

The Past that Discourages & Encourages; The Future that Encourages

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- [0 : 0 0] Put it off. Well, it sounds like the name of a Russian general, but it's actually some people's personality trait. Put it off, the kind of Spanish manana.
- The, why do today what you could do tomorrow? Why do this week what you could do next month? Why do this year what you could do next year? Many of us know that kind of temptation.
- And as we saw before coffee, that's exactly what had been going on in the latter part of the 6th century BC. So as we've already seen, we're 520 years before the birth of Jesus.
- And the good news is that the people have stopped putting off what they should have been doing. They are now back at work. And here in chapter 2, with the second dated prophecy, you can see we're now in the seventh month rather than the sixth.
- We've moved the diary forward another three and a half weeks. And Haggai speaks again to the people. He's told, verse 2, to speak again to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people.
- [1 : 1 7] And this time he's going to speak to them about a past that might discourage them. A past that might stop them from the work that they've got back to doing.
- You can see that in verse 3, the prophet is to ask the people three questions. And you don't need to phone a friend or ask the audience or anything like that to work out the answers.
- Because actually the third question answers the first two. The first question is, who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory?
- The building was destroyed, as we said this morning, the building was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar when he came and attacked Jerusalem. They were exiled for 70 years and they've been back for a handful of years.
- Anyone who was over the age of about 80 would be able to remember the first temple that was built. Would be able to remember the glorious temple that Solomon erected.
- [2 : 3 0] You can read its descriptions all in 1 Kings chapters 6, 7 and 8. A building that, along with his palace, took 20 years to construct.
- A glorious building. And anyone over the age of 80 would be able to remember it. Now there are some commentators, I think they're ageist, who say that there wouldn't be anyone who'd been able to remember it.
- My experience of older folk is that they can often remember what happened 80 years ago. It's that they can't remember what they had for breakfast today that's their issue.
- I remember that when my father-in-law had his 90th birthday, he decided to have a party. And it was in a lovely hotel and it was a lunch party.
- And after we'd had lunch, he decided to stand up and make a speech. Now he was a Cumbrian farmer and he decided to start by telling us the first tractor that they had on the farm that he had grown up on when he was aged 5.

[3 : 36] He spoke about this tractor for about 20 minutes. I thought if he was going to go through the whole of his life, we might have been there for 20 years. He could remember what had happened 85 years ago with crystal clarity.

It was just he couldn't remember what he did yesterday that was the problem. Anyone who was over 80 would be able to remember the temple built by Solomon.

But the second question is, how does it look to you now? In other words, they're being asked to make a comparison. Compare what you're building now with the temple that Solomon built centuries before.

Have a look. Get the grey tops and the coffin dodges out and get them to compare now with then.

And the comparison, well, the answer to the question, how does it look now, is the third question. Does it not seem to you like nothing?

[4 : 40] In other words, what they're building now is puny compared to what was built before. What they're doing now is less impressive to what they had before. And the danger is, is that you compare and you become discouraged.

Have you noticed that there are some people whose pastime is pastime? Yeah, they're always looking back. They're always looking back to what they think were the good old days.

That can happen secularly. It can happen religiously. It can happen secularly. You'll know that in the last two years, the creators of Dad's Army, Croft and Perry, have both died.

But it hasn't stopped the BBC from rerunning Dad's Army yet again on Saturday nights. You can watch it tonight, 50 years after it was first made.

And when David Croft died, I remember seeing in the newspaper a little headline that said, they don't make sitcoms like they used to. They were saying that that's the reason Dad's Army is still on, 50 years after it was made.

[5 : 49] That's why it's still on, on a Saturday night, because nobody's able to make sitcoms like the ones that they made 50 years ago. Those were the good old days of sitcoms. And that today's sitcoms, therefore in comparison, are useless.

Well, how discouraging that must be to the sitcom writers today. Okay. But it can happen in church too. A past that can discourage by looking back to the good old days.

A few months ago, I was preaching down in Kent. And it was a typical Sunday morning for that church. There were about 80 or 90, I suppose, who were there.

It was a building bigger than this with a gallery that went all the way around three sides of the building. I reckon it probably could have seated six or seven hundred.

And as we were drinking coffee after the service, a couple of the grey tops were chatting with me and they said, we remember this church when it used to be full.

[6 : 58] We remember this church when we used to have a Sunday afternoon, Sunday school, and 400 children came. We remember this church in the good old days.

Well, it wasn't just the two grey tops who were standing around me there. There were three others who were in their twenties and I just thought, how discouraging for those three to hear that.

