

Crossing the Finish Line

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 July 2026

Preacher: Josiah Ball

[0:00] I think my technology is situated here. I pray to the wind with eloquence, Lord.

May your word be the power, not the eloquence by which I say it. May it be the realities of which your word says that will not return void, but will accomplish the purpose for which you sent it. And Lord, I do pray for clarity that you would help me to be clear in this, but ultimately, Father, I trust that the power lies in you and you alone. So, Father, as we read this passage, as we talk through it, and as we hear your encouragement to us how to continue in faithfulness when we don't yet see the fruit, help us, God.

May it be truly an encouragement. May this not be a burden to anyone. May you be pleased to stir us up, to not give up.

We pray in your great and holy name. Amen. Well, hard to believe it, but today we wrap up the book of Haggai.

[2:01] We're already towards the end of our summer series, and we get to wrap up this wonderful book together today. And before we jump into our text, I want to start with just a brief reminder of what we've seen so far up to this point in the book of Haggai.

So, you remember, context of Haggai, which you're probably sick of me saying this by now since I've said it so many times, but context of Haggai is that the nation of Israel, they were God's covenant people.

They were the ones whom God said, you will be my people, and I will be your God. And for hundreds of years, they rebelled. They worshiped any God but the true and living God.

And they turned away from him. And so for hundreds and hundreds of years, God would send prophet after prophet warning them, turn back to me, turn back to me. And for hundreds of years, they did not.

Until eventually, God then gave them in and sent the nation of Babylon. They came in and they destroyed the city, tore down the walls, took the people captive, and most tragically destroyed the what?

[3:07] The temple. God's temple was destroyed. The people were in exile. This was one of the lowest points that Israel hit in the Old Testament. And then God starts to bring a restoration.

He sends the people back into Israel. A new power comes up, Persia. They kick the Babylonians out and they say, hey, Israelites, go back to Jerusalem. Rebuild your temple. I'm with you in this. And so the Israelites, they go back and they start doing what God had told them to do. They start rebuilding the temple for a little bit. But then they are met, they meet with internal discouragement, external opposition.

And those two together led to the people drifting. And they stop focusing on God, his ways, his glory. And they start focusing simply on themselves, their comfort, their house.

And it is into that context that God sends Haggai. So here's kind of the overview timeline of Haggai. First message came in the summer.

[4:08] Oh, I don't know if we have the slides up. Are we able to? Thanks, Zach. Appreciate you, IT back there. Let me know if I need to do anything up here. I have an upstream.

I totally forgot about the beginning. Thanks, brother. So God, the first message comes in Haggai chapter 1. And the Lord addresses the people's excuse.

The people were saying, now is not a good time for me to obey. And the Lord responds to that by saying, well, what is it a time for then?

Is it a time for you to focus on yourselves and your own comfort? Or is it the time to focus on me and my glory? And he refocuses their heart from, again, their own comfort, their own house, to instead his pleasure and his glory.

And about a month later, in response to that message, the people obey. God stirs them up. He stirs up their heart. They repent. They turn. And they obey God's commandment.

[5:05] And they start rebuilding the temple. One month later, the Lord gives a new message at the beginning of chapter 2, a message of encouragement. That's exactly what Pastor Rick just overviewed for us.

The older folks among them who had remembered seeing Solomon's temple and thought this work feels so pointless. And God sent an encouragement to them. And now, finally, two months later, winter, our equivalent is December, they get these final messages of encouragement. And the bottom line, what we will see today is how God gives the Israelites a two-part encouragement to encourage them to continue in the work even when they don't yet see the fruit. Continue in their faithfulness even though they don't see any fruit from their faithfulness. Amen. And so that is what we're going to see in this text. But I want to warn you guys, and this text is a tough one.

It really is. One of the commentaries, I put this up there to justify myself, that one of the commentaries said, they don't know of any passage in the whole of Scripture that has evoked more interpretations than this.

[6:20] This is a confusing one. I want to walk us through it as best as I can, but I ask for your patience. We'll put on our seatbelt. Let's walk through this together. Amen? Amen. All right, so I invite you to stand with me as I read from Haggai chapter 2.

Haggai, if you don't know where to find it, it's towards the end of your Old Testament or alternatively, I'll have it up here on the screen, but I read from Haggai chapter 2, verses 10 through the end, verse 23.

