FORMER GLORY - FUTURE HOPE

Haggai 2:1-9

When Jim Elliot was growing up in Phoenix, Arizona, he just seemed to be attracted to sporting activities- anything that was competitive. He went to see every football, basketball, baseball game that he could. You could see him on the sidelines of track meets, watching and cheering. And Jim wanted to play and compete himself, but he couldn't. His parents wouldn't let him play. So Jim just continued to peddle his papers using his bicycle, making a few dollars a week to buy tickets to watch others compete.

Well, as Jim peddled his paper route, he found that he was enjoying riding that bicycle. So he rode more and more. Soon he was taking longer and longer trips. And what once had been mere transportation for Jim now became one of the loves of his life. And he found himself getting better and better at riding. Finally he decided to try a significant bike trip. So In June of 1983, Jim traveled 1200 miles in 3 days, shaving 2 full hours off of the record for that distance. Then the next year in April of 1984, Jim set a new

world record for distance in a 24 hour ride- 502.3 miles, the first person ever to break the 500 mile barrier. In May of the next year, 1985, Jim biked coast to coast in the great bike race, 3,047 miles from Huntington Beach, Ca. to Atlantic City, N.J.- he finished 1st. Many of Jim Elliot's bicycle records stand unequalled even to this day, and he is recognized as a world class athlete on the bicycle. But it is interesting that it wasn't just his parents who discouraged Jim from venturing into other sports as a youngster. It was mainly Jim's handicap that prompted his athletic direction, it was his handicap that literally forced him to the bicycle. You see, Jim has a physical condition called grand Maul Epilepsy. That forced Jim to ride his bike, because he couldn't get a driver's license.

It is exciting to see someone overcome a handicap to achieve something great through hard work and perseverance. When discouragement and obstacles are conquered, the sense of accomplishment seems sweeter and more deserved than ever. In fact, when significant accomplishments are examined in life, one could question whether any noteworthy achievement is

every made without some obstacle or discouragement being overcome.

Certainly, as the 50,000 of the Jewish remnant returned back to the promised land under the leadership of Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple of God, they could expect a measure of discouragement as they were attempting this formidable task. And they did receive opposition. After an auspicious beginning laying the foundation in 2 years, they were threatened by the Samaritans and Canaanites, and the task suddenly appeared to be so overwhelming that they became discouraged, and they quit. For some 16 years, the foundation of the temple lay barren, while the remnant were struggling to eeck out an existence with the hand of God against them. They tried to build their houses, but unexpected expenses kept draining their financial resources. They tried to plant their crops, but the rains didn't come and their harvests failed. They just couldn't seem to get ahead in life.

Then Haggai the prophet came, and gave them a message from God, the message that we have been studying these past two weeks. This message was to begin work once again- to complete the rebuilding of the temple that had

been started. The message implied that God's blessing would return and his presence and power would be with them if they continued the work.

And the people had heeded that message, as we saw last time. They had returned to the work that God had for them, and they sensed the excitement and fulfillment of once again being in the will of God.

But now just a month had passed and a new enemy arose on the horizon- the enemy of discouragement. Their work had begun again on the 24th day of the 6th month (1:15), and now on the 21st day of the 7th month, there is a need for a new message from Haggai to combat the discouragement that had begun to creep in.

Let's read about it. <u>READ Haggai 2:1-9</u>

HAG 2:1 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.'

HAG 2:6 "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."

1. The discouragement itself came from the comparing the anticipated completion of the new temple with the glory of Solomon's temple which had been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar. It is interesting that Haggai's message came on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This holy day commemorated the wilderness wanderings and celebrated the summer harvest in the Jewish calendar. The Feast of Tabernacles was the 3rd and final feast on which every Jewish male was required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Passover and Pentecost being the first 2 feasts. As these people were celebrating this great feast day, remembering the power of God bringing forth his people from Egypt, instead of looking forward to another great deliverance and blessing of God in the future, they were lead to discouragement remembering the good old days at the temple. Some of the saints who were over 70 remembered that grand and glorious Temple of Solomon. They remembered the lavishness of it with the gold and silver, jewels and tapestry, the elegance of the artwork, the skill of the craftsmanship. And then they looked at the meager materials that they had

