“The Heart of Worship”

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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Haggai 2:3-7
August 3rd, 2014
I love this; today we get to spend some time in Haggai (pronounced Hagg-eye, or Hagg-E-I). It’s yet another book that few of us have ever read, or can even locate in the Bible! I personally have no memory of reading or studying Haggai in seminary. My beautiful wife, Connie, a great student and teacher of the Bible, confessed to me that there’s no underlining or hand-written scribbles in Haggai in her Bible!

We know very little about this minor prophet. Next Sunday’s prophet, Zechariah, and Haggai are mentioned together in Ezra—these guys are known as the “post-captivity” (post-exilic) guys—they were all living in the days when the Jews of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) returned home to Jerusalem after many years in Babylonian exile, in captivity. Regarding Psalm 138, which called us to worship today, there’s strong evidence that Haggai and Zechariah are the authors of it, and of some other “Praising God” Psalms—Psalms 146 to 149! Check these out this week.

So let’s get to the Heart of Worship. Some 2,500 years ago, in 537 BC, thanks to some unlikely friends—the Persians and their King Cyrus—the exiled Jews get to return home to Jerusalem. The Jews return and they immediately begin rebuilding the Temple (built by Solomon 400 years before). The Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians just 50 years ago. Now, on their return, for the next six-to-seven years, the Jews work hard laying the foundation on the new 2nd Temple. They put first things first rebuilding the Temple. They had “single-focus,” that worship matters; that praising God and worshipping God comes before all else.

But then they quit building God’s House. They got discouraged or disillusioned; they quit. Instead, for the next ten years, the Jews got to doing other things—their own things. They actually started putting their energies into building their own sweet homes, not God’s Home. You know, gated-communities, golf courses, spas, pools, Harris Teeters, you get the point. Maybe after all those years in exile they needed some downtime, some “ME” time! But those ten years of self-serving were not as pretty as it seemed. Jerusalem was a mess. No King, no fortified walls, and an unfinished place to worship God. For all the selfish ambition over the past ten years, Jerusalem wasn’t much of a city. Thus, the Lord God
was none too happy, and God let the people know. Can you say hail, drought, disease?

Enter Haggai. Haggai is a book of four mini-sermons, just 38 verses long, in two chapters. The first mini-sermon (the 15 verses of the 1st Chapter) basically is God, through Haggai, saying, “Hey, you didn’t take time to build My House. What’s up with that? You’ve been doing up your own sweet homes, but not MY home? You think you’re better off doing it that way? Really? Look out there and tell me what you see. Drought, poverty, blight—all because you neglected “My” house. You neglected building “My” house. You neglected “worshipping Me, in My House.”

This challenge, this in-your-face pep-talk, is all God needed to say. In Haggai’s second mini-sermon the people are all over it. They get the message. After ten years it’s now a green light. They are back at it, rebuilding the Temple like nobody’s business, first priority! Haggai 2:3-7:

Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear.

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this House with splendor, says the LORD of hosts.

The people are pumped up, back to building; back to first things first. All this happens and God says, “…from this day on I will bless you”(2:19). God says, “I’m in charge; I’ve got this one; this is My time. You’ve repented; you’re building, you’re worshipping Me; I’m going to bless you.”

So, for the rest of this time, I want to say three things about WORSHIP, which you and I can take into our week, into our walk. First, Sunday
worship is Good. Second, Worship is more than Sunday. Third, Worship anywhere, anytime.

First, SUNDAY WORSHIP IS GOOD. I’m making the assumption that you and I really love Sunday worship, because you and I are here, right? There are even those of you who love it enough that you’re streaming in live. Sunday Worship is good, isn’t it? We get to be together to engage in God’s Word. We get to be together as believers in one place, right here. We get the joy of worshipping God through music and singing. We get to simply pray together. Today, we get to share the Lord’s Supper.

