

Confidence in God's Word

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone, it's lovely to see you. Let me encourage you to have Haggai, chapter 2, open in front of you as we finish this little series this morning. It's been wonderful to hear as God's Word's gone forth, as we've been in this little book over the last while, just how it's been teaching us things about who our God is and what it means to live as His holy people.

So just really excited to finish it today, but let's pause our hearts, shall we, and just pray as we come to God's Word this morning. Amen. And so Father, our simple prayer is the words of the psalmist in Psalm 119.

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, your Word, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

So Father, be with us today by your Spirit as your Word goes forth. Teach us, mould us, convict us, challenge us, inspire us, we pray, for the glory of Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Well, Haggai 2 open in front of you. Let me tell you about my friend Sam. Sam's our Christian guy. He has a young family. He's got three kids, probably why we connected.

[1 : 18] Lives in Northern Ireland. And I phoned him a couple of weeks ago. Hadn't spoken to him in about a month or so over the Christmas and New Year period. And he tells me that he was really, really sick.

Didn't know this. Was really, really sick. So sick in fact that he was taken to the A&E; I presume in Belfast, with something called myocarditis.

Now if you're not medical, that will mean nothing to you. Basically the inflammation of the heart. So he's taken to A&E; in the ambulance. And he's telling me the story about how the ambulance comes to his house to get him.

And about how as the ambulance pulls up, his three kids are standing on the pavement watching this happen. I can't imagine many more things with three young girls. I can't imagine many more things more scary for a child to watch than your parent being taken into an ambulance.

But they're watching this. And Sam's listening to them having a conversation at the side of the road. One brother, there's two boys. One brother turns to the other brother, puts his arm around them. His name is Caleb.

[2 : 22] And he says, listen, don't worry. Don't worry. Remember in this house, we don't believe in goodbyes. We believe in see you later.

And so here's this wee boy in Northern Ireland, little backwater town, declaring his confidence in life after death. Here he is declaring his confidence that even if his dad dies, he will one day see him again in the future.

Now, my question is, some of you will be here and you hear that story and you're totally with them. You're totally with them. You think, absolutely, we don't do goodbyes.

We do see you later. But others of us will be here. And to you, that sounds like one of those motivational, cheesy slogans that that annoying friend of yours posts on Facebook. And you think to yourself, Disneyland nonsense.

And the question is, what I'm interested in is what is his grounds for claiming that? This little boy. What is his grounds for claiming that? And the thing is, this passage in Haggai 2, as I've spent time in it this week, gives us the answer.

[3 : 30] Now, to get us into it, let me harness the spirit of Burns Night a few weeks ago, so you're all celebrating. You certainly were after yesterday. Let me tell you one of my favorite Scottish words. And it's the word gallus.

Okay? Gallus. You use it when you're describing somebody who walks about life with a bit of a cheeky swagger. Right? Confidence. They're oozing.

Self-confidence. Because in their mind, everything in the world is going pretty well. Everything's good. Right? Gallus. And there's something of that in the air in the streets of Jerusalem in Haggai chapter 2.

Okay? So three months have passed since Haggai first spoke right at the beginning of the book. And two months have passed since the people started rebuilding the temple. Now, let me just give you a quick overview to see that they kind of lay the land here in Haggai.

Chapter 1, if you remember, a few weeks ago, we saw God challenge their apathy. Their apathy. Right? They're back in the land. They started rebuilding the temple. And then all of a sudden, after a while, they've just kind of gone a bit meh about it.

[4 : 39] Not that fussed about the Lord. We're just going to build our own wee houses. Right? We'll do that project over here at the temple. We'll kind of just let it go.

And God said, no, no, no, no. Come on. I am the God who longs to dwell with you. This is who I am. I'm the Lord who makes promises. I'm the God who acts. And this is about way more than a building.

This is about your hearts and you as my people longing to be my people and be my holy nation in the world. And so all of a sudden, the people start building again with renewed hearts.

God, by his spirit, has moved. And a few weeks ago, at the beginning of chapter 2, we saw God speak into their despondency. So they started building again.

