

Well, if you would please turn with me in your copy of the Word of God to the book of Haggai, which can be a challenging book to find. If you find the Gospel of Matthew and go back past Malachi and Zechariah, you'll find the wee book of Haggai, one of the minor prophets, minor in size, but not minor in message. The book of Haggai is a book that outlines the building of the temple among the exiled people. Haggai is one of the three post-exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who ministered to the people of God after their return from exile. Now, just a quick outline of Old Testament history so you can find your feet before we jump into the passage. Big dates in the Old Testament. 2000 BC is Abraham. Fast forward 1,000 years, you get to David. After David you have Solomon, after Solomon you have Rehoboam, Solomon's foolish son. His folly splits the kingdom in 931 BC. You have the ten tribes in the north, whose capital is in Samaria, and you've got the southern kingdom of Judah in Jerusalem. And those two kingdoms continue on. The northern kingdom without a temple and largely without prophets, only Hosea and Amos prophesied to the northern kingdom. They cut themselves off from the temple of God and therefore cut themselves off from the sacrifices of God and therefore cut themselves off largely from the word of God. They descend rapidly into rebellion and idolatry and sexual depravity and they are exiled by the Assyrians in 722, 721 BC. And they're lost in the sands of Persia. Those 10 tribes never returned. They're lost in the sands of Persia. The southern kingdom of Judah continues on until 586 BC when Babylon, who take over as the big superpower from the Assyrians, Babylon come down and exile the people, level the walls of Jerusalem, raise the temple of God to the ground, and take the people of God off into exile for those 70 years. Then in 539 BC, the kingdom of Babylon falls. The Medes and the Persians come in at night when the writing was on the wall in the Babylonian kingdom. And they take over in Babylon, the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. God raises up a new king called Sarus. And you remember, Sarus, he makes a decree to send Israel back to the promised land in 538 BC. And when they come back to the promised land, they begin building the temple. And you remember the old men who had seen Solomon's temple in all its glory, they weep at the little hut they made, not worthy to be compared with the glory of Solomon's temple. And the younger generation, they're delighted and praising God that a new temple has been built. And the sound of weeping and the sound of praising mingle together so you can't tell the one from the other. But in 536 BC, two years after they return, the work of building the temple grinds to a halt. A number of factors. There's the hopeless task of rebuilding what's been lost. joined with the hostility of the Samaritans. When Israel arrived back to Judah, they find the land has been inhabited by a cursed half-breed of Samaritans who left the temple in ruins, put pagan shrines everywhere. And they resist the efforts of God's people to build the temple. And for 16 years, the work grinds to a halt. And then God raises up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to call the people back to God and back to their priorities. And it's a great book to consider because planting a church can be a difficult and discouraging work. And the book of Haggai, the prophet Haggai is speaking to a discouraged and beaten down people. And we see these principles of how God builds his kingdom and revives the flagging spirits of his people through the preaching of Haggai. With that said, let's pray. We'll turn to the word of God. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you, oh God, for your word. It's inspired by you, breathed out by you. It is light that shines into the darkness of this world. And we pray, Father, for the help of Your Spirit this evening that Your Word will shine into the darkness of our hearts and give us encouragement and strength

as we begin this new work, that You will guide us to the principles of the preaching of Your Word that is always the foundation, the energy source, the dynamo that drives on the work of God among the people of God, by the Spirit of God, and for the glory of God. We offer these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to read the whole chapter, actually. Let's listen to the Word of God. 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, the 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 time for you yourself 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 have 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 a 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, and 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, our God, on the 24th day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king. When it's very easy to lose a grip on God, to sideline Him, when we're busy, busy with the beautiful things of life and busy carrying the burdens of life, and both were the case for the people in Haggai's day. They were busy building their beautiful houses, Haggai calls them, their paneled houses. But they were also carrying great burdens. When they came back to the land, as we said, the work began initially apace and then ground to a halt because of the hopeless task of building the temple again and the hardship or the hostility of the Samaritans who constantly snapped at their heels and discouraged them. And they got distracted. They turned away from building the temple. They began focusing on building their own houses, getting their feet back under them again. And their efforts initially were successful. But then there was a drought, and then a famine, and the harvests failed. It was a double-dip depression. And the people became thoroughly discouraged and sank down into their hopelessness and despondency. They're dissatisfied with life. Haggai exposes that in verse six. You've sown much, harvested little. You eat, but 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. They have no fruit for their labor. They're working hard, and the harvest, one harvest after

