



## Sermon Transcript August 18, 2019

### Be An Encourager Haggai 2:1-9

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 18, 2019 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

**Sermon Text**  
**Haggai 2:1-9**

<sup>1</sup> In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet: <sup>2</sup>“Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, <sup>3</sup> ‘Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?

<sup>4</sup>Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, <sup>5</sup> according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.

<sup>6</sup>For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. <sup>7</sup> And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>8</sup>The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. <sup>9</sup>The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.”

## Introduction

One of the greatest ministries you can have is the ministry of encouragement. I am going to encourage you this morning to “be an encourager.” There is a person in the Bible who was really good at this. His given name was Joseph. But his nickname was Barnabas, which means “*son of encouragement*.” The apostles were the ones who gave him this nickname because he was known for being an encourager. That is a great thing to be known for. It is a good reputation to have. Are you an encourager?

I want to begin this morning by making an assumption about the ministry of encouragement. I think it is good to acknowledge this assumption up front because it may impact how you listen to this sermon.

My assumption this morning is that the ministry of encouragement is a ministry for all of us. You are to be an encourager. Last Sunday we talked about different ministries you can sign up for and where we have needs this coming fall. We realize that not everyone is going to be an usher. Not everyone is called to work with children or to lead us in worship or teach a class. But when it comes to the ministry of encouragement this is not something you decide whether you want to sign up for or not. If you are in Christ, you have already been signed up for this ministry.

In the New Testament, one of the phrases you find attached to the word “*encourage*” is the phrase “*one another*.” That implies that this is something all of us are called to do to one another. In fact, we find ourselves on both sides of the phrase “*encourage one another*.” On one hand, we all need to be encouraged; that is for sure. But at the same time, we are all called to “be an encourager.” So when I encourage you to be an encourager this morning, you need to embrace the fact that this message applies to all of us. This is our collective calling as a local church. *Encourage one another*.

To help us consider the ministry of encouragement this morning, I want to look at an Old Testament prophet by the name of Haggai. Last week we looked at Jonah and when I mentioned Jonah at least you had some sense of who I was referring to. You at least knew to think of a runaway prophet and a “great big fish.” But if I say the name Haggai to you, does anything come to mind? I would imagine his story is much less familiar to many of you. But once you get to know his story, you will see how God used this prophet to bring great encouragement to God’s people. In fact, his ministry of encouragement helped the people overcome their discouragement and it empowered them to do what God had called them to do. That is what Christian encouragement

does. It is often the thing that is needed to empower us to overcome whatever it is that is holding us back or keeping us down.

## **The Need for Encouragement**

The universal need for encouragement is the first thing we encounter in our passage this morning. In verse 1 we see that a “*word from the LORD came through the prophet Haggai.*” Who did he bring this “*word from the LORD*” to? Notice what it says in verse 2. God says to him, “*Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people.*” This “*word from the LORD*” that comes through the prophet is for everyone: the governor, the high priest and the people. The reason God sends Haggai the prophet to these people with a “*word from the LORD*” is because they are all discouraged.

Let me give you a sense of what is going on here. In order to understand this minor prophet—this little book of two chapters—and the message from Haggai, you need to have some understanding of the historical context. Haggai is a prophet who speaks to the people of Judah after they return from 70 years of exile in Babylon. In 586 B.C., Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians and many of the inhabitants who survived were removed from their homeland and exiled to Babylon. Perhaps some more familiar names to you—Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were among many of the exiles who were taken out of their homeland and transported to Babylon.

But nearly 70 years have now passed. As time passed, the hand of God came against the Babylonians and they were overcome by the Persians. Persia’s king, King Cyrus, issued a decree that allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city. You can imagine how excited they must have been. Some of the younger exiles, no doubt, had never seen their homeland before. They only knew stories from the generation that came before them. The older exiles, however, remembered their homeland and they longed to return home before they died. And so 50,000 eager settlers returned to the broken down city of Jerusalem. The walls were in disrepair. The temple had remained in ruins. But that didn’t matter. They were returning home and were going to rebuild.

Upon returning to the city of Jerusalem, the very first rebuilding project they undertook was rebuilding the temple. Ezra tells us that when the people arrived at the sight where the great temple of Solomon once stood in all of its glory, heads of families met and they began to give money for the rebuilding of the temple. This was their number one priority because the temple represents the presence of God with his people and it was a

reminder to them of the covenant promises God made with the people of Israel. It was also the place where sacrifices were made to atone for the sins of the people. Immediately, and rightfully so, they began to rebuild the temple. They moved with such speed that in five months they completed the foundation of the temple.

