

September 14, 2025

Return: Encouragement for the Discouraged

Haggai 2:1-9

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...This past week has been a rough one in many ways. Not only did we pause as a nation to remember the events of 9/11, but at the same time, we became painfully aware, once again, of the darkness of the human heart with the assassination of Charlie Kirk. Whenever tragic events like these happen, it's a reminder that "things are not as they were supposed to be" and, deep down, we long for Christ's return when he will make all things new.

And in times like these, if we're not careful, we can get discouraged. We live in an evil world, marred by sin, and sometimes we may wonder, "is it worth it the effort?" Well, God's word found in the book of Haggai chapter 2 is a message of encouragement to the discouraged.

Perseverance seems to be an outdated concept in our day of instant everything. If it doesn't come easy, the thought is, why pursue it? Today, if it's hard or requires any real effort on our part, then we bail it in looking for the next "easy thing."

It's easy to start a new diet. But it's tough to stick to it when you crave that cinnamon roll. It's easy to get married. It's tough to hang in there and work through problems over a lifetime. It's easy to get involved a new ministry in the church. It's tough to keep on going when problems arise or when the results don't match your initial expectations. And because of this, we can become discouraged.

That describes the people in Haggai's day. We're picking up where we left off last week, just shy of a month after they had obeyed the prophets first message and resumed work on rebuilding the temple and getting back to God's business. And already, after only a month on the job, they are discouraged.

As we saw last week, the foundation had been laid about 15 years before, but the project had been set on the shelf as the people were busy with their own selfish pursuits. But now, in response to Haggai's word from the Lord, the leaders and people had begun to rebuild.

And that's when Haggai delivered his second message to the people (2:1-9). And in it, we learn that when we obey the word of the LORD, God encourages his discouraged people to persevere in his work. If you are able, please stand with me as I read God's second message to the prophet Haggai from the book of Haggai 2:1-9.

These verses teach us a few things about persevering in what the Lord has called us to do even in the midst of discouragement. First of all, we see that God understands and he cares about the discouragement we face while serving him in vs. 3.

The Lord did not gloss over or ignore the reality of the situation. The first temple was gone, it had been destroyed, and the second was, by God's design, not as "glorious" as the first one. It was probably hard for them to see the end results because all they had was foundation with heaps of stone lying around.

But God knew what they were thinking and feeling, and he brings it up to show them that he understood and that he cared for them. If we do not keep in mind that in all our troubles the Lord understands and cares for us, we will easily become discouraged.

The context here reveals several potential sources of discouragement when we get involved in serving the Lord. First, we see the loss of initial excitement can bring discouragement. There is always a certain sense of excitement when you begin something new. But the shine wears off.

There were probably piles of rubble that needed to be removed. Perhaps some of the workers had envisioned putting the finishing touches on some gold work or other craftsmanship, but they hadn't thought about doing the upfront work of hauling rubble. Their initial enthusiasm was already wearing thin.

Because of the time of year, possibly there were some delays and delays can discourage us. Work for the Lord seldom moves as quickly as we had hoped. Perhaps working around the numerous feasts and Sabbath days in the seventh month had dampened the initial enthusiasm because the work was going so slowly. It's easy for that to happen in anything we do for the Lord, and the delays get us down. When things don't happen in our timing.

Outside opposition and criticism can discourage us. In vs. 5, the Lord says, "Do not fear!" He would not say that unless they had a reason to be afraid. Probably some of the same men of Samaria who had threatened them and sent off word against them to King Darius from ch.1 15 years before were at it again. We need to realize that any time you attempt to do God's work, the enemy will stir up opposition. We're in a battle with the forces of darkness that are opposed to the church. We should expect opposition. Jesus said in John 16:33: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world."

But opposition can come from within as well and it takes many forms. A common one is pessimism. I'm sure someone in the group, someone who had been around for a while, said "That won't work. We tried that before," or "That's not the way we've always done it." And I'm sure it was coming from the other side as well. "We'll never get this done with all these old folks around who are stuck in their ways."

When they had laid the foundation years before, there was great joy mixed with weeping as we read about in Ezra 3:11-13. The young people who had not known the glory of the former temple, because they were born during the Babylonian exile, were rejoicing. But the old-timers, who had seen Solomon's Temple, wept at this new temple, because it just didn't measure up. Maybe they were saying, "God's blessing just isn't on this temple!" Pessimism can bring a lot of discouragement.

A wrong view of success can also discourage us. Some view success externally rather than spiritually. "This temple isn't as big as Solomon's Temple was. This temple doesn't have all the gold and fancy workmanship that Solomon's Temple did." But God says through Haggai, and I'm paraphrasing, "I own all the gold and silver in the world, and I could cover this temple with gold if I wanted to. But I'm going to do something better. Instead of gold, I'm going to fill this temple with glory, the glory of my Messiah."

You see, God doesn't view things as we do. God is looking for his glory formed in the hearts of his people, not for the outward, superficial signs of success. We're always looking for instant success as opposed to what God is doing in the eternal. None of the workers on

this temple lived to see its glory exceed that of Solomon's Temple. That didn't happen until Jesus came into this temple over 500 years later, and even then, many missed it!

But God says, "Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land" (2:6). While there may have been a partial fulfillment of that prophecy within a few years of Haggai's day in the overthrow of powerful kingdoms we'll see in the next chapter, the ultimate fulfillment is still future for us as well! God will shake all the nations when Jesus comes again, and they will bring the wealth of the nations to him to lay at his feet in the kingdom of Heaven.

