

God Wins
Haggai 2:20-23
Rev. Brian Bill
June 23-34, 2018

Since this is the last sermon in our “Now is the Time” series from the Book of Haggai, and the closing passage centers on just one individual, I’m going to change it up a bit by doing a first person narrative of a guy named Zerubbabel.

You’re going to have to use your imagination because I’m not going to change my wardrobe or slip on some sandals. Imagine if you will that my name is really “Zerubbabill.”

I heard you just finished the first of three Super Saturdays this summer in which your theme is *Time Lab*. Instead of putting you all in the time capsule to send you back 2,500 years to the time of Haggai, I decided to travel into your time.

In order to understand what I’m going to be sharing listen to Haggai 2:20-23: ***“The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, ‘Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts.’”***

I’ve got to tell you that I felt very alone, discouraged and disappointed. I was in a dead-end job with no future. I had been promised promotions but they never came. When I tried to motivate my co-workers they ignored me and did what they wanted...for 16 years! They were fickle, not faithful.

I was born in another country and never felt like I belonged anywhere. I was embarrassed about my family and was trying to do all I could to break the cycle of spiritual unfaithfulness. Whenever someone would bring up what my great grandfather and grandfather did I would just cringe. On top of all this, I had a name that people made fun of. Even I had a hard time spelling it and just to pronounce it reminded me of my unholy heritage.

Zerubbabel means, “*son of Babel*” because I was born in Babylon. I was from the land of losers as far as I was concerned.

Do you ever feel like a failure? Ever get down and discouraged? Are you disappointed with the way things are going? As you look at your family tree do you ever wonder if you can break generational dysfunction? Do you feel like giving up? Is your marriage a mess? Is your confidence shaken?

I can't wait to tell you what God taught me and how he poured courage back into me. I don't want to bore you with my family background but it's important that you know that I come from a line of kings. My grandfather was one of the kings of Judah. His name is hard to pronounce as well. His name was Jehoichin, AKA Jekoniah or Coniah. I think he had different aliases because of some terrible things he did. I'll try to talk more about him later...if I'm up to it.

When the offer was made to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple, I was all in. This was my opportunity to make up for all the failures in my family. What a privilege to go and build! This wouldn't be so bad. After all, the king was providing money and materials and safe passage for us to get there. I was also going to be with guys I really looked up to – Ezra and Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah, among others.

We jumped in and tackled the task when we arrived. We worked hard for about two years. We finished the foundation and built the altar so we could reinstitute sacrifices and start celebrating some feasts again. But you know how easy it is to start off strong and then hit a wall, don't you? My teammates started getting bogged down by all the opposition we were facing.

And then they started whining about how they never got a chance to design and decorate their own homes. And so they just stopped working...for 16 years! God's house was in ruins but their own homes were beautiful and even opulent. The people even used the materials designated for the Temple to panel their living spaces! In the interest of full disclosure, I need to say that I became very self-centered as well, thinking I could do life without God at the center. Does that ever happen to you?

I was frustrated that they wouldn't listen to me and I felt like a failure because I couldn't rally them. I also started to feel sorry for myself. Here I was the governor but really, what did I govern? My relatives were royalty but here I was in this remote land, staring at unfinished work, feeling like a lame leader, knowing that another king in another country was really in charge. I guess my family's curse and dysfunction was my destiny as well.

God's Word at the Right Time

Some of you can relate to how wonderful it is to encounter God's Word at just the right time. When hope had almost evaporated, God used Scripture to speak to me. It was during the same day that Haggai preached the sermon you heard last weekend. That message really motivated the people to persevere in the task, knowing that God was going to bless them.

I thought that maybe God had some more preaching for the people but this time He singled me out in the sermon. At first I was afraid that the Almighty was going to clobber me and continue the curse on my life. But it wasn't like that at all: ***"Tell Zerubbabel, governor of Judah..."*** I was surprised when I heard my name but grateful that God was thinking about me and had a message for me.

