

First Things First

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[0 : 00] Father, we ask, we have a passage like this in the Bible, and it's talked about people we don't know about, people we don't care about, names we can't even pronounce. It can be hard to know why on earth are we talking about this rather than about something more relevant.

And Father, often we don't even want to come out and say this to you in prayer. We think it in our minds, but with our lips, of course, we pretend. So, Father, we ask that you would do a mighty work and bring this word, your word, deep into our hearts.

Speak into our hearts, rule in our hearts. We give you unconditional permission and an invitation, Father, to do this. Pour out the Holy Spirit, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, this week I was talking, or just recently I was talking to somebody, and they were sharing how they, in their workplace, and those of you who work in, whether it's the government or very large corporations, you know there can be, there's a greasy pole that people like to try to climb to get higher up.

It doesn't even have to be big corporations. It can be something smaller like a Starbucks or some Tim Hortons or something like that, and there's a greasy pole to become like the shift supervisor or the manager to get promotions.

[1 : 18] And so, there was a person working in a large corporation, and he was sharing with me how, in fact, somebody had tried to move in, take credit for things he had done, move into his area of responsibility in such a way that he would look bad and they would look really good.

And they sort of had the, you know, because they were really trying, working very hard to climb that greasy pole. And then at the last second, everything came crashing down for this person.

And the thing that the person was sharing with me when we were chatting was that everybody in the office said, isn't karma A, B? And you can fill in the rest of the word.

Isn't karma A, B? Fill in the rest of the word. And it's a very, very common thing in our culture, isn't it? That, you know, it doesn't matter sort of if you're very secular, very spiritual, if you're an atheist or whatever.

You have this basic idea that there's a type of karma and that sometimes it just comes and bites you in the butt, you know? You get what you deserve. People in this particular case didn't feel sorry for the person who was climbing the greasy pole and hence trying to step on others.

[2 : 27] They just sort of thought, well, there you go, karma. And in fact, a lot of us live in a sense between two types of poles. That on one hand, we say, well, we're going to try to be a good person, do the right thing.

Why? Because we want to avoid having karma bite us on the butt. On the other hand, we also try to do things that will actually contribute towards success. And you know what it is.

Maybe it's, you know, like I was just reading the paper. So it must be true if it's in the paper, right? I was just reading the paper that, you know, there's an increase of people who are very interested in spells and in magic, in potions.

It could be books like *The Secret*. It could be different types of meditation or thinking whereby you visualize success to achieve success, where you align yourself with the universe or put yourself in a certain way so that the universe will get and help you to advance.

But there's a variety of ways that we do it. It might be that we're just using our, you know, our modeling and our techniques and our technology and our science. But there's a variety of ways that on one hand, we try to do certain types of things to get success.

[3 : 34] And we try to not do certain things so that karma won't come and bite us on the butt. But the fact of the matter is, if you think about this, that none of these things really work.

It's as if we have a type of addiction to the belief that it must work, while at the same time, it doesn't actually seem to work very well for us. And now if you're watching this and you're 18 or 19 or 20 and you've only tried one of these things, you're just trying your first one, you might not realize it.

But talk to somebody who's a little bit older and if you push them and if you can get them to get by their own type of amnesia, they'll tell you, well, they, you know, when they were, you know, when they're 22, they did this.

And when they're 24, they tried this. And when they were, you know, 28, they tried this. And when they were 31, they tried this. And if you look, there's in fact been a long list of different things that they've attempted over the years to achieve that success.

And when one fails or just doesn't work out, we still have this belief that there must be some type of thing like that. And so we pursue it even while we forget about the fact that these things haven't worked in the past.

[4 : 40] At a societal level, despite the fact that COVID has proven that governments are not omniscient and can't know the future, we all want them.

We want to double down on that belief for the future. We don't say, okay, one moment, you know, whoa, whoa, whoa, COVID has shown that there's a real limit to human power and technique. Maybe we should be thinking, no, no, no, we just want more of it, as if having more of it is somehow or another going to guarantee it.

