**Restoring His Glory Series**

**“Rejecting Spiritual Apathy”**

**Haggai 1.1-15**

**Introduction**

Today we begin a short series of sermons from the book of Haggai. One of the first problems we face with the book of Haggai is finding it in our Bibles. Apart from Obadiah, Haggai is the smallest book in the Old Testament. The book has only two chapters with a total of just thirty-eight verses. All we know about the Prophet Haggai is found in this book. His name means, “festival,” which does have some significance that I will point out later, but we know nothing about Haggai’s heritage or ancestors. Haggai comes onto the scene with no prior prophecies, gives his brief messages from the Lord Almighty and then, less than four months later, disappears from the pages of history.

The book of Haggai consists of four precisely dated prophecies but it really helps to know the historical context to understand the significance of those prophecies. So allow me to set the historical context. Approximately eighty-six years prior to Haggai’s prophecies King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem, burnt the city and the Temple to the ground, and took most of its inhabitants into captivity in Babylon. God had warned the people about the coming captivity through the prophecies of the Prophet Jeremiah. After decades in captivity God miraculously intervened when Cyrus, the King of Persia, conquered Babylon and brought the Babylonian Empire to an end. King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Cyrus’ proclamation is recorded in the book of Ezra.

*In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:* ***2****“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.****3****Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.****4****And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.’”* (Ezra 1.1-4)

Most of those in captivity stayed in Babylon but fifty thousand exiles returned to Jerusalem under Cyrus’ proclamation and the Prophet Haggai and Zechariah were among them. (Ezra 5.1-2) When the returning exiles arrived back in Jerusalem they discovered the city and the Temple lying in ruins. But these returning exiles gathered together as one man and with great zeal dug the foundation for the temple and built an altar so that the burnt offerings could resume.

Despite the glorious beginning, after two years the work stopped, mired in discouragement from outside opposition and derailed by a lack of focus. Ezra records it like this; “*the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”* (Ezra 4.24) And this is where book of Haggai begins. Hear now the word of God - Haggai 1.1-15:

*In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest:* ***2*** *This is what the Lord Almighty*

*says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.’”* ***3****Then 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?”* ***5****Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways.* ***6*** *You have planted much, but 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.”* ***7****This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways.****8****Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the Lord.****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 your own house.****10****Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops.****11****I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”* ***12****Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, 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.* ***13****Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: “I am with you,” declares the Lord.****14****So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, 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,****15****on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.*

The Prophet Haggai took the prophetic stage after sixteen years of apathy towards rebuilding of the temple. During those sixteen years those who had return under Cyrus’ proclamation focused on building their own houses and cultivating own land while the Temple remained in ruins. The day of Haggai’s first prophecy would have been August 29, 520 BC. This would have been the time for a new moon, a feast day for everyone. So the Prophet whose name means “festival” began his ministry on a feast day! My mother was born on Flag Day and she always say that everyone was celebrating her birthday by flying the American flag. Well, I think Haggai said this is my day and I’m going to use it for the glory of God. Everyone had the day off and gathered to celebrate the festival. It was an ideal time for the Prophet Haggai to preach his first message calling God’s people to rid themselves of spiritual apathy and to resume rebuilding of the Temple.

Now by this time you might be thinking, “Thank you Pastor for the lesson in Old Testament history but why should the Temple be so important to me and what does it have to do with my relationship with Christ?” So, allow me to answer the question, “Why is the Temple so Important.”

**Why is the Temple so Important?**

Like the Tabernacle before it, the Temple is important because it pointed forward to the work of Jesus Christ. Let me explain from Scripture how the Temple pointed to Jesus Christ. First, the Lord Himself forever linked the Temple to Christ’s finished work in the covenant God made with King David in 2 Samuel 7. In the Davidic Covenant the Lord told David that his son, Solomon, would build the temple but His Son, Jesus Christ, would establish the throne of His kingdom forever. (2Sam.7.13) We see the angel Gabriel confirmed this covenantal link when he told Mary that her child Jesus *“will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”* (Lk.1.30-33) Secondly, the Old Testament Temple was where the presence of God dwelt among God’s people. And we see the fulfillment of God’s presence in the person of Jesus Christ when the Bible tells us “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.’’* (Jn.1.14) Actually the word “dwelt” is “tabernacle,” which was the temple until Solomon. Brothers and sisters, Jesus is our Immanuel, which translated means “God with us.” (Mt.1.23) Lastly, remember how Jesus outraged the religious class when He told them, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”**The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”**But He was speaking of the temple of His body.* (Jn.2.19-21) Jesus was telling them that He was the fulfillment of the Temple.

