

Series: Haggai	Reference: Haggai 1	Title: Give Careful Thought to Your Ways	Date: 11.12.23
Website Writeup: Worship requires heart evaluation. Sometimes personal desire takes priority over God, and He confronts our errancy, drawing us back to purpose & the actions which further it.			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

Realize every word of any respectable sermon is prayerfully sifted & weighed. Like a jeweler parsing out choicest diamonds. Every jot & tittle crafted towards the goal of proclaiming Gods words to others, guided by the Holy Spirit who applies truth & makes the superfluous fall away.

Which makes these possibly the most important words you hear every week. Not because they fell out of my mouth, but because we explore Scripture together under the lead of the Holy Spirit. We expect God to speak through this, not just that someone expresses laical opinions about God. Sermons are both deeply human & deeply divine. When the Body comes together for worship with repentance & expectation the presence of God resides there in a unique way (Mt 18:20).

Turn to p645 in your pew Bibles as we begin to look at Haggai Chapter 1 today. Let's listen intently, God has a message for us. But we must expect to hear His voice. Are you ready to receive the Word of the Lord?

Please stand & let's pray the congregational prayer printed on the back of your bulletin. I will start, and you will read the bolded type...

Lord, all you words are true,

all your righteous laws are eternal (Ps119:160).

Your Word is a lamp for my feet,

a light on my path (Ps 119:105).

Your words are flawless,

like silver purified in a crucible,

like gold refined seven times (Ps 12:6).

We are attentive and ready to receive Your Word today!

Speak Lord for your servant is listening!

Amen.

Some background...The Babylonians had conquered Israel & taken them captive years earlier, destroying the Temple Solomon had built at that time. God was now moving to bring 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem under the rule of Cyrus the Great of the Persian Empire. Haggai was one, most likely old enough to have witnessed the destruction of the Temple of Solomon beforehand. He'd beheld its original glory. Shining as a beacon of light for about 400 years before its destruction. Placed strategically on the great trade route with all the worlds people groups flooding by it. Giving opportunity for them to witness worship of the one true God, hear His Word preached & have a chance to follow Him! Then they'd take that back home spreading the kingdom of God across the world.

But that once great Temple now lay in ruins. They return under the Jewish leadership of Zerrubabel & Joshua, with permission to rebuild from Cyrus the Great. They started, until they experienced social pressure, then stopped. For another 15-16 years the Temple lay with only its foundations built while the Israelites went about life. Then enters Haggai, a prophet called by God to call this remnant of Jews back to rebuilding the Temple.

We'll see in this story, worship requires heart evaluation. Because sometimes personal desire takes priority over God, and He confronts our errancy, drawing us back to purpose & the actions which further it. Remember, what's physical in the Old Testament is often reflected spiritually in the New - keep that in mind.

Haggai starts out addressing the civil governor & the religious head: Zerrubabel & Joshua, voicing their excuse for leaving the Temple in ruins for 16 years...v2...
²This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.' ³Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ⁴"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" ⁵Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways."

Remember, the Jews had been brought back, started rebuilding, then backed off due to social pressure, an excuse they'd used to avoid this work for 16 years. Probably walked by the Temple ruins daily, it became normal. Kids probably played within the broken walls asking friends, "What was this place?" "My mom says it was some old temple." Faith & its practices had gone to the wayside. They'd grown more interested in themselves, than the Kingdom of God.

But let's back up...why was this Temple so important? And why was the rebuilding of it so reflective of their indifferent faith - couldn't they worship without a building?

Well they could, but not fully. The Temple had been the center of Israeli life, a place of religious ritual, the repository of Scripture & other national literature, the meeting place of the Sanhedrin, etc. But you could do that in almost any building.

This building was special. 1 Kings 8:10-13 tells us why. When Solomon had first finished building it more than 400 years before, and they'd just placed the Ark of the Covenant inside, it says...

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. ¹¹And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. ¹²Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; ¹³I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever."

That's why it was so important, the presence of God resided there. People could come see & experience the Glory of God right there!

On sabbatical I worked through my honey-do list. Fixing windows & doors, organizing the basement, etc. Broken things I'd been living with so long, they'd become normal. I had time to do these before, but always found excuse not to. It's easy to live with broken incomplete things, but a squeaky hinge is a lot less important than a space for the presence of God. Their houses were in good order, and Gods wasn't, which tells us a lot about their heart of worship.

