

Title: **DISCOURAGEMENT FORBIDDEN**

Text: Haggai 2:1-9

Date: Sunday Evening — March 2, 2008

Tape: Haggai #7

Readings: *Merle Hart and Bob Duff*

Introduction:

How easily we are discouraged from doing that for which the Lord God put us on this earth. It is that discouragement that I want to address in this message. My text is Haggai 2:1-9. The title of my message is **DISCOURAGEMENT FORBIDDEN**.

This second chapter of Haggai contains three sermons God's prophet delivered to the Jews after their return from Babylonian captivity. The object of these three sermons was the same as in those recorded in the first chapter of Haggai's prophecy. He was sent to revive and encourage God's people. Specifically, he was sent to encourage them in the work for which the Lord God had established them in the land, the rebuilding of his house in Jerusalem. The Lord God sent these people back to Jerusalem to re-establish his worship in the land. Haggai's messages were designed to lift up the hands that hung down, strengthen the feeble knees and make straight paths for their feet. Let's read the sermon together.

(Haggai 2:1-9) "In the seventh *month*, in the one and twentieth *day* of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying, (2) Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, (3) Who *is* left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? *is it* not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? (4) Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I *am* with you, saith the LORD of hosts: (5) *According to* the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. (6) For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, *it is* a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry *land*; (7) And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. (8) The silver *is* mine, and the gold *is* mine, saith the LORD of hosts. (9) The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the

former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.”

Satan does his utmost to keep us from fulfilling our mission in this world and to hinder the work of God. He succeeded in hindering these Jews from building the temple; and he endeavors to hinder God’s people today from spreading the gospel. A spiritual temple is to be built for the Lord our God. That is our work, our responsibility, the reason the Lord has put us here. Satan will stop at nothing to keep us from it. He is a cunning and crafty foe. So, tonight, I have a message by which I pray that God the Holy Spirit will arm our souls “*against the wiles of the devil*” (Ephesians 6:11).

A DISCOURAGED PEOPLE

First, we have before us a discouraged people. **God’s people in this world are often discouraged and downcast.** Satan sought with great subtlety and craftiness to keep the Jews from building the temple when they were established in their land; and he had succeeded in his scheme. He did so by setting the world in their hearts and making them selfish, filling them with selfish ambitions. Once they had escaped Babylon, these Jews soon gave up the work the Lord had trusted to their hands because each one was eager to build his own house, and cared nothing for the house of God. Each family pleaded its own urgent needs. That might have been in some sense a reasonable thing. After all, a man must provide for his family’s needs. But, soon they felt that their needs included lavish luxury, and they were in hot competition to see who could build the biggest, fanciest, most luxurious, most impressive ceiled house. — While they were devoting themselves to the accumulation of more stuff, the house of God was a pile of rubbish!

When confronted with their sin and folly by God’s prophet, they replied, — “*The time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.*” They were waiting for a more convenient time. But a more convenient time never comes, because men whose hearts are set on this world never have enough. So they offer all kinds of excuses for doing nothing in the cause of Christ, excuses for neglecting the worship of God and the work of building his house.

- In the summer it’s too hot.
- In the winter it’s too cold.
- In the morning it’s too early.
- In the evening it’s too late.

- When they are young they have children to raise.
- When they are old they are too tired.

God's prophet put his finger on their real problem. It was the love of this world, utter selfishness that kept them from doing what they knew they ought to do. Nothing else, just selfishness! Haggai cried, in verse 4 of chapter 1, — *“Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?”*

Haggai's message did not fall upon deaf ears. God's people accepted the rebuke and were roused to renewed devotion by the Spirit of God. We read in verse twelve of the first chapter, — *“Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.”*

But the revival did not last long. The people were soon discouraged again, and again gave up the work. This time the older men threw a stumbling block before their younger brethren. Look at verse 3 in the 2nd chapter. The older men, recalling former days and the first temple, ridiculed the work as a very small thing compared with the temple of Solomon, which some of them had seen and others had heard their fathers talk about. Haggai describes what was going on in verse 3. — *“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing”*

- Isn't it amazing how old people always talk about how much better things used to be?
- I find it equally amazing that those who never do anything are the quickest to criticize that which others do.
- And those who are most quick to speak their mind are always most quickly offended when someone else does.

Being disheartened by these old sour-pusses, the younger men began to be discouraged and again turned aside from their work, thinking it could never measure up, that it would not really amount to anything. They were very willing to use any excuse they could find; and seized this one.

