

## Kingdom Perspective

Haggai 2:1-9

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I wonder if you've ever had that moment where you've watched a movie or TV show with someone and they've had completely different perspective on how good it was. You were bored they were on the edge of their seat. You thought the action/story was exciting, they thought it was predictable.

Having different perspectives on the same event is a pretty normal part of life. This especially happened to me in the *unique* experience of attending the kinder disco with my son Thomas.

For me this was terrifying. We had to dress up, mingle with other families that weren't wanting to be there, the expectation to dance to "kinder approved" music.

And it was the longest 45 minutes of my life as we piled into this small room with loud music as everyone stuck to the outside of the room to avoid possibility of dancing, Thomas broke his glow stick in the first 2-minutes which then went all over my jumper, he didn't want to dance, then we left.

The next morning, I awoke as one who had spent the night with a dementor, unsure if happiness would ever return. But for Thomas, he couldn't stop raving about the euphoria of the evening.

Highlight after highlight. The spinning ball that made colourful lights on the ceiling, free glow sticks that kept glowing even after exploding, and best of all the, the thrill of pizza and a juicebox.

A juicebox that was kept for some weeks as a trophy to remember the glory of the kinder disco and excitement that we might get to do it again as younger siblings go through the same program...

Same event, two perspectives. And I think we know this already but it really highlights how perspective really shapes our response. I left the disco exhausted, almost in need of resuscitation, whereas Thomas was buzzing and needed another 2 hours to calm down and sleep!

How we view something significantly shapes our response, especially our willingness to invest or keep going. And as we come to Haggai 2, God's people are ready to give up on their temple building efforts.

Haggai 2:1 tells us that about two months since Haggai started preaching. In Haggai 1 God confronted the people's lack of priority to rebuild the temple that sat in ruins. Although it had started with enthusiasm, opposition and threats saw the rebuild stop – sitting unchanged for 16 years.

But through Haggai's preaching in 520BC, building resumed (1:14). Yet while the people obeyed God's word and there is progress, in just a matter of weeks they are discouraged and disillusioned...

So God's Word comes to them again through Haggai: *the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>2</sup> "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, <sup>3</sup> '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?*

Do you hear the problem? They've resumed building the temple, but from their perspective, it's very unimpressive. How does it look to them? Well v.3, essentially like nothing! And key to this perspective is those who are old enough to have seen Solomon's temple and this hardly one compares...

And to be fair, Solomon's temple was pretty amazing! It had 180,000 people work on it, it took seven years to build, and it contained 285 tonnes of gold and more silver and bronze than you could count. (See 1Kings 5:3-16; 7:47; 1Chron 29:3-7)

In fact, the amount of gold used on the temple weighs more than the statue of liberty does! Like this thing is huge and impressive; expensive and glorious.

But more than that, this temple was built by King Solomon, when Israel was a powerhouse of wealth, wisdom, and weapons! Yet here they are building again while things are hard: they are poor, under Persian rule, and experiencing regular drought and frustration as they go about regular life!

So it's not really surprising that as this small and unskilled group get to work, they knew it was but a shadow of what stood before. As we heard in Ezra 3, the joy of laying the foundation of the new temple was drowned out by the loud weeping of those who saw the splendour of Solomon's temple.

And so just weeks into this restart of the rebuild there is discouragement, disillusionment, and perhaps just not what they were expecting. You can picture them asking, what's the point? Why bother continuing when it's just not going to be that good, never capture what it was before.

It hardly seems worth the effort and certainly not the risk of being attacked for it. And I wonder if just as it was in Haggai 1, this is resonating with us and another familiar story and experience? How easily are we discouraged and disillusioned as Christians?!

We established last week that our temple building project as Christians is kingdom building – seeing people know Christ and grow in Christ. And the church is often filled with people who are just a bit sad and bitter about how things are going... I'm sure you've heard it, perhaps even thought or said it...

How things just used to be better. Whether it's the preaching or music or prayers or conferences... Nothing compares to the good ol days and you'll always be able to find a Christian who has just settled into, perhaps stuck in, that pattern of cynical thinking where it's just never as good.

Yet even if that's not you, I think most of know the potential for disappointment is still very high. Whether it's feeling a bit despondent because of the state of the church, sensing Christianity is shrinking not growing and that our society isn't that unhappy about it really...

