

The Latter Splendor

November 9, 2025 (1)

Haggai 2:1-9

¹On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the Lord's word came through Haggai the prophet: ²Say to Judah's governor Zerubbabel, Shealtiel's son, and to the chief priest Joshua, Jehozadak's son, and to the rest of the people: ³Who among you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Doesn't it appear as nothing to you? ⁴So now, be strong, Zerubbabel, says the Lord. Be strong, High Priest Joshua, Jehozadak's son, and be strong, all you people of the land, says the Lord. Work, for I am with you, says the Lord of heavenly forces.

⁵As with our agreement when you came out of Egypt, my spirit stands in your midst. Don't fear. ⁶This is what the Lord of heavenly forces says: In just a little while, I will make the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land quake. ⁷I will make all the nations quake. The wealth of all the nations will come. I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of heavenly forces. ⁸The silver and the gold belong to me, says the Lord of heavenly forces. ⁹This house will be more glorious than its predecessor, says the Lord of heavenly forces. I will provide prosperity in this place, says the Lord of heavenly forces.



Today, in early November, we begin leaning into Advent. We begin with a three-week series called “The Days Are Surely Coming.”

Working mostly from the Old Testament's prophets we will return to the promises of God – promises of a new reality, of a new hope, and of an ongoing presence that will usher all of creation into this new kingdom of God. Together, this prophetic witness reminds us that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

By beginning Advent on this second week of November, we are invited to consider the promise of a new kingdom apart from what has become the machinery of Christmas. This is a kingdom that Jesus often spoke of, pointed to, and called the church to be. The church is to be a reflection of the coming kingdom of God in the here and now. When we are living as the community that God intends us to be, we are rallying around the hurting, we are bringing others into the body of Christ, and we are offering support during difficult times. The kingdom of God that Haggai points to, the kingdom of God that Jesus points to, these words do not call us to wait for the new heaven and earth to become the reality. No, these words invite us to bring about the new kingdom of God here on this earth. This is the “latter splendor” that Haggai speaks of and the now present “God of the living” that Jesus speaks of. As we prepare to better understand our call to help usher in this new kingdom of God in the here and now, let us begin with a word of prayer...

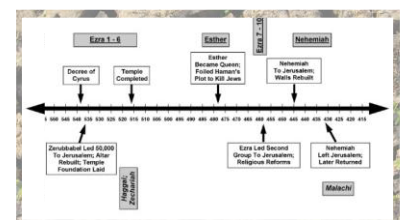


Most holy and powerful God, we take courage today that you will provide all we need to keep your presence at the center of our work to build this church and the community around us into a reflection of who and what you are. In and through us, may your love flourish, may your mercy pour out, and may your compassion be revealed, all for your glory. It is with this hope that I ask that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts are acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Please turn with me to Haggai 2 as we begin this time together.

Haggai was a prophet of God who worked during the reign of King Darius, in a time when the return from exile was well under way.

Following King Cyrus' decree, Zerubbabel was named the first governor of a new Judah.



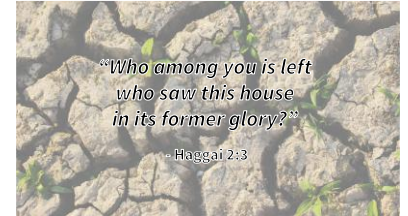
He led a group of about 50,000 back to Jerusalem and, under his leadership, the rebuilding of the temple got under way. The altar was rebuilt, and the foundation was laid. But attacks and pressure from the Samaritans halted the progress. This history is recorded in the first six chapters of the book of Ezra. About 70 years later, Ezra himself led a second group back to Judah, leading the efforts to rebuild the faith of God's people. The temple had been rebuilt, but the people's faith was lacking. To finish the story, about 40 years later, Nehemiah will lead the third wave of returnees, and their focus will be to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Sadly, it was during the first period, when the initial temple construction had halted, that people's focus shifted, putting efforts into rebuilding their homes, into planting crops, and into establishing new lives post-exile. All was not well with the people of God. So, God sends Haggai to speak into the people's procrastination and lack of commitment towards rebuilding the temple. Using Haggai's words as the inspiration to begin the process of rebuilding the temple will start again. Zerubbabel will see this project to completion.