Thinking about this, believe it or not, what happens in the book of Haggai speaks directly to this desire that we have to have things work out.

And it speaks directly to it in a very, very interesting and counterintuitive way. And so let's look. I mean, it doesn't look like it at first, as I said in my prayer, with these names that we can barely pronounce and all these odd cultural references.

But if you turn in your Bibles to Haggai, it can be a little bit of a hard book to find. And the Bible is divided into what Christians call the Old Testament and the New Testament. What we call the Old Testament, our Jewish friends call the Torah or the Tanakh.

[5 : 48] And it's in most English Bibles that Haggai is, I think, the third book from the end. There's Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and then the New Testament. Or you can just look it up in the table of reference.

Great if you can follow along in a Bible of your own. And just before we start reading Haggai chapter, well, actually, we'll read chapter one. I have a couple of, first one.

And here's a couple of things which, if you think of it in this way, it'll help you to get over the hoop of reading something which seems so foreign. And it goes like this.

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, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

And just sort of pause right there for a couple of things. So, first of all, I've been in the process of reading a couple of novels by Dion Meyer. They were originally written in Afrikaans, and they've been translated into English.

[6 : 49] And I enjoy them very much. And one of the things which is remarkable, it's the same thing when I read Swedish fiction or Norwegian fiction or Ghanian fiction or something like that, is that the sense of place is actually part of what gives it pleasure.

And gives me pleasure. And actually makes it far more interesting. And so, if you read a Dion Meyer novel, that even though they've translated it into English, they leave lots of Afrikaner or Zulu or Hossa terms in it.

And that, on one level, I mean, I sometimes have to go to my phone or go to the glossary and try to figure out what they're saying. But it actually adds to it. And so, I just want to encourage you. One of the things about this book, and it's very, very clear here, is that the writer wants to give you a sense of place and time.

Not as something which keeps you at arm's length, but actually something that can increase pleasure. It just may mean that it's not as easy to read as the tweet or the Instagram post from The Rock or, you know, whoever it is that you happen to follow.

It just takes a little bit more work. But if you actually just sort of say, one moment, this is really trying to give me a sense of place. And what the sense of place is, is this. It's actually a very, very – the whole way that it's written, it's really cool.

[8 : 10] The whole way it's written, it's trying to tell you this is something where it's in the level of realism. It's historical. And it has a real sense of place. And Darius does exist.

In fact, it's really, really, really funny. Darius is the head of the Persian Empire. And some of you might not know this, but I think it was only in the 1920s or the 1930s that Iran used to be called Persia.

Maybe it was later than that. And so what we see here is really, really cool. Right now, you have Iran funding Hamas to send rockets into Israel to kill them.

But here, you have the emperor of Persia actually working to get the temple rebuilt in Jerusalem. Like, that's sort of interesting.

All of a sudden, they go, whoa, that's sort of an interesting thing. I mean, obviously, there's 2,500 years separating it. But because of the way they mentioned Darius and these other people, we know that what happened – this all happens on August the 29th, 520 B.C.

[9 : 08] So in August the 29th, 520 B.C., the emperor of Persia, who's – if you read sort of the companion bits to this, which is mainly the book of Ezra, but also a little bit of Ezekiel, but mainly the book of Ezra, you see that Darius has been significant.

In fact, the Persians were significant in allowing the people of Israel to return to Jerusalem after they'd been carried away into exile in Babylon when the Babylonians defeated Israel and sort of stopped it existing as a nation.

And in fact, this is all a fulfillment of prophecy by Jeremiah that God was going to do this remarkable thing two generations roughly after the ending of Jerusalem. And so what we have here is that this is all part of Iran, or what we would have called back then Persia's interest in having the temple in Jerusalem rebuilt.

And it's very interesting. Now, Zerubbabel is an actual heir to the throne. He's a literal physical descendant of David.

He is the heir to the throne. But his name means seed of Babylon. And that's going to be significant in a couple of weeks when we look at it again. But here he is, in a sense, the Messiah.

[10 : 27] Jesus the Messiah comes from this line. And one of his forefathers, in a sense, one of Jesus' forefathers in terms of through the lineage, is actually named Seed of Babylon.