So it reads the Word of God. On the 24th day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the Word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priests about the law. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priest answered and said, No. Then Haggai said, If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?

[7:27] The priest answered and said, It does become unclean. Then Haggai answered and said, So it is with this people and with this nation before me, declares the Lord.

And so with every work of their hands and what they offer there is unclean. Now then, consider from this day onward, before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail.

Yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord. Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider, Is the seed yet in the barn?

Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree, have yielded nothing. But from this day on, I will bless you.

[8:38] And the word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month. Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth 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. 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.

So read the word of God. Let me pray. Father, I ask you to do the work that only you can do by your Holy Spirit.

Lord, give us grace by your Spirit to understand this text, to see the encouragement that is here, how we may, again, continue in faithfulness, even when we don't see the fruit.

[9:44] Give us this hope, Lord Jesus. Through your word, use me, God. You know how I feel, particularly unequipped today.

But Lord, I pray for your mercy and your help. And I pray in your great and holy name. Amen. Amen. You may be seated. So here's kind of the overview, game plan, of how I want to look at this text.

I see this text as broken up into two general encouragements, verses 10 through 19, and then a second encouragement in verses 20 through 23. And so we're just going to see how the Lord is encouraging them where they're at when they don't see fruit, which we'll see in just a second. And these are the encouragements that He gives them and encourages them to remain faithful. So let's start with this first one. Don't give up even when there's no fruit yet. So in order to explain this, and again, I wanted to start with that preface.

This is a little bit of a ride, a wild ride. The way that I want to explain this is actually going to be to walk through the text backwards. So bear with me.

[10 : 52] The reason why I think that that makes sense is because the heart of the encouragement comes at the end in verses 18 to 20. So I want to start with that. We're going to start with the big picture. What is God saying in this first encouragement?

And then we'll kind of work our way backwards to understand some of the clarifications and some of the groundwork that the Lord had laid. But we'll start with that big main idea and then work our way backwards through the text from there.

Make sense? All right. So let's start with that. The main point in verses 18 and 20 of this first encouragement. Consider from this day onward from the 24th day of the ninth month.

Pause there. That's significant that he's talking about that because the reason that I wanted to have this slide up here is that I want us to picture ourselves as the Israelites in this moment.

This, the 24th day of the ninth month in our calendar equates to December. Winter. This is after the harvest season.

[11 : 54] This is at the beginning of the winter season. They've been obeying for a few months now and they're entering. They just left the harvest. They're entering into winter. And how, what is their condition like at that moment?

Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider, is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing.

So here the Israelites are. They have been obeying God. They heard the word of the Lord back in summer. In the beginning of fall, they started to obey. They repented. They turned their hearts towards God and they had been walking in obedience for a few months.

But they weren't seeing any of the fruit of that yet. Their harvest still failed them for now. Right?

There is no vine, fig tree, pomegranate, or olive tree in the barn.

It has yielded nothing, even though they've been faithful. And so, what do we make of this? What does the Lord say to them? Because I think that this can be a common experience that we all feel.

[13 : 06] I'm thinking as I was going through this, what's the best kind of use case of my own heart? And there's a few that I might bring up throughout this message. But one of them is recently, I've just been feeling like my heart is very, for lack of a better term, worldly.

I'm a very, I don't know how to say it. I'm, especially in this last season, I found myself, my heart is very much tied to the world.

A good day, a day when my heart will be happy will be when I've had a good day at work or my circumstances in some way, shape, or form have been pleasant. I haven't had to have this big burdensome thing on my heart.

My heart feels so tied to the world instead of being tied onto Christ. I want to be at the place like we just sang it is well with my soul and like Mr. Ron was saying before the service, good or bad, praise the Lord.

I'm redeemed by Him and so I want my heart to be content in Him, not in the world. And so I've been fighting this battle for a long time, trying to get my heart satisfied in Christ and not in the world, but I'm not seeing the fruit of that just yet.

[14 : 20] I'm still, I've been pursuing the means of grace. I've been asking God for mercy and help. I've been doing all of, I've been pursuing God in this way for probably a few months now.

And I similarly, like the Israelites, don't see any of the fruit yet. And so that can be discouraging. Or to use maybe another example, I'll use the example from another song that we sang of addiction. What happens when you're fighting an addiction and it just won't die? And it becomes really hard to stay motivated in the fight. And you're pursuing accountability.