Or perhaps you've had that familiar experience of taking opportunities to speak about Jesus with a non-Christian friend or neighbour, sought to encourage and support another Christian but it's not gone well. Nothing came of it, no one notice, it wasn't appreciated, or it just kind of flopped.

Maybe it's the cost: the mockery in the workplace, the comments from family, or exclusion from our friends. Or often it's just our own doubts and confusion, wondering why God isn't doing what

we've asked, why we aren't seeing that change or opportunity we've prayed for time and time again.

It's not that hard, it doesn't take that long for that why bother question to come upon us. Especially when we feel like we are giving so much. Whether it's serving in kids ministry, vacuuming the floor, another music rehearsal, or sitting through another monotonous meeting, or striking up yet another conversation or extending an invitation that seems to go nowhere and achieve nothing.

It's easy to just wonder if it's worth it at all. Or even think, shouldn't God be making it easier or better? Can't we expect more change or outcomes when we serve the true and living God? Discouragement is often not far away as we ask ourselves: Why bother? Why risk it? Why keep going? That's where God's people are at in Haggai after just a few weeks of rebuilding. And I wonder if you can relate to that feeling, those questions, that discouragement?

Notice that God doesn't come down and roast them for how they are feeling or what they are thinking – he asks them the question: Does it seem as nothing to you?

So let's ask the question: how does living for Jesus – building his kingdom – seem to you? Does it seem as nothing? Has what was once joyful become a burden? What was exciting become a struggle; what was worthy of your time and energy become a fight with yourself for motivation?

Has zeal for people to become Christian and passion for the church to grow become too hard, too discouraging, not really worth it? Whether it's praying for and seeking evangelistic opportunities; discipling your children, serving in ministries that teach the bible, or being part of a team that serves.

How does it seem to you? How worthwhile, how valuable is it to you? It may seem as nothing to Israel but God comes and tells them his perspective, which is true perspective.

*<sup>4</sup> But now be strong, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord. 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, 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. <sup>5</sup> 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'*

God's message is clear: I am with you (v.4), my Spirit remains among you (v.5). God himself is present and at work among them. They might think that Solomon's temple spectacular due to its size and quantity of gold, but the real majesty, beauty, and glory of the temple was God himself dwelling there.

Notice this is the same promise and message that Haggai delivered in chp 1. The same assurance that God himself is among them. This is the message, this is the reality they and we need to keep hearing for true perspective, to motivate and sustain kingdom building. God is with us.

And the same God who filled the temple and gave Solomon wisdom and power is with them! And so the challenge for Israel and for us today is to remember that promise, see that reality to not rely on circumstances or comfort, even success or growth to make us willing to serve God and live faithfully.

By their standards and values, this rebuild is as nothing. But God himself is among them, he is the ultimate builder through them, and he hasn't changed. He is good, powerful, and promise keeping whether things are going well or are really hard, building is possible, building is worth it.

God is wonderful and praise-worthy whether we are singing with thousands at a convention or feeling like there isn't another Christian anywhere to be found. Kingdom building is worth it whether we feel like we in the heights of revival or in the depths of decline. And why?

I am with you says God. So be strong. Be strong you leaders like Zerubbabel and Joshua, be strong all the people. Did you hear the repetition. Be strong (x 3!). Get to work v.4, do not fear v.5.

So to keep us going as Christians, to keep us from disappointment or despair, we need to develop this deep awareness and joy that God is always with us. We are never truly alone or never powerless. And I think there are two key ways we can develop and deepen our awareness that God is with us.

Firstly, by praying daily to thank God that he is with us and asking him to make us aware of his presence throughout the day whatever we are doing or going through.

Think of Psalm 73: Asaph envies all the unbelievers around him who seem to have better lives than him, who are happy and wealthy while he's miserable and suffering. And where is his comfort as the Psalm finishes? Can I commend memorising and repeating this beautiful prayer. Vv.23-26

*<sup>23</sup> Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. <sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. <sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. <sup>28</sup> But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge*

And because God is with us by the Holy Spirit, the second thing we should do is deepen our understanding and appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.

Here is just a taste: by the Spirit alone can we read and understandable the bible. By the Spirit we are given courage to speak for Jesus; by the Spirit we are given the words to say about Jesus.

