

God's Chosen Seal

Haggai 2:20-23

June 9, 2024

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²⁰ The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, ²¹ “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, ²² and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. ²³ On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.”

My message title this morning is “God’s Chosen Seal”.

Imagine someone who you know really well and also knows enough about the Bible and the Christian faith but is not a believer and lives like the world. This man or woman tells you one day that “you guys are just like us”. Your habits, your talk, your preferences, your values, your desires and your cravings match up with theirs. What would you say? And just as you try to respond with a tone of protestation and disapproval, they offer you specific proofs. There would not be much to say then would you? I am making up this scenario but this world does not need a church that looks just like the world. What this world needs is a church that looks more like its founder Jesus Christ who gave his life for her. And there is a cost to pay to pursue Christlikeness.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27

All over the world, churches and many wonderful people have served orphans and widows but what about the second part? To keep unstained from the world. The word unstained in translated *without spot*.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the greatest theologians and the third president of Princeton University in 1753. This is what he said about his own heart. “When I look into my heart and

take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And it seems to me that my conviction of sin is exceedingly small and faint: it is enough to amaze me that I have no more sense of my sin. I have greatly longed of late for a broken heart, and to lie low before God”.

This is the reality of the Christian life: an ongoing acknowledgement of our sinfulness and our need for holiness.

In and by myself, there is not a day when I fall short of the holy standard of God. So it is with you. But here is good news - there is not a day when Christ ever falls short of the holy standard of God. In Christ you are complete and are being built up.

I begin with this introduction because we began this series in the book of Haggai with the theme, “A call to build the house of the Lord”.

As we look into this concluding passage in the book of Haggai, let me remind us what we saw so far. We saw that God was very concerned about his temple. About priority. Putting God first. God told the exiles to build the house. And there are a few reminders about who or what constitutes God’s house.

“You are God's field, God's building” 1 Corinthians 3:9

“You are God's temple” 1 Corinthians 3:16

“your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” 1 Corinthians 6:19

“In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:22

“we are his house” Hebrews 3:6

These are spiritual truths that the world does not understand. The whole world is in the grip of evil and darkness and is in desperate need of light. So, beginning with the Jews, God’s plan for Jew and Gentile was to gather a people for Himself, purify them and be a light to the nations. (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, Acts 13:47).

And we saw that God’s house exists for His pleasure and glory. The exiles took notice of Haggai’s message and obeyed God. And God told the exiles to be strong, to work and to not fear. God promised to be with them. And last week, we saw God promised to bless them.

And in these last four verses, God gives a future vision and a future hope. A rather terrifying vision but a secure hope for those who know God.

Let's look at verses *twenty* through *twenty-two*.

²⁰ *The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month,* ²¹ *“Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth,* ²² *and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother.*

This the second time God's Word came to Haggai on the same day. This is December 18, 520 BC. And in these three verses, we see God committing to very specific actions. What are those?

God is going to *shake* the heavens and the earth. God is going to *overthrow* the nations. God is going to *destroy*. This is a summary of judgment day. God is going to re-order creation itself and the kingdoms of the world.

How should we understand this passage?

I was reading recently an article in the New Yorker magazine (Article titled *Are we Doomed*) that said these four areas are areas of existential threats to humanity today – nuclear weapons, climate change, bio threats and Artificial Intelligence. In this article, experts from different fields weighed in on each subject and explained how we have had some close calls with nuclear weapons in the past, how climate change is supposedly affecting our life on earth, how bio weapons could be manufactured through the use of a rogue A.I. As I was reading through this article, I asked myself “Wait a minute. What about the most significant existential threat that has already affected all humans and continues to affect us till this day? Sin!” So I did a search for the word *sin* and found none. There was one mention of God quoted by a philosopher.

Sin is the most significant threat to our existence. And because of sin God can be the greatest existential threat or God can be your greatest refuge and hope. And those who have the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior have no reason to fear the penalty of sin, which is death.

This is the language of judgment in light of what God had done to Israel and the nations around it in the past and judgment that is to come. A complete fulfillment is not be expected during Zerubbabel's time. That is why there is no specific date for future judgment.

The first action you see is the *shaking* of the heavens and the earth

In verse twenty-one, when God says “I will shake things up”. Surely the exiles would have understood what Haggai said and meant. God shook up the heaven and the earth when he descended on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). But how is God going to shake up the heavens and earth in the future? It is left ambiguous to the exiles. But we know from a few texts.

2 Peter chapter three verse two and seven “*you should remember the prediction of the holy prophets*” because the “*the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly*”.

Revelation 16:18 tells “*And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake*”

The second action you see is the *overthrowing* of the nations

The exiles know what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah during the time of Lot.

“*Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.*” ²⁵ *And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.*” Genesis 19:23-24

We live in a day and age and in a culture that is not too different from Sodom and Gomorrah and in some ways worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. Think about this - a whole month is dedicated to the celebration of sin. Ungodliness is legitimized and legalized to the extent that if you don't agree with the promotion of sin, you are called a hater. But you see God has bad news for the ungodly. God is going to overthrow the nations. It is not going to go well for the ungodly. Unless they repent. In the meantime, speak the truth in love and take no part in the works of darkness.

The third action you see is the *destroying* of the strength of the nations and their power.

Again, the exiles remember Israel's history. Israel was a small group. There were nations mightier and bigger than they all around them. God rescued Israel from Pharaoh and the horse and rider fell into the sea. (Exodus 15:1). And God destroyed the nations and gave them the wealth of the nations. Similarly, God's kingdom through his Son Jesus Christ will reign and every knee will bow before Him.

And in verse twenty-two you see “*And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother.*” This is symbolic of the self-destructive nature of sin.

The future is quite terrifying for those who don't have God as their refuge.

But what about Zerubbabel? Is it terrifying for Zerubbabel, the people of Israel and by extension the disciples of Jesus?

Look at verse *twenty-three*:

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

On that day. That is the day when God is going to shake, overthrow and destroy and the nations.

God’s promise to Zerubbabel is that he will be under God’s protection. God will take him as his own. And God will make him as a signet ring. Signet rings were indicative of royal authority. Something very precious. God says Zerubbabel is very precious in God’s sight.

Why is that? Because God had chosen him.

Zerubbabel is safe, secure and is valued by God because God had chosen him.

Hear what God said about Israel.

“For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession” Psalm 135:4

“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth”

Deuteronomy 7:6

You see the language “his own possession” is used by the New Testament authors as well.

Jesus Christ *“who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works”* Titus 2:14

Zerubbabel as God’s signet ring does not end with Zerubbabel but continues in his lineage all the way to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 1:12 *“And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.”*

“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal” John 6:27

When Jesus said these words, the people around asked , “What good work must we do?”. Jesus said to them. Believe.

Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ receive the seal of God. The Holy Spirit. And they are secure in God.

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” Ephesians 1:13

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: God's Chosen Seal. Haggai 2:20-23

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What are some evidences or marks to assure us that our salvation is secure in Jesus Christ? Ephesians 1:3-4, Romans 8:16-17, 30,33, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 2:9, John 15:19

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

1. Do you believe God has called you to be built up and be part of expanding his kingdom? How? 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 14:12, Romans 12:4-8
2. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: In what way do you sense God has wired you to serve Him in the local church? What will you do to build the house of God?