

## *The Desired of Nations*

Haggai 2:6-8

September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Randy Lovelace

As we turn this morning to the Scripture passage, as we look together at this final Sunday in our mission's week and our missions' theme, *The Desired of All Nations*, it is an opportunity for us together to look at this passage from Haggai. But as is normally our practice, we would have the Scripture printed—or at least, not printed—but on the screens before you. That will not take place this morning, because the passage that was on the screens is from a different translation. That was my fault. I also increased it by one verse, which was also my fault. So we're going to go old school, and I'm just going to read the passage. If you have your Bibles, please turn to the book of Haggai, as we'll look at chapter 2. We'll be looking at verses 6 through 9. Haggai chapter 2, verses 6 through 9.

As you turn there—this is one of the shortest books of the Bible, but it has within it a great word of promise. A great word of hope in the midst of great difficulty and discouragement for the people of God who were Israel. They were in exile. The temple was no longer, and they are facing: what does the future hold? And in that, God would send word through his prophets. Much of what can be read here can also be found in Ezra as well as Zachariah, but here in Haggai, we learn of God's word through his prophet—that he would in fact see that the temple would be rebuilt, but that he would do a new thing, that he would in fact fill that with greater glory. What is that greater glory? It is nothing less than a desire of nations, what would be the treasure of all nations: Christ alone. Haggai chapter 2, verses 6 through 9.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the Lord Almighty. "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord Almighty. "And in this place I will grant peace," declares the Lord Almighty."

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me this morning?

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace to us this morning, and we would ask that you would open our eyes and open our ears that we would see wondrous things in your Word. That you would magnify Christ for us in our hearts. We praise you and thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

The desired of nations; it was to be Christ. But here in the book of Haggai, the prophet wasn't necessarily foreseeing that it would be in the person of Christ, but simply knowing that God would do a new thing. And in this book, what we read of the truth that in fact they needed to hear: that God was going to bring the fulfillment of his promises, and that he was going to set aright their desires—that he wanted to challenge what it was their desires were being set upon. It's important to ask this question: what should our desires be set upon? Because, in fact, as they say here, the desire of nations is not Christ. It isn't today and it wasn't at that time. It was not the one true God of Israel. But it's important that we at least talk about our desires, because we are desiring beings.

Our desires—or, as one writer would say—our *loves*, shape what we think, how we think, and how we live. It is true. My mother always told me growing up—and I never liked hearing it—she said, "What you really want to do, Randy, you will find time to do." Drove me nuts, because she was right. What we really want to do, we find time to do. Does it mean that everything we do is something we want to do? Not

necessarily, not directly, but certainly indirectly at least, because we know if we fail to do something, perhaps we'll get blown back. So out of an effort of self-preservation and protection, we do things—maybe not on the surface that we want to do—but we know it meets a deeper want. We are desiring beings. The year I became a Christian, this came so powerfully to me through the band U2 and their song, “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For.” Have you found what you’re looking for? This was something that Bono wrote about in his own testimony. Of course, he’s writing about it metaphorically, but when he says:

I have kissed honey lips;  
I have felt the healing in her fingertips;  
I have burned like fire,  
This burning desire;  
I have spoke with a tongue of angels;  
I have held the hand of a devil;  
It was warm in the night;  
I was cold as a stone;  
But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for

As the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, we talk in the language of in the language of desire, for we know that in the heart of every human being is deep-seated desire. And the problem with our desire is that it is often, if not very rarely, directed towards anything related to God—much less, towards Jesus Christ. Our desires are fickle things. They change with the whim, and they come and they go like the wind. That is the same case for Israel at this time. We now stand situated at this time that Haggai is being written at five hundred and twenty years, give or take a few years, before the coming of Christ. This is now sixty-five, roughly, years after Solomon’s temple was destroyed by the enemies of God’s people. There is no temple. They are in exile. The temple is in ruins. They are greatly discouraged. What about their desires? And what word would God have? It is here for us. You’ll see it in the outline that I’ve drawn up here directly from the text itself: *in a little while*. We’ll see in the opening verse, *nations will shake*. And then finally, *greater glory*. In a little while; nations will shake; and greater glory.

In a little while. We see this in verse 6, and he says: “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth.’ ” That statement in and of itself gives a whole history of Israel in one verse. Why? Because he says “in a little while.” Meaning, this is for us to be a word, that indeed when a prophet gives a prophecy in the Old Testament, there needs to be a near-time fulfillment as well as there will be a far-time realization and fulfillment of the promise. Go read Deuteronomy 18, that if a prophet utters something that is not foreseen, is not fulfilled, he is to be put to death. So there is a near-time fulfillment of this promise in a little while, but there is also a long-time promise as well. But it says that “I will once again shake the nations.” What is he referring to there? When he talks about shaking the earth and the heaven, this is calling the people of God all the way back to Mount Sinai, where the Lord was with Moses on the mountain and the earth shook and they were quaking in their boots. This is the Lord who has spoken. And the Lord reminds them, “I am the one who has drawn you up out of Egypt. Out of the land of slavery, I have redeemed you.”

