

Give Careful Thought to Your Ways

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[0:00] Well, we're going to be looking at the book of Haggai this week and the next. So please turn your Bibles back to Haggai chapter 1.

Well, it's a new year, and for some people a new year means a new set of resolutions. I don't know about you, but I don't do resolutions anymore after years of failed resolutions.

But if you do, what are your resolutions this year? Or even if you don't, what are your priorities this year? According to recent surveys, the top three resolution categories in 2025 are, first, financial well-being, so saving more, spending less, earning more.

Second, physical well-being, so exercising more, eating healthier, losing weight. Apparently I need to do that.

Third one, relational well-being, so spending time with family and friends, improving relationships with the people around us. What is yours?

[1:22] What are your goals? What are your priorities this year? Well, our passage today reminds us, perhaps quite timely as we begin our new year, that God's people ought to prioritize enjoying God's presence and worshipping Him above other things, or even in other things.

So let's read. In verse 1 to 2, 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 Josedach, the high priest.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. These people say, the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house. So here, God spoke through Haggai, the prophet, to the leaders of Israel, the governor and the high priest.

Now the issue was that the people thought, it's not time yet to rebuild the temple. It's not in their priority to do that right now.

You see, God's temple was a symbol in the Old Testament, a symbol of God's presence amongst the people. And it's a place where the Israelites enjoyed God's presence through worshipping Him in the temple amongst their midst.

[3:04] But the temple was destroyed when the Babylonian Empire overthrew Jerusalem and took the Jews as captives. And later on, as you can see in the introduction in your Bible there, later on, King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return to rebuild the temple.

But as we can see in other books in the Old Testament, like the book of Ezra, this rebuilding project was not finished. Now here in this text, Persia had a new king, King Cyrus, King Darius.

And as verse 1 indicates, this was only the second year of Darius' reign. And, you know, with a new government comes a new set of uncertainties.

Political instability, there's possible economic hardships, a new set of rules. And so the Jews felt that it wasn't time yet to rebuild the temple.

Let the things settle down first. That might also be what some of us experience. With a new year comes a new set of uncertainties.

- [4 : 24] Perhaps some of you are thinking about what the coming federal election will mean. for your businesses, if you have businesses, for housing rates, for your jobs, whether the inflation that hit us last year will get worse or better.
- I just got back from Indonesia, and there were people there who were worried about a new virus, apparently. With a new year comes a new set of uncertainties.
- Some changes, some new goals, and resolutions. And they all can affect our priorities, just like they did in our text.
- And the presence of God could easily be pushed away from our priorities. We might say, oh, it's not time yet to start that Bible reading plan.
- I've got to do such and such this year. It's not time yet to start a new prayer habit. I need to pursue that promotion this year.
- [5 : 31] But this is what God says in verse 3 to 4. 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, my house, remains a ruin? God presents an irony here.
- In verse 2, the people say that it's not time yet to rebuild the temple because of all the political and economic instabilities. But they have time to build paneled houses for themselves.
- You see, the heart of the problem is not that the temple is not rebuilt. The heart of the problem is that it falls in the priority list to be under all the other things that pertain to their own wealth and health and comfort.
- We could easily fall into the same trap, couldn't we? I could easily fall into the same trap. As we look into the new year and expect new challenges and new goals, we have new plans, new resolutions that prioritize all the things that we mentioned earlier, financial and physical or relational well-being.
- [6 : 51] we could easily forget about God and His presence in our day-to-day life. And as a result, we miss the point of life.
- We pursue wealth and health and comfort without realizing that God is the source of wealth and health and comfort. In verse 5 to 11, this is what the Lord Almighty says, give careful thought to your ways.
- You have planted much but harvested little. You eat but never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm.
- You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it. This is what the Lord Almighty says, give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord.
- You expected much but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home I blew away. Why? He glanced the Lord Almighty. Because of my house which remains a ruin while each of you is busy with your own house.
- [8 : 09] Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld the dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces on people and livestock and on all the labor of your hands.
- Now, this part of our text could be interpreted as you don't prioritize God therefore you don't get wealth. If you prioritize God you get wealth.
- Which actually makes sense of the Old Testament because in the Old Covenant through Moses if the Israelites obeyed God and worshipped him they would get material blessings.