But after a while, they've just felt crushed by the size of the task. Enemies all around thinking to themselves. We're just looking at rubble. And now two months on, God now speaks sobering words of truth to wake them up from their complacency.

[5 : 47] Because what they're thinking as they're doing this thing is surely God must be pleased with us. After all, we're doing what he asks. I mean, we turn up. We do the sacrifice thing.

We get the blessing. We go home and we get on with our lives of what it is that we really love doing with our days. So they're treating God like some kind of divine Coke machine.

Right? Put your coin in. Select your product. Down it falls. You grab it and you go. This is what they're treating God like. And this is compartmentalized Christianity. Okay?

We do our own thing Monday through Saturday. Sunday. And we do the God thing on Sunday. And that's kind of what we do with our days. And God is saying to this generation, I'm not having any of it.

And so through Haggai to people who are gallus, think things are going well. God points out two big problems that exist in their day. Two big problems that I think we'll realize really will hit home when we examine them.

[6 : 52] So he says two things to this people. Firstly, he delivers some home truths about holiness. And this really matters because this is all about how you and I today and these people can be right with our creator.

Because this is all about how we can come into the presence of a holy God. Because our sins, we've been thinking in that kids talk there, our sin, our rebellion against him, the fact that we want our way, not his way, it is a big deal.

It needs to be dealt with. Because to come into the presence of a spotlessly holy God, you need to be spotlessly clean. And this is almost a textbook example right here of how it doesn't work.

And so there's two angles on how this doesn't work. Firstly, God says stop treating sin superstitiously. So what the people are doing, verse 12, if you come with me. And it's hard to tell whether this is what they're actually doing or whether this is just the mindset that they're coming with.

Is they're taking consecrated meat from the temple, the altar. And they're bringing it home. They're placing it on the table and thinking that somehow it transfers its cleanliness to the rest of the house.

[8 : 02] Treating it like some kind of good luck omen. Like cleanliness can be passed on to everything it touches. Now I remember the friend at uni called Soshi. Soshi was a Muslim girl.

A great laugh. But every time you go into a room, what you'd see in the top shelf of the bookshelf was a copy of the Quran. As far as I can tell from what she said, she never read it.

But it was there because in her mind it almost acted like a good luck omen for the rest of the room. Anyone who came in contact with it. It transferred its blessing.

I had no idea, honestly, if that's a thing in Islam. I don't know. But it was a thing for Soshi. It transferred its blessing. And the thing is, Christianity, some of us come at it and we think it's no

different.

Just because we wear a cross around our necks, just because we attend a service, just because we read our Bibles and say our prayers, doesn't necessarily mean that we're right with God.

[9 : 01] That is not how we get right with the Lord. And so God says to this generation, would you stop treating sin superstitiously? And would you start viewing it deeply?

Verse 13. See, in the Old Testament law, there were all sorts of things that would render you unclean before this holy God. Things you did. Things you didn't do.

Things you touched. Things that just happened to you naturally because of your human body. I take it that God is there teaching his people then. That they need to be clean.

And they're not clean. He's the only one that can make them clean. God's teaching them that they cannot be made. Cleanliness cannot be transferred.

And he's teaching them, though, that uncleanliness can. And my wife and two of the girls tested positive for COVID 10 days ago.

[9 : 58] Giving you the time frame so you're not freaking out, okay? It was a fun house for the last seven days. But somehow, and I've no idea how, other than the grace of God, I tested negative all the time.

But here was the thing I was so aware of as we continued to live together in the same house. There was no way of me to pass my negative result onto them. No way. Right? I wasn't going up and rubbing my faces, in our kids' faces.

No way I could pass my negative result onto them. But there was every chance that they could pass their positive result onto me. So we were careful. Why?

Because uncleanliness spreads. It spreads. That's what God is saying. This is how it works. The problem is us. The problem is an internal one.

Sin problem in our hearts. Jesus says the exact same thing in Mark chapter 7 to his disciples. And the context is the Pharisees are looking at Jesus and his disciples and seeing how they're behaving.

