

Changing People

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[0:00] Thanks Andy. Folks, lovely to see you this morning. Wonderful to meet some new folks for whom this is your first time at Brunnsfield as well. You are so welcome here. Let me encourage you to turn to Haggai chapter 1. We're taking in three verses today. Here's the question.

How does the God of the Bible change people? I recently heard a story someone told about a man called Tony Morfitt. Tony Morfitt was one of Australia's most famous TV script writers.

He was a trained journalist and he was a committed atheist. One day he boards a plane bound for Sydney. Except there's one problem with this plane journey.

It's the day that it falls on. You see, this plane journey falls on Friday the 13th. I always find it interesting how the most calm people around all of a sudden become superstitious when they step on a plane.

You've never noticed that before. If you don't believe me, next time you get on a plane, and after all, it is a kind of flying Pringles tube really, isn't it? So you don't blame them. But next time you get on a plane, have a look for row 13 and see if you can find it and you'll understand what I'm saying.

[1:12] So Tony Morfitt, he boards this plane. And what he does is when he leaves his hotel room, what he does is he grabs a Gideon's Bible from the bedside's cabinet and he takes it with him, thinking I'll try and cover my good luck bases on this Friday the 13th.

And he makes it safely to Sydney. And after arriving there, he's in his hotel room and he takes out the Bible, the thing that kind of has seemed to have worked to get him here. And he thinks I'll have a read of it. And he turns to Matthew's Gospel.

And as a trained journalist, he was astounded at the amount of eyewitness details that he found in Matthew's Gospel. You see, the thing that he thought was a fairy story actually turned out to be full of eyewitness investigative evidence about this man called Jesus.

So he'd come to the Bible before and he'd thought that it was just a load of fairy stories. But actually, this thing holds water. There's credibility to it. And so the weeks go on and eventually Tony Morfitt becomes a Christian.

And he says in an interview before he died back in June 2018, you can Google this and you'll find it. He said, the Bible blew a hole in my ceiling. You see, how does the God of the Bible change people?

[2:26] He does it through his living word. That's how he does it, through his living word. And if you're still not with me, come and have a look at Haggai chapter 1.

You see, if this chapter were an exam paper, the question at the top of it would be compare and contrast. Okay, remember doing those things at school? That question that you dreaded in your English paper?

Compare and contrast. In other words, explain and point out the differences. So last week we took in verses 1 to 11 of this Old Testament book called Haggai.

We were introduced to the mere generation of God's people, if you remember them. Back in their homelands, which is great because God is faithful. But not all that fussed about the Lord.

And certainly not fussed about finishing the job of building the temple which he's given them to do. So one to live in the mere generation. And yet, by the end of chapter 1, verses 14 and 15.

[3:29] And note, if you do the maths and the dates here, this is 23 days later. What is going on? The people have their spring back in their step. And despite the opposition, they're back building again.

So you've got to do a compare and contrast with that one. And you ask yourself, what has happened? What's happened to bring about that change? And the answer is that the change has not come from inside the people.

Because that's what the problem is. Seems to be one of the unique claims and features of Christianity. Where everything else in our world is geared up to tell us that we need to look inside ourselves for the hero, for the answers.

No, the Bible says, no, inside of you is exactly where the problem is. Don't look inside of you. No, we need to look outside of us for wisdom. We need to look outside of us for answers.

We need to look outside of us to our creator to understand who we are and to know what he's done for us. We need the voice of the Lord. And you see, that's exactly what happens at verse 12, if you come with me.

[4 : 30] Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people, obeyed, and here it is, the voice of the Lord, their God.

So how does the God of the Bible change people? He changes them through his living word as it goes forth from his mouth.

This is what's changed the game in Jerusalem. You see, God, by the power of his spirit, through his words, has deeply impacted and transformed the hearts of his people.

This is what he does through his word as it goes forth. You know, I've got a good friend down in Bristol where we used to live. His name is Nathan. Nathan was my pastor when I was down there, and I always remember him telling me to do three simple things with my Bible.

