

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Be Strong!

Lesson: Haggai 1:15b-2:9

¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month. ² ¹ on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ² "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, ³ 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?' ⁴ But now be strong, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord. 'Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the Lord, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the Lord Almighty. ⁵ 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'

⁶ "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. ⁸ 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. ⁹ 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty."

You might have heard the phrase "prime time of life." People say that everyone experiences a peak period at least once in life. When was the prime time of your life?

It might be different for each person.

Some of you may think of the days when your hair was brown or blonde, when you could eat anything without gaining weight, when you could stay up all night and still work fine the next day. Maybe your teenage or twenties felt like your best years.

Some may think of the time when you were raising your children with love and sacrifice—the time when you were their hero.

For others, it might have been your forties or fifties, when your career was at its height or your business was thriving.

And some may say that their best time came after retirement—when wisdom deepened, and they could enjoy peace and share life's lessons with others.

So, when was the prime time of your life?

There is a phrase you may know well: "*Make America Great Again.*"

Don't worry—I'm not going to talk about politics.

When I first heard that slogan, I was a little surprised. I always thought America was already great—especially as someone who grew up overseas.

I grew up watching movies like *Home Alone* and *Toy Story*, and I had a good image of America. So when I heard that slogan, I wondered: *What does “great” mean? When exactly was America’s “great” time?*

As I studied, I learned that this idea of “greatness” often connects to what we now call the “Rust Belt.”

From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, the Great Lakes region was the heart of America’s industry and wealth. The era of the factory belt, or steel belt.

Factories were full, jobs were everywhere, cities were alive, and culture was growing.

But as time went on, things began to change. Factories closed, jobs disappeared, and towns that were once full of life became quiet. The “factory belt” became the “rust belt.”

Many of you here were born around that time—maybe in the 1930s to 1950s—and some of you may still remember the better days before the decline. Perhaps you have some nostalgia for those days of prosperity.

When we look at the Book of Haggai today, we find a similar story. I’ve been talking about the “prime time” of life. So, when was Israel’s greatest time in the Bible?

We all know King David, the greatest king of Israel. After him came his son—who was that? Yes, Solomon. The time of Solomon is often seen as Israel’s golden age. Israel was wealthy and strong, and the Temple Solomon built was magnificent—it stood for about 400 years.

But after that, Israel lost the war against Babylon. The nation was destroyed. The royal palace and the Temple, the house of God, were burned down. Many people were taken to Babylon as captives and lived there for about 70 years.

After many years, they finally returned home.

Some of them still remembered their glorious homeland from when they were children. But when they arrived, what they saw was not what they remembered. Their home was in ruins—empty, broken, and abandoned for too long.

Even though they had dreamed of returning home, now they felt disappointed, discouraged, and defeated.

And in that situation, the prophet Haggai came with God’s message: *“Let’s rebuild the Temple.”*

But rebuilding from nothing wasn't easy.
Those who still remembered Solomon's Temple felt even more sadness
when they compared it to the small, humble one they were now building.
They felt like giving up.

Then God spoke to them:

"Be strong, Zerubbabel."

"Be strong, Joshua."

"Be strong, all you people of the land, and work."

"For I am with you. Do not fear."

Friends, what kind of God do we believe in?

Is there anything impossible for God?

Our God is the God who makes the impossible possible.

He is the Creator of all things, and everything belongs to Him.

So let me ask you: When God says He will do something, will it happen or not?

Yes—it will surely happen. When God promises, He fulfills.

And God's promise is not only for the people of Israel long ago. It's for us today.

"Be strong!"

"Be strong, Church."

"Be strong, all you people of the land, and work."

"Be strong, and do not fear."

Friends, the feelings the Israelites had as they looked at the ruins of their city—disappointment, loss, and sadness—may not be so different from what we sometimes feel as we look at our small and aging churches or quiet towns.

So what should we do in this situation?

We trust God and His promise.

We stand firm and do not fear.

We build the Temple—meaning, we build our faith, our community, our spiritual home.

As time goes by, our bodies grow older.

Industries change.

Even David and Solomon's great kingdom did not last forever.

And sometimes, our beloved churches feel smaller and quieter than before.

There is nothing in this world that lasts forever—only God is eternal. Through this Word, God is asking us: “*What will you hold on to in such times?*”

Should we hold on to our worries? Or should we hold on to God—trusting in what He can do, and expecting great things from Him?

If worrying could solve problems, I would tell you to keep worrying! But we know it doesn’t. The more we worry, the more we lose hope, courage, and faith in what God is doing among us.

So let us stop worrying. Let us trust God. Let us be strong and not fear. Let us expect and hope for what God will do in our lives and our church. Let us build a strong temple in our hearts, a place for Jesus Christ to dwell.

This is what God desires from us.

Be strong! Be strong, and do not fear!
God is with us. God is working through us.
And as God promised:

“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.”

May we all go forward in strength and peace, trusting in His promise.
In Jesus’ name, Amen.