

The Glory Days are Still to Come

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if you can think of any teams in the Bible. There are a few kind of obvious teams out there in the Bible.

Maybe you think of Moses and Aaron, who work together. Maybe you think of David and Jonathan a bit later. Perhaps you think of New Testament Paul and Timothy.

Great teams of the Bible, aren't they? Maybe Aquila and Priscilla. You worked in their marriage together as a team. We came across, didn't we, last time in Haggai, a lesser known team, I guess, of the Bible.

The dream team. Haggai, the prophet. Joshua, the priest. Zerubbabel, the governor. However, these guys together, they led the rebuilding of God's house, the temple, as his people came back out of exile.

But one of the most underrated teams, I think, of the Bible is another team that we find on site at the same time. And that is the teamwork between Haggai and his fellow prophet, Zechariah.

[1 : 14] If you flip the page in your Bible, you will find the book that he wrote. They are working together at this time on this building site.

A bit like, I guess, site managers sent from God to do this work. So Ezra writes in chapter 5 that Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, son of Josedach, set to work to rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. That is what we saw, isn't it, last time in Haggai, that God's people obeyed God's voice again as the prophet spoke to them.

They sorted out their priorities, and they got back to work on his house. But that wasn't the end of the job for the prophets, obviously, because the book of Haggai has another chapter.

So God's people had an ongoing need to hear God's word in their work. And so Ezra says, the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

[2 : 28] In Ezra 6, we read the Jews continue to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah. And now that teaches something to us, I think, about the significance, maybe, of these kind of lesser-known books.

In our Bibles of Haggai and Zechariah, their importance back then and now in the life of God's people. It teaches us something, doesn't it, also, about the place of God's word in his work, how central it is.

It's indispensable. It teaches us something, as well, I think, about the role of preaching in the life of a church, to continuously build up God's people by his word, week by week.

And, of course, it tells us something about teamwork, doesn't it? The prophets, preachers. Well, we often need to work together to do that, to deliver God's word. And I say all that because there's one thing that Haggai's teammate, Zechariah, says.

That is, I think, intrinsic. It gets right to the heart of what Haggai is saying to us tonight. Zechariah says this, Who dares despise the day of small things?

- [3 : 49] The day of small things. See, life for God's people back then felt really small. They'd started to rebuild from the wreckage.
- But very quickly, they work out that God's house is not going to be as big as the old one. And the problem for them is that small was just not on their agenda.
- Ezra tells us, again, when they realized that it wasn't going to be as big, many of the old men who'd seen the first house wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house that was being laid.
- Though many also shouted for joy, so that the people couldn't distinguish between the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping. You talk about mixed emotions as they rebuild God's house.
- Because this new house was going to be small. But small, struggling, simple, weak.
- [4 : 54] Well, for them, it felt like nothing. They became disappointed, discouraged. Where was God in these small things? But just as God before challenged their priorities, well, now in Haggai, he comes to challenge their expectations.
- See, contrary to what they expect, verse 9, God promises them now the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.
- This is a day of small things, he says, but the glory days are still to come in the future. And so tonight, God, through Haggai, I think challenges maybe our expectations.
- What do we expect for God's church? What do we expect of him in our day? A day that perhaps can feel for us like a day of small things.
- What do we expect from our work as we labor together to build up God's house today? Well, first, Haggai tells us it's right for us to kind of pause and to say that, well, where we are now, maybe it's not where we want to be.
- [6 : 13] And so first, God calls us here through Haggai to grieve over faded glory. Grieve over faded glory. See, first, notice God confronts his people with the kind of disappointing reality there.
- And then, see that in verse 3, who of you is left who saw the house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?
- Now, we can tell from verse 1 that roughly a month had passed since they'd got back to work on God's house. So now you can imagine the kind of initial thrill, the excitement has kind of worn off, and the reality is beginning to sink in.
- Now, that is a really decisive moment in the life of a church, in the life of Christians, isn't it? Not, I guess, so much the moment of decision itself, but a month later.
- In church life, in our own hearts, how do we know whether our repentance, our kind of fresh devotion to God is just a flash in the pan, or a longer-lasting love?
- [7 : 26] Well, we find out, don't we, when life gets normal again. Even the shine has kind of worn off, and it stops feeling new, when loving God just feels like keeping going in faith.
- Well, then, do we still treasure God being with us? But it was harder still, I think, for these guys back then, because this is also the end of the week that they have spent remembering how God had rescued them in the past.
- So that date is the date of the Feast of Booths, when they remembered the Exodus. So all week long, okay, their heads have been full of the glory days.
- They look back and thought of how God had parted the sea in power, how he had been with them in the pillar of cloud and fire by day and night, how God's glory had appeared above the mountain, how he'd come down to be with them in his tabernacle.
- So they've been thinking about all of that, steeped in it all week, and then they come out of their tent, and what do they see? A small pile of rubble where God's house once stood.

