

Consider Your Ways!

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Date: 30 December 2018

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[0 : 00] With New Year's Eve being tomorrow, and New Year's just a day away from that, I would guess maybe some of you have been contemplating New Year's resolutions.

! New Year's resolutions. And we're going to start by talking about some of the history of New Year's resolutions. You may or may not know that the Babylonians are attributed with the beginning of New Year's resolutions.

They would make commitments to their deities, primarily about paying any debts they owed or returning things they borrowed. But for Babylonians, the New Year started in March.

It wasn't really until the Romans that New Year's resolutions began to happen at January, when they would make commitments to Janus, which you might recognize as the deity for which January is named, because he was able, supposedly, to see both forward and backwards in time.

And so the Romans would make these commitments to him to try to appease him for anything they'd done wrong or to try to gain his favor for the coming year.

[1 : 26] It was not really until 1775 that we kind of see New Year's resolutions get sort of a Christianized twist. And we see that with John Wesley starting his covenant renewal services or watch night services.

And those would happen on the Sunday closest to January 1st. And it would be an evening of usually multiple hours where there would be preaching and prayer.

There would be singing, times of meditation and reflection, so that the church could reflect on how they could best continue in their growth in the coming year.

But as I'm sure you're aware, at this point in history, most of New Year's resolutions are kind of devoid of any kind of religious connection. Research tells us 40 to 50% of adults make at least one New Year's resolution.

And as you can see up here, the top New Year's resolutions for last year were that I'm going to eat better, exercise more, spend less, do better with self-care.

[2 : 42] Self-care is a new term my son had to teach me about. I'm going to read more. I want to learn a new skill. Get a new job. Make some new friends. Or get a new hobby.

Those were the top New Year's resolutions last year. As you can also see, though, unfortunately, by February, 80% of New Year's resolutions have failed.

80%. And by the end of the year, 92% of those resolutions have failed. Now, I know that's probably a little discouraging for you coming into New Year's resolution time.

But we are going to watch a short video that hopefully will encourage you. This little girl seems to have it right. I have a problem with New Year's resolutions.

Not because they often fail or because they're too difficult. And not because I'm bad at them either. I mean, I've only been in line for four new years.

[3 : 42] No. I have a problem with resolutions because people think that that's it. It's the wrong time to change. Now, don't get me wrong.

We definitely all need change. I have no idea how to ride a bicycle. And my little brother has no idea what a toilet is for.

And some of you. Yeah, you probably should get out of the house more. But one big solution probably isn't going to do it.

Sorry. So, now what? Flush your resolutions down the toilet for one my little brother can't use? Of course not. Keep your resolutions but go easy on yourself.

Will you change? Maybe. What probably won't happen in one big moment. It'll happen in thousands of little moments. Every time you choose to forgive or slow down or be grateful or stay calm.

[4 : 46] Each little moment that you choose what's right instead of what's easy. Faith instead of doubt. Love instead of hate. That's where the change happens.

Even if you fail one or two or thirty times. It's okay. You've got thousands of more little moments ahead of you. You'll get better.

So, Happy New Year. God bless. And I'm off to ask my dad to get a book. If they're a whole pony. Bye. Bye. So, if you don't pay attention to the rest of the sermon, that's a pretty good summary right there.

Personally, for me, I have a birthday in July. And so, a habit that I've had for many years now is that usually the month before my birthday, I take time to reflect and meditate on some particular passage of Scripture.

And consider what kind of mid-course corrections need to be made for the rest of the year. And then in December, I tend to do the same. Find a passage of Scripture that I can meditate on and seek wisdom from the Holy Spirit about what needs to change for the coming year.

[5 : 57] And this December, it's been on the book of Haggai. And so, really, what I'm sharing with you this morning are the reflections that I have had personally looking at coming into this new year.

But before we start that, let's take a moment and pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace. And we thank you that, indeed, you are a merciful God.

And that, as often as our resolutions fail, your mercies never fail. And Father, we come now to your word. And we ask that you would give us eyes to see.

That you would give us ears to hear. That by your Spirit, you would speak to us through your word. And by the power of your word, you would transform us. You would challenge us. You would help us to grow in Christ-likeness.

