

COURAGE SUSTAINED BY HOPE

Early this week, before the storm I discovered a British-Israeli Neuroscientist named Tali Sharot. She is a Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience in the department of Experimental Psychology at University College London and at MIT. She teaches that hope is essential to our survival and can be the difference between living a healthier life or one trapped by despair. Studies show hopeful college kids get higher GPA's and are more likely to graduate. Hopeful athletes perform better on the field, cope better with injuries, and have greater mental adjustment when situations change. In one study of the elderly, those who said they felt hopeless were more than twice as likely to die during the study follow-up period than those who were more hopeful. Dr. Shane Lopez, a psychologist, regarded by some as one of the world's leading researchers on hope, claimed that hope isn't just an emotion but an essential life tool. I don't know about the faith or lack of faith in these scientists writing about hope, but I do know that many of the most vocal atheistic scientists say that no matter how much hope might help us handle the struggles of life, there is no basis for hope in a godless worldview. You can try to be optimistic, but that is hard if you believe in a godless and heartless world. Scripture, on the other hand, not only talks about the importance of hope but gives us reasons for hope. You see all of that in our Scripture today: **Haggai 2:3-9**.

Returning from captivity to a ravaged country and a ruined temple, their sacred place of worship, the people in Haggai's day had been called to rebuild the house of the LORD. They had begun in earnest but struggled with discouragement. They had a lot of work ahead of them and they could see that temple they were building would not compare with the one that had been destroyed. They didn't have the resources in wealth or manpower. They looked at what they were doing and felt it didn't amount to anything in comparison to the former temple. They were discouraged. We've all been there at times. I can only imagine the discouragement some people may be feeling this weekend looking at the wreckage left by hurricane Ian. Some of them may be facing hard decisions about whether or not it is wise or worthwhile to rebuild. Sometimes that's not a question we need to ask. Sometimes rebuilding is clearly what God calls us to do. That was true then, and it's often true now. It is true in many areas of life. I've been drawn to Haggai at this time because I think it is true with respect to the life and ministry of the house of God, the church today.

Well, in **verse 5**, God promised them what he promises us: His presence. He told them not to fear. If we stopped there, we would have sufficient cause for courage. But the next verse begins with the word "for," which connects what follows with the call to "fear not." What follows is cause for hope. In **verses 6-8** God promises three things. Sometimes we focus on comparisons and circumstances, what we think we can do or fear others may do. But God tells us what we can count on him to do. When we believe these promises we find hope and sustain courage. For each of the three things God says he will do, there is a corresponding attribute of God or title for God.

Let me give you each of these in turn and do it this way: I'll give the attribute and then the action.

I. GOD IS SOVEREIGN. HE WILL SHAKE HEAVEN AND EARTH.

Verse 6-7a *For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. ⁷ And I will shake all nations.*

The message is that....

A. Because God is sovereign, his children are never inadequate for the tasks to which he calls them.

The people of God could have felt they were insignificant in a corner of the powerful Persian empire. The Persian Empire is considered by some to have been the world's first true superpower. It encompassed what we today call western India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Iraq, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Northern Greece, parts of Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine, Egypt, Libya, and Sudan. The small remnant of returning Jews in Judah felt like nothing in comparison. And yet, God had shaken the nations up when the Persians defeated the Babylonians. God would shake things up again when Alexander the Great conquered the Persians and then again when the Romans conquered the Greeks. Through all of this, God was sovereign, and God *is* sovereign today, so God's children need not fear no matter what he calls them to do or face.

B. Because God is sovereign, his purposes will prevail no matter what.

In **verse 6**, God says I will shake *heaven and earth, the sea and dry land* are a poetic way to say everything. The singling out of the nations is to make it absolutely clear that this "shaking" is not just talking about

a physical earthquake but political upheaval. Haggai will use this same imagery later in the same chapter. In **Haggai 2:21-22**, he says, “*Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, ²² and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, everyone by the sword of his brother.*”

Psalm 20:7-8 says, *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. ⁸ They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.* God always calls us to look in faith and in hope beyond and above human and earthly resources to his sovereignty.

C. Because God is sovereign, God's people celebrate his majesty.

Some people struggle to think of God as being, at the same time, truly personal and terribly powerful, a God of sweet mercy and stunning majesty. But in Scripture, there is *no question* God is personal, and there is *no measure* to his majesty. **Romans 8:31** asks this question: *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* The answer is no one can stand against God or us when we are with him and for him. Nothing and no one can thwart his purposes.