[11 : 02] And saying, why do you guys not act like us? Why do you not wash your hands? Why don't you eat from the correct bowls? All these things that we've put in place to ensure that uncleanliness doesn't come from the outside and come inside.

Why do you not do it? And Jesus says that's not how it works. You think the problem is an outside one? No, no, no. Let me tell you the biggest problem is an inside one.

The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. When I was at school, there was a popular song by Christina Aguilera. Do you remember her? And the chorus just went, you're beautiful in every single way.

And the Bible's response to that is, yeah, but no, but. Okay. Yes, that the worldview of the Bible is that every single human life is a life that's made wonderfully in God's image.

I think it's just one of the most beautiful things that the Bible says about human beings. You do not earn respect and dignity. You simply have it because you exist. It's what's driven men like Wilberforce people down the generations, Christian people, understanding what this is, what God says about human life.

[12 : 13] And yet, the Bible would say no, because the human heart, we know it's true, isn't it? It's a mixture of beauty and beast. And we've seen this play out over the last two years.

Right? We are the people who are standing on our doorsteps, clapping for carers one minute, going, banging our drums, hitting our pots and pans, trying to encourage them.

And yet, we're the generation who are down as to fighting for toilet rule the next. I mean, is that not just the human heart? Capable of incredible acts of love and yet capable of incredible acts of selfishness.

The Bible says, yeah, but, no, but. You know the feeling? And this is what I discovered when I first came to know Jesus. That feeling of going to a doctor.

And you don't know what the problem is, but the doctor takes a look and says, that's what the problem is. And you think, yes. There's a reason why Christians down the years have talked about Jesus as the great physician.

[13 : 19] But this generation, do you see, they do not see their problem. And I think the challenge that would come to us today is if any of us are here and we're trying to play God, thinking that we can do our own thing during the week, live our own way, and then come in here on a Sunday and

think that we're somehow transferred to his good books.

We've got to feel the challenge of verse 14. What does God say to this generation who are doing the thing, but they're not pursuing it with faith? What does he say? Whatever they do, whatever they offer there, the altar, is defiled.

So God says, you're not right before me. And do you see how he takes them on a history lesson? Because I take it these people, if you look at the calendar, I think this is when they expect to bring in the harvest, and yet they've got nothing to show for it.

And God says, do you remember how a similar thing happened to your ancestors? And do you see how it's repeating itself in your day? What was its purpose? Verse 17. What was the purpose of these covenant curses that fell on God's Old Testament people?

It was to get you to return to me. Not just with token gestures of obedience, but to return to me with all of your heart. See, this God is after 24-7 holiness from his people.

[14:36] I remember, again, as a kid, 24-7 Tesco opened up in our neighborhood. Trying to get my head around the fact that that thing never stops. It never closes.

Never has an off day. That's what God is saying he wants to these people. Or maybe to flip the analogy. We have to view our lives not like a house with individual box rooms that all serve a different purpose.

We have to view our lives as being open plan. A whole thing of worship to God. And yet, despite all the failures of this generation, verse 19, God says, I will bless you.

My wonderful purposes for you and for the world, they're going to come through you, are not going to be thwarted because of your disobedience. So park that promise for a moment.

You see, God delivers some home truths about holiness. And then he delivers some hard facts about power. Verse 20, Haggai speaks again, do you notice, on the same day.

[15:40] Which I take it is perhaps why we're meant to view these two little sections together. But this time, do you notice, his words are not addressed to the entirety of the people. God's words through Haggai are addressed to one individual.

Do you see it? It's a private sermon to Zerubbabel, who at this point in time, is the king of Israel. And I take it perhaps he too is feeling a little bit gallows.

I mean, what is not to like about being the guy who's heading up the new project? What's not to like about that? And yet, do you notice all the way through this little book, the reference point for the reader has been the rule of King Darius of Persia.

Right? He's the player on the scene. Zerubbabel is small fry. Do you see it? Chapter 1, verse 1. Chapter 2, verse 1. Chapter 2, verse 10.

Chapter 2, verse 20. Who's the big dog here? Who's the big player? It ain't Zerubbabel. It's King Darius. That's the world in which Zerubbabel is operating in. You see, Darius is famous the world over.

