

4.2.24 am

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Date: 04 February 2024

Preacher: Reverend David Court

[0 : 0 0] Good morning, a warm welcome to the service this morning. It's good to see so many. I would normally say if there's any visitors here, you're very welcome. I can see there's many visitors here this morning, and you are very welcome.

It's good to have our own congregation, some visiting from different places, and those who are attending the Island Study Conference. So a warm welcome in the name of Jesus, and we pray that we'll know God's presence as we come together to worship this morning.

There's tea and there's coffee at the end of the service this morning, so if you're able to stay behind, please do so. 3.30 this afternoon, there will be the Mission Focus, as there has been in past years at the conference, and that will be held over in the hotel, and Richard Keller, who is in the congregation here, will be speaking about Japan.

Richard was in Japan with the family for a few years back, so he'll be sharing something of the Mission Focus from Japan. The evening service will be at 6, and that service will be taken by John Lachey, who's hiding there at the back row, and John and David also will be sharing at the fellowship after the service this evening.

So there will be a time of informal fellowship at the end. If you're able to stay behind, please do so, and we'll hear a little more from David and from John. The notices have been on the screen before the service began.

[1 : 2 9] I'm going to take five minutes to read through them all, so I assume you've had the chance to go through them yourselves. The only thing I will say is that the Sunday school, the primary Sunday school will go out as usual at the normal time.

The secondary Sunday school will not actually go out today, but they'll stay in the service, and so please take a note of that.

I think these are all the notices. It's great to have the Reverend David Court with us today. David, I've known David over a few years. We've walked a similar path in many ways, and it's good to share fellowship with him over the course of this weekend.

So don't be alarmed. I'm about to sit down somewhere else, and David will be taking the service. But we'll begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise, and the first item of praise is Sing Psalms 126.

[illegible]

[3 : 27] The Lord Almighty brings for us And joy of our new well.

Restore our fortunes, gracious Lord, Like streams in desert soil.

A joyful harvest will reward The weeping sowers' joy.

The man who, getting seed to sow, Goes out with tears of grief, Will come again with songs of joy, Filling his harvest sheep.

Well, we join together in prayer. Let's pray together. Amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, We bless you and praise you On this Lord's Day morning.

[4 : 59] We thank you for this, your day. We thank you that it's a day of resurrection, A day of hope. We thank you that it's a day of rest, When we can come aside and rest in you, The living and eternal God.

We thank you that you're a God Who has a wonderful purpose for our world. You're a God who is ushering in a new creation.

And we look forward to that new world, That new reality that you will one day Bring into being. When at the name of Jesus, Every knee shall bow.

And we look forward to that great day, When all that you are doing Doing will be revealed
for all to see. And we recognize that it will be indeed A day of surprise, A day of joy.

And we pray that you, our God, Would make us ready for that day. We know that we cannot stand before you on our own, Because we are unclean, And dirty, And stained by the filth of our sin.

[6 : 13] And we recognize our need to be made clean, To be washed. And so we pray that by your grace, We may be a people found in union with Jesus Christ, The lamb slain for sinners, The one who is our refuge and strength, Our shield and high tower.

And we pray that, We may taste something of your grace, This morning, By your Holy Spirit.

Your grace that finds lost causes, That opens the eyes of the blind, That forgives and restores and embraces, And indeed clothes with garments of righteousness, Your grace that we see at the cross of Calvary, That while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

We thank you for the blood of Jesus Christ this morning, That speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. It's blood that makes even the foulest clean, An omnipotent detergent, Such that our sins, Though they be as scarlet, Are made of white as snow.

Lord, we thank you that your grace Transforms and changes people, And we recognize our need of change. We need to be renewed. And so we pray that you would meet with us, And draw near to us, And bless us, Through the preaching of your word, And through the praising of your name, That you would fulfill your promises in our midst, That we may know this place to be none other than the house of God, And the very gate of heaven.

[8 : 05] Lord, we are weak, And we are needy, And so we look away from ourselves to you. We thank you for all that you've done for us, All that you've given us, All that you've promised us.