And this has proved to be a really sound bit of wisdom. So you can have this bit for free, and I'm crediting Nathan with giving me this. I find this really helpful, really helpful. He said, do three things with your Bible.

[5 : 35] First of all, hold it above your head. Hold it above your head. So place yourself under it. Stand under it. You don't tell it what it should say.

You submit yourself to God's living words. Don't try and shape what it is saying. Let it shape you. Let it mold you. So place yourself under God's word.

And then he said, secondly, put it under your feet, right? Reverently, but put it under your feet. Stand on it. Build your life on it. And then he said, thirdly, hold it to your chest and let God's word into your life.

Give it time. Let it search you. Let it convict you. Let it challenge you. Let it comfort you. Let God, through his word, inspire you. Let him mold you through his living words.

Under it, on it, in you. This is what God does through his word as his word goes forth. Because here's the promise that God makes in his word. That the word that goes forth from his mouth will always accomplish the purpose for which he has sent it forth.

[6 : 46] And this passage in Haggai, these three verses, I think are probably some of the greatest verses in all of the Bible. It's showing us the power of what God does in people's lives as his word goes forth.

So come with me to verse 12 and notice what happens when God's word hits home. You see, here's the wonderful truth about the Bible. These are the words and the works of some 40 different authors.

Who spoke at different times in history. Who were shaped by their different experiences. And who God used their different personalities.

It's what God does. He doesn't bypass us, his people. He works through us. 40 different authors. But make no mistake that standing behind and speaking through all of them is one divine author. You always say that we're a church that loves our 316s. We love John 316. For God so loved the world that he sent his only son. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. This church is built on John 316.

[7 : 52] The other 316, remember, is 2 Timothy 316. All scripture is God breathed. All scripture is God breathed. And it's useful for teaching, training, rebuking and training in righteousness.

All scripture is God breathed. And I think this is what the people realize is going on here in the streets of Jerusalem. That standing behind the voice of Haggai is the greater voice of the Lord. They're not two separate things. It's not God's voice and Haggai over here. They are the one thing. You know, think of it like this. I'm a simple person. You saw how I kind of clicked with it this week. I don't know if you've ever seen that scene in The Lion King. You can tell what stage of life I'm at. The scene in The Lion King. And it's the one where Simba and Nala find themselves cornered by the hyenas in the elephant's graveyard.

You know what I'm talking about? They find themselves in that place. And Simba tries to flex his muscles. He tries to roar. And he has a few shots at it. And it's pitiful. And the hyenas mock him. [8 : 57] They laugh at him. What does it? Is it bulls? What does he say? Is that it? Is that it? And then what happens? He tries again. But this time what comes out of his mouth is a mighty roar.

And the thing is, it's not him that's doing it. What is happening is it's almost as if this roar, Mufasa's roar, is coming through Simba. And the hyenas hear it. And they hear it. And they know whose voice it is. And they stand to attention. And I think that's what's going on here that the people realize is going on with Haggai. They hear his voice.

And it's not just an ordinary voice. They recognize that standing behind Haggai, the Lord is roaring. The lion is speaking. And that's what's true every time you and I pick up our Bibles.

This changes your quiet times in the morning. Every time you turn and listen to the words of Jeremiah, the Lord is roaring. Every time we open the words of Paul and read about Paul and bringing his personality to the game, the Lord is roaring.

[9 : 58] You turn to the words of David. You read about him. The Lord is roaring. Behind this book, the lion speaks. The lion is roaring as his word goes forth.

And notice the breadth of that conviction, verse 12. Do you see how it's not just the leaders who respond? It's not just Zerubbabel and Joshua.

It's the whole remnant of the people. It's spelled out there. The whole remnant of the people. In other words, this whole community. That's why the application of this, I think, as well as being individual, it's corporate.

This whole community. Understand what's going on here. And they respond in obedience as this word impacts their lives. And notice the depth of that conviction as well.

The people, what did they do? They feared the Lord. God became big in their eyes. And he became glorious in their hearts. And their lives were gripped with a sense of awe and reverence as they stood to attention to understand who the Lord is.