The Spirit comforts, guides, convicts us of sin, assures us of forgiveness and God's love, empowers us to change as he conforms our character to the likeness of Christ. He equips and enables us to serve others and to be an encouragement for them.

God is with us and though we don't see him, he is present, he is at work in us and through us and we can be strong, not afraid, and get on with living for God and building his kingdom.

God's presence is empowering for our present obedience. That's Haggai's first promise, but secondly, as we obey, God says we are connected to and participating in something bigger than we can imagine. That's the true perspective God is giving: there is a future glory that should embolden us to build now.

*<sup>6</sup> "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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty.*

This little building project is part of God's plan for the world – he's going to shake the whole earth and all nations – it's a picture of him judging and working powerfully – to fill *this* house with glory. So how can they keep building when the task seems enormous and beyond them?

How can they keep going when it seems so unimpressive? By seeing what they are doing through the proper lens of God's Word, the true perspective of what God is building through them.

That just as God worked powerfully to save Israel out of Egypt and bring them to himself, He will again work dramatically to save people to dwell among them yet from all nations. A work that he alone as the sovereign and powerful God can do that impacts the whole cosmos, shaking all nations in v.7.

God will bring what the nations desire, their treasure, like silver and gold. That although it seems small and unimpressive to them, especially compared to Solomon's temple, God is going to bring riches from across the whole earth to fill this temple.

Can you imagine God's people hearing this? How can this be? They would be thinking, we are so small and weak. We are scared and fumbling around in this rebuild. The Persians still rule and intimidate us, they can wipe us out at any moment, yet this is going to be compare to Solomon's temple?

*Yes and more! <sup>9</sup> '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.'*

Not similar to Solomon's but greater! And you can imagine them thinking how is possible? How can this be true? To which God is beautifully saying remember it's not about you! Notice all these promises in vv.6-9 are about what God is doing (*I will*). And how can he do this on such a huge scale?

Well v.8, the gold and silver really are his already. He is the all powerful, all knowing, in control God! He does as he pleases and this temple will be built and will be bigger and better than they can see or imagine! This is his work, his promise, based on the reality of who he is.

Yet at the same time, it is all deeply connected to their obedience to rebuild the temple. That although they can't see it, though they are small and weak, and yes even if they don't understand how or when this can possibly happen, their faithfulness is part of how God is working.

But there is a problem. This second temple rebuild seemingly never reached these majestic heights. It was finished but the nations didn't exactly flock to it and bring their treasure.

So did God fail? Well on the one hand, the answer is of course not. But that still leaves us with the key question of how we should understand these promises right?

Well it's because God's perspective again is often different, and bigger than ours. The temple project that God is speaking of is not bricks and gold but the church of Jesus.

God is building a world-wide temple and bringing the peace he promises in v.9 through Jesus. The greatness of this temple is not the materials or quantity of gold, but its universal scope. It is God's people, saved by Jesus and indwelt by the Holy Spirit that we are the temple of the living God.

And so the treasure of the all nations that fills this temple is not gold or silver but people – those from every tribe, tongue, and nation as they confess Jesus as Lord, enjoying the peace that He bought by his blood, a peace that begins now but will be perfected with new bodies in the new heaven.

And as Haggai speaks to discouraged Israel, he is saying your little building efforts are part of that plan and purpose that God is doing even if you have no idea how, even if you can't see it, that's reality, your work matters and has eternal significance because God is with you and working.

And the same is true for us. We may feel very small and discouraged, we might feel like we have nothing to offer or that God can't really use us to make an impact for his glory. And the task of seeing people come to know Christ and keep growing in Christ does seem big and beyond us right?

Often we are so aware of how inadequate we are for the job, of how unimpressive we feel. And it often seems like there are so many things stacked against us in that task.

So we need to listen to God's Word to look beyond what we can see and keep going: God is with us to empower us; and there is a certain future of glory God is bringing that should embolden us. And so the essential question for us is whose perspective will we believe, whose word will we live by?

As Alec Motyer says, "The Lord's response to his people's despondency is to turn their minds from what they think to be true of themselves to what is true about him. The key to tackling despondency is found here: Stop listening to ourselves and start listening to him and his word of promise."

