

Haggai 1 and 1 Peter 2:4-10

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 November 2020

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Our first reading comes from the Old Testament, from the prophecy of Haggai, and we're going to read chapter 1. 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 Jehozadak, the high priest.

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? Now this is what the Lord Almighty says. Give careful thought to your ways.

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 them.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. Give careful thought to your ways. Go up to the mountains and bring down timber, and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord.

[1 : 15] You expected much. 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 his own house.

Therefore, because of you, the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains on the grain, the new wine, the oil, and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle and on the labor of your hands.

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.

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.

[2 : 26] 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.

Our second reading comes from the New Testament. It's Peter's first letter. Chapter 2 and verse 4. As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by man but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house, to a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in Scripture it says, See, Amen.

Let's turn our attention to Haggai chapter 1. If I was to give this a title, we'd maybe have the statement that the people of God should prioritise God's presence, God's honour, and God's glory. But we'll get into that by thinking about good and bad investments. I saw a news headline this week announcing that rural house prices have been soaring as people have realised they can relocate as more people work from home.

[4 : 44] And the home improvement sector is booming also. So it seems like many people are regarding homes and property as a safe investment in our global crisis that we find ourselves in.

Well, we jump back from 2020 to 520 BC. So two and a half thousand years ago, Haggai, we discover in this book that bears his name, has a four-month ministry.

And for Judah, and we see this in chapter 1, the message is, your home improvement investment is not sound. It's a bad investment.

Why is that? Well, we'll hear it from Haggai, but it's also a lesson they should have learned from their history. Maybe as we begin, it's probably helpful to have a very quick timeline. So quick history lesson. 606 BC and then 597 BC, in response to the unfaithfulness of the people of God, twice, different groups are led into captivity by the Babylonian Empire.

[5 : 54] And in that period, we have Ezekiel, the prophet, his ministry. In chapter 11 of his work, you find the tragedy of God's glory departing from the temple.

But then as you get towards the end of the book of Ezekiel, chapters 40 to 48, the focus and the hope is that God's glory will return when the temple is restored.

And that's going to be significant for what Haggai has to say. So from 597, jump to 586. And that's when Jerusalem falls, the city and the temple are burned and more exiles are led away.

And then 50 years after that, so 538 BC, we're in now, the Babylonians are defeated by the Persians, led by Cyrus. They conquer the Babylonian Empire.

And then in 536, led by God, this pagan king Cyrus, the king of Persia, issues a decree that the exiles in their empire can return home.

[7 : 00] And Cyrus actually helps to fund a temple rebuilding project. So this first group of exiles, somewhere around 50,000 of them, so a significant number, they return to Jerusalem and they begin rebuilding the temple.

But very quickly, local opposition comes largely from neighbouring Samaritans. And so that work stops. And so we come to 520 and Haggai's ministry.

And for 16 years, the tools have been down. Nothing has been happening. And so Haggai, walking the streets of Jerusalem 2,500 years ago, brings the message, you need to focus on temple rebuilding.

To enjoy true restoration as the people of God, you need to have God's glory and God's presence with you. So you need to honour God. And that's going to involve rebuilding the temple.

Haggai has in mind that hope of Ezekiel being realised in their day. But maybe you're still asking the question, it's a legitimate question, why are we studying Haggai's now?

[8 : 03] What's that temple rebuilding project got to do with me, got to do with us, got to do with where we are? Why be interested in figures like Joshua and Zerubbabel? And my answer is because of the coming of Jesus.

Because we're told that the coming of Jesus is the coming of the true temple and what the temple represents, God's dwelling with his people, God's glory on the earth among his people.

The coming of Jesus represents the coming of the true priest-king, Messiah, who is now here.

Joshua and Zerubbabel represent who Jesus will be and his mission.

And the coming of Jesus is also the beginning of his great temple-building project. He is building his kingdom, he's building his church, he's building the temple. A church, a people who will live to enjoy his presence and his glory.

