

Haggai 1:3-15

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[0 : 00] Every generation has its unique challenges, and each generation is susceptible to its own, in some measure, self-inflicted crisis.

For the first listeners of what was read today, that is for the church in Jerusalem in the fall of about 520 BCE, their particular crisis or challenge, that which they were susceptible to and needed to address, was nothing less than spiritual lethargy.

You could call it a congregation that had succumbed to an apathetic heart. But we were reminded last week that this small band of people gathered in Jerusalem had relocated there some 15 to 20 years before.

Ezra was the one who tells the story of some 42,000 Israelites leaving Babylon under the edict of Cyrus to return to their own land, and even with authorization to build a temple, a house, to the Lord their God.

And they had done that. In other words, they had set out. But the generation that sets out eventually is the generation that settles in.

[1 : 58] And those who settle in are tempted to succumb to settling for. Simply by way of correlation today, you should know that Holy Trinity Church was founded by 37 adults who relocated into Hyde Park some 15 to 20 years ago.

They had set out. I was among their number. And just as in Ezra's day, the cherished list of individuals came by name according to Ezra, so too my most treasured possession in my own study is a framed certificate on the wall, signed by the 37 who left in order to come to build something for the Lord.

In fact, if my study went up in flames, you could have the thousands and thousands of dollars worth of volumes on the shelves.

I would grab that simple frame and run, cherishing the memory of those who set out.

But now, we have all settled in. And the danger for Holy Trinity Church Hyde Park, the crisis of our own generation, is that those who set out, settled in, and eventually settled for, and succumbed to spiritual lethargy to an apathetic heart.

[4 : 04] Haggai gives us today his first sermon in a series of four sermons that altered the course of that local congregation.

His opening is striking by way of sermon introduction. Verse 2, Thus says the Lord of hosts, These people say the time has not yet come.

Notice, these people, not my people, to rebuild the house of the Lord. Then, here it is, opening line, Sermon from Haggai, In the fall of around 520, The word of the Lord came, Is it time for you?

Notice the duplication of that second person plural pronoun, yourself. Is it time for you? That is, for you. To dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins.

The sermon opens by way of introduction with a very provocative question, a penetrating question on priorities. Now, the indiscriminate reader can very easily miss the meaning behind those opening words.

[5 : 36] It doesn't take much for someone to grab hold of that, and begin to say that the sermon is going to be about economic disparity. That the issue in Haggai's day was a distinction between the haves and the have-nots.

In other words, the temptation is to read paneled houses and come up with a sin of indulgence, when in reality it was a sin of neglect.

Let me put it to you this way for a number of reasons. It isn't the haves versus the have-nots. They all have their own place, a roof over their own head.

The question was not who has and who hasn't. It was that you got a roof and the Lord, He doesn't have a rain shelter. Secondly, the word itself for paneling is not directed necessarily toward interior paneling, as much as we might like those kinds of rooms.

The University of Chicago is filled with these halls with ancient wood everywhere, but rather, the root is the word for a ceiling. You finished your thing, and this thing only has got a foundation.

[6 : 55] Indeed, you could read it this way. Is it time for you, that is, all of you, to dwell in the house that you've got all done now, settled in, and the house of the Lord that you came to build hasn't made any progress now in 15 years.

You've got that early foundation dug, stones laid, but then what? You settled in. It's interesting to me that we need to understand it in this way.

The sin is one of neglect. In other words, you just got on with life and left God off to the side. In other words, there was a lack of what should have been appropriate dissatisfaction.

I think of, I think of our own work. not trying to equate our congregation with them entirely, but to just indicate that this is the temptation of our generation.

You know how it is when you walk into a place you're not familiar with. Perhaps you came into here for the first time. You might have thought, wow, I don't know who's running this, but man, my fresh eyes, I can see about eight or nine things I think I would do.

[8 : 34] I wonder if they've just kind of settled in. I thank God, finally, someone got that door to quit banging a few weeks ago. So he comes now to his sermon.

And the sermon is important because it talks about the house of the Lord as a priority. Now you need to understand this. Why would the house of the Lord have been a priority for the people of Israel?

What did it signify? If you're not familiar with the scriptures, you need to know that the scriptures put forward at creation man and woman in a garden who lived in the presence of God.