another, is failing. They're finding no joy in the normal pleasures of life. They're eating, but they're not satisfied. They're drinking, but their thirst is not quenched. And they have no money in their pocket. It seems inflation is running rampant in Haggai's day, much like our day. And they feel that they're earning money putting it into a wallet, but the wallet's got a hole in the bottom. As fast as they pour money in, it's falling out the bottom, and there's a lot of month left at the end of their money, and they're discouraged. And at such times, it's easy to allow that discouragement to cause your soul to drift further and further away from God. I wonder if that happened to you this evening. Busyness with the beautiful things of life, and busyness carrying the burdens of life, can so often grind a man down, a woman down, and we can just lift and sink in our spirits, lift our heads down, and we lose a sight of God and his word. And the answer in Haggai's day and the answer in our day is for God to raise up a preacher. And that's what God has done with the Reverend Geoffrey Tell. He's a preacher, first and foremost. He's a man who preaches the Word of God. And the answer in Haggai's day was Haggai, the preacher. that began restoring, began reviving, began rebuilding the work of God. And it's the answer here in Lexington as you begin to plant this church, my brother, is to bring the Word of God, to bear upon the people of God, and to encourage the discouraged, to lift up the faint-hearted, to give strength to the weak, and to call people back to God. There, and we pray for you as you do. And I want to consider with you very briefly this evening the kind of preaching that God uses to do that. And there are four brief points. First of all, the kind of preaching God uses to build His church and to bring revival is the kind of preaching that confronts people with God. Notice again and again in this passage, the one who is speaking is not Haggai. It's God. And God calls Himself the Lord of hosts. Verse 2, thus says the Lord of hosts. Verse 5, now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts. Verse 7, thus says the Lord of hosts. That's an august title. It's Yahweh Sabaoth, the Lord, the God Almighty who rules and holds sovereign sway over the hosts of heaven. He's the God who speaks and is done, who commands and holds fast, who does according to his will in heaven and on the earth and in the seas and all deeps, and none can stay his hand or say to him, what is this that you have done? He rules the angels of heaven, the demons of hell, and everything in between. He's the Lord God of hosts. And Haggai's a man who feels the reality of God in his soul. He's gripped by a sense of God. And that's what we need in our day and age, my brother. We need men who stand in the pulpit and who feel themselves very small, but who feel the greatness and the majesty and the glory and the authority of God towering above them and speaking through them. And as you go out to begin this work, that's my prayer for you, as I pray for myself, that you and I will be men who feel the weightiness, the majesty of God filling our hearts. Only such a sense of the one who sends us to preach can ever give us hope and courage to stand in our pulpits and to proclaim the unsearchable riches of His Word and not ours. So first of all then, preaching that brings revival, that builds the church of God, confronts people with God, with His majesty, with His glory. The second thing we see in our passage is a preaching that builds the church and brings revival, confronts people with Scripture. Interesting statement here, and it repeats through the book of Haggai, that the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai. Verse 3, again, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai, the prophet. It's in the next chapter. In the seventh month, on the 21st day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai. Verse 10 in the next chapter, on the 24th day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the

word of the Lord came by Haggai, the prophet. That the God of the Bible is a God who speaks. That when you open your Bible, the very first page, you find this God speaking. Speaking to the nothing, speaking to the darkness, the emptiness of A universe in which there was no universe, there was no time, no space, no stuff, nothing. Just God by himself existing in his glory and he speaks and everything, time, space, matter, will lurch into existence. And it's a sign to you, it's a sign to me that when God speaks, everything changes, nothing remains the same. And that's the first message of the Bible, because God wants you to realize that when you hold this little book in your hand, you're holding the most powerful, creative, restorative force in existence. And it comes from him, not from us. We don't generate it. We don't make it up. The Bible isn't God's or man's word about God. It's God's word to men. It comes from eternity, and it herniates into time. The Word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. It's an unearthly word. It's also a unique word. The Bible tells the story of God's dealings with mankind, and you could describe it as Paul does in Romans 9-11 as, Behold the goodness and the severity of the Lord. And there's everything in between, from the goodness all the way to the severity of the Lord and back again. It takes a whole Bible to make a whole church, and a whole Bible to make a whole Christian. But you can't preach the whole Bible in every sermon, as we often try. We need a sense from God, what particular message do these particular people need at this particular time and in these particular circumstances? In the book of Haggai, as many of the prophets of the Old Testament, and indeed Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament, mean to tell us that the word they need is a unique word. It's a word for them in their particular moment. And we can only get that word from God We must resist the urge to try and create a word in our own thinking that will make them feel good about themselves. You need to sit before God and say, Lord, what is your word for these people at this time, in this particular moment of their existence? It's not an earthly word, a unique word. It comes through an unlikely agent, Haggai, a mere man. That's amazing. God doesn't speak to men directly through a voice. People asked me that this week. I was talking about hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit. They said, did you hear a voice? I said, no, I don't, no, no. It was a sense of my heart, right? God uses men to speak to men. He speaks to sinners by sinners. And Haggai is an example. And so are you, my brother. You're bringing the Word of God to the people of God by the Spirit of God to transform them into the glory of God. And it comes with an uncompromising message. Haggai doesn't improvise. Thus says the Lord. These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord, period. Just leaves that hanging. That's the first word he gets. And that's the only word he gives. And the word comes a second time. It's a time for you yourselves to live in paneled houses while this house lies in ruins. Now therefore, thus says the Lord of Hosts, consider your ways. And he leaves it with verse six. He lets the Word that God has given hang in the hearts of God's people and do its work. It's an uncompromising message. So preaching that builds the Scriptures, or builds the people, it confronts people with the reality of God, and it confronts people with this book, Scripture. And my prayer is for you, our prayer is for you, my brother, that as you preach each week, as you teach Bible studies each week, as you lead people to God each week, you'll bring this book and only this book. And you'll use illustrations from all over the place, of course, to help unpack its message, just as Jesus did. But you'll bring this message to bear upon the hearts of your people. And you'll stand back and watch what the Word of God can do when it's unleashed amidst the people. Thirdly, preaching that brings revival and that