[8 : 42] So put yourself in their shoes. You can imagine, can't you, their disappointment, their sadness, their nostalgia for better times, the overwhelming sense that the glory days were back then, and they were never coming back.

I think it's easy, if we're Christians, to feel perhaps a similar way about God's church today. Perhaps you can kind of resonate with God's question, does it not seem to you like nothing?

That's a hard question, isn't it? Your faith, Christianity, is kind of hanging off the edge of society. Somebody, as I was walking the dog the other day, asked me what it was I'd do.

I told them that I was the minister of a church, kind of just stared blankly at me. Occasionally we're seen as a threat, but even when we're not, we're certainly a long way, aren't we, from even a time in living memory, when the church and the Bible and being a Christian was seen generally as a good thing.

Times have changed. Whenever we kind of think that the glory days of the church were, they seem to be in the past. Tonight, driving here, I drove past at least three former church buildings that have been repurposed or sitting empty.

[10 : 07] Or we think back, don't we, to the days of the early church, the book of Acts, the way that God's word was being spoken and people became Christians in their thousands and the church boomed.

And we can kind of sit here tonight and ask ourselves, where has the glory gone? You know, that sense of living in the shadow of the past can be so discouraging, can't it?

Well, that is what this remnant of exiles felt when they looked at the ruins of the temple. So what does God say? How does he speak into that situation? Well, firstly, maybe surprisingly, he caused them to face this hard reality.

How does it look to you now, he says? Does it not seem to you like nothing? Now, why would God point that out? It feels a bit like kind of rubbing their noses in a really hard situation, doesn't it?

But God's people back then needed that. Remember, for years, they had ignored the shame of God's ruined house.

[11 : 19] For years, there'd been no sense that there was something wrong in their world, in their community. But now God was calling them to see that there was something that wasn't right. To kind of recognize and own the hard reality on the ground and to lament.

your faith is not based, is it, on blissful ignorance. God doesn't call us to close our eyes as we live through this world to pretend that his church is something that it's not.

God calls us to see, to own the aching gap sometimes between the smallness of his church on earth and the glory of his kingdom as we would love to see it.

Do we long to see Christ honored in the people that we live around you? Do we long to see his kingdom grow in Scotland today?

Do we long to see his church built? I trust if we're Christians, if you're a Christian tonight, that you do long for those things. Well, says God, look around you.

[12 : 27] Look at you. Look at you. Look at you. Look at you. Look at your street. Look at your office. Look at the church at the end of your road.

These places that we live in should break our hearts. How often do we come to God grieving over those things, grieving over the ways that he isn't glorified in our world?

How often do we cry out in sadness to God that Christ is not trusted by our friends, our families, our neighbors, people who we love?

How often do we grieve over churches that have lost their first love, turned away from God and his word and left communities, towns, without a witness to Christ?

Does that not make us weep? Of course we trust, don't we, that God is sovereignly in control. He is on his throne. He's not lost a handle on his world.

