

Haggai

Bro. Chris Lawrence



I have to confess, I was excited because a new teaser-trailer of Star Wars came out just recently. I was pretty interested in it so I clicked on YouTube, and it already had 400-500 views. I was curious later on that night, one because I wanted to watch it again, but also to see how many had viewed this clip since the first time I had checked. It was over 11.6 million views to see this 88 second Star Wars teaser-trailer. A little over 24 hours later, there were almost 25 million views!

I was thinking through that and I was reminded of a book by Dr. Chuck Lawless that is titled Nobodies for Jesus. This book is a 14 day challenge to live out the Great Commission. In the book, he brings up the point that if someone or something really amazes you, you want to be a part of it and you want to tell others about that someone or something. There are a lot of people amazed by that Star Wars clip, and they are telling others about that teaser-trailer. There are many things people are amazed by or impassioned about, whether it be athletics, music, a home, food, or whatever it might be. But the point Dr. Lawless makes in this book is that ultimately, if we are going to live a Great Commissioned lifestyle, we have to be amazed by Jesus. But just as the amazement with a movie, or music, or whatever it might be, will eventually wear off, if we are not careful that same amazement can wear off concerning Jesus. We lose that zeal.

When was the last time you were around a new believer that had just come to know the Lord? What is that like? Usually there is a passion and zeal to know God's Word, and they just want to talk about Jesus.

I was around a new believer a couple of months ago. He had been in Christ a little over 2 weeks. The first thing he said was, "I have to tell others about Jesus." He wasn't prompted or commanded to say that. No one told him to say that. There was just the desire because of who Jesus is and what had happened in his life. The result was that he just wanted to share about Jesus. Do you remember when you first came to Christ, and what your new found faith was like? Do you remember how excited you were to truly know about Jesus, how excited you were to open up your Bible, and to tell any and everybody you knew about who Jesus is? But if we are not careful, the years can pass and though we can still be active in church, that zeal to tell others about Jesus can fade. We need to be reminded to continue to be amazed by Jesus.

That is what is going on in the book of Haggai. There are people who are doing great work for the House of God, but they have lost their zeal. Haggai will remind them that they need to continue to do the works of God based on who God is. Haggai is only 2 chapters; it is a short book in our journey on Route 66. Our Scripture will be Haggai, chapter 1.

Scripture

"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD." Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house

lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD. You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors." Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD. Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD." And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."

God's House, or Your House?

I think it is important to restate verses 3-4, *"Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins?"* So basically, at the very beginning of this book, Haggai is coming onto the scene and asking the Israelites which house is more important, your house or the House of God. You are really focused on your own house while the House of God lies in ruins.

Now, we have to go back a little on our journey of Route 66 to pick up the context. Solomon built a house for God, which was majestic, huge, and beautiful. It had all these amazing resources, gold and more, that was put into the house. But the Israelites and Solomon disobey, and consequences come. The wrath of God comes, the house is torn down by enemies, and the Israelites go into captivity. As they go into captivity, in bondage, a man named King Cyrus, who is over part of the Persian Empire, has a dream, a vision from God. Even though he is not an Israelite, he gets a vision from God that God's house needs to be built. Cyrus thought no other group would be better to build God's House than God's own chosen people. So he releases 50,000 Jews out of captivity to go back to the Promised Land to start building the House of God. They laid the foundation, but due to discouragement from outside forces and distraction of their own homes, nothing further happened for sixteen years.

- **God's House Suffers**

This is from where our context for Haggai 1:3-4 comes. He says you started the foundation, you laid this thing, but you haven't been doing anything for sixteen years! What is going on? Why are you so focused on your own homes and not focused on the House of God? They let the busyness of life and discouragement get in the way of continuing to persevere and continue to build the House of God.

In talking through the book of Haggai, Pastor Francis Chan said that as we think about being a Christian, the challenge is determining which house we will be really passionate about, our house or God's House. You see, even those the Israelites were now in the Promised Land, they were more focused on their own homes. Pastor Chan asks a question, which I think is so appropriate. We have all the time and money to give to the Church, but the question we must wrestle with is are we too focused on our own house that we allow the House of God to suffer, or are we going to let our own houses suffer to allow the House of God to be built up? That is the question. Which house will you allow to suffer so the other may be built up?

During this time of Haggai, they are allowing the House of God to lie in ruins so their own comfortable homes can be built up. God continues on in this passage to talk about the Israelites working so hard to build up their kingdom but not His kingdom. God says look what I have allowed to happen. I have allowed a drought to occur so you can't get what you want. He tells them to quit worrying about their resources or their own home, and go to the mountains and get the wood and gather the resources you need to build the House of God. The good news is that the people obeyed and gathered the resources. Picking up the narrative in verse 12, the people start working and building up the House of God. Here is where it gets really good. Haggai comes to them and starts talking to them. He gets a word from the Lord, (verses 12-15) and as he is talking to them, the people are encouraged again to start working on the House of God. The Bible says their hearts were stirred up. The reason their hearts were stirred up was because God was with them. Verse 13 says, "I am with you, declares the LORD."