builds the church of God confronts people, not just with God and with Scripture, but with the reality of sin. J.C. Ryle, the great 19th century preacher in Liverpool, said this in his book on holiness. He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high. A mistake here is most mischievous. Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption. I make no apology for beginning this volume of papers about holiness by making some plain statements about sin. The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. And I want to exhort you in that regard, my brother, as I exhort my own congregation. You'll never understand the need of the gospel, your need of the gospel, my need of the gospel, the world's need of the gospel, if you don't understand the problem that we've sinned against God. And as Haggai calls these people back again to begin the difficult work of rebuilding the temple, He exposes their sin, the bitter root of sin and the bitter fruit of sin. The bitter root of sin. What is sin? Well, you could ask the children and say, sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. That's a great definition, isn't it? But in reality, sin is even more profoundly simple than that. What is sin? Sin is when I put me before thee and mine before thine. And that's Haggai's chief message. These people say that time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. Is it time for you yourself to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins? They're building their own house while neglecting God's house. That's the essence of sin. And it comes deceptively. Notice that people don't say, it's never time to build the house of God. Now God says, these people say, it's not yet time to build the house of God. Well, then maybe do it tomorrow. When I was a child, my mother called me manana, tomorrow, because that was my motto for life. Take out the trash, Neil. I'll do it tomorrow. Do your homework, Neil. I'll do it tomorrow. And of course, tomorrow never comes. And it's easy in life when we're distracted with the beautiful things, building our houses, and the burdensome things, the trials, the difficulties, the problems, to allow ourselves to get beaten down, to get distracted, and to turn away, and to busy ourselves with other things, our own things, and to sideline God, and His word, and His glory, and His worship, and just preachers, we have to remind people of the reality of sin, because if they don't feel the reality of sin, they'll never feel their need of the gospel. That's why I think so many preachers today go wrong. They want to start with the gospel, but it'll make no sense if people don't feel their need of the gospel. And do you notice how Haggai, and I do think it's good to end our sermons with the gospel, and I normally do, but Haggai here, he just leaves the word hanging. Sometimes it can be good to let the word of conviction sit him on the people for a second. His first sermon is simply, this people say, the time has not yet come. And the next sermon is no more encouraging. You have sown much and have 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. And he lets that sit on the people for a second. Remember when I began my ministry back in Mississippi, I was contemplating preaching a sermon series on the book of Jeremiah. And I remarked to a friend of mine up in Maine, and I said to him, you know, it would be really hard though because people would be pretty miserable for the first 20 weeks or so. And he said to me, and that would be a bad thing. And his comment just caught me like a two-by-four. I realized that so often in my preaching I want people to like me, and the best way for people to