[16:45] You don't get a more powerful man than this at this point in time. No one's heard of Zerubbabel. Darius has an impressive looking kingdom with a mighty army. Zerubbabel is looking at a building project and living amongst sinful people.

And to top it all, yes, they might be back in their land, God's people. But Darius rules it all. Right? No mandate for an independence referendum is going to wash with him.

They're slaves in their own home. And they're surrounded everywhere by people who want them gone. And that's a huge problem.

But God says, into their second problem, verse 21, that he's going to overthrow all their enemies. The power of foreign kingdoms, those who would stand against God and his people, will be no match for him. You don't go toe-to-toe with the Lord and expect to come out victorious.

[17:48] Chariots, riders, swords, God triumphs over his enemies in Exodus-style fashion. And he brings his perfect justice.

Justice. Because God's victory and judgment over his enemies, all the way through, go together in the Bible. You know, there's a great chat with the girl who's cutting my hair down at the barbers this week.

And once we'd finished chatting about her love for Leonardo DiCaprio and the films that she enjoyed of his, we got chatting about the news. Okay? And about the things that have been on our news this week.

And the people in power, positions of influence who have abused what has been given to them. Right? What's been on our news this week? Footballers.

Yeah? Politicians. And so my question to her is, what do you do when you're denied justice? What do you do when a verdict comes back that says not proven?

[18 : 51] And you know it was anything but. Where do you go with that stuff? What do you do when someone gets away with it? And particularly, what do you do when somebody uses their power to gain an advantage?

And I started asking her, what would you do? And she said, well, listen, I know what the answer is, what you want to hear, but I would go about and try and get it myself. Like, what happens to the world if everybody starts thinking like that?

But more close to home, I said, well, yes, there's a problem out there, but what happens to the problem in here, in your heart, in my heart, when we demand our own little way? You know, the Bible says that there is a God who sees everything, and that one day all of us will have to answer for every deed, and one day all wrongs will be put to right.

And do you know what? She paused for a moment, she heard it, and she said, that makes total sense. Makes total sense. I take it that's what God is saying to his people here, who feel small, who feel helpless, that he will do it.

He's going to do it, verse 22. How's he going to do it? He's going to do it through his king. And all the way through this letter, Zerubbabel has been referred to the governor, yet here do you see in the text he's called my servant.

[20 : 07] And what that does is it brings him in to the line of King David. And so all the promises that God made to the Davidic king, that he was going to establish his rule, and that peace for his people was going to come through the line of this king, and his work, God is saying, I'm still going to do it.

Still going to do it. And so your two big problems, your holiness problem, and your power problem, I'm going to fix it, I'm going to sort it, I'm going to win. How am I going to do it? I'm going to do it through my king.

And through someone down the track who's going to come from your line. And here's an amazing thing, Matthew chapter 1. Who comes down the track? Zerubbabel's line.

Zerubbabel, and then it goes, son of, ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba, son of Joseph, son of Jesus, who is called the Messiah. Matthew points it out that Jesus comes from his line.

And let me just take you, as we almost work towards a close, let me just take you to, let me just take you to the one place that I found the most, I found the most moving, I was reading it again this week, the most moving in Jesus' life is he encountered an individual.

[21 : 18] And we get it in Mark chapter 5. And it's the one we just read earlier. I find it the most amazing scene is Jesus goes about his business. And Jesus, the context is, Jesus is on his way to heal this man called Jairus' daughter.

Now, Jairus is the synagogue leader. Now, we've got to understand that Jairus in this day, he's a man who carries some serious social capital. And Jairus' little girl is ill.

And Jesus is his only hope. And he comes and falls at his feet and says, would you come and heal my little girl? And Jesus is going. And Jesus, though, is delayed in getting there because a large crowd of people are trying to get at him.

And one of those people is this desperate woman who is as far as you can get from any kind of social capital.

Right? She's not given a name, but we're told everything about her. Mark chapter 5. She's a suffering woman. She's been hemorrhaging blood for 12 years.