And Lord, we ask that by your Holy Spirit, You would continue to lead us, And guide us, And direct us, That we would be a people Hungry for Christ, Hungry for his word, And hungry for his presence.

Lord, we pray for the community here, And the churches here. Lord, we thank you for them, And for their testimony, To your grace over many years.

And we pray that you would continue to build your church, In this part of the world. Such that the very gates of hell, Shall not prevail against it. We pray that you would strengthen your people, Strengthen their witness, That it might be bold and courageous, And that it might be effective.

We pray for many, Who know nothing of Christ, Who know little of the things of God, That by your Spirit, You may draw Neighbours, And family members, And colleagues, To Jesus Christ.

[9 : 33] Lord, we cannot do it ourselves, But Lord, We know that you are the God, Who can do it. And so Lord, We pray this morning, Bless us, And encourage us, And strengthen us, And help us to move forward in faith, Looking not to ourselves, But to Jesus Christ, Our great Lord, And King, And Saviour, In whose name we pray these things.

Amen. Amen. So I believe, There's a children's talk, At this point in the service, So, If the children are used to coming forward, They're very welcome to come forward, If they don't want to come forward, That's okay with me, But if you, Because I'm a strange person, And I'm here, So come forward if you like, And we'll try and say a word or two, Oh yeah, We'll move that out of the road, Anyone else?

Anyone hiding away? Okay, Okay, Right, Okay, I've got a question for you, It's a kind of tricky question, It's a kind of riddle, Okay, So this, You have to listen very carefully, Here's the question, What you do, There were nine copycats, In a boat, Okay, Nine copycats, In a boat, And one fell off, How many were left?

Eight. Eight. Eight. Do you think eight were left? Anybody else got a different answer? Four. Four. Any advance on four?

Eight. Four. Well, here's the answer, There were none left, Because they were copycats, And so when one fell off, All the others copied them, And fell off too.

[11 : 30] So when one copycat went into the water, All the others went into the water too, So there were none left. Now, Copying, And imitating others, Can be good fun, I wonder if you ever do that, You ever do that?

Copied people, I, I had a little, Well, One of my little brothers, When he was young, He liked to copy his favourite programme on television, And in those days, That was, Spider-Man, And he had, A Spider-Man costume, I didn't bring it, With me, I put it on today, But, He liked to, Jump about, In a Spider-Man costume, And pretend he was climbing the walls, And doing all sorts of stuff, Like that, Maybe you like to do those kind of things, As well, I don't know, What do you do, If we're going to copy someone?

What do you do? What do you have to do, If you're going to copy someone? What do you think? You have to, You have to look at them, Maybe you have to watch them, Maybe you have to listen to them, Maybe you even have to study them, So you see exactly what they do.

Now, Sometimes, We copy other people, Without even knowing, That we're doing it, We do it automatically, We copy, The people that we're with, Maybe that happens in our families, Perhaps we copy, The way they dress, Or maybe we copy, The way they speak, Or the games they play, Or the things they do, Or their habits, I'm from a family, Of four boys, And, When we were growing up, We, We listened to my dad, And, When he was speaking, We must have, Taken things on board, Because we're all grown up now, And we all, Have these sayings, That we use, That were just, What my dad spoke, All those years ago, Now we didn't deliberately set out, To copy my dad, We just picked these things up, Automatically, And there's a,

There's a proverb, That says something like this, We become, What we behold, That means we become, What we look at, What we spend our time, Looking at, And listening to, We become, Like that, It shapes us, Our thinking, Our speaking, Our living, So we have to be careful, What we're looking at, There's a verse in the Bible, In Ephesians chapter 5, Verse 1, Where Paul says this, Be imitators of God, One translator says, Says this, Copy God, Copy God, God wants us, To be like him, He wants us, To reflect his love, And his care, And his kindness, And truth, How are we going to do that?

[14 : 21] We need to look, To the one, Who is the image, Of the invisible God, And that's Jesus, We need to look, To Jesus, And we do that, By reading, And studying, And listening to the word of God, Because that's where, We see Jesus, And that's where we, Hear Jesus, We're all, Would you believe, Copycats, That's the way we're made, And we're all copying, Or following someone, The big question is, Who are we copying?

