

God's Backyard Blitz

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Date: 08 August 2004

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 8th of August 2004. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled God's Backyard Blitz and is based on Haggai chapter 1. I have a confession to make.

I'm one of those men who thinks they are a do-it-yourself person. You know the guys, the ones that think they can fix anything, make anything, renovate anything and just end up having a lot of jobs around the house that really don't get fixed up at all.

I thought I'd bring a prime example here tonight. I love collecting old furniture and I found this old chair in a Salvation Army shop at \$8. \$8, \$8 for this chair.

So I thought, well, I better strip this back. So, you know, I've got out the paint stripper and I've got the sander but typical me, I never really do a job properly. So I actually didn't pull it apart properly and didn't actually glue it back together.

[1 : 11] So it's a little wobbly. This little bar here is sort of snapped at the moment and you can see the edges where the paint, I couldn't quite get the sander in there.

It just wouldn't quite get in there. This is sort of like a typical Paul Dudley job. It doesn't look too bad but the reality is it's one of those disasters. Now, I gather I'm not the only one out there who likes doing your own, you know, building your own things, fixing things because I've seen that there are many, many shows that happen to be my favourite shows.

Let me tell you them. There's Backyard Blitz. You should see my backyard at the moment. It's not quite finished yet but I've got this great pond in the backyard there and it's only slightly broken though.

It's okay. Backyard Blitz Auction Squad. Now, that's good fun. That's fun watching that. Come on, hand up those who like watching Auction Squad. Ah, there it is. There's a few.

Yeah, thank you. Then there's Burke's Backyard. Better Homes and Garden. Now, that's a good one because it's got a good range of things there in Better Homes and Garden. Hot Auctions.

[2 : 21] Ground Force. Renovation Rescue. Now, that's a good one, isn't it? Hey, those dads out there who have done a really bad job. They come and they fix it up. Or mums for that fact, can I just say because there's some mums out there who hear they're no better.

Changing rooms. Come on, put up your hand. Come on, I reckon it's a, yeah, good on you, Tash. I'm glad you're brave enough to admit it. I love changing rooms. You know where they do all that changing around and you're fixing things and you're busy doing all these type of things.

There's this paint. There's recycle. There's sanding. You've got a budget. You've got to work with you. I love that. You know, \$15,000. We'll see what we can do with this house. See how much money we can get back for the people.

Then there's all the paving and doing all the stuff on the outside with the different plants. I never know how they know all their names. But it's great, isn't it? Just the way that they, and I love those before and after shots.

Aren't they just the best? You know, here it was before, dreary, drab, dull. No light, just terrible.

[3 : 26] Colours didn't mix. And at the end, fantastic. Just looking so good. Some of the social commentators have sort of looked around at these different things and tried to think about why is it that it's so interesting that we find these shows fascinating?

Why is it that we actually, not only these makeover shows, but cooking shows? Hand up those who like the cooking shows. Yeah, there's a few who like the cooking shows. A lot of us really like the cooking shows as well. And one commentator, a social commentator, was making the point that he thought that people actually love these shows because it's actually a place where we can control it.

It's our own little patch where we're in control, we can do something with our own skills and we're in control of it. And it's become, I guess, apparent that in our age that we live in, there is so much insecurity.

We live in an age of job insecurity where there are wars and rumours of wars, where politicians are becoming more and more mistrusted, where financial institutions are becoming more and more unstable, where there are relationship breakdowns all around us.

There's the cut and thrust of business. There's the stress of trying to get a good VCE mark. There is so much stress upon us, so much insecurity everywhere we look.

[4 : 48] And so what people are doing is they're trying to retreat into a little place where they can control it, where they can make their own little patch of beauty. It's true, isn't it?

You're busy yourself doing these things. You make your own little area where you can control it and you can make it so it looks so good. Don't worry about everything else out there. I can ignore that because I've got these great meals.

Look at this fig lamb that I've got here. It's fantastic. We all want a place of peace and security, a place which we can control.

It's a place which feeds our ego as well. Or we can say, look what it was and look what this lamb is looking like now. It looks great. Well, it's not just our backyards and our kitchens that we busy ourselves with.

I think the truth is we busy ourselves with all sorts of different things. Our school work, our uni work, our jobs, our sports, our hobbies. Oh, they're all good things. Don't get me wrong.

[5 : 54] But what we do is we pour ourselves into these things. Pour ourselves, give them so much energy in our time that we let some of the very important things slip by.

