From the Ashes - Part 2

Greater Glory

## Haggai 2:1-9

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church, today we’re continuing in part 2 of our series “From the Ashes” and last week we saw how King Solomon built a temple for God. It was the most magnificent temple imaginable; its splendor was far beyond anything that had been built at that time, and people from all over the world traveled to come see the temple and some to worship the God of the temple. But we also saw that behind the scenes of Solomon’s Temple a greater story was coming up from the mistakes of his father David and it was from the ashes of his father that God brought forth Solomon’s greatest glory.

Today I want to talk to you about a Greater Glory, and we’re going to look at the construction or the rebuilding of the second Temple. And so, before we get into it, I want to begin by acknowledging the fact that any of us can wake up on any certain day with this unsettling feeling that there’s got to be something more. Not necessarily a midlife crisis, because it’s broader than that, but the feeling in the pit of your stomach that by this time in your life you should have accomplished more, something bigger, or something greater. And so, maybe today you’re looking around at your life and your surprised that this is as far as you’ve gotten and that’s going to be important as we turn to the word of God because God builds massive monuments on the sorrow, defeat, and discouragement of our lives.

Last week, we saw how God built this massive temple on the broken dreams of Solomon’s father David. It was there on the threshing floor of Araunah, on the ashes of the sacrifice of his father that Solomon built the temple, and as the glory of the Lord came and filled the temple the people didn’t see the ashes because all they could see was the glory. But the countless sacrifices, and the praise and worship began to diminish and along with that the glory, because the people were distracted, and their hearts turned away from God.

After Solomon died, instead of worshiping the one true God the people started worshiping idols, and so God allowed a series of events to take place to draw the hearts of the people back to himself. In fact, in 600 BC history confirms that the Babylonians invaded the southern kingdom of Judah and in 587 BC in a humiliating defeat, the people of God were taken in chains to a foreign land. The city of Jerusalem with its great walls and their beloved temple were destroyed, and so for the people of God it seemed as if all hope had been lost.

Their identity had been stripped away, but from the very beginning, from the first invasion of the Babylonians, the clock was ticking, and God was watching. In fact, you could say that everything was right on schedule because the Bible tells us,

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Now, that doesn’t always feel like good news especially when you’re going through it, but the good news is that it is just a season, and with every season there is a beginning and an end.

The Jews were in captivity and the Lord said it would be 70 years. And so, they needed to trust that they were where they were supposed to be, they were going through what they were supposed to be going through, because God has a time for everything and the prophet Jeremiah said,

“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce” (Jeremiah 29:4-5).

And so, they’ve settled down, they’re marrying and having children, building homes and planting gardens, because it’s just a season and only God knows when they will be delivered.

In the meantime, the people of God are living off memories, sitting around remembering the good old days, and the Bible says,

“By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps" (Psalms 137:1-2).

In other words, they remembered the time before they were taken captive, before they had been shackled and dragged out of Jerusalem, snatched from their city of peace, and taken to a place of adversity. They remembered Jerusalem by the rivers of Babylon and they promised,

“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill]. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy” (Psalm 137:5-6).

And so, it was as they sat down by the rivers of Babylon that they hung their harps on the poplars and wept as they remembered Jerusalem, remembering how far they had fallen.

You see, in all of our lives there are times when we will go through a season of travail, struggling, and weeping, a season of mourning, and we can’t expect it to just be a few hours or a few days, because the Lord tells us that there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. The good news is that he also tells us,

“Weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

And so, there is a specific point of time in their suffering, in their captivity, when God will say it is over. You see, God has a time, he didn’t keep them from being dragged out of Jerusalem, he didn’t stop this from happening, but he had his eye on his watch.

God was working in their lives as well as in the lives of the nations around them. History tells us that the conquerors were conquered, the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians, and so it was that in 538 BC, Cyrus, king of Persia issued a decree that permitted the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. Of course, for students of the Bible this is no surprise because the prophet Isaiah declared over 100 years before:

“Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid” (Isaiah 44:28).

And so, suddenly, after having been kept in captivity for 70 years, the people are allowed to go back to Jerusalem, back to the capital of Judah to rebuild their lives.

