

The Good Old Days

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 13th of August 2000. The preacher is Phil Milman.

His sermon is entitled The Good Old Days and is from Haggai chapter 2 verses 1 to 9. Charles Spurgeon, a great preacher, began his sermon on Haggai chapter 2 verses 1 to 9 with these words.

Satan is always doing his utmost to stay the work of God. He hindered these Jews, and we're talking about here, from building the temple. And today he endeavours to hinder the people of God from spreading the gospel.

A spiritual temple is to be built for the Most High, and if by any means the evil one can delay its uprising, he will stick at nothing.

If he can take us off from working with faith and courage for the glory of God, he will be sure to do it. He is very cunning, and he knows how to change his argument and yet keep to his design.

[1 : 1 6] Little cares he how he works. So long as he can hurt the cause of God. I'm convinced of the truth of that last sentence.

Satan's only design is to hurt the cause of God. To do his work, Satan has many weapons. He may at one time use greed, another time use malice, avenge anger or malice or false accusation.

Still another time he may use lust, evil desires or the temptation to go for revenge. But of all his weapons, of all Satan's weapons, none is sharper than the one called discouragement.

If only he can get the people of God into despair over their efforts, then his battle is in part one. Well, it's part of human nature to struggle with discouragement and disappointment.

Perhaps you expected more from life and feel somewhat cheated by circumstances. It could be that someone who promised to love you forever has roughly treated you, or perhaps you have suffered at the hands of even your own family.

[2 : 3 2] I know people who feel ripped off by those with whom they work every day. There's probably people here who feel ripped off with people that they work with.

It could be that you've had more than your share of poor health and sickness throughout your life, and now you wish for a calm, sunny day. But none is in sight.

This passage that I read to you from Haggai is in a sense, I think, as I've read it and re-read it and read it and re-read it, it's a case study in the causes and cure of spiritual disappointment.

Hopefully we'll be able to show you that as we go through this tonight. Let me remind you briefly of the circumstances that surrounded this book.

The story begins as the exiles, or the people of God, Israel, have been sent into exile and they've been carted off from Jerusalem to Babylon.

[3 : 39] And they are now called here Jews at this particular time. And in this passage, in verse 2, we see that they are called the remnant. And so they've been carted off into exile in about 587 BC, and then now they've come back to Jerusalem to commence rebuilding the temple, which is the heart of Israel's worship.

And they have to rebuild the temple because the Babylonians, who had carted them off into exile, had desecrated the original temple. And not long after the rebuilding began, they ceased largely because of opposition, I think, from the Samaritans.

That was in about 537 BC. This is a history lecture going on here. Now, 16 years later, in around about 520 BC, God raised up this guy called Haggai to call the people back to the task at hand, back to the task of rebuilding his temple, God's temple.

And upon his prodding, they began the work, as I said last week, on August 29th, 520 BC. Now, they began the work and they came out full of gusto and were doing all the jobs.

But barely a month had passed and the initial enthusiasm had waned once again. They are in lament. It was all too difficult. They were overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the project and, it seems, by the memories of how great the former temple, which was the temple of Solomon's, had been.

[5 : 17] And by comparison, their efforts at rebuilding the temple now seemed embarrassingly small. And their attempt at rebuilding, therefore, is only a shadow of what was there in the past.

So that's the sort of the setting. And Haggai now speaks to this willing but discouraged group of workers, the remnant of the people. And tonight I want to look first at the causes for their disappointment or their discouragement.

And in so doing, as we try to understand this passage, we'll discover something about our own personal struggles. So let's begin with the causes of disappointment.

This passage, again, suggests several reasons for the discouragement, most of which evolve around the problem of what I call a bad memory. They were guilty both of dwelling upon the negative and of forgetting the positive altogether.

Now, memory can be a blessing or it can be a curse. And for these Jews, for this remnant, it had become a heavy burden that stifled their progress.

[6 : 28] So the first cause of their disappointment is of the good memories of the wrong things. If you look at verse 3, the first part of verse 3 in this chapter, it says, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory?

The original temple, as I said a moment ago, which was built by Solomon, was destroyed in 586 or 587 BC. And Haggai, as I said, prophesied in 520 BC, 66 years after the event of the original destruction.

