

TEXT: *The Promised Glory of the New House*

1 On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: 2 "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, 3. 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? 4 But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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. 5 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.' 6 "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. 7 I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 8 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 9 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Dear Friends in Christ,

Mrs. Ernst sat in the pew. It was Christmas Eve. The children were dressed in their new dresses and outfits. 18 of them were standing in front of the congregation singing their memorized Christmas songs and verses. Tears were falling from Mrs. Ernst's eyes and slowing running down her cheek. Those tears weren't just shed because of memories past or because of the enthusiasm of the children singing those eternal truths, truths she had once sung as a child herself in that very church. No, she was shedding tears of sadness, where have all the children gone. Just 50 years ago the whole front of the church was packed with children, over a hundred of them. The pews were filled with proud parents. Chairs even had to be set up in the isles. Now there were only a handful of children in comparison to those days. Yes, her tears were tears of sadness and disappointment.

Life is full of disappointments. The context of our text this morning reveals a disappointment God's remnant experienced in their day. God sees our disappointments and responds to them with comfort that encourages us through those sad and disappointing times. Today, we will find **encouragement for disappointing times** in Haggai's second oracle to God's people.

Let's review. The words of our text are the second of four messages the prophet Haggai proclaimed on behalf of the Lord in 520 B.C. It was "the second year of King Darius" (1:1). Last week we heard that the Lord wanted the people of Jerusalem to return to the abandoned project of building the temple. Through Haggai, God rebuked attitudes of indifference and selfishness that contributed to the construction delay (1:2ff) and restored a spirit of hope and anticipation to replace one of negativism and self-pity (2:3ff). The rebuilding and continued use of the temple was an important element in the messianic program that the Lord was carrying out through and for his people.

The central assurance conveyed to the people was that the Lord remained present and active among them (1:3, 2:4). The faithful Lord declared that the heart of the covenant relation that had been established at Sinai following the exodus from Egypt (2:5) remained intact. The temple in Jerusalem was to offer a visible sign of the divine presence and serve as a distinctive assurance of future benefits that would surpass the blessings of the past.

But instead of dwelling on these thoughts and being thankful for all God's blessings both material and spiritual, the older generation of the remnant dwelt on a disappointment. It's the seventh day of the feast of Tabernacles

(Lev. 23:34ff), the great festival of rejoicing on which Israel was to give practical expression to its gratitude for the gracious guidance which it had received through the wilderness, as well as for the blessing of the harvest of all the fruits of the ground, which ended with the gathering in of the orchard-fruits and with the vintage, by the presentation of numerous burnt-offerings and other sacrifices. It should have been a festal occasion, but it wasn't. Part of the problem was a miserable harvest. But there was something else that discourages the older generation especially. Haggai addresses their disappointment saying, **“Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?”** (v. 3) Haggai is addressing especially the older generation of the remnant many of whom remembered Solomon's temple which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar over 50 years earlier (586 B.C). Ezra tells us what this generation felt about the new temple, Zerubbabel's temple, after the builders laid the foundation of the building. **“Many of the older Priests and Levites and family heads who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.”** (Ezra 3:12-13) So this was their disappointment, the new temple looked like a hut in comparison to the temple Solomon had built.

What disappointment are you dealing with in your life right now? Were you hoping to enjoy retirement, but instead you are dealing with some disease which is making it less enjoyable than you hoped? Or maybe because of the weak recovery of the economy you have had to go back to work to make ends meet so that your retirement savings don't dry up before you die. Had you hoped to go to college, but the finances weren't there? Or maybe you liked someone, but they weren't interested in you. Life is full of disappointments, most of them are because of bad choices we have made in our lives or because of sinfulness and evil in the world. Most disappointing for us Christians ought to be the times we sin in weakness. Remember Paul's words, **“I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”** (Romans 7:18, 24) How often are we not like Paul? We know what is good, but fail to do it. We know what is evil, what is bad, but still we do it. The Jews had only themselves to blame! It was their sins, their idolatry that caused God's judgment. Solomon's temple would never have been destroyed if they had listened to Jeremiah's warning and repented. Our disappointments, most of them, result from our sins or the sins of others around us, don't they?

God sent Haggai to his people with a message of encouragement. **“4 But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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. 5 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.' 6 "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. 7 I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 8 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 9 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty.”**

The specific thrust of Haggai's message is that the temple which they were to build, although inferior in external appearance and adornment to the former temple built by Solomon, would actually signal a greater glory to come in the future. God's people could and should commit themselves confidently to the task because of distinctive future blessings here articulated by the Lord. In the middle of this cluster of promises is the promise that **“the desired of all nations will come.”** Many, including Martin Luther, believe that that phrase refers to the Savior, Jesus. Everyone needs a Savior, a deliverer. God promised Abraham that “all nations would be blessed through his family.” (Gen 12:3) Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The nations both need and desire a Savior. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. God said

through Haggai that he would give peace in this place, that is, in Jerusalem where the temple was built. Jesus died on the cross and purified us from all sins. The curtain in the temple that separated the Most Holy and the Holy Places was ripped in two when Jesus died. God was declaring that sins were forgiven and heaven was now open for all to enter in. Peace and fellowship with God were restored with Christ's death.

It is possible to understand those words differently. The verb form in the Hebrew is plural, which requires a plural subject. Therefore some interpret the subject here as "desired things," referring to the treasures of the nations rather than the Messiah. In fact, through the centuries the majority of translators have chosen this interpretation for the Hebrew noun. The translation would then be something like, "the treasures of all nations shall come in." Prof. Forest Bivens who recently retired from our Seminary in an exegetical brief of the WLQ on this term wrote that he preferred this second way of understanding the term. He also states that one thing is certain. We are dealing here with "predictive messianic prophecy" but we can not say with certainty whether this term identifies Christ himself or the desirable things of all nations. Time does not allow us to say more today, but next week we will give more time to this statement in our sermon. We can say today that either interpretation points to the gospel.

God encouraged his people by giving them good news. Though small in external appearance, this new temple would surpass the former one in glory. This hope would strengthen and encourage them to continue to build. They had nothing to fear as they went forward because the Spirit was with them. The project was completed just four years later.

Does God have an encouraging message for you today. He does! It's in the Bible. The central message of the Bible is that Jesus saved us from our sins just as God promised. Since our main problem is sin, God saving us from our sins is indeed a message of encouragement. Yes, we sin and that's disappointing to us, but God forgives us our sins through Christ. When we repent (express our sorrow over sin) and trust in Jesus for forgiveness which has already been declared at the cross) we receive the gift already paid for by Christ. This forgiveness encourages us for the future and motivates us to approach each new day with a renewed desire to live our lives for Christ. We are comforted in knowing that God's Spirit is with us and that all that we experience will work out for the good for those who love God. (Romans 8:28) What can be more encouraging than that as we experience the disappointments of life.

With encouragement like that, all of our tears and shouts in this world can become tears of joy and shouts of jubilation! Amen.