But what about their present context? They were in a time of great discouragement. As I said, the temple of Solomon was destroyed. It was lying in rubble. And what that meant was the following: the temple of the living God was to be, in the midst of the people of God, a couple of things. First, it was a statement of his favor. The presence of the temple of God was a statement of his favor. Secondly, it was a statement of God’s presence; for where the temple was, where the law of God was held, and where the worship of his people took place, was where his presence was in the midst of his people. The third thing in which the temple represented: it was a place in which God’s law was taught—again, taking them back

all the way to the mosaic covenant where God gave to them the mosaic law, the moral law, the Ten Commandments, and all the attending commandments to be a moral law of instruction that reflects God's character, his holiness, his faithfulness to his people.

But not only was it a reading of God and a place where God's law and his moral character and his righteousness were celebrated—it was also a place where God's *grace* was celebrated. For God's law was to be read and taught but intricately connected to that law; it was also the way in which God instructed his people, that when they failed to uphold the law—which they inevitably would do—he has graciously provided a way to atone for sins. The temple was a place where sacrifices were offered to atone and to cover over the sins of the people. So here they are, the temple is no longer, and it lies in ruins, and they are greatly discouraged. The Lord knew that. Just prior to these verses, we hear him say, "I know that you are discouraged," and he says " 'Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.' " They *were* fearing. They were looking around, and they were like, "Can't it be like it used to be?" Because at this point in the book of Haggai, there are two or three words, great statements that Haggai gives to the people.

By this point in the book of Haggai, something interesting had happened. The foundation of the temple was beginning to be rebuilt. But as commentators and scholars have discovered throughout the history of this point in the rebuilding of the temple, a great discouragement fell over the people of God, because as they started to form up the foundation again and build up the stones, those who were alive during Solomon's temple and all of its grandeur began to look on this new rebuilt temple and go, "That's not like it used to be. It's not gonna be as glorious. If it isn't as glorious, will God bless it?" But God wants to tell them, "You want to go back, but *I'm* telling you there's a greater glory" And yet they were so filled with discouragement—and I will tell you, are we so different than they are?

Now, here I want to ask, if you are a Christian in the Lord Jesus Christ: as you woke up this morning, or as you were walking around or living your life this week, as you looked at the world around you, were you encouraged or discouraged? Do you think about nations at war with nations? Threats of war and rumors of war? Sectarian violence? We see violence in our own land. People against people. People against authority.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Pastor Tim and I went to a conference down in Arlington where a professor and pastor was speaking on the world in which we live, and this discouragement kind of set in on the entire group as we were gathered for the seminar. Halfway through, he had been teaching about how we live in such an individualistic world—he calls it the "I" world—and he's looking at this "I" world through the lens of human relationships, human sexuality, and he began to look at all these things. And after an hour, I was standing at the back of the room, and I was just like, "*Ughhh*." And it was just unrelenting. When finally—there was about thirty or forty of us who were pastors and counselors there—after about an hour of this, there was a brief moment and he goes, "Well, I pretty much know you're wondering, 'Where's the good news?' " And I'll just confess to you, I just said out loud: "Yeah, I think I need a drink!" Because what he was talking about was the brokenness of marriage. He was citing a Pew Research Center poll that increasing numbers of young people in their twenties are not only cohabitating outside of marriage, they have absolutely no desire for marriage, because there's no *hope* at all in human relationships in actually being able to last. When they asked college students what they thought about it, they said, "Look, the divorce rate is over 50%. Why would I even bother?" Many are from broken homes and have no real hope not just in marriage but in human relationships at all. And then it begins to go further and further down, and what's so easy for Christians is to look outside in the world and go, "Man, it's so *bad* out there! I wish we could go back to some other simpler time." But really, the purpose for the conference was for us to focus on *us*.

If you think about the all-too-large percentage of Christians who are not staying married, the all-too-large percentage of Christians—not pointing *at* the world but looking *inside the walls of the church*—how many are addicted to things like pornography, both men and women? Addicted to all kinds of things? And as we look at our own hearts at the yawning, unrelenting loneliness and separation in human relationships—even horizontal relationships are so broken. Not just in marriage, but just in human relationships. And we mourn it, and it's so discouraging, and we *feel* it, do we not? With all the social media in the world, all the hashtags, all the videos, all the pictures—do we really feel any more connected? I mean, *really* connected? A challenge to one of my friends who writes so eloquently as a professor at a university—he writes lamenting how online education is killing the local, smaller university. And our conversation has really been about, “Okay. Fair enough. But if it wasn't for Facebook, would you be in touch with your oldest and longest term friends?” Because if we're honest, aren't phone calls and personal conversations quite frankly just inconvenient and messy and time-consuming?

