

“CONSIDER YOUR WAYS”

or

FIRST THINGS FIRST

(2) Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built.

(3) Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, (4) *Is it* time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house *lie* waste? (5) Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. (6) Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages *to put it* into a bag with holes.

(7) Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. (8) Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. (9) Ye looked for much, and, lo, *it came* to little; and when ye brought *it* home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that *is* waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. (10) Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed *from* her fruit. (11) And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon *that* which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

(12) Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. (13) Then spake Haggai the LORD’S messenger in the LORD’S message unto the people, saying, I *am* with you, saith the LORD. (14) And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, (15) In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.”

What child of God can think about the desolate state of things among the people of God that Haggai saw before him, with the house of God lying in ruins, with the worship of God neglected,

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while the people who had just been delivered from Babylonian bondage devoted themselves carnal things, making no effort to build again the house of God and reestablish the worship of God in their midst, and not be astonished? — Had they so soon forgotten the bondage from which the Lord had delivered them? — Did they not remember that it was idolatrous covetousness, the love of the world, that had carried them into Babylon? — Cared they nothing for the glory of God? — Would they take their sons and daughters by the hand and led them to hell, saying by their example, “Love the world, get all you can and can all you get; forget God, forget grace, forget the worship of God; eat, drink and be merry; there will be plenty of time to worship God later”?

Yet, that was the state of things when the Lord God sent his prophet Haggai to deliver the message we have just read. When we think of the backwardness of the people to remove the ruins and to erect a place of worship to the Lord, we are astonished at such indifference. What can be more demonstrative of base ingratitude, self-serving covetousness and carnality than to see the house of God in ruins, while those people for whom God has done everything, to whom he has been indescribably gracious, merciful and forgiving devote themselves to building palaces for themselves and storing up all the wealth they can obtain! That was the situation Haggai faced. That was the state and condition of God’s ransomed people, to whom this message was preached.

Does what I have said bite and sting? Do these things apply to you? Do they apply to me? Let’s see. If they do, let us hear the Word of the Lord and repent.

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Haggai was sent of God to expose the evil and sin of his people in neglecting him, his house and his worship, to rouse them from their lethargy. Solomon’s temple was before them in ruins. They passed by it every day. But no one lifted a hand to rebuild it.

- The Lord God had delivered them from Babylon and sent them back to Jerusalem to build his house; but no one lifted a finger to the work.

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- God had provided everything needful for the work; but they said, “*The time is not come that the Lord’s house should be built.*”
- They had experienced remarkable, supernatural deliverance from the bondage and ruin brought upon them by their own sin; but they devoted themselves the world and the things of the world!

How sad! How deplorable! Yet, their behavior is honorable compared to ours. Is it not? The Lord Jesus has saved us by his grace that we might be his witnesses unto all men. He has redeemed us with his blood that we might proclaim redemption everywhere. He has sent us forth into this world for the building of his house the church, the ingathering of his sheep, to build his kingdom. He has provided us with everything needful for the work. And we take what he puts in our hands (time, talent, money and life) and devote it to our own pleasure! We are alive to everything else, excited about everything else, and devote ourselves to everything else except the cause of Christ in our day! — “*Consider your ways!*”

“*Consider your ways!*” — What do we get for our love of the world, for our devotion to it?

- We eat like kings, and never have enough. We drink and gorge ourselves, and remain hungry and thirsty. We buy the finest clothes money can buy, and want more. We save our money and can never save enough, putting it “*into a bag with holes*” (v.6).
- We run every man after his own things, looking for much, and it comes to little, because God blows it away. Why? Because God’s house, God’s cause, God’s worship is despised and neglected (v. 7).
- We crave satisfaction, but seeking it in the things of the world, we find nothing but drought in our souls (vv. 10-11).

“*Consider your ways!*” — The Lord God, our heavenly Father dampens our enjoyments, and tinges them with sorrow, to expose our evil, to get our attention, to draw our hearts away from the world and remind us of bounteous blessings of his grace upon us, to bring our hearts home to Christ. — “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world!*” (Hebrews 12:5-13; Colossians 3:1-3)

(Hebrews 12:5-13) “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the

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chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: (6) For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (8) But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (9) Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? (10) For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness. (11) Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (12) Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; (13) And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

(Colossians 3:1-3) “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

We should use worldly things as wise pilgrims, like staves to help us make our journey through this world. So long as they help us forward in our way, we should make use of them and value them accordingly. But when they become troublesome hindrances and cumbersome burdens, we would be wise to throw them away. Samuel Rutherford warned, “Do not build your nest in any of the trees of this forest. They are all marked to be burned.”

