

January 10, 2010
Haggai Chapter 1

Alright good morning and since this is my first Sunday with you this year, Happy New Year! I'm glad you are here. Grab your Bibles and turn to the book of Haggai.

I assume that might take you a minute or two, so while you are turning there, let me tell you why you're turning there. Haggai is not where I had planned for us to go today. But because of several things that happened in the past few weeks – including everything from the crazy snow over Christmas and the following weekend to some printing problems that happened over New Years – but mainly the opportunity I had to be in a pastor friend of mine – Scott Berry's - church in Southlake last Sunday – God has aimed not only us, but my heart at this little used book of the Old Testament. So this morning God wants us to hear from Haggai the challenge He gave to His people as we start a new year together.

Now, if you haven't found Haggai yet, it is in the minor prophets or the last few pages of the Old Testament in between Zephaniah and Zechariah. If you are using one of the pew Bibles, you'll find it on page 667. Everyone there? Hold your Bible up if you're there.

Alright – let's look at chapter 1 together. **TEXT 1:1-15**

Obviously this OT book centers around the temple of God. And we need to remember that in the Hebrew culture – among the Jewish people – **the TEMPLE was the most important element of Old Testament culture.** It plays a prominent part in just about all the Old Testament books. When the Hebrews were wandering through the wilderness, the tabernacle – the tent of meeting – was the center post of their camp. All the tribes were arranged around the tent – around the temple. And God gave very specific directions about how to construct it – not only in the wilderness but also when the people finally got established in the promised land and all that went into building the temple itself.

In that culture, **the temple was a visible reminder of the PRESENCE of God with His people.** God chose to manifest His presence in mighty ways in the tabernacle, with the ark of the covenant that was kept there, in the temple itself when it was built. It was a reminder of God's presence, of their sin, of God's grace, of God's miracles on their behalf, everything in their culture pointed to the temple of God. Ok?

Now let me bring us up to speed right quick to where we are in Haggai. Once the Jews got established and comfortable, the very thing God warned them about began to happen. They began to forget – to turn their attention off of God – off of all the temple represented – and not only off of Jehovah God but onto other religions and false gods and to begin to break the laws of God without remorse or concern. That's the nutshell version.

And as a result, God raised up the Babylonians and in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army overrun Jerusalem and destroy the temple of God. And not only does he destroy the temple, he deports most of the surviving Jews to Babylon – takes them away from the promised land. For over 40 years they are in exile in Babylon because of their abandonment of God and His ways.

And as what normally happens when a nation grows in success and might and wealth – it becomes arrogant and lazy. And that's what happened to Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonians. They were enjoying the basic conquering of the world and did not take note of this little nation of Persia outside their borders rising up. And to make a lot of history really short, in 539 BC, Cyrus and the Persians lay siege to Babylon – they get past the city's defenses pretty cleverly – and overthrow the Babylonian kingdom.

And when Cyrus gets into rulership over all these new people, he realizes there is an entire conquered people group living in exile among the Babylonians and he – by the grace and sovereignty of God – not only allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem and their homes and gives them permission

to rebuild the temple, he even agrees to fund it – to pay for it. Now not all of the Jews left but most of them returned to Jerusalem and the promised land to begin rebuilding their lives.

Again to nutshell history for us, it is not long before Cyrus is replaced in rulership and a guy who does not know Cyrus comes to power and he repeals all that Cyrus did to help the Jews – in fact he created opposition for them in any attempt to rebuild the temple. **So for at least 16 years, the people of God have been living back in the promised land, though still under a foreign king's rule, and they have STOPPED working on the temple.** The temple site has lain there unfinished, unused, un-worked on for at least 16 years. And that's when God sends Haggai to remind them.

