

Consider Your Ways

Haggai 1:5-8 2:15-19—And now thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but are not satisfied; ye drink, but are not filled with drink; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages for a bag with holes. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Consider your ways. 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 Jehovah.

Haggai 2:15-19—And now, I pray you, consider from this day and onward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of Jehovah, —before those [days] were, when one came to a heap of twenty [measures], there were but ten; when one came to the vat to draw out fifty press-measures, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the work of your hands; and ye [turned] not to me, saith Jehovah. Consider, I pray you, from this day and onward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth [month], from the day that the foundation of Jehovah's temple was laid, consider [it]. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive-tree have not brought forth: from this day will I bless [you].

Let's have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we gather here in Thy presence, we do pray that Thou wilt reveal Thy mind to us. Open our understanding and bring us into Thy very thought that we may know what is Thy thought and learn to obey Thee and follow Thee and glorify Thy name. We commit this time into Thy hand. It is Thy time. Lord, we pray that Thou would use this time to bless Thy people and enable Thy people to understand Thy heart and bring us into that which Thou art after. We are ready to give Thee glory. In Thy precious name we pray. Amen.

The Remnant Returns to Jerusalem

Thank God for bringing us together again. In the book of Haggai, you will find the word *consider* four times. In other words, God wants us to consider. If you look at the chronological table in the Bible, you will find that in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed Jerusalem, both the city and temple. But fifty years later in 536 BC, Cyrus, the emperor of Syria, gave orders for the Jews in captivity that whoever desired to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple they were free to do so. Because of this, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel and a remnant returned from Babylonian captivity to go back to Jerusalem. Jerusalem at that time was a desert place. Everything was destroyed, so they had to start from the very beginning.

After they arrived in Jerusalem, in the second year they started to lay the foundation. When the foundation was laid, some people cried because they had seen the former temple. Other people shouted because they were young people who had never seen the former temple.

The Building of the Temple was Stopped for Fifteen Years

When they started to build the temple, their enemies tried to disturb them and they appealed to Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes listened to them and commanded the building of the temple be stopped. So the temple in Jerusalem was stopped for fifteen years. During those fifteen years, what did the remnant who had returned do? They built their own houses. They built beautiful houses for themselves thinking that it was not yet time for the building of the temple. But then God raised up two prophets—an old man, Haggai and a young man, Zechariah. They began to prophesy to the children of Israel and encouraged them to start building the temple in spite of opposition. Thank God, the people listened and they began to build the house of God in the second year of King Darius.

Of course, they were still surrounded by their enemies. But thank God, they continued to rebuild the house in spite of opposition through the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. God raised up these two prophets, Haggai an old prophet and Zechariah a young prophet, to encourage the people to complete the building of the house of God in Jerusalem.

Haggai and Zechariah Encourage the People to Rebuild the House of God

Haggai, being an old man, did not speak much; there are only two chapters in his book. But Zechariah, being a young man, spoke a lot. When Haggai spoke, there was one word that he repeatedly used and that is the word *consider*, which means “think over, think deeply, think well, think what has happened, think what will happen if you obey God.” Four times the prophet Haggai used the word *consider*.

He said, “You are building your own houses and leaving the house of God in desolation. What happened to your life? Do you find your life satisfactory? No. You find your life very unsatisfactory. Why is it so? It is because you have left the house of God desolate and you are building your own house.” So the prophet Haggai suggested that they should go to the mountain, gather the material and begin the building of the house of God. Thank God they listened to the prophet and they began to build.

In the book of Haggai, you find four times the prophet used the word *consider*. Consider means “think over, think deeply, think what has happened and what will be happening.” How important it is that we do consider before the Lord. Sometimes we live our lives casually. We live day by day as usual but God wants us

to consider, to stop, to think, to think over. This is the time for us to consider. Why is it so? Because we know that the coming of the Lord is imminent.

The Lord May Come at any Moment

I often say that all the prophecies that precede the coming of the Lord in the Bible have been fulfilled; every one of them. There are still prophecies to be fulfilled, but these prophecies are concerned with the coming of the Lord and afterwards, not before. We are living in a very exciting time. We are living in the last days. We are living in the days when we expect our Lord to return at any moment. As we are gathering here this morning, do you know it is quite possible that the Lord will come back today? If He should come today, are you ready? Are you prepared for Him? So it is of utmost importance that we, who are living in the last days at the time when the Lord may come at any moment, should be ready.

