Sermon- Prophecy of the Coming Glory

Scripture: Haggai 2:1-9 Sunday, October 22, 2017

First, let me give you a little historical context in which prophet Haggai was presenting this message to the leadership and people of Judah. So the book of Haggai is referring to events dated to 520 BC in Jerusalem. Now what was going on in Jerusalem in 520 BC? Well firstly, this was the time of the return from Babylonian exile. So if you remember Jerusalem, the city that the Israelites thought was impossible to defeat was defeated in 586 BC by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Then in 539 BC when Belshazzar was ruling Babylon, he sees the writing on the wall and that very night King Cyrus of Persia defeats Babylon. Within a year of Cyrus taking over Babylon he gives permission for the Jews to return to their homeland and not just return but by a real miraculous turn of events he finances the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem including the temple. So by year 536 BC construction had begun on the temple. Unfortunately 6 years later because of Samaritan opposition had managed to stop construction. And once you stop something, it is like calling a time-out. You kill the momentum and so even without Samaritan opposition the project was stalled out for 10 years. That is when prophet Haggai is sent by God to speak to the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel and Jeshua the high priest and the remnant of the people who were living in Judah.

We even know the precise day in which this message was given, it was Oct 17th, the very day I started putting this sermon together. Isint’ that amazing? And this is what prophet Haggai asks the people. He asks, “does anyone remember this temple in its former splendor?” This would have been 66 years ago. Actually it is possible that there were a small number of people there who actually remembered. This was not a rhetorical question. But even if they had not seen the first temple with their own eyes I am sure that every single person there knew what Haggai was talking about. Because everyone knew that this was a temple build by non other that Solomon the richest and wisest person who ever lived. The first temple was legendary in its grandeur. Everything used for the temple was the best and it had incredible amounts of gold overlaying everything including the floors. So when Prophet Haggai asks the people, do you remember this temple in its former splendor, he is literally taking the minds of the people on a trip. To imagining the kind of temple that Solomon would have built would be to stretch the imagination of the ordinary human mind. Just imagining Solomon’s temple would have given them a high.

Then he switches gears dramatically and asks them “how in comparison to that temple does this look to you now?” Just to give you a context, so 66 years ago Solomons temple was completely burnt to the ground. There was nothing remaining. That temple was the center of life for the whole nation. This temple is a stubble in the ground. That temple was Solomon’s pride this temple is actually embarrassing. That temple housed the power of God and the source of power for the whole nation. This temple has no power, this temple seems like nothing. When the exiles returned they started first building the foundation. They had taken two years to build just the foundation and there was nothing more that was done. Then the Samaritan’s played some games messed around with them and even that construction had stopped. And people got busy with other things. So for 10 years the foundation of the Second temple just sat there. So the contrast could not have been more stark between the old and new temples. So Haggai says when you compare the old temple with what we have now, this one must seem like nothing at all, it was not an exaggeration. It was merely the facts. But Haggai was not trying to discourage the people. Haggai had a very powerful message to tell the people.

He tells them, when you think that what you have is nothing, I want you to know that God has a very important message for you. And the message is this, God is telling you people to be strong, because my spirit is with you. Be strong. When you think that the task of building this great building is very big and your financial resources are nothing like King Solomon’s don’t worry, be strong because I the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills am with you. When you think that you don’t have people who are motivated and full of the energy and zeal they have for this project don’t worry be strong because the Spirit of God who howered over the waters right at the dawn of creation is with you. If you think that you lack the ideas and creativity and clout of a leader like Solomon had for this project, be strong. Be strong, be strong, be strong.

Because God has a message for you. God is about to do something amazing. God is about to shake the heavens and the earth and the oceans even. God is going to shake the nations of its treasures. And you know what God is going to do after that? God is going to bring all those treasues into this temple, so that this temple will be grand. And you know how grand? It is going to have the grandeur that reflects the grandeur of the God this temple is dedicated to.

And you know what else? I am going to fill this temple with glory. And do you know to what extent? Well, I am going to fill this temple with a kind of glory such that the glory that this temple is going to have will be greater than the glory it had in the past. Can you imagine such a scenario? It is really unimaginable actually. You are saying that this temple that we poor exiles who are a rag tag bunch who are barely surviving are going to build a temple that has greater glory than the temple that King Solomon the wisest and richest built? That seems unimaginable, illogical, unrealistic and delusional. But you know what, this is the word of God and it is His promise and it is His prophecy. It may not make sense to you but God is not a liar and God is also not limited in any way. What God wants to do he can do. And this is what that incredible God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is saying people! Believe it nor not but this God is saying that the glory of this temple is going to be greater than the glory that resided in the temple that Solomon built.