now with which to build this new temple. While Israel was at the peak of her history, David had devoted the last portion of his life to storing up treasures with which to build the temple. Solomon had bestowed lavish riches upon it himself as he supervised its construction. There was no way possible at this time after the Babylonian Captivity that they would be able to in any way approximate the quality of that former temple. They were all pretty much destitute themselves, all they had was the meager stipend granted to them by the King of Persia. They would be fortunate to get the temple up at all, let alone strive for any singleness of beauty which would distinguish it from other nations like Solomon's temple. Solomon's temple was unique. Other kings and queens traveled from all over the world to see its splendor and beauty. Now that uniqueness was gone forever.

As these elderly people reflected upon the glory of Solomon's temple at this special feast season, they were discouraging the new work that was being done on the temple.

What's the use of building a new temple anyway? It will never be as

glorious as the former one?

2. To encourage the builders, Haggai comes forth with a message from God. 3 times in verse 4 the prophet repeats the words,"Be strong" or "take courage"- once to Zerubbabel, then to Joshua and finally to all the people. And these 3 commands are followed by the plural command addressed to all of them "and work".

Notice his words with me- <u>READ Haggai 2:4</u>

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's remedy for this discouragement was to be strong in the Lord, and in faith continue to do his will, building the temple. As the people would commit themselves to His task, they would have the confidence that God's strength and power would be with them for the accomplishment of His work.

Now this is important for us to note, because the natural response to

discouragement is to give up and quit. Discouragement saps our strength and energies, but more than that it saps our heart and spirit. We become more tired, less motivated, and the work seems to double and triple in volume. And so the natural tendency of these people when this discouragement hit them was to give up the work on the temple again.

But Haggai told them not to succumb to this temptation. No, they must rather gain new strength from the Lord, and go forward in the work.

One of the greatest enemies that the Christian faces is discouragement. It can immobilize and paralyze the greatest of potential. But the best remedy for discouragement is doing just what we don't feel like doing. When we are discouraged, we feel like quitting. But when we find strength in the Lord, and when we discipline ourselves to carry on in the work to which He has called us, an amazing thing happens. Our focus is turned again to the excitement of the accomplishment of his work, and our hearts are encouraged once again. So what if the new temple would not be as glorious as Solomon's temple. A new temple would be a whole lot more glorious than the pile of

rubble that they started with. And the building of this temple would again raise a testimony for the Lord in the Promised Land. So the people were encouraged again to the work by Haggai.

As an additional point, may I just say a word about the ministry of encouraging others. What a valuable and profitable ministry this is. Some folk I think feel that they have the spiritual gift of discouragement, and they take it upon themselves to criticize and cut down and hinder the work from progressing. It doesn't matter

how hard you work, your work is never going to approach the days of the old temple. The church today is nothing compared to the New Testament church or the Reformation church or that church of the Great Awakening. It doesn't matter what we do, we can never approach the glories of the good old days. It is interesting that the gift of discouragement is never listed among the spiritual gifts. But the gift of encouragement is. Romans 12:4-7 - JUST AS EACH OF US HAS ONE BODY WITH MANY MEMBERS, AND THESE MEMBERS DO NOT ALL HAVE THE SAME FUNCTION, SO IN

CHRIST WE WHO ARE MANY FORM ONE BODY, AND EACH MEMBER BELONGS TO ALL THE OTHERS. WE HAVE DIFFERENT GIFTS, ACCORDING TO THE GRACE GIVEN US. IF A MAN'S GIFT IS PROPHESYING, LET HIM USE IT IN PROPORTION TO HIS FAITH. IF IT IS SERVING, LET HIM SERVE; IF IT IS TEACHING, LET HIM TEACH; IF IT IS ENCOURAGING, LET HIM ENCOURAGE.

