

Fowey Fables – no.15

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Dear Friends

The book of Haggai is not everyone's favourite Bible book, but Haggai had a powerful and relevant message which worked in his day and would work in ours. Just 16 years before he wrote, God had intervened in Jewish history to bring them back from 70 years of captivity in Babylon, another of those Old Testament pictures of redemption and new birth. By the time Haggai wrote the Jews had become comfortably settled in their own homes, self-centred and apathetic. God had called on them to rebuild the temple, the Old Testament illustration of His presence among them. They had started but become distracted by their occupations, all the jobs which needed doing around home, and the demands of spouses and kids.

When we first came to know Christ, we were excited to share Him and enlarge His 'temple' on earth by bringing others to meet Him. We too have become distracted even in our busy church programmes. We need Haggai's message.

His prophecy came in four parts with only weeks between parts 1, 2 and 3. Parts 3 and 4 were both given on the same day.

Part 1, (chap.1) was about ***priority***. Put building God's temple first. The message came with a promise of the ***presence*** of God. Nothing matters more or is more fulfilling and thrilling than introducing people to Jesus.

Part 2, (chap.2:1-9) was concerning ***perseverance***, keeping going when we begin to tire, the team seems too small and our credit cards are 'maxed out'. This message too came with an expanded version of the first promise of His presence. He guaranteed total ***provision*** and His ***peace***. God will always provide for His plan, though not for ours. Knowing that means that we can relax and be at peace. We have only to concentrate on building His temple.

Part 3, (chap.2:10-19) raised the question of ***purity***. Is godliness catching? No, sin is catching but Christ-likeness comes only from meeting Christ at the cross and then Him indwelling us as the Holy Spirit. God's plan is the ***preaching*** of the gospel, not just being good and hoping others will follow.

Part 4, (chap.2:20-23) dealt with the issue of God's ***power*** to give us victory over the world, the flesh and the Devil. As we choose God's priority, we will come under attack. How will we stand? The signet ring had two purposes. It would be like a wedding ring, a guarantee of the love and faithfulness of God.(Song of Sol.8:6) Secondly it allowed the wearer to ***print*** his or her mark in wax on the seal of a document. It was a signature which was unique and indicated ownership and commitment, as the Holy Spirit seals us with the unique character of God.(Eph.1:13)

At Fowey Lodge we have been thinking deeply about Haggai's 4 messages. Over the last ten years the Bible school has become so international that we have diluted our focus on New Zealand as our first call. We have been looking hard again at how to build God's temple in our own country. Our young people's camp programme has long been a great opportunity. We will again be having Water Weeks in January, this time on Kawau Island. We would love to expand our plans, particularly among the kids who would never otherwise have the opportunity. The medical practice gives a wonderful opening to tell struggling people of Jesus. For the last 2 ½ years a highlight of my week has been running a clinic for the homeless at the Auckland City Mission in downtown Auckland. It often reminds me of the cave of Adullam where 400 homeless people who were 'distressed, discontented and in debt' found David and then found God.(I Sam.22) Once my homeless patients have decided they can trust me there is a wide open door to be simple and direct about Jesus.

One of the many striking impressions of Africa this year for Nick and me was the constant emphasis among Christians on straightforward evangelism. This was a healthy reminder to us of what is equally desperately needed in New Zealand.

The secret of Christian perseverance according to Rom.5:1-5 is the message of grace received by faith. Our Bible school has experienced many ups and downs over 40 years. Cancellation of our course accreditation by NZQA, and therefore of student visas, last year was definitely one of the downs! This year we have only had 20-25 full or part time students which has seemed discouraging after facing 180 students 2 years ago. The question has been 'Do we continue?' The answer has been easy. Yes. This year's group have been a delight to teach because they are all so hungry to know more of the grace of God which is theirs by faith. So long as students like these continue to come we will continue with Bible school.