That we might love one another. And that we might love you. Father, I pray that you would help our time to be fruitful. That you would guide and direct me as I speak.

[6 : 58] That it would be your words. That, Father, you somehow, through your great and mighty hand, would use this small token in a way that will bring glory to Christ for generations to come.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. So, looking at the book of Haggai, let me give you a little introduction. You may or may not be very familiar with Haggai.

Haggai is one of the minor prophets. And, as you remember, we've talked about the fact that they're called minor prophets not because they're unimportant. They're just shorter than major prophets.

So, Haggai is only two chapters, most of which we'll cover this morning. Which is why we're not singing another song, I guess. And so, it's a minor prophet. And it's really very good timing for us to look at this.

Because this coming year, Pastor Andrew is going to be preaching through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. And Haggai ties right in. You'll see Haggai fits in perfectly.

[8 : 01] Eventually, you'll see it in the book of Ezra. And so, that gives you a little context. Let me give you a little historical context, if you didn't read all the points already. Starting in 586 BC, Babylon comes in and destroys Jerusalem and the temple.

Now, actually, at that point, it's really the third time King Nebuchadnezzar, who you probably remember by name, has led an attack against Jerusalem. And it's the third time.

But, really, at this point, everything's pretty much decimated. I mean, everything is just left in ruins. The temple is gone. The majority of the people at this point have been carried off into exile in Babylon.

And then, about 47 years later, in 538, no, 539, Persia comes in and conquers Babylon. And as Persia takes over, King Cyrus, king of the Persians, issues a decree that allows those people that had been brought in because they had been conquered by the Babylonians to return to their homelands if they chose to do so.

And so, we see then, in 538, almost 50,000 Jews. It's a little less than 50,000, but that's an easy number. About 50,000 Jews decide to leave Babylon and leave the lives they've developed.

[9 : 23] They're returning home to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. By 536, the Jews that have returned have successfully cleared away the rubble of the old temple and laid the new foundation for this new temple.

But then, as you'll see when we get to Ezra, some opposition kind of rises up from the surrounding areas. Some of the people that are living around Jerusalem begin to put some pressure on them to stop building.

And then, the new king of Persia kind of gets involved, and there's governmental pressure to stop building. And the Jews stop, and for about 16 years, the foundation just lays there, bare. And the Jews go about their lives. And it's at that point, about 520, that Haggai begins his prophecy. And I think a good summary for all of this is given by James Montgomery Boyce, where he talks about the fact that Haggai is about the right people, this remnant of Jews, in the right place. They've returned to Jerusalem, doing the right work. They're there to rebuild the temple specifically and help restore Jerusalem with the right heart.

[10:43] And I think that's important for us to keep in mind that these Jews have left an established life in probably the leading civilization of the time.

I mean, they were leaving a life of affluence, comfort, ease, to return to Jerusalem, which is completely devastated. I mean, there's, it's really, there's, well, we'll talk some more about it momentarily, but things are bad.

And so, the right people, in the right place, doing the right work with the right heart. And that's where we start with the book of Haggai. If you are using one of the Bibles that's in the seat back in front of you, you can turn to Haggai.

It's on page 791. 791. And like I said, it's two chapters, so if you turn too quick, you'll definitely miss it. But if you want to, you can turn there and read with me.

We're going to begin in chapter 1 and read verses 1 through 4. And the first thing we're going to see in this message from Haggai is the conscience of the people revealed as their excuses are exposed.

[11:48] Okay? Let's read. It says, 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 Sheltiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. 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 remember what we just talked about. You know, the right people, right place, right work, right heart. You know, these people have sacrificed greatly to come back to Jerusalem. And they've done this work of laying the foundation. And then as opposition arose, they let it go.

And for 16 years, they're walking by the foundation bare day after day. Day after day, they're reminded that they're not doing what they had been called to do.

[12:54] And I don't know about you. Well, I do really. But I'll say I don't know about you. But if you're like me, when you're not doing something you're supposed to, it doesn't take long before you kind of start to justify that.

You know, you can't just go, I'm not doing the right thing. You come up with some excuses. And that's what we see here. And that's what we see exposed here when they say, the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.

You know, their conscience was working on them. And they had to give a reason for why they weren't doing what they were called to do. But let's just be honest for a second. They have some pretty legitimate reasons, right?