Now, it's not impossible that all those years ago, Haggai himself was a boy in 587 BC. And he was perhaps a young boy when the temple was destroyed.

And certainly there must have been many people who came back as part of the remnant who were over 75 years old who had remembered the splendour of Solomon's temple and mourned for what they had lost.

And when they spoke, these people who had seen the temple in its former glory and now see it's just in a bunch of ruins, when these people spoke, they recalled the glory of the old days and they remarked at how insignificant this new temple seemed to be in comparison.

[7 : 54] And it hardly seemed like a temple at all for them. Where was the gold? Where was the silver that had marked out Solomon's temple?

It had all gone. And it almost embarrassed these people to see such a shabby structure being erected where once the old temple in its former glory had stood.

Perhaps they thought it just wasn't worth the effort. Maybe, just maybe, it would be better to simply live with the happy memories of the good old days. Well, memory is a wonderful thing if you remember the right things.

But for the Jews of Haggai's day, it was a curse because they not only remembered the past, they lived there. And as a result, they had trouble living in the present and thus looking to the future.

That's why Haggai's called up by God in a sense to prophesy. So that's the first thing. The second thing is that there is a bad memory of the right things, point B there.

[9 : 00] If you look at verses, the second part of verse 4 and verse 5, we read, I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt.

These people had forgotten what God had done in the past. Now let me ask you a question to keep you all awake here. What had God, look at this passage, what had God done for them in the past?

It's not a rhetorical question. Took them out of Egypt. He had brought his people out of Egypt. It was one of the most amazing events of Israel's past.

It's written about, it's been talked about by God's people. It's an amazing event. Yet somehow that incredible miracle seemed like only a distant memory.

It was a dim, distant, vague memory. They had forgotten, these people had forgotten how they were trapped with the Egyptian army behind them and the Red Sea before them. They had forgotten about that story.

[10 : 05] They had forgotten how Moses had struck the water and the sea parted and they were able to walk through on dry land. You've all seen the movie, The Prince of Egypt. Well, that's based on the story that's actually in the Bible about how God rescued his people.

They'd forgotten that. And they had forgotten that when the Egyptians followed them, the seas came together and what did it do? It swallowed them all.

They all drowned. Pharaoh's entire army drowned. So why does God remind them here through Haggai of this miracle? Because the God who rescued them from Egypt is the same God today.

He is the same God today that he was back then and he still works miracles today. Look at the end of verse 5. It says, My spirit abides or my spirit remains among you.

Do not fear. That's who he's addressing the remnant of these people here. My spirit abides among you. Do not fear. Now think of the implications of that statement.

[11 : 15] My spirit abides among you. Do not fear. Think about the things that have gone on in Israel's past that had a glorious past in a sense. But Abraham, who is their father in a sense, has gone.

Moses, who's given them the Tenkin Monuments, he's gone. David, their first, well their greatest king I should say, is gone. Solomon, who built this wonderful and glorious temple, is gone.

But God's spirit is still here. Fear not. Be strong. Pick up your hammer and your chisel. Keep on working. Don't look back to the past.

Don't worry about who isn't here. Focus on who is here. The Holy Spirit of God. He's with his people forever. Therefore be encouraged.

Keep moving forward. Don't be intimidated by daunting circumstances and so on. God has promised to stay with us forever.

[12 : 21] However, his spirit is the fulfillment of that unbreakable promise. So we must keep on keeping on. For the spirit remains with us.

So they have a bad memory of the right things. The third cause of their disappointment is they are playing what I call the comparison game. The second part of verse 3, look at that.

It says, How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? These old people are speaking here. And the old people remembered the glory of Solomon's temple, which I had just spoken about.

And they wept when they saw how insignificant this new temple was turning out to be. To them, it seemed to represent the failure of the past.

It was a living symbol of what they had lost 66 years earlier. And they felt it wasn't even worth the effort to rebuild because it would never look like the good old days.

[13 : 23] The same thing happens to us whenever we play the comparison game. We compare our children. We compare our wives or our husbands or our friends.

We compare what we used to have with what we have now. We remember the past as better than it really was so that the present seems worse than it really is.

Friends, the comparison game is foolish. It's dangerous. Because only God can make a proper comparison. And it reminds me a little of the story about Peter and Jesus.