You can imagine the excitement of the people. Ezra tells us that the people marked this momentous occasion with a great celebration. The priests put on their vestments and the people gathered up their instruments and they sang this song in thanks to God, *“For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”* Ezra likens their exuberant worship to shouting. He said that *“the people shouted with a great shout.”* He said that their celebration was so loud that they could be heard from far away.

Indeed they were heard from far away. Their neighbors heard them. Their neighbors weren’t overly excited about these Jewish exiles returning to their homeland. In fact, they wrote a letter of complaint to the king’s officials claiming that these exiles were a rebellious people and if they are allowed to rebuild the city of Jerusalem they would be nothing but trouble. So in Ezra 4 we learn that the neighbors of Israel *“set out to discourage the people of Israel and made them afraid to go on building.”* Can you imagine that? There was a group of people who had as their main objective to discourage the people of Israel from rebuilding the temple. And their plan worked to perfection. They so discouraged the people of Israel that for fourteen years they did not lay another stone on top of the foundation that took only five months to build.

So in Ezra 5:1 we discover that God sends two prophets to this Jewish remnant in Jerusalem with *“a word from the LORD.”* Their names were Haggai and Zechariah. Here we are this morning in the book of Haggai. We are looking at the very words of encouragement that Haggai gave to a very discouraged people. His message to these discouraged exiles was simply this; *“Rebuild the temple!”* Haggai is only two chapters long, but it is divided into four separate sermons that the prophet delivered to the people who had returned to Jerusalem. Each sermon begins with the date when it was delivered. The first sermon is found at the beginning of the book where it says in Haggai 1:1, *“In the second year of Darius the king in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet.”* In his first message to the discouraged exiles he admonishes them for having their priorities mixed up. They have been back in the land for over 14 years now and they are all living in their new homes while the temple—God’s house and God’s presence among them—remains in ruin. So the prophet exhorts them to start rebuilding again. Haggai 1:14 says that after the Spirit of God stirred them, *“they came and worked on the house of the LORD.”*

Our passage this morning is the second message that comes to them through Haggai a little over a month after the first message. Haggai 2:1 dates our passage as *“the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month.”* This is a message that encourages the people early on in the process of getting back to rebuilding the temple. I think there were two things that were discouraging them as they got back to rebuilding the temple.

First of all, the pain of the past, the memory of what once was, was a constant reminder to them as they tended to rebuilding the temple. Haggai says to them in Haggai 2:3, *“Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?”* The “old timers” would have really appreciated this. They were probably looking at the new temple going up and they were saying under their breath, “This temple isn’t what it used to be. You should have seen the temple Solomon built.” King Solomon brought in some of the best craftsmen from all over the world to construct a magnificent temple. Of the building of Solomon’s temple it says in 1 Kings 6:21-22, *“Solomon covered the inside of the temple with pure gold, and extended gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, which was overlaid with gold. So he overlaid the whole interior with gold. He also overlaid with gold the altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary.”* And so Haggai taps into this discouragement and asks, *“Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?”* In fact when they gathered fourteen years prior to celebrate the laying of the foundation, part of the noise that could be heard by their neighbors was the weeping that came from the older generation. All the pain of the past came to the surface. Ezra says of this loud shout that you couldn’t distinguish between the shouts of joy from the younger generation and the weeping that came from the older generation.

Do you know what is interesting about the date of this second message from Haggai? This was the time of year when the Israelites would celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. On one hand, it was a celebration that looked back at the mighty way God made his presence known when he delivered their ancestors, the people of Israel out of Egypt. It was a time when God visibly and miraculously displayed his power time and time again. But it was also a celebration that looked forward to a future time. The prophet Zechariah indicated that this feast pointed to a time in the future when all the nations will someday go up to Jerusalem to worship Israel’s God, the one true God. It is a picture of future glory where Jerusalem and Zion will be the hub of the world.

It seems to me that part of the discouragement that emerges among the people of Israel is this idea that they are stuck in the present between the glory days of the past and the yet to be realized future. And do you know what is always true about the present? It is

hard. It is filled with trouble and disappointment. It is often mundane and not very glamorous. It causes us at times to glamorize the past and dream about the future. In doing so we can forget that God is very much in the present. We read about the revivals of the past when Spirit of God once swept through New England and the hearts of many were turned to God. And we long for the future “*when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*” But the present seems nothing like the revivals of the past or this glorious picture of the future which seems so far away. And you look at the present and you strain to see where God is at work. And you can become discouraged. But it is Habakkuk who reminds us that “*the just shall live by faith.*” And so Haggai encourages them to rebuild the temple.

The other thing that discouraged the people as they got back to rebuilding the temple was that as soon as they started up again the neighbors showed up again. They wanted the names of the their leaders and another letter was drafted and sent in complaint to the king’s officials. I am sure they were nervous about how the king might respond to this complaint and it is always discouraging when people come out against you. Only this time, under the encouragement of Haggai, they didn’t stop building.