You're doing all the, you're seeking the Lord, praying and asking Him for help and deliverance. And you're doing this for a long season of time, but the deliverance hasn't come yet.

What do we make of that? What do we do when we are in that moment? And so what the Lord says to them is, but from this day on, I will bless you.

[15:25] He gives them a reassurance. He will bless them. To put this, I want to put this in New Testament terminology that we may be a little bit more familiar with or comfortable with. From Galatians chapter 6, Apostle Paul writes, Do not be deceived.

God is not mocked. For whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.

But the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And here's the key part. And let us not grow weary of doing good. For in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

I think this is the heart of the encouragement that God is giving to the Israelites. Don't give up on faithfulness. You're not seeing, it's not due season yet, you're not seeing the fruit of your labors. But don't give up. I will bless you. And so similarly for me, as I continue fighting in my heart, I want to be satisfied in Christ.

[16:30] It would be so easy for me to just give up and say I'm just going to live a halfway Christianity for the rest of my life where my emotions and my heart is tied to the world and I'll just ride the ups and downs because I've been trying to be centered on Christ and it's just not happening.

But I don't want to give up on that. I want to land in that place of being satisfied in Christ. I want to land in that place of being content in Him so that my job, having a bad day at work, doesn't crush me because I have Jesus.

And so I'm going to keep, don't give up on that. Keep going. And the same thing with battling the addiction or whatever. Never, ever, ever will I say to myself, you know what?

This is just how it will always be. God is powerful enough. Keep sowing to the Spirit. Keep fighting that sin. Keep doing that. Don't give up. And in due season, we will reap.

Amen? Amen. So that is, I think, the main point of this encouragement, but there's seven verses that precede that which give us helpful context and helpful groundwork for us to understand that.

[17:37] Because as I just said it, does anybody feel like I'm kind of a little bit close to being works-based? Like if I do the right things, God will give me the right things or anything like that? Maybe just a little bit. But backtracking the text and we're going to see in the context leading up to this encouragement, there's two things that protect us from thinking that this is a works-based thing.

The first is that the Lord is already pointing out in the context it's not just about the external actions. It's about relationship. Let's see that in verses 15 to 17. Backwards in the text.

Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of 20 measures, there were but 10.

When one came to a wine vat to draw 50 measures, there were but 20. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me.

So this is before they had repented, before they had begun to work on the temple again, before they had turned their hearts towards God. The Lord is saying the reason why all this was happening to you was because your heart was not turned towards me.

[18:49] That's what God was after this whole time in the book of Haggai. He's not just after them doing the right external actions, go and put brick upon brick in the temple.

He's after a heart that is turned towards Him. And so as you hear me say this encouragement about don't give up, keep sowing to the Spirit, don't hear me just saying keep doing the right external actions.

Hear me saying in that keep sowing to the Spirit by keep pursuing your relationship with God.

Whatever it is, whatever the thing might be, in your battle against addiction, don't just view this as I want to stop doing this habit.

View it as I want to be pure in heart so that I can see God. Does that make sense? It's not, we're not just, as Christians, we're not just after right behavior in this church.

we're after hearts that are turned towards God, love Him, and then pursue obedience out of that relationship with Him. Amen? Amen. So that's the first clarification.

[19:54] So when I say this encouragement, keep sowing to the Spirit, don't give up even though you don't see the fruit yet. Keep pursuing that faithfulness. Hear me saying that that's done in

relationship with God.

Second clarification, this one's the real doozy. So especially, put on your second seatbelt for this one. It's not about works.

So the Lord is going to, if we go even backwards in the text, He's going to lay an even deeper foundation protecting the Israelites from thinking that this is about works by giving them an object lesson about holiness and uncleanness.

So beginning in verse 11. Thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priests about the law. Go to the experts. If anyone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priests answered and said, No. Then Haggai said, If anyone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?

[21:07] The priests answered and said, It does become unclean. So there's an object lesson here. Kind of confusing, but I boil it down to this. If there's holiness, so you have this holy meat in his garment and he touches something with it, the holiness doesn't transfer.

An analogy for this that I was trying to think of throughout this week is think about sickness and health. If you are healthy and you go to a hospital and start coughing on someone's face, are they going to become healthy?

