

Give Careful Thought to Your Ways

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bibles back to Haggai chapter 1. Haggai chapter 1 on page 769. You might have been confused why our reading ended with in the second year of King Darius, which is presented there as the first line of chapter 2.

But it actually belongs to verse 15 of chapter 1. So it's debated whether in the second year of King Darius belongs to the 24th day of the 6th month in the second year of King Darius, or it belongs to chapter 2 in the second year of King Darius on the 21st day of the 7th month.

But it doesn't matter. So we just read what is given to us. Okay. Anyway, it's a new year.

And for some people, I don't know about you, but for some people a new year means a new set of resolutions. I have stopped doing resolutions years ago after years of failed resolutions.

What are your resolutions this year if you do have resolutions? If you don't, what do you prioritize? What are your priorities this year?

[1 : 27] 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, exercising more, eating healthier, losing weight. Third, relational well-being, spending more time with family and friends, improving relationships.

Which one is yours? What are your goals this year? What are your priorities this year? Well, our passage today reminds us, perhaps quite timely as we begin the new year, that God's people ought to always prioritize God's presence above other things, or even in other things.

How does that work? Well, 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 God spoke through the prophet Haggai to the leaders of Israel, the governor and the high priest.

[3 : 09] And the issue was that the people thought it's not time yet to rebuild God's temple. It's not in their priority to do that right now. Why is that bad?

Well, God's temple in the Old Testament was a symbol of God's presence amongst the people. It's a place where the Israelites enjoyed God's presence through worshipping him.

But the temple was destroyed when the Babylonian Empire overthrew Jerusalem and took people as captives. And later on, King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return to rebuild the temple.

But we know from the book of Ezra that this rebuilding project was not finished. And so about 15 years later, Haggai spoke.

And here in this text, Persia had a new king, King Darius. And as verse 1 indicates, this was only the second year. So the second year of King Darius.

- [4 : 19] Now, with a new government, it's still new, with a new government comes a new set of uncertainties. Political instability, possible economic hardships, and a set of new rules.
- And so the Jews felt that, no, it's not time yet to rebuild the temple. Let's wait until things settle down first. Perhaps that might be what some of us experience, or we know of people who experience this.
- With a new year comes a new set of uncertainties. Perhaps some of you are thinking about what the coming federal election will mean for your businesses, for your shares, if you have shares, housing rates, for your jobs, whether the inflation that hit us last year will get better or worse.
- I just got back from Indonesia, and apparently people there are worried about a new virus. I don't know if that's true or not. But with a new year comes a new set of uncertainties.
- Some changes, some new goals, resolutions, and they all can affect our priorities. Just like they did the Jews in our text. And the presence of God could easily be pushed away from our priorities.
- [5 : 48] We might say, oh, it's not time yet to start that Bible reading plan. I've got new exercise goals this year. Or, it's not time yet to start a new prayer habit.
- I need to pursue that promotion this year. 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 panelled houses while this house remains a ruin? God presents an irony here.
- In verse 2, the people say that it's not time yet to build the temple of God, to prioritize God's presence amongst them because of all the economic and political instabilities.
- But they did have time to build panelled 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.
- [7 : 04] Now, we could easily fall into the same trap. I could easily fall into the same trap. As we look into the new year and expect new challenges and new goals and we have new resolutions that prioritize, you know, all those things that we mentioned earlier, financial well-being, physical well-being, relational well-being, we could easily forget about God and his presence in our daily lives.
- So easy. And as a result, we miss the point of life. We pursue wealth and health and comfort without realising that God is the source of wealth and health and comfort.
- Verse 5 to 11. Now, this is what the Lord Almighty says. Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvest is 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 honoured, says the Lord.
- [8 : 24] You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why? declares the Lord Almighty. Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house.
- Therefore, because of you, the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil, and everything else the ground produces on people and livestock and on all the labour of your hands.

Now, this part of our text could be interpreted as you don't prioritize God's presence, therefore you don't get wealth. If you prioritize God's presence, 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.

And verse 11, shows that. Because they did not prioritize God's presence, God called for a drought so that they were poor.

[9 : 49] Now, in Jesus, our covenant with God works slightly differently when it comes to material blessings. We're not promised material blessings now. The promise for material blessings comes in a new creation, the everlasting, perfect new creation that we have covered in December.

For now, we have been promised spiritual blessings, Ephesians 1, the blessings, all blessings in the heavenly places in Jesus.

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

Notice that, especially in verse 6, it doesn't say that they didn't get anything for their work, but it was never enough. They still got harvests, but the harvests were not enough.

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

[11 : 03] 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 still.

They still got some material wealth, but without God, they were never satisfied. In verse 9, they expected much. They always wanted more, but they always felt insufficient.

You see, God is like the spring of water, and things in this world that give us happiness and satisfaction and prosperity are like pipes that channel the water.

water. The further away those pipes get from the spring, the less fresh the water gets, and therefore, the less satisfied we become.

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

[12 : 14] We don't get 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 satisfaction comes from God, the spring of life. I grew up knowing lots of wealthy people who did not have God in their lives, but who had lots of money, but without God, they're never satisfied.