It is so hard to not wake up in the morning and go, “Is this all there is?” We're not so different than our Jewish forbearers... and I want that to hang there. There are a lot of tears and a lot of brokenness here in this room, and it is something we need: a word of hope. That is what this word was to the nation of Israel. He had one word for them: *do not fear*. And he said that in the second main point: “nations will not be shaken.” That's what he tells us in verse 7. He says, “ ‘I will shake the nations, and what is desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty.” What he's meaning to tell them is that, “in the midst of your discouragement, I want to tell you that I am going to move again, beginning this day, and I am going to be with you as my people, I love you and we will see the temple rebuilt.” But notice, the emphasis here is not on the edifice. The emphasis is that “I will *fill* the house with glory”; that “the nations will *not* overcome you.”

But then there's another thing, when he says here, he says, “I will shake the nations and *all* the silver that is mine—*all of it*, declares the Lord—and the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the one of former days.” And this will happen because the Lord will raise up a new king. And the king's name that we learn of in the book of Haggai is King Zerubbabel. King Zerubbabel would be the one through whom he would lead his people to see the temple rebuilt. Now why is this important? It's because King Zerubbabel is the descendent of David. And he says to Zerubbabel at the end of this book through his prophet Haggai, he says, “You, Zerubbabel, will be a signet ring for me. You will be a gemstone for the Lord as a descendent of David.” What in the world is the Lord saying? The Lord is saying, “Do you remember the promise I made to Moses? I brought you up out of the land of slavery. Do you remember my promise to David, that I will be your God and you will be my people, and I will make you a blessing unto all nations? I will multiply you.” *Now* he's saying, “I'm not only going to see the building filled again with a greater glory; I will also give you a king of my own choosing.” And he's saying to them, “I will defeat your enemies. *Do not fear*.” And then he says, “When I do this, the desired of all nations, the treasure of all nations, will come in.”

Now, the near-term fulfillment of that is that the temple was, in fact, rebuilt under Zerubbabel. The nation of Israel, though still in exile, was being restored. And indeed, their enemies would not overcome them during this time. The Lord would stay faithful to his promise. But more than that, what the Lord has begun here is also a long-time promise which will find its fulfillment in Christ alone. Because it is this temple, *this* temple, which would be built and then, shortly before the birth of Christ, would undergo a rehabilitation. A renewal. It would be in *this* temple that Christ would be found by his parents at age eleven, teaching in the temple. It would be *this* temple that would be refurbished under Herod, that would then be the place to which Jesus would come to clear out, the court of the Gentiles, which was to be a place for the nations to come to worship the triune God. Jesus would come and remove the tables so that the people of the earth could come and worship the triune God. And Jesus said, “This is my Father's house. My zeal is for my Father's house to be a house of prayer.” And it would be in *this* temple, which is

being rebuilt, that the curtain would be torn from the top to the bottom—at what? At the crucifixion of Christ.

There was an immediate fulfillment that the nations will shake because they will not defeat the nation of Israel, but the world would shake again, and what caused the ripping of that curtain? It was an earthquake at the crucifixion of Christ. This is God's promise: the nations again will shake at the fulfillment of the promises of God. Do not fear. And you may be tempted to want to build a wall around your life and build up a nice secure place, a hedge against the world—but that is not what the message of the Lord is to you. The Lord's message to us is *do not fear*. Do not look at your circumstances around you and say, "Surely the Lord has forsaken us." Rather, oftentimes it's not until we've reached the end of our rope that we really see that not is the Lord there, but he always *has* been there. Do not fear.

But there is not just this promise that the nations will shake; it is also the greater glory. He tells us this in verse 8. He says, " 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty." Because of all that the temple meant, what the Lord's promise is here is that "I will fill it with a glory; I will fill it with a peace; I will fill it with my presence that will satisfy every desire; every longing will find its home in me." And when this comes, as a promise that this greater glory would come, there are three things which both tell us about the text and also apply it for us.

It is first that this greater glory is a challenge to us, as it was a challenge to the people of Israel. Because of this: they weren't just doing nothing while they were discouraged. The first chapter of Haggai tell us that in the midst of their discouragement, though there was no temple, though Solomon's temple was in ruins, what were they doing? In verse 3 of chapter 1 it tells us this: "Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai." Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses while this house remains a ruin? Now, this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but you have harvested little. You eat but never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it." It's not that they didn't have personal belongings and some degree of wealth and blessing; the problem was, it wasn't enough. The harvest was there, but it didn't last. The riches were there, but they were constantly having to spend it to put more food on the table, more wine in their glasses. The Lord was allowing a severe mercy so that their stomachs would not be full and they would not be enriched with great wine, because he didn't want them to find their satisfaction in those things. It is both a challenge of God and also a statement of God's love to his people. Let me ask you: is the challenge any different to us in our day?