Who are we following? If we're Christians, Then we will want to follow Jesus, We want to be like him, And we want to spend time with him, And we want to become, More like him, We become, Who we look at, We become, What we behold, So let me encourage you, Always to look, To Jesus, Okay, Let's pray together, Let's say a short prayer, Father we thank you, That you are our God, We thank you, That you have given us, So much, In your son Jesus Christ, We thank you, That you've made us, To be, Imitators, And copiers, To learn in that way, And we pray, That you would help us, To learn from Jesus, And to become, More like him, Not to be conformed, To the pattern of this world, To be conformed, To the one, Who loved us, And gave himself for us, And we pray this,

In Jesus name, Amen, Amen, Thank you, Boys and girls, You can return to your seats, Is that okay? Well I don't know, You might want to sit there, The whole service, But I don't think, That would be a good idea, Okay, Okay, We're going to sing, Again this time, Again from Sing Psalms, It's Psalm 67, And God be merciful, And bless us, Shine upon us, With your face, That the earth, May know your actions, And all lands, Your saving grace, And we sing, The whole of the psalm, And we'll stand to sing, Amen.

Oh, Lord, may the people praise you. May all people sing your praise.

For you judge the nations justly, ruling over every race.

[17 : 30] May they sing with joy and gladness. May they all rejoice as one.

Oh, Lord, may the peoples praise you as they all unite in song.

Then the land will yield its harvest. God will pour his gifts abroad.

God, our God, will surely bless us. All the earth will fear our God.

Amen. Amen. To the close at verse 23.

[18 : 55] Haggai chapter 2 from verse 10. Let us hear and read together in God's word. On the 24th day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priests about the law. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priest answered and said no. Then Haggai said if someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of those, does it become unclean?

The priests answered and said it does become unclean. Then Haggai answered and said, so is it with this people and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands.

And what they offer there is unclean. Now then, consider from this day forward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare?

[20 : 28] When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

I struck you, and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail. Yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord.

Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid. Consider.

Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on, I will bless you.

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.

[21 : 39] 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. This is the word of God.

Well, we're going to continue in our worship. This time we're going to sing a Gaelic psalm. We'll remain seated. It's Psalm 72 from verses 17 through 19.

I won't attempt to read the Gaelic. You'll be pleased to know. But we'll remain seated to sing. It's Psalm 72 from verses 17 through 19.

[23 : 37] It's Psalm 72 from verses 17 through 19.

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There was lots of hard work, but not much real worship. They were not yet focused on a holy God and on becoming a holy people. The Holy One of Israel was not yet at the centre of all things.

And so Haggai begins by engaging in a kind of Q&A; session with the priests on the teaching of the law. And so we read in verse 11, thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priests about the law. And he directs the people back, of course, to God's word. Many of those laws were taken up with issues of holiness holiness and purity. They were indicators to the people that Yahweh could not just be approached in any old way. Certain holiness regulations had to be adhered to. And here Haggai is instructed to ask the priests a question. Verse 12, if someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

[32 : 50] And the priests answered and said, no. And the point that Haggai is making here is that holiness is not contagious. Holiness is not transferable to other things in a sense. For example, if we had a primary four class full of healthy children and into that class we placed another child who had chicken pox, for example, would the child with chicken pox become healthy and well because of his or her contact with the healthy uninfected children? Of course not. Clearly he or she would not become well through contact with others who are healthy. That's essentially the point that's being made here.

Placing unconsecrated, uncommitted people in an environment where they will come into contact with others who are committed to God would not automatically make them committed to God.

Holiness and consecration to God is not contagious in that sense. And then in verses 13, Haggai said, if someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean? The priest answered and said, it does become unclean.

So it is with this people, as with this nation before me. And so with every work of their hands, what they offer here is unclean. So this time Haggai goes on to speak and ask this question about uncleanness and defilement. It's again a question about the ritual law. The point is, it's kind of the reverse really. While holiness and consecration is not contagious, defilement and uncleanness is contagious. If we go back to our school class of children with all the healthy children and we put the unhealthy chickenpox child in, what happens? Yes, they all get chickenpox. There was a time when that was quite common. People didn't have chickenpox parties back in the day. They wanted to get infected because that's what happens. And that was the situation in Haggai's day. The fact that the people's hearts were not fully given to the Lord meant that all that they did was defiled.

