

This is week 2 in our study of Haggai: The Time is Now. If you missed last week, we went all the way back to when King Solomon built the most magnificent temple for God. People came from all over the world to worship God and show him honour, and just to see the glory of this temple. Unfortunately, we know that after King Solomon died, the people turned away from God, and they started worshipping idols, and so God allowed a series of events to take place to try to bring their focus back toward Him.

We talked last week about the destruction of the temple. In 587 BC, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian army destroyed, completely devastated Judah, including the massive insult of destroying the temple. The Babylonians took the Jewish people into captivity and they were in captivity for seventy years, and so you can only imagine the sense of relief and hope around fifty years in, when a remnant of people were allowed to go back and to rebuild their homeland. Under the Governor Zerubbabel, about fifty thousand or so people went back to rebuild their city. The first priority was to build the house of God, and so they started building the temple. They got the foundation in place, got the altar in place. They were met with some resistance, and guess what they did? They just gave up, and fourteen years the temple sat there unfinished with no progress.

So, God called Haggai to tell the people to get back to the task of rebuilding the temple. Haggai 1:13 *Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord. 'I am with you' that's the important bit. But then vs 14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty.*

I don't know, but I imagine there has been a time in the life of every believer where God has stirred your spirit. God gives you hope to accomplish something that he puts on your mind. God did this for the people. He gave them a sense of faith. We're supposed to rebuild the temple. He stirred up their spirits. This will happen for those of us that are followers of Jesus. There will be those times, like out of the blue, where we think we're supposed to do this. You have faith for something, and you want to attack it, and that's because God has stirred up your spirit.

For the Israelites the story is a bit like this: They get fired up and they start but a month later it has all fizzled out. Then they look at what they've done and they're like, "Is this all there is? This this pathetic. This isn't much progress." All of a sudden, everybody was discouraged.

Let's be honest. How often does that happen in our lives now? We're going to do this. We're going to attack, and then we flame out before we ever get started.

We're all like that to some degree. We can attack, we can build this temple. We can build this temple. One month later, to the day –we know because they dated everything in the book. One month later, they flame out. I don't know what it is for you. We're going to get out of debt.

We're going to get out of debt. Oh, Christmas. We forgot about that. It's in December again, so we can't do that. I'm going to go on a diet. I'm going to go on a diet. Oh, custard doughnuts at half price. I'll do that later. I don't know what happened to you to discourage you. We're going to do this, and then when we don't make the progress we think that we should make, we get incredibly discouraged.

That's exactly what happened to the people of God. We're going to do this for God. It's going to be amazing. One month in, when it didn't go as they expected, they got incredibly discouraged.

God had Haggai ask them this question, and, to me, it's a loving question. It's almost like God is trying to get to the root of their discouragement. If you are discouraged today, perhaps you're discouraged because of one of these two reasons we find revealed in this question, Haggai 2, verse 3. Haggai asked them on behalf of God, *"Who of you is left, who of you is left that saw the house in its former glory."* In other words, who is old enough to remember Solomon's temple. Wasn't it amazing. They look at their work, and he says, "How does it look to you now? Does it seem to you like nothing? Who of you remember the former temple in its amazing glory? Does this one look like nothing to you?"

Two causes of discouragement I want to talk about today. The first one is comparisons, comparisons, and the second is a lack of progress. Comparisons and a lack of progress. Very certainly, these people are doing the same thing we often do. They were comparing their start with someone else's finish. We just started. Our temple doesn't look very good, and their finish was so much better. In fact, Bible scholars estimate that Haggai was probably around seventy, maybe in his mid-seventies when he wrote this book, when he is prophesying to them. He's probably around seventy, seventy-five years of age, which means fifty years before they were in captivity, he would have been a teenager, certainly old enough to remember the former temple. Wow, Solomon's temple is amazing. This one isn't amazing at all, and there's this sense of comparison.

I don't know about you, but I get discouraged sometimes when I compare where other people are that I'm not. Jobs, cars, houses, children, qualifications, new members all things that we compare against other people and suddenly you feel incredibly discouraged. What's wrong with me? You compared, just like the Israelites did, our little pathetic attempt to build this new temple pales in comparison to the glory of Solomon's temple. We're a failure. We feel so discouraged.