[11 : 05] You see, when the Bible talks about fearing the Lord, and it's something that's really good to wrestle with. I can recommend some great resources if you really want to think about this. It's not a fear that causes us to run away from God.

Now that's sinful fear. It's very much when the Bible speaks about fearing the Lord. It's an understanding of who he is that compels us to know him more and come close in delight as we understand who he is.

The fear of the Lord should not cause us to run away. It should, like a magnet, cause us to come close. You see, to fear God is to be magnetically drawn in to savor his beauty.

And you find yourself in that place where you can honestly say that upon no one else am I placing the directions of my eyes and the affections of my heart, but upon the beauty of the Lord.

And I love that scene in the, when the disciples are in the boat, you know the one in Mark's gospel, and the winds are hitting it and they're, they're, they're just out their depth. And they turn to Jesus, he's sleeping, they say, Lord, don't you care?

[12 : 12] Don't you care what's going on? Of course Jesus cares. He loves them more than they can ever imagine. But his purposes in this moment are to teach them who he is.

And what happens? Jesus stills the waves. He calms the storm. And the disciples at the beginning of the account are fearful of the storm. By the end of it, they're fearful of Jesus.

They're not running away from him. It's a sense of we cannot take our eyes off him. That's what it means to fear the Lord. The Bible says right there is the beginning of wisdom.

God's done this through his word. We always talk about doing this at kind of four levels at Brunfield. As we gather on a Sunday, kind of casting the net wide. It's a community. We're a community that submits ourselves to God's word.

We love to hear from God's word. We are formed by God's word. It's why it's so important after the service during this that we're speaking to one another, coming out in the evening, encouraging one another. And we go in one.

[13 : 12] We talk about small groups. Good chance in our small groups. And if you're not in one, I encourage you to do that. To spend a bit more time with a smaller group of people, maybe eight to ten, thinking about the application of God's word.

And then we bring it in a little bit more. We think about one-to-one, smaller relationships. If you're not in a one-to-one, thinking about how you can meet up with one person, just share life together,

sharpen one another, bring the word to bear.

In our homes as well, parents, if we're here thinking about how we can make God's word, the very atmosphere of our homes, what can we do to nurture the young minds that God has given us the privilege of bringing up?

And then thinking about it personally. And I was just thinking about this. I was just thinking, when was the last time you were deeply comforted by the words of the Lord?

That you felt the love of the great shepherd as he speaks to you through the word? I find that all the time, that challenge, when I've messed it up, the devil would say, who are you? Particularly doing my role, honestly, who are you to do that?

[14:16] But the voice of my father that would come alongside us and know you are justified. You are right with me. Not because of who you are, not because of what you've done, but because what I've done for you through my son on the cross.

That's who you are. The devil would come at me again. Who are you? Who are you? You've messed it up again. No, no, no. The word of my father is saying, no, you are an adopted son of God. Not because of who you are, but because what I have done in your life in Christ.

When was the last time this word deeply comforted you? In a weary place, in a hard place. Let me ask you as well, flip it around. When was the last time it challenged you? Even through God's people, as the word comes forth, no, no, no, you shouldn't be living like that.

You shouldn't be doing that. When was the last time it challenged you? And let me ask you, when was the last time it caused you to change? You know, one of my favorite stories, I love this story. Famous story about Harland and Wolfe, one of the great shipbuilding company in Belfast.

Probably most famous for the place where the Titanic was built. But what happened back in the day, one of the biggest problems for the owners was that at the end of each day, when the men in the factory left en masse, they had the stealing problem, right?

[15:28] The men would just take a little bit of pipe, a little bit of lead in the jacket and head home. Because there's so many of them. How do you police that? So what happened is the men kept on going and the directors realized they had a problem on their hands.

During one of the periods of revival in Northern Ireland, what happened is that many of those men in that factory became Christians. And God starts to work in their hearts and the Spirit of God starts to take the Word of God and prod and poke in their lives, showing them the things that they need to change, convicting them of their sin.

