

New Year 2015
Haggai 2
January 3rd & 4th, 2015

Happy New Year...Can you believe that it's 2015 already? Beth and I were talking a couple of weeks ago about how the whole Y2K debacle seems like it happened just yesterday...and some of us were buying bottled water, generators and building bunkers in our back yard; meanwhile Beth and I were planning a wedding...call it youthful optimism! And here we are, together...by the grace of God!

God has given us another year, which we never want to take for granted! Rather...we step into 2015 and see the New Year as an opportunity to look ahead with expectation at what God is able to do in and through our lives in the season ahead.

So...today, I want to share with you something that God began stirring in me last fall! And it came during a season when I was having a difficult time trusting that God is in control of my circumstances, good and bad. And that He is sovereign over both my celebration and disappointments!

During this time, I came across the book of Haggai, which is tucked away in the Old Testament! Through Haggai, God began confronting my unbelief and strengthening my ability to take Him at His Word! And this text is so good...that I thought, *"Where is the one place in all of Scripture that is a slam-dunk New Year's message? Haggai! That's where everyone goes when they need encouragement, right!"* Some of you are questioning whether Haggai is even in the Bible.

It is...so, if you have your Bible...go to the gospel of Matthew, then backtrack three books into the Old Testament, and you'll find Haggai. If you don't have a Bible, have one on us! I want to spend the next few moments encouraging you with what I've learned from God's word over the last several weeks!

Let's look at Haggai, chapter 2:1...I'll start by giving you some context...

"Then on October 17 of that same year, the Lord sent another message through the prophet Haggai."
Haggai 2:1

Haggai was a prophet of Judah around 520 B.C. during a time when the Hebrew people were coming back to Jerusalem after spending sixty-plus years as captives in Babylon. As the people settled into their city...they built houses, planted crops and raised livestock, all of which was very good, except for one thing! The Temple of God lay in ruins.

This may seem inconsequential, but you must understand that from the moment God brought his people out of Egypt, He promised to dwell with them. God's presence among His people was the one thing that set Israel apart from every other nation and world religion! So...in the wilderness God dwelled in a portable tent called a Tabernacle...and there He spoke through Moses to the people. Years later, when Israel arrived in Jerusalem, David's son Solomon built a temple as a permanent place of worship, prayer and community...

Now...as the people were returning to their homeland, you would expect to find a sense of urgency to rebuild the temple where they could gather to worship and hear from God. Instead, surrounded by ruins and memories of defeat and captivity, Israel grew despondent. So, in His mercy, God spoke to His people through his prophet, Haggai!

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Through Haggai's words, God teaches us three things about Himself, each of which has incredible personal and corporate implications for us in the year ahead! **Here they are (notes)... He is Lord over the Mess! He is Lord of the Mission. He is Lord of Provision!** Let me give them to you one at a time; then I'll tie them together!

First...He is Lord over the Mess! (Verse 2.)

"Say this to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of God's people there in the land (side note: this is a great place to go when naming a boy. What's his name? I don't know, how about Jehozadak?): Does anyone remember this house – this Temple – in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all." Haggai 2:2-3

If you listen closely, there's divine comedy here! In our minds, the first thing Haggai says probably makes the top-ten list of things not to say to a depressed person. *"Wow...do you remember how incredible the temple used to be? Look at it now! It's a shadow of what once was. It must seem like nothing at all."*

This doesn't seem like any way to comfort someone who is hurting, does it! What is going on?

Haggai is stirring the memories of the people, who as children had walked the courts of the temple before the Babylonians reduced it to rubble. Think for a moment about how our childhood memories are oftentimes exaggerated...and how the people and places we remembered to be great or grand in size and scope were actually quite average when we returned to them as adults? And this can cause an emotional letdown, can't it? **Have you had this experience?**

Jeff: Jeff, who is one of our pastors and led worship today, is a childhood acquaintance of mine! Twenty-three years ago, I was the water boy for Jeff's Varsity basketball team! My favorite memory is the night that the Lamar Tigers played in the District Tournament! And I was on the sidelines, proudly decked out in my early 90's neon-green, purple, and pink jogging suit, cheering my team on! For the record, pink was hot in the early 90's! We won the District tournament, and it's the only time in my life outside of fantasy football when I've been part of a winning team. That night, my parents let me ride the team bus home! So, we're on the school bus singing, *"We are the champions my friend...We'll keep on fighting till the end.* And I remember that night...looking at Jeff and my brother and all of their teammates, thinking to myself...does it get any bigger or better than these guys!