Verse 6 is the only verse from Haggai repeated in the New Testament. **Hebrews 12:27-29** says this: *The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken, that is, created things so that what cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our "God is a consuming fire."* Storms will come. The final storm that shakes all things will be sent by God himself. But after the storm, the sky will clear, and there will come a greater glory and a final peace. Only that which belongs to God and his kingdom will remain. All the work we do in obedience to Him and in response to his grace is part of an eternal kingdom. From the ancient prophets to the coming of Jesus to the future kingdom, it is *all* part of his purpose and kingdom. One day everything that isn't part of God's kingdom will be shaken into oblivion, but we who have known him and served him will remain. *Fear not!*

God is sovereign. He will shake heaven and earth.

II. GOD IS SUFFICIENT. HE WILL FILL HIS HOUSE WITH GLORY.

Verse 7b-8 continue the outcome of God's sovereign shaking up of the world in history - *so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts.*

A. Sometimes we lose courage because we think we have very few resources.

The Temple Solomon built was covered in gold. These people didn't have anything like that in the way of wealth. Consider the description of the former temple that is found in **1 Kings 6-7**. For two chapters' magnificence is described. Here's just one example. **1 Kings 6:29-31** *Around all the walls of the house, he carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers in the inner and outer rooms. ³⁰ The floor of the house he overlaid with gold in the inner and outer rooms. ³¹ For the entrance to the inner sanctuary, he made doors of olivewood; the lintel and the doorposts were five-sided. ³² He covered the two doors of olivewood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. He overlaid them with gold and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.* They could not equal that. But God is saying that is irrelevant. Because he truly is God and all things belong to him - all the silver and all the gold belongs to him.

B. When it comes to what God wants us to do, our wealth or lack of it is not an issue. God will provide whatever is needed.

Historically, in the years preceding the coming of Christ king Herod the Great began to renovate, enlarge and beautify the temple that the Jews would build in the days of Haggai. The improvements took forty-six years. Lots of silver and gold flowed into the work on the renovated temple. Was that how the prophecy was fulfilled? Most scholars think as significant as that was, it didn't reach the extravagant level of Solomon's Temple and, therefore, can only be considered a sort of foreshadowing of something greater. A foreshadowing that pictured a greater glorification of the temple yet to come. But the truth revealed in the prophecy was an assurance of God's sufficiency. Whatever work God calls you to do, you can take courage, knowing he is able to provide all that is needed to do that work for him.

One time, when I was still in college, a missionary I greatly respected asked me to consider coming with his team on a trip to Africa. Without hesitation, I immediately said I couldn't do it. I couldn't take time off work to afford it. He gently suggested that I should have at least

paused to pray and think about it. He was right. How often do we add everything up and look at our resources and limit God? As if he is not sovereign and not sufficient even to give us what we need to do what he calls us to do? At the end of **Philippians 4:19-20**, after thanking the Philippians for their generous gifts of support for his ministry, Paul writes, *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.* That's the true application of that promise. Not that God will fund every project we imagine, but God will provide all we need to do everything he calls us to do in life. Our part is to trust and obey. The silver and gold are his. He will provide all that's needed.

*God is sovereign. He will shake heaven and earth.
God is sufficient. He will fill his house with glory.*

III. GOD IS A SAVIOR. IN THIS PLACE, HE WILL GIVE PEACE.

Verse 9 *The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.”*

A. The true greater glory of God is found in his incongruous gift of peace through Jesus Christ.

As with so many prophecies, there is a mysterious, intriguing dimension to this prophecy. Sometimes prophecies are fulfilled in ways very differently than we might have expected. There is a fun example in *The Lord of the Rings*. Eowyn, a woman, a shield maiden of Rohan, confronts the chief of the Nazgul, the witch king. Under her armor and helmet, he doesn't know she is a woman. It had been prophesied that he would not fall by the hand of a man. So he arrogantly tells her she's a fool. No man can hinder or kill him. At the climactic moment, she takes off her helmet, revealing herself to be a woman, and says, "I am no man." Then stabs and kills him. Sometimes Biblical prophecies are like that. Perfectly fulfilled in unexpected ways.

The physical temple they were constructing, even as renovated by Herod, was never physically as the older temple of Solomon had been. So in what way could the latter glory of this second temple be greater than that of Solomon's temple? The only answer is that it will have greater glory in an unexpected way because it will be graced by the presence of Jesus and its historic and prophetic relationship to him.

Two of the earliest testimonies to the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation in Jesus came from prophetic individuals who encountered

the baby Jesus while worshipping at *this* temple - Simeon and Anna in **Luke 2**. When Jesus was twelve years old, it was in the courts of this temple he amazed the religious leaders with his wisdom. When Jesus began his ministry, it was this temple that he cleansed, driving out the moneychangers. This temple, which the people in Haggai's day looked at as nothing, was the temple he called his father's house and said it was to be a house of prayer for all nations.