Seed of Babylon. Sorry, not Seed of Babylon. Seed of Babylon. And he's the heir of David. And the other person, the priest, is a physical descendant of Aaron. And now, here they are, under the authority of Persia.

Israel is a conquered nation. The city is in fundamental ruins. There's not that many Jewish people back, but there is a Jewish settlement there. They are trying to rebuild the city, the people, the culture, to reclaim the land.

And in a sense, they're trying to – what's going on here? And this is another reason – one of the reasons I chose this is that we're talking about we're going to have to be rebooting everything once the lockdowns come to an end.

Whatever that's going to look like. Is it going to look like the roaring 20s? Or will we be wearing masks for the next 30 years? Let's pray we are not wearing masks. The second we can stop, there's something about a face.

[11 : 33] Anyway, that's a whole other sermon. I don't want to get you sidetracked on that. But they're all talking about rebuilding and rebooting and all of that type of stuff. And that's what's going on here. They're trying to reboot, rebuild the people under the auspices, on one hand, of Persia.

But, of course, at the end of the day, ultimately because God has called the people to be there. Anyway, let's – oh, and there's one other thing here.

The message of the Lord, the word of the Lord comes by the hand of Haggai the prophet. It's a very, very powerful image. It's almost as if – think of it as a mailman.

Those of you who still get snail mail, it's as if God has written a letter and gave it to – God sat down, wrote a letter to the people, gave it to Haggai, and Haggai just comes and gives you the letter that comes from God.

That's the imagery here, that when Haggai is speaking in these particular ways – not that every word that Haggai ever says is like that, but in these particular cases, it's as if the living God, the triune God, has written something down by hand, given it to Haggai, and Haggai comes and gives it to the people.

[12:39] And when they open the letter and read it, what they're hearing is God speak to them. It's a very interesting thing because when they're rebuilding the temple, one of the things that can't be in the new temple is the Ark of the Covenant.

That's gotten lost to history. Watch Indiana Jones and you'll figure out where that actually went. I'm just joking. Indiana Jones won't tell you. It would be really funny if at the end of the end of the end it did turn out that it was in some nameless warehouse in the U.S. or something.

That would just be too funny for words, wouldn't it? But anyway, in the Ark of the Covenant were the Ten Commandments written by the Word of God, and that's now lost.

But here we have a message from the Lord delivered by the hand of Haggai to the people. And boy, let's keep going. We've only got to verse 1. We haven't even got to the crux of the year.

Verse 2. Here's the message. Thus says the Lord of hosts, These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. And we'll just sort of pause there for a second.

[13:44] Remember I've said the city is fundamentally in ruins, but they've built some houses. They've cleared some spaces. They made some houses.

And the other thing that you don't know, you have to read the companion book from the Book of Ezra to know this, is that 12 years earlier they started to build the temple. But they got some pushback by the locals who weren't Jewish.

And as a result of the pushback, they stopped. So for 12 years they've been working on their own houses. They've been working on their own stores, their own businesses, their own fields, their own crops. But they've completely and utterly stopped working on the temple or as the house of the Lord.

And in fact, in the original language, the idea is it's now become a settled opinion of people. Like that common sense wisdom that it's not the time to rebuild the temple of the Lord, that in fact it is the time to do all these other things that they're doing.

That's sort of the settled wisdom that they have. Then verse 3, Notice that they'll continue to use this imagery, by the hand of.

[14:51] Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins? Now, it's interesting.

The word paneled here, what it's saying is that it's not as if God has gotten mad. It's not as if God's saying to them, Listen, you know, when you come into this new area, I don't care if you don't have a house to live in.

I don't care if you don't have a tent to live in. I don't care if you don't have a roof over your head. I don't care if you don't have any food growing in the fields. I want you to build my house first and then you deal with...

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's not what's going on here. This is the idea of the panel that's actually quite significant to the story. Them having a place for them to have a roof over their head and the crops, that's been dealt with like 12 years ago.

