

## ***“Prophetable” Grace***

Ezra 5-6 - NCBC, May 15, 2016

Main Point: **God’s word empowers God’s people to do God’s work.**

**God’s word empowers God’s people to...**

**...prioritize God’s Pleasure** (Haggai 1:8)

- No longer living for ease
- No longer living for now

**...rest in Christ’s Cleansing** (Zechariah 3:1-5)

- No more filth
- No more guilt

**...work by God’s Spirit** (Zechariah 4:6-7)

- No limit to God’s power
- No limit to God’s grace

Application: **God’s workers must saturate their minds in God’s word.**

- No worship without His Word
- No witness without His Word
- No work without His Word

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**Opening Announcements:**

<<How Firm a Foundation>>



Jesus Christ is our strong foundation. He’s our cornerstone. To lean on Jesus for repose means to look to Jesus for rest, for security, and for safety. So when your life is built by faith on Jesus Christ – though you should experience all hell and its shakings here on earth...you can be confident of this biblical truth – that Jesus will never forsake you. And your house will stand firm in the storm, when you’re building on the solid rock of Jesus Christ and His finished work.



The truth is, we're all in progress aren't we? We haven't turned out yet. There should be "Construction Zone Ahead" signs up on the highways leading to the church house every time God's people gather together. For God is working here. And just like hard-hats are required on any other construction zone... God's word is absolutely required anywhere God is working.

So this morning we are want to consider both chapters 5-6 of Ezra, with a particular focus on the ministry of God's word in this Temple building effort.

You will find **Ezra 5** on page **392** of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand in honor God's Word, as I read **the historical account of God's restoring grace through the prophets from Ezra 5 and 6 this morning.** Reading now from Ezra 5, verse 1, in the English Standard translation:



*Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and*

*Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. <sup>2</sup> Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.*

*<sup>3</sup> At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus: "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?" <sup>4</sup> They also asked them this: "What are the names of the men who are building this building?" <sup>5</sup> But the eye of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until the report should reach Darius and then an answer be returned by letter concerning it.*

The rest of chapter 5 is a copy of the letter that the Persian governor Tattenai sent off to King Darius. Chapter 6 tells how King Darius searched the archives, found a copy of King Cyrus' proclamation, and responds back to Tattenai with an even stronger decree for the completion of God's Temple in Jerusalem.

For the sake of time we're skipping over some gold mines here, so make sure and come back and read the letter King Darius sends back to Tattenai later, but for now, let's pick up our reading in **chapter 6, verse 13**:

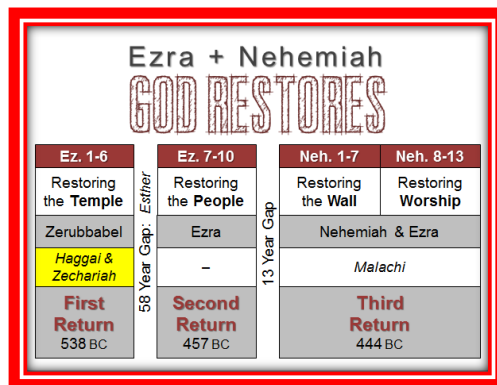
*<sup>13</sup> Then, according to the word sent by Darius the king, Tattenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates did with all diligence what Darius the king had ordered. <sup>14</sup> And the*

*elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia;<sup>15</sup> and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.*

### **This is the Word of the Lord.**

You may be seated. **Let's Pray.**

Let's set the stage a bit for our study this morning. If you are presently 16 years old, please stand up this morning.



Please stand up if you are 16 years old. Thank you.  
Now please stay standing for a moment.

Church – do you remember how chapter 4 ended? The fear tactics of the enemies of God successfully stopped

the temple construction. God had set captives free from Babylonian exile to return to Jerusalem and rebuild His house...but fear won the day. And now it's been 16 years since anyone worked on the temple.

