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Haggai 2:20-23: *Our Confession: The Lord Rules*

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This morning we are finishing up our short sermon series on the book of Haggai...

I invite you to turn in your Bible to Haggai 2:20-23.

Hear now the Word of the Lord from the book of Haggai.

²⁰ The word of the Lord came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ “Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

²³ “‘On that day,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

It’s helpful if we take a brief survey of the history leading up to Haggai:

Because of Israel’s sin, they’re sent into exile.

The Babylonian army comes in and, under King Nebuchadnezzar, they destroy Solomon’s grand temple in Jerusalem...

The city is ransacked...

And a lot of the population are driven east to live in Babylon.

After 70 years under Babylonian rule, a new super power comes to rule...

Remember, Israel as a people are pretty small and insignificant.

The Persians defeat the Babylonians...

And under the Persian king, Cyrus, the people are allowed to return home.

He says, “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem.”
(Ezra 1:2)

So the first wave of Israelites are sent back home with orders to live in Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

They begin work on the temple, building the altar and laying foundations...

But their neighbors get scared and start to threaten them.

So work on the temple comes to a halt.

For years nothing happens with the temple...

Not too much thought is given to this place where the glory of God once lived...

This used to be the center of their lives.

So the Lord sends the prophet Haggai to the people...

To challenge them to make the Lord their first priority...

To encourage them to start work on the temple again...

Promising them that the Lord's glory will be great among them...

And assuring them that the Lord their God is still with them.

This is where the people are at in our passage this morning.

In the eyes of the world Israel is small and insignificant.

Persia is the empire of the day...

They make the decisions and hold the power.

King Darius is essentially ruler of the known world.

For the Israelites coming back home this is not what they wanted or expected.

It's easy to see how they could have felt defeated:

Seeing the Lord work through a Persian king, allowing them to come back home...

Only to still be under the rule of a foreign power...

Still under the rule of the Persians.

They expected the Lord to show his power and his sovereignty.

They expected the Lord to put *his* ruler on the throne...

A king appointed by God to rule the people.

Instead this Persian king ruled.

Life still seemed dark...

Israel was still surrounded by its enemies;
 They were still vulnerable to attacks;
 And the future didn't look as promising as they had expected.

But God sends Haggai the prophet to the people:

“Tell Zerubbabel that I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms.”

God tells his people that *he* is still in control...

That *he* is the one with the authority over all kingdoms.

And he does this through Zerubbabel.

Zeru who?

Who is this guy Zerubbabel?

Is that what you said? “Zerubbabel???”

What do we know about him and why is *he* made this promise?

From the Old Testament we know a few things about Zerubbabel.

First, we know that he was in exile.

He experienced what the people experienced in Babylon (Ezra 2:1-1)...

He knew what they went through being away from home.

Second, we know that he's a leader.

In our passage he's referred to as the governor of Judah;

Earlier in Haggai he's specifically named with the high priest Joshua;

He led the first wave of Israelites back to Judah from exile.

So we know that he plays a role as a leader of the people.

Third, we know that he was a main player in the rebuilding of the temple.

In Ezra we're told that he began rebuilding the altar and offered sacrifices to the Lord.

In Zechariah we're told that “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of the temple, and his hands will finish it.” (Zech 4:9)

So we know that he's an obedient guy...

Listening to the prophets' encouragement to rebuild and commit to the Lord.

But perhaps most importantly for us what we know about Zerubbabel...

Is who he comes from.

He comes from David's line...

King David, a man after God's own heart.

King David, the man God chose to lead his people.

King David, the man given a promise:

God made a promise to David saying, "I will establish a house/dynasty for you. I will raise up your offspring to succeed you...and I will establish his kingdom...I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (2 Sam 7:11-14)

God's promise to David and his people is that God will always be in control.

God will always have *his* person on the throne.

Through David's line God will bless his people.

King Darius might be on the Persian throne right now...

But God is the one in control...

God is the one who gets to decide who leads and rules.

And now from David's line comes Zerubbabel...

God's choosing of David's offspring—

This throne that lasts forever—

It passes through Zerubbabel.

In v. 23 Zerubbabel is called a "signet ring."

A signet was an engraving on something hard...like a ring...

It was pressed into a soft substance like wax.

Important people with authority (like kings) had signets to put their stamp on things...

It was a sign or seal of authenticity.

Only they had their engraving or signet, so if you saw their seal you knew it was official.

It'd be like receiving a letter with a raised stamp or impression from the company...

You know it's from them...

You know it's official....

It has their mark.

Through Zerubbabel God is saying...

"It's official."

"I'm still in control."

"I still rule over all."

"I still hold the future in my hands."

"And I *will* overturn royal thrones. I *will* establish my kingdom."

A promise is made to Zerubbabel...

The one from David's line...

The one chosen by God...

A promise is made to this governor of Judah:

"Although the world sees you, Zerubbabel, only as governor of this small piece of the Persian Empire..."

