Haggai - Commentaries by George Vicesimus Wigram

Food for the Flock: Volume 8, I Am With You

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IT is a blessed thing for us that, in the word of God, in connection with difficult circumstances, we always find divine principles set forth, which apply not only to the day in which those circumstances occurred, but which also find their application in our own day.

We are left here in a place where difficulties and trials of every kind have come in. It is easy enough to get on when there are no difficulties, but it is impossible for me to witness for Christ in a day when there are, unless I know what my resources are. And we know that we are in a day of difficulty, a day of disheartening, a day very much the same as that of Haggai; so that we may expect to find here principles that will apply to ourselves.

In Ezra we are told what it was that discouraged the people, and how they yielded to the pressure that the enemy brought to bear upon them. They yielded to it, and got occupied with themselves. In a certain sense they gave up the public and corporate testimony, and satisfied themselves with their own individual blessing. But we, for ourselves, must remember that there is a corporate testimony on earth now, and that out responsibility is to maintain that testimony.

Now the people here had given up the testimony, for there was very little to encourage them 'to go on with it. There had been the glory connected with the house when first it was set up; now all that was gone. What they lacked, and what we want, is faith. When all is gone to the outward eye, then is the moment when faith tomes in. There never was a moment when the people of God needed faith more than in the 'present day, when everything seems going to Wreck and rain around us.

In the second Epistle to Timothy, when Paul's sun is going down, and he is exhorting Timothy to maintain the testimony—at the very time in which he exhorts him to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine," he is obliged to add, as far as the look-out was concerned-not, things will grow brighter—no—but—”the time will come when they will not endure Sound doctrine.... they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto `fables." If it is the look-out that either encourages or discourages you, then there is enough to discourage any servant of God. But in such a moment it was the very time when Timothy Was to work the more earnestly.

So in Haggai, the Lord stirs His people up by the prophet, to be not looking at the surrounding circumstances, which were well calculated to depress them, but to set to the work of the Lord's house, counting on the One on whose power they could rely in it all. And the moment the people are obedient, that moment comes the word of the Lord to them, " From this day will I bless you." We get their activities afterward, but the instant they turn to obey, the instant their heart is towards Him, comes the response, "I am with you." And they could not have moved a step without that stay. Neither can we move without it. The Lord does not say to us, Go on a little way, and I will see how you get on, and if you do well, I will be with you. No; He comes at the first step in the path of obedience.

And now God brings in two things to cheer them in their path, and, as we consider them, we shall doubtless see the analogy between them and ourselves. The first thing he says to cheer them is, " Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" The very thing that had been weighing on their hearts; the plain building-nothing to see-after all the glory of Solomon's. But says the Lord, "I am with you, according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not." It is the unchangeableness of God: it is the same power, the same spirit, the same God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, who is going to be with them in all the wreck and ruin.

Does it not ever cheer your heart amidst the ruin around us to look up into heaven? To see that the One who is seated there at God's right hand is up there for His people?

" Yet"-and here is the cheer that comes in-"yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." It is " the latter glory of this house;" it is the same house all through, not another. The comfort and cheer for their hearts is this: that, discouraging though the outlook was, yet the latter glory of this house which seemed to them so poor, should be greater than the former in the days of its magnificence.

And what is the cheer for our hearts in the present day? It is, amidst all that is discouraging around us, the fact that "Christ has loved the church and given himself for it," and that He will " present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." Is this going to be true? What a cheer for our hearts to know that the day is coming when this church, now so ruined and scattered, shall be brighter and more glorious than it ever was, even in the bright day of which we read in Acts Our poor hearts are apt to get under the burden; we are apt to cry to the Lord to come and deliver us from all the sorrow, all the ruin, that surrounds us. But God has other thoughts for us. He would have us in the path of obedience before He comes. He says, I will give you the promise to cheer you till I come; and now what I want you to do is to build, and not to despair. Surely there is enough to make us weep, to make us hang down our heads in the present day; and natural judgment would lead to the casting aside of this one and that one as hinderers to the testimony. But, whilst I seek to be faithful and true in my own responsibility to the Lord, I recognize the fact that, though the enemy has come in and spoiled the flock, tearing one here and another there, so that the corporate beauty of the whole is spoiled, yet the sheep are His. We cannot say, Let us gather together all the sheep that have not got their wool torn, their feet wounded; that would be eclectic, sectarian. We have to do with the sheep, every one of them., in the state in which we find them. If our love is co-extensive with His, it will reach out to every one of them. If in a day of difficulty we are found not in communion with God, not walking with Him, not taking His lead, we shall but scatter the sheep, and do more harm than good; but if we walk with Him, we shall have His light and His guidance through it all. The great thing is to have the mind of God about His own.

I need hardly say that this consideration for the sheep will never lead to indifference as to our associations. Our responsibility to purge ourselves from vessels to dishonor abides, and we may have the grief of withdrawing ourselves from those who walk disorderly; but, if we are with God in these things, grace will be exercised up to its divine limits, instead of being arrested by mere human considerations.

Thus can we cheer and support our hearts. The coming of the Lord draws nigh, when every saint of Christ shall be like Christ. Are there those on earth about whom we may be weeping? What a blessed comfort that the day is coming when they will be like Christ! This is our cheer as to the future.

And then as to the present, " / am, with you." Directly I am obedient I have God with me. It is not directly I am doing His work; I may do His work in my own way; but it is obedience that He seeks. What a cheer for our hearts to be able to have the confidence that God is with us! Then we get that blessed comfort spoken of in Colossians, " the peace of Christ," about His saints. Wonderful grace that God should invite us to make our requests to Him, so that, casting all our care upon Him, nothing may be able to ruffle us. What about the saints of God? What about the church? If I am called to look forward to that day when all will be bright, when all will be perfect, so now I am called to have the peace of Christ about it all.

The Lord give us to know something of what the cheer, what the comfort is that God gives. We are called to have patience under all circumstances until we emerge in all the brightness, all the joy, of the moment when we shall be fully in accordance with all His mind for us.

(J. G. H.)

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