

HAGGAI 2 : 3 – 9
WHO SAYS IT WON'T BE GLORIOUS, WHEN THE LORD SAYS IT WILL !

Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel, says the LORD; and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land, says the LORD, and work; for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts. According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear!

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations. And they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, says the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, says the LORD of hosts.

Can you identify with these words? “The weather this past week was tough on my energy and my stamina. It took the light-heartedness out of this Christmas season. This will be a lousy Christmas.”

The setting of our text is somewhat similar. The people of Judah weren't very joyful. They had every reason to be. Ninety years earlier, they had been taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. Babylon was later defeated by the Persians, and King Cyrus of the Persians gave the people permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and the temple! Talk about a joy! They had been gone 70 years and now got to return! When they got back to Jerusalem, they started on the foundation of the temple, but became pre-occupied with rebuilding their own homes. They also became intimidated by the “power brokers” around them, who did not want Jerusalem to flourish again. Thus work on the House of the Lord stalled and remained at a standstill for twenty more years. The Lord used the prophet Haggai to stir the people back to action. Work re-started, but the people were discouraged. They weren't all that excited about the new temple.

Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? In their eyes it was depressing. Those who had seen the former temple (and a rapidly shrinking group it was---death was calling) remembered the temple of Solomon and its glory. They looked at this work and felt it was Nothing. It would never replace the former house of worship. Lack of joy was dragging everyone down.

Does that sound like you this past week? “This Christmas isn't going to be like last year's. The weather was nicer; we did-things-up right. This snow and this wind and this cold, have really exhausted us.” Or, maybe you think back to a particular Christmas as a child and; “I'll never have another Christmas like that.” Or, maybe you remember when all the children were young and filled your house with excitement! This year? Christmas seems like nothing. Christmas will come and go, no big deal.

Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel, says the LORD; and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land, says the LORD, and work! God told the people to be “strong,” to push forward, to “work” on the Lord's house. The temple wasn't going to get built by itself. The Lord wasn't just going to plop it down from heaven in front of them. They needed to work with heart and will.

The same with Christmas. And I don't mean the outward Christmas—sure, if you want to see the kids giggle you have to spend lots of money, buy lots of presents, make their world beautiful with lights inside and outside, treat all their tastebuds with candy. These things come and go, shine and fade. The internal aspects of Christmas, the spiritual aspects of Christmas, are the point. “Work” yourselves with God's Word. It takes work—even on Sunday to get something out of the church service. It takes work to concentrate on the Scripture readings and process them (maybe read along in your Bible). It takes work to concentrate on the thoughts of the hymns (not just the melody). It takes work to listen to the sermon devotionally, applying what it says to YOU. Advent and Christmas are the same. “Be strong and work in the Word.” See the dead-end road you are traveling because of your sin. See what a glorious highway and destination the Lord has in store for you through His Son. That's something to relish at Christmas.

I am with you, says the LORD of hosts. According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear! Haggai told the people “not to fear,” for God “promised” when He brought them out of slavery in Egypt that He would be with them. This building project also was under His care.—HIS care. Fear not!

The same is true at Advent and Christmas. Although God has not commanded a Christmas celebration, He has commanded us to focus on His Son. Don't be discouraged if this year's outward Christmas doesn't match up to another year's. That outward “work” doesn't really matter. The work that matters is “getting into your head” how much God's Son laid aside for you, and how much He came to carry for you, to save you. Find it over and over in the Bible. Work spiritually for a glorious holiday. Fear not the outward circumstances. That's what the devil wants you to focus on—the outward glory—and if you can't make the day glorious outwardly, then it's nothing. Not true! God's promise in Christ stands sure!

Haggai says, *For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations. And they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, says the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, says the LORD of hosts.*

God reminds the people of Judah that He is in control. Six times in this text Haggai refers to Him as the “LORD of Hosts.” That is a powerful name for God. The LORD (in all capitals) means Jehovah, the great “He Is”—the One who always is, who is over all and above all, who is under obligation to no one, who makes a promise and keeps it because He wants to not because He has to, who is truth and love, who gave up His own Son for every sinner in the world. He is steering—Fear Not! ----- Also, Haggai says He is the LORD of “hosts.” The common meaning of “host” is someone who puts on a banquet. The word host also means “multitude.” We speak of an army “host,” the starry “host,” the angel “hosts”—multitudes! Here we have a double expression of the greatness of God. God is the “He Is” as well as the Lord of every “multitude.” When He says, “Fear not! Peace!” He is not just “some guy” talking.

The “LORD of Hosts” says to the temple re-builders, “Glory will be seen in the seemingly less glorious temple.” He will shake this world and its people to the core, physically and psychologically. All will be seeking His Son, the Savior. *And they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory.* People from afar will come to this temple; for in it, the One, the “Desire of all nations” will be found! He is the most inviting, delightful desire in all the world. He is the eternal Son of God, sent in grace—an undeserved gift!-- from top to bottom. He came to Bethlehem for you. “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (II Corinthians 8:9). Ahh, that is what all flesh seeks—to be at peace with whoever or whatever is on top. That Desire of all nations is Jesus. In Jesus, peace with God is available without cost, without money. The holy babe born at Bethlehem, God and man, became the sinless one crucified as a criminal at Calvary, and the victorious One alive at the tomb on Easter--the God-man!—in whom is peace with the Father. Thus, *The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, says the LORD of hosts.* Here is real glory, not of the outward building of the temple, but of the inner glory of acceptance with the Father-- “the peace of God which passes all understanding that shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!” (Philippians 4:7). Imagine if this church would be the shabbiest building in town. But if Christ the Savior be proclaimed here and the Peace with God won by Him for every sinner be offered here, the church is the most glorious building in town! The Desire of all men's hearts is found here. Imagine the people streaming to it!

The LORD of Hosts says Christmas will be glorious also this year in Jesus the Savior! Work to focus on Him and the message of God's Peace in Him. Jesus is your Desire, In Him you have PEACE—peace of heart and peace of soul before the Lord. Be strong! and Fear not. Though the outward Christmas fall apart this year, though the worldly Christmas crash this year, be it because of blizzard and cold, sickness and injury, guilt and despair, death and the grave; in Christ this Christmas will be great! In Him is peace, forgiveness, new life, resurrection from the grave, and eternity in heaven. Who says Christmas won't be glorious this year!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---