And what starts happening is that the men start bringing back to the factory all the little bits of lead and copper and pipe that they've stolen. And in fact, so many men did this as God's Word impacted people that eventually the owners of Harland and Wolf had to make a public announcement saying, can you please stop bringing back the things that you've stolen because we just don't have room enough for all that stuff.

And this is what God does when His Word goes forth. That's why we read from Hebrews 4 earlier. It searches, it impacts, it gives life to. Because what is our exposure to God's Word?

What an amazing Father we have. Notice what happens when the Word hits home. Notice what happens when the Lord stirs up. You see, to complement this thing of the challenge, and that's what's coming verses 1 to 11, God steps in with a glorious promise.

[16:52] Verse 13, do you see it? He says, I will be with you. So God steps into this situation and He brings a promise of His presence.

I take it in the context, it just means that He will be with them. He will protect them. He will guide them. He knows the plans He has for them, that He loves them, that He is the covenant Lord, and that He is right there with them.

You know, it's true, isn't it, in life that it makes all the difference knowing who's on your team. I remember doing the relay race at Scottish Championships when we were growing up at school. I wasn't the fastest guy in the team, in the four team, but I knew we had the fastest guy in Scotland on the last leg.

So when I came to run, guys in the lanes next to me were overtaking me. I didn't care because we had the fastest guy in Scotland on the last leg. People laughing at me because I'm shorter than everyone else.

It doesn't matter because we've got the fastest guy on the last leg. It really matters, doesn't it, in life to know who's got your back, to know who's on your team, to know who's right there with you.

[17 : 53] The words of Martin Luther, with God on our side, we are always in the majority. And God stirs the people up by His Spirit, which I take it just means that by God's Spirit, that word, the Spirit caused it to marinate long in the hearts of the people.

It galvanized them, that promise. Encouraged them that the Lord was with them. That's what the people need to, an encouragement. Verse 14, do you see? God stirs them up. And verse 14, the people step out in faith.

They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty. So the people are getting going again. God has stirred them up through His words. So do you see what's happened here?

God has promised His presence and He's given them a job to do. He's promised His presence, He's given them a job to do. And you fast forward to today, where we live, the New Testament times, it's exactly the same pattern for us.

Because you turn to the pages of the New Testament, you find the risen Jesus doing exactly the same thing, except He's taken those promises and amplified them. See, this is what Jesus said to His disciples when He's risen.

[19 : 11] The end of Matthew's Gospel, then Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

So there's the task that Jesus commissions His disciples to do, not to build a temple. Okay, the temple was all about Jesus. It was always leading to Him who would be the very fulfillment of what the temple was all about.

He is the meeting point between God and man. He is the place where He is the ultimate sacrifice. It was always about Jesus. And so the call for us today is to respond to these words here.

This is the job that Jesus has given us to do. This is the work empowered by His presence and His Spirit that He calls us to get busy in. I love it.

He tells His disciples what He wants them to do and He tells them He wants them to go to all peoples and make disciples. That's a huge job. That's a huge job, especially when you consider in the context that there's a living of them at this point.

[20 : 24] So, a living of them taking on the world? Impossible job. If it were not for the promises that Jesus bookends this job with. Do you see how all power has been given to Him?

This is what He's saying. And this is why we need to understand it. All authority has been given to the risen Jesus. So that means He's not just the Lord of our individual lives as Christians. He's the Lord of everything.

He's the Lord of everything. This is the Father's harvest field. All authority has been given to the risen Jesus. And He says, Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

What a loving promise from our Savior. That He is with us. And He's not just with us. By the indwelling Holy Spirit. And if you're a Christian here today, this is true of you. Whether you feel it or not, whether you're up for it today or not, this is true of you.

The Holy Spirit lives inside of us. The very presence of God with us. So do you see it? Jesus has promised His presence. And He's given us a job to do.

[21 : 30] A job to speak to others about Him. To serve and love His people. To be for the benefit of others. To take this message of Him to the peoples of the world.

You know, let me ask you, we're winding it down now. Let me ask you, when was the last time you just dropped Jesus into conversation? You ever done that? Just dropped Him in.