God raised up Haggai in about 526 BCE to confront the people's complacency. In chapter 1 Haggai questions the people's choice to live in "*paneled houses*" while the temple sits in ruin. The prophet informs the people that in spite of sowing seeds, they are still hungry. In spite of raising some sheep, the people are still without adequate clothing. He tells them that those who are working are putting their wages into "*bags with holes*." In short, to sum up the problem, Haggai tells the people, you are not flourishing because you have neglected God's house. If you rebuild God's house, Haggai says, then God will be honored. But because they choose not to do this, remaining inwardly focused instead, God proclaims that the skies withhold their dew and the earth will withhold its produce. The people heard this word of God spoken through Haggai, and they began to again fear God – in a healthy, good way.

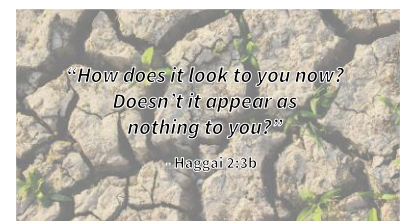
The spirit of God moved among the leaders and the people, and they returned to the work of rebuilding the temple. This sets the stage as we turn to our reading from chapter 2 of Haggai.

In verse 3 of chapter 2, Haggai steps into the middle of the rebuilding scene and asks the governor, the chief priest, and the people working, *“Who among you is left who saw this house in its former glory?”* There is very little chance that anyone raised their hand. The 70 years of exile had certainly left the possibility of there being only a small handful of people who had even heard their parents’ or maybe grandparents’ telling of the glory of the first temple. So, then, why does Haggai ask this question?

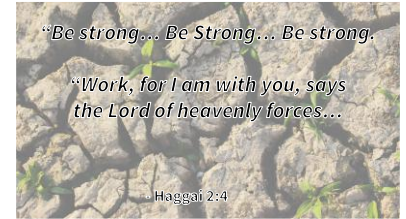
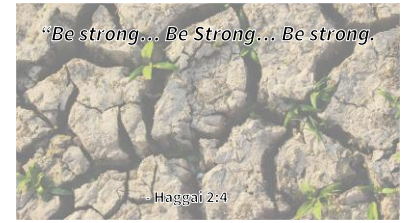


The prophet asks because there is value in looking back. Yes, there can be a danger when we become too nostalgic. We can get caught up in remembering the past and this can cause us to lose track of the present, never mind of the future. In this way, nostalgia can become an idol. But a healthy attention to the past can help us understand the legacy in which we stand. This, in turn, can help us face the future unafraid. As Haggai asks this question, he is hoping to harness some power from the past to encourage them in their present work and to cast a vision of hope for the future.

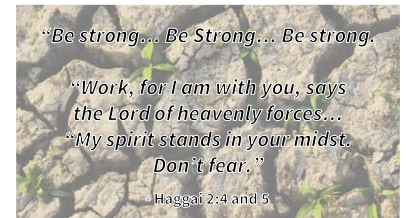
Haggai then speaks to the present moment. In the rest of verse 3 he says, *“How does it look to you now? Doesn’t it appear as nothing to you?”* These are not words of discouragement but words of reality. And they are words that prepare the leaders and the workers to hear what God has to say next. So, in this sense, these are words of anticipatory encouragement.



Three times in the next verse, Haggai says, *“Be strong.”* He says, *“Be strong, Zerubbabel.”* He says, *“Be strong, high priest Joshua.”* He says, *“Be strong, all you people.”* Yes, the task will be difficult. Yes, at times, the tears of exile will come back as you remember what once was. In your work, be strong, be brave, be courageous. Then, in the rest of verse 4 the prophet tells them why they can be strong: *“Work, for I am with you, says the Lord of heavenly forces.”* The Lord your God, the one for whom you rebuild this temple, I am with you, says God. Work in faith and in trust, knowing that the Lord your God is with you in all that you do. Work in faith, people of God, trusting in God’s presence amongst the people.