[13 : 32] But is that not all the more reason for us to pour our hearts out to him? To him who sees more clearly than we do how things are. He actually stirs our hearts in longing for his kingdom, for his Christ.

You better still, he is the one who does the work, isn't he? The one who builds his church. The one who goes after those who are lost. And so through Haggai, he calls us for us to see and to lament, cry out to him over the faded glory of his church, his gospel, his kingdom in our land.

And friends, that's different from kind of nostalgia and just wishing that things could be the way that they were once. It's different, isn't it, from complaining to each other as we sometimes do, don't we?

God is calling us to come and complain to him, to cry out to him from our hearts to the one who is in control of all things. So friends, do we do that?

Do we let ourselves do that? But God doesn't leave us grieving because next, Haggai comes to us with hope. Secondly, he calls us to work, to work with God in hidden glory.

[14 : 57] Now we read verse 4, Be strong, Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, Joshua son of Josedach, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord, and work, for I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty.

Be strong, and work, he says. Now we might wonder what is God expecting? You know, when he says, be strong, is that kind of like when we maybe say to each other, get well soon?

You know, it's a nice thing to say, isn't it? But it doesn't do anything, it doesn't make someone well. You know, where was the strength going to come from for these returned exiles in their despondency and disappointment?

Yeah, well, with God, these are not empty words. Notice, they're followed with a promise. Be strong, and work, for I am with you. I am with you.

We saw last time in Haggai, this is kind of the headline, a promise of this whole book. Our work rests on God with us. See, God isn't just hoping tonight that we will find the strength that we need to press on.

[16 : 11] He gives us all the strength we need for everything that He calls us to. I don't know if you've perhaps come across, read the work of St. Augustine.

If you've not read his book, Confessions, and you're going away this summer, pick it up before you go. It's well worth your time. He's rightly known as one of the greatest thinkers in Christian history.

But throughout his life, you know, I find this really refreshing. He found himself weighed down by his own sense of weakness, and often his sense of failure.

And as he writes about his life, he kind of repeats this prayer to God, give what you command, and command what you will. Give what you command, and command what you will.

See, he was confident even in his utter weakness that whatever God called and commanded him to do, well, God would give him everything that he needed to follow that call and that command.

[17 : 17] Peter says the same in his second letter, and he writes, His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.

And that is just what we see here, isn't it? God calls His people to be strong and to work, and so He comes to them with His own strong presence to give them the strength that they needed.

You know, building up from the ground again felt like an impossible task to them. And I suppose the question is, even if they did rebuild it, would it be worth it in the end?

It was going to be smaller than the old one. How can we keep working when perhaps we don't have the strength to go on?

Well, God says, I am with you. And His promise is that that will never change. See that in verse 5? Where He says, this is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and my spirit remains among you.

[18 : 22] Do not fear. Do you see the beauty of what God is saying? That the glory days that they had been looking back to when He rescued them, He is saying, what I said to you then still counts today.

Nothing has changed. I promised I covenanted with you when I took you out of Exodus in the good old days, and I am still with you now. You were where these guys lived.

It felt a long way from the center of the universe. It was known as the province beyond the river, kind of the back of beyond, over there somewhere.

But even where they lived in the back of beyond, well, God was with them, which made it the bright center of the universe because the creator of the universe was with them.

And friends, that is true of us now as it was for them back then. We, as they didn't have, we don't have, do we, anything kind of showy or glamorous to show for God being with us.

[19 : 31] We look, don't we, like ordinary Christians and an ordinary church because that's exactly what we are. To us, now as to them back then, God doesn't come with a kind of outward show of visible glory.

He says he comes in hidden glory, buying the power of his spirit who lives in and among us. His being with them back then wouldn't be seen in a glamorous building, but in the strength that they needed for their unglamorous work.

And it's the same for us now, isn't it? God's glory in his church, how is it seen? Well, not in kind of outwardly impressive things, but things which maybe some people might look down upon.

