

Haggai #1: Consider Your Ways (Haggai 1)

PRAY

There is a trail on the southwest side of the city that is a favourite of my family's
Called the Lime Kiln Trail... I know many of you have walked this trail as well
It's especially great for feeding birds (chickadees and nuthatches) right out of your hand
But partway down this trail, you come across remnants of civilization: ruins of an old lime kiln
A large stove for refining lime deposits, used up to around 70 years ago
Parts of the stone structures still stand, but nature has steadily encroached as well
Much of it has fallen into disrepair... the buildings mere traces of what they once were

Question: Is your *life* like this? Is there anything lying in shambles or ruins in your soul today?
Are there things that you've allowed to fall into disuse or disrepair?

Are there parts of your spiritual life that are mere traces of what they once were?
It could be a devotional life or prayer habit or passion in worship that is lying in shambles
Or maybe you've stopped fighting against a destructive sin that's caused a lot of damage
It could be a love for the lost that's grown cold
Or maybe a spiritual gift that's long lain dormant
Perhaps your spirituality has been sapped by obsession with technology... Or whatever
Whatever it is the Spirit brings to your mind, make note of it... Even write it down right now
This (___) lies in ruins in my life... Then keep this in mind

As I believe God's Word can speak into these areas of our lives with power, helping us rebuild
I'll invite you to **TURN** with me to the little O.T. book of Haggai [page #791]
Where we'll spend the next 3 weeks... You may need the page number for this one!
Some of you haven't read this book before... Some might not have known it even existed

Haggai was a prophet who delivered messages from God around 500 years before Christ
The Hebrew people, after consistent failure to obey the Lord, had been exiled into foreign lands
And Jerusalem, including the temple, had been destroyed and left in ruins
But after nearly 50 years in captivity, some exiles were permitted to return home
At first, there'd been fervency to work and rebuild the temple, and its foundation was rebuilt
But, as the book of Ezra tells the story, after some hostile neighbours raised a stink,
and some harsh realities of agrarian life began to sink in,
the temple project was stalled, seemingly abandoned—put on hold for 16 years
Over those 16 years, the Jews' passion waned, and they turned their attention to other matters
Like rebuilding their own personal homes and businesses, for instance
Many of the people settled into a status quo, working hard to grind out a living
The news in Persia heralded the excitement of a new king, Darius
Meanwhile, in the empire's backwater province of Judah, not much was going on
And it's into this stagnant situation that Haggai began to prophesy, calling them to action
Urging them to get over their apathy and stop delaying their obedience

Micah Fries says: "*Haggai is the story of God's people who were focused on their own satisfaction and failed to flourish because of it. Their repentance and obedience would result in God's blessing.*" ...Sound familiar? I suspect this is reflective of many of us today:

Preoccupied with our personal plans, agendas, and desires... But apathetic in our faith
In a hive of activity... Busy days filled with all kinds of pursuits, except the most vital:
Loving and worshipping the God who loves us and has saved us

That's why the temple was a big deal: It was where God's people primarily worshipped God
You could say the temple was the place of two things: God's glory and God's sacrifices
It was where God specially dwelt on earth, revealing his glorious presence
And it was where worshipers made sacrifices to God to atone for their sins
So think about that: If you were missing the place of God's glory and God's sacrifices,
You'd feel that God was not with you and that you were stuck in unforgiven sin

For us who worship God as he has been revealed in Jesus Christ, Jesus himself is our new temple
He is the Word who took on flesh and dwelt (or 'tabernacled') among us... God with us
He is the once-and-for-all sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away our sin
And we worship in and through him—as his church, which also reflects his temple
So the message of the book for us isn't that we need to go build another physical temple
It's that we need to restore God's rightful place in our lives and build up his people
This is why I chose to preach this book at this time
As I thought of all the projects and prospects on the horizon for our church,
Including planting new churches and renovating or rebuilding our old facilities,
I felt it would be apropos for us to spend time with people in similar positions as us—
In Haggai, as well as in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah soon
But the main application for us won't usually be to pick up tools or to give to a building fund
It'll be to work with the Lord in rebuilding all of our hearts' devotion to him
Church plants and church buildings will come, and we'll have parts to play in them
But first things first! Let's check the state of our own souls with the Lord

Without further ado, I'll read Haggai chapter 1: **READ v.1-15¹** (This is the word of the Lord)
This passage explicitly claims to be the word of the Lord—a message directly from God—in v.1
As for all the names listed there, three are of particular importance:

Haggai, the prophet, who later is called 'the messenger of the Lord'
Zerubbabel, the current governor of Judah, and grandson of the king who'd been exiled
He was a rightful heir of David's throne, the closest thing they had to a king
And Joshua, the current high priest in Jerusalem

It's noteworthy that all 3 major O.T. leadership roles intersect here: prophet, priest, and king
Offices that Jesus would fill and fulfill for us one day

But that's the context: Haggai is sending a message from the Lord to Zerubbabel and Joshua
And v.2 establishes the gravity of this message: "*Thus says the LORD of hosts...*"

Literally, 'YHWH of Hosts'—or the Lord of heaven's armies of angels
The ultimate one in charge and the one with unthinkable supernatural power
We dare not treat a word from him trivially!