What has been equally encouraging has been the perseverance of those who have helped, with no material reward. We are inspired by lecturers like Euan Bartlett and Frank Hutchinson who are still going after 20 years. Sam and Thelma Chapman have been trustees with us for a similar time as well as Sam teaching ever week. Together they stick at their NZ wide ministry among Maori and their worldwide role with indigenous peoples. Radha and Barbara Poonan, who have also been part of our lives for over 20 years, are taking on new roles in 2007. Radha will be tutoring and giving pastoral care. Barbara will look after CNEC administration including John Wandera's orphans in Uganda. Ike and Mary Samuels whom we have known since the early 80s have moved into the student dormitories as house parents, at least for a few months. They will be an outstanding influence, we hope for longer than they originally planned. Ross and Ethne Hanna have been marvellously faithful friends who have persevered at Arohanui hostel in Ellerslie. Ron and Aggie Russell, after 35 years of yacht based ministry on Dayspring I,II and III, are wondering with us about Dayspring IV as another yacht for sharing the gospel at least in NZ and possibly the Pacific. Rig and Shakuntala Reddy who began the ministry at Muanicula in Fiji, back in 1975, are now based in Sydney and have a renewed sense of call to preach and teach in Australasia and Asia. Kilioni and Akanisi Marama

have cared for Muanicula for over 20 years, faithfully persevering in often lonely circumstances. Dick and Jan Park have been great friends since the late 60s. Dick comes with me to the Auckland City Mission as my 'nurse'. On the way there and back we continue as we always have to share our wild new ideas about the grace of God and how to teach it. How could we be discouraged with so many powerful examples of perseverance?

Increasingly we are seeing the possibilities of the internet as an instrument for equipping Christians to persevere. Our website www.foweylodge.com has been redesigned and will be not just a way for us to communicate what we have to offer in Bible school but a means of teaching at a distance. We are in the process of putting more and more Bible studies on the site. We have received a request from African pastors for a set training course. Six series of studies, 2 Old Testament, 2 New Testament and 2 topics, will form a certificate and twelve a diploma. Students will be asked to complete assignments which we will not grade, for reasons we have often discussed, but will see as evidence of wholehearted participation. Do have a look at the site and give us your advice.

One of the dangers of continuing in the same work for many years is that we take our personal relationship with Christ for granted. Christian history is littered with so many tragic wrecks of Christian leaders who crashed in a moral sense, some spectacularly. For most of us the crashes are less sensational but equally damaging. Selfish habits grow, conflicts remain unresolved, doubts creep in because we have caught the attitude of the world around us. Twice Paul told us to examine ourselves, (I Cor.11:28; II Cor.13:5) but not each other. We are to check whether Christ is actually in us, and whether we are clean through the blood of Christ. There is no vaccination against sin however mature we are.

The last few years have brought a whole series of attacks, principally through government agencies. The NZQA, NZ Immigration Service, the IRD and the Manukau City Council have all in various ways threatened to wipe us out. These challenges are now resolved for the moment so we can only wonder, what is next? The NZ government of the last few years has become increasingly hostile to Christian teaching so that the tension between 'rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's', (Matt.22:21) has become a much sharper one. Like the coin which bore the imprint of Caesar, so our lives are to bear the imprint of Jesus. We have become more aware of our calling to speak out publicly and with those in authority whenever the gospel is challenged, to be the signet ring of God, the real Lord of the Ring!

As a family God has kept every promise He made to us. Pete is maturing fast as a young man who knows where he stands with God and is becoming a real leader for good among his wide group of friends, as well as in our camp ministry. Have you seen his website www.foweycamps.co.nz ?

Nick is growing rapidly as a Bible teacher with a solid grasp of truth and a great way of explaining grace. He has become a great friend and brother in Christ in the ministry God has called us to, combining teaching and practical maintenance at the Lodge. The world is opening up to him.

Christine continues to be my absolutely indispensable and precious other half. She not only manages brilliantly to balance the books for the medical practice and the Lodge but has a great ministry among children and the many needy people who come our way. She still insists she is not a teacher but for a non-teacher she teaches superbly.

As for me, I continue to do a bit of this and a bit of that and love it! I trust I am listening to Haggai.

I have not this time mentioned the many past students who get in touch at different times. We always love hearing from you or about you, so please keep sharing your lives with us.

I am completing this letter early on Christmas morning before the rest of the family wake up. Despite all the commercialism the day still has a very special feel about it. We trust it will have a very precious meaning to you and your family this year.

Our love in Christ

Tony, Christine, Nick and Pete.