I mean, there's some pretty legitimate concerns here. I mean, first and foremost, there was this opposition from the people surrounding them and from the government that was trying to persuade them to stop building.

And that was serious. But on top of that, you know, they've come back to this area where everything's devastated. There's not a Home Depot. I mean, they can't just run to Home Depot to pick up a few things to build the temple, right?

[13:57] And on top of that, they have all their personal needs. They all need houses to live in. I mean, that's a reasonable need. And they have to have food, which, again, the area is devastated.

So that involves clearing land that's been overgrown for at least a generation and then begin to plant and harvest and create some kind of source of food for them.

Then commerce has to be restored. They have to find some shops, get some shops set up and try to get the economy moving again. I mean, there's lots of challenges that are very real here.

And honestly, I mean, if it was me, I could easily see myself going, you know, if God was in this, it wouldn't be so hard. Okay? So they're making excuses, but they're pretty valid excuses.

But I think the thing we see here is that even great excuses don't release us from the call of God on our life. Right? Right? Even great excuses don't release us from the call of God on our life.

[14:58] And we see that as God speaks. Isn't it? Isn't this interesting? He says he doesn't address all of their underlying concerns. Right? He doesn't talk about all of the challenges. He really just asks a simple question.

Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in paneled houses while this house lies in ruins? Now, I really don't know if it's like this with you, but often the Holy Spirit deals with me that very same way. He doesn't really deal with all of the minutia of my excuses. He just asks a simple question that makes me go, yeah. The reality is I'll find some way to do whatever's important or whatever I really want to do.

I'm really just making an excuse. And we see God do that very same thing here. And so as I'm reading through this passage and beginning to reflect on it personally, the question that I'm asking is this question.

What excuses am I making to avoid God's call? What excuses am I making to avoid God's call? And just take a minute and consider that for yourselves.

[16:10] You know, for me, some of the things that came to mind were, I know I should spend some more time in prayer, but, you know, I'm just so busy. Of course, you know, the Holy Spirit then says, well, you have time to watch that show or you have time to go to the gym or you have time to read a book or, you know, there's always something you have time for, but it's just not prayer, right?

Or I know I should get up earlier to have more quiet time, but I'm just so tired. But if we have to get up for work or go play golf or to do something enjoyable, it's no problem to get up early, right?

What about I know I should volunteer to help with this or that or the other, but I'm just too busy. I know that I should help this person or I should love this person. I should try and take care of this person, but they really just drive me crazy, yeah?

I know that I should give more of my time or more of my money or more of my effort, but excuse after excuse after excuse. So take time to just consider what excuses are you making to avoid God's call in your life.

The second thing that we see here in Haggai is the command, the command to consider your ways. Verses 5 and 6, verses 5 and 6 says, Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways.

[17:26] You have sown much and harvested little. Sorry, lost my notes here. It's going to be a little quiet for a moment.

Just be patient. It'll come back. I hope. Or we'll have a lot of time for singing. I have to start over now.

Okay. Going back to the beginning. You guys must not have paid attention. 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. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

I can honestly tell you that these two verses have troubled me as much in my spiritual life as probably anything in Scripture. I guess I'm slow because the Holy Spirit continues to bring me back here time and time again.

[18:28] Think about how harsh, how sad these words are. You know, it talks about the fact that they've sown much. And again, remember what that means.

They've come back to this desolate place with this overgrown land that's set for a generation or longer. And so they've had to clear all of that. And they've had to plow it. And they've had to till it. They've had to plant the seeds. And all of that's without tractors and stuff. I mean, I can't even imagine. I can't imagine doing it with a tractor, but let alone without a tractor. So they've sown much.

They've done all this work. But there's just no reward. The harvest has been small. They says, you eat, but you never have enough. Even what they've gained, whatever crops they've gotten, whatever they've gotten from their labor isn't satisfying to them.

There's no satisfaction from their labor as well. Then it talks about, you drink, but you never have your fill. And if we are going to translate that a little more accurately, what it really says is, you drink, but you can't even get tipsy.

[19 : 33] Can't even get drunk. So even as they're seeking to find some comfort for the harshness of their life in alcohol, there's no satisfaction in that. There's no comfort in that.