Now they're putting luxury items in. Now they're putting luxury items in. You know, now they're going to Architectural Digest and they're looking at different magazines and they're getting the latest, most expensive countertops and kitchen appliances and bathrooms and all of those types of things.

[16:06] And they're getting the good stuff for their place. So this is long gone beyond them meeting their basic needs. They've just decided that God...

In a sense, really what's going on here is it said that the Lord isn't first in their lives. Now if you're watching this and you're not a Christian, you might think, okay, well, why is that a big issue? Well, we're going to talk about it in a moment. But for them...

And here's the thing. For those of us who are Christians, when the Lord is no longer first place in our lives, he's rarely second place. In fact, it might be that at first, when the Lord is no longer first in your life, he moves to second.

But he very quickly slides to second, fifth, tenth, twelfth, twentieth, thirtieth. Like way down. Maybe not all the way to thirtieth, but way down. It happens very, very quick. Like either he's first or he drops way, way down.

Because once he's no longer first, there's all these other... You know, you need to make money. You have this thing you have to deal with. You have your friends. You have your kids. You have the hockey playoffs.

[17:08] You have the NBA. You have the Major League Baseball. Like before you know it, you know the kids have to have this lesson and this lesson and this lesson and this lesson and this lesson. And in fact, this is one of the things which is really important if I lose you for the rest of it.

And this is a Christian message. And I'll explain to those of you who are watching who are trying to figure out the Christian thing, why this is important. But the temptation is going to be for us as individuals is that when things open up, what we say was, well, okay, George is going to be doing this thing every Sunday and Daniel will be doing this thing and Matt will show up.

And, you know, we have a few who are doing all those things. But gosh, I got to get my kids back into sports. Gosh, I got to get my kids back into lessons. Gosh, you know, I need to take those trips. Gosh, I got to get all this done.

And we got to get all of that type of stuff done. And there's no desire to think that the first thing that we need to do is to start to rebuild the Christian community and Christian fellowship.

That's going to be the great temptation for us. Anyway, back to the text. So here's the here's in a sense the charge that God has made to them. He's confronting them about the priorities of their life.

[18:15] Because, you see, it's not a matter that the temple, in a sense, what the temple's presence, we'll get to it in a second. No, no, I'll say it now. The temple's presence is a sign that the Lord is with them and that they want the Lord with them.

That's what it is. It's a sign and an indicator of their priorities. And if they aren't doing that, it shows they don't really care if the Lord is with them. They don't really care about it at all.

Like, it's gone down to a lower and lower and lower and lower priority. Because we want to get that the more expensive faucet. We want to get the more expensive big screen TV. We want to get the more expensive car.

We want to get all these other things set up in our own lives. And these things and the Lord becomes a low priority. So what happens next? Verses 5 and 6. And this is still the Lord speaking. Now therefore, or now then, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. You have sown much and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough. You drink, but you never have your fill.

[19:18] You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And I love this phrase. Many of us will relate to this. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Now, it's very interesting. Some of you, if you're looking on different English translations, it's not going to sound exactly the same. And it's because in Hebrew, the original language, two different things are being communicated at the same time.

And it's a very, very, very relevant problem. And it isn't saying that they're starving. It's saying that there's not as much as they hoped and expected for. That's on one level of the sense.

You know, gosh, I put my money in that TFSA and I was expecting an 8% return, but I only got that 6% return. Or I was expecting 12% because of the way the market is and I only got 10.

You know? But the other aspect of it, and some of your English translations will reflect it, is that it's like that Rolling Stone song, I Can't Get Satisfaction. That, in fact, you drink that craft beer, but it's just not as satisfying as you thought it was going to be.

[20:23] You drink that expensive coffee and it's just not as satisfying. You know, the kids being in sports, the piano lessons, the weekend away, you know, it just wasn't quite as much beer as I thought.

But more importantly, it just didn't quite have that meaning or significance that I thought. And that's what the Bible here is saying. Now you can see where it starts to have a bit of a thing when I said that at the beginning, remember I said a thing which is a common human issue, especially in North America today, is that on one hand we want to avoid the things that are going to bite us in the butt. On the other hand, we also want to do those things which will give us that satisfaction and give us those material things because we want both. And that's what this, the beauty of the Hebrew is it's capturing both.