Now that I work alongside Jeff every day...don't get me wrong, he's a big guy, and he can still dunk over my head while I can barely touch the net! And I'll occasionally bring a water bottle and towel into his office as a reminder of the past! But he's not the untouchable giant of the court that I made him out to be!

In the same way, Haggai stirs their childhood memories by saying, *"Don't forget how great and grand the temple was when you were young!"*

While this might seem insensitive, psychologists know that the first step in caring for a despondent person is to admit with them the reality of what is causing their despondency. You've got to enter into

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their pain and be able to say, *Things are a mess, aren't they?*" Through Haggai, God is saying to the people, *"I see your mess!"*

Listen...for some of us the holidays and New Year bring with them things like joy and expectancy, and there is relationship, provision and health...and we're running into 2015 with lungs full of air! It's not difficult, during those times to say, *'Life is good. Therefore God is good, and I believe He's in control.'*

But some of you are limping into 2015, aren't you? Life has kicked you in the gut, and you're struggling to get a breath!

Some of us are looking at the ruins of a broken relationship, a missed opportunity, financial hardship, or physical illness. Someone disappointed you, or you regret something that you did to disappoint them! And when you remember how good things used to be...there's extreme sadness!

Then, there are those of us who will face unexpected heartache this year! We just don't see it yet! Fifteen years of ministry has taught me that this year I will sit with someone who has been broken by life, and I will do a funeral that no one was expecting to plan, or you'll do mine! It is the reality of life.

It's in these moments, surrounded by ruins, that we question whether God is in control or whether He's good! It's not difficult to believe that God is present in the beauty! But is He present in the mess?

God has used this text to show me that He is not only the Lord of the mountaintop, but He is also the Lord of the mess! So, we can trust and worship Him in both, knowing that He is the God who is able to bring beauty out of the ruins.

The second thing Haggai teaches us is that He is Lord over the Mission! (Verse 4-5)

"But now the Lord says: Be strong, Zerubbabel. Be strong, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people still left in the land. And now get to work, for I am with you, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid." Haggai 2:4-5

I love this! Right in the middle of their despondency, God calls the people to action...He doesn't minimize the mess, nor does He leave them in their mess. He calls them to see beyond their mess to the mission at hand!

"Get to work, for I am with you!"

Now...this isn't the only time in Scripture that we find these words. For example, in the book of Joshua, right before the people of Israel were to cross over the Jordan river into Canaan, God spoke to Joshua...

"This is my command – be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

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Then...moments before Jesus ascended to heaven, do you remember what He said to his followers?

*"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: **I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**"* Matthew 28:18-20

Each time that God calls his people to action, He promises to be with them. Here's why this is important!

Unlike Israel, we are not called to build a physical temple for the purpose of worship, prayer and community! That is how the people of God worshiped Him before Jesus came.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Peter...

"You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God." 1 Peter 2:4-5

This is saying that we no longer gather in a physical temple to stand in the presence of God! And we no longer offer animal sacrifices to make ourselves right with God. Instead, Jesus is has become our True Sacrifice to take away our sin and make us right with God. Now...because of Jesus we stand with confidence in God's presence!

Israel was called to build a temple to honor God! Today, God is building a different kind of temple...a spiritual temple comprised of people from every nation, tribe, village, language, city, and community...united by Jesus, filled with His Spirit, and committed to His glory! We call it the church!

Let me help apply this for moment!

Today, we are called to live in such a way that our friends and neighbors see the greatness of Jesus Christ in our lives and many more are drawn back to Him!

I spent the entire fall trying my best to show you that if we're going to live in such a way that points people to the greatness of Jesus our lives must be *Questionable!*

To live *Questionable Lives*, we encouraged you to develop different habits...

#1: Bless three people every week – By looking for ways to bring them joy or to alleviate a burden! You can bless people by encouraging them, or through an act of kindness or service! You can also bless someone by looking for ways to generously give your time or resources to help meet a need! Look around your home, or neighborhood, or office...and you'll find endless opportunities to bless others!

#2: Eat with three people every week – Develop a habit of sharing your meals with others! We already

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eat three times a day...that's 21 meals a week! Seek to invite another person to the table for three of those! **As you do this, ensure sharing your table with Christians as well as with those who don't yet know Christ! You'll be amazed at what God can do when you simply begin eating with others!**

#3: Pray for one person every day!

Finally...continue to pray for one person every day this week! Ask God to work out his grace in their life!

As you live this way...your life will bring honor to Jesus!

Now...no one falls into this kind of living! No one wakes up on Monday morning and says, *"Wow...look at how generous and kind and hospitable I've become!"* It only happens as you develop these habits in your life with the help of the Holy Spirit! **Look again at verse 4!**

"And now get to work, for I am with you, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid."