They were defiled in the temple with unclean hearts and hands because their hearts were far from God. Their religious worship was infected by that same spirit. They might well have been doing the right kinds of things, but they were not offering to God acceptable worship. And so God speaks to the people through Haggai and tells them that the fact they're trying to rebuild the temple was not actually transforming them into a holy people. Being brought up, as the old saying says, being brought up in a garage doesn't make you a mechanic. One does not follow the other. The people's worship was unclean.

[35 : 43] It was rotten. It was defiled. Their misplaced priorities still infected everything that they did. As we saw back in chapter one, their focus was wrong. They were putting themselves first and God second.

You know, sometimes if something's just a little bit off, even just a little, it can cause hugely destructive problems. Maybe there's a problem with a bearing in your car. It's just a little thing.

And yet that can have enormous consequences for how it drives and for the safety of the passengers. One little thing is wrong. Everything else is thrown out of kilter. The car won't function or drive properly. And it's the same in the life of faith. If worship is not our delight, if God is not number one in our lives, if we're not looking to him and enjoying him, then everything else is going to be off.

Everything's going to be thrown out of kilter a little bit. Everything tainted by our lack of love and worship for the Lord. And so we need to consider our ways. It's important that we get this right.

Because if we don't, a lot may be wrong. We need to consider the worship God requires. And then we need to consider, secondly, the discipline God sends.

[37 : 18] Verse 15, consider from this day forward, before stone placed upon stone in the temple, how did you fare? One came to a heap of twenty, there were but ten. Draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me. So Haggai then asked the people to consider how things had been for them in the land.

It's not a story, really, of abundant blessings and fruitfulness. Quite the reverse. Life had been hard for those returning exiles. Poor harvest, crop failures, extreme weather, struggling economy, hard times for all. And as we noted before, those hardships should have been a sign to the people that something was wrong. These hardships were not to be understood as an accident of nature. They were to be understood as a judgment of God. God was seeking to discipline his people and wake them up. And as we noted before, God spells this out to his people in Deuteronomy 28, the dire consequences of unbelief and disobedience. And the reason for that is he sends them that message is because he wants them to be faithful. He wants them to love him. I've said before we need to be careful.

Not all hardship and difficulty can be attributed to God disciplining his people. Persecution, for example, hardships, privations associated with it often come upon believers, not as the result of unfaithfulness, but rather faithfulness. And similarly, when bad things happen in our lives, it's not always down to sinful rebellion. We have to be careful. Very dangerous to attribute all illness, hardship, difficulty that people experience as being due to sin or a lack of faith. And we need to, I would say, beware those who so readily and easily make such claims. There's often a mystery to the providence of God and discipline is not God's only purpose in adversity. But that being said, sometimes God does bring hard things into our lives to wake us up from our spiritual slumbers. C.S. Lewis famously wrote, God whispers to us in our pleasures but shouts in our pains. It's his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Suffering is God's warning signal, reminding us that this life is not everything. Suffering and hardship encourages us to look up to the living God and to put our faith and trust in him. He is the one from whom our help comes. I've noticed over the years as a minister that suffering and painful experiences tend to have two effects. Either hearts become hard and brittle and seemingly impervious to God's word as people turn away from God, reject him, or hearts are softened and become sensitive and receptive to God's word. Either these hard things drive us closer to God or they move us further away from him.

[40 : 36] Let me ask you this morning, if you are going through a hard time, what is going on in your heart? Are you being drawn closer to the Lord or are you drifting away from him?