If not, then they would get material curses. In Jesus, as Christians, our covenant with God works slightly differently when it comes to material blessings.

Our material blessings are promised in the new creation while here we get all spiritual blessings in Ephesians 1. All the heavenly blessings all blessings in the heavenly places in Jesus.

[9:26] But I think this part could also be interpreted as you don't prioritize God you can still get some material blessings but you will never be truly satisfied.

Notice that the text doesn't say they didn't get anything for their work but it says that it was never enough. In verse 6 they still got harvests but the harvests were not enough.

they felt little. They could still eat but it was never enough. They could still drink but they were never satisfied. They had clothes but never felt warm enough.

They wanted more. They needed more. They earned wages but they were never enough as if they were put in a purse with holes. Next minute they're gone. The people were able to produce things they still got some material wealth but without God they were never satisfied.

In verse 9 they expected to get much. They always wanted more but they always felt insufficient. You see God is like the spring of water.

[10:49] and things in this world that give us happiness and satisfaction and prosperity are like pipes that channel the water. The further away those pipes get from the spring the less fresh the water gets and therefore the less satisfied we are.

And if we try to detach the pipes from the spring and run away with them we get the pipes we get the wealth but there's no water inside.

There's no satisfaction. Wealth and health and comfort are not against God but prioritizing them over God or instead of God is the problem.

Wealth and health and comfort don't satisfy outside of God. Real prosperity comes from God the spring of life.

I grew up knowing lots of wealthy people who did not have God in their life but who had lots of money. But without God they're never satisfied.

[12:03] They always wanted more to the point that they had to bribe fake taxes and oppress people for the sake of getting more money even though they already had a lot of money.

Life without God is unsatisfactory. But I also know of people who don't have much but are so satisfied with God.

A pastor friend of mine went to a poor village in Indonesia and he was invited into a Christian family's house for dinner. Their house was tiny.

There was only one room in the entire house. one room for five people for sleeping in for dining in for cooking in. But when this pastor came they cooked him fancy food.

So he asked them how often they ate that kind of food knowing that they're poor and they said never. All of their money was used up for that dinner for the sake of hospitality.

[13:07] And so this pastor asked why what are you going to eat tomorrow? And they said we've always been living day by day praying that tomorrow God would give us our daily bread.

And he's never disappointed us. We are satisfied because God is good. Such satisfaction from such a poor family who experiences God's goodness in such an intimate way.

I'm not saying that we ought to be like that to experience God's goodness. The Bible is not anti-wealth and health. But what the Bible is saying is that wealth and health by themselves cannot satisfy.

God is the source of wealth and health and his presence satisfies. satisfies. It saddens God when we prioritize health and wealth above his presence that satisfies.

It's like these people prioritizing their own paneled houses above the presence of God in the temple. It saddens God when we only want to play with the blessings that he gives like wealth and health without communing, enjoying, the presence of God the giver.

[14 : 39] My family and I just, like I said, just got back from a holiday in Indonesia visiting family and friends. And a few weeks before we went, my parents had been video calling Kai and showing him the toys that they had given him and that they had bought for him and that they would give him once he got to Indonesia.

And so as soon as we arrived at my parents' house, Kai's first question was, where are the toys? It's not, where is grandma, where is grandpa?

It's, where are the toys? That's a classic toddler behavior, isn't it? But in a sense, that's what everyone does. Forgetting God, the giver, while we play with the toys that he has given us.

Money, work, family, kids, grandkids, pleasure, all these great things that he has given us as gifts.

We are playing with them, but often we forget the giver. And although we might prosper and do enjoy these things, true satisfaction always eludes us because our actions are divorced from God, the spring of life.

[16 : 09] He satisfies us. And it's also what we Christians often do, even though we should know better. God is our father.

We often do that as well, forgetting our father when we play with his toys. How many times this week have we planned something, or worked on something, or worked for something, without even realizing that God is right next to us, without even acknowledging his presence?

