

God's Message to Us in Haggai

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Introduction

In our sermon series going through the books of the Bible, we have done nine of the twelve minor prophets.

- Today we come to Haggai which is number ten.
- You may remember how I told you that this collection was put together in one scroll by 300 BC.
 - The first six (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah) were written during the period of Assyrian dominance—including the time of Isaiah and before.
 - The next three (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah) were written at the time of the decline of Assyria and the rise of Babylon.
 - And the last three (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) were written after the Exile from the time rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel to about 442 BC

Haggai tells us exactly when his prophecies came...to the very day...

- In the first verse he says **In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying...**
- The second year of Darius is 520 BC, and the first day of sixth month would be August 29th for us.
 - The other three prophecies in Haggai come within months...
 - The second one (chapter 2 verse 1) was on October 17, 520 BC
 - The third and fourth prophecies came on the same day, December 18, 520 BC.
- Now let me remind you what we learned in the book of Ezra of this time period...
 - That the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple occurred in 536 BC, 16 years before Haggai gave these prophecies.
 - You will remember that there was much opposition that hindered the rebuilding project.
 - Ezra 4:24 and 5:1 actually tell us that the building began again in the second year of Darius as a result of the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah.

Haggai is essentially a gracious call from the LORD to build God's house.

- It is a call to get to work and an encouragement to keep on working on God's house.

I would summarise the four prophecies as follows:

- Prophecy #1 in chapter 1: Do not neglect God's house—it is more important than your own house.
- Prophecy #2 in 2:1-9: Keep up the work—though it seems small, God will expand His church among all nations.
- Prophecy #3 in 2:10-19: Do not forget to be holy—working on God's house does not make you holy.
- Prophecy #4 in 2:20-23: Be certain of it—Christ our King will have God's favour and blessing.

Have you been lagging along in the work of the LORD... in your walk with Him?

- This book is for you!
- What a special thing that our LORD should care for us enough to encourage us so that we will get back on track and stay on track with the things that matter most.

Let's take a look at each of these prophecies and see how they apply to us today.

- Prophecy #1 covers all of chapter 1:

I. Do not neglect God's house—it is more important than your own house.

- Look at Haggai 1:2-5: **“Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, ‘The time has not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built.’ ”** ³ **Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,** ⁴ **“Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?”** ⁵ **Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: “Consider your ways!”**

A. How should we apply this today?

1. The temple had been torn down by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon 66 years before the time of this passage, but 16 years ago, King Cyrus of Persia had decreed that the Jews should return to their land and rebuild the temple.
 - They had been discouraged in the work and had been focusing on their own houses instead of God's house. The work was not being done.
2. I have heard this applied to church building projects—getting people to give financial support for the church building.
 - And I suppose that that is an application, but surely the work of God is much more than erecting church buildings.
 - The temple in the OT represents the testimony of the gospel—it was the OT representation of how God is reconciled to man and how we live before Him as His people.
3. Thus the application for us is that our whole lives should be devoted to Christ and His kingdom.
 - I wonder, do you care about seeing the kingdom of Christ grow—are you praying for your friends and relations to come to Christ...
 - or are you more concerned about whether they like your clothes or whether they think you are a nice person or a together person...
 - or maybe you are concerned about your own bank account and retirement plan or about your house or your career.
 - The issue is, do you care about the state of the church?
 - Do you care whether the church in Nova Scotia grows or tanks?
 - Do you care whether Christ is known or not?
 - If you care, what are you doing about it?
 - Are you living a life that will point others to Christ or are you just living for your own interests... your own house?

B. If you are living for your own interests instead of for Christ's kingdom, Haggai tells you that you will never be satisfied.

1. He uses a helpful image... that you are putting your money into a bag with holes in it.
 - That is just what it is like.
 - You are busy, trying to be cool, or trying to be rich, or trying to be successful, or trying to be entertained... whatever it is...
 - and all your efforts are in vain.
 - You will never find satisfaction in those pursuits...
 - especially if you are a child of God (and it is questionable if you really are born again if you don't care about Christ and His kingdom).

2. There are two reasons that you will not be satisfied with your own pursuits.
 - either because you will never be able to get what you want—
 - or because you will get it and still won't be satisfied with it.