The Bible teaches us that the Old Testament Temple was designed by God to be a temporary edifice looking forward to the completed work of Jesus Christ. Every part of the Temple, every piece of furniture, every instrument used by the priesthood, and even the priesthood itself pointed to the finished work of Christ. The Temple and everything in it were signs and symbols that God would send His Messiah to fulfill the redemptive plan of God. So, when the Temple was destroyed in the Babylonian invasion it seemed as though the redemptive purposes of God had been lost. But when the opportunity came for the exiles to return and rebuild the temple it seemed as though the redemptive purposes of God had been resurrected.

The returning exiles were energized and full of vision to return and rebuild. But the people lost their focus and turned their zeal towards personal enterprises instead of maintaining their focus on the purposes of God. So after sixteen years of apathy Haggai stand up during the festival and says, *This is what the Lord Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.’”*(1.2)

**These People**

Remember these people were the faithful ones. Haggai’s audience was not immature followers. These people were the ones who left the comforts of Babylon to return to a decimated land and to a Temple that had been destroyed. These people believed in the redemptive purposes of God. But over the years these people adopted an attitude saying, *“the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.”* (1.2) It seems that they intended to resume rebuilding of the Temple one day, but not today.

These people sound like those in the church of Ephesus who have lost their first love and the Lord told them to remember, repent, and return to the deeds they did at first. (Rev.2.5) Haggai’s prophecy calls these people to remember why they return to Jerusalem, to repent of their apathy, and to return to the work they did at first. *Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”**Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways.* (1.3-5)

**Consider Your Ways**

Giving careful thought to our ways is a very important spiritual exercise, especially during the pandemic. The COVID–19 chaos is partially responsible for inducing spiritual apathy among many professing Christians, even the most faithful. The major disruption of church attendance routines, among plenty of other disruptions, has many believers falling into a sense of apathetic stupor, a lack of concern for the things of God, and an absence of the care of the soul. A Christian who may have been focused on diligent personal prayer, Bible study, and Christian service just six months ago might today feel totally numb toward the Lord and the mission of the church in the world.

Like the people in Haggai’s day these people are not ignorant Christian. They know what to do. They know that God is worthy of worship. They know that they should pray, read Scripture, sing, and serve. But, in spite of their knowledge, soul numbness prevails. Like the people in Haggai’s day these people are not lazy Christians. Before COVID–19, they were active in the spiritual disciplines and Christian ministry. But COVID has brought discouragement and caused them to lose their focus for the things what matter most. They just find themselves not caring anymore.

These are not baby Christians. Like those returning to Jerusalem they are the faithful ones but now they find themselves drowning in spiritual apathy. Those of us who are older in the Lord should be careful about our attitude to the Lord’s work because our younger brothers and sisters in Christ are taking their lead from us. When mature Christians become lackadaisical in building up God’s house, weaker and newer Christians often begin to reduce their involvement too.

As I have mentioned before, a major Christian resource group has discovered that one-third of practicing Christian have drop out of church altogether. One in three practicing Christians have stopped viewing worship services online and are considering not returning to in-person worship even after COVID is gone. Brothers and sisters, spiritual apathy is deadly for the soul. In times like this we should consider our ways, remembering how the Lord saved us, repent of our lethargic attitude, and return to the deeds we did before COVID.

I believe we can learn so much from the book of Haggai and there are many parallels to our lives today. The Apostle Paul tells us that *these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction.* (I Cor.10.11) The Apostle is telling the Church that these things happen for us! These things happen so that we can learn from their mistakes. The only difference between them and us is that we live on this side of the cross – this side of the fulfillment in Christ.

The people in Haggai’s day had enjoyed many years of prosperity and had turned their attention away from the purposes of God to build for themselves elaborate homes. But now in the month of August 530 BC the people had fallen on hard times. The days of prosperity were in their rearview mirrors. Sound familiar? They had *sown much, but harvest little;* they *eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied;* they *drink, but there is not enough to become drunk;* they *put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and* those *who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes.* (1.6)

The people had worked hard in the fields. They had diligently planted the seeds. And they were expecting a bumper crop. But that’s not what happened. They *expected much, but see, it turned out to be little.*(1.9) They harvested little. Not even enough to bring any satisfaction. Their theme song was from the Rolling Stones, “I can’t get no satisfaction, Cause I try and I try and I try and I try, I can't get no, I can't get no.”

