

## FEAR(LESS/FUL)

### **Haggai 2:1-9**

#### **Intro**

Quick background on what we are about to hear: it was written to the people who have been brought back from exile in what we now know as Iraq. They have been back, in fact, for around 18 years. They know God, but they feel distant from God (for in their way of thinking, in order to be close to God you still need a Temple...which in their case still lay in ruins). They are struggling to rebuild their community, and their country. They are working hard at surviving and this has left them feeling like they are being ground into little more than dust. God senses this anxiety, even anguish, and is speaking to His people. The scripture reads this way.

### **Haggai 2:1-9**

2In the second year of King Darius,<sup>1</sup> in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, <sup>3</sup>Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? <sup>4</sup>Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, <sup>5</sup>according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. <sup>6</sup>For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; <sup>7</sup>and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendour, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>8</sup>The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>9</sup>The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.

### **II Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17**

#### **Intro**

Our second passage also speaks to a community that is feeling distress. And again, we hear the response of God.

Listen for it, for in its articulation we are reminded of foundations that we need for the days when our distress begins to assail us. The scripture reads this way.

### **II Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17**

2As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, <sup>2</sup>not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. <sup>3</sup>Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. <sup>4</sup>He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of

worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. <sup>5</sup>Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?

13 But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup>For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup>So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, <sup>17</sup>comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

### **'Fear(less/ful)'**

So...I'm not sure if you've noticed, but apparently there's going to be an election, and some voting or something that's supposed to happen in a few days.

I'm not sure, have you heard anything?

Yeah, at this point we're all sick of it.

But then there is the reality that one of the two major party candidates is actually going to win.

I don't know about you, but that doesn't feel me with confidence and assurance. Depending on how far down into the political minutia I allow myself to be on any particular day, it actually causes me to be fearful (and again, that's with both of the major party candidates).

And that's without taking into account all of the other stories that feel like they are getting little to no airplay because of how much oxygen the presidential election has taken out of the room.

For example, how many of you have heard about what's going on in Standing Rock? My hunch is that a solid majority would be oblivious with that describer.

What if I described it as the pipeline demonstrations that are occurring in North Dakota? I would assume that we would actually get a few more of us who have at least seen the headlines.

I was in the category of reading the headline...but the name, let alone the rationale for the protests, I was completely ignorant of. Then I started to read some of the commentary and I immediately knew that I was guilty of not opening my eyes and ears to truths that are difficult to hear (how Native Americans are the subgroup of people within the country who are (percentage wise) most likely to be killed by someone in law enforcement, which only enforces the perspective that the Native Americans are little more than an afterthought who have been shoved around and penned in to the point of eradication...and a majority of people in the country could care less). I was wrong to be ignorant to their pleas.

Which are not all that dissimilar to the pleas that continue to be screamed out in Syria (due to a civil war), Iraq (because of the fallout of the ISIS takeover), all those who continue to face fear because of the evils of Boko Haram in Africa, or even the drug and corruption war in Mexico.

Again, depending on how far down into the minutia a I dig, I end up experiencing feelings that are more than a little similar to being fearful. Talk about being ground into little more than dust...and I'm so far on the outside looking in that I can take time to invest myself in games 6 and 7 of the World Series.

The pleas are out there, and yes, the pleas are close to home as well as we are able to recognize so many problems that leave us in a place a crying out, feeling abandoned or that if we don't do something for ourselves, well, then nothing's going to happen.

Sometimes it may feel like the scripture passages that we hear have little connection to our current reality.

Then there are days like today.

So what should we take away?

Here's the first thing (which very much is heard in our Old Testament reading): God has this...all of this.

That is not a statement that leaves us passive to the waves of a broken world but instead the contextual foundation that we need to abide upon, exist in, and be covered by. God holds this creation; God holds us, and as we talked about last week, that embrace is forevermore.

In Men's Group this past week (gentlemen: Thursdays at 6:30 am in the lounge, there's always more room and the coffee is hot – I know a guy), this past week we continued our reading in Paul's letter to the Romans. Verse 7 of chapter 14 says the following: 'We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.'

Some may hear that as rather defeatist but as it is followed up with the this, ('For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.') it becomes the affirmation and amplification of what we have heard in Haggai: God holds us and we need to live our lives from that place. If we don't, we fear; when we do, we are reminded that we are more than conquerors (and that is regardless of what the pundits may say about the scriptural declarations that we make).

And that leads us right up to the second thing that we are able to derive from our passages this morning (isn't it nice when it works that way?): if we are looking for someone else to stand and declare the truth of God, then we are abdicating the responsibility that is ours as the church, that is ours as people who have been led to be disciples who profess their faith that Jesus Christ is the savior of all who died for all and was raised so that all might have the opportunity to abide with God forevermore. That is exactly what we hear in II Thessalonians: that we are to proclaim the Good News.

Said another way, it's not the current or future president's job, or the government's job, or the UN's job, or anyone else's job to declare the truth of God: it's our job, it's the church's responsibility, our obligation, the church's calling!

So how do we do that? Here are some scriptural suggestions (again, taken from Romans 12): 'Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to

strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; ...'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink;... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'

You know what that is? An umbrella of direction that provides us the suggestions that we crave, while at the same time providing Divine protection to us, and to all those who come into contact with us, from the fear that is very present in the midst of the world (which shows up when we forget or ignore the foundation in which we are called to abide, build, and be sheltered by – and yes, am I referring to Jesus).

Why do I say that? Because when you begin to abide in the Lord and allow His love to flow through You we are able to always see how we continue to be held by God. Yeah, we may be messed up, but we are still beloved by the Creator of all.

Yes, there is so much that is able to cause us to quake, and because we are held by God we are able to declare through our words, our actions, our very being the Good News of Jesus Christ. Let's go.

#### **After Sermon Prayer**

Your people throughout the generations have more than their fair share of moments when we felt like we were being ground to little more than dust. But You have been able to declare over and over that whether we live or we die that we are held by You: the Lord of all. God, in these days of worry and fear that we currently face, pour out your Spirit of fearlessness that we might stand together and proclaim Your truth through our words, our deeds, our very being. Lord, let it be so. Amen.