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We will have that upon which we set our hearts; but there is something better to set your heart on than this world. — Christ is better! If they had been written at the time, I think Haggai would have chosen Matthew 6 or Luke 12 as the text from which to preach this sermon. — “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*” **Let’s look at Luke 12, verses 22-31, and ask God to**

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graciously enable us and sweetly force us by his grace to put first things first.

(Luke 12:22-31) “And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. (23) The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment. (24) Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? (25) And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? (26) If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? (27) Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (28) If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith? (29) And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. (30) For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. (31) But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

There are five things in these verses to which I would direct your attention.

1. Here is **a fact to remember**. — “*The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment*” (v. 23). **There is more to life than the gratification of animal cravings and the adornment of the body.** Yet, these are the things about which all men and women most naturally devote most of their thoughts and energies. This is the very thing Paul is talking about when he says, “*Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.*”

(1 Timothy 4:8) “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

We only live in these bodies. Life is what is inside the body. Life is not that which is sustained by meat; but that which is sustained by grace. Beauty is

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not something you can buy in a clothing store, or in a plastic surgeon’s office. Beauty is the hidden man of the heart, Christ Jesus, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

2. **In Haggai, the Lord tells us to consider our ways. Here in Luke 12:24-27 he tells not only to consider our ways, but to consider him.**

Our Savior is calling us away from the care of the world and calling us to faith, calling us to honor God by believing him. He does so by pointing out some things that ought to be obvious to every kindergarten child. They may seem to be simple, insignificant, almost trivial lessons to carnal minds; but after studying this Book every day for the past 41 years, after reading hundreds of volumes of theology, I find the things mentioned in this passage to be matters of deepest importance. The more I ponder them, the weightier they become. The more I study them, the more profound they appear.

Consider the ravens. — “*Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?*” (v. 24) — If God Almighty condescends to provide for the needs of a bird, a raven at that, if he orders the affairs of providence to give the ravens their daily food, is it reasonable for us to ever imagine that he might fail to provide for us?

Consider the yourself. — “*And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?*” (v. 25) — The word here translated “*stature*” should probably be translated “*life,*” or “*age*” as it is in John 9:21 and 23 and Hebrews 11:11. What our Lord is saying here is than none of us can, by any means, add one bit to the...

- Height of our frames.
- The maturity of our years.
- Or the days of our lives.

Our days are “*as an handbreadth*” (Ps.39:5), considerably less than one cubit! If we are not able to add anything to the number of our days on this earth, it is utterly absurd to spend our time and energy fretting about how we can do so! Far better it is for us to say with David, “*My times are in thy hands*” and rejoice to know that it is so.

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Consider the lilies. — *“Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?”* (vv. 27-28) — If the Lord God, every year, provides the lilies with fresh foliage and fresh blooms, how absurd it is for us to imagine that he might fail to clothe us today, or tomorrow.

Consider the heathen. — *“For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things”* (v. 30). — What a shame it is for God’s people to grovel like the heathen of this world after the things of the world. If God is my Father and Christ my Savior and the Holy Spirit my Comforter, if heaven is my home and eternity is the span of my life, I ought not find it difficult to live above the cares of and anxieties of the heathen. Faith in Christ ought to make my heart light. The light of eternity ought to make the things of earth grow dim. Heavenly glory ought to make the baubles of earth utterly insignificant to me.

Consider your Father. — *“Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things”* (v. 30). — This fact alone ought to make us perfectly content. All our needs in this world are perfectly known to our Father, the Lord of heaven and earth. He can relieve our needs whenever he sees fit; and he will relieve our needs whenever it is best for us that they be relieved. He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to death to ransom our souls, he who gave us his darling Son will not fail to give us everything we need (Romans 8:32).

Let us consider these facts. May God the Holy Spirit write them upon the tables of our hearts and cause them to bring forth fruit in our lives.

- Nothing is more common to men than worrying about things over which they have no control.
- Nothing is more contradictory to our professed faith in the living God than worrying about the things of this world and our lives in it.
- Nothing so honors our God as confidently trusting him.