like me is to leave them feeling good about themselves when they leave the church. But my goal is not to leave the congregation feeling good about themselves. My goal is to bring them back into fellowship with God. And sometimes, as Ryle reminds us, we've got to dig down before we can build up. And so Haggai exposes the bitter root of their sin, me before thee. And then he goes to the bitter fruit of sin. He explains the very dissatisfaction they're lamenting. their crashing economy, their rampant inflation, their failed harvests. What's the cause? Verse nine, you looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away, God says. 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, and the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors. That Haggai connects the root of sin and the fruit of sin. That God has been disciplining these people. He's been chasing them. It is He who has dashed their economy. It is He who has blighted their harvests. And you see, it would be entirely the wrong message for Haggai to come and preach all things work together for good. Of course, that's true. And all these things are working together as good to good as God calls these people back to himself. But it's not the word that God says they need to hear. They need to hear what's happening and why. They've forsaken God, they've sidelined Him, and God has been blowing the trumpet of trial and tribulation to call them back to Himself. That's the word they need to hear. God's call is for them to feel bitter about their sin, not better about themselves. But that's the kind of preaching God uses, preaching that confronts man with God, that confronts man with the Bible, that confronts man with the vast and solemn subject of sin and the myriad of ways you and I seek our own kingdom and not the Lord's. And lastly, preaching that brings revival and that rebuilds and extends the kingdom of God is preaching that calls people back to God. I'm thinking here of repentance. Haggai says, consider your ways, the Hebrew is It's much more practically graphic. Literally, the Hebrew says, set your heart upon your ways. That true religion, true repentance, true dealings with God isn't something we do with our lips alone or with our hands alone or our feet alone. It's something we do in our hearts. It's with our hearts that we depart from God. It's with our hearts that we focus on our own things and not God. We build our own houses and not the house of God. It's with our hearts that we say, maybe tomorrow, but not today. It's with our hearts that we depart from God. And it's with our hearts, my brothers and sisters, that we must return to God. A true, saving Christianity in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is a heart business. And in our sermons, we're preaching from God to the people, and we're saying to them, essentially, give me your heart, my son, my daughter. Where's your heart this evening? Have you given your heart to God? And the word is coming through Haggai. It's coming through your pastor. It's coming from God. And God is saying, give me your heart. Turn, turn from your waywardness and come back home to God. And God's calling people back to his house The temple wasn't just a place to do religion. It was a place to meet God safely. If there's one message about the Old Testament temple, it was surely this, that it's not safe to come to God's presence just as you are. You need a sacrifice. Some one must die if you are to live. And so morning by morning, day after day, month by month, the people of God would trek to the temple. And they'd bring a lamb, or a ram, or a bull, or a goat, or a turtle dove. And it would die, and they would live. And its blood would make atonement, atonement between them and

their God. And it would bring them back. back through the sacrifice of God, back into the presence of God. Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message. Verse 13, I am with you. I am with you. That's why the temple mattered. mattered because God matters and His presence matters and His plan of redemption matters. And the call of Haggai to these people was to rebuild the temple. And that call to repent was intensely practical. God says, verse 7, set your heart upon 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. Notice the practicality of this repentance as God calls his people back to himself. It's as practical as picking up that axe, walking up that mountain, cutting down that tree. and bringing the wood back to build this house. And until that happens, repentance hasn't happened. It's an intensely practical thing. And you and I, my brothers, we preach the Word of God to God's people. We've got to give them practical ways, connected to the gospel, connected to the Spirit of God. We don't white-knuckle our way to holiness, but practical ways to be done with sin, to turn from it, that they might turn to God, that He might take pleasure in us, and that He might be glorified. I'll leave you with a quote again from J.C. Ryle. Sanctification, which is another word to describe the building up of Christians and the building up of churches. Sanctification, again, he said, is a thing which cannot justify a man, and yet it pleases God. Just as a parent is pleased with the efforts of his little child to please him, Though it be only by picking a daisy or walking across a room, so is our Father in heaven pleased with the poor performances of His believing children. He looks at the motive, the principle, and the intention of their actions, and not merely at their quantity and their quality. He regards them as members of His own dear Son, and for His sake, Christ's sake, wherever there's a single eye, He is well pleased. And that's one of the things I think, a note I hear in too much modern preaching, is that they so preach the gospel that it almost makes our efforts superfluous. But Paul prays. for the church in Colossae, that they might be fully pleasing to God, that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, with all spiritual wisdom and understanding, that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, that in Christ, as we trust in Him, lean on His Spirit and strive to be done with sin, to say no to it and yes to God, that our halting efforts in Christ and our halting efforts in the Spirit still please our Father as we engage ourselves in the work. And it's God's people. They do that. As we preach a gospel that confronts them with the majesty of God, confronts them with His Word, confronts them with their sin, and that calls them back to Him in concrete, practical, personal repentance. May God bless you, my brother, and your congregation as you engage with that. As you do, Christ will build His church. It's not your job. It's Christ's job. and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word, its power. We pray, Father, that it will perform its work in this place, and also through the ministry of Pastor Tell and Pastor Kent, that as they preach your word, they will feel the glory of God resonating in their hearts, that they'll know they're not preaching in their own names, They're not preaching their own message, but they're preaching the living word of the living God, and that they would be amazed to see what your word will do, and that's unleashed in a city through the faithful preaching of the gospel and the scripture from which it comes. And we offer these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.