But, if you are sick and you go to a room of healthy people and you start coughing in their face, will they get sick?

Yeah. It's the same. That's how, that's what the Lord is saying. He's drawing this object lesson about holiness and uncleanness. Uncleanness, we can think about as a sickness, is contagious. Holiness is not contagious. Holiness is, not transferable. Uncleanness is transferable. So, what's the point of that object lesson? We get the point in verse 14.

[22:20] And Haggai answered and said, so it is with this people and with this nation before me declares the Lord. And so with every work of their hands, what they offer there is unclean.

The point of the object lesson is to make this parallel. We saw, again, the sick person by going around coughing on people is going to transfer that sickness where they go. And the point of that object lesson is to say to the Israelites, if you are unclean in your heart, then the works that you do themselves are unclean.

That sounds a little harsh, but, but I want to point out, this is why the gospel is so necessary. See, if there are any unbelievers in this room, if there's anybody who doesn't know Jesus, chances are your worldview is something along the lines of, if I'm a good person, then God will accept me. Something along those lines. If I do good, then good will happen to me. But what that, and that's what 95% of people on planet Earth believe.

They believe that if I just do good stuff, if I'm a generally good person, that is what will make me acceptable to God. But what that paradigm, what that ideology misses is this truth.

[23:43] That, according to Scripture, sin has made all of us unclean, and so now even our good works are themselves unclean. Our good works can't make us clean before God because our good works themselves are unclean.

Does that make sense? This is why the gospel is necessary. Good works cannot make us clean. We have to be made clean by God Himself or else we are stuck, we are trapped, we are sick with a terminal illness that nothing that we can do in and of ourselves can cure.

The only solution, I'm going to go off Scripture here just a second, and say to anybody who may be wondering, I'm sick. I have sinned in my life, and I don't know what to do.

How do we be, how are we made clean? Reading from Titus chapter 3, when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

The point of this passage and the reason why I'm saying all of this is to say, works, it's not about works. Works cannot make us clean. Works cannot make us fruitful.

[25:14] Works cannot make us blessed. We have to be made clean by God first, and that's something that only He can do. And then again, all of that boils back up into the main point, which is, to the Israelites, He's saying to them, don't trust in your works.

Your works are not why I am blessing you. I'm after your heart and relationship with you, and since you've turned to me, now, even though you don't see the fruit, I am going to bless you, so keep on

being faithful.

Amen? Make sense? And that's the first encouragement, and I just want to land the plane on that by saying, think through whatever it might be in your life. Battle against sin, a pursuit of righteousness, a pursuit of God, a pursuit of what He's called you to do, whatever it is. Oftentimes, we hit this kind of point of discouragement where we don't see the fruit. We're striving towards it. We're praying towards it, and we just don't see anything happening. My encouragement to you is Galatians chapter 6. Keep on sowing to the Spirit. In due season, you will reap if you do not lose heart.

[26 : 34] Amen? Amen. Amen. So that's the first encouragement that the Lord gives on this day. Now we turn to the second. Verses 20 through 23.

Haggai says, the word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the 24th day of the month, the same day.

Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of the kingdoms, and 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.

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.

So again, to understand this encouragement, place ourselves as an Israelite back then. Why did they stop rebuilding the temple in the first place? It was because of internal discouragement and external opposition.

[27 : 48] There were people in the surrounding nations who were opposing them, stopping them, and so part of the encouragement that the Lord is giving to them is, all those nations who are opposing you, who you're afraid of, they're about to be nothing.

They're going to be totally overthrown. They're going to be, look at this language. He's going to shake the heavens and the earth. What does he mean by that? Let overthrow, destroy, overthrow, go down by the sword. That's the emphasis of what he's saying here.

But of course, then that raises the question of, did that happen? Were all of Israel's, Nate, were all of Israel's enemies torn down? Did God raise up a military Messiah to rule and reign and this kind of, to destroy all of the surrounding nations, get rid of all the Gentiles in the world and leave only a Jewish world only?

No, God had something, a bigger plan in this promise, which we already touched on last week when we talked through Hebrews and how did the author of Hebrews interpret the shaking the heavens and the earth. So if you weren't with us last week, I encourage you to go back.

