

Series: Haggai	Reference: Haggai 2:1-9	Title: Promises & Presence	Date: 11.19.23
Website Writeup:			
<p>In spiritual drift, personal desire eclipses worship and we do not practice the presence of God. God lovingly confronts our waywardness. Our only acceptable response is repentance leading to faithful obedience. God draws us back to our dual purpose of worship & mission where we find satisfaction. The end goal of mankind is to glorify God & enjoy Him forever - eternal worship! Our time limited call is 'mission' - to make God known among all peoples.</p>			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

Turn with me to p645 in your pew Bibles - Haggai ch2. Background reminder: The Babylonians had conquered Israel 7 decades earlier, taken them captive, and destroyed the Temple Solomon had built over 400 years earlier - the place of God's presence among His people. 1 Kings 8 tells us God's presence filled the Temple upon its completion, making it central to worship. This house of God's presence located on the trade route with all the worlds people groups parading by gave opportunity to witness worship, hear God's Word & have a chance to follow Him! Then return home spreading the kingdom of God across the world.

God was now bringing 50,000 Jews back from exile. Haggai being one, old enough to have witnessed the destruction of the Temple 70 years before. He calls the people back to rebuilding. They return, start, then due to outside social pressure they stop & for another 16 years the Temple lay with only its foundations in place while the Israelites went about life.

What's physical in the Old Testament is often reflected spiritually in the New. So, our question is linked to the presence of God in that Temple, and what it means to again make room for the presence of God in us, individually & corporately. Since, as a result of Christ's work on the cross our very bodies are now the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The nature of grace means our relationship can't be broken with Him, but intimacy can be dampened when we experience spiritual drift away from a heart of worship.

In ch1 God continually reminded them to give careful thought to their ways. To consider what they were doing, or not doing, what got them to this place of dissatisfaction. They learned - worship requires heart evaluation. That in spiritual drift, personal desire eclipses worship. We may go through the motions of worship without actually practicing the presence of God - our house all cluttered with desire for self, not for Christ. So, God lovingly confronts our waywardness, to which our only acceptable response is repentance which leads to faithful obedience. God draws us back to our dual purpose of worship & mission, and the daily practices which reflect them. And it's in that where we find satisfaction.

The end goal of mankind is to glorify God & enjoy Him forever - eternal worship! And although all people worship something, not all people worship God. So, our time limited call before Christ's return is 'mission' - to make God known among all peoples. As Isaiah 56:7 says..*for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.*

Jesus said it in Matthew 24:14...*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Which means His last command in the Great Commission, is our first concern...
All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Engaging mission is worship. Worship leads to mission, mission leads to worship.
Mission will end, worship is eternal.

So, they came & began work on the Temple to again make space for His presence among them - a step towards their restoration of worship....but people are people...they began, but something happens. Let's see what happens beginning in 2:1...

...on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ²“Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, ³“Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?

After 15-16 years of spiritual drift, they begin work for 3 weeks, but it grinds to a halt yet again. This directly after they responded so well at the end of chapter 1! What happened, and why does God pose these 3 questions to them now in v3?

Apparently, there'd been new opposition similar to what they faced 16 years earlier. But, even more discouraging, there are some older nay-sayers within their *own* ranks who were old enough to have seen the first Temple & don't like what they're seeing now!

Ezra 3:12 sheds light on the situation, it says...

“But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former Temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid.”

So, again at the first sign of trouble they stop which shows how sensitive they'd become, at the slightest pressure they fold. They'd experienced spiritual drift for 16 years, lost their heart of worship. When we *don't* tend to the presence of God in life we become overly sensitive, easily defeated, full of self-pity & play the victim. Our focus shifts to the self & we're easily overcome. When God stirs us back to healthy worship & we begin to take steps in rebuilding, we should expect attack & setback - but never defeat!

But attack doesn't always come from outside the ranks, sometimes it comes from within. David expresses this in Psalm 55:12-14...*If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God, as we walked about among the worshipers.*

Looking upon their work while listening to these older folk degrading their efforts was demotivating & they stopped! Maybe it wasn't outright attack, just criticism & complaining. Some are adept at critiquing anything & everything: the music, preaching, leadership, the person across the room, etc. We spew our 'opinions' freely thinking we've done a good thing, but we don't realize we just laid waste to someone's soul. Maybe we meant to motivate, but we've done the exact opposite. We do well to take our critical hearts to the altar & sacrifice them there.