'Paneled houses' reveals affluence, they had money, but it wasn't going towards worship. We know our hearts are always where our money's placed. Diverted from God's kingdom purpose to their own purposes. Slowly comforts & desires had eclipsed their heart of worship & Gods' Kingdom call to bring Him to the nations through the vehicle of the Temple - His presence had no place to manifest Himself. In their indifference there was no place for God to reside. Gods glory seems to be limited when His people are disobedient. Disobedience is toxic to worship. It breeds indifference.

Maybe they convinced themselves it wasn't the right time to give attention to God's presence there - maybe they thought, 'God would want us to wait until everyone's on board with the rebuilding.' Sometimes we convince ourselves we're doing Gods will, but we're not. The Temple was the heart of worship, for them it had become normal for it to lay in disrepair - although it was where Gods presence resided. They'd become oblivious due to their self-serving.

So, God compares the Temple with their own homes exposing their sin of indifference, and then reveals what it's brought them...

⁵Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

Although they had paneled houses, they apparently were never satisfied. So God said, "Give careful thought to your ways," turning the focus onto them where it belonged, because there's a reason for their dissatisfaction.

Their difficulties arose from their disobedience. A simple decision 16 years earlier, set in motion a slow drift away from the Lord. Prioritizing the feelings of people over God caused them to settle into an indifference & there was little, if not any worship at all in their daily practice. They'd become comfortable with the Temple in ruins, but dissatisfied in all other ways - ignoring the voice of God leads to dissatisfaction. Practicing the presence of God satisfies.

It stands true, our priorities need to be aligned with God's will if we're to truly worship God. In Him alone is satisfaction - obedience influences worship. We can't lose our salvation, but we can clog up the relationship. When God asks us to do something, we'd do well to obey, in even small ways - or we will start a spiritual drift away from Him. And obedience brings about powerful things (*Sarah Todds Walmart Story*).

Life without worship, or just going through the motions of it, may produce some of the things we want, but it leaves us empty, unsatisfied & wanting more. We were created for worship. Real worship breeds life. Without everything falling under the umbrella of worship slowly an insatiable appetite arises & we're left unsatisfied, and we get used to it. We forget what it was like, or could be! The joy of salvation eludes us. Eventually, despair, bitterness & fear grow because life has no purpose except the pursuit of pleasure; and pleasure wasn't designed to fill the role of purpose.

So, God intervenes to give them a charge...

⁷This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD.

Remember, OT physical foreshadows NT spiritual...A renewed call to build His House; go up into the mountains, bring down timber, hew stone, mix mortar, sharpen tools. Sweat. Harvest materials. Work. Effort. Focus. Hard work for people used to living in paneled houses. Selfless work, which they may not yet see how it directly benefits them. So, while they work, they need to be thinking about how they got to this place.

Remember, they're not just building a building. They're making space for the presence of God among them. The presence of God which satisfies & was intended to be displayed to all those nations traveling to Jerusalem along that trade route. Fulfilling their Abrahamic Covenantal call that they were blessed to be a blessing to all nations.

So God has reiterated what needs to be done, then restates what brought this about.

⁹"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. ¹⁰Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. ¹¹I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."

God pursues His people even in their indifference to Him, creating an atmosphere which leads to true worship. He disciplines those He loves (Her 12:6) to refocus their gaze on Him. Repeating these things over & over since we know that people living in fog need to be told many times how to get out of it. He's promised to bless us with His presence without which we self-destruct. And, we're to bless others by introducing them to His presence. God is certainly worthy of all praise, glory & honor! If we experience dissatisfaction, maybe He's trying to get our attention. To divert us from a destructive path back to true purpose.

How did they respond?

¹²Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message

of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

Mark this day as one of the rare times you've read that Israel actually obeyed the Lord! Unlike so many of God's prophets, Haggai wasn't killed, run out of town, or thrown into a well - they listened intently to him & embraced his message! In short, they repented.

It continues...