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 to sleep in, to dine in, to cook in. But when this pastor came, they cooked him fancy food.

[13 : 45] And so he asked them how often they ate that kind of food, right? Because they were poor. And they said never. All of their money was used up for the sake of that dinner, for the sake of hospitality.

And so my pastor friend 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.

Now 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 without God.

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

[15 : 09] It saddens God even more when we only want to play with the blessings that he gives, wealth and health, without communing, without enjoying the presence of God the giver.

God. My family and I just got back from a holiday in Indonesia, like I said, visiting family and friends. A few weeks before we went, my parents had been showing Kai, my son, the toys that they would give him when he arrived.

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

That's a classic toddler behavior. But in a sense, that's what everyone does. Forgetting God while playing with the toys that he has given us, like money, work, family, friends, pleasure, all great things that he has given us as gifts, and we play with them, forgetting often that God is the giver.

Like these people in our text, playing with their paneled houses, enjoying them, forgetting the presence of God in the temple. 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 : 57] And it's an irony that it's often what we Christians often do. Even though we should know better, we call God our Father. There's no more intimate way of calling God.

There's no other religion who calls their God Father. Father. And yet, how many times this week have we done something, planned something, worked on something without even recognizing that God is right next to us, waiting to commune.

God. Every time we eat, we cook, we budget our spendings, we play with our friends, we dream about the future, God is right next to us, watching us, being present with us.

How many times have we been present for him? I have, I have neglected God so many times this week.

We prioritize things other than God. But here is the good news. God loves us so much that even when his people, us, when his people fail to prioritize his presence, he still desires us.

[18 : 24] Even when these people in our text failed to prioritize the presence of God in the temple, what was God doing? He was planning to send his presence in the person of Jesus.

He still desired to dwell with them and so he sent Jesus the embodiment of God's presence. Isn't that who he is? The Emmanuel, God with us to come into the world who did not desire him?

He chased us because he desired us and he desired to share his presence with us and to satisfy us. Isn't that what Jesus said?

Come to me and I will give you rest. He satisfies us. And 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 could be abandoned by God's presence? But such is the great mystery of the cross.

[19 : 47] Because there, Jesus bore our sins. 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 of us 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 in the Holy Spirit.

So God doesn't only dwell in a temple, but through his Holy Spirit he shares the fullness of his presence inside every one of us 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 wondered about that fact, about that reality that we are in right now, that we are in Jesus and God's presence is in us?

[21 : 13] that's amazing. It's so amazing God's love towards us, even when we often fail to love him as he deserves.

And so let's repent and prioritize God and his presence. And that's what the Israelites did in verse 12 to 15.

then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord, their God, and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him, and the people feared the Lord.

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people, I am with you, declares the Lord. So the Lord stood up the spirit of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, son of Josedach, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.

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. It's amazing how once they heard God's rebuke, they repented.

[22 : 32] What happened? The Lord stirred up their spirits. The strength to do the action after repentance comes not from themselves but from God.

We already have that strength when we repent as the Holy Spirit is already in us, empowering us for service. And so the question now is how?

How do we do it? How do we prioritize God? Like, those people, they wanted to repent. The how was quite easy. Bring down the timber from the mountain.

Build the temple. How do we prioritize God's presence right now? That's the question, isn't it? In our work, in our family, do we need to read the Bible and pray on our knees 24-7?

That's a bit impossible. Well, I think there's a way to prioritize God's presence and enjoy it while doing other things.

[23 : 43] And I think that's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10. So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

And so, perhaps our priority list, if you are building a priority list this year, it doesn't have to look like first God and then everything else.

Perhaps it should look like God in everything else. God should not even be listed in our 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, have fun with our friends, watch Netflix, use social media, TikToking, whatever, we should ask, how do I enjoy God's presence while I do this right now?

prayerfully. And one way to do that is by doing things prayerfully, recognizing that God is always with us, being present, and therefore we can talk to him.

[25 : 02] For example, when eating some chicken and chips, we can talk to God and say, my God, this is great.

Thank you for creating such wonderful flavors. Thank you for creating El Jannah. Thank you for creating my taste buds so I can taste.

There are a lot of people who can't taste, by the way. here's an example that you might not be able to relate to if you don't have kids.

But I've got kids, and they take up my entire time at the moment, so I'm going to use this. Rocking SR to sleep, my baby, takes forever.

And I like to sing Be Thou My Vision. Be Thou My Vision. Not only because it's a good song, and it sounds like a lullaby, but also because the song is a prayer.

[26 : 11] Be Thou My Vision. Lord, be my vision, that I like to pray for myself and on behalf of SR, that he might have God as his vision growing up, above riches, above man's empty praises.

That's one way I rock a baby to sleep while recognizing that God is right next to me. And I can talk to him through singing a song.

I can recognize his presence. How do you prioritize God and his presence this year? I challenge you to think of one way that you would like to try this week.

One way. But for now, let's rise and sing. singing him. .