[22 : 28] She's a poor woman. And she's spent all that she's got trying to get better from doctors, trying to get better. And yet her situation has only gotten worse.

And to compound it all, she's a suffering woman, she's a poor woman, that makes her, because of her condition, an unclean woman. You know, I read a story from a girl called Christy this week, who lives on her own down in London, and she's talking in the book that she's written about how when the news of lockdown first broke a couple of years ago, instantly because she lives on her own, and all the social connections are gone.

Her biggest fear was that nobody would see her. No one would see her. No one would know. No one would care. Do you know that feeling? You know, some of us will be here today, and you know

that feeling.

You know what it is. You know what it is to think, does anyone care? Does anyone see? And this tells us that Jesus sees. He knows. And he cares.

He sees this unclean woman. He knows her. He stops. It's wonderful in the story. He stops. All these people round about him, and this one woman reaches and touches, and he stops, and he looks.

[23 : 53] And she's so desperate to get to Jesus, her last punt of getting better, that she reaches out and touches his robe. Now remember everything that we've just talked about. Okay? What should that mean?

He is clean. And she is what? Unclean. So what should happen? Her uncleanness should be transferred to him.

But the reverse happens. She's made clean. This woman is healed physically. I take it a wonderful little taste, foretaste of Jesus' kingdom.

That day we will all be healed. And she's healed spiritually. Jesus says, Daughter, feel the intimacy in that language. Your faith has saved you.

And she's a follower of Jesus. Now you have to ask, what's going on there? Does Jesus just bend the rules because of who he is? No, no, no. What's going on there is Jesus is bearing her uncleanness on himself.

[24 : 56] He is bearing her infirmities. He is bearing her shame. And do you know what? That's exactly what goes on the cross as he dies. For every single person who trusts in him, he makes our shame.

He makes our sin. He makes our failures his own. And he bears it on the cross. And do you know what? By faith in him, almost like a mother, and by the child in her womb, we are gathered into Jesus and his cleanliness, his cleanness, is ours.

Oh, friends, would you see gloriously that Jesus is the answer to the people's home truth about holiness? He's the glorious answer. How can anyone be gallus when they've tasted the grace of Jesus?

You see who he is? God has, and more than that, rather, he is the risen Jesus. So God has glorified him. He's given him the divine seal of approval. He's bestowed on his son the signet ring.

And one day to this Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. And he is the one through whom God is going to make all things right.

[26 : 18] So here's what I was pitching this week as we draw this to a close. I was trying to pitch her this woman. And she's there on the final day. She's before the judgment seat of God. And someone says to her, what right of you to come in here?

Who are you to come in here? And she's got the audacity before the throne room of a holy God to look at Jesus sitting at the right hand of power on his throne and simply point at him and have the audacity, the boldness to claim four words as her own.

To point at him and say, he made me clean. Friends, that is our only hope. How good is this Jesus?

So what does this woman and this little boy who doesn't believe in goodbyes but believes in see you later? What does this first century Middle Eastern woman and this 21st century little boy in Northern Ireland have in common?

You know, they're trusting it all on the king with the signet ring on his finger. And if you're here today and you're feeling the weight of your sin, come to him.

[27 : 42] If you're here and you're feeling the weight of the fact that no one sees, no one knows, come to him because he's God's glorious answer to his promises. You know, we'll close with this, one of the most popular hymns down the ages.

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.

No other fount I know. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Let's pray, shall we? Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jesus.

And we thank you that he is the one who can make us clean. And we thank you for Jesus, the one who is all love and all power.

Father, and so as we respond to what you have done for us in giving us your son, help us, Lord, to walk with faith and obedience as we trust our unknown tomorrows to you, the knowing, all-knowing God.

[29 : 03] And so, Father, we just thank you that you are the God who knows us and loves us. Oh, Father, would you, by your Spirit, be at work in our hearts today, bringing assurance, bringing challenge, poking your finger on the areas where we need to change as we respond to who you are.

But, Father, would you flood our hearts with a sense of your love for us? And so, Lord, we pray these things because we pray in our King with a signet ring on his finger.

We pray in his precious and in his loving name. Amen. Amen.