Both we want more, more stuff, but we want more satisfaction and meaning along with the more stuff. And that's what's going on here. And now we come to verses 7 and 8.

And this is where we start to see the indication of the temple being not really just about a building, but about whether they actually want God, the Lord, to be with them.

[21:36] Listen to what it says, verse 7 and 8. Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. Think about your ways. Think about your life. You know, none of us want to live an unexamined life.

In fact, one of the ways we would put down another person is to say that they don't live an examined life. But the question is, do we live an examined life? Do I, do you live an examined life thinking about our ways?

Do we think about what it means that we don't get that satisfaction? Consider your ways. Verse 8, go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house and that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord.

And some of your translations will be a little bit different there. It's both that I may be glorified and I will glorify myself through this. But the heart of the message is that God isn't looking for something extravagant.

He's saying, listen, you live amongst ruins. There's all sorts of rocks right there to rebuild the temple. You know, and there's all sorts of, you know, when you're rebuilding things, you know, you need some shimmies and other types of things to help balance the rocks.

[22 : 40] It's all around you. They've got all around there already. All you need is this one extra thing. You just make a trip up there, get something for the bigger beams. And I don't care if the house is extravagant. I don't care if the house is rich.

I don't care about that stuff. I want to be with you. I want to live with you. I want to be in your midst, in the midst of your mess, in the midst of your successes, in the midst of your trials and tribulations, your joys.

I want to be with you. I want to be your God and have you as my people. I'm asking for a sign, an indicator that that's what you would like.

But I, they're not saying to him, gosh, Lord, we're here worshiping, hoping you'll show up. No, it's not like that at all. He's there and he wants some sign that they want him to be there with them and for him to be their God.

Now, the next thing is going to be very shocking to us. And it's for many of us, it's going to be a sign of why we go, oh, gosh, good grief. How stupid can this be?

[23 : 45] Because it's going to, well, that's going to be a response of many people. And you're going to maybe hope, okay, George, you know, he looks at the commentaries. He looks at the Hebrew. He's going to tell us that, no, no, no, no, no, no.

The English here is very accurate. It actually is saying what it seems to say in English. And it's going to be a bit shocking and off-putting to a lot of us. But listen to what it says. Verse 9, still God speaking. You looked for much and behold, it came to little.

And when you brought it home, I blew it away. In other words, what he's saying is, you know that purse that seems to be losing money?

I made a couple of those holes in it. I made a couple of the holes. I blew it away. Why? We're still in verse 9.

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.

[24 : 48] And listen to this. I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth on man and beast and all their labors. I have done this.

I have reduced from 12% to 10% on your TFSA's or 8 to 6. I have no idea what people are getting on their TFSA's nowadays. I can give you some biblical advice about money.

Don't come to me for advice about stock markets or anything like that. But I was just talking to a financial guy. No, I was talking to him. I was on the board of directors of an organization, and we were talking about the budget.

And I said, listen, I'm trying to figure out the book of Haggai. So I don't know if I'm giving you the right thing about this budget and all of that. But here we see this very, very specific thing, that God stops us.

Now, many of us say, okay, gosh, George, this is unscientific. It's primitive. Like, come on, George, really?

[25 : 53] How can you even read something like this? Well, let's think about this for a second. The fact of the matter is, is that what you are longing for is what's being said right here.

And in fact, the only way to actually conceptualize and get what you want is what the Bible here is telling us. Like, think about it for a second. Many, many people in Canada pray.

Many atheists pray. And even people who don't pray, I've had atheists who've asked me to pray for them. I'm not making that up. And then, you know, people do spells.

They work with crystals. They try to do meditation techniques and other types of exercises to try to get the universe to move in a way so that they get what they want.

But how does that work? Doesn't that show that you have a fundamental desire, that there is some way that by your actions you can communicate with something greater than nature, that can actually change nature in a way that's going to help you?

