

THOUGHTS ON HAGGAI

Chap. 2, verses 3 to 9

“ Yet Now ”

“ Yet Once ”

THINGS were in an extremely weak state at that time. A remnant had returned from Babylon to the ruined city of Jerusalem: had in some measure restored it; and, after some delay, had begun the rebuilding of the Temple. But their hearts must have been saddened and discouraged as they contrasted the present conditions of the nation with what it had once been in the reigns of David and Solomon. And the question put to them by the prophet in connection with the partially restored Temple, only tended to emphasise all this: “Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” That is, in comparison with the first Temple. Beside this, as we learn from the accounts in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, there was opposition within and without, and they were surrounded by hostile nations, with little means of defence. It is to this, no doubt, Zechariah refers (he was contemporary with Haggai) when he says: “This is the word unto Zerubbabel, Not by might (or army), nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Chap. iv, v. 6.)

And yet, what is God's message to them in the midst of these circumstances? “Yet now”; *now*, in the very face of them and in spite of them—“Now, be strong.” God had not failed, and He was their resource. They were to think of Him, and all that He could still do, and instead of giving way to despondency, instead of contemplating their own weakness, they were to think of Him.

And how instructive and interesting to notice that the command to “be strong” was not spoken merely to Zerubbabel and the High Priest, the leaders at that time, but is addressed to all the people; old and young, rich and poor, learned and ignorant.

“Yet *now*”—when it seems as if so little could be done, and some might be asking, Is it any use to do anything? the command is not only “be strong,” but “be strong . . . and work.” There is *something* for *everyone* to do. We are not all called to do the *same* thing, but to do the thing that

God has appointed for us. How this injunction agrees with the Lord's words recorded at the end of Mark xiii, and spoken in view of His departure. He likens Himself to a man taking a far journey who left his house, and gave authority to His servants, and "unto every man his *work*." (v. 34).

Yes, God has something for everyone of us to do. And we cannot ask ourselves a more important question than this: "Am I *fulfilling the purpose* for which God saved me?" It may not necessarily be of a very public nature; we may not have any special gift of which others can take note, our ministry may be of a very private nature: "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." (Eph. iv. 7). And it is the responsibility of each one of us to find out what God's will is in the matter. "Unto every man his *work*."

But the prophet not only speaks to them as the mouth-piece of God telling them to "be strong and work," but he adds these pregnant words for their encouragement: "For I am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts." Here is our resource. Left to ourselves we can do nothing. But there is all the might and power of God to work through us. The question is not simply, "What can *I* do?" but "What can *God* do through me?" And so, God reminds them of another thing: "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 was this fact, above all others, that distinguished them from other nations. The Apostle Paul asks the question: "What advantage then hath the Jew?" And this is his answer: "Chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." We owe the Bible to the Jews. Inspiration, through the agency of God's Spirit, belonged to Israel alone among all the nations. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter i. 21).

And although the particular gift of *inspiration* has ceased, and God's written word is complete, yet the Holy Spirit now dwells with us in a fuller way than in those times and is the special gift of God to all His children; and He is the one who can make us strong; and work *in* us and *through* us, however weak and failing the public witness of the Church *at large* may be. We are to be "strengthened with *might* by His Spirit in the inner man." (Eph. iii. 16).

While all that has been said is of the deepest importance, there remains one thing more, which we cannot afford to neglect, for it has reference to God's purposes and plans which He is shortly going to bring to pass. The announcement is prefaced with the words: "*Yet once*, it is a little while." We have had "*Yet now*," and here are two other words to place beside them. They are quite as arresting: "Yet now": "*Yet once*." As we think of the two great wars, some of us have known, and of the legacy they have left, and as we ponder all that the nations are attempting to do to remedy it, and if possible prevent another catastrophe, could anything be more arresting, and even startling, than what follows: "*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 (or the *things desired* of all nations shall come; see R.V.) and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts . . . and in this place will I give *peace*, saith the Lord of Hosts."

The people had been exhorted to "be strong" and "to work," but now God Himself proposes to work, and to accomplish that which He alone could bring to pass. What God proposes to do, in the words above quoted, is outside and beyond anything that man could even think of attempting, much less accomplishing. Should not this be of the deepest interest to us? For we know the God who will do this. And the prospect is full of ultimate blessing. For while, in the first place, everything is to be shaken, including the nations, in order that that which cannot be shaken may remain, yet as a result "the things desired of the nations shall come." (R.V.).

No doubt these words from the R.V. give the thought in the original better than our A.V. God's house will be filled with His glory, and the promise is: "in this place will I give *peace*." We have a description of this scene in Isa. ii. 2-5. War banished: and the nations seeking after God, with a desire to know and to do His will.

On all sides it is constantly affirmed that the supreme desire of the nations, at the present time, is *peace*. The United Nations Conference is striving after it. For months past meetings have been held to debate how this much desired end can be obtained. In the passage we are considering we have the assurance given that "the things desired of all

nations shall come." "In this place will I give *peace*" is God's definite promise. The sad and solemn fact is that men are not seeking it in God's way, or in consultation with Him. They forget the One who is the "Prince of Peace." Only when He takes the sceptre, and all things are put under His feet will the words of the hymn writer be fulfilled :—

All taint of sin shall be removed,
All evil done away,
And we shall dwell with God's Beloved,
Through God's eternal day.

Judgment will come first, as we see by the latter part of this same chapter, and all man's pride and haughtiness will be humbled, "for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth." (Isa. ii. 21).

In Mark xiii, the passage to which we have already referred, the Lord impresses three things upon His disciples in view of His return. To pray, and watch, and work.

All that we have been speaking of is in view of the Second Coming of Christ. Nothing can be radically changed until the government is upon His shoulder, and the Prince of Peace takes His rightful place in the scene where He was once rejected. And our duty, as well as privilege, is to pray that this may be brought about ; and watch for it. This should supremely engage our attention, and not what man is doing. As our Lord taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In the meantime "Be strong and work."

"Go labour on, spend and be spent
Thy joy to do the Father's will !
It is the way the Master went ;
Should not the servant tread it still ?
Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice,
For toil comes rest ; for exile home ;
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,
The midnight cry, 'Behold, I come !' "

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