Then there's, also, just a lack of progress, and this is what they did. We're a month into this, and this is not going well. We're trying so hard, but we're not getting anywhere, and it looks rubbish. This is how we often feel. You say, "I'm going to go on a diet. I'm going to get in shape. I'm going to go on a diet," and so for a whole month, you eat nothing but kale and almonds, and you gain two pounds. You're like, "What happened? I'm trying so hard. I'm working out, and it's not working". You take two steps forward, and then it seems like three steps backwards, or maybe for you it's like your whole spiritual lack of progress. You think, "I've been a Christian for all

this time, and, yet, I still say bad words. We're going to worship God. We're going to church today, and we argued all the way there, because we were late.

For some of you it's your children – even adult children. You're giving them good advice. You're doing everything you can to help your kids make good decisions, and you're like, "Could you be any more stupid?" It's so discouraging, because you tried everything you know to try, and they continue to make decisions that are just devastating. Spiritually, you're trying so hard to overcome that one sin, and you look back going, "I've been walking with Jesus with for all this time, and that one sin, maybe I just can't ever overcome that. Maybe it's just not worth it." You wake up one day, and you think, "I tried, and I'm not there, and they are, and I've worked harder," and you're just discouraged, just discouraged.

I'm going to be really honest, and I know that's risky, and I'm not looking for sympathy – I have noticed recently that a lot of the ministers I am in contact with are really struggling with discouragement. There have been more and more comments and conversations about how difficult ministry has become and how impossible it is to meet all of the expectations that are placed on you as a minister. I really believe that this is a spiritual attack because of the number of people affected by it. And, I have to say that it also affected me. I'm not looking for compliments, I just want to be honest.

I am discouraged by my sinfulness – I'm a follower of Jesus and a minister and I'm ashamed by some of the things I do; I am conscious of my failures and often feel that I'm not doing a good job.

When I go home today I'll go over and over the service in my head and think about the things I should have said, and what I wish I hadn't. I feel a sense of divine responsibility for you. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep. But the other metaphor is that, under Jesus, I am the shepherd, and it is my responsibility to help the sheep follow Jesus, and sometimes I just feel rubbish at it.

You might be wondering why on earth I'm telling you this and it's simply to say that we are all in it together. We all live with disappointment and discouragement at times. I'm not complaining, I actually love what I do most of the time. But what do we do when we face discouragement?

What God tells his people to do when they are discouraged – 'We're building the temple, and it's just not going well. It's never going to be as good as Solomon's temple. We're trying to do the best we can, and the best just isn't good enough.' - God gives them the most loving and simple instructions, and, to me, that's one of the most beautiful things about this little book, is just how loving God is.

Do you remember last week when they're like, "We don't know how to build a temple," and God's like, "Let me just make it really, really easy for you." If you missed last week, you just

messed so much. God basically said, "It's just one, two, three. Here's what you do: number one, go up to the mountain; number two, you bring down the wood; and, number three, you build the temple."

You choose the hard right over the easy wrong.

Haggai 2:4 *But now be strong, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord. 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the Lord Almighty.*

Be strong Zerubbabel. Be strong Joshua. Be strong all you people. AND WORK! Why? 'For I am with you.' What do you do when you are discouraged? God says essentially two things. The first thing he says, "Be strong," and then he says, "Do the work." You are discouraged right now. What do you do? God says you, be strong, and you, do the work. When you're discouraged and you want to give up, what do you do? God says be strong, and do the work.

The great news is that we don't have to be strong on our power. We live in New Testament times, and our New Testament teaches us that when you are weak, His strength is made perfect through you. In other words, I don't just have to be strong in my own strength. I've got a supernatural strength dwelling within me. The same spirit that raised Christ from the dead, dwells within those who believe. In fact, when you can't do anymore and you're about to give up, that's when you are a perfect candidate for God's strength to be strong through you. Be strong in the Lord, and do the work.

Notice he didn't say, "Talk the talk," but do the work. Notice he didn't say, "Dream the dream, but do the work." Notice he didn't say, "Compare the results, but do the work." What do you do when you're discouraged? You be strong in His power and you do the work. Put down another stone. I just put down a stone, and it didn't seem to make much difference. What do you do? Be strong and put down another stone. Put down another stone. But it's not working. Consistently do the last thing God told you to do. Consistently choose the hard right over the easy wrong. Consistently do the work. Put down the stone. Put down another stone. Put down another stone. Put down another stone. Consistently do the hard thing. It would be easy to go home. It would be easy to say it's hard. It would be easy to say there's not a lot of progress, but God says, "Be strong and do the work." Be strong and keep doing this.