Look at the young people standing up this morning – God's people stopped doing God's work when they were born. But don't feel sorry for God's people yet...because they managed to stay plenty busy during those 16 years. They just turned their focus to rebuilding their own homes, their farms, and their own personal lives. And for 16 years – life went on. The temple foundation again became overgrown and lay dormant...until chapter 5 verse 1,

*Now the prophets – Haggai and Zechariah – prophesied to the Jews.*

[Thank you young people – you may be seated.]

God's word was preached to God's people and what was the result? Energized revival and recommitment to the work of God together!

Church it is the preaching of God's word that supplies needed grace to kingdom builders. God's word awakens God's people from apathy, assures them of their divine acceptance, and activates a lifestyle of responsive worship. Apart from the active grace of God's Word, God's work would remain undone by all kingdom builders.

So right here in verse 1 is the main point we want to focus on this morning:



**God's word empowers God's people to do God's work.**

Grace came through the prophets – Grace came through the preaching of the Word of God! The people's perspective was transformed through the influence of God's Word. Priorities shifted. Hearts were encouraged. Sin was exposed and repented of. And a greater future joy motivated them to begin to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem. And what does the end of verse 2 say,

*And the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.*

In chapter 6, verse 14, after God works in King Darius to decree Persian permission and provisions for the rebuilding effort – we see this testimony as well,

*And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by the decree of the God ...through the Persian kings.*

Without the preaching ministry of Haggai and Zechariah – the temple would have never been completed. For it's always God's word that begins and sustains God's work among His people.

Let me ask you a question. Does God still have work for His people to do here on earth now?

Absolutely!

Of course we're not building a physical temple anymore, but we are set free from sin and commissioned to worship and witness just as the exiled Jews were. And just like the Jews... we can get too content thinking that another time would be better to do God's ministry than the present.

Wouldn't it be compelling to hear the actual messages that Haggai and Zechariah preached to these downtrodden and indifferent Jews?

I mean there's no doubt about it in our text this morning. The entire temple was rebuilt and completed in four short years – mostly due to the prophetic preaching ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. This is a huge testimony to the role of God's Word in the work of God's people.

This week in my study I wanted to listen to Haggai and Zechariah's preaching. So I downloaded all their sermons and listened to them... Okay... I didn't download them... I just read what they said – for we actually have their messages recorded for us in the books of Haggai and Zechariah in the Scriptures.

So after studying through all that they preached, I've selected three themes from their sermons that I believe are characteristic of all Biblical preaching. And as we walk through these three themes of Biblical preaching this morning I believe it will help us better understand why God's Word is a necessary active ingredient in the hearts of God's people who are involved in doing God's work.

First let's listen to Haggai, where we learn that God's word empowers God's people to...



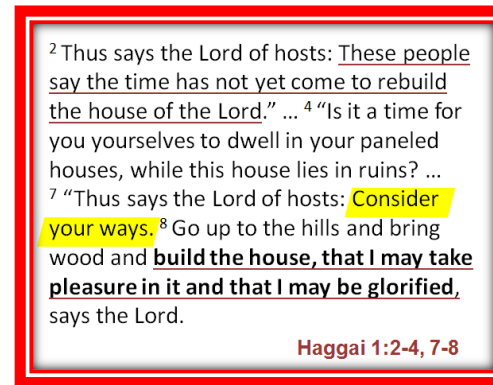
...prioritize God's Pleasure (Haggai 1:8)

Please turn to Haggai in your Bible. It is the third to the last book in the Old Testament. So find the Gospel of Matthew, and go back three books to the short book of Haggai.

Haggai is only 2 chapters long – consisting of 4 different messages that Haggai preached to the people in the course of 4 months in the year 520 B.C.

The clear keynote of Haggai's preaching is that the redeemed people of God must reorder their priorities and engage in the work of building for God. Rather than living for their own present priorities – like more financial security, more kid's activities, more career promotions, and more lavish vacations ... God's Word graciously helps us prioritize God's pleasure above everything else.

Listen carefully to Haggai 1:2-8,



*2 Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord." ...*

Let's pause right there... the people were saying it wasn't quite time yet for them to do God's work. And we can relate to this easily enough, right? My house and farm needs a bit more attention, or... right now the cultural pressures are a bit hot... I think I'll give it a little more time, before I start using the spiritual gifts God has given me and intentionally start making disciples among my neighbors and coworkers here in central IL.