I have said all that to say this: — Things are no different today. Discouragement comes very easy to us. It is a native weed that grows wildly in the soil of our corrupt hearts. To believe God requires divine

intervention and grace. Unbelief is natural. It takes little for us to become faint-hearted, because we have within us an evil heart of unbelief, ever ready to depart from the living God and to depart from his revealed will.

- Sometimes we become disheartened because the work God has trusted to us is overwhelming.
- Often we become discouraged because we focus our thoughts on our inabilities. Because we can do little, we do nothing.
- Discouragement often arises from living in the past.
- How many times we have brought our hearts down with discouragement by comparing ourselves with others.

Such discouragement and the idleness it brings is very common. Zerubbabel and Joshua were infected with it, just as much as the residue of the people. Even Elijah once had a pity me party and longed to die.

This faint-heartedness is so common that it was the plague of Israel throughout the Old Testament. They were discouraged at the Red Sea, by the mere rattling of Pharaoh's chariots. They were discouraged when they found no water. They were discouraged when they had eaten up the bread they brought out of Egypt. They were discouraged when they heard about the giants and the walled cities in the Land of Canaan. **What havoc cowardice wreaks!** Fear and unbelief works evil in every direction. **Yet, discouragement is the national epidemic of God's Israel.** But God forbids it.

BE STRONG

That is the *second* thing I want you to see. **God forbids discouragement.** He commands us to be strong. Whenever discouragement comes in it is dreadfully weakening. I know it is because Haggai was bidden to say three times to the governor, high priest, and people, "**Be strong.**" Being discouraged, their hands hung down, and their knees were feeble. **Faith walks in the strength of God's omnipotence; but unbelief makes us utter weakness.** Unbelief fails in everything.

Discouragement breeds weakness, and weakness breeds idleness, causing us to neglect our known responsibilities. Haggai said, "*Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work.*" **They had ceased to build. They had begun to talk and argue, but they had laid down the trowel.** They were extremely wise in their observations, and

criticisms, and prophecies; but the walls were not built. One man knew exactly how big Solomon's temple was. Another found fault with the architect who was used to draw plans for the temple. One objected to this and another to that; but each had his opinion and was determined to make his opinion known.

The fact is, when we have nothing to do, when we are discouraged by our unbelief from doing good, we are sure to do evil. When we cease from the work of the Lord, and waste time in idle banter, debate nonsense and look for faults in one another. Rather than building the house of God and promoting the worship of God, rather than doing something for the furtherance of the gospel, these fine men...

- Argued points of church history.
- Debated questions about prophetic times and seasons.
- Wrote out rules of discipline, just in case they ever got around to building the temple.
- Developed a sound creed for people to sign before coming into the temple.
- Held lengthy discussions about exactly what kind of mortar had to be used to build a true temple.
- Thumbed their noses at those working to build the temple saying, because they wanted to have a pure temple.

OUR STRENGTH

God's prophet says three times, — "*Be strong; be strong; be strong.*" But we have no strength. And it is even worse to seek strength in ourselves and attempt to work for and serve God, attempt to do the work of God in the strength of the flesh, than it is to do nothing. But God's prophet does not direct us to look for strength in ourselves. Oh, no! If we would be strong we must find our strength in our God. That is the *third* thing I want you to see. — **Christ is our Strength.** — "*The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God*" (Exodus 15:2). — "*God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect*" (2 Samuel 22:33). — "*The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower*" (Psalm 18:2). — "*In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God*" (Psalm 62:7).

He who commands us to be strong says, — “ *Be strong...for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not*” (vv. 4-5).

Notice that the words “*according to*” were added by our translators. **The Triune God, who commands us to be strong, promises that he, the Triune God is with us in all his Being.** He is our Strength!

- Christ “*the Word*” is with us.
- God the Father, our covenant God is with us.
- God the Holy Spirit remains among us.

Reading the text as it is given in our translation, the promise is equally sweet. — God is with us precisely according to his covenant word, his word that he will not take back and cannot break. God remembers his covenant and stands by his promises. Therefore his Spirit remains with us. Therefore, he says, “*fear ye not!*” Let me be free of fear, and no obstacle can daunt me, no enemy can stand before me, nothing can turn me aside from my labor.