We think these are the things that are going to bring us, fill in the gaps, fix our insecurities, make the hardships just that little bit easier. But in the end, it actually doesn't fill that sense of great need.

We actually need to hear this message of Haggai, a very important message of a prophet. You see, we need to be careful that we don't miss out on the things that are most important.

It's like renovating a house. You start putting up the beautiful, this week, they had these great aluminium panels, feature wall, you put these aluminium panels on it and it looked great.

But what's the point of putting aluminium panels on a great wall with this lovely burgundy plum colour in the background if the whole house is full of termites? Or the foundations are about to collapse at any moment?

[7 : 02] There are bigger issues that need to be dealt with here, not just dealing with the surface stuff. Or like a garden, getting out there and changing your whole garden, having a water feature in the back corner and these great trees, only to know that in two days' time a six-lane highway is actually going to be constructed through the back of your yard.

There are bigger issues there that needed to be dealt with before you start trying to deal with those things. I guess for us ourselves, it's like trying to put a little band-aid on the chicken pox, on those little spots, thinking that's going to solve the problem when there are deeper problems, deeper issues inside.

When we become so busy, we miss out on what is really important. It's a lesson of history and it's a lesson that Haggai brings to his people.

I thought we'd take a pause here and give you a history lesson. Now, I don't know about you, I didn't like history. So I thought I'd make it a little bit more exciting here for us, a little bit more visual. So I've got some actors. Now, in this little drama that we're going to be playing at, we need Jerusalem. Can I have Jerusalem coming up? Thank you, Jerusalem. Can you go stand over there? And a fine-looking Jerusalem too.

[8 : 20] Look at that. A fine Jerusalem there. A Jerusalem is God's city and it's been built and it's a great place. And in the midst of the city, as you know, is the temple and things are going really well in the time of King David and King Solomon.

But after the time of King Solomon and King David, it just goes downhill very badly. The kingdom splits. We have wars and internal wars and God's people start following other idols and worshipping other gods and Israel comes to a very sorry mess.

Jerusalem itself, it's a very sorry state. But God sends his prophets. Where's Jeremiah? Jeremiah the prophet. Here he comes. Jeremiah came to Jerusalem.

Now we need some Jews actually. Let's get some Jews in there. Thanks Jews. You can just go and sort of stand behind Jerusalem perhaps.

That's it. Just sort of hold up the sun. There they are. Look at them. There are the Jews there. A likely looking lot. They're misbehaving quite badly. That's good.

[9 : 35] There we go. Thank you for that, Ryan. That's good. Another one would help. Just another little nudge. Yeah, thanks again. Good. Things aren't good.

And so, Jeremiah, God raises up Jeremiah to speak to the Jews in Jerusalem and tell them that they need to get their act together because if they don't, then God is going to send them into exile. And so, Jeremiah starts speaking these words.

In fact, it's actually a message of doom for them. Jeremiah brings the word that a Babylonian army is going to come in and sweep and take them away for their disobedience.

And so, it's a very strong word. Thank you, Jeremiah. If you want to just speak some very stern words there, you've done your job. And so, at the end of him speaking these words, the Babylonian army comes sweeping in.

King Nebuchadnezzar leading the way. Oh, gosh. I feel a little nervous now. King Nebuchadnezzar, here he comes.

[10 : 38] In comes King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army and they wreck havoc in Jerusalem. And what they do is actually take some captives back with them.

So, if two of the Jews could be taken captive... Thank you, Jeremiah. You can sit down now. Jeremiah was around at this time, but he's now gone to Egypt. And if you could... Yes, that's probably a good spot there.

That'd be great. They've gone back to Babylonia and there's King Nebuchadnezzar with the Jews being held captive and the Babylonian army and things aren't good.

Now, there were some that were left there, but Jerusalem was actually a crumpled heap. The temple is destroyed. Yeah, that's good. That's very good. Very, very...

This is great. They're going to be wanting wages after this. And the Jews there, there are a few remaining Jews who are sort of looking after the place and doing bits and pieces, but they don't actually do any restoration really and it's just a very sorry state back there in Jerusalem.

[11 : 43] I guess it's very sorry for the poor Jews who have been held captive as well in Babylonia. But as we heard a couple of weeks ago from Peter Adam in the book of Ezra, that God doesn't leave his people there in captivity, but God raises up the Persian army and also Sirius.