[26 : 55] Like, isn't that what's at the work when you think that karma is a, and when it bites you in the butt, that you are thinking that there is in fact something beyond what you can touch and feel and touch and eat, and that there is some type of a transcendence or some type of a something in the universe that has some type of an impact on what is happening?

And what about love? What about love? When we're in love, what about sex? Isn't there often a sense that what's happening is that you're touching something transcendent?

That when you're in love, that you're touching something in something which is bigger than just stuff, than just bank balances, than just atoms and molecules.

Don't you have that sense that there is something which is bigger? What about when you go out into nature and you look around and you just have something about the glory of it and the beauty of it? And don't you have sometimes in your lives when you sort of have a sense that this can't just be mere atoms in motion, that there is something transcendent?

Don't you even talk sometimes to your friends as if there's something almost mystical, almost magical, something above nature when you see nature and experience it in different ways and you have different experiences?

[28 : 19] That in fact, that's what you think, that's what you long for, that's why you think that there's some way that you can have success or that there's something that you do that you avoid so you don't have karma bite you on the butt. But here's the problem with that.

That people, when we feel that, science and philosophy, science just like hard thinking, just undermines that, cuts that out from underneath you.

The fact of the matter is, is that science would tell you that you're just a bag of cells that poops and pees. That's all you are. That in fact, everything just came about as a result of scientific processes. In fact, those scientific types that are those, that guy at the party that everybody finds unbelievably irritating and they don't want to talk to because he just explains scientifically why crystals are anti-science and only an idiot would believe something like that.

You know, if you ever come into a party and there's that guy, it's usually a guy, that guy. There was one other time, actually, it's very funny. There was, I've seen him in Bridgehead and there was this guy talking all mystical and all of that and it was his girlfriend who kept puncturing it all the time with science.

[29 : 38] And it was a very, very funny conversation. He would get all dreamy-eyed and everything like that and then she'd puncture it with how science and the real world works and he'd look a bit startled and he'd move on in a different direction.

But you don't want to, you know, that's what that, there is that guy that goes against it. But here's, you see, where only the gospel, only the gospel makes, helps you to understand why it is that those senses that you have, that there is, there is a transcendence, that there is mystery, that there is something greater than nature, that there are ways that when you see something in nature, you're on a canoe trip or you have a campfire by the edge of a lake at the cottage and you have the good food and everything is still and you hear the loon and you just have this sense that there's something in nature that is greater than nature or that when you're in love and then you have this sense that there's something that when you're in love, it's not just, it's not just your neurons firing, that you've touched on something bigger.

Only the gospel and the Bible makes that clear and comprehensible. Because you see, at the very, very heart, and at the same time, which preserves science, only the gospel, only the biblical narrative does this.

You see, because what it is, is that the Bible reveals that everything that exists was designed by God. And because everything that exists was designed by God and sustained by God, it means that, well, there is order.

You can see how his design worked. That, in fact, scientists can go into the tiniest little bits of stuff, and the biggest bits of stuff, and they can learn things about how the whole thing works, and from

those things about how they work, they can develop new medicines, and they can develop new ways of reaching Mars or the moon or whatever, and because there is a design behind it. [31 : 28] It's not just mere random stuff just happening. There's a design, and so we can look at the design. We can look at the world. We can see the design. But at the same time, it was designed by God.

That means there is something really, both there is a God that does exist, that is transcendent over all things. That, in fact, when the psalmist says, the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firm proclaims his handiwork, that we can see that.

This is expressing something that we feel. But at the same time, the Bible reveals that because God has designed everything, the triune God has designed everything, the triune God sustains everything, it means that not only can you look for science to explain things, but that we don't live in a closed universe but an open universe.

Why is that significant? You see, here's how all science works. Science always works. The scientific method and scientific laws always assume something being closed.

So they say you develop an experiment where you try to control as much as possible. We won't get into the Heisenberg principle of indeterminacy and all that stuff, okay? But you try to keep as much as you can outside of it to create a closed system and say, well, if you do A and B and C, then what's going to happen in a closed system?