There was a great, cloth veil or curtain thirty feet wide, sixty feet high, and three inches thick that hung in this temple, separating the holy inner sanctuary where the presence of God was concentrated from the people who came to worship. It was a symbol of the way God, in his majesty and purity, is set apart, separate from us in our brokenness and sinfulness. **Matthew 27:50** speaking of Jesus' crucifixion, says, *And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.* Then **verse 51** says, *And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.* What happened in Jesus is that God, having become one of us in Jesus, died for us on the cross. He paid for our sins so that the barriers between Him and us would be torn open through his torn body. Look at what God had said through Haggai in **verse 9**, *And in this place, I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."* He did it. On the cross, Jesus said, *it is finished*, and through the torn body of Jesus, a way was opened to the heart of God and to peace with God. **Hebrews 10:20-22** says, *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

B. God is a God of saving grace who reveals his glory in surprising ways. Our part is to trust and obey in hope.

Jesus, in **John 2:19**, had said, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again."* With those almost mysterious words, in what no one understood at the time, he drew a direct connection between this temple and himself. He fulfilled the true meaning and brought the ultimate glory to this temple. He was saying *I am glorifying this temple by my presence in it and now I am taking over its purpose in my own being. What it has beautifully represented I will now embody, and I will pass its purpose on in my body to the church in which I live.*

Listen to how Scripture puts it in **Ephesians 2:20-22**. *Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.* Over the millennia that followed Jesus' resurrection, consider all that has been freely given to the church and her mission in the world. The silver and gold, the financial support for missions and ministries, places of worship, and hospitals and educational institutions have all come into the true temple that Jesus inaugurated in massive amounts over the centuries. And the people themselves are the treasures of greatest value, what Peter calls the living stones being built together into a dwelling place for God come from every nation. Many famous and influential people and others unknown to the world but known and loved by God, saved by grace, and placed as living stones in God's true dwelling place. The temple they were building in Haggai's day did not look as impressive to their eyes as the old temple but this was the place where God would begin to reveal a different and greater glory, the riches of his grace and his gift of peace to all who believe in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

In Pilgrim's Progress, the famous allegory of the Christian life Christian and his friend Hopeful are making their way to the celestial city. And at one point, they fall into the hands of Giant Despair, who rules Doubting Castle. Every day Giant Despair goes down to the dark dungeon where he holds them prisoner, and he beats them. Whenever the sun came out, Giant Despair fell into some sort of fit, which rendered him powerless to do anything at all. While there is some debate over what Bunyan meant by that because he doesn't explain it, many think what is meant is that when the sun comes out, that is when Christian, the Pilgrim, begins to think about the hope he has as a Christian believer. That's when the light comes into his life, and Giant Despair falls into one of his fits and can no longer beat him up. Christian and Hopeful were wondering how in the world they would ever get out of it, and Christian remembered that he had something he had forgotten. It was the key of promise, the word of God. And so he pulled out the key of promise, and he sticks the key of promise into the door of his prison, and of course, it opens it, and he finds that that key of promise opens every one of the gates of the castle. He, and we, escape Giant Despair and find courage when we use the key of promise.

God often calls his people to faithfulness in what looks like likely-to-fail efforts. God seems to prefer working through people who look unimpressive and insignificant and weaving them into a larger story so that the barren women, the little brother with five smooth stones, the teenage virgin, the loaves and fishes, the cup of cold water given in faith are all woven into the tapestry of His sovereignty and become a part of his greater story.

If you are unsure of your relationship to Jesus or if you know that you have not yet come to him and trusted in him as your Savior, why is that? Is it because he doesn't seem impressive to you? Is it because you do not feel worthy of him? God works in a surprising way. Don't hold back or doubt his offer of grace that can save your soul. Turn to him and trust in him. And then, whatever he calls you to do, be strong and very courageous. He is with us when we give ourselves to him, and he will take our works and weave them into his plan in ways we cannot presently see. It will be good. It will be for his glory and our peace.

Amen

Confession of Faith

Psalm 46:1-7

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

³though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.

⁶The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

O Lord, you are my refuge and strength. I confess my sins to you knowing your holy purity and majesty is immeasurable. I deserve judgment, but you have offered grace. The sacrificial death of Jesus has opened the way for me to be truly and fully at peace with you. I trust in him who died and rose again for my salvation. He alone can grant me peace and give me hope I gratefully own him as my Savior and Lord. Amen

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord of the wind and the waves please quiet the storms in my life with your grace. Lord, I believe you are sovereign, you are sufficient and you are the only Savior who grants peace and reveals glory. Help me always to hold firmly to your promises and to guard my heart in hope. Give me compassion for those who have suffered and are struggling. Show me how to best work and pray to help them to recover and find their peace as I find mine in you. Amen