Some of you need to know that God loves you no matter what you've done or where you're from! Hold on to the words found in Zephaniah 3:17: ***"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."***

God then called me ***"governor of Judah."*** I didn't want to be reminded that I was governor but God knew that's what I was. Likewise, God knows what situation you are in right now.

And then He said some things that really got my attention. God wasn't done with me! He had a plan and He was going to follow that plan. Judah was just a tiny spot in the world but the Savior of the world would trace His roots from there! Babylon was big but God was bigger. Persia was powerful but the God of the Angel armies was omnipotent. God was weaving His way and His will for His glory...as He always does.

I was really struck by the forcefulness of the words. There were no "maybes" or "mights" about it. What God says He will accomplish: ***"...I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you..."***

The first thing that came to my mind was this: *He's God and I'm not. It's all about the Almighty because He wins in the end.* I appreciated how one of your theologians captured it: *God does not exist for us; we exist for God.*

The word “*overthrow*” made me think of how the Sovereign One shook the heavens when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. I also remembered what the Almighty did to the Egyptians when the waters of the Red Sea wiped out their chariots and drivers.

Everywhere I looked I saw reminders of the power of Persia, but God was way more powerful. I was encouraged to hear that God was going to shake things up and shatter kingdoms.

God’s Future Plans

And then I heard the Lord Almighty say, “*On that day...*” I knew that this was a reference to the coming day of the Lord. Many of the prophets used similar words to refer to the “last days.” When that phrase comes up it’s a signal that what follows has do with future fulfillment.

What God said next made me quickly realize that while he used my name He was referring to me as a representative of the kingly line from the tribe of Judah. Let me explain by walking through the phrases found in verse 23: “*I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts.*”

The word “*take*” is a common verb in Hebrew that means, “*to seize or grasp*” and was used when God changed the status of someone. My mind went back to 2 Samuel 7:8 when God said this about David: “*Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel.*” God bounced me from Babylon to rebuild the temple but I think he had more in mind because this word was also used of kings being anointed for kingship. That certainly couldn’t apply to me personally, could it?

And then amazingly, God referred to me in four ways.

1. Servant. “*O Zerubbabel my servant...*” When He called me a servant, I got spiritual Goosebumps because “*servant*” was used in many passages to refer to the coming Messiah, or Promised One. One such use is found in Isaiah 53:11: “*Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*”

2. Son. “*Son of Shealtiel.*” Some of your commentators wonder if Shealtiel was my real dad or if he was really my uncle who adopted me because 1 Chronicles

3:19 indicates my birth dad's name was Pedaiiah. Here's something that will blow your mind. If I was adopted then I had all the rights of being Shealtiel's son but that means I avoided the curse that came through my grandpa Jeconiah. Again, I'm not sure about all this because I could never get a straight answer. It sure felt like my life was under a curse.

Servant. Son. Signet.

3. Signet. *“And I will make you like my signet ring.”* Three words were now ringing in my ears: *shake, take* and *make*. God was going to shake things up, take me from being a lonely leader and make me into a signet ring. The word signet means, *“to affix a seal, to seal up, to fasten by sealing.”*

It's difficult to explain in your culture but a signet ring was a very common symbol of honor, authority and power. We read in Genesis 41:42 that Pharaoh first gave his signet ring to Joseph as a badge of delegated authority. A signet ring was used to sign and seal documents by pressing it into hot wax. A king would guard his ring carefully because it represented his reign.

Just three years ago archaeologists discovered a royal seal containing a Hebrew inscription that reads, *“Belonging to Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judah.”* This is really cool because Hezekiah served about seven hundred years before Christ. This particular royal seal was used to secure the strings tied around rolled-up documents.

Let's see if I can make a connection to your culture. For those with kids in college, a signet ring would be a bit like your FAFSA Pin Number. Or something a notary public uses. Today you use seals or embossers to authenticate ownership, much like this one your pastor uses to identify which books belong to him (actually, he wanted me to ask if you have any of his books you haven't returned). BTW, feel free to stop by the library this weekend to pick out some books you'd like to take home.