The conversation that Peter and Jesus have after Jesus has risen from the dead in John's Gospel. In chapter 21 there, three times Jesus goes up to Peter and he asks, Peter, do you love me?

Three times Peter answered, yes, you know I love you. And three times Jesus said to him, feed my sheep, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Then Peter, talking about all these things and being reinstated with Jesus, he then saw the Apostle John, the writer of John's Gospel, following them and he asked, Lord, what about him?

[14 : 40] Looking, referring to Peter, meaning where does he fit into your plans? To which Jesus replied, if it's my will that he remain until I come or return, what is that to you?

God isn't obligated to treat us in exactly the same way he treats anyone else, nor is he required to treat us today exactly as he did yesterday. Because God is God, that's why, and we're not.

He has the right to do what he pleases. And if you think about that fact, it makes all comparisons useless and counterproductive in a sense.

Well, playing the comparison game can be dangerous and foolish in a sense. The fourth point for their cause of disappointment is that they were living in the past, downgrading the present and forgetting the future.

One result of living in the past and looking down on the present is that you do forget about God's promises for the future.

[15 : 49] And in this case, it meant missing God's promise to bring even greater glory to the rebuilt temple than it ever had during Solomon's day. Look at verse 9.

It says, The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.

Friends, disappointment drains all our energies because we focus toward the past instead of moving confidently into the future, knowing that God is with us.

Well, there are four causes of their disappointment. Let's now turn to looking at the cure for disappointment. What is their cure? Or what is the cure for disappointment?

Again, this passage suggests four steps that we could take to free ourselves from the swamp of despair or self-pity. And the first step is actually the hardest.

[16 : 50] It's the most basic in a sense, and in some ways it is the most important. And that is this. We need to let go.

Is it there? There you go. Let go. How often this lesson comes up in our spiritual life. We'll never grow until we learn to let go of the past.

In Haggai's time, the Jews had to let go of their fond memories of Solomon's temple and learn to place their trust in God. And until they did that, they would never make any spiritual progress.

They would just dwell on themselves and it would be kind of a downward spiral, I would have thought. Now for you it may mean letting go of some painful memory from the past that keeps you from moving ahead.

It may mean choosing to forgive even though the other person won't admit that they have done anything wrong. And it often will mean deliberately choosing to let go of some dream that you have held on to for many years.

[17 : 55] No matter what it is, whether it's good or bad, if it's holding you back, you've got to let go of it. What things in the past are holding you back and are you holding on to and not letting go of?

As hard as it may be, ask God to help you to let go. And until you do, you'll find it very difficult.

In fact, I would say you won't move forward with God. Let go. Look up. To look up means to get a new view of who God is.

And in this passage again, Haggai uses one particular name for God. Now, again, this is not a rhetorical question and it's not hard.

I don't have any minties though, I'm sorry about that. If you look closely at verses 1 to 9, what do you notice about the word Lord? Very good.

[19 : 01] That's right. It has capitals there. And when you say the word Lord in capitals in the Old Testament, it's the translation for the Hebrew word Yahweh, which is the personal name for God.

It's God's personal name. It is Yahweh who the people, who this remnant, the people who have returned from exile in Babylon are in relationship with you. Yahweh, the Yahweh that we are in relationship with is the creator of heaven and earth.

He is God Almighty, the Lord of hosts whom they worship. But these people did not have their eyes open as to who he was.

They weren't looking up. Their view of God was too small. So this task of rebuilding the temple was too overwhelming for them.

In the same way, your view of God radically affects the way you approach life. Take a good look at the God you worship, that we worship.

[20 : 05] Is he big enough to handle your problems? If not, then you need to look up and get a new view of God, the Lord of hosts, the Lord Almighty.

Let go. Look up. Look ahead. God only sends his people in one direction and that's forward.

He never sends them back to the past and he never lets them stay in one place for too long. And the people of Haggai's day had romanticised the past and completely forgotten about the future.

And what was that future? This gets a bit complicated here, but verses 6 to 9 make three specific promises about the future. Let me read to you verses 6 and 7 again.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, the Lord, Yahweh, for thus says the Lord of hosts, Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land and I will shake all the nations so that the treasure of all nations shall come and I will fill this house with splendour, says the Lord of hosts.