 - a. The LORD declares here that He Himself will withhold success from those who are neglecting their calling to seek first His kingdom... His house...
 - Look at verse 7-11: **Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Consider your ways! ⁸ Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified,” says the LORD. ⁹ “You looked for much, but indeed *it came to little*; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says the LORD of hosts. “Because of My house that *is in ruins*, while every one of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. ¹¹ For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of *your hands*.”**

 - b. This is His mercy to you.
 - By keeping you from having all that you want,
 - or from being satisfied when you once get what you thought would be all that you want,
 - He reminds you as His child that life is to be found in Him, not in the things that you covet.

 - Oh how we work against our own happiness when we are not living for the Lord and for His kingdom.
 - We destroy our own happiness.
 - But when we seek first His kingdom, we have the bonus of enjoying all the good things that He gives us in this world as well.
 - There is something special about getting something nice and knowing that is from our gracious heavenly Father's hand.
 - We can truly enjoy it then, and keep on enjoying it.

 - He was so gracious to Solomon... he got everything that he coveted, but the LORD gave him no satisfaction with it.
 - That is the way it often is... once you get what you coveted, it still does not satisfy...
 - And then Solomon learned that life was about fearing God and keeping His commandments... and that was best for a man to simply enjoy whatever God gives him... instead of trying to get more and more.

C. See the good example of Haggai's hearers!

1. They responded to his words.

- They responded to the call to seek first the kingdom of God:
 - **Hag 1:12-13: 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 presence of the LORD. ¹³ Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, spoke the LORD's message to the people, saying, " 'I am with you,' says the LORD."**
- Haggai gave the prophecy on August 29th, and by September 21st, within a month, they were already back to work on the house of God.
 - Hag 1:14-15 says: **So 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, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.**

2. Too often we ignore God's call.

- We hear the word, we hear the warning, we know it is true,
 - but before much time has passed, we have shaken it all off and we just go on like a stupid idiot living as we were before...
 - wasting our life that might have been poured out for Christ and His kingdom—investing in treasures that moth and rust cannot destroy.

3. What joy they had as they began to do to the work of God.

- Some of you young adults... right now you are in a time when you could be having the joy of bringing others into God's kingdom.
 - I remember being in university before and after I came to Christ.
 - What joy there was to live for Him and to have people ask me about my hope, to have some of them pour out their hearts and to see them come to church and to Bible study and to trust in the Lord.
 - It was so much better than those boring nights out on the town and at the parties that we tried to make exciting.
 - Now I knew the LORD who had saved me and I could tell others of Him... even when some rejected me... there was joy in bearing reproach for His name.
 - Don't waste these years—they are years of opportunity—years of growth in the LORD.
- And you who are older... some of you are married or have children...
 - Honour the LORD in your marriage, pour out your life for the souls of your children.
 - Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...
 - What is more important than the souls of your children?
 - What a joy it is to lead them in the ways of the Lord and to watch their lives unfold for Him... but if not, you can never go back and do it again.

TRANS> Haggai's second prophecy was given less than a month later... on October 17, 520 BC.

- It runs from Hag 2:1 through 2:9 and can be summarised like this:

II. Keep up your work for God—though it seems small, God will expand His church among all the nations.

A. Sometimes, it can seem like your impact for Him is very small.

- You can feel like you are labouring much and accomplishing little... It can cause you to give up.
- 1. The LORD knows about this discouragement... He experienced Himself when He was here with us.
 - He knew that some of the older people were discouraged as the temple was built because they remembered how much greater Solomon's temple had been.
 - Look at 2:1-5. **In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying: ² "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: ³ 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?' "**
 - They were discouraged, not because they did not love the LORD, but because they did...
 - and this house that they were rebuilding for Him seemed like nothing compared to the one that Nebuchadnezzar had torn down sixty-six years before.

➤ The LORD is not aloof, but very mindful of such struggles.

2. Think of us... we have so little impact in Nova Scotia.

- There used to be great churches all over Nova Scotia, filled with people who believed the word and who loved God...
 - And now we are so few—so small is the work.
 - Most people hardly even know that we are here.
- And as we look at Truro...thinking of doing this small little work there... in Truro... where there used to be so many faithful reformed churches.
 - What can we do? What difference can we really make?
 - What's the point of even trying?

B. Yet, look at how the LORD encourages us...

1. He calls us to be strong, reminding us that He will be with us as He was with His people when they came out of Egypt.
 - **Hag 2:4-5: "Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel," says the LORD; "and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land," says the LORD, "and work; for I am with you," says the LORD of hosts. ⁵ "According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!"**
 - How small and weak they were coming out of Egypt...
 - They could not escape from their bondage to Pharaoh, but it was the LORD who sent the plagues and parted the Red Sea...