[32 : 42] But it's all different if, in fact, the system is open. And that's what the Bible teaches. The system is still open. God still intervenes in things. It would be as if, you know, my son was to move to another city, and he opens up a bank account and he opens up a line of credit.

And he has, you know, he has virtually, he has a terrible credit ready just because he hasn't worked for very long or anything like that. And so my wife and I, we co-sign that. And so we're also signatories on the bank.

And on one level, the law of mathematics will all tell you infallibly how money is being spent by my son. And, you know, he spends this much and so there's this much. But it doesn't say anything. In that system, my wife and I can, after thinking about it or after talking to my son and hearing about his need, we can put in \$500.

Because his bank account isn't a closed system. It's an open system. And me putting in \$500 doesn't destroy the laws of mathematics. And that's what the Bible says about the entire world. There is a God who does exist. The triune God does exist. And the triune God who does exist can write a letter and use a human being to bring it into his creation, into his creatures, to tell them things.

[33 : 54] That I want to be with you. I love you. I want to be with you as your God. And for us as Christians, Jesus says, I want to be with you as your Savior.

I want to be with you as your Lord. I want to walk with you through your day. I want to be with you on Sundays in church. I want to be with you in your small groups.

I want to be with you as you try to figure out the important things in your life and the unimportant things of your life, the major decisions and the micro decisions. I want to be with you. You see, how can we know that such a universe exists?

Well, I mean, Jesus is the preeminent example. And that's where we would begin. How Jewish people or Jewish friends would, that's a bit of a different issue. But for us, the whole thing is that Jesus is the great miracle.

He is the great miracle whereby God intervenes in a sense in the created order and by an act of creation creates a zygote in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

[34 : 55] And Jesus walks amongst us perfectly modeling that he desires to be with us in our mess. That he comes to a captive people. Only this time they're under Roman authority, not Persian authority.

And he comes to his people and he suffers all the things that we do only without falling into sin. He suffers our trials, our temptations. He denies himself or is denied things just as we are denied particular types of things.

And that he dies upon the cross and he dies upon the cross in our place, in our stead, because he is with us. He has been among us. And he takes all there is to taste of death. And on the third day, he rises from the dead.

The body is gone. The grave is empty. He has risen from the dead. He has defeated death. And that is all in a piece of the things that he did throughout his life. The way he could turn water into wine. The way he could heal a man who was born blind.

The way he could heal people with physical deformities. He could heal not only the leprosy so that the leprosy is gone, but that limbs are rebuilt or restored. That time after time after time, Jesus is modeling that we do not live in a closed universe.

[35 : 59] We live in an open universe. That there is a God who does exist. That he does speak. And he speaks because he desires to dwell with you. And he can only dwell with you if he is first.

Because to think that the Lord is dwelling with you when he's 15th means you don't really believe he's the Lord. Christians, if you think that the most important thing for you, those of you who have young children, is that, well, first I'm going to get my kid in three different sports, two different music lessons, one thing for math improvement, one for science improvement, and something else.

And whatever time is left, we'll put him in Sunday school or we'll put him in the youth group. Jesus isn't first. See, the fact of the matter is, is that it's never the right time in the eyes of the world to put Jesus first.

See, it's like a lot of other things. It's never the right time to forgive. People say, well, you know, you have to, you know, it's too raw. It's too, it's too hurtful. You know, you need to do this to try to tampen it down and get some type of control over it.

And before you know it, there's always some other type of thing. But the fact of the matter is, is like, and this is all part of following Jesus. The fact is you begin with forgiveness. You begin with being obedient to trying to forgive. You begin by saying, Lord, I am in such, I am in such mind-breaking, heart-breaking pain and sorrow.

[37 : 32] I can hardly say a word to you. Your word says I need to forgive. And I don't even know what that looks like, but I'm crying out to you that you would help me to forgive.

Begins with that, because it begins with God being present with you. Jesus has died for you. It begins with that. Same with generosity. It's not as if you have all the money. No, no, it begins with, you never have enough time.