The good old days. They're busting a gut to do what they can to make Jesus known now. It's just different now to how it was. But looking back to the good old days can be very discouraging indeed, can't it?

I have to watch that. I've got children from 21 down to 14. My 14-year-old goes to a secondary school where there are 1,200 pupils.

On a Friday morning before school, there's a Christian union. There are four who go to it. Four out of 1,200.

[8 : 03] The lady who runs it, a lovely Christian woman, I've said to her a number of times, I said, there must be more Christians in the school than that. She said, if there are, I don't know who they are. She said, I think there probably are only four Christian kids in the school.

And then I caught myself. What I said to her was, do you know, when I was at secondary school, after I became a Christian, we had 60 in the Christian union.

the good old days. And as I said, I thought, how discouraging is that for her to hear that, to hear my good old days when she's working her socks off to try and make Jesus known in the secondary school.

It's just different now to how it was then. The second temple, built by the people in Haggai's day, was physically nothing like the first one built by Solomon.

But there's a danger you look back and you're discouraged by the past. Though, it's not looking back that's wrong, it's what you look back to.

[9 : 20] Because notice what you could look back to, which is in verses 4 and 5. You'll see that the contrast comes with the word but at the beginning of verse 4. But now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the Lord.

Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehoshadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land. Be strong. And then in this little sandwich that Haggai keeps loving to use.

Be strong, verse 4, and concludes in verse 5, do not fear. And why should they continue to work being strong and not being afraid?

Well, in the middle comes again this repeat, for I am with you. It's what we saw in chapter 1. For I am with you, declares the Lord. And here's the looking back that will encourage.

This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my spirit remains among you. You see, the danger is you make a comparison with the present with the past.

[10 : 29] And you see that things aren't now quite how they were in the past. And the danger is you start thinking that God isn't with us. He's not in it.

But if they looked back, if they looked back to the promise God made when they came out of slavery in Egypt, they would remember that God made a promise that he would be with his people.

So verse 5 is looking back to when they came out of slavery in Egypt. You may remember that the people were in Egypt for 400 plus years. They'd become enslaved in Egypt.

And then through Moses, God led the people and brought them to Mount Sinai. They come there in Exodus chapter 19. They remain there until Numbers chapter 10.

And at that time, God enters into a covenant with his people. And part of the covenant God makes with his people is his promise to be with them.

[11 : 36] His spirit to be amongst them. And that's a promise that's true whatever things look like in experience.

A past that encourages God's presence with them through God's promise to them. Now you and I don't look back, do we, to being rescued from slavery in Egypt?

We don't look back to Mount Sinai. But nonetheless, we do look back and hear the same promise. I am with you. The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are the covenant God has made with us that says, I am with you.

And I am with you however it seems to you things are going now. We have to be aware of thinking God's presence is somehow connected statistically to numbers.

You and I live in an era, don't we, where league tables are all the rage. Hospitals have their league tables. Schools have their league tables.

[13 : 05] Universities have their league tables. Is Glasgow quite up? I have no idea. League tables around performance, around results.

That's the culture we live in and the danger is is that we then slip into thinking that God's presence is somehow related to performance. So if the Christian union at your university is small then that must mean God's not with you.

Or if the student work at church is not going that well it must mean God's not with you. But that's complete baloney, isn't it? When Jesus at the Great Commission in Matthew chapter 28 says, and I am with you to the end of the age as long as things are only going well.

No, I'm with you. I've covenanted to be with you. So, of course, therefore, be strong. Therefore, don't be afraid. Therefore, stick at the work.

Therefore, continue temple building on your university campus, in your workplace. Stick at it. I'm with you. My spirit remains with you.

[14 : 33] The past that can discourage, don't allow it. The past that encourages, keep meditating on it.

However hard it is for you, and even if, for you, it's not as good in inverted commas as it used to be for someone else in the past.

Because however it is, God has said, I am with you. And if you've got God on your side in temple building, you can be strong.

And you don't need to be frightened. It is an astonishing thing how often we are frightened in modern temple building, in making Jesus known.

When the girl's clipping away at my hair, why am I frightened about what a girl might think of me who I probably won't ever see again?

[15 : 37] There's something illogical about that, isn't there? And it's even more illogical when I remember God has said, and I'm with you. You can be strong.

Don't be afraid. After all, what's the worst that could happen to you? A number of years ago, I had the great joy of going to Romania to preach in some churches there, and I spent some time with a Baptist pastor in a place called Timisoara, which is where all the kind of freedom and uprising against Ceausescu happened.

And I chatted to him and I said, how was life like in the Ceausescu, the communist era of Romania? And he said, the churches were bitterly persecuted.