The children of Israel, who had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, laid the foundation but because Artaxerxes forbade them to continue, they left it unfinished. They had to do something, so they began to build their own beautiful houses to live in. They said, "The time of rebuilding the temple has not yet come." But thank God, He raised up these two prophets and encouraged them to consider. What should they consider? Because they were building their own houses and had left the house of God unfinished, they should consider that God had not blessed their living.

Haggai Encouraged the People to Consider What They were Doing

Haggai told them, "You consider now. You did a lot for yourselves and tried to have a good life, but because the house of God was left unfinished, what has happened?" He said, "You brought in more but you enjoyed less. Go to the mountain, get the material and begin to build the house of God in spite of the fact that it was forbidden by Artaxerxes." Thank God, the remnant listened to Haggai. So they began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. As they were doing this, their enemies tried to disturb them. At first they would say, "We will help with your building." They said, "No, this is our responsibility; we will do it alone." So the enemy used all kinds of means to disturb them and stop the work of the building of the house of God. But thank God, through the two prophets God encouraged them to go on.

The prophet Haggai used the word consider four times. First, they were to consider what had happened because they were building their own houses and leaving the house of God desolate. He said, "You take in more, but you enjoy less." This is because the blessing of the Lord was not there. "Go up to the mountain, get the material, build the house of God, and God will bless you." Thank God, the

remnant listened to the prophet and they began to build. The enemies tried all kinds of means to stop them, but by the grace of God and the encouragement of the prophets they continued until the temple was finished.

Here is an urgent lesson for us today because we are living at the end of our time. All the prophecies before the coming of the Lord have been fulfilled. If you search the Bible, you will find they are so. So what is before us is the coming of the Lord. Our Lord Jesus can return at any moment. But why is He delayed? It is not because He does not want to return; it is because His bride is not ready.

The Story of the Taylor Family Who Served the Lord for Generations

I remember the story of the great-grandfather of Hudson Taylor. When he was a young man, he loved the world; he loved dancing and the enjoyment of the world. But on the day he was to be married, he got up and suddenly remembered that it was his wedding day. It was a serious matter. So he went to the field and prayed, and as he prayed, he forgot the time. He prayed and prayed and prayed. When he finished praying, he realized it was already time for his wedding. Everybody was waiting including his bride. They wondered where the bridegroom was. So he hurriedly went and they were wed. In the evening, before they went to bed, Hudson Taylor's great-grandfather told his wife that they had to pray. It was a surprise to his new wife because this was not the way of life they lived before. Hudson Taylor's great-grandfather told her to kneel down and he prayed. The result was that this family became God's family. God used this family for his glory. For four generations the Taylors served God. After Hudson Taylor even more generations served God. During the war time, I was in Chungking, and I saw Hudson Taylor's grandson going through the street of Chungking shouting the gospel. This family was blessed by God and used by God because his great-grandfather served God.

We Cannot Afford to be Careless in the Way We Live

God wants us in this moment to consider, to think over, to think deeply. We cannot afford to be casual anymore. Thank God we are here and for this opportunity to meet together. But we do not know if when this day is over the Lord may have come. Do you think it is impossible? No. It is absolutely possible. All the prophecies preceding the coming of the Lord have been fulfilled. You can search the Scriptures and you will find that it is so. What is left are the prophecies during the coming of the Lord and after His coming. We are living in a very crucial time. We cannot afford to be careless like the children of Israel who had left the house of God unbuilt for fifteen years and built their own houses. They thought the time for the building of the house of God had not yet come because the time was not

yet ready. Is that our thought? Do we think that the Lord will not come now? that we still have time? that we can enjoy ourselves? that we can wake up when the time comes? May we not deceive ourselves! The time is now; the Lord may come at any moment. However, the problem is: are we ready?

The Ten Virgins

You remember the ten virgins who represent Christians. They all had their torch with oil in them, and they all went out to meet the Bridegroom. That was the attitude of God's people from the first generation onwards. They were going to meet the Lord because it was possible that the Lord may come during the first century. But as they were waiting, they all died. So these ten virgins in Matthew represent the Christians that have died through the centuries; they could not wait for the Lord's coming. Suddenly, at midnight, there was the cry, "The Lord cometh." And they all woke up which means they were resurrected.