If nothing else, the background of this minor prophet reminds us that everyone needs encouragement. It is a constant need. When we are told to *encourage one another* in Hebrews 10:25 it says it this way, “*encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*” That phrase “*all the more*” is a reminder that the need for encouragement is constant. There are all kinds of things that cause us to be discouraged. On one hand, this sounds like I am simply stating the obvious. Of course everyone needs encouragement. But my question to you this morning is “who are you being a Haggai to?” Do you even see the one around you who is discouraged? Are you looking for the one who is discouraged? Are you open to receive the one who is discouraged? Be an encourager.

A prayer I am going to share with you at the end of the sermon and in this week’s blog in the *Pulse* is a prayer I would encourage you to pray regularly. It is a prayer by Scotty Smith and it ends with this request: “Put names and faces before us who need the encouragement you alone can bring, Lord Jesus—missionaries afar, a co-worker across the room, a stranger in the airport, the check-out lady at Publix, a grieving parent, a brokenhearted friend, a weary pastor and or a forgotten senior. By the emanating light of the great Day of hope, may we bring rich encouragement to this day.” Make that your prayer and listen to how God leads you into this daily ministry. Everyone needs encouragement.

## The Means of Encouragement

Before I share the actual words of encouragement that Haggai offers this discouraged remnant who returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, I want to first identify the source of our encouragement. In doing so, I want to make this point. There is something distinctive and unique about Christian encouragement. There is something different about the encouragement we are able to offer one another as brothers and sisters in Christ that you can't get any other place.

I am not discounting the power of encouragement that comes to us in other areas of our lives. Many of us can speak to the encouragement we may have received from a teacher, or a coach, or a boss, or a neighbor, or a parent, or a friend—or possibly even a stranger. And in many cases those words of encouragement were life shaping and significant and they often came from people outside of faith. And yet, what is distinctive about Christian encouragement is that our encouragement to one another is anchored in the gospel. We have a hope in Jesus that is certain and cannot be shaken. No matter how dark things get, we actually have something we can hold onto that will carry us through whatever it is we have to face in life. Even though we are in the Old Testament, Haggai points us to Jesus and the gospel as the source of his encouragement.

In Haggai 2:6-7, Haggai says, “*For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.*” The word “*shake*” means that God is going to intervene. He is going to move again. Five times in verse 6-9 the title *LORD of Hosts* is used in these verses. It is a title that refers to the authority of God over all things. So when God decides to move—to shake—nothing can stop him.

So what is God going to do? What God is about to do is fulfilled in concentric circles. There is something God does in the immediate context that demonstrates that God is at work. He says in verse 7 that “*the treasures of all the nations shall come in.*” Do you remember that letter the neighbors sent to the king's officials to complain about the Israelites rebuilding the temple? When the king received the letter in the capital of Persia, someone decided to check the archives. In checking the archives it was not only discovered that King Cyrus issued a decree for them to return to the land, but he issued the command for them to rebuild their city and he sent supplies along with them to help them do that. So the message that came back to the neighbors who issued the complaint was twofold. “Don't you dare stand in their way of rebuilding the temple.” And then in



Ezra 6:8, King Darius said to these neighbors, “Moreover, I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God. The cost is to be paid to these men in full and without delay from the royal revenue.” In other words, your tax revenue is to fund this project. He says in Haggai 2:9, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts.” Truly, when God “shakes” he does amazing things.

But this is just the beginning of God’s intervention. Look what he goes on to say about this temple that they think is nothing compared to Solomon’s temple. “*The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.*” In other words, if you think Solomon’s temple was the standard, I am going to “shake” once again and do something that will be greater than the temple Solomon built.

Well, what is “*the latter glory of this house?*” Or would it be better to ask, “who” is the latter glory of this house? It is Jesus! Didn’t Jesus say of himself, “*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.*” He was referring to his death and resurrection for the atonement for our sin. Didn’t Jesus say of himself in Matthew 12:6, “*In this place is one greater than the temple.*” The temple was a symbol of the presence of God and the provision of God to atone for the sin of the people. But it ultimately pointed us to Jesus who brings us peace. And now we are part of a living temple—not made of brick and mortar—but of people from every nation who turn to Jesus. And someday, that circle will go even wider because when Jesus comes back the presence of God will fill the earth. All of a sudden, Solomon’s temple seems pretty small to what God will do through Jesus and the gospel.

What you need to see is that this is the source of Haggai’s encouragement to the remnant who returned to Jerusalem. We are able to give real encouragement to one another because it is anchored in the fact that God has intervened in this world through his Son and has already conquered sin and death. And so when we offer encouragement to one another we can appeal to a God who is making all things right and so we can follow him even if it is hard, or painful, or there are difficult obstacles to overcome.