You look back at **verse 1** and in them midst of all those names, God gives quite a reminder to His people. First of all, it is **a reminder that they have BLOWN IT.** In most of the books and records about the kingdom and events of Israel, the dating system is always linked to the king – and in the Bible most of those links are somehow linked back to King David – it gives them meaning and connection to God. But in verse 1 Haggai reminds them that **they are ruled over by a PAGAN king. Why? Because they had turned their backs on God.**

But it also is **a reminder of the GRACE God has shown them.** They are ruled over by a foreign king, but **they are no longer in Babylon.** They are in Judah – **they are back in the PROMISED land.**

And then in **verse 2**, we start to find the problem.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"

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?"

The problem is that GOD'S temple lays in ruins – it is not being worked on or rebuilt – **yet they have built THEMSELVES nice houses in which to live.** For 16 years they've worked on their own stuff and left God's out of the picture.

And just kind of an aside here right quick – before we get to what is really the problem and why God sent Haggai to confront them – notice the excuse the people are giving. Verse 2 tells us they were saying “the time has not come for God's house to be built” – it's not a good time right now. We don't have the time, God – we don't have enough to do that right now. In fact implied in this excuse is a pointing finger – not only has the time not come, but it's not our fault, it's your fault, God. You haven't given us enough or the time might be here.

They are basically blaming God for this situation. And let me just give you a freebie here. That's our nature too, isn't it? We live in a culture and even more we are a people that doesn't like fault when it falls on us. It's not my fault. I didn't do it. We are all about blame. But here's the freebie from uncle Brett this morning, be careful what you blame God for. He takes that really seriously.

But back to the problem that Haggai is laying out here, I want to be real sure that we get this. **God's point here is not about the BUILDING.** That's why I spent all that time taking you through the culture and history – is so that when we get to this point, we can understand that the issue really isn't about a building.

Because it would be really easy for us to read this and try to apply it to us and say ok – God is stepping in here because the temple isn't built up while their houses are. So the temple is like our church building and their houses are like our houses, so the point here is the importance of really building up and taking care of our church building. Oh great – here it comes, Pastor Brett wants us to build something new. What's it going to be? A lap pool in the baptistry? No. That's not what is going on here.

The problem is not about a building. **The problem is a matter of their PRIORITIES. They had prioritized everything else but God.**

The issue is not the temple, but the presence of God and their relationship with Him. And that is what they had grown apathetic about. Listen – **as soon as there was RESISTANCE to that part of their lives – it was no longer a priority in their lives.** And that is why God sent Haggai to challenge and warn them.

And what we see here is the absolute truth **that if GOD is not the priority of your life nothing else is going to MATTER.**

Take a look at **verse 5**. He says “*Give careful thought to your ways.*” Most translations say “*Consider your ways.*” **One of the Hebrew words in the phrase** behind the word “consider” or the phrase “**give careful thought to**” **literally means “HEART.”** It was used to refer to that inner sense of who you are, what makes you you, the core of your life.

He says **evaluate at your HEART in the midst of how and what you’re doing in life** so to speak. Then **verse 6** explains why.

You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.” Sound familiar?

They were working hard – they were doing lots, but it was all leaving them EMPTY, because God was not their priority in the midst of it. Without God first, all the other stuff won’t work – not when it comes to SATISFYING your life.

So what does God tell them to do? In **verse 8** He says,

“Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD.”

He says get back on track – go back up into the mountains and bring down what it takes to rebuild my house. Think about that. They’d already done that, right? When they first got back and Cyrus was in charge, they’d already been up in the mountains – they’d already done the work to get the stuff to build the temple. Where’d it all go?

Yeah – they used it for themselves – for their nice paneled houses God calls them in verse 4. **What God by His grace had provided for them to be able to have, they had used not to glorify HIM, but for THEMSELVES.** There’s probably a pretty obvious lesson in that for us as well, but no one likes to be spoon fed, so I’ll leave that one up to you – and instead I want us to not miss the focus in this.