READ v.2²... On one level, this procrastination made some sense
Not only had they seemed legitimately hindered in completing the job,
But another prophet, Jeremiah, had prophesied that their exile would last 70 years
And it had only been 66 years... So if they followed the theological clock,

Then the temple didn't *really* need to be rebuilt for another few years
As Haggai will make clear, they misinterpreted the times: the time was actually long overdue
They effectively said: 'We can put this off to another day... I have better things to do'
They might as well have said that the glory of the Lord wasn't that important
This tendency to overlook the things of God in favour of our own was not a new thing
And it's *still* very much a thing in our lives today
Postponing or disregarding obedience is our trademark move, since the garden of Eden
Look down at what you said lies in ruins in your life right now
If God wants you to do something to address that today, don't put it off till tomorrow
Don't say you'll wait until you're older, or that you're waiting for a less busy season
Don't tell the Spirit who convicts you that '*the time has not yet come*'

[tr] So God repeats what his people have been saying: "*These people say...*"... But God disagrees
There's a clear contrast here between what *people* say and what *God* says
"*Thus says the Lord of hosts*" and **READ v.3³**... "The Lord says" is repeated 6x
And then "Consider your ways." is said twice... So: "Listen to God. Examine yourselves."
That's the thrust of this passage... And the big point we ought to take away from it is this:
God's glory must come first in our hearts and lives... We'll see this from 3 distinct angles... First:

God's glory comes first—over our own comfort (v.1-4, 7-9)

[r] God's glory comes first—particularly over our own comfort

Did you see this? It's in God's response to his people's procrastination: **READ v.4-5⁴**

In other words: Stop and take stock of where you are... Do a self-evaluation
When was the last time *you* slowed down enough to do that, even for an hour?
Maybe that's a way you can redeem your holidays this summer
Don't take a break from God, take a break *for* God
And really stop and consider the way you're living life right now

The people were saying, 'It's not the right time to build God's house.'

So God replies, 'And it *is* the right time for *you* to live comfortably in your *own* houses?'
'Paneled' doesn't just refer to ornate decorations, but instead to being inhabitable or comfortable
People were putting the same work into their own homes that they'd set out to put into God's

Now, these people had indeed had a rough time trying to finish the temple 16 years ago
But their hardships shouldn't have been used as an excuse to become self-absorbed

That is such a temptation for all of us when we go through hard times
It's easy to throw a pity party, and focus all our energy on our own problems
Even when things are tough, we shouldn't withdraw from serving God and others
Suffering is not an excuse for sin... And centering our existence on ourselves is sin

The people of Haggai's day weren't wrong for building their own homes or fixing them up
They were wrong to do that *at the expense* of obedience to the Lord and worship of him
As he restates the indictment down in v.9: **READ v.9⁵**

It was a matter of priorities... A matter of preoccupation... A matter of the love of our hearts
Imagine God asking: "Are your houses really more important than your allegiance to me?"
For that would be covenant rebellion... That would break the greatest commandments

Deuteronomy 10:12 said: *“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...”*

These people had been neglecting this in order to increase their personal comfort

And aren't we all tempted to do likewise? It's so easy to focus on ourselves instead of the Lord
It's so easy to focus on educational or physical, material work over spiritual, soul work
It's so easy to prioritize our comfort and level of living at the expense of eternal matters
Coming from someone with a newer home which has taken a *ton* of hours of work to fix up,
It's easy to prioritize our own homes and gardens over God's better home and garden
I can get preoccupied with painting my walls and fixing my lawn and cleaning my vehicle
None of which are wrong... We are called to be good stewards of what God entrusts to us
But I can do these things disproportionately, distractedly, or even idolatrously
“Busying myself with my own house”,
While neglecting to develop my love for the Lord, my spiritual disciplines, my family's discipleship, or my service of God's people
Kids, you may need to consider if you're focused more on your nicely paneled houses in Minecraft than you are on reading your Bible or going to church
So consider your ways... This can be quite convicting to us all, no matter what is distracting us

We might wonder: Since the Lord doesn't *need* a temple, but we do need shelter,
Should building our houses first maybe actually be more important after all?
But here's the thing: It's not that he needs a temple, it's that we need him
And he knows that he is our greatest need of all... So he must come first... As we read:
“Do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ...Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:31-33)

