

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 23 Oct 2022

Sermon Title : Haggai Sermon Series
Think Again: This is The Best We Can Have

Speaker : Rev Reuben Ng

Text : Haggai 2:1-9

INTRODUCTION

The main theme of the Bible is salvation through the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, but there are sub-themes that we can glean from different parts of the Bible, and Haggai chapter 2 is about God's assurance to His people as He said, "I am with you." to them. This had also appeared in many other parts of the bible all the way from the time of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the Judges and Prophets through the Old Testaments to the time of Mary and Jesus in the Gospels and even in Luke's writing on Paul after Jesus had ascended to heaven.

God does this because He knows that His people will be discouraged. He wants to show us that He cares about us when we face discouragements. Besides showing us that He cares, He also wants to ensure that we will get the encouragement that we need from Him. This is similar to what we will uncover in Haggai chapter 2.

In last week's sermon, we learnt that following the Israelites' return to Jerusalem in about 538 BC, years later around 520 BC, God asked the Israelites in Haggai Chapter 1 to "think about their ways" because they dwelled in their paneled houses whilst God's house (God's temple) laid in ruins. Motivated by God's word through Haggai, they started to work on the house of the Lord on the 24th day of the 6th month.

Old Temple vs New Temple (Haggai 2:3)

God spoke to the people for the second time through Haggai about a month after they had started work, asking who amongst the builders had seen God's temple in its former glory.

- Those who were around 66 years back would have seen the old temple and witnessed the Babylonians destroying it in 586 BC. They would have recalled the grandeur of the previous temple but had to face the fact that they lacked manpower and did not have the same precious materials as the people back in Solomon's time.
- ❖ They had to face the reality that no matter how much effort they put into rebuilding God's temple they can never restore its grandeur of the past.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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Significance of the 7th month

- In the Jewish tradition, the 7th month is the time the Israelites celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles which is the final of the 7 Jewish feasts, with the 21st day of the 7th month as the last day of the celebrations.
- In 960 BC, King Solomon finished building God's temple and began dedicating it on the 8th day of the 7th month. The celebration lasted 7 days. (1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 7) Immediately following that, the 15th day of the 7th month is the customary start of the Feast of Tabernacles which lasted another 7 days. The entire 14 days of dedication and celebration was very lavish and grand. Besides, when they dedicated the temple, God's glory came down to fill the temple completely that the priests could not enter it.

Fast forward 440 years later to 520BC, having heard tales of such amazing celebration passed down through the generations, the people who were building God's temple in Haggai Chapter 2 would have realized that the temple they were building could not compare with that grand temple that Solomon built.

- ❖ They would naturally be dismayed and questioned, "what was the point of them doing this" and they may start to think, "maybe this is the best that we can have".

Persevere in the work, "My Spirit is with you" (Haggai 2:4-5)

God told the people going through this painful and tiring times, "be strong, Zerubbabel...Joshua... be strong, all you people of the land" because He cared about them. He called them to "be strong", "be courageous", or "take heart".

- We too should draw encouragement from these verses when we get worn down by discouraging words or circumstances. God wants us to persevere.

God's call for them to be courageous was followed with "Work! For I am with you".

- Let us keep on pressing on in working God's will out in our lives, as we draw strength from God's encouragements that He is with us.

God reinforces this by reminding the Israelites of His promise when He delivered them from Egypt and that "His Spirit is present among them". (Haggai 2:5)

God provides the resources to complete His work (Haggai 2:7-8)

God said that through the wealth of other nations, God's temple will be filled with material splendour, which we see being fulfilled in Ezra 6 when King Darius of Persia decreed the following even though he was not a worshipper of Yahweh:

- that the rebuilding of the temple be financed by royal revenues so that the work will not stop. (Ezra 6:8)
- that everything required by the priests in Jerusalem for the worship to the God of heaven and the work of the temple to be given to them. (Ezra 6:9)

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New temple more magnificent than the old (Haggai 2:9)

The temple was enhanced and rebuilt over the years by generations that followed. According to Bible scholars, by the time Jesus came, the reigning King Herod who was a renowned builder had diverted the Roman Empire's funds to enhance the building of the temple. It was a much more magnificent and beautiful temple than the first, and the number of people worshipping in the temple was much bigger too.

- Even when we are discouraged and worry about resources for God's work, we can have faith that God will bring the resources for us to complete His work because everything belongs to Him, and so be affirmed that nothing is impossible for God.

God will never leave or abandon you

As God's people we are called to live out His will in our lives in every facet, aspect, or arena. As we face difficult moments in carrying out God's work, let us not be discouraged but instead remind ourselves to "be strong" and to "not stop working for God".

- Jesus exemplified this by consistently having the faith that God was with Him in both the good times and the bad times.
- As we follow Christ, we should strengthen ourselves in the Lord by reminding ourselves of this constantly. Sometimes we may have a discouraging thought that maybe we did something wrong and hence we are deserving of punishment and God has removed himself from us. In moments like these, reminding ourselves that "God is with me" is going to be enough.

Hebrews 13:5 is a huge assurance that God will never leave or abandon you, and in the Amplified version of the Bible, this verse is expressed:

"He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless nor forsake nor let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]"

The strength and the force of this assurance is that there is absolutely zero possibility of God removing himself even if we did something wrong.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, as children of God, let us take heart, be courageous, be strong, in working out the will of God in our lives because God is with us. He will never ever leave us, and He will never ever forsake nor abandon us.

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A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2a. Appoint someone to read Haggai 2:1-9 aloud slowly.

2b. Picture yourself as one of the Israelites at work in this rebuilding project in Haggai's time who had seen the glory of the old Temple built by king Solomon. Which of God's encouragements in the passage speaks to you the most?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. In which area(s) of your work for God whether in your personal life, family, school, career, or ministry, have you adopted the thinking that “this is the best we can have”, and so have given up working or are thinking of giving up working?
- 3b. Which of the following caused you to give up working in 3a. above?
- (i) Lack of presence of God
 - (ii) Lack of encouragement/motivation
 - (iii) Lack of courage
 - (iv) Lack of resources
 - (v) Lack of success
 - (vi) Lack of assurance
 - (vii) Others (please specify)
- 3c. How has this sermon spoken to you in your above situation(s)?
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- 4a. What is one thing God is calling you to be strong in while working out His will in your life?
- 4b. Having learnt of God's faithfulness to His promises made in Haggai 2:1-9, what can you do to achieve 4a. above?
- 4c. How can your group members help or encourage you to be strong and persevere in fulfilling 4b. above in the following week(s), till your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies, Prayer and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your personal testimony on how the Holy Spirit gave you the assurance that God is with you in carrying out God's work, when you almost resigned to the fact that "this is the best we can have". Include how things became better as you persevered.

OR

Give thanks to God that "He is with us" and "He will never leave nor abandon us" when we live out His will for our lives.

6. With a prayer partner, bring all that have been shared to God, committing your lives for God's work, and thanking Him for His faithfulness that He is always with you. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of your personal and SG life that you should think again if "this is the best we can have", so you may persevere and work on those areas by faith.

Pray for your group and our church to hold God's promise tightly that He will never forsake nor abandon us, and be courageous to work on together even when facing difficulties and setbacks, so we may reflect God's glory to the people around us.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. This is Amazing Grace – Phil Wickham <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPQKj2Zptr0>
2. Still – Hillsong https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyZDXA6_crE
3. Great Things – Phil Wickham <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4CY3nf1Mvw>

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