[21 : 23] A time of international shaking is coming upon the world. Now it's interesting that these verses here from Haggai chapter 2 verse 6 is quoted in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 26 and 27.

And there in Hebrews it applies to the return of Jesus Christ. Let me read to you Hebrews 12 verses 26 and 27.

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. And this phrase, Yet once more, indicates the removal of what is shaken, that is, created things, so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

That's what verses 26 and 27 say. Well, why does the writer to the Hebrews use these words, quote these words from Haggai here, and what does Haggai mean when he says these words to the people?

Let me try and explain it. It's confusing. He says in a little, a time, what is he saying in verse 6?

[22 : 49] Thus says the Lord of hosts, Once again, in a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth. And in Hebrews he said, Yet once more I will shake the earth, or at that time his voice shook the earth. He's referring originally to a time when God shook the earth at Mount Sinai, just before the giving of the Ten Commandments.

If you were to go back into Exodus chapter 19, you see just before the Ten Commandments are handed down, there's a sound of trumpets and all those sorts of things going on, and there's the shaking of the ground all around the people.

Now Haggai says here, A day is coming when he, that is God, is going to shake the earth again. But the next time he will shake the heavens as well. And the day is coming when God will shake the entire world.

A shaking that is greater than any earthquake. And in that final great day, everything that has been man-made will be destroyed. Only eternal things will remain.

Now I don't know if you've ever been in an earthquake or not. We don't have many here in Australia. But when I, a long time ago, lived in Sydney, we had a small tremor one day.

[24 : 02] And it happened while I was sitting in my office in Chatswood on the North Shore. Sounds very sophisticated, doesn't it? It was just the back of a shop. And there was this earthquake.

And suddenly the walls around me started shaking. The ground underneath me was rocking. And I originally thought that it was our delivery truck had hit our shop and was about to fall down.

But it wasn't. And then a few minutes later, there was a radio report saying that an earthquake had hit and that Newcastle, a city north of two hours, probably north of where I was working, had been hit badly.

People were trapped and so on. And it turned out that several people were killed by that very same quake that I was in. It was scary to think that.

Now we know that earthquakes occur and we know even the most likely places that they may happen. But we don't know when they will happen.

[25 : 08] Now I think that Haggai is talking here about a metaphorical earthquake. An event greater than any event any seismologist could ever dream about or hope to predict.

And when this one comes, the whole earth will be shaken apart and everything in which people put their trust will be gone.

Money, houses, land, cars, buildings and wardrobes will be wiped out in a brief moment. And if you can see it, if you can feel it, if you can touch it, it will disappear.

What will be left? Only those things that cannot be shaken, eternal things. And they're the things of the spirit, the word of God, your own soul, your own spirit.

And Hebrews 12 verse 28 again sums it all up as a kingdom that cannot be shaken. That's what will be left, a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Now there's an application for us all here.

[26 : 13] Do not pin your hopes on this world. It is going down. It is going down for good, kind of like north Melbourne. It is going down.

It cannot last. It's going to crumble. It is going to fall. And the whole world and everything in it. So if you live your life for this world, on that day everything you live for will be nothing but dust.

God is saying something important to us here. He is telling us of an unshakable kingdom to come. And it's ours. It's for his people.

And he's warning us about that. So there is a time of international shaking to come for the world. I'm going to speak a bit more on that next week about that shaking because the rest of chapter 2 picks up some of those things.

But in verse 7 he talks about a bit more shaking and then he says the treasure of all nations shall come. For many centuries Jewish and Christian commentators have agreed that this verse refers to the Messiah, to the coming of Jesus Christ and he is the treasure of every nation.

[27 : 36] But how is it that Jesus can be called the treasure of all nations when so many do not believe in him? There are a number of answers here.

Jesus' coming was expected by the nations. Jesus' salvation is needed by all people. Jesus is admired in every nation because he has followers today in every nation.

Jesus is desired by all who see him as he is. Jesus will be prized by all in the end. You can mark my words on that.

Jesus is the light of the world. We read about that in John's Gospel. He is the light of the world, the light to the Gentiles, that is those who aren't Jews. And he is the salvation of the earth.

All kings will one day bow before this Jesus. Thus he is and will forever be the treasure of all nations. So Haggai is telling about the treasure of all nations that shall come.