¹³Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. ¹⁴So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, ¹⁵on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

God promises, "I'm with you," then stirs their hearts. It's encouraging to know when God calls, He stirs & goes with us. Good for them...they began the work again...nice story...But, what's it got to do with us? Well, worship requires heart evaluation. God's glory is limited by our disobedience. It's toxic to worship & breeds indifference. What's physical in the Old Testament is spiritual in the New. 'How is the rebuilding of that Temple reflected spiritually for us today?'

It's both an individual & corporate answer...We're certainly glad not to have to worry about the Temple with all its rituals! We know our spirituality & worship aren't tied to any building. Jesus fulfilled all that as the final sacrificial lamb, no more need for all the Temple ritual sacrifices. We're filled with the Holy Spirit & have become the Temple of God! His presence resides in us! Billions of portable Temples walking the earth.

But our flesh still battles us. Spiritual warfare is real. Some are hamstrung by some major sin. But most simply grow satisfied with an unfinished Temple, with the unfinished task of being sanctified. We stop engaging with Jesus in quiet times, in regular church attendance, bible studies, discipleship with others & a rich prayer life. We grow satisfied with harboring a few pet sins which we view as harmless compromises. 75% or even 95% spiritual growth is good enough we say. We abuse God's grace, and like an unmoored boat on a placid lake, we slowly drift away from the Lord on an imperceptible undercurrent. And we wonder why nothing satisfies.

The proper response to God's confrontation of our disobedient hearts is repentance. Only when repentance occurs can we begin to do what God's called us to do. To move forward in that relationship, we have to accept where we've fallen short in it.

Remember, it was commonplace for Jews in Haggai's day to walk by the Temple ruins & be okay with that state of affairs, or to think someone else will do it. It's commonplace for us to drive by churches which have been converted into condos & be okay with that, or think it's someone else's responsibility to reach people for Christ. To see our churches shrink but never evangelize a soul ourselves.

When Jesus says in Matthew 18:20, ‘...where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them,’ we know it doesn’t mean He isn’t present with us when we’re alone. Paul tells us in 1 Co 6:19 our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was saying the presence of God is manifested in a unique way when people come together in agreement in worship - like adding lumens - one lightbulb may be 50 lumens, 100 together is 5000. We reflect Christ more brightly together which makes space & service sacred. Not to mention the benefits & command to keep meeting together in Scripture (Heb 10:24-25).

In 2019 the script flipped. It was the first year more churches in America closed than started. 2023 is the first year the Vineyard has seen more churches close than planted. We live in a post-Christian un-churched America. 40 Million Americans have stopped attending church in the past 25 years.¹ Before the pandemic on average, 8-10 churches a day close their doors - that’s grown since. Pastors are quitting in high numbers. We could spout statistics all day, but we know this, look around you, there’s a lot of empty seats in this room.

“Everyone looks out for his own interests, not that of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 2:21)
But you’re here, maybe you don’t need this sermon. However, maybe you’ve grown satisfied with only a partly constructed Temple in yourself, and in this church. Maybe you’re quietly indifferent, stopped pushing yourself towards intimate worship with Christ. Maybe your prayer life is lackluster at best because you’re satisfied with the mediocre. Maybe that’s reflected in spotty church attendance, showing up late & leaving early, no quiet times, not having discipleship relationships, not going to Bible study, never sharing your faith, or never considering you have a ministry. Maybe you can take or leave your pastors words since they’re just his opinion, not a source for the Spirit of God to speak. Maybe you’ve lost sight of the joy of salvation, and the glory of Christ, and you really don’t expect Him to speak to you via these avenues.

In referencing Jesus’ command to be perfect, CS Lewis said, “I think Jesus meant the only help I will give is help to become perfect. You may want something less: but I will give you nothing less.” Jesus doesn’t want a pound of flesh here & there. He wants our whole person: body, mind & soul. He said that unless we’re to die with Him, we can have no part in Him. We have nothing to give Jesus except our broken lives. Our absolute need means surrendering everything. Every father’s pleased at his baby’s first wobbly attempt to walk, but no father would be satisfied with anything less than a firm, free, manly walk in a grown-up son. In the same way, Lewis says, ‘God’s easy to please, but hard to satisfy.’”² We should always desire more of Jesus, ask God to reveal your sin, and ways the world has captivated you. Repent & find your joy & purpose once more!

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/07/christian-church-community-participation-drop/674843/#>

² <https://www.cslewis.com/god-is-pleased-but-hard-to-satisfy/>