Now, having said that because we have the benefit of seeing what did we can examine this prophecy and ask the question, how did that prophecy work out? So what happened. Let’s look at the facts. Haggai’s prophetic message did get the people mobilized. The work to rebuild got restarted and the work was completed within the next five years. This temple got dedicated in 516BC. In terms of the finances, resources came from Cyrus the Great, Darius the Persian, the King in Susa whose cupbearer was Nehemiah. The Jewish people also contributed generously and as they contributed they began to prosper and flourish like they were not when they were not tithing. So the financial resources came in, the labor resources came in, the leadership resources came in and the work was completed. The altar of the second temple was built at the exact site of Solomon’s temple. And this temple lasted for the next 500 years till the time of King Herod who undertook a major renovation. But that renovation did not last for all that long because in AD 70 the second temple was completely raised to the ground by the Romans this time. So the question you might be asking is, so in the end, was the glory of this temple that Zerubbabel built really as prophet Haggai predicted, greater than the first temple built by Solomon? Well, as a matter of detail, the new temple did not have a bunch of things Solomon’s temple had. It did not have the ark of the covenant, with the original stone tablets with the 10 commandments, the pot of mana and Aaron’s rod. It did not have a lot of other things as well. But it did have this going for it. While Solomon’s temple stood for 372 years, this temple stood for 586 years. So approximately a 100 years longer than Solomon’s temple. Well, was that fact alone enough to say that this temple had greater glory than Solomon’s?

Actually, we have a fascinating incident in the life of Jesus addressed in John chapter 2 that addresses this question. You see Jesus was in this temple 500 years later. And there was a lot of exploitation going on of poor people there at that time in history. And Jesus was really mad and he makes a whip and drives out all the money changers. Now the authorities were very upset and they come to Jesus and ask him what authority he had to do these things. And Jesus tells them something fascinating. He says destroy this temple standing here, this glorious structure in your eyes and I will rebuilt it in three days. Now the text itself clarifies that Jesus was talking about his own body.

What that means is that Jesus was telling them that He himself is the temple of God. You see when Jesus dies on the cross, he died bearing the sins of the whole world. But when he rises again, he rises as the eternal Son of God and victor over evil, sin and death. And the temple he would found by sending his own spirit on his disciples would cover the whole world and last for thousands of years. Now tell me. Has Haggai’s prophecy come true. But I just need to clarify one thing. You see the important prophecies in the Bible have a two step fulfilment. There is a partial fulfillment a few years after it was uttered and they have a complete fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

But let me bring this in to our time now. As I was reading the book of Haggai, the question that came to me was, what was our church like 66 years ago. That would have been the year 1951. It seems to me that it would have been a glorious time to be in Argentine Mennonite Church right? Do you remember what it would have been like. I am sure that there are at least 3 people here right now who might remember that time. This was when the children’s home was at its peak. That means there were about 40 kids who were living in the children’s home being completely looked after by people here. And there were young people who came from all over the country to take care of them. I remember Louise talking about how those kids would all come to church walking on the streets in a big line. I don’t know how you did it in those days. We have trouble transporting 20 kids for VBS from one building to another. Can you imagine those many kinds and the Volunteer Service works filling this space? Can you imagine all the youth people full of life and excitement and hope for the future that filled these pews? Can you imagine that the young people in this congregation finding their life partners right here in this community and then serving this church together for decades and decades? That was a glorious time wasn’t it?

Here is my challenge to each on of us. Whether you can actually remember the former glory of this place or you can imagine it, I want each of us to open your heart to the message of prophet Haggai and see how it is speaking to you. Prophet Haggai’s message was very clear. He said, if you can remember or imagine the former glory of this place and thing what we have now is nothing compared to what it was then, be strong. Be strong because God is going to shake the nations and bring in the resources needed to rebuild this place. So that the future glory of this place will be greater than its former glory. And you know why I think this prophecy is for us, because as Christ’s church, this individual church is part of the church of Kansas City which is part of the church of the United States which is part of the global church. We are that future glory. God is already bringing the nations and the resources of the nations to us. And with Abraham and God willing even Cheri as part of the team, it makes it easier for us to imagine the future glory of this place right. With Samuel and the new worship band we have it becomes that much more easier to imagine the future glory of this place right?

Well, my appeal to you this morning is simple, examine how Haggai’s prophecy is speaking to you personally and about our community. Can you imagine the future glory of this place? This is God’s church and God’s mission. And it is not about us but His glory. Everything that God does is glorious. So be strong, church. Be strong Abraham. Be strong you worship leaders. Be strong you elders. Be strong church. And be ready for the ride that God is going to take us on to see His glory. Let us pray.