In verse 5, God puts it this way: *“My spirit stands in your midst. Don’t fear.”* Before continuing in Haggai, I want to pause and remind us that these words are still truth. Last Sunday, as Jeff stated the obvious – that \$36,000 is a big number – maybe some of us needed some encouragement. As we were invited to consider the present state of our flooring and were then invited to step into imagining a better foundation, we need to remember that God is with us in this work and that God’s Spirit will lead and guide our work. When we begin to worry about our church being able to accomplish this task, when we fear not having enough resources within our own grasp to be a part of completing the project, we need to remember these words of hope and encouragement: *“My spirit stands in your midst. Don’t fear.”*

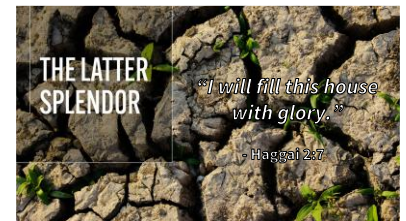


Haggai is reminding the governor and the high priest and the people that it is God who is in control. He is reminding them that God is the architect of the vision and the power behind this new story. Haggai calls them to see and live into a future that is brighter than the past.

While all of this is important for the physical rebuilding to continue, the most important message that Haggai has to bring is that God is present, not just in the work but in their lives too. Even though much of the temple still lies in ruins, the prophet says, God has not forsaken the promise to be present to the people. In the work, in the struggle, God is present. Haggai does not say, ‘When the building is all done, then God will come back to be with you.’ No, the prophet says, ‘God is here now.’ God is fully present in the moment. Even when it seems that the glory of the past temple may never be revived, God is present. Even when the task before us seems beyond our abilities and beyond our resources, God is present.

So, when God says through Haggai, in verse 7, *“I will fill this house with glory,”* God is probably not really talking about the building.

God’s plan, God’s vision for the people of God, is way bigger than the physical structure. The house where God resides, well, it is not just the building that the Israelites call the temple. In fact, the temple is the house of God only when it is filled with the people of God. The ‘house’ that the prophet speaks of, the things filled with glory and splendor, that will be the people of God. At this point, yes, the people of God have mostly lost sight of who and whose they are. As we said earlier, it will be Ezra that rekindles that fire. But at this point, Haggai cautions against getting too caught up in the building. Here he is calling them to remember that for the people of God to be filled with glory and splendor, they must be focused on the living out of their faith and their trust in God in their daily living.

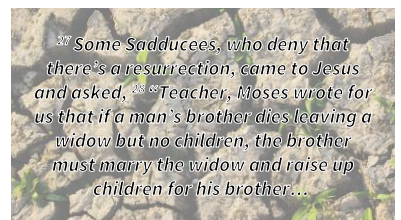


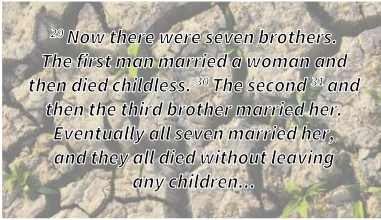
We were recently reminded of this during the pandemic. During that time, it could have been easy to lose our way or to allow our focus to be misguided. In many ways, COVID reminded us that the church is not the building. Even though we could not gather together physically, we were able to continue to do the work of God.

During this difficult time, we were reminded that the church is at its best when the people of God at work in the world, in the community, in our homes. We found that we were able to do the work of God because out there in the world, God remained present with us. The glory of God was being revealed in our being and doing as faithful disciples out there in the world.

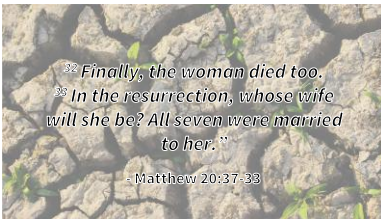
Before connecting into Luke's gospel, we must then ask why Haggai was encouraging the people to rebuild a building. In the end, we might wonder, a building for what purpose? A church, a temple, a building – they are important because they provide a structure and often a place for doing the work of ministry. As faithful followers of Christ, we do need a place of beauty and wonder that draw us deeper into God's presence in our lives and in our world. We need a safe place to be equipped and encouraged so that we can go forth to do the work of God. Haggai would remind us, though, that the building serves its purpose only if the people create space for God to lead and guide them in their doing and being, in their thinking and dreaming. This is the latter splendor that Haggai hopes for – a community of faith that allows God's glory and splendor to shine through them and from them. It is a glory and splendor in the present time, in the daily living of their faith in the world.

