

Haggai Sunday Sermon Series
Christopher Arcadi
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God First: Consider Your Ways
Week 1: Consider your Priorities

We are going to be camping out in the book of Haggai for the next four weeks.

Why Haggai?

Three reasons:

1) We've likely never read it. Raise your hands if: read, Bible, guy/girl

2) We don't know what's the book is about.

- Martin Luther - "If we should consider the subject matter unsympathetically, the prophet will seem quite trivial on the surface, especially in our day. Everything about which he prophesies, especially about rebuilding the temple, has ceased. As a consequence, we must consider the subject matter correctly, so that we look not so much at it as at the Word of God."

3) A proper reading of Haggai fundamentally challenges the way we look at life and the way we do life as God's people.

And I pray that the Lord would challenge us today: our ideologies, our thinking. That he would awaken us from spiritual slumber and apathy - as we can so easily slip into those things as we live lives of relative comfort and ease while missing out on much that God might have for us.

The sermon series this month is: God First. When it comes to life, when it comes pursuits, when it comes to intentions, when it comes to finances, our hearts, our time, our comforts, God's Word is clear, Haggai is clear - God comes first. God rules and reigns over it all. There is nothing outside of his authority that he does not have ultimate control of, ultimate Lordship over.

Throughout the book of Haggai there is the phrase, the mantra, "Consider your ways." Do you know that God deeply desires, he yearns for, fellowship with people? God desires to have a real relationship with those he deeply loves. Everyone. But God also wants us to recognize that true human flourishing and blessing are found only as a result of a restored relationship with him. And so there is the exhortation by God for us to "consider our ways." The NIV says, "give careful thought to..." In other words God is saying that we all should be carefully examining what we do and why we are doing what we do and what is happening as a result of how we are living because those things bear testimony to our spiritual condition before God and whether or not that relationship is right and we are experiencing the human flourishing, the full life as Jesus says, that he desires to give. And maybe we're not. But God says consider, examine, weigh for yourself, be honest with yourself - it might be revealing to you.

And I've set up my series in Haggai off of that simple phrase "Consider your ways" This week is "Consider your priorities."

So let's jump into the text this morning to see what God might say to us:

V.1 - In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

Background:

Because of great record keeping by the Persians we actually have the exact date that this prophesy began – Aug. 29th, 520B.C. In fact this entire book took place over 5 months between Aug. and Dec.

When the prophecy of Haggai was given he was probably an older man, likely in his 70's at least. Old enough to have lasted though the exile, old enough to have seen the glory of the first temple, Solomon's Temple.

So the people of Israel had been allowed to return from exile in 538 - 18 years earlier and when that happened approximately 50,000 Israelites returned home at this time.

But we must realize that Israel now basically just consisted of Jerusalem and the small surrounding territory of Judah – nowhere near what it once was. It was a sub-province now of the Persian Empire, that area where Jerusalem was, was subject to the control of a more dominant Samaria, but nevertheless it was granted its own somewhat independent leadership under the governor Zerubbabel, and the high priest Joshua.

As you can imagine when the people returned home there was great excitement and concern to start rebuilding the temple. After all God had been faithful to them, he had not forgotten them. And we can see from Ezra chapter 3 that the foundation of the temple was quickly rebuilt and Israel celebrated this accomplishment. But then the work stopped. Why? Ezra chapter 4 tells us that it was largely due to the Samaritans. They didn't want the temple rebuilt so they began to thwart the building progress by discouraging the Israelites and making them afraid to build. It also says that they bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose. This effort was so successful the work stopped completely and the project lay dormant for 16 years.

Pause: Look up here – this is a great connecting point for us today to the book of Haggai. Because when it comes to our spiritual lives we deal with issues of discouragement, fear, and frustration all the time.

- Discouragement that reality isn't always what we want it to be. The church is marginalized in society today. The world isn't getting any better. Life doesn't always smell like roses.
- Fear that devotion to God will cost me something: my safety, my reputation, my popularity, my job, my goals, my comfort.
- And frustration that life is difficult and we fall short and there are obstacles, cultural and personal, which we must deal with if we are going to live faithful lives to God.

And it's into this context that the Lord speaks – Two years after Darius succeeds Cyrus as King of the Persian Empire the word of the Lord comes to Haggai calling out the sin of the people and demanding that God's temple be rebuilt.

Now just one last important piece of information before we jump into the meat of the text: it has to do with the importance of the temple.