I was thinking about this. Maybe tomorrow some of you go to the office, some of you go to the classroom, some of you go to university. Whatever it is you're doing tomorrow, you know you can guarantee the question of leadership is going to come up.

Isn't it? If you think about it, everything that we've seen in our news this week, leadership, an example. Wouldn't it be great to drop into a conversation the reason that you follow Jesus? Really simply, that Jesus, when we're talking about leaders, here is a leader who said, He has come not to be served, but to serve and to give His life for a ransom for many.

Let's drop it into conversation. When was the last time you dropped Jesus into conversation? And here's the question I asked myself as well this week. When was the last time I took a gospel risk? Given who He is, given what He said is true, given the fact that His is the harvest field.

[22 : 45] Let me just close, tell you something that impacted me over the last couple of months or so. Let me tell you about the SU group that I helped run with some other parents at my kids' school. So we started doing it again once things kind of opened up after lockdown.

And praise days, right? The first day that we did it, there's 15 kids turn up, which is incredible, actually. 15, P6, P7, 15 kids turn up. And so there's a group of us, we challenge them. Having a day, the great time, we challenge them. Go and tell your friends. Just go and tell your friends. Go and tell them what we did, we had good fun here. Tell them about the Bible stories that we learned. Just go and tell your friends. And so next week, I'm part of the team and we get there and we're praying beforehand and I say, how many do you think we're expecting this week? And they kind of say, well, do you know what? Double digits. I think if we hit double digits, we've done well. So, lunch bell goes, doors open, in they come. One, blah, blah, blah, one. 29 turn up. Right? So the 50 have gone and just told their friends to come along. Come along. So I'm sitting there looking at these 29 kids, humbled and deeply challenged by the bravery of a wonderful group of 10 and 11 year olds.

[23 : 55] They've just gone and told their friends. And sometimes we massively overcomplicate it, don't we? So I'm looking at these 29 kids and we're looking at one another thinking, what do we do?

Is this COVID safe? I don't know. We're just going for it. Open the windows. Just praying, Lord, would you guide us? We don't know what's happening here. So there's 29 kids and I'm very aware that they've now walked into a class size that's bigger than the one that they've just left. So all of a sudden there's chaos in this place. All of a sudden people outside in the playground outside start looking in because there's more noise in the classroom in here than there is outside. All of a sudden they're looking and thinking, what on earth is this? So we're praying. Lord, here's what we don't know. Okay? We're praying about it. Lord, we do not know what you are doing. Right? We do not know what you're doing. This is incredible. Do not know what you're doing. But here's the thing that we do know is we continue to teach them. We're doing a Bible overview. We're talking about Abraham. We're talking about Isaac. We're thinking about Jacob. Thinking about Joseph. Every time linking it to Jesus. We don't know what you're doing but here's what we do know.

[24 : 54] As your word goes forth, your spirit moves, the lion roars and he speaks. You speak, Lord. Yours is the harvest field.

And do you know what? Every day is a sowing the word day. Isn't that amazing? Love being humble by 10 and 11 year olds. How does the God of the Bible change people? He does so through his living word. Let me just finish with these words of Anne Judson who gave her life along with her husband to take in the message of Jesus to the peoples of India and then eventually they get to Burma.

She said this, a little while we are in eternity. Before we find ourselves there, let us do much for Christ. How does the God of the Bible change people?

He does so through his living word. Let's pray. And so Father, I just ask Lord, because you are so gracious and good and kind.

[25 : 57] Father, I pray that you would just in the silence now just be at work by your spirit through your word in each of our hearts today. Lord, for those who are weary, would your voice bring comfort?

For those who are discouraged, may your words bring assurance. Father, for those who are doubting, may your word bring a sense of power and conviction. and Lord, we just ask as a community here at Brunfield that you would continue to shape us by your living word. And so Father, I pray that as we close this service today, Father, we think of the parable of the sower, that as your word has gone forth, that it would land in good soil. Help us, Lord, to respond like the people did here in Haggai's day in obedience and in faith, because they've just been captured by a wonderful, glorious picture of who you are. So Father, hear our prayer, because we pray in Jesus' worthy name. Amen. Amen.