Older folks should remember Ecclesiastes 7:10 which says...*"Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?'"* You can hear it, they've resolved themselves to not see any good in anything new, and sometimes anyone as well. And misery loves company, they'll let you know it. To them, no one else knows how to walk in the Spirit, no one else understands the Lord like they do. In their opinion, everyone else's contributions are small, misguided, or wrong. Others don't know how to really worship, only they do. They've cornered the market on the Holy Spirit, and have become spiritual gnostics, only they have the special knowledge of worship.

We'll always have those cantankerous old souls belittling anything new. But many people these days say the opposite, which is equally damaging. As a product of evolutionary thought many now say only new is better. Said with prideful assurance that humanity's progressed beyond those ancient people & their outdated ideas & practices.

Yet, that's not the point of this passage & Scripture largely attests that old is trusted, tested & true. That there's nothing really new. There may be innovation, but we don't abandon past forms of worship which have worked for centuries for the sake of change. Often that attitude comes from a culture of prideful affluent individualism always feeling it has to evolve & improve on anything rather than settle within community & trust what's always worked.

Progression happens with new discoveries in architecture, technology, art, medicine, etc. The human heart never progresses. Rampant antisemitism we see now proves this. We haven't evolved past hate, sin is the root of our problem. We're still the same crooked people with the same crooked heart, pointing the same crooked finger at the same crooked neighbor while looking at them with the same crooked eye. We've not evolved past ancient peoples. There's nothing new under the sun, ideas are presented as new, but they're cyclical - it's all been done before.

If the Apostle Paul walked into this room he'd master an iPhone quickly, run theological circles around us, and preach a better sermon than me without the aid of commentaries, or the New Testament. His intellectual capacity wasn't limited by the era in which he lived. His brain wasn't less developed than ours. He wasn't a few steps closer to being an ape than you because humanity didn't evolve from apes. We may know more details about some things since time has accumulated them for us, but we're still broken sinful people in need of a savior with the same capacities & faculties Adam & Eve had at the point of creation.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 means don't get stuck in the past, keep looking forward to where God's going, to what He's building. Don't discourage others in their effort to build space for worship since God is actually building it! Embrace & encourage any effort at worship in others, build with, not against them.

God isn't progressive in nature or character. Biblical Christianity is still cemented in the unchanging Law of God, His story through time, the local church called to worship & witness to the nations. God's moving forward, He's not reinventing everything as He goes, rather He uses past solid truth to build towards His perfect will as revealed in Scripture. We still preach the same message to the same broken sinful needy people. Forms may change slightly over time, but even they shouldn't be abandoned too readily.

God's moving from Garden in Genesis to City in Revelation. He's made us part of that journey. Things may look somewhat different over time, at times our efforts may look paltry at best, but these are steps in building the house of Worship, the Church. God is building something great in partnership with us.

So, in effort to build this worshipful space for the presence of God in us & in our community, we hold to the rich promises & practices of the past while evaluating our hearts, making incremental changes as needed. We don't discourage others, saying church was only great at some point in the past. Theirs was not a brand new thing either. They didn't start from scratch - they rebuilt on old foundations, the place which previously housed God's presence! Their mode of worship was the same, although it may've looked a bit different than before.

The truth is, the bride of Christ can't die! There may be times of purging, purification, or adaptation, and the Church always emerges more beautiful than before, since God's presence is with us as we build!

The difficulties of doing church are many & varied, but it's growing towards glory with a foundation built on God's promises measured off the cornerstone of Christ!

We'll always need to be open to change without sacrificing content of message & passion for Jesus. Forms may thoughtfully change, but they shouldn't be thrown out without serious agreement among God's ordained leadership. We desire to partner with God, building a space for worship which glorifies Christ.

Let's continue in vv4 & 5...

4But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. 5 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.

He repeats the command be strong three times. Be strong, for no other reason than His presence is with them. His Spirit remains in you. It's not up to our skills or money - when God's present, nothing can destroy us - there simply is nothing to fear. The world can't overcome the Church. The weight of the office we bear, as ambassadors of Christ, depends on who we represent. There may be setback, but opposition will never prevail....