- Haggai seems stuck on this. And we look back from a new testament perspective a we do view it as superficial – We look down on Haggai and say “Don't you know God cares about the heart Haggai and not the house, we can worship God anywhere.” And Haggai would say, “Um, duh.”
- If we actually read dedication of the first temple in 1 Kings 8 it's obvious that Haggai and the Israelites already know that God did not need a house to dwell, that nothing in creation could contain him. It not about a dwelling place.
- It's also apparent that the rebuilding of the temple wasn't to restart the sacrificial system. Haggai never mentions that. So if it's not about giving God a home and it's not about the sacrificial system what's the point?

Why was the rebuilding of the temple so important?

4 Reasons

1) **The temple was a testimony**, a testimony to the glory and honor of the Lord. They are bound up with it. Go back and read Solomon's prayer in the dedication of the first temple. You'll notice an emphasis on the Lord's name, which is synonymous with his honor and glory.

- The Lord built the first temple as a monument to his name, as a monument to his honor and glory.

- The Lord destroyed that temple as a monument to his honor and glory and holiness because they rebelled against him, broke covenant and worshiped idols.

- And now the Lord is calling for a rebuilding of the temple, for the sake of his name, for his own honor and glory.

2) **The temple was a witness**, a witness to the nations. In Solomon's dedication he states that the temple was to be a witness to all peoples that all peoples might know and fear the name of the Lord. In 520 BC that need still existed and that's why the temple needed to be rebuilt. The Lord is still the one true and living God and this tiny, seemingly insignificant remnant was still God's chosen instrument for bring worldwide blessing, for bringing a savior into the world and the world needed to know that God's purposes, and plans, and people remained the same.

3) **The temple was a symbol**, a symbol of God's covenant with his people. What was the essence of God's covenant with his people? We see it later in this first chapter of Haggai, verse 13. We see it in Exodus when God says you will be my people and I will be your God and when Moses is pleading with God after the people sinned with the golden calf, Moses says, “If your presence does not go with us, we might as well die in the desert!” It's his presence. “I am with you” is the essence of the covenant. God's people in God's place under God's rule. The temple was supposed to be the physical, visible, tangible reminder of the relationship between this God and this people. For a time he was angry with them for their rebellion against him and he sent them away to exile but he was still their God and they are

still his people even in exile and now that he is restoring their relationship a new temple and new symbol is needed.

4) **The temple is a sign**, it's a pointer of things to come. It points forward to the consummation of all things. To Revelation 21 there we find a new world, a new city, and a new Eden. There all of God's people will be gathered together, but there will be no temple – we are told that repeatedly. Why? Because it won't be needed anymore. God and the Lamb will dwell in their midst and they will see him face to face. The temple pointed people to and prepared them for the day when this temple was no longer needed. It was a sign of great hope, of infinitely better things to come.

No wonder the Lord was so insistent that the temple be rebuilt!

So if that is why the temple was important. Let me also tell you how the temple applies to us today. If the temple served as a testimony, a witness, a symbol, and a sign then:

1) The temple's purpose was fulfilled in Jesus.

John 2:19-21 - Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

- Jesus was the testimony to God's honor and glory – God's own Word incarnate
- Jesus was the witness to the nations of God's redemptive purposes both in the way he lived and through his work on the cross
- Jesus was the symbol of God's desire for relationship with his people – I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.
- Jesus was the sign of great hope – fulfilling in himself God's purpose to save redeem and restore all of creation.

Jesus was the temple, but it doesn't stop there.

2) The church is the extension of Christ and the continuation of his work here on the earth both individually and corporately. Christ now dwells in us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Individually this is seen in:

*1 Cor. 6:19 – "Do you not know that your bodies are **temples** of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price."*

As a Christian you are a:

- Testimony to God's honor and glory
- Witness to the nations of his redemptive work
- Symbol of God's new covenant and his love relationship with people
- Sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God – that there are better things to come, a better life to live, and we should be living that way.

But not only as individuals are we the temple but also corporately as the church:

1 Cor. 3:16 – “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s **temple** and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?”

1 Peter 2:4-5 - As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Why should we continue gathering together? Why should we continue giving of ourselves and our finances to the work going on here? Why is it important that we come and be physically present here instead of sitting at home in our convenience and comforts? Because we are a beacon to the world and together we function as a:

- Testimony to God’s honor and glory
- Witness to the nations of his redemptive work
- Symbol of God’s new covenant and his love relationship with people
- Sign and foretaste of the Kingdom of God – that there are better things to come, a better life to live, and we should be living that way.