The Lord was with his people in the fiery cloudy pillar which was conspicuous in the midst of the camp. His presence was their glory and their defence. This is a type of the presence of the Spirit with his church. **The Holy Spirit descended upon the church at Pentecost, and he has never been taken back.** He abides with God’s church permanently. He is with you to comfort you, to help you and to enable you as the servants of God in this world. Above all else, he is with us to make us know our weakness that we may find our strength in Christ. Let me show you (2 Corinthians 12:2-10).

(2 Corinthians 12:2-10) “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. (3) And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) (4) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (5) Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. (6) For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me. (7) And lest I should be

exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. (8) For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

God's grace in Christ is sufficient to meet our every need (v. 9).

(2 Corinthians 12:9) "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Here God's elect are assured of his grace in Christ and the absolute sufficiency of it always and in all things. One of the names of our great God is *El-Shaddai*, which means *God All Sufficient!* The grace of God in Christ and that alone is our sufficiency. It is sufficient grace because it is effectual grace. **God's grace in Christ is sufficient for us for everything and at all times.**

- Sufficient to accomplish all his saving purposes!
- Sufficient to pardon, justify, regenerate, sanctify, and preserve us!
- Sufficient in every time of need!
- Sufficient in health and sufficient in sickness!
- Sufficient life and sufficient in death!
- Sufficient in judgment!
- Sufficient to present us faultless before the presence of his glory forever!

Look at verse nine again. In the second part of the verse **our Savior declares that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.**

(2 Corinthians 12:9) "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Obviously, our weakness contributes nothing to the perfection of Christ's strength. He is the omnipotent God! The obvious meaning of this statement is that the strength of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ appears to be or is manifestly made perfect through the weakness of those sinners who are saved by his grace. Paul writes in another place, — "*When we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.*"

- I have no strength to atone for my sin. Christ is my Atonement.
- I have no strength to obey God's law. Christ obeyed for me.
- I have no strength to give myself life. Christ is my Life.
- I have no strength to resist temptation. Christ is my Preservation.
- I have no strength to draw near to God. Christ is my way of access to the Father.
- I have no strength to make myself holy. Christ is my Holiness.
- I have no strength to resist the devil. Christ has bound the dragon of hell for me.

Read the last sentence of verse nine one more time. "*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" **It is only when we are brought to know and acknowledge our weakness, infirmity, frailty, nothingness and insufficiency that the power of Christ and his all sufficient grace rests upon us.** The moment we flex our muscles, straighten our backs, lift our chins and say, "I can do this," we are in trouble.

Now, look at Paul's statement in verse 10. — "*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*" — "**When I am weak, then am I strong.**" — Here, writing by inspiration, Paul obeys the admonition given in Joel 3:10, where it is written, — "*Let the weak say, I am strong.*" He that is weak and sees himself to be so is strong in Christ, and has the blessed experience of renewed strength from him day by day.

Obviously, then, when I am strong, then am I weak. Many there are who imagine themselves wonderfully strong in knowledge. They seem to know everything about everything. They were, they say, born again this morning; and before dusk they have mastered the Word of God and are ready to become instructors of others. They do not hesitate to disagree and dispute with anyone. You do not have to ask for their opinion. They will give to

you, if you just pause to breathe in their presence. They are sure of everything.

Spurgeon said, “I have noticed these fine gentlemen are the first to deny the faith, and to fall into all manner of heresies... Those who are so very sure are always the most uncertain.”

Whenever we feel ourselves superior to others in any spiritual matter, we have reason to be suspicious of ourselves. Beware of self-confidence. Self-confidence is nothing but a prettier word for self-righteousness. You can mark it down as a matter of unflinching certainty — When I am strong, then am I weak!

Now let me show you the meaning of this statement. — “**When I am weak then am I strong.**” When I am weak **before the glorious majesty and holiness of God,** then I am strong because my weakness forces me to look to Christ alone for mercy and grace. This is exactly what Isaiah experienced (Isaiah 6:1-7).

(Isaiah 6:1-7) “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. (2) Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. (3) And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory. (4) And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. (5) Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (6) Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: (7) And he laid *it* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”

When I am weak **before the holy law of God,** when I see what it requires, when I realize that my very best righteousness is nothing but filthy rags before the holy Lord God, then am I strong, because my weakness compels me to look to Christ alone as my Savior.

- My Righteous Representative.

- My Satisfying Substitute.
- My All-prevailing Advocate.