In v.7-8, Haggai says: **READ v.7⁶**... Give careful thought to this: **READ v.8⁷**
'Re-devote yourselves to the work... Go get all the lumber you need to finish rebuilding'
If they went and did this, it would be evidence of their repentance
It'd mean they were rejecting apathy and indifference, and seeking to love the Lord again
And when they were finished, God says he would take pleasure in the temple and be glorified
Pleasure in the sacrifices offered... Glory in his presence restored

[tr] What happens if we don't repent? Well, a life of self-interest leads to a lot of self-futility
So Haggai didn't just want people to consider their own behaviour and lifestyle...
They needed to consider the consequences of living the way they were

After all, God designed the world to work in certain ways

When we disregard or disobey him, we will not flourish as people... And so, we'll see:

God's glory comes first—or expect consequences (v.5-6, 9-11)

[r] God's glory must come first—or else we should expect dire (even disastrous) consequences

Look how the Lord says this: **READ v.5b-6⁸**... Like, 'Think back to what's been happening...
You've worked hard... You've eaten... You've clothed yourself... You've made bank...
And you're no better off for it all!

Your crops have failed you... Your meals have been insufficient... So have your clothes
You may as well be putting your money into a bag with holes! It's disappearing on you'
Everything they were doing was becoming unfruitful, unsatisfying, and unsuccessful
They were like hamsters on a hamster wheel, running faster and faster, but getting nowhere
What they got out of life was very different than what they were putting in
And when we, like they, put our own interests before God's interests,
We reap the consequences of those priorities: a life of futility
We race through life, never quite reaching our goals, because we're after the wrong goals⁹

So, was the secret to success simply to put God first, and he'd bless them in all these areas?
No, that's like an early version of the prosperity gospel
If we think this way, our focus isn't on Christ, but simply on a more effective materialism
Seeking God becomes a means to building our own kingdom and houses
But God cannot be manipulated into blessing us
Haggai wasn't promising them huge crops, satisfying meals, high-end clothing, or secure wealth
He was just repeating the principle that life functions best when we're aligned with the Lord
As well as implying that some of their negative outcomes in life were results of ignoring God
There are consequences to all our actions... Something they should've been particularly aware of
In Deuteronomy 28, God laid out a number of covenant blessings and curses,
which would come on his people, depending on their faithfulness to him
They'd already experienced the worst of these curses, in the exile
So that they were now facing futility, hunger, and drought shouldn't have surprised them

READ v.9a¹⁰... And why were their lives in relative ruin? Because they left God's home in ruins
READ v.9b-11¹¹... They were actually experiencing God's opposition to them
He had turned the very heavens and earth against them!
God was disciplining his people through his creation... And they hadn't connected the dots yet

Brother or sister: Sin always has consequences.... And it usually hides the price tag
There are really difficult consequences that some of you here today are already facing
But hear me now! We don't need to face them forever, because God sent us a Saviour
On the cross, Jesus took all our worst consequences on himself,
Essentially experiencing all the covenant curses—hunger, nakedness, poverty, death
In order to forgive us, purify us, and restore us to a relationship with God
And now, our lack of flourishing and the judgment we deserve can be made right
Once we repent—turning from our sins, and believe in Christ—turning to him
Haggai, even when his message seems harsh, was a good gift to God's people
Calling them to a life of wholeness and healing and giving them hope of God's blessing¹²
He's the smoke alarm going off, trying to wake sleepers up and get them outside into fresh air

[tr] So what do we do with all this? God's glory has to come first in our lives
We need to prioritize him over our comfort... Or else expect there will be consequences
And, as I think we're seeing, Haggai was wanting one key thing from his people: repentance
A change of heart that leads to a change of lifestyle
And this change of lifestyle would show itself in obedience and faithfulness... The point?

God's glory comes first—so obey him and work with him (v.12-15)

[r] God's glory comes first—so obey him and work with him

Here's where the story takes an amazing turn for the better: **READ v.12¹³**

Picture Zerubbabel and Joshua sitting and reading over a letter from Haggai

And as they do, a dawning realization comes over their faces:

'Oh man... We've messed up... We never should have let this sit for so long...

Haggai's right... We've got to tell everyone and mobilize the people.'

It appears the leaders modeled the right response of repentance for the people

And that led to a proper fear—a reverence and awe—of the Lord

Now, if that sounds like an unusual response to prophets in the Bible, it's because it is!

This—conviction and submission—is what *should* happen every time we hear God's Word

But, sadly, that often doesn't happen... And in Scripture, it's an especially rare thing

God's prophets notoriously got ignored, rejected, scorned, and even killed

For people to repent and obey—and the first time, at that—was an anomaly among the prophets

Haggai gets through to them! ...His book provides an encouraging example of what can

happen when we listen to God's Word, do what he says, and experience his blessing

So as you've heard his message today, what is your response? Are you ready to repent?