You never have enough money to be generous. You never have enough time to read the Bible. You never do. So you've got to put him first. But you only put him first because he put you first first.

That he died for you when you weren't even seeking him. That long before you ever loved him, he loved you. Long before you even might have known that he existed. He knew you existed and he loved you.

And if you feel any tug in your heart right now, it's because from all eternity the Lord has desired that you would be his child. That you would put your faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior and your Lord.

[38 : 32] You see, if there's in fact a God that does exist who can speak, if there is in fact a God who exists who has created all things, if there is in fact a God who exists that in fact has created a universe that's open to him doing things, then the fact of the matter is he can work through circumstances, which is what you believe in prayer.

And he is the standard of right and wrong. He communicates that and makes it clearer to us than we could ever know by ourselves. But he confronts, he speaks, it's all out of love because he desires to be with you, with me, with us.

Let's just finish the text just to bring it to the end. Verse 12. I'll talk about the fear of the Lord a little bit later.

But it's all the language. You see, the sign of their putting him first and their desire to have him with them is their obedience. It isn't that their obedience will make him present, but that because he's present, the right way to respond to him is obedience.

It's a very important significance. I mean, he first declares he wants to be with them after they've ignored him for 12 years. That's grace. Jesus wants to be with you even if you've ignored him this morning, this week, this month, this year, this decade, your whole life.

[40 : 14] And he makes that offer to you first. And to respond to him and begin to desire to have him as Lord and Savior, that one of the things that that same desire is a desire to obey.

It's the same thing in any type of a, like in a love relationship. There's obedience that goes along with love. If you can't have love, if there's love but no obedience in the couple in terms of their desires, you don't have love.

Right? Isn't that what you tell your friends? What? He didn't want to, you asked him to do that and he said, no, I was going to go fishing with his buddies and drink a lot of beer. He doesn't love you. Right? Isn't that what we say?

That's the way you understand this. Not that he's Stalin ordering you around. But this is love himself, desiring love.

And you can't have love without obedience. Verse 13. Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message. I am with you, declares the Lord.

[41 : 19] And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Sheilatel, the governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Jehoshadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people.

See, it isn't even, because he's with you, he doesn't leave you all by yourself to figure things out. He's with you. And as he's with you, he moves in your life. I've run out of time, but as long as you live for number one, meaning yourself, you will never, ever, ever have meaning in your life or purpose.

You only have purpose and meaning in your life when you understand that the center of your life is outside of yourself. Continuing on.

And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of their God, their hosts. And then it gives you the date. It's actually the 21st day of September, 520 BC. On the 24th day of the month, on the 6th month, in the year of second, second year of Darius the King.

Friends, consider Jesus. He only wants to be with you as your Savior and as your Lord. And he saves you because he put you first.

[42 : 31] And now he will always put you first. He asks that you will put him first. Trusting that as you put him first, it isn't that he will remove all the things in your life. Of course he knows that your kids need to have some friends.

Of course he knows that you need to have a house to live in or have friends yourselves. Of course that. But it's not a matter that he becomes first and abolishes all of that. But that when he becomes first in your life and in the life of our church, he puts all those other things in their proper place.

And we begin to enter into a life of true meaning and significance for the glory of the Lord. Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for this, your word. We thank you, Father, for the flavor and the character of it.

The odd names, Father, that these aren't things that should push us away, but that we can revel in and delight in. And the Jewishness of it, the Persian-ness of it, the ancient-ness of it.

And at the same time, Father, we realize it speaks directly to our hearts. Father, we ask that you help us, those of us who are Christians, who have put Jesus, made Jesus their Savior and Lord.

Father, help us to once again desire to have Jesus be first in our lives.

[43 : 37] First in our money. First in our family. First in our relationships. First in our career. First in our fears. In our loves. In our desires. Our plans. And, Father, if there's any here who are watching, who have, they start to feel the Holy Spirit tugging on their heart.

We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would just move in their mind and heart with great power and deep conviction. And bring Jesus to them. And help them, Father, to call out to you that Jesus might be their Savior and their Lord.

And all these things we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.