Be strong in the Lord. Put down another stone, and another stone. When you want to give up, what do you do? You be strong and do the work. You be strong and keep praying, even when you don't see results. You be strong and continue to open up God's word, and seek Him daily in His word. You be strong and continue to do the right thing, even when you're not getting anywhere.

You be strong and continue to pay off your debt. If it's only a few pounds a month, you take a step in the right direction, and you do it month after month, week after week, year after year.

You continue to do the right thing.

You be strong and continue to love when other people are not loving in return.

You be strong and bring your best when everyone else on your team is making do.

You be strong and show honour, even when the person over you is not acting honourably.

You be strong and continue to love your spouse, even when your spouse is unresponsive.

You be strong and continue to reach out to that person, even when they do not hear you or let you in.

You be strong and continue to love your children. Pray for your children. Stand for your children, even when they don't stand for anything that you believe is right.

When I find myself discouraged, I continue to say in the strength of God, I will be strong and I will show up and do the work. Every single week, here's what I'll do, I'll continue to pray. I'll continue to seek God, on your behalf and for myself. I'll continue to study His word. I'll continue to lead with every fibre in my body, and I will preach Christ crucified, risen, and here to transform lives, and together we will continue to do it stone after stone, after stone, after stone.

It may be that even now someone here is comparing. I'm not there. I wish I was. I'm discouraged. I don't see the progress. You have to decide to trust in God's strength, when you have none of your own. The promise 'I am with you' is still true today. Still true for you. Be strong in the Lord and do the work, and that's why God's word is so powerful to us. Heb 6:9 *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

If I had ended the message about now, basically what I would have done is give you a go get them message. Come on, pull your bootstraps up and keep trying. That's not a bad message, but it would be incomplete. Let's make it complete.

God says, "Be strong and do the work." Why? "For I am with you," declares the Lord. This is the key to all of it. It's not that you do it on your own, it's you do it with Him. What God was going to show them is the most world changing news, since the beginning of time. Haggai 2:9 *'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty.'*

God says, "The glory of this temple, the glory of the present temple, is going to be way greater than the glory of the former temple." And they're going, "No, no, no, no, that can't be right." Even secular historians say Zerubbabel's temple wasn't even close to Solomon's temple. There's no way. What are you saying, God?

They had no idea that God was actually foreshadowing the great New Testament truth of his love. You see, all through the Old Testament, what happens in the physical is often a picture of

what happens in the spiritual in the New Testament. It's a foreshadow. God shows physically what He will do spiritually. God shows naturally what He will do supernaturally, and here's how.

In the Old Testament, people had to go to the temple and make a sacrifice in the hope of getting right with God. The New Testament, God says, "If you're a follower of my son, Jesus, I actually live within you." Old Testament, you have to go to the temple and make a sacrifice in hopes of being right with God. In the New Testament, God comes to you, and makes a sacrifice so you can be right with Him, and the Holy Spirit lives within you. Jesus is the greater glory. This changes everything. Now you don't have to be strong, and do the work on your own. You do it because He is with you, but He's not only with you, but He's in you. Greater is He that is in you, than He that is the world. Jesus is the greater glory who dwells within you.

Every time you put a stone down in His name, you are glorifying Him.

When you serve someone, He's being glorified.

When you love someone, He's being glorified.

When you forgive someone, He's being glorified. When you lift up His name, He's being glorified, and here's why we should not be discouraged, because we are not alone. We don't have to go to a temple and make a sacrifice in hopes of finding God, but He came to us, and gave His son that we would be right with Him.

Therefore, Jesus dwells within those who are believers, and He is the greater glory. That's why you never have to be discouraged, because, you're not alone. He's with you. He's with you. Be strong and do the work, because I am with you, declares the Lord. Therefore, we know that he who began a good work in us will be faithful to carry it out until completion. Let us not become weary in doing good, because in the proper time, we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up.

If you are discouraged today, remember, God came to you. He made a sacrifice, so you could be right with Him, and He is not only just with you, He is in you. Therefore, you can do everything He calls you to do.