(Psalms 23) “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of

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righteousness for his name’s sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

3. Here is **a call to faith** in our God (vv. 28-30).

(Luke 12:28-30) “If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith? (29) And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. (30) For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.”

- Faith in God’s Goodness.
- Faith in God’s Wisdom.
- Faith in God’s Power.
- Faith in God’s Grace.
- Faith in God’s Promises.
- Faith in God’s Providence.
- Faith in God’s Faithfulness.

4. Now, in verse 31 our Lord directs our hearts heavenward and tells us of **a kingdom to seek**. — “*But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.*” — “*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*” (Matthew 6:33).

We all know that our first priority in life ought to be the kingdom and glory of our God. We must not give our hearts to this world. Let us not live as though we were animals, without immortal souls. May God give us grace to live as men and women who are constantly aware that our lives in this world are but a very brief prelude to another world, as men and women with immortal souls to be saved or lost. You and I have...

- A death to die.

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- A God to meet.
- A judgment to face.
- An eternity awaiting us.

Those things need to be ever before our hearts and minds. But **when can it be said that a person is seeking the kingdom of God?** That is the question I want to answer as I conclude this message. Am I seeking the kingdom of God? Are you? I know this — The kingdom of God is the only thing worth seeking! And I know this — **A person is seeking the kingdom of God when he is living in the pursuit of Christ.**

(Hebrews 12:14) “Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:”

(Philippians 3:3-14) “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. (4) Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: (5) Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; (6) Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. (7) But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, (9) And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (10) That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; (11) If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. (12) Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are

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before, (14) I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

5. Here is **a promise from Christ** to content our hearts.—”*All these things shall be added unto you*” (v. 31). That person who sets his heart upon Christ and eternity shall never lack anything in this world that he needs. — “*Lacked ye anything?*” He shall always have exactly enough of everything.

(Psalms 37:25) “I have been young, and *now* am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.”

(Psalms 84:11) “For the LORD God *is* a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good *thing* will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

(Isaiah 3:10) “Say ye to the righteous, that *it shall be well with him*: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.”

(Isaiah 33:16) “He shall dwell on high: his place of defence *shall be* the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters *shall be* sure.”

(Romans 8:28-32) “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (29) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (30) Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (31) What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (32) He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

(Psalms 23) “The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of

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REPENTANCE GRANTED

Now, go back to Haggai 1. Once Haggai had delivered God’s message, God’s people heard him and the Lord graciously wrought repentance in them, beginning with Zerubbabel and Joshua, their leaders.

(Haggai 1:12-15) “Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. (13) Then spake Haggai the LORD’S messenger in the LORD’S message unto the people, saying, I *am* with you, saith the LORD. (14) And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, (15) In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.”

Zerubbabel means a stranger. It comes from the words Zer and Babel, confusion; alluding to the old Tower in the plains of Shinar. But his father’s name was Shealtiel. It is also a compound word, coming from the words Shealtu and El. It means, “I have asked of God. AS you know, Joshua is the same name in Hebrew, as Jesus is in Greek, both meaning Savior. Zerubbabel (the governor) and Joshua (the priest) typify our Lord Jesus Christ, our Governor and our High Priest. When they went to work, the people followed. And if you and I respond to God’s Word, if we repent of our sin and devote ourselves to the cause of Christ, it will be because the Lord Jesus has not left

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us to ourselves. It will be because God our Savior still works in us to will and do of his good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

GLORIFY GOD

Let me show you one more thing, and I will be done. — If we would glorify our God while we live in this world, let us devote ourselves to him entirely, giving ourselves to the blessed work of building his house, establishing his worship, and seeking the salvation of his people in the day he has given us (Haggai 1:8).

(Haggai 1:8) “Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.”

If you are still concerned that you might lose something if you take everything God gives you and devote it to the cause of Christ, listen to the promise God gives in Exodus 34:23-24.

(Exodus 34:23-24) “Thrice in the year shall all your menchildren appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. (24) For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year.”

God give me grace to value nothing in this world in comparison with Christ and his cause, to value nothing in this world more than I will value it when I leave this world.

(Psalms 73:23-26) “Nevertheless I *am* continually with thee: thou hast holden *me* by my right hand. (24) Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me *to* glory. (25) Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire beside thee. (26) My flesh and my heart faileth: *but* God *is* the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”

Amen.