- And then it was He who sustained them in the wilderness and He who brought them into the Promised Land, subduing enemies that were stronger and greater than they were.
2. Yes, my brothers and sisters, don't grow weary in serving the LORD.
 - God is glorified when we are weak.
 - His strength is made perfect in our weakness.
 - Think of those twelve disciples, one was a traitor, the others were so weak, yet from them the worldwide kingdom of God has sprung forth.
 - That worldwide kingdom in Christ is the very thing that the LORD promises here.
 3. Through this little impoverished temple building remnant, God is going to bring forth the One who is called *the Desire of All Nations*!
 - Their little community certainly did not *seem* like anything that the nations would desire as they built this little temple—so unimpressive compared to the colossal palaces and temples they had seen in Babylon and now in Persia...
 - But look at what the LORD says in Hag 2:6-9:
 - **Hag 2:6-9: “For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; ⁷ and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts. ⁹ ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the LORD of hosts.”**
- a. This temple will be greater because God is going to shake the heavens and the earth with this temple...
 - He is going to bring the nations to His Son who is here called *the Desire of All Nations*.
 - This is the kingdom prophesied by Isaiah that the nations flow up to, begging to learn of the LORD.
 - It will be by His earth-and-heaven-shaking power.
 - The glory of this temple will be far greater than any other.
 - b. It is here, in this temple, that God will give peace!
 - Solomon's temple had more gold, but the sacrifices offered only brought ritual cleansing...
 - When the Desire of All Nations comes to His temple, He will bring, as verse 9 says, peace.
 - He will reconcile sinners to God... bringing true reconciliation between God and man.
 - c. I love reading the opening of Paul's epistles... where he always expresses how thankful he is for those who are in Christ.
 - We need to remember how special it is to think that though we may be few in number, every soul that is saved is an eternal soul.
 - And that God uses us to build His church.
 - Don't be discouraged, press on! It is He that shakes the heaven and the earth to carry out His work!

TRANS> And now we come to the third prophecy in Haggai 2:10-19.

- It is in the form of a warning that had become necessary as the work went on.
 - This prophecy came on December 18, about two months after the encouragement.
 - It is a reminder...

III. Do not forget to be holy—working on God’s house does not make you holy.

A. Haggai is addressing this problem that often afflicts us when we take up work for God after having been negligent.

1. It is good that God’s people had responded to Haggai’s call and that they were busy building the temple again.

- It is also good for us as a congregation if we should listen to the call to get busy in the things of God—to resume vibrant family worship, to become zealous in prayer, to reach out to our neighbours, to do good works in the community, to support missions, to no longer neglect the things of the Lord.
- This is all good...

2. But the danger is that we will suppose that just because we are busy in activities for God, we are holy.

- I am sure you have run into this kind of thing...
 - Religious people—they do all sorts of religious things, but they drink to excess, they live double lives, they cheat people in business, they tell lies, they fight and quarrel with others...
 - They do religious activities, and, like the church at Sardis, have a name that they are alive, but Jesus said that they are actually dead.
 - Sometimes the most outwardly religious people can be the most ungodly people of all!
 - Their religious activity is a mask for their ungodliness and a salve for their consciences.
 - I remember as an unbeliever in university going to church on Sunday with a hangover without repenting of what I did the night before.
 - Somehow, in my mind, going to church made me more holy.

B. Haggai addresses this problem and we need to hear him, especially if we have begun to take up the work that God has called us to do.

1. We have returned to our Bible reading and our prayers and our outreach and our giving and our family worship and our faithful church attendance and good works...

- If you have not done that yet, then you will console yourself that you are not like those active Christians who are hypocrites.
 - You are busy putting your money in a bag with holes in it and invest little in the kingdom of God...
- But if you are busy in the work of God, then this is a temptation for you to trust in your activity and think that it makes you holy.

2. Haggai uses a lesson from the temple itself to address this problem.

- In Hag 2:11, he says: **Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying,** ¹² **‘If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment,**

and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?’ ” Then the priests answered and said, “No.”