In other words, the garden was like a house in which they dwelt with God. But upon their rebellion against his word, they were cast forth from the garden.

And having lost the garden, there was no dwelling of God with humankind. But then the direction comes to Moses in the wandering years to have this tabernacle.

[9 : 51] And the tabernacle was the place of meeting. God says, while I cannot dwell with you, I will nevertheless come among you at the tabernacle.

Tabernacle. And so there's a construction of a tabernacle where they would have sacrifices for sin. And it says that God would come and meet with you there.

So that at the end of Exodus, when Moses sets up the tabernacle, three times in the chapter, you have this seven-fold reiteration of what he's doing.

Seven times you're to do it this way. Seven times you're to anoint it this way. Seven times you're to actually complete the work. All of which Moses did. And then it says, and Moses finished the work.

So that the mind of the reader would recollect the Genesis story of seven days God doing what he's doing to dwell among us. And then he finishes.

[10 : 46] And so, just as he did at creation, where his glory rests upon all that he did, so at the construction of the tabernacle, God comes down. The tabernacle of ancient Israel was a greenhouse on the move that replaced the garden that had been lost.

And so as they wandered, God was yet with them. And when they would camp, they would camp circular around the tabernacle so all the people faced the very presence of God.

But when Israel came into the land, they settled and needed something more permanent. Think of it this way. With the Garden of Eden lost, and this traveling greenhouse now dilapidated, they set apart parkland, as it were, fixed, that God would be among us in the temple.

And so the construction of the house of the Lord for Israel was critical because there was no visible manifestation of God in the world without the tabernacle or the temple.

So when he says, you've got your priorities mixed up, he's indicating you've gone on with life, and yet you have not secured my presence in this world among my people.

[12 : 08] That's the significance. And so he says, is it time for you to just get on getting on? And you haven't gotten done anything that would manifest my presence in the world.

And so he comes with a sermon. After that introduction, you can see the structure of the sermon. It's very clear, very simple. The first thing is, this little phrase there in verse 5, Now therefore says the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways.

Part 1. You'll notice a repetition of that same phrase down in verse 7. Thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. He has two things to say to the church at that time.

Both under that banner. Consider your ways. Which on the first half is a call to reflection.

What's lost in the translation of that word consider your ways is the Hebrew word heart. Which is actually present in the original. To consider your ways is to think hard and reflectively on where your heart is.

[13 : 27] What are the ways of your heart? Think about it, he says. A call to reflection. And notice what he wants them to reflect on.

It's their present realities. Verse 6, You have sown much and 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 in a bag with holes. This five forceful lines that just drive down to a singular point.

Consider how little you have given how much you've gone after. Let me see if I can roll those five over you.

I know your effort, but it's all to little effect. I see your sweat, but tell me what you have to show for it.

[14 : 45] Your hard work to get ahead is evident, but you and I both know you never seem to get over the hump.

You're concerned with getting yours, yet you know what it is to be left out in the cold. And those of you who got a little something to put aside, well, you know that the emergencies come up and that's draining like money out of a bag.

Consider. Think about it. Am I preaching to anyone here? Tell me. Does a PhD student or an undergrad not know years of labor in a library and how much are we left holding?

The man in business years up early out going driven driven but never really turning the wheel to get the momentum you thought you needed.

The homemaker everyone it isn't that they were loaded with all kinds of things this was a people that had very few things and the preacher wanted them to think about how little they had after how much energy they had expended.

[16 : 48] The sermon shifts though as most sermons should. Verse 7 it moves from this call to heart reflection to what could only be called a call to action.

it shifts from a point about their present realities to a new priority. Verse 7 thus says the Lord of hosts consider your ways go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house that I may take pleasure in it that I may be glorified says the Lord.

It's an alteration of priority and it's simply this to put God's glory first to take your eyes off of yourself and to take up with his own presence.

It's almost as if Haggai to me is he'd be a great preacher today. He's one of these it doesn't have to be this kind of way preacher. It doesn't have to be that you get up every day and think merely about what you need to do.

How you need to provide. How you get ahead. And it isn't even that you got to start thinking about other people. It's that you got to start thinking about God.

[18 : 15] Where is God in your equation? It doesn't have to be this way says Haggai. You set out with him. You set out for him. But you've settled in.

You've forgotten him. You've neglected him. You've just gotten on with all the things that are required for you to get through. And so he says what's needed is an alteration of priority.