What are you giving your heart to? Proverbs 4.23, above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. Jesus, where your treasure is, there your heart will be. Also, where is your treasure? What are you delighting in? We need to have the attitude of Jeremiah, who in the midst of all his troubles and in all his perplexity and distress was able to say, correct me, O Lord, but in justice, not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. And so if suffering comes, trials come, we need to consider our ways. The worship God requires the discipline God sends. Thirdly here, the hope God brings. Verses 18 and 19, consider from this day forward, since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider is the seed yet in the barn. Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on, I will bless you. So here's God's promise to his people. I will bless you. I'm going to turn this situation around. Now that's given, of course, in a very specific situation. God promising to bless his people. Previously, as it were, they had been under a curse. Now blessing is on its way. And God is giving to this beleaguered people a hope for the future. The seed that had been sown to little effect, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, the olive, had yielded not just a little but nothing at all. The situation was disastrous.

They were standing on the brink of economic disaster. And it's at this point that God speaks and intervenes. Things are at their darkest. And he shines his light. And he speaks and brings to his despairing people this word of hope to them. And it strikes me that that is often the way of it, isn't it? It's when people have given up on themselves and reached a point of desperation that they discover their only help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

It's here when things seemingly cannot get any worse, that God's grace meets them and restores them. I'm reminded of the story Martin Lloyd-Jones, a famous Welsh preacher, recounts. He wrote a great book on preaching called Preaching and Preachers. A fabulous book. And in that book, he has this story.

This is what he writes. He said, I knew a poor man who'd been converted from a terrible life and sin and who'd become a fine Christian when I was in South Wales. And afterwards, unfortunately, for various reasons, this poor fellow had become a backslider, fallen deeply into sin, run away from his wife and children to live with another woman. He'd come to London, lived in sin, squandered his money, actually gone home and told his wife a lie to get further money out of her.

[44 : 06] The house in which they lived was in their joint names. He got this changed. He put it in his name. He sold it in order to get the money. He'd gone very, very, very far into the far country.

He had sinned terribly. The money was finished. The woman had deserted him. He was utterly miserable and ashamed. So much so that he decided he was going to commit suicide. Feeling that in his deep state of repentance, God would forgive him.

But he could not forgive himself. He felt that he had no right ever to approach his family again. So he decided to walk to Westminster Bridge, throw himself into the Thames. He was actually on his way to do this. And just as he arrived at the bridge, Big Ben struck half past six, 6.30. And a thought flashed into his mind. He said to himself, referring to Lloyd-Jones, he will now just be entering his pulpit for the evening service. And so he decided he would come and listen to me once more before he put an end to his life. He made his way to Westminster Chapel in about six minutes. Got through the front door. Walked up the stairs. Was just entering the gallery when he heard these words.

God have mercy on the backslider. I uttered that petition in my prayer. And they were literally the first words he heard. Everything was put right immediately. And he was restored.

Friends, there is hope and there is blessing in the gospel, even for the vilest of offenders. None are too far gone that his arm cannot reach. And sometimes people get to a very low place indeed.

[45 : 50] Submerged in guilt and shame and fear, there appears no way out, no hope. Yet it's often at the very bottom when folks can get no lower that God in his grace reaches out his hand of mercy.

And friends, maybe that's a word for someone here today. God is speaking into the apparent hopelessness, despair of your own situation. And he's saying this, I can bless you. I can use you. I can restore you.

Because here is the God who brings hope even to a faithless people. The God who removes the curse and brings blessings to his people. Great curse of sin lifted indeed through the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross that we might come to know God and enjoy his blessings forevermore.

And so there's hope here wrapped up in this ancient prophecy of Haggai given on the first, first on the 18th of December, 520 BC. And the prophecy here is like an engagement ring.

It's a pledge, you see, of all that's to come. And the blessing promised to those of Haggai's day, you'll notice as we read through the text, it's actually quite an unashamedly material blessing. Seeds, vines, trees that brought forth nothing were going to be fruitful. God was going to turn this wilderness into a garden. And I think there's an indication here that this hope that we have as believers is actually an unashamedly physical and material one. It's not something vague and ethereal. It's not all clouds and harps. It's not something insubstantial. It's something real and tangible. Jesus said, the meek shall inherit the earth. Of the lamb in Revelation 5, it said, you ransom people from God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God and they shall reign where? Upon the earth.