- **God Stirred Their Hearts**

At the beginning of chapter 2, we see that about four weeks have passed since they started building up the House. Haggai shows up again and asks three questions:

- 1. Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?**
- 2. How do you see it now?**
- 3. Is it not as nothing in your eyes?**

To paraphrase, he says, hey, do you remember Solomon's house? How many of you were alive when that house was still in existence? Do you remember how big it was? How does this house you are building now compare to Solomon's house? Does it really compare to the size of Solomon's house? As they were laying the foundation, in reality, it was absolutely nothing compared to how majestic and how big Solomon's house was, where the glory of God was supposed to be and had all this gold and other adornments. The new house is nothing.

He is playing off Ezra 3:10-13. In those verses, we get an unbelievable scene of what is going on. Now, get this. Sixteen years earlier, the people had been building the foundation of God and they completed it. Then in verse 10, absolute and utter chaos happens. The young people are so excited because they were a part of building of God's House that they literally started yelling and screaming because the foundation has been laid! It is like they have won a national championship, it is absolute and utter chaos! Yet, at the same time, the older people who remembered how majestic Solomon's house was, started yelling and screaming, not in celebration, but out of mourning. Get this picture! You have all these Israelites yelling and screaming, the young people yelling and screaming because they are celebrating the foundation is laid, and the older people are mourning. In Ezra 3:13, the Bible said that the sounds being made by the Israelites, from the young and the old people, were so out of control it could be heard far away. That is what he is playing on in Haggai chapter 2 when he says this place is nothing compared to Solomon's, yet at the same time, God reminds them, "I am with you." That is all we need. No matter where you are in your walk, all you need to know is God is with you.

I am blessed to have two unbelievable parents. Thinking back to athletics when I was growing up, my parents were so supportive. They would be at all my events, as well as my brother's events. During a basketball game when we were being defeated and I just wanted to give up, or if I was just under a lot of pressure, I can remember looking through the corner of my eye at my dad and him doing a little fist bump. What that meant was I am with you. At that moment, no matter how big the team might have been, no matter how much pressure was on the line, no matter how badly we were being beaten, I knew my dad was with me. That was all I needed to take a step of faith and continue to persevere.

- **"I am with You"**

These words in Scripture, "I am with you," are all over the place. When you look at Abraham, what is his encouragement to live out the covenant? God is going to be with him, and not only with him, but in Genesis 17, it talks about how God would be with his children. In Genesis 26 with Isaac, as God confirms the Abrahamic covenant to him, He said, "I am with you." In Jacob's dream in Genesis 28, God said, "I am with you." In Exodus 3, when Moses is asking how in the world he can take on Pharaoh, God said, "I am with you." In Joshua 1:9, when Joshua has to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land and there were these so called giants, and all of these other things to deal with, God says to him, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." In Acts chapter 18, Paul is dealing with the church in Corinth, and there is persecution and suffering. But in a vision to Paul, God says, "Fear not, I am with you." This all leads to the Great Commission, doesn't it? We are commissioned in a lost and dying world where there is evil and suffering, and Jesus says go tell everyone who I am in Matthew 20:18-20. Then, at the end of Matthew, He says, "Behold I am with you till the end of the ages."

When we truly understand God is with us, no matter what the situation might be, we can do it. When you think about the step of faith God might

be calling you to make, know that you can do it. You may think about what people are going to say. You think about how much it could cost financially. You think you really don't know if you can do this. Yes, you can. The reason you can is because God is with you! You may be thinking about a trial in your life. You may be in a marriage where your spouse doesn't respect you, or maybe you think your spouse might never come to know the Lord. But what will get you through this is knowing that God is with you. You might be thinking about your work, about how it is hard to continue to labor and be Christ-like at your job. You need to know that God is with you! You might be worrying about another chemo treatment and you know you are going to get sick and you don't want to persevere. The hope for you is God is with you! No matter what your situation might be, you can continue to persevere on, you can continue to labor, and you can continue to take that step of faith, no matter how difficult it might look. You can do it because God is with you! The reason we can say that, the reason we know that, and the reason we believe that is we know who our God is. The Israelites knew who God was. He parted the Red Sea. He saved them. He did all those miraculous things to get them out of Egypt. They knew who God was.