Now we ought to pause here for a moment just as we pause to ask what is the significance of the house of the Lord for Israel we ought to pause to say what are we to make of this kind of thing?

What is our priority to be? I mean we're not building a temple the way they built it nor should we. So what is it? Interestingly if you follow the scriptures and you haven't read them before it's a continuing building story where God as a dynamic author not only of the book itself but in human history has front end loaded certain characters and events and objects with greater significance than you knew at first and only when the story came to its conclusion did you see the full manifestation of what he meant it's this kind of deft ability to front and load things that take on greater significance that makes you and me want to go to a movie again you've walked out of a theater before haven't you and said I gotta go see that again you've read a book and said I wanna read that again well at least the movie you wanted to see again why because the author put things in early that you didn't recognize at the time but when it all came to fruition you're like oh my word there's so much on the early going that I didn't realize until it all came in

I want to see it again I want to read it again I want to watch it again so too is God he has front and loaded in the history of Israel a real people and in the objects of their cultic worship a significance that would build in time that would cascade till its climactic moment so the garden of Eden where God dwelled was exchanged for this traveling greenhouse of a tabernacle which built into a temple where we began to get hope that we would again dwell with God to the person of his son Jesus who has a zeal for what the house of the Lord even at a young age and Jesus in his adulthood says destroy this temple and in three days it will rise up again and the reader begins to wonder are you kidding me is Jesus actually the full completion of God's intended plan that he merely front headed loaded things along the way that's the Christian belief you can reject it you can accept it but that's the way it is the

[21 : 17] Christian believes that Jesus is the final revelation of God and that when he is on the cross he actually is the meeting place for God we don't need to build another house you don't need sacred space you need to figure out does Jesus himself actually provide the place where I meet with God is he the temple is he the greenhouse is he the garden why is it that when the Bible ends there is no temple because he's there now what are we to build then if Christ has completed it all then we are to build something in this neighborhood that gives glory to his name that's going to come in a lot of different ways the question I'm going to ask at the end and I'll ask it again now is there anything in your life that proves you have a priority for the glory of

Christ but back to the text they're to build this house what's interesting to me is not so much these two ideas that are sitting next to one another but the synthesis of his sermon in other words it isn't just the call to reflection alongside a call to action as what he does to bring the two together all the sermon of Haggai is moving to verses nine and following you looked for much and behold it came to a little and when you brought it home I blew it away that's that's the connection he's making between idea number one you've done a lot of work and you've got little to show for it and idea number two why don't you get about the priority of the house of the

Lord and the synthesis of the two ideas is that all this little you got is a direct result of I blew it away that God says to this congregation I am intentionally frustrating you so that you might get fixed you want God's blessing today it may very well have already come through all that past affliction that you might hear the first of four messages of Haggai and get about a new priority and so God basically is saying in verses 9 through 11 that he is the source of all their lack so that they might come back to setting out with him therefore he says the heavens above have withheld their 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

God says I am behind your troubles God says I have frustrated you that you might allow me to fix you I have shaken you that I might awaken you I have given you your groans because I am concerned with your growth I have made your life hard because I will do anything to make you humble I have left you empty that you might turn to me and be filled I have pulled the rug out from underneath you that you might fall on your knees before me because you wouldn't get on your knees any other way says God!

Lord disciplines those whom he loves let me say it to you this way God wants your attention how long will we be apathetic toward him if not now when more than likely if not now never the response of that sermon was quite interesting it's there for us in 12 and following and we ought to move through his message and conclude with him I want you to see the response of the people there in verse 12 Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Joshua the son of Jehoshadak the high priest with all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the

[26 : 53] Lord their God and the words of Haggai the prophet as the Lord their God had sent him and the people feared the Lord that was the internal conviction! they were that the human heart is the crux of the human problem and they've listened to it and they've received it so this word that they obeyed the Lord is nothing different than they listened to him they heard him they heard him and they feared him they received it and they respected it they took it as unto themselves they began to think my way has gone amok so that I might come back to what I was supposed to be about in the first place that's the response of the people which really then had three results first of it they were encouraged from the

