

Sunday evening March 25th 2018 at CBC
Sermon outline: Haggai 2:10-23

In the book of Ezra we meet the people who had returned to Israel after the period of their exile. A decree issued by Cyrus king of Persia had allowed them to return. Jerusalem was in a mess, its temple destroyed. They began to rebuild it, but the work faltered for several reasons.

In due course, the Lord sent messages through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The book of Ezra tells us **that** the prophets prophesied, that they were with the people, helping them, and that the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah.

The books of Haggai and Zechariah tell us **what** the prophets actually said. We have been looking at Haggai on two previous occasions, and we are here again for the last time this evening. We will start with a reflection on the book as a whole, and then focus on the particular section 2.10-23.

[1] THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD – to change

The messages from the Lord via Haggai had the effect of turning things around for the Jews. Whereas they had lost their focus and were concentrating on building their own houses, when the word of God came to them through the prophets, the situation was transformed. And this transformation worked very quickly, for God's word came to the people over a period of about three and a half months.

Now we rightly insist that the Christian message, the message of the Bible, calls upon people to change. Repentance is a

change of mind leading to change of behaviour. But in underlining the need for change we should not forget that the *agent* of change, in the first instance, is the word of God. The word of God, empowered through the Spirit of God, brings about change in people.

Notice that Haggai and the leaders were not merely the human agents of the change brought about by the word of God, they were also affected themselves – 1.14.

And we must apply this to ourselves. Where will the impetus for change and progress come from? The word of God as it is brought to us. And we should be looking for, and praying for, the word of God to change all of us, whether we are involved in giving ministry or receiving it.

If the word of God does not change us, there will be no change.

[2] THE PRESSURE OF THE WORD OF GOD – to think

We have thought about the power of the word of God to bring about change. But that change involves human response. And the human response that is very obviously underlined in the book of Haggai, and not least in the verses we are looking at today, is .. thinking.

The theme runs throughout the book:

See Haggai 1:5; Haggai 1:7; Haggai 2:15; Haggai 2:18

In 2:10-19 the priests are given two questions. They have to think about the answers, which they give correctly.

From there, the Lord – through the prophet – goes on to ask the people to stop and think about the effects of a lack of holiness in their lives to this point. It's a repetition of, or another part of the challenge of, what has been said in chapter, where the people have been asked to notice their lack of blessing. Had they stopped to think about the reason for this? Haggai's message from the Lord is intended to make the people think. They have to ask questions and apply the answers to their behaviour. It is not an easy or necessarily pleasant process for them. But it is essential if they to understand the way forward. They will not appreciate the Lord's goodness to them unless they understand their own behaviour. The same is true for us.

[3] THE PROMISE OF GOD'S WORD – to bring peace

See Haggai 2:6-7 and 2:20-22 and Isaiah 13:11-13

Clearly this is a major, massive, event that the Lord describes to Haggai. He is to pass this on to Zerubbabel. It sounds like the end of the world, the last judgement or something close to it. In 2:20-22 there is no direct reference to peace as such. But this is a personal message for Zerubbabel and it assures him of safety and thus, peace, in the midst of the turmoil. Whatever the Lord is going to do, Zerubbabel will be to the Lord as a signet ring was to a ruler – a personal and much prized possession.

[a] What did this mean for Zerubbabel?

Safety for him and those he represented,
a lifting of the judgement against his ancestor,
the security of the Messianic line.

[b] But what does it mean for us?

See Hebrews 12:22-29

The writer takes the promise to shake the heavens as a marker for the last judgment. He points out that there are temporary, created, things – like the heavens and the earth which can be shaken – and permanent things like the kingdom of God (heaven) which are eternal and which the Lord's people will receive. This being the case, the Lord's people must behave in an appropriate manner, namely:

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." NIV

So, as we read the message of Haggai to Z, we must be thankful that if our trust is in Christ we may look forward to safety and security on the day when the created order is shaken, and we should therefore express our faith and confidence by worshipping God acceptably with reverence and awe.