It talks about you have clothed. You clothe yourself, but no one's warm. I mean, all of the effort that they have, and whether it's the clothes they brought with them from Babylon, or whether, again, it was in making new clothes, as much as they worked on that, as much as they would put on, it still didn't comfort them.

There was no warmth. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. I mean, talk about inflation. You work all day, you get your money, and by the end of the day, it's worth less than it was when you started that day.

I mean, they're working, and they're doing all they can, but they're not making any headway. And so the area of reflection that this leads me to, that I've asked myself many times, is, what areas of my life fit this description?

And I'd ask you to just consider that. What areas in your life fit this description? Is it in your job? Is it that you're working as hard as you can, but you don't seem to be making any progress?

[20 : 42] Maybe it's in your finances. You know, you're trying to save. You're trying to get ready for retirement. You're trying to save up for something, but you just don't seem to be making any headway in it. Maybe it's in your relationships.

Maybe with your spouse. You're trying to help restore things with your spouse. Or maybe you're seeking a spouse. You're not having any progress in that area. Maybe it's with your parents or with your children, other family members or friends.

But in your relationships, as much as you try to do, there doesn't seem to be any benefit from it.

Maybe it's in your health. You know, this is one of the things that you guys have heard me say this year.

Just has really been a struggle for me in eating and exercise and trying to do better about my health. And as hard as you try, you're not making any progress. Or maybe some of you young people, it's in your education.

You're trying to study. I hope you're trying to study. You should try to study. But you're not making any progress. You can't seem to get it. Your schooling doesn't seem to be successful. Or maybe it's in ministry.

[21 : 41] Maybe it's in trying to do something here at the church. Or something in your own spiritual life or your own spiritual growth. What areas of your life do you feel like you're trying and trying and trying and working and working and working, but all to no avail?

It's worth considering. Now, let me just give you a disclaimer, okay? I'm not saying that just because there's some obstacles in your life, that that definitely means you're not making God a priority in some area.

But what I am saying is, if you have this sense that you're trying and doing all you can, but you're not making any progress, it's worth taking the time to get alone with God and ask Him by His Holy Spirit to show you if there might be an area in your life where you are not making God a priority. So that's the second thing. The third thing we see here is the call. The call to put God's pleasure first. To put God's pleasure first.

In Haggai chapter 1, verses 7 and 8, it says, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it, and that I may be glorified, says the Lord.

[23 : 01] Now, I think it's worth noting here, God doesn't leave them guessing. Right? He doesn't leave them guessing what they should do to help restore things. He's pretty clear with them about what they need to do next.

But I think it's important for us to take a moment and just realize this isn't about God needing a temple. Okay?

This isn't about God needing a temple. God's not like pouting and going, Oh man, you guys are spending all your time working on your house. Why don't you build me a house too? It's not like that.

Okay? God's delight here is not in the building. It's about His people. God delights in His people pursuing Him. And God's concerned because here the Jews are.

They've just come back from exile. Remember? And already, we're only 16 years into them being back. And their hearts are already starting to slip. They're already starting to set aside God as their

priority.

[24 : 00] They're already starting to set aside God's calling in their life and let it go. And God's calling them back and saying, Don't you realize you're starting to forget me already? You see, God's concern here is not the building.

It's the people. Here's a couple of psalms which, Well, the first one is Psalm 149, verses 1 through 4. And interestingly enough, in some of the Greek copies of the Bible, this psalm is attributed to Haggai as the writer.

The evidence is a little up in the air, but it is interesting for the point of the sermon today. But it says this, Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song.

His praise in the assembly of the godly. Let Israel be glad in His maker. Let the children of Zion rejoice in their king. Let them praise His name with dancing, making melody to Him with tambourine and lyre.

For the Lord takes pleasure in His people. He adorns the humble with salvation. You see, the Lord takes pleasure in His people.

[25 : 09] Look at Psalm 147, verse 11, which also is sometimes attributed to Haggai. It says, But the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.

See, God's call to them here in putting His pleasure first isn't about this building. It's not that He needs a temple. God doesn't need a temple.

God's bigger than every temple, right? Anyway, the point here is that He is calling them back to Himself. God delights in His people delighting in Him.

And so, one of the things that is the reflection for me at this point is, what could I change today to give God greater pleasure? What could I change today to give God greater pleasure?