Sunday morning worship lifts us up and, most of all, our worship lifts up God. This is why it’s important to invite God’s Spirit to be with us on Sunday mornings. It’s important to show God our desire to worship Him. It’s important to show God our readiness to worship Him with all we’ve got—our hearts, minds, bodies! God wants us to prepare, be ready, show up! Otherwise, worship can be pretty shallow, half-hearted. In Isaiah (29:13), God complains about worship being stale prayers, insincere praise, and being a bunch of empty words. When we come with devotion and desire into worship, God’s heart leaps with joy. Every Sunday, before our first worship, we pastors gather in the Parlor with some faithful prayerers. We gather, we center ourselves, and we prepare to worship God. Every Sunday, we pray something like this: “Come, Holy Spirit, fill this place, move in people’s lives, work through every element this morning—prayer, song, Word; Holy Spirit, come, move, comfort, strengthen the people You love.” Invite the Holy Spirit to be here, with us, in worship!

(VIDEO of Christian Comedian TIM HAWKINS – Raising Hands, Praising God!)

Whether we raise our hands or not when we worship, we do love our intentional, organized worship. But here’s the challenge. We sometimes confine worship to Sunday mornings only. We sometimes limit our definition of worship to just “church-type” kinds of things. We “worship” Sunday mornings, of course, and we might worship when we’re with our small group of friends, or that weekly Bible study. “Worshipping” God in all of these “church” activities and settings is fantastic. Praise God! But worship is not just a “church-thing” that we do. Worship is not just a Sunday morning “activity.” Worship is much more. We are missing out if these are the only ways we see ourselves “worshipping” God. Pastor Paul Tripp wrote in his blog a few weeks ago something I found really
helpful. He said that “Worship is NOT primarily your activity (what you do on a Sunday morning, for example); instead, worship is FIRST (and foremost) your identity as a human being. Worship is who you ARE, in God, with God!” (7/14/2014). Worship is NOT primarily your activity—it’s your identity!

Second, WORSHIP IS MORE THAN SUNDAY. Anything you and I do and say that brings God pleasure is an act of worship. God’s heart races when we bring God pleasure, when God sees us desiring Him (by our habits, routines). Conversely, it brings God pain and sorrow when God sees us worshipping other gods, and ourselves. Jesus, in John’s Gospel, says, “True worship happens when you and I give ourselves completely and only to God” (4:23). Last Sunday, Pete talked about us living in a state of “continuous partial attention” on things, of missing so much around us, because our noses and eyes are continually on our phones and screens. He called us, instead, to a “Uni-Tasking,” to the need to recover a single-focused life of devoted attention to God. “Some things are not meant to be multi-tasked,” Pete said; “There are things—specifically, seeking God, living with God—which need our singular, undivided attention” (7/27/14).

Third, WORSHIP ANYWHERE, ANYTIME. God IS right-here-with-us. The truth and reality is that we have ACCESS to a LIVING God. There’s no other religion, no other tradition like it. The truth and reality is that Jesus Christ breathed, walked, laughed, cried, suffered and died here on earth. There is no other God like this God. The God we worship is WITH US, right here, right now, and when we go out there. Jesus Christ is a God we can see, hear, and call upon. Jesus Christ is a God we can experience anywhere, anytime. He invites us, He beckons us, to come and connect with Him, to be with Him, to DESIRE Him. This is what real worship is—staying connected to God, meditating on Him day and night, thinking of God while eating breakfast, attending class, pumping gas, sitting in a pew, or on a Metro seat!
All over Scripture we find people worshipping God anywhere, at any time: (Daniel and Joseph) at work; (Mary, Martha) at home; (Ruth) out in the fields; (Paul) in jail; (Peter’s Mom-in-Law) in bed; (David) in battle. David himself declares, “I will thank the Lord at all times. My mouth will always praise God” (Psalm 34:1). Anywhere is here, and God is there. In his Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren has a couple great chapters on worship. He writes, “Worship is not just a PART of your life, like Sunday is a part of the week. Rather, worship IS your LIFE,” Warren says (p.66). Wherever here happens to be, God is there! Anywhere is here— the café or cafeteria, the waiting room, the community pool, the store aisle.

So, two Sundays ago, I was driving home from Sunday morning worship. I was stopped at a light on Maple Avenue. Next to me was a black pick-up truck, a Ford F150, with this license plate: N2 WRSHP! New to Worship? Two things came to mind: I hope we Welcome People here who are New to Worship! Reach out and welcome them. Make them feel at home in God’s House. And, for yourself, will you be New to Worship? Yes, every Sunday morning; but New to Worshipping God in every hour of every day, in this coming week, with singular, devoted attention on God—desiring God and bringing Him pleasure.