There were three primary purposes of a signet ring:

- It was the personal signature of a king
- It validated royal authority
- It was a guarantee to fulfill a future promise

Here's how I like to say it: *The ring of a king carried the highest authority in the land and empowered subordinates to act on behalf of the king.* Unbelievably, God

was telling me that he was going to turn me into a signet ring! Somehow I represented the dynasty of King David and God was resuming the messianic line interrupted by the exile as a consequence of the sins of my great grandfather and grandfather.

I guess I need to be upfront about some of the gross things my *great* grandfather did. His name was Jehoiakim. When confronted with Scripture, instead of believing it, he decided to burn it. I heard that something similar happens today when people read the Bible and ignore what it says. Some even try to get around it by saying, *“I know what the Bible says, but...”*

The story about my great grandpa is found in Jeremiah 36. I grew up knowing what verse 31 said: ***“And I will punish him and his offspring [that would be me] and his servants for their iniquity. I will bring upon them and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and upon the people of Judah all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, but they would not hear.”*** That’s not much of a family blessing, is it?

Ok, now I’m ready to tell you about my grandpa. He only served as king for three months and then was deported to Babylon because of his disobedience. I’m going to read from the prophet Jeremiah and I’d like you to listen for the words, ***“signet ring.”***

Jeremiah 22:24-27: ***“As I live, declares the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off and give you into the hand of those who seek your life, into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans. I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another country, where you were not born, and there you shall die. But to the land to which they will long to return, there they shall not return.”***

Wait, there’s more. In verse 30 we read: ***“Thus says the LORD: ‘Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring [that would be me] shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah.’”***

Let’s stop and ponder this. If my grandpa was told that he was like a signet ring that was pulled off, then could God be reversing the curse by making me into a signet ring? How could that be? Could God actually be restoring the line to the Messiah through me? Hold on...I’ll explain more in a bit.

Servant. Son. Signet. And here's the fourth thing I'm called: *Select.*

4. Select. Verse 23 says: ***“For I have chosen you.”*** I was now convinced that while God was speaking to me, He must have someone else in mind. The word ***“chosen”*** was used when appointing kings. This term was also used of the Messiah in Isaiah 42:1: ***“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”***

The word ***“chosen”*** was ultimately used of Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2:4: ***“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.”***

Well, that's my story...and I'm sticking to it, because God has stuck with me. Before I depart I'd like to pass along some life lessons that I learned.

Life Lessons

1. Let God's Word come to you. If you want to hear a word from God, you must be in the Word of God. Don't wait for a feeling or an experience. Instead, soak yourself in Scripture. If you've ever said, *“I wish God would speak to me,”* He already has. And He put it in a book called the Bible.

In Zechariah 4:6 God singled me out again with a wonderful promise and reminder because I'm prone to try to do things in my own strength: ***“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”*** This was directed to me but I'm happy to share it with you. Are you in the Word on a regular basis? The Edgewood Bible reading guide for July is from the Book of Isaiah and is called, *“Salvation Comes from God.”*

Haggai only preached four sermons but I understand that this is your pastor's eighth sermon from this book. He knows how to stretch out a series, doesn't he? But there are so many lessons to learn. Here are some that I wrote down (BTW, this list is posted on Sermon Extras at edgewoodbaptist.net).

1. God's purposes must have priority over our pursuits
2. When procrastination sets in, determine to be proactive
3. The presence of the Lord is the antidote to despair
4. Because you have been saved to serve, stay on mission
5. Dissatisfaction is designed to lead us to find satisfaction in God alone

6. Remember the past while embracing the present in order to be faithful in the future
7. It's never too late to do what's right
8. God works His way and His will for His glory
9. Becoming holy requires intentional effort; being unholy requires no effort
10. It's important to obey today
11. Disobedience brings discipline and obedience leads to blessing
12. God is sovereign over the nations and the future

2. Trust God's timing. Have you noticed that we almost always have to wait for God to do something? That's OK. That's the way He set it up. The words He said to me didn't come to fulfillment for five hundred years! But God's timing is perfect and He will perfectly carry out His plan. Listen to the four times God uses the pronoun "**I**" in these four verses.