This Side of the Cross

But, we live on the other side of the cross. We know who Jesus is. We know He is with us. One of my favorite parts of the gospel is Mark 4:35-5:42. In these verses, we read of amazing things going on with Jesus. There is a humongous storm. The Bible describes how out of control it was and how big the waves were; everyone thinks they are going to drown! They all think they are going to die, so they're all going crazy, and what was Jesus doing? Jesus was asleep in the boat. They wake him up, and He said, "Peace be still." Jesus is like, what are you guys worried about? But Jesus was in complete control of the situation. He just calmed this humongous storm, and they get off the boat and go to a cemetery. It's a pretty creepy morning! There is a guy filled with many demons, completely out of control, with chains on. People attempted, unsuccessfully, to hold

him down. Now, I don't know when the last time you saw someone possessed by a demon, but it is not a comforting experience. The last time I was in Brazil, I saw someone possessed by a demon and they needed about ten people to hold them down because there was so much force there. But what does Jesus do? He casts out the demons. That is pretty amazing!

Then, Jesus crosses back to the other side of the sea and a mob immediately comes to Him. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, comes to Him, concerned about his daughter. She is sick and dying and he wants Jesus to do something. This mob takes Jesus to meet Jairus' daughter. While on the way, someone touches His robe. This woman, who had been to all these doctors, and spent all of her money hoping for healing from this blood issue she is afflicted with, thinks if I can just touch Jesus! When she did, Jesus knew power had gone out of Him. Immediately, this woman was healed, and Jesus said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well."

In the midst of this mob telling Jesus He needed to go and save this young girl's life, someone is healed just by touching Him! But while Jesus was still speaking to the woman, someone came for the ruler's house and said there was no need to go; the young girl was dead. Jesus asked them what all the commotion was about and said she is just asleep. They all start laughing. He walks in with His main core of disciples, and the girl who was dead is now alive, and Jesus said give her something to eat. We have a God who calms the storm, casts out demons, heals someone, and raises someone from the dead. I don't know the exact timeline, but if that is all in one day, it is a pretty big day!

I was thinking about this old basketball coach, the late Jim Valvano, who said if you cry, if you laugh, and you love somebody in one day, you have had a good day. If that is the definition, I think there were a lot of people that had an amazing day on that particular day. Look at everything that happened. The disciples were on a boat, certain they were about to drown, and the sea is now calm. There was a man who has been possessed by

demons, probably crying and mourning because of his condition, and he is now celebrating, laughing, and rejoicing because the demons are now gone. And what he said is just so good; he said I just want to be with you Jesus! Jesus said no, you have to go back and tell others about who I am. Then there was this woman who has been healed from this disease. Imagine years upon years of suffering and spending everything she had to be cured, and then just touching Jesus' garments and she is healed. Then, there is a man's daughter who is raised from the dead!

When we understand who God is, when we understand God is with us, the result is this - no matter what the situation might be, we serve a God that is God over nature. When the storms of life attack, our God can overcome. We serve a God who has defeated the evil forces of this world. When spiritual attacks are occurring, our God is with us and can overcome that. We serve a God who has defeated the curse of sin and the disease of sin, so even with health problems, our God can overcome even that. On top of all of everything, our God, on the cross, defeated death. So even if we die, by God being with us, we have overcome death! When we understand, no matter what the disease might be, no matter what the trial might be, no matter what the storm might be, our God can overcome! That God is with us!! When we understand that we have the hope to do amazing things for God, when we truly understand these truths, the result is amazing! We are not just numb to them! We are amazed! God calmed the storm; God healed somebody; God arose from the dead! These truths need to resonate with us so we can truly continue to live this thing out.

Jesus: Greater than the Temple

Haggai talks about our God who is with us. He talks about how good Solomon's temple is, but then, he says something greater than the temple is coming. That something is Jesus, who calms the storms, cures diseases, and raises people from the dead. Jesus says in Matthew 12:6 that something greater than the temple is here. For us to have this relationship

with Jesus, we have to know and understand that we have to be willing to deal with our sin.