Haggai 2:4-5

If there is one thing God has been teaching me in this season that I've known intellectually, but have so often failed to grasp at a heart-level...it is that He is with me! And when you understand that God is with you, it will change everything!

Children: My little gal, Elise, who is seven...is still at that wonderful age where, when we're out together in public or a crowded place, she'll take my hand! And you know what Elise is saying, don't you? She's saying, *"Dad, As long as I'm holding your hand, I know that everything will be ok!"*

Jesus is saying to us today... *"I am with you! Do not be afraid! Get to work and live with such purpose and passion that many will see My greatness and be drawn to My Father! As we do, He will continue to build His kingdom!"*

He is Lord of the Mess! He is Lord of the Mission!

Finally, He is Lord of Provision! (Verse 6-8)

"For this is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: In just a little while I will again shake the heavens and the earth, the oceans and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations will be brought to this Temple. I will fill this place with glory, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of Heaven's Armies." Haggai 2:6-8

You've got to imagine that as Haggai tells the people to get to work rebuilding the temple...many in the crowd are thinking, *"Haggai...how in the world are we going to rebuild a temple from scratch when we've only just returned from captivity! The temple has been reduced to nothing! We have nothing!"*

Their situation was desperate and without God's intervention...they would never see the temple rebuilt!

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The same is true of us! We're desperate for God's intervention, and without Him we have nothing!

Money: In November, I wrote a letter to our community, in which I told you that we were roughly \$70,000 shy of our need for the year! I'll confess to you that I was awake in the middle of the night for several nights worrying, praying...wondering how God was going to provide, and this in spite of the countless ways God has provided for this community.

I was worrying because all too often I believe that our provision depends primarily on people! (Sin)

That's when I came across this text! God convicted me that I was trusting in man instead of Him, the Lord of Provision!

There is a misnomer in the local church that it is our responsibility to build Jesus' church into something that is great, vibrant, and life giving by making fiscally responsible decisions and budgeting well and then hopefully, at the end of the day, we keep our head above water, meet budget and grow by 10%! Like this is a picture of wild success that honors Jesus and makes his name great!

Don't hear me wrong! I'm not suggesting that budgets and exercising wisdom aren't important...we value both!

What I am suggesting to you is that we can meet budget every year and yet completely miss what Jesus wants to do in and through His church for His glory!

Over and over again in Scripture, we find that when God calls His people to something...

His vision will always exceed our resources!

Therefore, if we're in the middle of God's will...we will find ourselves asking, *"How in the world are we going to do this!"*

And this is where we must listen to God's promises.

I WILL: Three times, in verses 6-7, God promises... *"I will shake the heavens and the earth! I will shake all the nations. I will fill this place with glory."*

Then He says... *"The silver is mine...the gold is mine!"*

Let me ask you! If you knew that all of the silver and gold in the world belonged to God! If you knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is the Lord of provision, how would it change your view of money and generosity?

We would worry less, wouldn't we? The reason we worry is because we don't believe He knows our needs!

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We would enjoy and be grateful for what we have without stressing about what we don't have, wouldn't we?

If we believed that He is the Lord of Provision, we would give more consistently and sacrificially, wouldn't we? The reason we don't give sacrificially is because we don't believe God will continue to meet our needs if we do.

If we're going to follow Jesus wherever He leads, we must come to see and believe that He is the Lord of Provision! To do this, our hearts must rest in the gospel!

Gospel – God saw us in our deepest need...covered in sin, separated from Him, and He sent Jesus into our world to take the penalty for our sin and die the death we deserved! If God has already given us everything to heal us, forgive us, and call us His children, won't He also meet our every need!

He is the Lord of Provision...so let's trust Him!

Close!

Harbor, our mission as the body of Christ is to do everything possible...by the mercy and power of God at work in us...to *Help People Find Their Way Back to God!*

The truth is that without him, we're hopeless. Our lives are a mess...our best efforts will fall far short and we'll never accomplish His mission on our own!

But He has called us to join Him on mission, and He is working in and through our lives to bring Him glory. And He is providing beyond our ability to conceive for the needs of this community to continue doing ministry.

As we ended 2014, I want you to know that God provided above and beyond for all of our ministry needs! Thank you to each of you who are investing in the ministry God has called us to with your time and resources! I'll remind you again and again that it's never about budgets and spreadsheets...but about people! Every dollar you invest is a direct investment in someone's life!

As we begin another year, can I encourage you to consider how you are actively playing a part in the mission of Christ? Live *Questionable Lives!* Live hospitably. Live generously. Pray for people...and expect God to do great things!

Pray