So these are some of the reasons why I hope as we study Haggai we'll find it engaging and helpful, especially as we think about Advent and the coming of Jesus. But into our text, three things to say.

[9 : 07] First of all, we need to concentrate on the bulk of the chapter, which is God's word of complaint against his people. We find that in the first 11 verses. This comes almost like a lawsuit.

So who's being charged here? Well, the message comes to the spiritual leadership, comes to Joshua the high priest. The secular leadership comes to Zerubbabel, who's the governor, and it comes to the nation.

And the charge against them is of selfish priorities. Verse four, So they're charged with selfish priorities and they're charged further with dishonouring God.

And we see that in verse nine. This is all happening because my house remains a ruin while each of you is busy with your own.

The temple is in ruins. And it seems like the question is, or the decision from the people is, well, let's not rebuild now. Let's not do it just yet. Why is that? Well, perhaps, sort of looking at the situation they find themselves, perhaps it was because of their poverty.

[10 : 20] We just don't have much sort of spare income at the moment. Perhaps it was the force of that opposition that was against them. Maybe it was simply convenience.

But for whatever reason, Haggai is sent by God to issue a rebuke that they have put personal comfort over God and God's temple.

God, as it were, is pulling back the curtains to reveal what they're truly living for. And it's not God and it's not his glory. Rather, it's their own personal comfort.

But the result hasn't been years of prosperity. Rather, there has been so much in the way of frustration and futility. Listen to verse five.

God says, give careful thought to your ways. Reflect on this. You've 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.

[11 : 20] You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it. What is that? That's a life of frustration and futility because they've been following this God of comfort rather than the God of the Bible, the God of creation, the God of glory.

And it's not a coincidence that this frustrating time is happening. Rather, verse nine, you expected much, but it turned out to be little.

Why? God says, I blew it away. Verse 10, because of you consequence, the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops.

Verse 11, I called for a drought on the fields, the mountains, the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else. Here are the covenant people of God receiving covenant curse because of their disobedience.

They are being shown the seriousness of their sin. And it all ties up to temple rebuilding and the fact that they're not.

[12 : 26] And so why is temple rebuilding such a big deal? We'll think about it for them, but also think about it for us. We need to see what the temple represents so that we can apply this to the church and to ourselves in 2020.

Rebuilding the temple or not is a public statement. It is revealing how much the people value God and what their desire is for God.

You know, for the nation, for Judah, it reveals their values and desires. But also it would be a public statement to those on the outside looking in. If they were to rebuild the temple, this would be their way of saying, listen, God is at the heart of our life.

This is what defines us as a people. Temple rebuilding also speaks of priority. It would reflect them putting God first.

Remember, Jesus said, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. That's what God's people in every generation are called to do. And in this case, that would be shown by rebuilding God's house.

[13 : 34] We also think about temple rebuilding in the context of presence, the presence of God and the glory of God. So remember Ezekiel. The great hope promised is that when the temple was restored, so would God's presence with his people be restored.

The high point of the covenant is that God would live among his people. That's why it's so significant in the new covenant that Jesus comes as Emmanuel, as God with us.

This is the high point. This is the climax of all the hopes of the people of God. God and his people. Us enjoying the glory of God in our lives.

And the temple rebuilding should also represent their praise. Because what's happened in their story? We saw it in their timeline. God has rescued them. God has restored them.

Not because they deserved it, but by his grace and love and mercy. And their heart response then should be praise and worship. A saved by grace people, our reflex action should be worship, praise, obedience.

[14 : 42] So Haggai is sounding a warning in 520 BC, 2020 AD. Watch how you invest.

And particularly, he would say to them and to us, don't neglect the temple of God. What does that mean for us in the New Testament era?

That's why Bob read for us in 1 Peter 2. Quite simply, you and I must not neglect Jesus. Who is Jesus? He is the true temple. He is the living stone.