I don't want to walk through all that again. But just to summarize, the author of Hebrews quoted from Haggai this idea of shaking the heavens and the earth and the author of Hebrews interpreted that as when the Lord will remove all created things.

[29 : 11] This is a promise of the resurrection. This is an end time promise. This is our ultimate hope that we look forward to. So me, struggling with my addiction, with my worldliness, whatever it may be, part of my hope is that there's coming a day when God will shake the heavens and the earth and all of this sin and suffering and brokenness will be overthrown.

And so, I can fight the battle knowing that the war is 100% won. I can go about my fight against sin knowing the end result is already completely secure.

I am a victor through Christ. He's going to shake the heavens and the earth. He's going to remove all of the stuff that I am battling with. So I battle today as a victor, not as...

Yeah, exactly. Amen. So that's part of the... And this is all just getting at how do we remain faithful? How do I keep fighting my sin?

How do I keep pursuing God even when I don't see the fruit? Part of it is remember where we're going. Remember our ultimate hope. Remember the new heavens and new earth in which we are headed towards.

[30 : 26] Which God will remove all of these created things, all of our sin, all of our sorrow, all of our suffering, and all that will be left is the kingdom that cannot be shaken. And then finally, the last verse of Haggai is one of my favorites.

The last verse is a messianic promise, if you are familiar with that terminology. Messianic promise is just kind of...

It's a form of promise that God often gave in the Old Testament. He gave messianic promises to Abraham that were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Or promises that he made to David that were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

And this is another one. And so... And the specific messianic promise which is given to Zerubbabel, who by the way, if anybody's curious, is in the genealogy of Christ.

He is a direct... Christ is one of the direct descendants of Zerubbabel according to both Matthew 1 and Luke 3. This is clearly a promise to Zerubbabel through your descendant, Jesus.

[31 : 34] Here's what I'm going to do. He's going to make him like a signet ring. What does that mean? What is a signet ring biblically?

In short, a signet ring is a symbol of power, glory, and honor. And I get that from Genesis 41. Here we see in Genesis 41 a narrative picture that kind of explains what a signet ring symbolizes.

This is Pharaoh talking to Joseph and he says, You shall be over my house and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Do you hear within that authority and power?

You shall be over my house. Only as regards to the throne will I be greater than you. Glory. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.

Power again. Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck.

[32 : 42] And he made him ride about in a second chariot and they called out before him, Bow the knee. Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.

So the signet ring here is the symbolic gesture that Pharaoh gave to Joseph to represent Pharaoh saying, I'm giving you power, I'm giving you glory, I'm giving you honor.

And that is a picture of who? None other than worthy are you our Lord and God, Jesus, to receive what? glory and honor and power.

He created all things and by his will they existed and were created. This is a promise in verse 23.

God is saying, through your descendants, Zerubbabel, I'm going to raise up a signet ring, a man who will be the full one worthy of honor and glory and power.

And so as I'm thinking through how do I remain faithful? The answer is, remember Jesus, the true signet ring who alone is worthy of honor, glory, and power.

[33 : 52] Jesus Christ, the conqueror. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who was slain for our sins. Jesus Christ, the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given.

And Jesus, the one whose blood makes us clean from all of our uncleannesses. So as you, to wrap up, when you find yourselves in that moment, fighting sin, pursuing righteousness, whatever, find yourself discouraged because you don't see any of the fruit, I encourage you, keep sowing to the Spirit.

In relationship with God, trusting in His grace, not your works, keep sowing to the Spirit. Trust that in due season you will reap and ultimately that reaping will come in the new heavens and new earth when all of the sin and all of the opposition is completely removed and all that is left is Jesus, the signet ring of God who alone is worthy of glory and honor and power.

Amen? Amen. Let me pray. Father, I thank You for Your mercy and Lord Jesus, we praise You, the true signet ring, the true descendant of Zerubbabel who alone is truly worthy of honor and glory and power.

be with each one of us, God, in the ways that we each fight sin, in the ways that we each pursue righteousness, in the ways that we each desire You and Your kingdom to come.

[35 : 22] Lord, encourage us, protect us from losing heart and ultimately, Lord, keep us rooted in the ultimate realities of Your kingdom and Your kingship. We love You, Lord Jesus, and it is in Your great and holy name that we pray.

Amen. Amen.