[47 : 56] The Christian hope is not to die and go to heaven. It's to die and be with the Lord. Our ultimate hope is in him, a rescuing and returning savior. Our hope is not for some vague disembodied existence. It's for new resurrection bodies. It's for a new heavens and earth.

And the material blessings and hope given to the people under Haggai's ministry at a pledge of what God will one day when the curse is finally and completely lifted. Usher, he will usher in a new world far more real and substantial and lasting than this one ever was. Think of those words of Isaac Watts' great hymn, Joy to the World, speaking of when Christ returns in power and majesty and glory.

There's that verse, no more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found. And here's the hope that God brings to us through the prophet Haggai. So real that one day you will be able to touch it and taste it. Remember Peter says, 2 Peter 3 11, in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to what? A new heaven and a new earth. The home of righteousness. The worship God requires, the discipline God sends, the hope God brings. And fourthly here, the promise God makes in verses 20 through 23 on this last message. This very specific focus this last message has, unlike the previous message delivered to the leaders and to the people, this address is directed towards just one particular individual, Zerubbabel. Name means offspring of Babylon. He's been mentioned earlier in the book, chapter 1 verse 1 and 12, chapter 2 verses 2 and 4. He's the governor of Judah. It's likely he was someone born in Babylon when the Jews were in captivity there. And then when they returned, Zerubbabel came home, as it were, and appointed governor under the rule of the rule of the Persians. And Haggai's previous sermon ends on this note of hope. Things are bleak, but God is going to turn things around. And then we have this final recorded sermon, again on the 18th of December. And God speaks to this man, Zerubbabel, and encourages him in the task of leading the people. And I think what's happening here is this, he's underscoring this great truth that despite the way things appear, there is a future and a hope for God's people. That's maybe something we need to hear even today. It strikes me there is a much more acute sense of the church's weakness and vulnerability even than a generation ago. The kind of questions that people ask today, can the church survive?

Does it have a future? And those were the kind of questions I think that folks were asking in Haggai's day. But the burden of Haggai's final message, you'll notice, it's not one of exhortation and command.

Again, it's one full of the promises of God. Here is the Lord telling Zerubbabel of the things that he is going to accomplish. The Lord is not here telling Zerubbabel about what the governor must do for him. He's telling Zerubbabel what he will do. In these verses, God says to Zerubbabel, not you will, but I will. Let me just highlight a couple of things about this promise God makes to him. First of all, I think it's a promise that God is going to show his power. I'm about to shake the heavens and the earth, overthrow the throne of kingdoms, destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, overthrow the chariots and their riders and the horses, and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. Language here echoes with sounds and experience of God's redeeming power. There's Moses, God stretched forth his hand, he delivered his people from their oppressors. In a dramatic display of power and authority, he, over the idols and gods of Egypt, he defeated Pharaoh, he brought his people out. Exodus 15, we're told of Moses, the Israelites, sang, I'll sing to the Lord, he's highly exalted, the horse and its rider he's hurled into the sea.

[52 : 49] The picture there is God casting down his enemies. Kingdoms overthrown. The same language used in a whole lot of places in the Old Testament. Don't have time to look at those. Sometimes it's used to refer to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Deuteronomy 29, 23. The reference to falling by the sword of his brother from Judges 7, 22 and part of the story of Gideon defeating the Midianite.

Again, a picture, God saving and rescuing his people against all the odds. And so God reminds his people again, I'm going to shake the heavens and the earth. The powerful kingdoms of men will crumble and fall. It's a word of encouragement to this little nation, a people of no reputation, a people weak and powerless, dwarfed on every side by the great empires of the world, past and present and future. And God comes to them, you see, in all their weakness and frailty and says, look, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to shake things up. And these great superpowers will be overthrown. They will be ruined. They will be cast down. Because only the kingdom that I am building shall last forever.

Kingdoms and empires of this world will crumble and decay. They are going nowhere. They have no lasting future. They have heads of gold and feet of clay, inherently unstable. They rise and they fall.