Loved ones – one of the most successful tactics of our enemy in Christ's church today is dreadful lethargy. Apathy. Indifference. Inertia. God's work will remain undone as long as you and I content ourselves with excuses for waiting just a little bit longer.

But listen to God's Word in verse 4,

<sup>4</sup> *"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ... [then verse 7]*  
<sup>7</sup> *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord.*

The grace of God teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright, and godly in this present age.<sup>1</sup> In short God's Word motivates us towards intentional disciplined living.

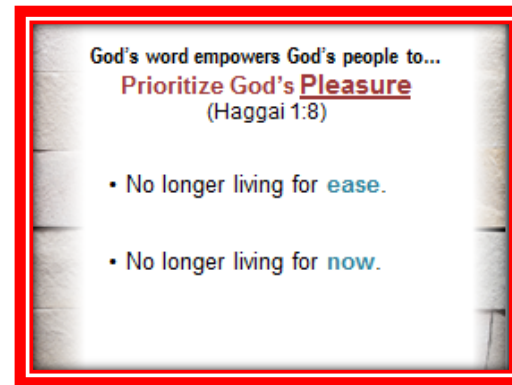
But without the ongoing ministry of God's Word, our self-discipline would become only legalistic drudgery. But God's Word motivates God's people towards personal

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<sup>1</sup> Titus 2:12

sacrifice with superior pleasure... the pleasure of God Himself in all of eternity.

Church – we need the preaching of God's Word. For God's word empowers God's people to prioritize God's glory more than our **present ease**, and prioritize eternity more than our **present situation**.



It wasn't so much that paneled houses were the problem for the Jews – it's that their lavish attention to own luxuries had taken over their lives. Their priorities had been distorted by the ease of here and now.

But here's the piercing truth of God's Word – all the possessions, power, and prestige of this world can never deliver lasting joy. Wealth and ease in this life always leave us wanting a little bit more. It's like you're putting all your hopes for peace and contentment in a bag filled with holes.

But whenever we listen to God's words – we find a different perspective altogether don't we?



Are you prioritizing your eternal joy more than your present ease? Are you investing your life in the temporary, or in the eternal?

This passage in Haggai 1 is very dear to me. For this passage was used of God to motivate me to leave my former church family that I loved very much – where it was very comfortable and convenient for me just to say put where I was – to uproot and move my family to join this work of God here at New Castle Bible Church. Without a doubt – God’s word empowers God’s work as it helps God’s people prioritize lasting pleasure.

Wish we had more time to hear the rest of Haggai’s message this morning...but for the sake of time, let’s listen in to Zechariah’s pulpit for a moment.

Zechariah is the book immediately after Haggai, and if you turn to **chapter 3** we learn that God’s word empowers God’s people to...



### ...rest in Christ's Cleansing (Zechariah 3:1-5)

The first eight chapters of Zechariah record the preaching of this prophet to the exiles during the first 2 years that they were rebuilding the temple. Zechariah was younger than Haggai, and joined him in his preaching ministry 2 months after Haggai began in 520 BC. Interestingly, the last 6 chapters of Zechariah are dated approximately 40 some years after the temple had been completed and are focused more on Israel’s glorious future when they will eventually receive their Messiah by faith.

While Haggai’s preaching was full of rebuke for the people’s sinful indifference, Zechariah’s preaching called the people towards repentance as they looked forward to the future blessings available in the coming Messiah.

Zechariah’s preaching was especially Christ-centered – with 11 different specific references to the Messiah throughout his 14 chapters.<sup>2</sup>

So it’s no surprise then that we see God’s Word empowering God’s people to do His work as they rest in Christ’s cleansing.