And not only is encouraging listed as one of the spiritual gifts, but it is also clear from the Scriptures that every Christian is to be active in encouraging others. Some specialize in this ministry, but we all need to be active in encouraging each other in the Lord. Paul concluded his letter to the Colossians by saying that he was sending Tychicus to them "for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts." (Col. 4:8)

It is amazing how much encouragement one person can bring into the life of another. We either remember or have read about the nightmarish blitz that London endured during those bleak hours during WWII. Day after Day,

Night after Night, the German planes continued to bomb the city. The situation appeared to be quite desperate, and the people's hearts were filled with despair and discouragement. And at times, everyone would be almost ready to quit. But then one man's voice would ring out over the radio, and the nation's heart again would take courage. Yes, of all the strategies and plans that were offered, undoubtedly the greatest service that Winston Churchill had for his native country was his ministry of encouragement to them.

Haggai had this same ministry to the Jewish Remnant. When their hearts were discouraged, when they were ready to quit rebuilding the temple because of the opposition of the Samaritans, or because of the discouragement of crop failures, or even because of the realization that this new temple would never approach the old one in its splendor and magnificence, Haggai would speak words of encouragement to them.

And we can and should have this same ministry towards one another. When you think of how blessed we are as people in this wonderful land of

ours, when you think of how God has blessed our church and our families in the past, we certainly have a solid foundation for having a strong ministry of encouragement to each other.

3. So then we have seen the discouragement of the builders as they began to realize that this new temple would not be as glorious as Solomon's temple in its outward beauty. And we have seen Haggai's ministry of encouragement to them- be strong and continue to work for the Lord.

Now as they continue to work for the Lord, we see something that is most interesting develop. Haggai gives to them another message which gives them a whole new perspective on this matter of the glory of the temple. It is a prophetic message which reveals to them that even though it appears at this time that the glory of this new temple will never approximate the old one, that in reality the glory of this new temple is going to be greater than the old one.

READ Haggai 2:6-9.

HAG 2:6 "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."

Now we see immediately that this is a prophetic message. The "desired of the nations" is speaking of Jesus Christ, the Messiah himself. And the implications of Haggai's statement are clear. Whereas these builders thought that this new temple would never approximate the glory of the old one- they were only looking at the outward appearances. In reality, this new temple would be far more glorious than the old one, because the Messiah himself was going to come and walk in it, and teach in it, and celebrate holy days in it. God himself, in the incarnate second person of the trinity, the Son of God, Jesus Christ himself, was going to grace this temple with his presence and he

was going to fill it with his glory. Man might look only at the outward appearances, but God was looking at the glory that would fill his house, and this glory was far greater than was presently imagined by the builders.

When we become discouraged, we lose the proper perspective on life. We only see problems, and the problems always grow to gigantic proportions. And we all get discouraged at times.

But when we maintain the disciple to work and to keep on doing what we know the Lord wants for us to do in the midst of our discouragement, when we gain strength from our relationship with the Lord, and when in faith we press on toward the mark for His glory, then something amazing happens in our lives.

It might be immediately, usually it is after a longer period of time. But a new insight comes from God which gives to us a new perspective on the matter. We begin to see not just as man sees looking at only outward appearances, but we begin to see as God sees, that the result of our labors for him will result in greater glory for His name.

The process that these people went through in rebuilding the temple in a physical way is a similar process that we go through in our own lives. Are you discouraged this morning? Are you disheartened like these builders? Looking at the good old days, looking at the former glory? Haggai would give to you the same message that he gave to these builders. Be strong in the Lord. Drive your roots of faith deeper into Him. And work. Don't give up-work for him. Do what you know that he wants you to do. Now there are times when God wants us to change direction, and we need to listen to his leading. Sometimes he brings circumstances into our lives which we cannot ignore. But when we know what he wants for us to do, we need to step out in faith and do it with all of our heart. And as we trust him, he will reward us, and the end of our work will bring more glory and honor to him than we imagined before.

It is most interesting to note that there would be another great message delivered on the very day which Haggai delivered his, some 500 years later. A message made possible by the faithfulness and encouragement of Haggai.

It was on the very last day of the feast of tabernacles, during the public ministry of Jesus Christ, that the son of God himself stood in the temple area a gave a great message.

READ John 7:37-38

JN 7:37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Jesus was able to deliver his message of salvation on that day, because Haggai delivered his message first, and the people of God were faithful to complete God's work in building the temple.

May we also be faithful in the completion of God's work in our lives. We may never know in our lifetime how God might use our labors for him in the future.