Now, we've got Sirius sweeping down here from the back. Here comes Sirius sweeping down across the plains to come and capture, be the new world power. Here he comes. Look at him there. Very strong. He comes in and he actually takes on King Nebuchadnezzar and he becomes the new ruler. Now, where's your army? Where's the Persian army? Thank you. This is great.

The Persian army, and they actually get rid of the Babylonian army and Nebuchadnezzar. A big clap for them. They've done a great job. And so, the new world power now is Sirius and with the Persian army and so, but the Jews are still held captive there.

But as a part of this, Sirius has a good plan. He wants to spread out his rule throughout the land and so what he decides is he's going to send the captives back to their own native lands and actually send them back.

[12 : 58] But by doing that and actually providing for them to do that, hopefully they will still be sympathetic and still happy to sin under the Persian empire. And so, King Sirius sends some of the Jews back, but not all the Jews want to go back.

So, some of the Jews start heading back and they arrive back in Jerusalem. Now, this happens about 537 BC is when the Jews come back in, into Jerusalem.

And when they get back there, they're there and there's a sense of exhilaration, a sense of adventure. It's only a small group that have come back, but there's a sense in which they're coming back to rebuild the temple.

Sirius here has actually taken some of the coffers out of his own bank amounts and he's actually given it to them to start building the temple. Not only that, the things that were stolen by Nebuchadnezzar, it's very bad, I'll talk to you about that later, Chris.

The things that were stolen from the temple, he says, look, take them back as well. So, Sirius is really trying to make a big effort and he says, look, go back and worship your God. Go back and sort it out.

[14:12] Sort out the mess. What a great God, standing there in the background. God had promised this with Jeremiah. It was Jeremiah's message of hope, that they would come back, that they would not be exiles forever.

God is a very gracious God. So, anyhow, the Jews are back there, but there's a bit of tension. You see, Melissa, she's been there for quite some time, 75 years odd, and, you know, she's not happy about these other Jews just coming to walk back in and think they can just take back over the place. So, there's a bit of tension there. Oh, there it is. Don't get in the road of those eyes, I tell you. So, there's a bit of tension there that things aren't quite right.

They end up, they do set the foundations of the temple and the altar is built. Where's our altar? Here he comes. They do start and they get an altar up, they set the foundations, but then things go a little sour.

And I think that's where we might leave our drama at this point, because this is where Haggai picks up. So, thank you very much if you want to take a seat. Bit of a clap there. I hope that sort of helps set the scene a little bit of where we're at.

[15:29] You see, once the Jews came back into Jerusalem, they've had good intentions, they've started to get things going, but over a 17 year period, things don't go well.

So, they've got the tension amongst themselves. They've got the tension from their neighbours. I guess it's like backyard blitz, isn't it? You've got bad neighbours and good neighbours. Well, they've got some bad neighbours, the Sumerians.

And they're not very happy about them rebuilding the temple and that type of thing. And not only that, there's these poor seasons where the crops actually fail in this 17 year period.

There's tension from the states around. Even in the world scene, Sirius, shortly after taking over world power, he dies. And there's a bit of a struggle in amongst the Persians.

Who's going to be the next king? Now, it's all very unstable. There's a lot of insecurity. You can imagine it being there in Jerusalem, can't you? There's tension all over the place.

[16:31] You've started off with great intentions, but, you know, gosh, Persian army, there's a bit of tension there. Things aren't going well. We've got the Sumerians looking over our shoulders, telling us to stop and not to continue.

We've got tension amongst ourselves. What are we going to do? What they do is what we do. They start working on their own backyard.

They start fixing up their own houses and they ignore God's temple. Have a look in verse 2. Thus the Lord of hosts, these people say that the time has not come to rebuild the Lord's house.

Then the Lord, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai, saying, it is time for you yourselves to live in your panelled houses while this house lies in ruins.

The charge against them is they're looking after their own little thing, their own little patch. It's much easier to try and fix up your panelled houses and make sure that they're living in comfort.

[17:37] And that's the way, isn't it? When things get tough in the midst of hardship, that's what we want to do. We want to busy ourselves doing things that make us feel good and overlook the things that are more significant.

Well, God's not happy about this. God is not happy about it at all. And so after 17 years, God raises up his prophet Haggai. You see, God is a God, it would be easy for God just to let the people go. I mean, he's tried and tried again, hasn't he? I mean, after taking him to exile, you'd think that would learn the lesson. But no, they don't learn the lesson. It would be easy for God just to give up. God to blot them out. But God has made promises and God keeps his word. And so he raises up Haggai.