- a. In other words, does something that is holy make the things it touches holy?
 - If you are involved in building the holy temple, does that make you holy?
 - If you go to church or read the Bible, does that make you holy?
 - If you do outreach, or lots of hospitality, or family worship, does that make you holy?
 - And the answer is “no.”
 - b. Instead, it is the opposite.
 - If you are unclean—defiled by sin that has not been dealt with—then you make all the holy things of God to become unclean.
 - You can be full of religious activity, but if you are not walking in Christ your Saviour, looking to Him for pardon and life, repenting of your sin, trusting Him who died for your pardon,
 - then all your religious activity is unclean—it is defiled and unacceptable—it is offensive to God.
 - Haggai shows us this in verses 13... Hag 2:13: **And Haggai said, “If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?” So the priests answered and said, “It shall be unclean.”**
 - You actually pollute the sacrament or the prayers or the outreach to the poor if you are not in Christ, walking with Him in faith.
 - Haggai is very pointed in verse 14: **Then Haggai answered and said, “ ‘So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,’ says the LORD, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.’ ”**
 - If you haven’t repented, nothing you offer is acceptable.
- C. In verses 15-17, He calls them to consider how God had been chastening them.
1. As we saw from the start of Haggai, the LORD had been withholding blessings from them because they had been neglecting the house of God.
 - The Lord has called them to repentance—
 - He wants to bless them now—
 2. And in verses 18-19, He calls them to consider the future...
 - Now that they have repented and returned to build the house of God, He is ready to bless them again, and He will—so long as they are not hypocrites.
 - In verse 19, He says, **“Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.”**
 - They have returned, and God is ready to bless them, but let them not rest in their religious activity.
 - The religious activity is essential, but it is profane if you are walking in hypocrisy and not in union with Christ.

TRANS> Haggai’s fourth prophecy comes later on the same day.

- It is recorded in chapter 2 verses 20-23.
- It is an encouragement and can be summarised like this:

IV. Be certain of it—Christ our King will have God’s favour and blessing.

A. One of the great discouragements for the godly in the exile was the fall of the house of David.

1. God had made promises to establish David’s Son on the throne of God’s righteous kingdom forever, and to give Him victory over all His enemies.
 - It was to be by God’s blessing and acceptance of David’s Son, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ, that all of God’s people would be blessed.
 - He would be God’s accepted man, God’s accepted righteous king.
 - God’s favour to Him would be the source of blessing to all of those (and only to those) who received Him as their Lord and Saviour.
2. But with the exile, the house of David as a regal dynasty had fallen.
 - There was no throne of David now.
 - His descendants had been reduced to governors serving under other monarchs... in Haggai’s day, under the Persian ruler, Darius the Great.
3. And even regionally, Zerubbabel was threatened by the enemies all around them who were trying to stop the Jews from building the temple.
 - You can read about that in the book of Ezra.

B. But here at the end of Haggai, the LORD promises that He will establish the throne of the Son of David!

1. The prophecy has a short range fulfillment and a long range complete fulfillment.
 - In the short range, Zerubbabel the governor would be accepted by God and he and the Jews would be able to carry on this work of building the temple.
 - But do not forget what Haggai said in his second address...
 - that the God was going to shake the heavens and the earth and that *the Desire of All Nations* would come!
 - That long range fulfillment of the coming of Jesus Christ as the ruler over the entire world is promised here at the end of Haggai.
2. Let’s walk through the passage...
 - Hag 2:21-22 speaks of the ultimate fulfillment: **“Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: ‘I will shake heaven and earth. ²² I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.’”**
 - This is addressed to Zerubbabel, but clearly when it speaks of shaking the heavens and the earth, it is looking beyond him to Christ, the Son of David who was to come.
 - It pictures the ultimate triumph of Christ’s kingdom over all rivals.
 - It speaks of all being subdued under Christ when His kingdom is finally established and all is returned to God.
 - And then in the last verse, Haggai 2:23, God promises to make Zerubbabel, the son of David, His signet ring: **“In that day,” says the LORD of hosts, “I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,” says the LORD, “and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,” says the LORD of hosts.**
 - A signet ring refers to ownership and true representation.

- For your king to be God's signet ring means that he is fully connected with God so that He and the Father are One; what He does is what the Father does; His rule is God's rule; His victories are God's victories; where He reigns, God reigns; where He is accepted, God is accepted; whom He favours, God favours.
- Thus it is with Jesus Christ.
 - If you have seen Him, you have seen the Father.
 - If you have accepted Him, you have accepted the Father.
 - If you have salvation in Him, you have salvation in the Father.
 - He is the Mediator between you and God... His kingdom is God's kingdom... no one comes to the Father but by Him.

Conclusion: What encouragement there is for us to do the work of God in Haggai!

- We waste our time in vain pursuits if we do not seek first His kingdom!
- Even though our efforts may be small and meager, they are part of the grand work that God Himself is doing in the world through Christ.
- He is God's signet ring, and if He is our king by faith, we will share in His salvation and His victory and His eternal inheritance.