True success will be measured in the light of eternity, not in our lifetimes. We need to keep this in mind as we labor for the Lord. God's timing is not our timing. Whatever our source of discouragement in our work for the Lord, God understands and He cares.

But He doesn't coddle us or let us stay there, left to wallow in our self-pity and discouragement. For his word to us when we are discouraged is to persevere (vs. 4a) Three times the Lord repeats, "Be strong!" Literally, "Take courage!" And what does he call them to be strong, or take courage, in doing? To work. Keep going! Persevere! And there are two aspects to this kind of perseverance, an attitude and an action.

Perseverance requires the right attitude. The people had the wrong attitude. They were weak because they had gotten their focus off the Lord and onto the slow, disappointing progress on the temple. Maybe they were thinking, "This will never get done. We're just wasting our time!"

Have you ever noticed how much your attitude affects your ability to persevere? If you're motivated, you can stay up all night on some project. But if you get discouraged, most of the time, you never get around to finishing it.

But God says, "Be strong!" Now we know we aren't to be strong in our own strength, of course, but in God's strength. 2 Cor. 3:4-6 says: "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of [the law] but of the Spirit. For the [law] kills, but the Spirit gives life."

So, be strong! Have the attitude that hangs in there in spite of obstacles and discouragement. The real question is not how do we see things, but how does God see things? If we have not factored God into the equation, we don't see things in the right perspective.

But perseverance doesn't only require the right attitude, but it also requires the right action. God's point through Haggai here is that our attitude provides the motivation, but motivation without actually doing the work won't get the temple built.

Thomas Edison, the famous inventor, had a lot to say about this subject. One of his most famous quotes was this, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." And I think that many of us here would agree that much of the Lord's work is far more perspiration than inspiration! Just because you're gifted in whatever you do for the Lord does not mean that it just flows effortlessly. It takes effort and hard work. To persevere, we must not only have the right attitude, but we also must also put our hand to the plow and do the work. And as I mentioned last week, there are lots of areas in this

church where you can get involved. You can come talk to me or find out you to talk to and get involved. It is going to take all of us working together to reach this community for Christ.

Finally, God assures us when we are discouraged in serving Him. (vs. 2:4b-9). First, God assures his people by his presence. After telling Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people to be strong and to work, God adds in vs. 4, “‘For I am with you,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

The people may have feared a hostile army coming against them as before, but God is the Lord of hosts, the sovereign ruler over all the armies of heaven and earth. If the Lord of hosts is with us, who can defeat us?

If we’re serving him, then nothing can happen to us accidentally or without his express permission. The assurance of his presence should lift our discouragement and enable us to press on. God gave this assurance to Joshua before he led the Israelites into the promised land, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified and do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:9)

God also assures us by his promise in vs. 5. The “promise” here refers to the covenant God made with Israel when they came out of Egypt. He promises them now, as he had then, that his Spirit would go with them and abide in their midst. Therefore, they need not fear.

You want some encouragement today? God has made a better covenant with us than he did with them in the New Covenant, enacted on better promises which the author of the book of Hebrews speaks about in Heb. 8. Jesus sealed that New Covenant with his own blood and he promised us the indwelling Holy Spirit to be with us forever as Jesus told his disciples in John 14:16: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper [Advocate, Counselor], to be with you forever.”

When we grow discouraged in our service for him, we should remember his promise, that he will not leave us as orphans, but he has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to serve him. Praise his name!

And God assures his people when they are discouraged through his prophecies in vs. 6-9. The many prophecies in scripture are not given for us to speculate about the future, but to strengthen and encourage our faith. When we see how God has worked down through the ages in accordance with what he told his people in advance, it encourages us to keep serving him, knowing that the remaining unfulfilled prophecies will surely come to fruition, namely, the soon return of our Lord Jesus.

The Lord says in vs. 7 that He will “fill this house with glory” and in vs. 9 that “the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former.” There is some debate here. How could Zerubbabel’s temple be greater in glory than Solomon’s? We already talked about the people’s discouragement because this temple didn’t have the same gold and furnishings as the first.

And, while King Herod later replaced this temple with more glorious buildings during the time of Jesus, this verse probably refers to the coming of Jesus himself into that very same temple. His presence made it even more glorious than Solomon’s Temple.

And in the kingdom, his presence as King of Kings and Lord of Lords will surpass the veiled glory of his first coming. In the new heavens and earth, there will be no temple, for, we are told, “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” as we’re told in Rev. 21:22.

The Lord also promises that in this place he will give peace. Again, this has multiple fulfillments. In his first coming, Jesus preached peace to both Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:17). We have peace with God and with one another when we trust in His shed blood (Rom. 5:1). But true and lasting peace for this world and for Jerusalem will only come when Jesus returns. And don't we long for that peace?

Since the Lord has promised us the final triumph of his Son, we should be encouraged in our work for him, knowing that our work in the Lord is never in vain.

The truth is, we can persevere in whatever the Lord has given us to do for the building of his kingdom because he has enabled us through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Just as the result of the people's building the temple in Haggai's day would bring more glory to God, so our obedience in building his spiritual temple, the church, will glorify him. If you are discouraged in your service for the Lord, be encouraged today to persevere for his glory. Let's pray.

Benediction: "May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your heart and strengthen you in every good deed and word." – 2 Thess. 2:16-17