads only to death.

And to turn and go God's way to life and to blessing. Consider how are things going?

Going our own way in life will only ever lead to frustration. And we know that to be true. And many, many of us here also know the reverse.

When we go the Lord's way, when we obey His word, He stirs our hearts and blessing comes.

Often despite how things look. But that is the reality.

[28 : 18] Blessing comes by going the Lord's way. The decisive thing, the thing that really makes the difference is God's action to bless His people. Despite how undeserving they are, God chooses to bless.

Holiness is not contagious. They have not caught it from somewhere else. And that really is a wonderful thing for us today. Because on our own, we could never come into God's blessing. No amount of religious stuff, no amount of being near holy things and places and people could make us God's people on their own. And yet God has blessed us.

And that together is what we must be praying for. For the Lord to bless us, for the Lord to bless those who we know, who do not yet know Him.

It would be a wonderful thing to bring them to church. It would be a wonderful thing to bring them to the life course tomorrow. That is the normal way that God gives His blessing, extends His grace to people.

[29 : 32] But above all of that, we must be praying that as we do these things together as a church, the Lord would be at work to bless. And we see with the rest of this chapter what that blessing means.

As we see in verses 20 to 23, that we can fear not, for God is committed to bless His people. The word of the Lord comes again to Haggai, verse 20.

He is to speak to Zerubbabel, the leader of the people. And the Lord says that He is about to shake the heavens and the earth, to overthrow the throne, the rule of kingdoms.

He is going to destroy the strength of the nations, overthrow their armies. The horses and their riders shall go down, everyone by the sword of His brother.

This is Exodus language. This is how God rescued His people way back from Egypt. And so as God's people read this, as they hear this, they know that God can bring judgments like this on His enemies.

[30 : 40] The Lord is describing a huge war, a shaking of all of creation, which will see kings and armies and nations laid waste before Him.

He is going to remove all rival kingdoms through this great shaking. The start of this chapter showed God revealing Himself through shaking the earth.

But here, the emphasis of that shaking is on the destruction and the removal of all rival kingdoms. His blessing on His people means that all their enemies, everything opposed to His Lordship, will be overthrown, will be cast down.

And on that day, verse 23, declares the Lord of hosts, God will raise up Zerubbabel, his servant, and make him like a signet ring. That title, servant, has been used to describe Moses, the great father of the faith.

It's been used to describe King David. And the signet ring is used through the Bible as a sign of a royal reign. We see it with Joseph in Genesis, with Jehoiakim in Jeremiah.

[31 : 54] it means a royal reign. And so Zerubbabel, being like a signet ring, is a sign to the world that God has good, has royal purposes for him.

The covenant, the pledge of relationship with God and His people is continuing. He's absolutely committed to His people, with promises that He cannot, that He will not break.

Zerubbabel, he comes in the family line of King David. He's not an insignificant character with an odd name. No, through him, God is preparing His people for what He will ultimately do in Christ. Don't turn there now, but right at the start of the New Testament in Matthew's Gospel, we get the family tree of Jesus going right back to Abraham. And Zerubbabel is right there.

Matthew chapter 1 verse 12. The royal mark on Zerubbabel here, the signet ring, was not because he would have an earthly throne. No, God's people, they looked weak.

[33 : 04] They were no longer a sovereign nation, they were a vassal state under the thumb of the Persian empire. But right here, when things looked weakest, when things looked at their most precarious, God was assuring His people that the best really is yet to come.

They are a royal nation. On the day when God comes to overthrow all His enemies, Zerubbabel and all God's people, we, the church, together, will be like a signet ring.

We will reign with Christ. No great military victory by God's people will win this. No, God has chosen His people.

He's absolutely committed to them. And He will sovereignly work through this line to birth the King, King Jesus, because He's chosen to do so.

And we today can look at the life of Jesus and see more of this prophecy fulfilled as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, as a crown of thorns was placed on His head, as He took a cross for His throne.

[34 : 14] Well, that did not look very glorious. That looked weak. But it was through the cross that He went to the very throne room of heaven.

And it is from there that He rules over all of creation now. And it is from there that God has promised He will come back.

He will return to judge all that is opposed to Him. He is the King forever, who will banish all God's enemies forever. He will fully fulfill Haggai's words.

And so as we come together to the end of this short prophecy, let's remember the big picture. God has graciously stirred the hearts of His people by His word to work for His kingdom.

He's shown that He is absolutely committed to building His kingdom with and through His people.

And right here at the end of the book, we've seen that the Lord will bless His people, bringing a king who will banish all enemies forever.

[35 : 25] That was a message which Haggai brought to the people. It's little wonder that if we read the history in Ezra, the people really did get on heartily with the work in front of them.

They respond to the message with joy. For their eyes, their hearts have been lifted. Lifted from seeing what seems like a difficult, a fruitless task in front of them, to see that what they are doing is a work which God has graciously brought them into.

A labor which is the greatest work in the world. And we do need the same today to see and consider. To see and consider that despite how things often look, despite the constant battle we face between walking by faith or by sight, despite all that we see in front of us, to know that the Lord's way is the way of blessing.

there will be no disappointment, no feeling of being missold. No, we can look to how glorious, how undefiled, how unfading, how unshakable his kingdom is.

And so we see that it is the Lord's blessing to give us the great privilege and greatest joy of serving him as builders of the kingdom together. And we do that today under the king who Zerubbabel looked forward to, the one who we know is King Jesus.

[37 : 03] We look to him, the one through whom the Lord graciously blesses us with cleansing and with security forever. Let's pray together.

Father God, your kingdom is glorious and eternal. It never disappoints, it never fades. And so we pray that you would, by your word, stir our hearts not to fear, but to faith and to trust that following you together as your church is the way of blessing.

And would you give us great rejoicing and great encouragement as we do that together. for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.