And we need to hear that call today because there many voices seeking to speak into our lives. And especially three main stories we can live by when it comes to Christianity:

Firstly there is the story that our wider world and society is telling us. It's the story that Christianity is on the way out. It's declining in number, dying and ultimately unwanted. The wrong side of history.

And it's been this way from the beginning. When Jesus came into the world to reveal God's glory, he came to his very own, but his own did not receive him. As he hung on a cross, seemingly helpless and defeated, did he not seem as nothing? Far from glorious or worthy of anything from us?

Our world declares that what Jesus says is out-dated & unhelpful at best, hateful & harmful at worst, something to just keep quiet about or even be ashamed of, and certainly not something people want to hear or talk about. A story that says following Jesus isn't good for others or for you.

And that is often a powerful and confronting story as it makes us feel small, weak, and powerless – without hope for change or progress or that we can make any impact at all.

But secondly, sometimes there is the story we tell ourselves – that inner voice that comes and says the world has it right: “you’re missing out, life will be better if you ignore what Jesus says...”

All that wasted time at church, the money you could stop giving away and spend on yourself, the real good life embraces what everyone says and does when it comes to drinking, or sex, or gambling. Think of all the freedom and benefits if you just move on from God.

And this inner voice is loud and strong when we compare ourselves with others, or especially start to accuse God of failing us! It’s easy isn’t to look around at the lives of others and just think God has really let us down – that he really should have given us more and better.

Comparison robs us of joy and selflessness as it distorts our perspective of both what is ultimately best for us and the abundant riches we have received in the Gospel... For Israel it was comparison with other believers in the past that dictated what they thought God should do for them now.

And this especially happens when we invest in kingdom building and see no fruit. That inner voice can so powerfully let us know that we aren’t good enough and God clearly isn’t doing anything.

As we listen to that voice we so easily come to the same place as Israel: why bother? It is nothing. Which is why we need the third perspective and story we are told and must listen to: the good news of Jesus, that there is a peace and wholeness that our souls are longing for, found in Christ alone.

Good news that though we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. Peace through the crucified Jesus in your place, peace with risen Christ that lasts forever.

When we look to Jesus, the Gospel of his life, death, and resurrection, we see God’s control and power, we see his love and goodness, we see that we now have an identity and belong to a kingdom that will last forever, even through death itself because Jesus will return and raise us forever.

Whose perspective will we live by? Because the promises of Haggai 2 are richly applied for us as Christians today as we heard in Hebrews 12. Saved by Jesus and assured of God’s presence by the Holy Spirit, we know the one who rules history and there awaits for us a future glory.

Hebrews 12:<sup>26</sup>*At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”*<sup>27</sup>*The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.*

<sup>28</sup>*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,*<sup>29</sup>*for our “God is a consuming fire.”*

The risen and reigning Lord Jesus will return in glory to shake and judge the nations one final time, leaving only his kingdom – his people – that last forever with him. But notice the author says in v.28 we *are* receiving that kingdom, already enjoying that peace, so we should worship him gladly.

God is filling his temple now, bringing people from all nations peace and salvation that lasts forever in Jesus, and it will be perfected at his return (Rev 21:22-27), and we have been mercifully and gloriously caught up in his eternal plans and purposes for the world – and to participate in them.

We keep true perspective, we gain courage and strength to be faithful and keep going, as we worship the God who has given us peace through his son, and build our life on listening to his word.

A few years we looked at Haggai on our youth group camp. And as we often do, on our youth shared his testimony – including how it was RE in his primary school, about 6 years earlier, that was so significant for introducing him to God and igniting a desire to know Jesus more.

And it just so happened that one of the volunteers who had come along to cook at that our camp, was his RE teacher all those years ago.

And in God's kindness, she heard this testimony, and actually got up to share how for years she'd struggled to keep running that RE program because it really did just seem like it was nothing – more and more kids were opting out, they didn't really engage, it hardly seemed worth it.

And it was so beautiful, so encouraging as she shared how thankful to God she was now in this moment, though years later, that she had persevered despite what she could see – and how humbling not just to hear the encouragement – but to gain true perspective that God was at work through her, even if she couldn't see it or appreciate it at the time.

This is our God: faithful, patient, loving, saving, building and with us. So whose voice will you listen to? Whose perspective will you live by? Let's pray.