He is the cornerstone. He is that one chosen and precious to God. He is the heart of our faith. He reveals the glory of God to us.

He is our way back to God, way into the presence of God. And so we are not, as a church and as individuals, to neglect Jesus. But we're also not to neglect the church of God.

[15 : 38] So Jesus is the living stone, but the people of God are also living stones. We are built up into this spiritual house in which God dwells by his spirit.

And so we are not to neglect one another. To be positive, we are to build one another up. By sharing the word of God together. By praying with and for one another. By enjoying fellowship together. By loving and serving each other. This isn't time for isolation. That's really hard because we're naturally more isolated.

We are not to neglect Jesus. We're not to neglect the church of Jesus. So that's God's word of complaint. But in the middle of that, we hear God's word of grace.

Now we talk about grace. It's one of those words that we hear often. We sing amazing grace. But I wonder if sometimes you find in your experience you can lose sight of the sense of wonder and awe and privilege at God's grace.

[16 : 48] Haggai's message to the people then was that God was being dishonoured. The people were saying, I'm going to worry about my house and ignore God's house.

God had saved them. God had restored them to the promised land. But as Haggai walks around and as the people walk around Jerusalem, the temple in the middle lies in ruin and rubble.

God is offering himself. He made that great promise to Ezekiel, rebuild the temple and enjoy the glory of God. But they're choosing what? They're choosing panelled houses.

Choosing their home improvement projects. And it seems so unforgivable. But before we point fingers and say, well, I'll never do that. What about us?

When we reflect on our own life and experience, do we find ourselves sometimes being self-centred? Our hearts being drawn inwards rather than upwards and outwards?

[17 : 48] Do we ever find ourselves pursuing my own comfort over God's honour? My comfort and convenience over serving God in various capacities?

Do I ever rebel against my Redeemer? Am I unwilling to listen to him to show him the honour that he deserves?

Do I ever take Jesus for granted? I think if we are honest, that if God could sue the church in 520 BC for breach of contract, covenant contract, I think in the same way, because we are fallen sinners, God could sue the church in 2020 for also breaking the terms of the covenant.

We stand in need of God's grace and the good news of grace every bit as much as the people in Haggai's day. Which takes us to verse 7 and verse 8.

A second time we read, give careful thought to your ways. And look who's speaking. It's the Lord Almighty. 14 times in the book of Haggai. God is called the Lord Almighty.

[19 : 13] They'd lived under the rule of Babylon, and now Persia. And they're still, relatively speaking, very weak, but they're being reminded of the greatness of their God.

And in verse 8, Go up into the mountains, bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured, says the Lord.

Give careful thought, God says. Reflect so that you would change. And then Haggai brings this message about temple rebuilding.

And it's important for us to see that God's goal is not that they would build the temple for him. You know, God hasn't been homeless and needing to find adequate shelter. No, God wants the temple built for them, for their sake, for their spiritual good.

Yes, they have been restored to the land, but their restoration as the people of God will not be complete until God is dwelling with them. They need the temple for that reality. They need the grace of God in their lives, and so they need to rebuild.

[20 : 21] And so God calls them to that and gives them that promise of his grace. That his presence and his glory would be with them.

That that Emmanuel principle, God with his people, stands at the heart of the covenant, and God in his grace gives an invitation to the people to enjoy that once again.

And he also calls them to rebuild the temple because that's how the relationship, the covenant relationship, is maintained between a holy God and sinful people.

What happens at the temple? There are washings. There are reminders that before a holy God, we are sinful and unclean, and the people needed to be washed.

At the temple, there were sacrifices to make atonement and to secure forgiveness for their sins.

And there were priests there who were mediating for them, who were, as it were, giving them access to God's throne of grace.

[21 : 22] So the temple was really significant for their ongoing relationship with God. And then you think about where the New Testament goes with this and point us to Jesus as the true temple.