Why? Because the Lord withheld the dew from the heavens and brought a drought on everything the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of their hands. (1.10-11) Sometimes God allows certain things to happen to get our attention. Our loving Heavenly Father sometimes disciplines His children for their good so that they may share in His holiness. (Heb.12.10) And here the Lord used this drought to call the people to repentance and to realign their lives with the infinite worth of Christ. As I said back in June of this year I believe that coronavirus is God’s call to all of us to repent and realign our lives with the infinite worth of Christ. Lets be careful to use this opportunity to remember, repent, and return. *This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the Lord.*(1.7-8)

I want you to see that the people had a wrong attitude towards God’s glory. They said, “There’s plenty of time to do what God wants. There’s plenty of time to please God. We will get to it next week, or next month, or next year. But the Lord says, “No! Now is the time, today is the day. *Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house.”* You see the deeper problem was the people’s indifference to the glory of God. Look at what the Lord says, “*build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored.”* Build My house, so that I may be pleased with it, so that I will be glorified.The people were indifferent about the thing that brought pleasure and glory to God. Indifference to the purposes of God is always a sign of failure to love the things that God loves. The indifference of the people was seen in them seeking what pleased them instead of what brought pleasure and honor to God. They had inverted priorities, and as Dr. James Boice put it, “in the final analysis all inverted priorities are idolatry. They put the creature before the Creator.”

*Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, 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.* (1.12)

**The People Obeyed the Voice of the Lord their God**

*The people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.* Starting with the governor Zerubbabel, to the high priest, Joshua, and then to the whole remnant of the people. Everyone surrendered themselves to Word of the Lord. You see, church renewal should start at the top and then extended to every heart. Each one had given ear to *the voice of the Lord their God* through the Prophet Haggai and as a result the people renewed their reverence and respect to God and His purposes. Oh that we today would give ear to the voice of the Lord and experience a spiritual renewal of reverence and respect for the purposes of God.

**“‘I Am With You,’ declares the Lord.”**

*Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke by the commission of the Lord to the people saying, “‘I am with you,’ declares the Lord.”*Remember I told you that the Temple was where the presence of God dwelt with God’s people. Well, here we see the Lord declares that He is with them even before the Temple is rebuilt. Brothers and sisters, the Lord dwells among the people who do His will. The Lord is with His people who do His holy will.

**The Lord Stirred Up Their Spirit**

*So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, 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, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king.* (Hag.1.12-15)

The Lord always empowers us to do what He commands. Notice this “stirring of spirit” started at the top with the governor and high priest and extended to all the people. This “stirring of the spirit” wasn’t some wild spiritual experience but rather it was an arousal to action. Our Church Fathers told us that we ought to be diligent in stirring up desire to do the works He has called us to do. (WCF 16.3) Notice those who experience this “stirring of the spirit” *came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.* As the great Christian missionary William Carey said in his famous sermon in 1792, “Expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.” Brothers and sisters, the stirring of the spirit cannot and should not be wasted on blessing ourselves. The stirring of the spirit must result in action. Being doers of the word not just hearers only! We must expect great things from God and attempt great things for God. O’ Lord stir our spirits today!

**Closing Thoughts**

This morning I want to challenge each of us to reject spiritual apathy and awaken from spiritual slumber in four ways. First by examining our focus on Christ. Two times in today’s text the Lord tells the people to, *“Consider their ways.”* So this morning I am asking for you to consider if you have been procrastinating saying, *“The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.”* (vs.2) Have you been putting it off or pushing back from the purposes of God?

Secondly I want to challenge each of us to become engage in the Lord’s worship and work. The Lord always calls His people to “go up, rise up, and enter in.” These commands are consistent with the purposes of God and they should not be ignored.

My dad always said, “You can’t get anything done sitting down.” And part of the lyrics of a Keith Green song was “Jesus rose from the dead and you can’t even get out of bed.” But verse 14b says, *“they came and worked”* and so should we.

Thirdly, enjoy the presence of God. *“‘I am with you,’ declares the Lord.”* (Hag.1.13)

Jesus tells us, “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Mt.28.19b) and again the Lord says, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Heb.13.5) The Lord promises to be with those who do His will.

And lastly, expect the Lord to stir your spirit. Ask the Lord to stir your spirit today to expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.

Examine – Engage – Enjoy – Expect

This morning letus restore God’s gloryby rejecting spiritual apathy and lay *aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.* (Heb.12.1b-2a)