And this is a question I would encourage you to take time to consider, to think about. I mean, every day, I would encourage you to stop and ask yourself, what could I do today to bring God greater pleasure?

[26 : 10] Imagine how that would change your life. But especially as we go into this new year, asking yourself this, if you could just make one change, what could you change to bring God greater pleasure?

Maybe it would be giving Him more time, time in prayer, or time in His Word. Maybe it would be time that you spend in meditation of His Word, or time that you spend sharing the Gospel with others.

Maybe it's time ministering and caring to others, building up the body of Christ. What are some things that you could do to help increase God's pleasure, to give Him pleasure?

Maybe it would be regrouping in your own life, and trying to tackle an area of sin again, that you've been overlooking, or an area that you felt like you haven't been able to find some success, and you've kind of gotten discouraged and given up in.

Maybe regrouping and trying to deal with that area of your own sin, and to give God pleasure.

Maybe it's about giving God something more out of your life, whether you're giving more sacrificially of your time to something, or giving sacrificially of your money, giving sacrificially of your skills, in some way that you're doing it just to bring pleasure to Him.

[27 : 23] So what could you change? What one thing could you change to bring God greater pleasure? The fourth thing we see here is the consequence.

The consequence of being self-centered. The consequence of being self-centered. In verses 9 through 11, it says, You looked for much, and behold, it came to little, and when you brought it home, I blew it away.

Why? 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, and I have called for a drought on the land and on the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.

We see here God reminding them of the consequences of living a self-centered life. And you need to understand, it probably doesn't strike you, hopefully, the way that it would have struck the Israelites when they hear these things.

But these things are not just a random list. You know, God's not just randomly going, Hey, how can I get them? You know, I'll bring a drought on them. Ha, that'll teach them. It's not like that. Okay? God is very specifically addressing things here that they should recognize.

[28 : 51] We could go back in Deuteronomy chapter 28 and read about the curses that from the very beginning, God said to the Israelites as they came into the promised land, If you turn away from me, this will be what happens.

If you turn away from me, this is how you'll know your heart has moved, because these are the things I will do. And so even here, where the prophet Haggai is speaking these very things, the Jewish mind should go, those are the curses.

We're suffering God's loving discipline. And that's really the point here. God reminds them, if they're going to continue living self-centered lives, that he will be faithful to what he's promised, and he will lovingly discipline them to bring them to the point of repentance.

And so, the point of reflection, are there areas in my life where I'm experiencing God's loving discipline? Are there areas in my life where I'm experiencing God's loving discipline?

And this kind of goes back to the list from verses 5 and 6, where we talked about things that you might be facing where you're working as hard as you can, but you're not making any progress.

[30 : 09] Those might be some areas that would help you see that, but I would encourage you to take time to think about this. Are there areas in your life where you're experiencing God's loving discipline?

You see, God is faithful. If you're his child, he will not let you just do whatever you want and ruin your life and go, hey, you know, it's up to them. Okay? That's not what we see in Scripture at all. What we see is, God's commitment to us as our Heavenly Father is that as we are seeking to turn away from him, to forget him, to run from him, to rebel and disobey and do the things that ultimately will destroy us, he lovingly disciplines us and chastises us and brings things into our life that will break us and remind us of our need, our need for him.

So, time to reflect on that. Something else. I'm having a difficult time with technology today.

And the funny thing is, I really already knew that that was going to happen. I felt like the Holy Spirit told me that, but I thought, Lord, what do you want me to do about it? I don't have another plan.

[31 : 19] I guess I could have printed it or something. Maybe that was a point. I don't know. Is this God's loving discipline? So, we get to the next section, the application.

The application. So, the message that Haggai has brought to them, we now see how it applies or how it's worked out in their lives. We look at the first thing here in verse 12, where it says, consider your ways.

Consider your ways. Haggai 1.12 says, Then Zerubbabel, the son of Sheltiel, and Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God.

And the words of Haggai, the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people feared the Lord. Now, if we actually, if you skip down to verse 15, actually, and look at it, it gives you a date, and it might not mean anything to you unless you took time to do the math.

But it's interesting to me here that what we see is, it talks about the people obeying. But in verse 15, what we see is, it's 23 days later that they actually begin work on the temple.