I am about to shake...and overthrow the nations

I am about to destroy

I will take you...and make you

I have chosen you

If you've been waiting for something for a long time, hold on to Isaiah 14:24: "**As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.**" In the midst of your problems, you can trust His purposes. Even when things are shaking, submit to His sovereignty.

3. It's all about Jesus. Did you notice that I just disappear from the scene after having a minor role in two of the Minor Prophets? Do you know why? Because it's not about me; it's all about Jesus. This passage was not personally fulfilled in me because I never sat on the throne of David but *the* Son of David positionally fulfilled it. This reminds me of your theme for the summer Super Saturdays, "*Discovering Jesus from Eternity Past to Eternity Future.*"

God was reversing the curse beginning with me and my descendant, Jesus the Christ, who will sit on the rightful throne of David! The angel Gabriel announced it this way in Luke 1:32-33: "**He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.**"

Check this out. It's mind-blowing. Both Matthew and Luke list my name in the genealogy of Jesus! A failure like me is in the family tree of Jesus! Matthew 1:12-

13: “And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel...” And Luke 3:27: “...*the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel...*”

Your pastor told me that you like to wade into the deep waters of the Word. Are you ready to dive below the surface of the Scriptures? Jesus must be the descendant of Jehoiakim in order to have the legal right to the throne of David and at the same time, because of the curse, He must not be of his seed. This is very difficult to do but it was accomplished by virtue of the Virgin Birth!

Check this out...Jesus is the legal son of Joseph through adoption but because Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus does not have the cursed bloodline that travels from Joseph back to my great grandfather. Since Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, the curse of Jehoiakim was not passed along to Jesus! And since Joseph adopted Him, He was the legal heir to the throne of David. The curse is reversed!

And now, the Son of God, who is also the Son of David is wearing the Sovereign One’s Signet Ring as seen in John 6:27: “*For on him God the Father has set his seal.*” Hebrews 1:3 adds: “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...*”

4. God can deliver you from dysfunction. God can reverse your curse and save you from your sins so that you can do things differently than your parents or grandparents did. God can start a new family tree of faithfulness beginning with you!

Jesus died in our place, taking our punishment, so that we might be free. Galatians 3:13 says that Jesus took the curse of sin for us so that we are no longer condemned: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.*”

We could say it like this: “*Because of grace, Jesus took our place.*” Maybe you think you don’t qualify because you’ve messed up too much. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done; what matters is what Jesus has done. There is grace for everyone. Jesus has promised us freedom in John 8:36: “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*”

5. Join God’s team if you want to win. Once you’re saved, you will be sealed with the Holy Spirit according to Ephesians 1:13: “*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were*

sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” And 2 Timothy 2:19 says: **“But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’”**

If you are saved, God’s signature is on your soul! In Isaiah 49:16, God says: **“Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”**

Check out the last four words of the book: **“declares the Lord Almighty.”** It’s not about me...and it’s not about you. It’s all about the God of the Angel Armies. There’s a battle going on between good and evil but the battle has already been won because of what Jesus has done on the Cross.

Well, it’s time for me as Zerubbabel to head back or Haggai will wonder where I went. I turn it back to Pastor Brian...

I’m really excited about the new series that begins next weekend called, “Behold Your God!” Isaiah 40:9 says: **“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”** There is nothing more practical than beholding and believing God – for until we know Him, we haven’t even begun to live. This series on the attributes of God will help us not only know *about* God, but to actually *know* Him more intimately and personally than we ever have before.

Let’s stand and declare in song that God is able. He will never fail because He is Almighty God. He is greater than all we seek and greater than all we ask.

Closing Song: **“God is Able”**