[28 : 44] And then again we go down to verse 9 and it says, The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former. Now the people of Haggai's day must be thinking, how can this be?

It can only be wishful thinking. After all, Solomon's temple was so vast and so magnificent and this temple that they are building now seems so small and insignificant.

For hundreds of years it would seem that this prophecy was impossible. But the day would come and has come when Jesus himself would walk through the temple, the temple that was rebuilt under Herod, would walk through those temple precincts in Jerusalem.

And Jesus is the greater glory that God promised to the people of Haggai's day and Jesus is the glory and the indestructible temple, the heart of our worship for all of God's people today.

As his people, as God's people, we are called to be building his temple just as the people of Haggai's day were called to build God's temple. Now as God's servant and worker, you never know what will come of your faithful service for God.

[30 : 07] Whether it be teaching Christian religious education in the schools or whether it's the way we act at school, the wise use of our words in our conversations in the classroom or out in the playground, out at work, wherever it may be.

Some little thing that you say or do may vastly impact the world and touch many lives. touch many lives for Christ.

So as Christians, be faithful because you never know who is watching and listening and you never know the lives that you can impact through your faithful service for Jesus.

Let go, look up, look ahead. The fourth point is in overcoming disappointment is to get moving. Get up and get moving for God.

Too many of us sit around stewing in our own juices when God is saying get up and do the work that I have called you to do. And that's what the Lord said here to the Jews.

[31 : 11] Three times in verse 4 he says, Take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord. Take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehoshadak. Take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord.

Work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts. Friends, take courage in the Lord. Rise up and do the work of God.

Take courage in the face of difficulty and do the work of God. God, don't let anything stop you. Take courage because God is with us.

His spirit abides with us. Now let's face it, we all get tired and we all get worn out from time to time, whether it's having to listen to a sermon or whether it's having to work.

I personally am wondering what is going to happen, how am I going to get through the next five weeks. There is so much work that is ahead of me, personal work, not stuff that I can actually delegate out.

[32 : 16] But as Christians, we're not left on our own and that's the great hope that I take. We need to remember that and we all need to ask God to help us to go the next step.

Lord, here I am now, help me move to the next step. And in the taking of that step, he will give you the strength to take the next step after that as well.

So many people today live in defeat because they can't climb the steep mountain that is before them. But remember this, that son actually picked up that idea, didn't it?

It's just that person that's sort of given up in the end, I think. But remember this, you don't have to climb the mountain. You just have to take the next step with God and he will help you to take the next step as well.

Well, there's an outline for you to look at there and to think about when you get discouraged and ways in which you may be able to cure some of our disappointment.

[33 : 29] But it seems here, as we look at this chapter, these verses from chapter 2, that discouragement was driving these people from doing God's work. And it can discourage us from doing God's work too.

But we need to keep the big picture in sight. How do we do that? Know what it is that God has done for us and his people in the past.

In other words, get a handle on the Bible, understand it, read it, study it with other people. people. Secondly, no one believe what he has done to rescue his people through Jesus Christ.

Put your trust in Jesus Christ. He is the hope for us in the past and the hope for the future. For all who trust in Jesus, there is a guarantee of eternal life.

Jesus shook the nation then and he continues to shake the nations today. And there will be a final shaking at the end when Jesus returns. But with Jesus as our firm foundation, we will be sitting tight on that final day when all the world will see him as Lord.

[34 : 41] Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, these words are confusing and hard to understand. Lord, we pray that you would give us hearts and minds that are willing to see what your word has to say and that your spirit would help us understand it.

Lord, for us today as your people, we get discouraged and we get disappointed. Heal us where we have a good memory of the wrong things.

Please help restore our memory to see the right things, the right things of you. Forgive us when we've played the comparison game. Forgive us when we've lived in the past and downgraded the present and forgot about you entirely.

Lord, where we are hurt and ache, may we let go, may we look to you and may we look to that glorious future where we will know and every knee will bow and confess that you are Lord.

Lord, I pray that now as your people, your willing servants, that we would be willing to move and move for you in faithful service. Lord, we do this knowing that your spirit is with us.

[36 : 01] Amen. Amen. Amen. ...

... ... Amen.