He said, our Baptist church was twice burnt down by the Securitate. He said, I was arrested on one occasion and I was in a prison cell.

He said, one of the Securitate, that's the secret police, put a gun at my head and said, if you do not renounce being Christian, I will shoot you.

[16 : 47] I said, what did you do when the gun was pointed at the temple of your head? And he said, I said to him, all you are doing is threatening me with death and that is to threaten me with heaven and that is no threat at all.

And the Securitate man noted at that point he'd lost because the man was not afraid the worst that could happen to him is that he was going to be sent to glory which is no threat at all.

What's the worst that could happen to you if you open your mouth to someone on Monday and talk to them about Jesus? What's the worst that could happen when somebody asks you on Monday, what did you do over the weekend?

Did you get up to anything interesting on Saturday? And you say, yes, I went to hear this man do some talks on the book of Haggai and what he was encouraging us to do was that to talk to people about Jesus and I'd like to talk to you about Jesus now.

What's the worst that could happen? I reckon you probably won't get shot. I'm with you.

[18 : 15] My spirit remains amongst you. So don't be afraid. Be strong. Verses 1 to 5 is about looking back and looking back to the right thing but then verses 6 to 9 is looking forward and what God is going to do.

So here's a future that should encourage us to work as well. This is what the Lord Almighty says. In a little while. What will God do?

If you notice the repeated phrase that comes in verses 6 to 9 is I will. It just comes in every verse. I will. I will. I will. And what is it that God is going to do in the future?

Well first he's going to establish a universal people. Let me try and prove that to you in verse 6 and 7. In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth.

Now that little phrase I will once more means God's already done this before. When did God bring about a great earthquake shakings of the heaven and the earth?

[19 : 23] Again it was at Mount Sinai when Moses came out of Egypt to that holy mountain. There was a great earthquake and at the earthquake which you can see from verse 5 God covenanted.

God entered into this binding agreement with his people. But he will do it again. There will be another earthquake. But notice as he shakes the heavens and the earth verse 7 this is going to be the shaking of all nations.

And as God shakes the whole earth not just a mountain as God shakes all nations then now here's a little difficulty in translation. In my NIV it says the desired of all nations will come.

Now Andy read it in your version because your NIV was slightly different to that. And what is desired by all nations will come it's not the best translation that you could get.

It is the translation actually that Charles Wesley liked. I don't know whether you know that when Charles Wesley wrote hymns we tend to sing only a very small number of verses that he actually penned and Can It Be he's got a dozen verses but it would go on forever so we only sing about four or five of them.

[20 : 46] His best hymn I think is the Christmas one Hark the Herald Angels sing I think it's terrific but there are verses to that we never get to sing at Christmas and one of them is Come desired of nations come and he understood verse 7 with this idea of the one you desire or the desired of all nations as being a reference to Jesus.

I don't think it is. If you've got an ESV in front of you you will discover that the word is actually in the plural and the ESV translates it as the treasures plural of all nations will come and I think it's much more likely that what Haggai is saying is there's coming a time when there will be people from all nations who will come to the living God.

That's what God promised isn't it? I don't know whether you know the Old Testament falls into two halves. The first half is Genesis 1-11 and the second half is Genesis 12 to the end of Malachi.

They're not even in space obviously but Genesis 1-11 broadly speaking is God's dealings with Adam and his family and Genesis 12 onwards is God's dealings with Abraham and his family who become Israel.

And at Genesis 12 at the beginning of the second half of the Old Testament God promises to Abraham that through him all nations same little eye phrase here all nations would be blessed would come into the opposite of what happened as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden.

[22 : 34] God would bless all nations. Well I wonder when that promise comes to be fulfilled do you think?

When is this little while fulfilled? Well the answer is it has been fulfilled is being fulfilled and will be fulfilled.

Do you remember when Matthew describes the death of Jesus he tells us in Matthew chapter 26 there was an earthquake at the death of Jesus.

And then the great commission that we've mentioned is go and make disciples of all nations. It starts its fulfilment at the death and resurrection and the coming of the Spirit.

So that Luke will tell you in Acts chapter 2 verse 5 that in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost there were people from all nations gathered in Jerusalem and they hear the gospel spoken to them in their own tongue and the beginnings of the international people of God takes off.

[23 : 50] But but the New Testament quotes verse 7 in Hebrews chapter 12 and says that the shaking ultimately will happen on the day Jesus returns.

and when Jesus returns well then gathered around the throne according to Revelation 7 there will be people from every nation tribe and tongue gathered around.