Lord then Haggai the messenger of the Lord spoke to the people verse 13 with the Lord's message I am with you declares the Lord what a great turn at the course of one sermon in the middle of the sermon they were shaken to consider God saying I am against you but by the end the encouragement has come and he says I am with you you see the one that he slays he will comfort there was encouragement from the Lord there was empowerment by the Lord look at 13 then Haggai the messenger of the Lord I'm sorry 14 the Lord stirred up notice the repetition here 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 this stirring up happened they didn't stir themselves up the

Lord stirred them up this is the same phrase that we find early in Ezra when they decided to set out they decided to set out because God stirred them up but having been stirred up and set out they settled in and having settled in they settled for but now 15 20 years later this ought to be encouraging!

for you! you could have been! away from the will of God for your life for the last 15 20 years is there hope for you? Can God do anything for the one and the ones who say wow I remember the day long gone by when I attempted to live with God at the center of my life but that's too long now the answer to this text is no you can be doing your thing for a couple decades and one sermon set you on a renewed course because of God's patient kindness towards you the Lord encourage them I'm with you the Lord empowered them he gave his spirit to them and the third result of all this is that the engagement of the people was now renewed to build the house of the

Lord and they came and worked on the house of the Lord their God on the 24th day of the month in the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king which is really 23 days later than when this sermon took place if you're observant to the text my guess is they began to make plans right away well we got some stuff to do we hadn't even thought about this for a while so let's make some plans let's form a few committees figure something out so that all of a sudden in three weeks time they were ready to actually begin the work they engaged in the work of the Lord in other words they began to say to themselves you know it doesn't have to be like this it doesn't have to be that I live on the south side of Chicago and so few people in my neighborhood are concerned with the things of the Lord it doesn't have to be that way you know it doesn't have to be like this it doesn't have to be that I go through all my days doing all my work considering all my things that I need to accomplish and

[31 : 35] I never once verbally say anything about the Lord let alone talk to him it doesn't have to be that way and all of a sudden among the people everyone began to get to work on how do I bring glory to God in my place and for you me it is how do I serve Jesus how do I make him known how do I align my life to him you see Jesus in one sense becomes the fruition of this threefold result it's Jesus who actually has the spirit of the Lord stirring him up from his early age in his baptism the spirit rests upon him it's Jesus who actually goes about all the work of the house of I couldn't complete it's Jesus after the resurrection that turns to his disciples and says behold I am with you always to the end of the age so that this fulfillment of Christ as the temple gets passed on through the apostles to say as he was a foundation stone in the house of the

Lord so we are living stones being built up into a temple for God what do you need to do to put Christ first simply this love one another serve one another give yourself to Christ maybe today even perhaps for the first time what can you point to that would demonstrate to us all that Christ and the church is your highest priority what can you point to consider this what have you got now consider this what he would have you build now consider this that he can empower!

you let me put it this way what argument does your life your time your resources actually make for some of you I would tell you to become a Christian today not because that's what happens in Christian sermons but if you today have recognized that the Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's glory in the world and he is the only place you can go to meet with God and you never even done that you can't build anything until you actually find yourself in a relationship to him so you come to him and say hey help me follow you for others though just as in the days of Haggai and Zachariah and all these there were free will offerings the houses the Lord got built!

I'll tell you when I know God is really doing something when everything is provided for and a pastor has got to stand up and say you know what thank you for your offerings we just want you to lay low for a week or two because we're trying to figure out what to do with these funds that would be a different day that be a different day some of you it's not a question of free will offerings but I'll just stay there for a moment look at your check book you want to know your priorities add it up tell me where you spend it tell me how much goes into the restaurants and how much goes into commitments!

you think might actually benefit the cause of Christ not only free will offerings what about guilt offerings they did this in that day too some of us some of us the question of just repenting Lord I've neglected you a long time I repent from that today some of you it's restoration of relationships fractured some of you it's an element of witness some of you it's getting out of the house of the Lord and serving the community in which we live that Christ might be made known some of you it's your time how much time a week are you giving to demonstrate a priority to the things of God well I want to just encourage you that this was the first of four sermons that

[36 : 27] I think changed the life of a congregation there's three more to come so I hope you come back next week our heavenly father we look at this opening word from this ancient prophet and ask that we would at least be willing to do some introspection that we might not settle for anything less than what you would have from us in Christ's name we pray amen let's stand and look for the winds of the prophet to fill our lives this week Ž Ž Thank you.