Among the ten virgins, five were wise. They not only had oil in their torch but they had extra oil in their vessel because they did not know when the Lord would return. So they were ready; they were prepared. But the foolish virgins thought the Lord would not come in their lifetime, that they had plenty of time. They also had vessels, but they did not put extra oil in them. They put in other things they thought were precious to them; but because the Lord delayed, they all fell asleep. In the Bible, falling asleep means they all died. That speaks of the Christians from the first century onward. But thank God, the day is coming when there will be the sound of the voice that says, "The Lord cometh." They all rose up. That means they were all resurrected. The wise virgins had extra oil in their vessels so they could replenish the torch, and they were able to go and meet the Bridegroom. But the foolish virgins thought they were wiser than the wise virgins, so they had other precious things in their vessels; but they cannot use these precious things to rekindle the torch. Therefore, they had to go and buy oil. As they were gone, the Bridegroom came, and the wise virgins went into the wedding. We do not know whether the foolish virgins got their extra oil or not. (I wonder if they did get it.) But when they came back, they found the door closed, and they were barred from the marriage feast. They were thus cast into outer darkness.

The Outer Darkness

When you are reading the Bible, I wonder if you are curious about the outer darkness. Do you want to know what outer darkness is? The Bible does not tell us; it just tells us it is outside of the wedding feast. In other words, it will be outside of the kingdom of Christ. Those outside will not participate with the Lord in the kingdom of the heavens during the thousand years rule. They will be cast outside

in outer darkness. I know many people are wondering what the outer darkness is because we all have that curiosity. Of all the books that I have read, I have only read one book that tells us what he thought the outer darkness was, and that is Robert Govett; but I will not tell you what he said.

Anyway, one thing is sure. Outer darkness is outside of the millennium kingdom of Christ. During those thousand years when Christ shall come and reign over the earth and the overcomers will reign with Him from heaven, these foolish virgins will be outside of the kingdom. During that time there will be gnashing of teeth which simply means repent. They will repent because of their present pleasure, and they forfeited the kingdom rule.

But thank God, this is not the end because the Bible says that when they were cast in the outer darkness, there was the gnashing of teeth. In other words, that is the time they are repenting. They repented that they were not ready for the Lord's return. Because of their repentance, thank God, God's grace knows no end. Whom He has chosen, He has called; whom He has called, He has justified; whom He has justified, He has glorified. So if you believe in the Lord Jesus, you are saved forever. Not only forever, but you will be saved to the uttermost. Eventually, everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus today will be completed by the grace of God. In Romans 8:30 we are told that whom He has foreordained, He has called; whom He has called, He has justified; whom He has justified, He has glorified. So every brother and sister will be glorified. As you read Revelation 21 and 22, you will find that in eternity all the Christians will be crowned and reign with Christ forever and ever. But during the millennial time, those outside of the kingdom will repent in darkness.

The Challenge

Brothers and sisters, the Lord is coming. He may come today. Who knows? Even though we may gather this morning, this afternoon hopefully this room will be empty. Everyone will be taken and no one will be left in outer darkness. That is my prayer.

Do not think that it is yet far off and there is time for you to take pleasure for yourself and time for you to repent and return to the Lord in time for His return. This is wishful thinking. We do not know when He might return. He may come at any moment—today, tomorrow, or anytime. So what is necessary for every one of us is to be ready at any moment. This morning, I will challenge you with one word: Are you ready for the Lord's return? If He should return today, is there anything in your life that would stand in the way of you being taken and thus left in outer darkness? May the Lord have mercy upon us!

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, how we praise and thank Thee that Thy return is imminent. Lord, Thou hast warned us that Thou may come at any moment. Do not allow us to be complacent, to love this world for a little while, not knowing that if Thou should come today where we will be. Lord, we thank Thee that Thou who has called us will save us to the uttermost. Thou who has called us, Thou will justify us. Thou who has justified us, Thou will glorify us; every one of us. Oh, what a God you are! What a gracious Savior You are! Lord, enable us to understand Your heart and offer ourselves completely to You and allow You to work out Your full salvation in every one of us. Do not allow us to covet the pleasures of this world just for a few moments and lose that reigning with Christ during the thousand years. So we commit every brother and sister here into Thy hand and ask that Thou have mercy upon us. Wake us up that every one of us will be ready for Thy imminent return. The prayer of our heart is, "Come, Lord Jesus, we are waiting." In Thy precious name. Amen.