Then God gives a stirring promise concerning His providence over the nations...
6"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. 7I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 8 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 9 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

As they stood there looking at what they regarded now as a paltry, cheap, imitation of a Temple, God launches into this wonderful picture of what would come. Assuring them, their work isn't in vain, they're *not* just placing stone upon miserable stone. They're building the house of God making space for His presence.

Our efforts in building space for worship in self & church have great kingdom value. Jesus started with 12 men & changed the world! What can God do with you, and this church if we set our minds to worship & mission? Remember, worship leads to mission, mission leads to worship. Mission will end, worship is forever!

The Persian church had been persecuted into non-existence by the 7th century. In the 1960's one man named Haik Hovesepian felt called to take the gospel to Persians in Iran. Up until that time to be Persian meant you were Muslim. Haik labored for 8 years serving the Lord there, and had 5 house churches started with only 20 former Muslim Persians. He translated 150 worship songs into Farsi, facilitated the Bible to come in, and by 1981 the number was up to 60 believers. Haik was eventually martyred. But by the late 80's the Persian church was in the thousands, then it exploded - they couldn't get enough Bibles printed in Farsi to cover the demand in Iran. To be Persian no longer means you're automatically Muslim, now there's a new category, farsi-masihi, or Persian Christian. One guys worship led to obedient mission - it changed the world again!

This remnant of Jews would see that house filled with God's Glory greater than the first. But they have to answer in faith that it'll be great despite the negativity of their own people. This foreshadows the coming of Christ. Christ will fill the Temple with Glory. Christ, the desired of all nations. But he's also foreshadowing what he'll build with in the future - the Body of Christ, the Church. He'll shake the heavens & the earth, the desired of all nations will fall into His hands. Christ will inhabit the Temple of souls. As we labor in faith the desired of all nations fall into His hands - the Uzbek, Tajik, Lampungese, Iranian Persians, and people of the Eastern Main Line, as He builds, and fills His Temple with His wonderful radiance!

Give careful thought to your ways, are we worshipping Jesus, or in spiritual drift? Building His house, or ours? God's promises will fuel our continued worship, but sometimes we need to hear them again. Asking God to remind us how He's worked before, so that our worship will remain focused on Him. Worship which can stand the test of time & experience will be fueled by God's faithfulness.

The greatest remedy for a spirit of defeat is repentance. Repentance allows us to be confident of our status before God. God is faithful in all things, which means He's faithful to forgive. Forgiveness sets us free to live lives filled with joy & hope. A release from being chained to regret. He calls them to the work of ministry in the context of His promises & presence. The most uplifting thing anyone can hear is that God is with them. They'd be rewarded for their obedience & commitment to God's call on their lives.

I've said a lot..let's land this plane. If you're taking notes, write these down. We're talking about practicing the presence of God. The question is, what are the practical time-tested actions which intentionally foster a lifestyle of worship? (Elicit answers: church, bible study, quiet times, discipleship, coming early/leaving late, prayer, etc.)

History is all about what God's building through Christ's body on earth! Of bringing His presence back among humanity; Immanuel, God with us. His paying our debt to make us presentable before a holy God! Just as those Jews built a building for His presence out of stones, God is building His Temple now out of hearts & filling it with His glory!

Remember...

- His last command is our first concern (Mt 28:18-20 | the Great Commission)
- Worship leads to mission. Mission leads to worship. Mission will end. Worship is forever. So, worship is obedience to mission .
 - Jhn 14:21...*Whoever has my commands & keeps them is the one who loves me*
 - 1 Jhn 5:3...*this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome*
 - If Jesus walked in & told me to do something, could I say, "Sorry Jesus, I can't do it unless my hearts into it." No! Mature faith means obedience first & the heart will follow.
- Spiritual Drift happens which tends to make us easily dissatisfied, defeated & overly sensitive. God confronts it, and only repentance brings satisfaction.
- Sacrifice the critical nature (Ephesians 4:29...*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*). Don't pine for the past & criticize the new. Don't criticize the old thinking only people & ideas which are new are valuable.
- The more intimate your worship with Jesus, the less critical you are.
- Expect setback & attack even from within, but don't let it deter you. God is with you, do not fear!

BENEDICTION: JUDE 24-25...

Would you stand for the benediction...

*To him who is able to keep you from stumbling
and to present you before his glorious presence
without fault & with great joy
to the only God our Savior
be glory, majesty, power & authority,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
before all ages, now & forevermore! Amen.*