God is present. Like the old Israelites, building their paneled houses, forgetting the presence of God in the temple. Every time we eat, we cook, we budget our spendings, we play with our kids, we play with our grandkids, we dream about the future, God is right next to us, present.

How many times have we been present with him? I have neglected God's presence so many times this week.

We prioritize things other than God. But here is the good news. God loves us so much that when we, his people, fail to prioritize or even desire his goodness, his presence, he still wants to be with us.

[17 : 49] Even when these people in our text, these people in the Old Testament, fail to prioritize or even desire God's presence with them in the temple, God was planning to send his presence.

and that's Jesus. He sent Jesus the embodiment of God's presence, the Emmanuel, God with us, to come into the world, God himself coming to be in our midst, the world who did not desire him.

He chased us because he desired us and he desired to share his presence with us and satisfy us. Isn't that what Jesus said? Come to me. and I will give you rest.

And that Jesus died on the cross being abandoned by God's presence when he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Isn't it a mystery how the embodiment of God's presence would be abandoned by God's presence? sins? But such is the great mystery of the cross because there Jesus bore our sins.

[19:09] Every time we neglect God's presence, we ought to be abandoned by God's presence, right? But Jesus was abandoned instead of us.

Every time we pursue other things outside of God, we ought to be left unsatisfied. but Jesus was left unsatisfied instead when on the cross he cried, I thirst.

He bore the consequences of our abandonment of God on the cross so that when he rose again, he could share the fullness of God's presence with us in the Holy Spirit.

So God doesn't only dwell in a temple. but through his Holy Spirit he shares his presence inside every one of us who is in him, who is in Jesus.

And each one of us can be intimately satisfied by God's presence through the Spirit in Jesus. Have you ever stopped and meditated on that truth?

[20:22] That the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, is inside us and we are in him, in Jesus? How amazing is God's love towards us?

Even when we often fail to love him as he deserves. As if he's saying, you don't want to build my temple, to fight for my presence, I'll fight for that myself.

I'll send my presence down to you. And so repent, let's repent and prioritize God and his presence and our worship of him.

And that's what the Israelites did in verse 12 to 15. then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Jezebadak, 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, bless the Lord. And so the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, son of Jezebadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.

[21:52] 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. So once they heard God's rebuke, they feared God and repented.

And watch closely what happens in verse 14. The Lord stirred up the spirit of the leaders and the spirit of the people.

And so they began the work. The people only needed to repent and the strength to do the action, to do the work, came from God. He stirred up their spirits.

Now we already have that strength. when we repent, because the Holy Spirit is already in us, empowering us for service.

So we can do the action needed. So how do we prioritize God and his presence in our lives, in our work, in our family, in our relationships with the people around us?

[23:06] how do we prioritize God and his presence? Well, prioritizing God and enjoying his presence above all things doesn't mean we always have to spend time reading the Bible and praying on our knees 24-7.

That's impossible, isn't it? There's a way to do other things while enjoying God's presence. And I believe that's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10.

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you play with your grandkids, you budget, do it all for the glory of God.

So perhaps our priority list doesn't have to look like God and then everything else. It doesn't have to look like that. It should look like God in everything else.

Perhaps God should not even be in the priority list because he should penetrate every single thing that we do in our priority list. Whether we eat or drink or work or plan for the future or have fun with our friends or have fun with our grandkids or watch TV, work on the computer, use social media, we should ask, how do I enjoy God's presence while I do this thing right now?

[24:35] And one way to do that is by doing things prayerfully, remembering his presence with us, right next to us. We talk to him.

When eating some delicious pork belly, for example, we can talk to God and say, my God, this is great.

Thank you for creating such wonderful flavors. While rocking Esa to sleep, my second one, I like to sing, Be Thou My Vision.

Not only because it's a great song, but also because the song is a prayer. Be Thou My Vision. Please be My Vision. It's a prayer that I like to pray for myself and on behalf of Esa, that he might have God as his vision above riches, above man's empty praise.

That's one way I rock a baby to sleep, while also acknowledging God's presence with me, talking with me. How do you prioritize God and his presence this year?

[25:53] When you know that you are in Jesus and the Holy Spirit is in you, perhaps you can think of one way that you'd like to try this week.