This is the situation where we find the people of God, finally after decades they’re able to return home, bringing their children who were born in captivity to a home where they’ve never been before. And so, in a moment, the very same people who were weeping, hanging their harps on the poplars as they remembered Jerusalem are filled with joy. The Bible says,

“When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy” (Psalms 126:1-2).

And so, it was like a dream, and some of you have been going through a season, it has been so long that normal doesn’t seem normal anymore, but if you hold on you are going to see the end of it.

When the Lord brought back the captives, it was like a dream. The captives were set free, the people of God have come back home, and the Bible says,

“Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord. So, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God” (Haggai 1:13-14).

And so, the people returned and began rebuilding the house of their God, because for the Jewish people spirituality was the center of life and not the peripheral. In other words, they learned their lesson, they knew that God must come first, and so even though they needed to repair the walls and rebuild the economy, their first priority was to rebuild the house of God.

And so, they started building, and the Bible says in Ezra chapter 3, verse 10,

“When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel” (Ezra 3:10).

“With praise and thanksgiving, they sang to the Lord: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid” (Ezra 3:11).

And so, they got the foundation in place, they were shouting about what God was doing. They’re excited about this, because they’re going to have a temple, they’ve heard about this, but they’ve never seen it, and so this is something new. But watch what happens, one generation is saying this, they’re excited, giving shouts of praise, and another generation says, “But it’s not like the old one.”

Look at verse 12, the Bible says,

“But 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” (Ezra 3:12).

In other words, the ones who should’ve known better, who’ve seen God’s faithfulness in the past, who knew that God is with us and we can’t fail, didn’t recognize that he was doing a new thing. And so, when they saw the foundation, they had seen the former temple, and so they had this picture in their mind of what it has to look like, this is how I thought it would be, but when they saw the temple, it didn’t match their expectations. And so, watch what happened, one generation was weeping over what it was, and another generation was shouting over what it will be when God gets done with it.

I want to talk to you about two causes of discouragement that the Lord brings to our attention in this text today. The first cause is comparison and the second is a lack of progress. For the older generation they were comparing the work that had just begun to the finished work of Solomon’s Temple, and so there’s a sense of comparison. And then, on the other hand there was a lack of progress, because they were only a month into the project, they had been working hard, but they’re not getting anywhere.

It’s kind of like New Year’s resolutions, like going on a diet or getting into shape, and you’re trying so hard, a month goes by and there’s a lack of progress. And so, you wake up one day incredibly discouraged because you thought by this time you would be better off. You are not where you thought you would be, you’re trying your best, but you’re not sure it’s even worth it, and so you’re discouraged.

The people of God are only 30 days into the project and they gave up. They got discouraged in the work because it didn’t look like the old one. They got discouraged because it didn’t look like the one they heard about. They got discouraged because they looked at their work and they thought it would be better than that. But God was trying to communicate something to them, and so he raised up the prophet Haggai to call the people back to the task at hand.

“On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "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, '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?” (Haggai 2:1-3).

In other words, God says your vision is too small for what I want to do. This is not just a temple built by human hands, this temple is a shadow of Jesus Christ. And so, what they are building is different, and God is trying to get the people to understand that they’re not just rebuilding what they had before, but they’re building something better.

And sometimes we find ourselves stuck wishing it would be like it was before, wanting it to go back to the way it was before, but God is not going to make it what it was before, because if you made it what it was before it wouldn’t be any better. And so, it’s not your image of what God is supposed to be like, not your idea of what church is always been, but it’s according to his word and he says,

“We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory...” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

And so, these people rebuilding the temple needed to

find out what God said so that they’re not trapped in the ruins and ashes of yesterday. What God is about to do is going to be so much better, but when Haggai shows up the people have gotten discouraged because it seemed like everything was against them.

In different ways, I believe we all live there, we’ve all experienced this at some point in our lives. It’s like there’s a little resistance on the outside, some disappointment on the inside, a little bit of you, a little bit of the world, and a little bit of the devil, creating this perfect storm. And so they’re trying to rebuild something they’ve never seen before, really reinventing the temple, and they’re not seeing the progress they want to see. And so, what do we do what we find ourselves in that place, when we’re discouraged on the inside and discouraged on the outside?