In the second year of King Darius, this is the year 520, 17 years after they've arrived, on the first day of the month, so we're talking here, the 29th of August.

[18:44] This is the day when Haggai speaks. 29th of August, 520 BC. The first day of the month, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai, to Zerubbabel, son of Shittil, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

You see, God raises up this prophet. And over a 15-week period, Haggai comes and brings messages to the people and to the leaders. Telling them that they need to get on with and finish building the temple.

It's got a nice timing. By the 18th of December, it's all finished. Haggai can get on with Christmas preparations and that type of thing. It's all good for him. 15 weeks, that's all his ministry is.

We actually don't know much more about Haggai after that. Some surmise that he was perhaps old and died shortly after. We don't know. We only have these two short chapters and his messages that he comes to bring over a 15-week period.

But he has a single mind. He preaches ardently to them and he wants to see them to help the people understand the new perspective that they should have of God and their relationship with God and the promised blessings.

[20 : 02] He wants them to continue building the temple. So, let's have a look at this prophet's message. Let's have a look here, what he says. Thus the Lord of hosts, these people say, the time has not yet come to rebuild the house, the Lord's house.

Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai saying, it is time for you yourselves to live in your panelled houses while this house lies in ruins. Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider how you have fared.

You have sown much and harvest little. You eat but you never have enough. You drink but you never have your fill. You close yourselves but no one is warm. And you earn wages, wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.

In this first little part here, Haggai wants them to have a good look at how things are faring with them. And as they look at themselves and Haggai points it out, they realise they're in the midst of a curse, God's curse, God's punishment upon them for not having that single-mindedness that they should have for God's perspectives.

This should have been a warning for them. They should have seen it in the Old Testament law that in the midst of drought and hardship that this was a part of God's curse upon them and that they should have realised this and gone on about God's work.

[21 : 23] We continue there in verse 7, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider how you have fared. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the houses so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured, says the Lord.

And you looked for much and lo, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why, says the Lord of hosts, because my house lies in ruins while all of you hurry off to your own houses.

Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew and the earth has withheld its produce and I have called for a drought on the land and the hills and on the grain, the new wine, the oil and what the soil produces on human beings and animals and all their labours.

Here we see a curse that is upon the people, a drought. It should have been a clue as I said before them but they didn't pick up on the clues.

They lacked spiritual fever and commitment. They did not seek God's kingdom and so God brought about the curse, the curse that he said that he would bring. But God is not a God who wipes them out from the face of the earth.

[22 : 34] Even though he's entitled to, he doesn't because of his promise. Well, it brings us to the question, what is so important about this temple? Why is the temple so important? I guess we need to come to some type of understanding of the temple.

The temple before its solid state was actually the tabernacle. It was the tent that Moses set up when he was travelling through the wilderness and it was this place where God dwelt.

It's an aspect where he brought his self-disclosure. It was a meeting place between God and his people. In the tent in the wilderness, what would happen is they would set up their tent and this great cloud of glory would come down upon the tent and it would be the place where God and Moses would meet.

It would be this dwelling place. When Solomon builds the temple and has a more permanent fixture, we see here that the cloud in chapter 8 of 1 Kings comes and fills the temple and we see this great glory.

But as we see through this, we see that God is not confined just to this tabernacle or this temple. But it's actually a very important place, a meeting place between God and his people.

[23 : 48] Isaiah talks about it as the place where the nations will flood in, a place where living waters will flow out, a place of great blessing. It's the central focus for God and Israel.

But as we've seen, Israel has abandoned their efforts. They've given up trying to build the temple. And God has given them the consequences for doing so. So Haggai comes in and he challenges them.

So what's their response? How do the Israelites respond to this challenge that Haggai brings? Have a look there in verses 12 through to 15.

Then Zerubbabel, son of Shittil, and Joshua, son of Jehoshadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of the prophet Haggai, as the Lord their God had sent him and the people feared the Lord.

Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, saying, I am with you, says the Lord. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, son of Shittil, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, son of Jehoshadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people.

[25 : 06] And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the 24th day of the month, in the sixth month. What's their response?

It's a unanimous decision by both the leaders and the people to get up and get on with God's backyard blitz in the temple. They're going to get in there and they're going to rebuild the temple. They're going to resume the work. They've decided that they will hear God's word and obey it. And notice here that Haggai, Haggai's words here, they recognise Haggai's words as God's words. That when God speaks, when Haggai speaks God's words, they recognise them that they come from God and they obey them. And this is important for us to recognise that when we hear from God's word, the Bible, we need to be people who hear and obey.