In another prayer, Scotty Smith says it this way. “Dear heavenly Father, there are *many* things over which I don’t have any control; *many* outcomes that remain hidden from me; and *many* broken stories, broken people, and broken circumstances that may, or may not, get better this side of heaven.” Where can you get encouragement that satisfies that need? It is the gospel! He says, “But this *I do know*, because of the finished work of

Jesus, my future contains zero judgment and 100% joyful welcome by you; zero wrath and 100% perfect righteousness in Jesus; zero brokenness and 100% perfect relationship with you. It's **all** gonna be—not just okay, but magnificent beyond our wildest dreams and hopes.” And so he adds, “Until then, Father, make me a genuine encourager and “builder-upper” of my family, gospel-posse, and friends.” It is the gospel that allows us to offer genuine encouragement.

## The Words of Encouragement

As we seek to be encouragers, we now look at the actual words Haggai said to encourage the governor, the high priest and the people. He said in verses 4-5. *“Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.”*

Haggai's words of encouragement were *“Be strong!” “Work, for I am with you.” “Fear not.”* These are words of encouragement that come up over and over again in Scripture. “I know that the task of rebuilding is hard, but be strong.” “I know that this temple doesn't seem anywhere near as magnificent as the previous one, but I am with you.” “I know that the neighbors sent a letter of complaint against us, but fear not.”

These are not words of encouragement that come from some sense of bravado. I think of phrases like “Boston-strong” and “Houston-strong” that speak to the resiliency of a city after some kind of trauma or disaster. The prophet wasn't passing out t-shirts that said, “Jerusalem-strong.” While that can be admirable, it is not the kind of encouragement we offer, because quite frankly it can only take you so far. Our encouragement that is anchored in the hope of the gospel empowers us to be faithful.

We can say things like this: “I know what you are dealing with is hard and doing the right thing is difficult, but be strong because you can trust God.” “I know that it feels like you are alone in this, but God will not leave you.” “I know that the future seems uncertain but God holds the future so fear not.” These words of encouragement are anchored in the gospel and we need to encourage one another over and over again with these words: “Be strong!” “God is with you!” “Don't be afraid!” Hebrews 10:23-25 tells us that when we hold onto our confession of hope—the gospel—we can stir one another to love and good deeds and we make it a priority to not neglect getting together so that we can encourage one another and all the more as we see the Day approaching.

## Conclusion

Be an encourager! Everyone needs it! The gospel is our endless resource for real encouragement. We are surrounded with people who need to hear these words: Be strong! God is with you! Fear not!

Make it a matter of prayer. Ask God to lay on your heart someone in need of encouragement. When God lays a person on your heart, be obedient and encourage them. It could be through a phone call. It could be a letter. It could be over a cup of coffee. It could be through a visit. Then, ask God to lay a word on your heart that you could offer that person for their encouragement. If we all did this on a regular basis, we would be empowered to overcome what is holding us down. *Encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Take the prayer on the back of this transcript and make it your daily prayer this week and see what God does.

## A Prayer for the Encourager

*“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another on to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:24-25*

Dear Lord Jesus, as I meditate my way through this “let us” patch of gospel admonitions, a couple of things stand out. On one hand, I’m convicted about the importance of holding onto the hope you’ve won for us—a living hope, an anchor of hope, a glorious hope—hope, not hype. Our hope is *certain*, but I certainly need to “hold it fast,” like gripping one of my favorite fly rods or cameras—for enjoyment, not out of fear of losing it.

I praise you that the gospel doesn’t call us to “hope in hope” but *to hope in you*; for you’ve made promises you alone can keep. You are faithful and you are loving, and that’s all we really need to know. Not hoping is *not* an option. Super-size my hope today, Lord Jesus.

This Scripture also convicts me about the importance of being a lot more intentional, regular, and creative in bringing encouragement to friends, family members, and anybody you put in my way. As the great Day of your return approaches—the Day when all hoping in part will give way to *the fullness of hope*—I want to be a man who speaks life, encouragement, healing and hope, to those who need it the most. I want to live as a conduit of your mercy and grace, in timely and tangible ways.

Put names and faces before us who need the encouragement you alone can bring, Lord Jesus—missionaries afar, a co-worker across the room, a stranger in an airport, the check-out lady at Publix, a grieving parent, a brokenhearted friend, a weary pastor and or a forgotten senior. By the emanating light of the great Day of hope, may we bring rich encouragement to *this* day. So very Amen I pray, in your grace-full and hope-filled name.

Prayer by Scott Smith, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/a-prayer-for-living-as-encouragers/>