Well, here’s what God tells his people to do, he gives them the most loving and simple instructions, he tells them in verse 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” (Haggai 2:4).

And so, he tells the governor, the priest, and then all the people, here’s what you do when you’re discouraged. First, he says, “Be strong,” and then he says, “Do the work.” And so, when you are discouraged and you want to give up, he says be strong and do the work.

But the best news of all is that we don’t have to be strong in our own power, he says, “For I am with you.” And that’s even more powerful today than it was 2,500 years ago, because this is A.D. and not B.C., and the Lord teaches us,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

And so, you and I don’t have to be strong in our own strength, because you’ve got a supernatural strength dwelling within you if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells within those who believe, and so when you can’t do anymore and you are about to give up, that’s when you become the perfect candidate for God strength to be strong for you.

Therefore, the Lord says, when you are discouraged, find your strength in me, and do the work. He doesn’t just say, “Talk the talk, dream the dream, or even compare the results, but he says do the work. Just be strong and do the work. Put down another stone, continue doing the work. Put down another stone, consistently doing what God told you to do, because the key to success is consistency.

That’s why God’s word is so meaningful, it’s so powerful, in Galatians chapter 6, verse 9 tells us,

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

And so, you show back up and you do the work. He says, be strong and work. Be strong and keep praying when you don’t see results. Be strong and continue to do the right thing even when it doesn’t seem to be getting you anywhere. Be strong and continue to show up and exercise when the numbers are going the wrong way. Be strong and continue to love when other people are not loving you in return. Be strong and show honor even when the person over you is not acting honorable. Be strong and continue to love your spouse even when your spouse is unresponsive. Be strong and continue to love your children, praying for them, even when they’re not doing what you believe is right. Just be strong and show back up, stay in the game, and never give up.

We’ve got to continue to do the work, continue to do it stone after stone, because at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we don’t give up.

God says, “Be strong and do the work.” And then he answers your question, the unspoken question, “Why?” And he answers in verse 5,

“This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear” (Haggai 2:5).

God says, “Do not fear, I am with you, and that is the key to it all. It’s not that you do it on your own, it’s you do it with him. And so, what God was going to show them is the most life changing news since the beginning of time.

"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. 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” (Haggai 2:6-7).

In other words, there is a greater glory coming. And he’s about to say something that they won’t even be able to get their minds around. He says,

“The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. '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" (Haggai 2:8-9).

And so, they were like no way, Zerubbabel’s Temple wasn’t even going to be close to the glory of the former house. But they had no idea that God was actually foreshadowing the great New Testament truth of his love. Because all through the Old Testament what happens in the physical is often the picture of what happens in the spiritual in the New Testament. It’s a prophetic shadow as God shows physically what he’s about to do spiritually. God shows naturally what he will do supernaturally. And so, God was about to do something that they could not even imagine.

You see, they were accustomed to bringing sacrifices to the temple in the hopes of being right with God, but God says something in the New Testament that is completely mind blowing. In first Corinthians chapter 6 he says,

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

In other words, if you’re a follower of Jesus, God has come to you, because he dwells within you. And so, he came to live among us, making a sacrifice so that you could be right with him, and the Holy Spirit dwells within you. You see, that changes everything, because you are the temple, and Jesus is the greater glory. And so, you don’t have to be strong and do the work on your own. You do it because he is with you, and not only is he with you, but the Bible says,

“The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

You are the temple of the Holy Spirit, Jesus dwells within you, and the glory of this temple will be greater than the glory of the former temple. And so, I want to encourage you to be strong and keep doing the work, because Jesus is the greater glory who dwells within you.

Be strong and put another stone down in his name, because when you serve someone, he is being glorified. When you love someone, he is being glorified. When you forgive someone, he is being glorified. When you lift up his name, he is being glorified. Be strong and do the work, don’t become weary in doing good, because he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. He is with you and so you can do everything he calls you to do.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ’s Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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(301) 447-4224

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

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