Isaiah said that God's word would not return to him empty so God's word here doesn't return empty and they get on with building the temple. It talks about here they feared God, they humbled themselves before God, they revered him as they ought and they got on with it.

[26 : 30] And notice how Haggai takes none of the credit for it. He recognises that it's God's work there. But God doesn't leave them alone in the midst of their work, God stirs up the spirit, God engages with them, he has his mighty hand upon them and he helps them in their task of bringing about the change and so they get on with it.

Well it seems like a great story so far and we're going to look at Haggai in the next week about what happens a bit more. But what does this first chapter have to say for us?

Well here's what I think it says, we need to go down there this week and we need to build a temple. I mean that's what we've been encouraged here, the Israelites they've been told to go and build the temple so we're going to go out there and we're going to build a great temple down, we've got lots of area out here, I think we can get some plans drawn up, we're going to get great pillars and we're going to get an altar put in there, we're going to bring in sacrifices again, it's going to be great. Well no, we don't take the Old Testament that way and directly apply it to our lives. What we need to do is we need to understand it in light of Christ.

You see, there's only one man who didn't busy himself with the things of this world but obeyed God's word. There is only one person who did that fully and that was the word of God, Jesus.

[27 : 58] This man, Jesus, was the temple of God. It was the perfect meeting place of God and his people because he was truly God and truly man.

Jesus is the true temple, he is the fulfilment of the temple. Not only that, we, by God's spirit, who trust in this Jesus, become God's temple as well by faith.

What a great and awesome privilege. The meeting place between God and his people is now with us. That God, by his spirit, in our lives, we become the temple of God, meeting together here as God's temple.

What a great privilege. knowledge. Well, what does this passage then have to say for us? Are we people busying ourselves with the things of this world and ignoring the things of God's world, the things of his kingdom?

Are we ignoring the temple that is within our lives? Jesus spoke about kingdom perspectives in the Sermon on the Mount. You might like to look up Matthew 6 verse 25.

[29 : 22] Jesus spoke about how we should live our lives, live kingdom lives with kingdom perspectives. Listen to what Jesus had to say in chapter 6 verse 25.

It's page 787. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear?

Is not life more than food, the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valued than they?

And can any of you, by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin.

Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith?

[30 : 25] Therefore do not worry saying, what will we eat, or what will we drink, or what will we wear? For it is the Gentiles who strive for these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

things, but strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Let me say that last bit again.

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about today, tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. How busy are we? What are we busying our lives with? How's our uni work going, our jobs, our home improvements?

What are we spending our time with? I'm sure there are lots of good things that we can put our time in, and we should be putting our time to, but are we neglecting the things of God's kingdom? Are we seeking first his kingdom?

[31 : 30] Are we obeying God's word? Hearing God's word and obeying it. We've heard from God's word over the last couple of weeks.

Last week it was on love. Have you obeyed God's word this week? How loving have you been in the people that you've come in contact with? Think about your spiritual gifts.

We heard a sermon on spiritual gifts. Have you thought and taken into action how are you going to be serving God in these areas? Well, let's just take another step back. How often actually hearing from God's word?

How often actually listening to God's perspectives and how they should be applying to your life?

When was the last time you read the Bible outside of church here? What a rebuke for all of us.

Are we reading God's word? Are we actually hearing it? But then I guess the next question is are we actually obeying it the way that we should be? Just stop and reflect for a moment.

[32 : 35] Stop and reflect. The busyness that is in our lives feeds our ego but is it starving our inner person?

It fills our calendar with lots of great things but are we fracturing our families? it cultivates a great program but it ploughs through our priorities.

What are your perspectives? Stop and reflect just a moment on what you did this week. Reflect on the busy things that you're involved in.

how did you use your time? God did not leave Israel alone in the midst of them working out their busyness and their priorities but God stirred up the spirit within them.

let me pray for us that God will so stir up the spirit in our his spirit in our lives that we will have kingdom perspectives that will live lives that seek his righteousness first in all that we do in school work work, uni, our meeting with people.

[34 : 12] Let us pray that we have kingdom perspectives. Let me pray. Father we pray that you will stir up your spirit in our lives that you will show us the areas where we are busying our lives not in kingdom perspectives.

Father help us to see these areas and repent. Father we pray that you will give us by your spirit the strength to change our lives.

Give us the motivation and the energy we need that we may hear your word and obey it. Amen.
Amen.