Not one is permanent. Think of Isaiah's words, surely the nations are like a drop in the bucket. Before him all the nations are as nothing. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. The sooner they are planted, the sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows upon them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

I think that's a very important message for us to hear today. Believers in Pakistan or Iran or Indonesia, countries under the power of Islam, it's important to hear this word. And it's important for us even in our own Western culture, so hostile now to biblical faith. Church appears so marginal to modern life and culture in Great Britain today. Thrust to the edges by militant secularism and atheism. But we need to remember that God is able to shake the kingdoms and ideologies of men such that we are given to ask, where are they now? Hitler's acclaimed Third Reich boasted to reign for a thousand years. It didn't last thirteen. Kingdoms come and go and so we need not be afraid. Our lives are in the hands of the sovereign

[55 : 55] God and he is no powerless idol. He is the king of kings and the lord of lords and his arm is not too short to save and rescue his people. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever. And there's a promise here that God will show his power. But there's also a promise here that God will exalt his servant. Verse 23, on that day declares the Lord of all, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you.

This final verse is really a really intensely personal word to Zerubbabel. I'm going to take you, I'm going to make you, I've chosen you. And what is going on here? He's referred to as my servant.

That's the title often used in the Old Testament of King David. Highly significant. Because Zerubbabel is believed to have been the grandson of Jehoiakim, the last official king of Judah, who was carted off to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem. Haggai reminds Zerubbabel that he's been chosen. I've chosen you, language used of Abraham and Joshua 4, Joshua rather 24 3, I took your father Abraham, I chose your father Abraham from the land beyond the river. And what we're being told here is that God has set his eye upon Zerubbabel. He selected him to fulfill his covenant promises. The Lord is going to take him. The Lord is going to make him into something special. I will make you like a signet ring, he says. And the signet ring, some translations seal, was a symbol, you see, of the king's authority.

It was the great emblem of the king's power and majesty. It was used to endorse official documents. It was precious. It was usually worn by the king at all times, either on a finger or a chain around his neck. It was the king's signature, his means of identification. It was precious. It was valuable.

So what does God mean when he says to Zerubbabel, I will make you like a signet ring? What is God promising? Is he promising to make him great? No, I don't think that has said at all. Because one of the strange things, of course, is we hear no more of Zerubbabel than the rest of the Old Testament.

[58 : 14] To understand what is going on here, we need to go back before the exile to words spoken in the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah 24, verse 24.

As surely as I live, declares the Lord, even if you, Jehoiakim, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, wear a signet ring on my right hand, I would pull you off. I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear, to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and to the Babylonians.

Because back in the days of Jeremiah, you remember the covenant lay in tatters. It lay in pieces, broken and destroyed by the unfaithfulness of the king and the people. And God cursed Jehoiakim and his line, and the people were taken into exile. And to all intents and purposes, it appeared as if the promise of a Davidic kingdom had failed. It all come to nothing. The exile appeared to have signaled the very end for God's people and the very end of God's promise. But now you see things have changed.

God has brought his people back. And so what we see in this verse of Haggai is a reversal of the judgment and the curse of Jeremiah 24. The signet ring that had been torn off was now being put back on.

And through Zerubbabel, God was going to lift that curse and bring blessing to his people. He was going to restore them and raise up his servant to the throne and accomplish his mighty purposes. The Davidic line would be restored. The signet ring put back again. And the blessings of the covenant poured out upon the Lord's people. God says to Zerubbabel, you're going to be my signature in history.

[59 : 52] The guarantee that my promises to David will be fulfilled. For friends, God will not allow his promise to fail. Human lives, human history is littered with broken promises. But God is utterly faithful. And he literally moves heaven and earth to keep his word. Just when everything looks like it's all over. And that God's promises and people have failed. God displays his faithfulness. And he revives and restores and renews. Jesus expresses that same thought when he says, I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Nothing can thwart his purpose, not our sins and failures, not our many enemies, not even our foolishness and stupidity. He will build his church and nothing shall stop him.

And of course we encounter Zerubbabel's name in the scriptures just a few pages further on in our Bibles. Not in the Old Testament but actually in the opening chapter of the New Testament.