God says get started – build my house – why? Verse 8: *“so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored.”*

Folks we have talked about this truth more times and in more ways than I can count, but here it is again. God says do it for my honor – for my glory. Let me just lay this out for us right quick: **1) God is always about His GLORY.** And **2) a heart with God as its priority seeks to GLORIFY God.** And in the context of the other things they had been doing and finding no satisfaction in that we saw – even the basic things of life – what we see here **3) is God’s pleasure is what brings our PLEASURE.**

Or as John Piper has so often put it – “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

When we make God the rightful priority of our lives, the natural result is that the eyes of everyone around us fall on Him.

Think about it in terms of football if you want – this is the bowl season – there are too many bowl games to even count these days – and when a football team wins a big game like a bowl game, what do the players these days do to the coach?

They pour a cooler of Gatorade on him right? Which I'm not real sure how being all sticky is meant to convey congratulations and good job and thanks coach. But it wasn't always like that. How did they used to celebrate with the coach when they won a game?

They picked him up and put him on their shoulders didn't they? They paraded around the field with the coach up on their shoulders – higher than everyone else. Why? So that everyone's focus would go right there – would be on the coach – to bring attention and glory to the coach.

The same thing happens when we get what God is saying here in Haggai. **When Jesus has the rightful place of priority IN my life, then He will be lifted up BY my life and the eyes of the people around me will focus on Him – He will be glorified in me and I will find my PLEASURE in Him.**

Church there are so many lessons and applications for us in this and I pray even now that God is bringing home to your heart the truth for which He brought you here today. But let me just put this together in terms of where we are in 2010.

New Year means New Year's resolutions. Even for those of us who aren't into actually verbalizing any resolutions, there is still that sense of starting over – of newness – of another chance.

But when you think about it, new year's resolutions are really nothing more than statements of priorities, right? You are prioritizing your life. So in a very real yet very blunt way, let me just make this plain. If when you do or if you were to sit down and write out your new year's resolutions – I don't care if they have to do with eating less, exercising more, spending wiser, stopping smoking, starting reading, giving up chocolate, taking up Spanish, whatever – if the top of your page over all doesn't say First and Foremost Priority – Jesus Christ, then nothing else on your list is going to matter.

I'm not saying you won't be able to accomplish anything else on your list. I'm just saying it won't matter. It won't last. It won't satisfy. And you'll find yourself next year if not sooner trying to do it all over again – looking for the next resolution that will get you what you missed in 2010.

Church, that's why we are about what we are about. Our vision – our goal – our priority so to speak – here at Fairway is to be doing life in Christ one step at a time together.

To be living life – day to day – decision by decision – with the priority of Jesus – with the Word, the will, and the ways of Jesus Christ determining every step we take.

How? At the very least, the basic steps God has shown us are by worshipping Jesus together in corporate worship each Sunday, by learning truth together in Bible study classes each Sunday, by building community in LINKs each Sunday night, and reaching our world every chance we get for the glory of God.

How is that vision stirring in your heart and showing up in your life? How will it this year?

Because here's the awesome part of that life. Go back to **verse 12** of Haggai chapter 1.

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD.

When they repented of their apathy – of their misguided focus – when they heard and believed the truth of what God was saying – when they let God be the priority of their lives, what did God tell them?

I AM WITH YOU, declares the Lord.

Why? Because the temple was rebuilt? No. Look at **verse 14 and 15**.

So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They

came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

God was with them not because they had rebuilt the TEMPLE. They were just getting started.
But because they had returned in their HEARTS.

Folks, now that we have heard what God said to His people through Haggai, we can't help but hear Him saying to us the same thing – **verse 5 and verse 7 – give careful thought to YOUR ways.** Consider your heart in the midst of your ways.

What drives what you do?

What dominates what you think?

Who or what is the priority of your life?

Verse 12 tells us - when the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai...God's response was "I am with you." There is nowhere else I want to spend 2010 than in the presence of my Jesus. And God has just laid out for us how to do so. To live with God as the priority of our lives – to do life in Christ one step at a time together – to be for the glory of Jesus. Will that be your life in 2010?

Let's pray.