"*You* are my signet ring..."

"*You* are authorized under *my* authority to act on behalf of *me*."

A great promise is made to Zerubbabel... a promise that doesn't come true quite as we'd expect.

Zerubbabel doesn't become the official king;

Israel doesn't overthrow the nations;

The temple is rebuilt, but the glory of the Lord never returns as it once did.

One commentator says,

"It remains one of the great puzzles that, after reaching the zenith ascribed to him here by Haggai, nothing more is known about the activities of Zerubbabel." (Eugene March)

A great promise is made of this man, but we don't really know what becomes of him.

Was God faithful to his promise?

I'm sure the people were asking, "Is God still in control?"

It's the same question that we still ask today:

"Is God in control?"

“Does the Lord still rule over all creation?”

There are a lot of people out there today who answer, “Surely not.”

Maybe not in these direct words, but we see evidence of it everyday.

What does it look like in someone’s life to live as if God is not in control?

Hopelessness.

If God is not in control of this dark world full of:

Violence;

Bullying;

Marriages collapsing;

And loved ones dying;

All that there’s room for then is hopelessness.

Any ray of light, any sliver of hope, is sucked out of the room by despair...

At best, all that’s left is leaving life up to chance or the inevitability of a lonely death.

It was in the news this past week:

Kate Spade, Anthony Bourdain, and the Dutch Queen’s sister all committed suicide (separate occasions).

Three big-names took their own lives;

Three people who seemingly had it all.

I don’t know what their relationship with the Lord looked like, or if they had one...

But it got to the point for them where they saw no other way out of the pain.

They saw death as their only escape from the despair.

How sad and painful it must have been for them—

Three people who looked like they had it all together from the outside—

Only to be tore up by darkness and hopelessness on the inside.

And how many of us suffering under that same pain?

Even us, we who know the Lord...

How many of us are still overcome by the grief and pain of life...

It’s easy for us too to look at life and feel like God has lost control.

We may think differently with our minds...

Able to tell ourselves intellectually that God still sits on the throne...

But in our gut we sense that we're all alone.

We sense that the hopelessness and despair of life has won;

And that God has resigned us all to the same dismal fate.

The promise made to Zerubbabel didn't come fully true in his time.

They didn't see the full restoration of the temple...

They didn't see God's leader seated on a political throne.

They were still under the rule of the Persians.

But today we see what Zerubbabel couldn't see.

We see that God was faithful to his promise...

That God was still in control.

Because we know that through King David's line...

Through Zerubbabel...

Came Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter one where the genealogy of Christ is given...

Zerubbabel's name is stated in the list of those who came after the Babylonian exile.

Christ came from this line, traced back to Abraham and including David and Zerubbabel...

Zerubbabel was only a shadow of the things to come...

He was only a type of Jesus Christ.

Who also went into exile with the people...

As did Zerubbabel.

God the Son, came down to earth to live with us.

He came to live with us, people caught in a big mess of sin.

And he walked with us.

And as the people looked to Zerubbabel as a leader...

So too was Christ a leader...

Teaching people the true meaning of the law...

Showing people how to live with love and compassion.

And just as Zerubbabel was a main player in rebuilding the temple...

Jesus Christ *was* the temple:

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise up it again.” (John 2:19)

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God.

In him we find the full glory of God.

No longer does God reside in a building...

He comes to us in human form...

In the person of Jesus Christ.

He is the one promised to us in the Scriptures.

Everything in the Old Testament points to him.

Everything builds up to this point where Christ enters into the world and dies for God's people...

God the Son came into the world to save us from our sins...

He came into the world to save us from the mess we got ourselves into.

He is the long-awaited Savior of the world.

And he is the one now seated on the throne.

This is what we do when we profess our faith.

We declare that what God says is true...

That his promise made to us in baptism to love us is validated.

We proclaim that we were once dead in our sin...

Unable to save ourselves...

Unable to resuscitate our dead bodies.

But because he loves us...

And because he chose...

God brought us back to life in Christ.

Christ's blood was poured out for the forgiveness of our sins...

To pull us out of the world's biggest mess.

But our profession doesn't end there...

It doesn't stop with us.

Ryan, your profession of faith isn't just a testimony that *you* believe...

It's a testimony to the whole world that God is still in control...

Our confession is that God still rules...

And that Christ even now is seated on the throne, ruling the universe.

"Jesus is Lord."

This is our confession.

Lord, not just of my life...

But Lord of the universe.

This is our reality...

This is the reality of the whole world...accept it or not...

That Jesus is Lord.

The one who loves us more than anyone in heaven or on earth is seated on the highest throne.

He is the one in control.

He is the one ruling.

This is a bold profession that brings hope to a hurting world.

It speaks light into dark places...

And brings life where there once was death.

Brothers and sisters, we've all been given this hope.

And we come here every Sunday to remember this hope...

To remember and rehearse the story of God's love for us...

So that we can go out into a hurting world with the message of God's love.