That is what on earth God is about. That's what God is doing. So verse 6 and 7 find the start of their fulfilment in the death resurrection ascension and Pentecost and it's being fulfilled as the gospel now does go to all nations.

My hunch is that there are people from a number of different nations even here this morning. Who's Scottish? Who's English?

Who's something else? Let's hear what the others are. What were Irish? Irish. Irish. We love the Irish. Irish.

[25 : 00] Northern Irish. I love the way across the have we got any other non-Irish? Nigerian. Ghana. Czech.

See people from all nations. I often tell people in Scotland that you do know that Scotland is the very ends of the earth don't you? You do know that.

It is. If you get one of those oblong maps we've got one on our kitchen wall. If you've got one of these oblong maps and you draw a line from Jerusalem and you follow it all the way up to Scotland once you've got to the edge of Scotland there is no more.

You fall off the top of the map. You are the ends of the earth and the gospels come here. All nations. It's great news isn't it? A universal people will be established.

It's begun. A glorious temple established. Verse 7b And I will fill this house with my glory says the Lord Almighty.

[26 : 08] 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. Now that doesn't mean literally the physical second temple that's being built.

but the glory of what it shadows which is the temple that's being built as the gospel goes out now is better than the physical building in Jerusalem.

and again it started being built through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the spirit. It's being built now and one day it will be finished.

and a lasting peace established and in this place verse 9 I will grant peace declares the Lord Almighty.

Shalom. And when is that fulfilled? Again it starts in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The coming of the spirit. So that Paul can write in Romans chapter 5 verse 1 therefore since we have been justified we have peace.

[27 : 23] We are at peace with the creator of the universe today. But it's not a complete peace yet. Because we are not living in a world of peace.

And we don't live in relationships that are perfectly peaceful. I don't know what St Silas's is like here in Glasgow but the church I go to we are not always in perfect peace together.

Sometimes people get cross with one another and upset with one another. But there's coming a time when we will enjoy peace forever and ever and ever. What Haggai is telling the people is that God is with them.

And what Haggai tells the people is what God will do. And because this is what God is doing work for him.

be at work. Have his priorities rather than your own priorities. Have his command above your own comfort. The New Testament's view is that to know what God is doing is one of the great blessings of being a Christian.

[28 : 41] people. I don't know whether you know that in America now they're no longer using rats in scientific experimentation.

They're using lawyers instead. There are two reasons for that. First because there are more lawyers than rats in America. And secondly because there are things that rats won't do.

But I don't know whether you've seen those scientific experiments where you have a kind of maze and you have a little bit of cheese at the centre of the maze and the rat is allowed into the maze and it has to scurry this way and that and turn this way and that until it finds the reward at the centre of the maze.

Do you know many people go through their Christian lives as if they're in a maze? Going in one direction then another direction turning this way and that way this way and that way. Paul says that to know what God is doing is one of the great blessings.

So Ephesians 1 says praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and then goes on to tell us that what he is doing is exactly verses 6 to 9. He is bringing a people for himself who one day will enjoy peace in the presence of God for all eternity.

[29 : 58] That is what God is doing. So do you not think it is a no brainer to order our own lives and our own priorities in the same direction that God is taking everything?

To order our praying, order our giving and ultimately order our conversations with non-Christians so that they come into being part of the fulfilment of verses 6 to 9.

If that's what God's doing, don't you think it makes sense to kind of work in the same direction as God? Don't allow comparisons with the past to discourage you.

Look back though and be encouraged. I am with you. I promised to be with you. And this is what I'm doing.

What I'm doing is what I've always said I will do. They must have wondered, don't you think, when they returned back from exile, from Babylon and they came back to Jerusalem.

[31 : 14] They must have wondered, is God really going to do everything he'd always said he would do? Those promises he'd made to Abraham ways back, is he really going to do it? Yes, he is. Yes, he is.

And you and I have even more confidence that he is because we're now bound up in the fulfilment. He will do what he's promised. So, don't be afraid.

Be strong. And work. Let's pray. Thank you. Thank you. Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your promise to be with us.

Thank you that your spirit remains with us even when things look bleak and when numbers are low or times are hard or we're opposed.

Thank you that you've covenanted to be with us. Thank you that we can therefore be strong, not be afraid and we can be at work. Thank you that however bleak things look, you're still faithful to the promises that you've made, that you will fulfil what you've said you will do.

[32 : 34] And thank you that we see all the beginnings of it in the coming of Jesus. Keep us faithful to the tasks before us, we pray, until they finally reach their fulfilment when Jesus comes back.

And we ask it ultimately for your glory and pleasure. Amen.