Turning to Luke 19, we also see Jesus pointing to God's glory and splendor being revealed in the here and now. Some doctrinal snipers try to trap Jesus with a trick question, and of course he dismantles the trap. They are 'snipers' because they are asking Jesus about the afterlife – something that they do not believe in. Here is the trap, from verses 27-33: ²⁷ *Some Sadducees, who deny that there's a resurrection, came to Jesus and asked,* ²⁸ *"Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies leaving a widow but no children, the brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother..."*





29 Now there were seven brothers. The first man married a woman and then died childless. 30 The second 31 and then the third brother married her. Eventually all seven married her, and they all died without leaving any children...

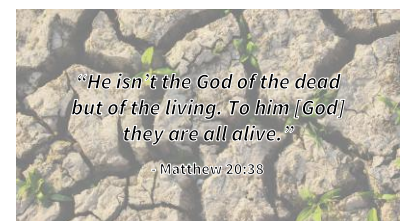


32 Finally, the woman died too. 33 In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? All seven were married to her."

In essence, they ask Jesus, in the afterlife, which man is the husband of a woman married more than once? In short, Jesus' answer is simple: 'None of the above. They don't marry in eternity.' For Jesus, the premise of the question is flawed, because in eternity we are not really dead. In verse 36 Jesus says, *"They can no longer die... [as] God's children they share in the resurrection."* In spirit, all who believe in Christ as Lord and Savior will one day be alive in the afterlife. He then reminds the Sadducees that Moses referred to God as still being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Drawing upon the Old Testament witness, Jesus is pointing out a flaw in their nonbelief in the resurrection.

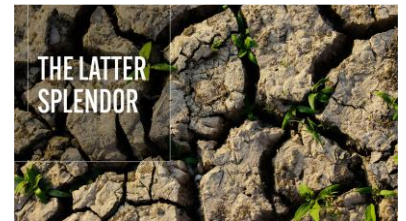


Next Jesus adds, in verse 38, *"He isn't the God of the dead but of the living. To him [God] they are all alive."* Here Jesus takes the Sadducees question about the afterlife and slips out of the afterlife, right back into this life, into the present time, into the right now, into how we are living out the faith today.



In connecting the promise of eternal life to living in the present age, Jesus invites us to use our hope in the future blessing of eternity as energy to motivate us to live the resurrection life right now. God's kingdom and the new creation are unfolding among us this moment. It's not something we have to die to see or to be a part of. When we give our lives to God, then God gives us new lives here and now. The "end of the world as we know it" is simply the turn of the page from one chapter to the next. God is already creating the world anew. In reality, Christ did not just come once. Christ comes all the time. Christ enters our life and changes it, brings about the end of that old life, as we die to self. Made new again in and through Christ, we start a new way of living. Over and over. Day after day. Each day closer to Christ.

This dying-and-rising is the gospel's constant promise and constant invitation for each of us to continue our daily walk, growing closer and closer and closer to Jesus Christ. Yes, we will sin and fall short, and yes, we will be forgiven and made new again. Over and over. This is the latter splendor to which the good news of Jesus Christ points to. God is with us now. God continues to be with us. For God's love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness – one day in eternity and in every day of this life – for this we say, thanks be to God. Alleluia and amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. Resurrection power is not just one day sometime in the future. It is every day. How do you experience this in your life? How does it help your faith to grow?
- 2) *Pray*. Where might your focus be shifting from what God might be calling you to, instead to focusing on self? Pray for the Spirit to re-focus you on God's purposes.
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 20:45-21:4. What do these stories reveal about what it means to live a life of faith in the here and now? How do you demonstrate this in your life?