You're having a conversation with a neighbor over the garden fence about the Lord Jesus or encouraging somebody with a text to keep going in faith or praying with and for each other for that tea.

You're building up God's church today happens in ways that we might not notice if we were looking for them. Small ways. It might feel like nothing. It might feel shameful at times, but it's glorious work.

[20 : 55] That is Haggai's message because that is where God's spirit is at work. This is where he is in ordinary Christians doing ordinary things in his strength to build up his church.

We might look back, mightn't we, to the kind of ultimate glory days in the past when Jesus himself was here on earth in person. We think perhaps wouldn't it have been better to have been a Christian then when he was here, but was it?

Here was God with us in the flesh. But as the prophet Isaiah says, he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him.

John writes in his gospel, he was in the world, the world was made through him, yet the world didn't know him. Emmanuel, God with us, he was overlooked and ignored and rejected and nailed to a cross.

The life and death of Jesus did not look glorious to the people who were there and then, did it? And yet, as we thought this morning, it was through his life, through his death on the cross that God is glorified and worshipped throughout the world by his redeemed people today.

[22 : 29] It is truly glorious what he did. And so, how can we keep going with what seems like the kind of low-key and yet impossible task of building his church?

Well, my spirit remains among you. I am with you, he says. God has given us everything that we need in Christ. He's given us his spirit to be with us forever.

You see, the Lord told the apostle Paul, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect not in power, in weakness, in weakness.

Friends, when life feels unimpressive and unglorious and ordinary, we need to remember that God's spirit is poured out by a crucified king, that the hands that baptize with the spirit are nail-pierced hands.

his glory was not seen by the world. And so if our work as a church today looks or feels unimpressive, it's not because we've lost something that we once had or need to add something on to what God is doing.

[23 : 43] No, it's because his glory is hidden. So it was in Christ, so it is with us. And if you're here and you're not a Christian today, maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, please don't miss this.

Maybe church doesn't look like much. Maybe the message of Jesus doesn't sound like much, but don't write him off. Being a Christian, it doesn't feel or look impressive, it is simply and yet wonderfully the work of God's spirit in our hearts giving us what we need to follow Jesus every day.

Perhaps Christianity doesn't look or feel like much to you and yet it is the power of God to save everyone who believes. And so if we are trusting in him, brothers and sisters, let's remember that God has given us everything we need to build his church.

He gives us what we need, maybe especially when we are feeling worn out, when we are feeling weak, when we are losing heart. It's when this returned remnant were at their very lowest, isn't it, that God came to reassure them that he was with them.

It's often the case in the Christian life, isn't it, that when we feel that we have nothing else to fall back on, nothing else to rely on, no strength left of our own, well, it's then that God's presence is felt most closely, that his strength, his power in us is felt and experienced most strongly and powerfully.

[25 : 30] When we feel strong, when we try and give out of our own strength, that is when we wear out in God's work, that is when we lose heart, because God's work is God's work.

And so, friends, let us keep wrestling in him, working with him, looking to him for strength, for he is with us in hidden glory. But finally, we see that God's glory won't be hidden forever.

So lastly, we're called to hope in God for greater glory. Hope in God for greater glory, because God says to us, the glory days are still to come.

Fear not, he says to them. Don't be afraid of this task that feels impossible. Don't be afraid of hitting more roadblocks. Don't be afraid that, mainly, it's not going to be good as before.

And here is why, verses 6 and 7. This is what the Lord Almighty says. In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

[26 : 39] I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty.

So they stand in the back of beyond, looking at a heap of rubble. God's people are told that he is about to shake the universe to threads. The heaven and earth and everything in between is about to be turned up on its head, and the riches and the glory of the nations of the world will pour into this heap of rubble.

God says he would soon shake the treasures of the cosmos into his house down to the loose change, so that, verse 9, the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.

God promises this one is going to be better than the old one. How could that be? They were looking at it, weren't they, the foundation? How could it be better?