Matthew 1, verse 12, at the beginning of the gospel. The genealogy of Jesus. After the exile to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel the father of Abihu. There Matthew tells us how the chosen one of God, the servant of the Lord, the promised saviour, had come into the world to save his people from their sins. He has done so in the line of Zerubbabel to fulfill the promises of God, sit on the throne of David and establish his eternal kingdom. And so Zerubbabel is a key link in that genealogical chain that will eventually lead to the coming of the Messiah. Here way back in the days of Haggai, God is working out his saving purpose for the world, preparing the way of the Lord. Zerubbabel is a messianic figure pointing us to Jesus. And so we look to the greater son of Zerubbabel, the true servant of the Lord.

The Lord's signet ring and precious in his sight. And yet for those great purposes of God to be accomplished, this precious servant was called to suffering and humiliation. Because it's in Jesus that the curse of the fall is reversed. And it's through him that covenant breakers, exiled in the far country of sin and disobedience, are brought back to God. And Jesus was the signet ring, pulled off the Lord's right hand and cast off, forsaken, abandoned on the cross, cursed, that we might be blessed, rejected, that we might be accepted, enduring wrath, that we might enjoy love. And yet that cursing and death was no defeat. Jesus was raised up from the dead in conquering power. His victory now proclaimed among the nations. And the day is hastening on when we will see this Jesus lifted up because all of human history is moving towards this end. It's all moving towards the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We dare not forget that. That new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells. Christ will be exalted to the highest place. He will be given the name that is above every other name. And his enemies will be made a footstool before his throne. And we will see his kingdom come in all its fullness. Do we believe that this morning? Many years ago, when I studied in Glasgow back in the 1980s, there was a lot of renovation work at that time being done and all the Victorian tenement blocks in the city. At one time they knocked them all down and then they took this different policy to restore them. And where I lived, there was a block that seemed to be obscured by scaffolding for such a long time. And the scaffolding almost appeared to be a permanent fixture on the city landscape. Until eventually one day the scaffolding was taken down.

[64 : 17] Behind was revealed these gloriously renewed and renovated and beautiful sandstone buildings. Consider this, that one day the entire scaffolding of human history will be taken down and dismantled.

When that happens, what will be revealed is the glory of a new creation. In which the kingdoms of this world will have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

The end of 1 Thessalonians, Paul has this benediction. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful. And he will do it. He will do it.

Not I will do it. Not you will do it. Not the church will do it. Not they will do it. He will do it. Friends, we're called to live in the light of that great reality.

[65 : 27] That all the ideologies and kingdoms of this world will one day fall and above them will be exalted. The one whom the Lord calls my servant and my son.

And whom by grace we call my Lord and my Saviour. Friends, he will do it. Worship God requires.

May he be first in our affections. The discipline God sends. May it soften our hearts. The hope God brings. May he prepare us for that great tomorrow.

The promise God makes. May it strengthen us to serve him faithfully today. Let us pray. God our Father, we ask that by your spirit and through your word you would make us indeed a holy people.

That you might use the circumstances of our lives and our experience to draw us nearer to you. That you would plant your hope within us in our hearts.

[66 : 41] And that we would be those who believe and grab hold of your great and wonderful promises. Lord, help us to live today in the light of that great tomorrow.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to close our time together as we sing our final item of praise.

It's a hymn. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father. There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not.

Thy compassions they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be. And we'll stand to sing. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father.

There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not.

[67 : 56] Thou changest not. Thy compassions they fail not. As thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, Sun, moon and star-shed, Their courses above.

Join with all nature in manifold witness, To thy great faithfulness, To thy great faithfulness, Mercy and love.

Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness, Morning by morning, New mercies I see.

[69 : 36] All I have needed, All I have needed, Thy hand has provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Pardon me. Pardon for sin and a peace that endured, Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide, Strength for today and right hope for tomorrow, Blessings of mine, Blessings of mine, With ten thousand beside.

Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness, Morning by morning, New mercies I see.

All I have needed, Thy hand has provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Now may the God of peace, Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, The great shepherd of the sheep, By the blood of the eternal covenant, Equip you with everything good, That you may do his will, Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, Through Jesus Christ, To whom be glory forever and ever.

[71 : 25] Amen.