Have you been startled wide awake by the voice of God?

And are you ready to make some changes in your life, with God's help?

Despite all our failures, he has made it possible for us to repent and be transformed

Iain Duguid shows how the gospel weaves throughout all of Haggai 1

And sorry; I love it so much that I'll quote it at length: *"Jesus has himself shown the zeal for God's house and kingdom that we lacked, purifying the earthly temple and creating a new people to worship God. His zeal for God's house has now been credited to us, as if it were our own. Jesus has also taken on himself the punishment that we deserved for our self-centered failure to seek God's kingdom and to build his house. Our sin of being perpetually interested only in building our own houses and kingdoms was paid for on the cross... In place of our constant preoccupation with food that does not fill, with drink that does not satisfy, and with clothing that cannot warm our souls, God promises us real food, drink, and clothing. In Christ, he gives us the bread of life, a fountain of living water, and glorious wedding garments to cover our spiritual nakedness. In place of the futile things to which we so readily give our lives, the Lord promises to give us true and lasting satisfaction in him."*

So will we now give our lives to him? Or re-surrender them to him?

Then look how Haggai gives his people assurance, in v.13: **READ v.13¹⁴**

Such a simple, yet extraordinary promise of peace and grace!

Remember: Without the temple, it seemed like the Lord was gone—maybe for good

So how encouraging to hear God's prophet assure them that God was with them again!

I don't think it's a coincidence that God promises his presence with us in a special way

whenever we follow him in obedience... Think of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:

'Go make disciples, baptizing, teaching them to observe (or obey) all I've commanded...'

And what? *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (28:20)

Or **Hebrews 13:5**: *"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you.""*

So if the Spirit prompts you to make some changes in your lifestyle today, obey him
But do so with the overt promise that God will be with you, helping you follow through

It'd be easy for us to leave a sermon like this full of guilt and pressure:

Examine your life! Repent! Pull yourself together! Or beware the consequences!

Oh and when it comes to our building program, remember God loves a cheerful builder!¹⁵

That's not my hope for you at all today

Yes, we are often painfully like Haggai's hearers, self-absorbed with the best of them

And yes, this wrong focus has led to much unfulfilling frustration in our lives

So yes, we need to heed the call to repentance and obedience—to build God's home first

But things are different for us, now that the temple of Jesus' body was ruined and raised back up

Christ is now our access to and assurance of God's presence

And we ourselves, the people of his church, are the temple that he came to build

And he will build his church! ...So will we joyfully join him in his work?

For it will take work—hard work—to repair and rebuild ruins

The gospel is not opposed to work—the gospel inspires good work

And this is what Haggai's hearers were moved to do: **READ v.14-15¹⁶**

God reassured them of his presence with them, and they rapidly got to work

Within a very short 23 days, their building project got off the ground... I'm jealous

But it's all because of the Lord... He gets the glory for this... Did you notice?

It's he who "*stirred up the spirit*" of the leaders and then all the people

He roused them from sleep... He sparked their enthusiasm... He enlivened their hearts

The people obeyed... But Haggai explains this was God working by his Spirit through his Word

And God moves his people in the same way today... By his Spirit through his Word

So if you are moved today or you get to work, be sure to give him all the glory for it

Don't only do it for yourself... Do it for him... Or you've kind of missed the whole point

CONCLUSION

Let me share briefly how the Lord is working on me in these areas

I got the chance at a pastor's retreat last week to slow down and consider my ways

I evaluated what things were going well and what were not, spiritually

It took a lot of thought and prayer, but the Spirit revealed certain things to me

For example: Ways that I was valuing listening to podcasts over engaging in prayer

How I was prioritizing physical fitness over soul care

And that I was doing more house-and-yard work than family work

These were my 'paneled houses'... I was convicted, and knew I had to make changes

With the Lord's help and my wife's support, we're seeking to do just that

I'm not a hero... It's not easy, and we all need each other's help

But always remember that we serve a God who is a Saviour of ruined lives

He is the first and best Rebuilder of ruins... And he is with us, always, until the end

PRAY

Benediction: prayer, 5min, Isa. 41:10?

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: "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? Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 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. “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 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. 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. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. 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.” Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, 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 feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, “I am with you, declares the Lord.” And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

² “Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.”

³ Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet

⁴ Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways

⁵ 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.

⁶ “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Consider your ways. 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.

⁹ HT Duguid

¹⁰ You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away.

¹¹ Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. 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.”

¹² HT Fries

¹³ Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, 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 feared the Lord.

¹⁴ Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, “I am with you, declares the Lord.”

¹⁵ HT Duguid

¹⁶ And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.