- **Our Hope**

After this prophecy about something greater than the temple coming, Haggai calls the priests over and asks them if holy food can touch other food and make that food holy. The priest says no, it can't. Then he says, when someone touches a dead body they become unholy, so if they touch someone or something else, does that make them unholy? The priest says yes. What is his point? Let me give you an example to make the point. Let's say my two boys are outside playing in the mud, caked in it from head to toe, and they come in the house. What is going to happen? Everything they touch is going to be dirty. The floor will be dirty. The couch will be dirty. The table will be dirty. Mommy is going to be dirty. Daddy is going to be dirty. Everything they touch will be dirty because of their dirtiness. The whole house will be affected. Now, on the flip side, we give the boys baths, clean them up, and now they are spic and span. They are clean, excited, and running around the house. Will the house all of a sudden become clean because they are now clean? No! The point Haggai is trying to make here is if you are coming to the House of God and haven't repented of your sins, the result is that you are still dirty! In fact, sin is just spreading to everything you touch. When you put money in the plate, it is dirty money. When you serve without Christ, it is dirty serving. Everything you do, whatever it might be, is dirty and sinful without Christ, and you are spreading the dirt all over the place. There is really nothing we can do to avoid that. It is only the grace of God and repentance that can make you and what you give Him clean. When the people in this passage return and start working on the temple, God says something, and it is nothing they have done, it is just by His grace. In verse 19, God says I am going to bless you. That is our hope. Not only is God with us, God is going to bless us.

As I think about this book of Haggai, it is interesting to me that these prophecies they are working so hard for (that something greater than the temple is coming), are ultimately about Jesus, but Jesus isn't coming for another 500 plus years. I have news for you; all these people are dead by the time Jesus comes onto the scene. So how are they really blessed? It is an eternal blessing. I believe for every single one of us that are Christians, there is a promise and truth that God is with us and God is in us. We will ultimately be blessed, but we just don't know when. It might be in this life, it might not be.

You know, we really love the stories about people that have been blessed by God and come out of sin. We loved the stories of the marriages where there was sin involved, and they repent of their sin and now they have a picture perfect family. We love the stories about the crooked business man who changes his practices around, and now his business is growing like no other. He takes biblical principles and gives all his money away. We love that! We love the story about the person who has a brain tumor and there is no hope for him, and now he is healed. We love the story about the person who has made all these sacrifices and a check comes in the mail at the right time, and they are able to buy milk and food. We love those stories. But you know, sometimes faithful believers don't always get those blessings. There are times when a spouse does everything he or she can, and the other spouse doesn't repent. Sometimes a person starts applying biblical principles to the business and it doesn't get better, it actually gets worse. There are times people pray for a healing and the cancer continues to spread. Sometimes people are really hungry, living for the Lord, they open up the mailbox, and the check isn't there. Yet, we still know God is with us and He will bless us.

Authority and Power

At the end of this book, something is said that is so powerful and so good when Haggai comes to Zerubbabel. Now, Zerubbabel is in a situation where he is stressed out. He is building a temple, not as big as Solomon's

temple, but they have all these issues going on. Nations are all around them and they have all these enemies to deal with. But through Haggai, God said some interesting things to Zerubbabel. First, you are going to be My chosen servant. Zerubbabel is in the line of Jesus Christ, according to Matthew 1:12; he is part of the line of Christ. The chosen Servant will come through the line of Zerubbabel. He will have the signet ring, which means despite all these threats and situations, he is royalty. It meant you have power, you are part of My Kingdom, and nothing is going to stop you, for eternity.

In Genesis chapter 41, Pharaoh puts the signet ring on Joseph. This ring signifies that Pharaoh has authority and power. He gives it to Joseph and now Joseph has power from one who has all authority. I think that applies to us. In Matthew 28, at the beginning of the Great Commission, Jesus says all authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. The result of that is Jesus has authority to send us out. But we had an issue because we need power when we go out. And that power came at Pentecost. And now, at salvation, the Spirit of God comes upon us and gives us that power. The One who has authority has put the signet ring on us! Ephesian 1 says He has put the Holy Spirit in us. We have been stamped by the King's ring. We have been guaranteed. We have that deposit. We have that mark. Now we know that no matter what comes our way, God is with us. We are a part of His kingdom. No matter how sinful the world might be, no matter how difficult the world might be, the One who has authority over the entire universe has given us power to overcome. He has given us not only power to overcome, but power to be part of His Kingdom. This is our hope! No matter how difficult it might be right now, He is coming back. He will judge the nations. The nations will shake. He will deal with sin upon His return. When that day comes, there will be no more death, no more disease, and no more pain. There will be ultimate amazement that Jesus has come back, and we will be in awe of Him forever because of who He is! He is with us, He will bless us, and He will take care of us for eternity! The more we understand that, the more we should have this desire to be

amazed by Him. The more we understand that, the more we should be stirred up, fired up, to build up the House of God. The more we understand that, the more we should want the whole world to know who Jesus is because of how amazed we are by Him.

Where are you right now? Have you lost that zeal? Have you lost that fire for the Great Commission? When was the last time you told someone about Jesus? Maybe you need to pray and think through that. When was the last time you really felt the Lord call on you to take a major step of faith? When was the last time your heart was really stirred up to do something for God? Are you doing God's work? You can do God's work because He is with you. Despite your trials, God will bless you because He is with you, and you are royalty. Let's continue to build up the House of God.