We are the temple and with that said it is not bad application to equate neglecting the temple and God’s desire to rebuild it, to our spiritual life and God’s desire for us to make the investment to build that as well.

And it is important that we remember this on our journey through Haggai lest we lose our way.

So that’s what the temple was supposed to be, and that’s what God’s people knew it was supposed to be. Now let’s consider their excuse for not building it.

² “Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?”

If you are taking notes write this down:

Truth #1: The people of God had a problem positioning their own priorities over God’s priorities.

No one in Israel would have said that the building of the temple wasn’t important. They were just saying that is wasn’t the right time.

Just like today we might not say that being a fully formed follower of Jesus Christ isn’t important. We just live like now isn’t such a great time for it. We’ll get around to it, eventually, maybe, once all the stars align and my kids are out of the house and I’m independently wealthy and I have nothing better to do and no other wants or desires that might distract me from it. Sure! But now’s not such a great time.

The contrast here is interesting – paneled houses/ruins; comfort and luxury/neglect; priority and care/abandonment.

Question church: What takes priority in your life?

What gets more attention in your life you – your own thoughts, plans, and desires – or God – his thoughts, his plans, and his desires? How much time is devoted to building your spiritual relationship with the Lord? What wins the day - God's Word and his will or my word and my will?

Application: We spend a great deal of time and effort managing life, even just to do it “right” as our culture demands. And from the millionaire living a life of luxury to the homeless person who is doing all they can just to scrape by with the bare necessities of life, every person needs to wrestle with living a life of selfish ambition rather than one of obedience to God.

This leads us to the second truth found in the text:

Truth #2: A life lived without God is a life of diminishing returns

Haggai is clear that a disregarding of God leads to a lack of flourishing in life.

V.5 Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.”

Anyone ever feel like that?

Futility in life is a sign of cursing not blessing. Jesus said “I have come to give you life and life to the full.” God's covenant with his people was that they would experience blessing and prosperity as they walked with the Lord, but if they fell away from the Lord they would step outside of his blessing and enter into curse. I would ask each of us to consider our ways this morning. Does life feel like this for you? Where you are putting in so much effort but receiving so little in return? Perhaps it's because you are trying to do it all without God. Perhaps it is because you are trying to build your own house while his house, your spiritual life, lies in ruins.

But here's the remedy church:

Remedy: Build the house

V.7“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁸ 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.”

Go – bring – and build – three verbs which can be used for application of what this looks like for us.

1) Repent – When God says “go” what he is telling us to do is to go a different direction. To stop what we are currently doing and to turn from it. That's repentance.

- Where do we need to repent church? What do we need to change? Where do we need to go a different direction?

2) Trust – When God says “bring wood” we need to realize that wood wasn’t anywhere near Jerusalem. There were no trees. During the sieges and conquests they had deforested the region and so it was going to take effort and time to travel all the way to the forests and to carry that wood all the way back to Jerusalem. Would it be worth the effort? Worth the investment? Yes. God was calling his people to trust him.

- Just like God is calling us to trust him that turning from a life in which we are the priority and putting in the time and effort to make him the priority will be worth it.

3) Obey – When God says “build” it’s a call to obedience. Don’t just cognitively agree that it’s probably a good idea and a thing we should do. Do it. Obey. James tells us that if a person “knows the good they ought to do and does not do it, it is sin.”

Postponed obedience is a consistent condition of the sinful heart. And a life lived in sin leads to a lack of flourishing. Not God’s will for his church, not God’s will for his people.

As we conclude today look at verses 9-11:

V.9 “You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.”

As we gather before the Lord’s table today, the Lord is telling each of us this morning to consider our ways. To consider our priorities. Like it or not, God is at the center of all things. He is a sovereign God and the all-powerful authority over each of our lives. And He loves you. And in Jesus Christ he bought redemption for you to give you life in his name. He wants you to find the fullness of life and peace that is found only in his presence. But are we building his house? Are we pursuing him? Have we made him a priority in our lives and are we living as the testimony, witness, sign, and symbol he has purposed us to be?

As we prepare our hearts for communion, I would ask us to do some soul searching. Where is the Lord calling us to repent, to turn around and go a different direction? In what areas is the Lord calling us to trust, in his life, in his provision? Finally, in what areas do we just need to obey, to do what the Lord is calling us to do? Don’t be apathetic towards God’s voice this morning. Make building the house a priority, for in it life and flourishing under the blessings of God are found.

Let’s pray.