Jesus as the greatest gift of God's grace. So he read John 1, 14, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and we have seen his glory.

And then in John chapter 2, verse 19, Jesus said, destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days. They replied, it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you're going to raise it in three days.

But the temple he'd spoken of was his body. Jesus sees himself as the true temple. And Jesus comes to be our great high priest.

So Jesus is the one who reveals the glory of God and who brings the presence of God to us. Jesus is the one who washes us from our guilt and our sin by dying on the cross. Jesus is the one who offers himself as the once for all perfect sacrifice to cover all of our guilt, all of our shame, all of our sin.

[22 : 34] Jesus is the high priest giving access to God, now constantly living to pray, to intercede for his people, pleading our cause on the basis of his completed work by his cross and resurrection.

And Jesus is the one who, although living in perfect obedience to his father, fulfilling all the demands of the covenant, goes under the covenant curse there on the cross, feeling abandoned, dying in the darkness, so that by grace and through faith we might live enjoying covenant blessing, peace with God, life from God, forgiveness as a gift of God, his presence in our lives.

And Jesus is the one who is also building the living temple, the church of God, in all times, in all places. And that temple, those living stones, they are made up of sinful people like us who have been saved by God's grace.

So there is a word of complaint, but in there, there is a word of grace. And then just as we finish, I want to see how the people in Haggai's day respond to God's word.

And to think about that for ourselves. I'm thinking of parents and teachers here. Have you, in a sense I know you have, felt the frustration of instructions or warnings falling on deaf ears in your family or in your classroom?

[24 : 18] That was something the prophets knew very well. It was the typical pattern in the Old Testament. The prophets would come and they would announce a message that God was not pleased with their disobedience, that God would come in judgment and people didn't listen.

Haggai's story is remarkable because Jesus would say in the New Testament, the usual pattern, Jesus said to the Pharisees, he usually killed the prophets. But here, in the space of 23 days, there's a total turnaround.

16 years living for comfort, not rebuilding. And then all of a sudden, everybody is busy at it. How do we explain this?

How do we explain anyone changing from being deaf to God's word, deaf and blind to God's glory, to hearing God's word and responding? And the answer is faith. And that faith comes as a gift of God's grace.

Here, the language in verse 14 is this. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the spirit of Joshua, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.

[25 : 28] The Lord stirs them up. The Lord gives the gift of grace so that they have obedient faith, which leads them to action. Verse 12, Zerubbabel, Joshua, the whole remnant, they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.

So now they're going to start working. Now they're going to sacrifice their income and their time for the sake of God's glory, for the sake of God's temple. And what's their attitude?

The people feared the Lord. They have a proper sense of awe and reverence for the glory of the God who saved them.

And what's their motivation as they begin to get to work? Verse 13, Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people.

I am with you, declares the Lord. And the beautiful thing is like after they hear I am with you, that we see them set to work.

[26 : 34] It's not the warning that motivates. It's not the fear of punishment. What gets this people worshipping and obeying and fearing and serving is the promise of God's gracious presence.

Grace motivates in the Christian life. Likewise, today, what do we need? We need the gift of faith. We need God's grace in our lives.

We need to believe the promises of God's word and especially to believe that Jesus is God with us. What's going to move us from spiritual apathy to having a spiritual appetite to hunger and thirst for

God's word and God's righteousness and fellowship with God's people?

What will shift us, just like Haggai's day, from self-interest to self-sacrifice of our time, our resources, our gifts? It's only as we see with the eyes of faith Jesus as our Emmanuel God with us, to recognise Jesus as God's great gift of grace to his church, to be received with faith, with gratitude, with worship.

So today, as we finish, to use the words of verse 5 and verse 7, let's give careful thought to our ways.

[28 : 10] Let's reflect on our priority when it comes to God. And let's receive God's promised grace to know I am with you because we are trusting in, we are walking with the Lord Jesus.