Notice the vision that Zechariah saw and was able to proclaim to God’s people in chapter 3:3:

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<sup>2</sup> “Angel of the Lord” 3:1-2; “The righteous Branch” 3:8, 6:12-13; “The stone with seven eyes” 3:9; “The King-Priest” 6:13; “The humble King” 9:9-10; “The cornerstone, tent peg, and bow of battle” 10:4; “The good Shepherd who is rejected and sold for 30 shekels of silver, the price of a slave” 11:4-13; “the pierced One” 12:10; “The cleansing fountain” 13:1; “The smitten Shepherd who is abandoned” 13:7; “The coming Judge and Righteous King” 14.

<sup>3</sup> Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. <sup>4</sup> And the angel [of the Lord] said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."

**Zechariah 3:3-4**

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Let's explain what Zechariah is preaching here first. Joshua is the same person as Jeshua in Ezra. He's the high priest of the returned exiles – representing the religious condition of God's people here in this vision.

So here's the high priest – clothed in filthy garments representing the contamination of sin – standing before the Angel of the Lord.

Now it's important to remember that in God's Word all references to the Angel of the Lord is referring to the pre-incarnate Christ. This is the Messiah. Jesus Christ is in the preaching of Zechariah here as the Angel of the Lord!

And what does Christ do for God's people who are covered in selfish and idolatrous sin?

*Remove the filthy garments! Look at this! Behold. I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure righteousness!*

Church – it is the preaching of the cross of Christ that motivates the work of the church today! For we don't work for cleansing ... we work because we've been cleansed by Christ!

God's word empowers God's people to...  
**Rest in Christ's Cleansing**  
(Zechariah 3:1-5)

- No more **filth**.
- No more **guilt**.

**No more filth. And No more guilt.**

God's Word empowers us to work as we rest in Christ's perfect cleansing of our souls. Hallelujah, what a Savior! No more stain of sin. No more shame and accusation.

Are you listening to this message from God to you today?

This is "prophetable" grace – this is good news church. This is why God's workers must saturate their minds in God's word – for God's word tells us that we don't serve



God to pay for our sins or earn cleansing...but we've already been cleansed by faith in the work of Christ alone!

Hear God's Word to you this morning. You can cease from your striving. You can stop trying to be good enough. Repent from trying to minimize your sin or minimize God's holiness. Listen to God's Word – and let it excite your soul to thankful worship. Jesus takes away the sins of all who believe in Him.

Now let's quickly examine one more aspect of Zechariah's preaching to Zerubbabel and the Jews who were seeking to do such a monumental work together for God's greater pleasure.

For in Zechariah chapter 4, verses 6-7 we observe that God's word empowers God's people to...



...work by God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6-7)

In chapter 4 Zechariah shares another message from God to help comfort God's people in their kingdom building work.

For God's work never advances far in this world without opposition. And God's workers need to constantly hear God's word if they are to remain faithful to their calling.

The Samaritans and enemies of the Jews were content to leave the Jews alone as long as they were not building the temple. Just like Christians today, the world doesn't mind for the most part if we just keep to ourselves and stay out of trouble.

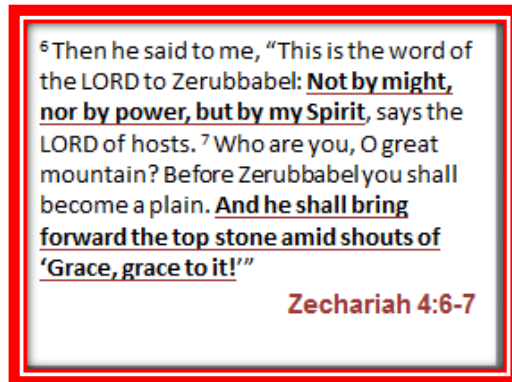
But as soon as God's people start to become active in the work of God – the world hisses and seeks to quiet all kingdom efforts.

You see the temple represented more than just a religious system of sacrifices and offerings for the atonement of sin. The temple of the God of Israel was a visual reminder of God's person, power, and presence among His people. The temple was an indisputable testimony of the worship and witness of God.

Just like the church today. We are also seeking to advance a people of worship and witness to our King Jesus Christ.