When I am weak **before my trials and temptations in this world**, then I am strong, because my weakness forces me to look to Christ alone to uphold, sustain, and strengthen me. My enemies sometimes overwhelm me. The world, the flesh and the devil are too much for me. I am no match for them. Like Paul, I cry out to God to take away the thorn in my flesh. Sometimes, he takes away the thorn; but usually he responds by saying, *My grace is sufficient for thee*” and graciously causes me to know that it is.

When I am weak **before my cares in this world**, then I am strong. I am no different from other men. I have the same cares and concerns as you men. I am a father. As such, I am often fearful for my daughter’s soul and for the souls of her children. I am a husband. As such, I am fearful for my wife’s provision and welfare when I am gone. I am a pastor. As such, I am fearful for your souls. Yet, in my weakness, Christ is my strength. I say with David, *“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee”* (Psalm 56:3).

When I am weak **before my responsibilities as God’s messenger to you**, then I am strong, because my weakness makes me seek God’s strength and grace in Christ. Knowing the burden of the Word of the Lord and the power of the gospel, I constantly cry, *“Who is sufficient for these things?”* When I do, I hear the voice of every true prophet, every true apostle, every true preacher of the past, and every true preacher today echoing the words of Paul - *“Our sufficiency is of God”* (2 Corinthians 2:16; 3:5).

When I am weak **in spiritual watchfulness**, then am I strong because Christ, my Shepherd, is watching over me. Like the disciples sleeping in Gethsemane, I often find that though my spirit is willing, the flesh is weak.

I will probably be weak **in death**; but even then I will be strong, because I will have no hope for my soul but Christ who I the Resurrection and the Life. I hear a good many young, inexperienced believers, almost mockingly, speaking of the fears some of God’s saints have in death. But I wonder if those “dormitory bravehearts” will be so strong when they face leaving this world. Should you visit me on my deathbed and sense that I am experiencing some apprehensions, or fears, do not be surprised. (If Peter could sink in the water, so can I!) I hope it shall not be so. But if it is, do not be surprised. I am a sinner now; and I will be a sinner then. I was born a

sinner; and I will die a sinner, a sinner saved by free grace alone. **If I am too weak to brave Jordan's chilly waters, God my Savior, my good Shepherd, will yet carry his weak sheep upon his shoulders to the other side.**

All these weaknesses cause me, like the scared little rabbit described in Proverbs 30:26, to run to the Rock, my hiding place, who is my strength. Christ is my Rock, the Rock of my salvation. Like a weak, scared rabbit, I make my house in him.

This is my prayer, Lord God, make me weak before you, and keep me weak.

- Consciously Weak.
- Growingly Weak.
- Painfully Weak.
- Contritely Weak.

I pray that God will graciously do the same thing for you. This is God's promise to weak, needy, helpless sinners (Isaiah 66:1-2).

(Isaiah 66:1-2) "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that ye build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest? (2) For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even to him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

GOD'S PROMISE

Now, go back to Haggai 2 for a minute. God commands us to "work" in verse 4; and work we must, devoting ourselves to the cause of Christ. **But just as he who commands us to be strong is himself our Strength, he who commands us to work is he who performs the work.** Look at his promise in verses 6-9. Remember, in verse 8 of chapter 1, he says to you and me, "Build my house. Here, he promises that he will do the building of his house.

(Haggai 2:6-9) "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it *is* a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry *land*; (7) And I will shake all nations, and the desire of

all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. (8) The silver *is* mine, and the gold *is* mine, saith the LORD of hosts. (9) The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.”

- He will shake heaven and earth to save his people.
- The house and temple he is building is his church.
- The desire of all nations is our Lord Jesus Christ.
- He will full his house.
- Our poverty and inability will be no hindrance to him. He declares, “*The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.*”
- Christ is the Glory of his house.

In this second temple built at Jerusalem, there were five things missing, which were the real glory of Solomon’s temple: (1.) The Ark of the Covenant, (2.) The Mercy-seat, (3.) The Urim and Thummim — Lights and Perfections, (4.) The Continually Burning Fire on the Altar, and (5.) The Shechinah. All these things ind their fulfillment in Christ, who is the great Glory of the House of God.

- In this place God gives peace!
- And when he gives you the peace of his house, the peace of God in Christ Jesus, his word to you is, — “*from this day will I bless you*” (v. 19).

Discouragement is, by all these things, forbidden!

Amen.