Well, wait and see. Wait and see, says God. Would their work on this house be worth it? A thousand times, yes, he says.

[27 : 57] It looks small, maybe unimpressive, perhaps, but a time is coming when it will be drowned, flooded with glory. Now, this promise would have been hard to believe, wouldn't it?

Far bigger than anything that these people dared to imagine. In fact, it's far bigger, isn't it, than even a kind of brick and mortar house could possibly hold all the treasures of the world.

Could there's something bigger going on than a physical brick house? In fact, we know that there is because this house that they did rebuild, well, a few hundred years later and it was rubble again.

It was torn down, this time by the Romans. The glory never returned. See, in the end, this house was just a matchstick model of a place where God was to fill with glory and is still to fill with glory.

a new heavens and a new earth, a new creation. New heavens and earth, sea and dry land, he says, all things made new where God will be present with us for good.

[29 : 12] Glory days are not behind us, he says, they are still to come. That's what we heard, isn't it, read from Hebrews 12 where the book of Hebrews promises that he will once again shake heaven and earth and what remains will be a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom where he will live with us forever.

Do you believe that? Looking at our world today, do you believe that day will come? Amen. God says, keep waiting, friends, and he will cover this world with glory forever.

The world as we see it today is like a giant monopoly board, isn't it? Since the fall, different players have come and gone, kingdoms have risen and fallen, they've divided up the properties, vast amounts of wealth changing hands over the centuries, the balance of power shifting, but in reality, says God, he owns the whole board.

He says, the silver is mine and the gold is mine. He owns everything on the board and one day soon, he says, he will cash in. He will tip the board up, turn over the table, pour all his treasures down into his house and he will fill his house, his people, his church, his world with his glory.

So, brothers and sisters, does that give us hope for the future? Yes, it does. Our work now may feel stumbling and small and difficult and unimpressive, but God promises one day soon, in a little while, says Haggai, that all people will see his glory.

[31 : 04] And so, our work and our witness now is worth it, isn't it? Because the glory that's coming is greater than anything that this world has ever seen. And so, the question really isn't how can we keep going with a work that's doomed to fail?

It's how should we work, knowing that we cannot fail. Our worship, our witness, may feel weak.

Sometimes it may not feel worth it. But if we are working with God now, we do not need to fear for the future because we are called to live, to work in the hope of a greater glory coming soon.

The glory days are still to come, says the Lord. God with the coming of the risen Lord Jesus. That day is written in his calendar with a permanent marker. He will not forget.

He will not miss his appointment. And in that new world, in that new creation, when it comes, God says he will give his people peace, shalom, completeness, wholeness.

[32 : 16] God brothers and sisters, that is a hope worth us holding on to, isn't it, as we serve Christ this week. It's a hope that's worth us holding out as we go into a terribly broken and desperate world as witnesses to him.

Because the glory days are still to come for those whose hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ. And so take heart, be strong, and work, for I am with you, says the Lord Almighty.

Let's pray together. God, our Father, how we thank you that the promises of your word do not change, that you are faithful to all that you have said that you will do.

Thank you, our Father, that we see your great works throughout history, the creation of the world, your rescue of your people, the coming of the Lord Jesus, his death, his resurrection, the building of your church.

Father, the fact that we sit here tonight in Aberdeen, 2,000 years since that day when you sent your Spirit Father, how we thank you and how we pray, our Father, that you would give us hope that by your Spirit, by your word that we have heard tonight that you would set our hope on the glory that is coming, Lord, that we would live in the light of eternity, Lord, that we would fill our diaries, our calendars according to that one day that is coming again, when Christ will come again.

[34 : 07] Lord, we pray that you would lift our hearts, Lord, that when trusting you, following you is hard, Lord, that when church life disappoints, Lord, that we would continue to put our trust in you and rest in your strength.

Lord, we thank you that you meet us not in our strength but in our weakness. And so we pray, Lord, that you would humble us, help us to come to ye in our weakness and find strength again.

Build your church, we pray, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.