And so God's workers need to hear God's word – for the world hates any witness to the glory and grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So listen to the preaching of Zechariah from chapter 4:6-7,



*6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: [Remember Zerubbabel was the Jewish governor responsible for overseeing the temple rebuilding project,] Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. 7 Who are you, O great mountain?*

This mountain that Zechariah is preaching about is the huge opposition against the rebuilding effort. All the hatred and frustrating efforts of the Samaritans and their bribed Persian officials. Certainly Zerubbabel and the Jews must have been tempted to hopelessness and despair at times in the work – the task was too great, their resources too limited, the efforts too exhausting – would they ever be able to scale this mountain of opposition standing in their way? Well the preaching continues...verse 7:

*Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"*

The final top piece of the temple shall be completed – God's Word has proclaimed it so – and all the while God's people will shout with joy – Grace – Grace --- all by God's grace!!

Church – you need to hear the preaching of God's word. For every time you hear God's word faithfully preached, you will have your priorities reoriented towards God's glory, your rest deepened in Christ's substitutionary cleansing, and your confidence deepened in God's Spirit.

For God's word empowers God's people to greater works by God's Spirit.



What is God really telling the people through his prophet Zechariah here?

*No limit to God's power. No limit to God's grace.*

God's Spirit can be trusted on to finish the work that He begins through His people. There's no mountain too large for God to overcome in the building of His church today.

Hear the word of God this morning, and allow your soul to be electrified towards faithful engagement in our mission.

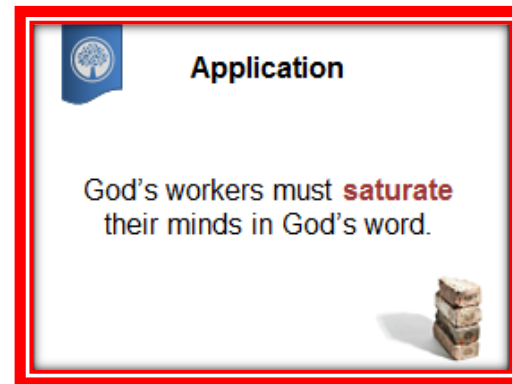
These themes of Haggai and Zechariah's preaching to the temple builders are actually the themes of God's entire revelation that we call the Bible. No wonder the preaching of God's word energizes God's people to become more actively involved in God's work.



Biblical preaching communicates biblical truth – so it is never less than head knowledge. But it is far more than that. Biblical preaching should stir and awaken our souls to greater wrestling with sin, greater confidence in God's victory, and greater joy from the fact that we get to be part of something that is far greater than our own lives in our own place in time. We are part of the building of

God's church – all to the eternal praise of His glory and His grace!

So then, our application is quite clear. If we are empowered to do God's work through the ministry of God's word, then it only makes sense that,



God's workers must saturate their minds in God's word.

God's people need to regularly feed upon God's word. Not therapeutic and empathetic epilogues that pass for so many devotionals and sermons today. But my soul – and your soul – needs to have the word of Christ dwelling in me richly. My mind needs to be brought captive to the obedience of Christ through daily mediation of God's Words.

And remember – God's Words have been revealed to us through Christ in the Holy Scriptures. So don't pursue an unmediated connection with God apart from Christ. That only fosters pride, arrogance, and self-reliance. Rather – humbly and joyfully come to the banquet table of Christ –

and feast daily on the delicacies of His exceeding great and precious promises. Feast on the revelation of His glories that will be our experience in days yet to come. Drink deeply from the cleansing fountain of God's grace – a grace that is greater than your sin – if you would but believe on Christ and stop trying to be good enough on your own. And listen carefully – for every time you hear from God you can hear the supporting refrain of God's active Spirit – convicting, renewing, strengthening, and empowering God's people to do His work. Without God's Word there can be no worship, no witness, and no work.

May God therefore engraft His Word more deeply in our souls that it might bear good fruit.



Let's pray. **Closing prayer.**

<<Grace greater than our sin>>

**Next Sunday Baptisms** in 1<sup>st</sup> Service – Kris Mettelman and Becky Calhoun.

Benediction:

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may our whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:23-24*