One of my friends wrote this week, while quoting a 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, he says, "Have middle class Christians traded faith, hope, and love for security, material comfort, and ambitious success?" We have beautiful homes. We have wonderful clothes. We enjoy the richest of foods at our fingertips. But the Lord will graciously and lovingly confront us at every point where we try to find our hope, our grounding, in them. Out of love, he will not allow us to find legitimacy or success in having a little bit of a wider television, that one more room off the back of the house, that one more new coat, that one more great meal. All of it is gift, but we're never to confuse the gift with the giver. The Lord challenged his people in that day as he challenges us with this question: who's kingdom are we building? Are we building the Lord's kingdom, or are we building our own? I ask myself that same question as I pose it to you.

But as surely as the Lord gives us challenge, he also gives us this other thing under this greater glory; it is great comfort. Because you see, I didn't mention Zerubbabel and his kingship and his being a

descendent of David, being the signet ring of the Lord which we learn at the end of the chapter, just because I'm wanting to drone on as a pastor or to show off my learning. There's something significant here and it is this: you see, when God said, "I will choose for myself a king, and here's this Zerubbabel through whom I will lead my people to rebuild the temple," he wasn't just picking any king; he was picking a king who is a son in the line of David, who then—if you turn to Matthew chapter 10 verse 13 and in Luke, you will find the name Zerubbabel—who would also be in the line of Christ. This king is meant to be a type that points us to Christ, who is our King. And our King comforts us with this: *do not fear*. "Do not build for yourself secure places in hopes that you will find comfort there, but alone in my promise." For when he says to the people of Israel, "I drew you out of Egypt," the word for us is that our Egypt is sin and death, that it is in Christ alone that God has freed us. Our King came to free us from sin and death, and if he did that, how much more then will he not also give us all that we need? That is the Lord's promise. Even the writer of Hebrews at the end of chapter 12, says this to the people of God: "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.'" The words once more indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. The comfort of the King is, "I will allow these things to challenge and shake you to know this: that the kingdom that I am building will never be shaken. It will never be destroyed. It is eternal. Comfort, comfort my people. Do not fear."

But the final is not challenge and comfort, it is call. And it is this: a call to reach the nations. A call to reach the nations. This past week, as we've been in this theme of the desired of nations, our calling as a church is to make Christ known, that he would be the desire of nations. But we begin in our cubicles with people working next to us, with our neighbors in our neighborhoods, and to where God has led us with our gifts, our talents, and our works. But to also go around the world. It is completely possible to send missionaries around the world and yet not make him known even to the people who live around us. Having missionaries does not make us a "missional" church.

When gathered on Wednesday, we were talking about being a missional church and what that means. What that means for Columbia Presbyterian Church is that we are called to plant churches and communities—this is key—that are not communities that look like us, filled with people who think like us or look like us or talk like us or vote like us—but we are called to build the kingdoms and churches and communities for *Christ*, and to preach the gospel in word and deed, regardless of where people come from, regardless of what they look like. And that we will—humbled by the glory of the gospel, by a king who came to die on a cross for us, humbled by that reality—hold out with open hands the beauty of that gospel and that grace to whomever the Lord leads us. As Paul would say, in Christ, there is now no longer Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female. It doesn't matter. We are called to be outwardly faced, because Christ came to us and we are called to go to him.

But if you, this morning, are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the call is to you. This call to you is this: yes, you may go ahead and fill yourself with as much food and wine and clothes and houses and all that life has to offer, but you and I both know—deep down in the chasm of your soul, you know—that they will never satisfy your deepest longing; they will simply be a band-aid over a wound that will never heal. He calls you to find your desires met and satisfied in Christ alone. And indeed, that is precisely where Bono, a confessing Christian, would finish that song he wrote in 1986, when he said these words:

I believe in the kingdom come  
Then all the colors will bleed into one  
But yes I'm still running

You broke the bonds  
You loosed the chains  
You carried the cross of my shame  
Of my shame

Christ Jesus has carried every sin, every shame, every brokenness on his life, and he carried a cross for you and me, that we would see him as the desire above all desires, the fulfillment of all the love that we have—and the longing that we long for will not find its place except in him. Let's pray.

Come, Lord Jesus, come, and give us hearts that find a home in you. Father, I pray that you would both challenge and comfort and call us to the glorious, magnificent glory of your son, Jesus Christ, that he would not only be the love of our hearts and our lives, but that he would be the one that we would make known throughout the world. Lord, will you do this? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.