[32 : 40] And so, here we see it talk about their obedience, and yet they haven't started obeying. But I don't think that's accidental. I don't think that's a mistype. I think what we really see here is that the people are being obedient to God's command for them to consider their ways.

God's called them to consider their ways, to think about what's going on in their lives, and the people obey that. They take time, and they stop and go, hey, that Haggai guy is right. Look at our lives.

What are we doing? We are experiencing God's loving discipline. And as they begin to look at that and see the truth of God's word, they're convicted. And that's why it says, the people feared the Lord.

They saw their own sin. They saw what was happening, and their hearts are convicted, and they repent. They begin to turn away from that way of living and begin to turn their hearts back towards pursuing God.

And I think it's very interesting for us to take time and consider this same point. Am I willing to make the necessary changes in my life? As we see God working, as we see the truth of his word, as we hear his word applied in our lives, as the Holy Spirit is working in us, are we willing to see that, to accept it humbly, and to repent, to turn away from those things, the areas where we're not making God a priority, and pursue him?

[34 : 11] Are we willing to change whatever needs to change? And that's a question, ultimately, that we all have to ask. I mean, you know, you come week after week. I come week after week.

I get paid to do that. You guys don't. But we still come, and we hear God's word preached, right? Week after week after week. But it doesn't do any good if we don't ask this question. Am I willing to change whatever needs to change for the glory of God?

That's what it always comes down to. Am I willing to change? The next thing we see here, the application of this truth, is the comfort of grace.

The comfort of grace. This is my favorite part, just in case you wondered. You could pay more attention now. Verse 13 says, Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message.

I am with you, declares the Lord. Okay, now just take a second and remember what's been happening, right? These people came back. They started strong.

[35 : 14] And then for 16 years, they've been turning away from God. They've been pursuing a more self-centered life. They haven't been pursuing God's calling in their life. And for 16 years, they've gotten further and further from God.

He's been disciplining them more and more. It's been getting more and more severe in their lives. And suddenly, here they're presented with the truth. They see it.

They repent. And what does God say? I'm with you. You guys aren't excited enough. I mean, isn't that the gospel?

You see, they don't understand the fact that they're being forgiven even though there's no temple. There's no sacrifices. They haven't even started rebuilding the temple. They've just repented.

And immediately, God grants them forgiveness and intimacy of relationship where he says, I am with you. But you see, we know there's more to that story, don't we?

[36 : 13] Don't you? You see, it's because of Jesus, right? They didn't know yet. But we know their forgiveness is because of Jesus, the Son of God, willing to come to live a perfect life, to die and take God's wrath for them, that as soon as their hearts turn back, God says, I'm with you.

You're forgiven. That's the good news. And that's good news for you. That's good news for me. That's the good news. That's what we have to offer the world, right?

That no matter how far we've moved, whether it's been 16 years or it's been 60 years or it's been a lifetime that you've been turning away from God, that as soon as you turn back, God says, I am with you because of Jesus.

And so you can see the point of reflection here. Am I willing to believe in faith that Jesus' death provides forgiveness? Am I willing to believe in faith that Jesus' death provides forgiveness? forgiveness? And when you really come face to face with your sin like these people had, that's the best news you can ever get that Jesus made a way.

[37 : 34] The next thing we see is the gift of obedience in verse 14. Just when you thought it couldn't get better, the gift of obedience. Haggai 1.14 says, And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Sheltiel, 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, and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.

So God comes to them through the prophet Haggai, presents them with the truth, brings them to the point of conviction. They realize the truth. They repent. They turn back.

And God says, I forgive you. I am with you. And then he says, okay, go do your work. No, it's not what's happened, right? It says right here that the spirit of the Lord then comes and stirs them up to obey.

Even obedience is a gift. Even obedience is a gift. Isn't that great news? Aren't you encouraged? Aren't you blessed? The point of reflection for this is, am I willing to keep running to Jesus and allow him to stir up obedience in my life?

[38 : 53] Am I willing to keep running to Jesus and allow him to stir up obedience in my life?

Brothers and sisters, if you think that you're going to obey and walk with God in your own power, I have really bad news for you.

You are not going to be successful. I don't know if it's the best or worst case scenario, but you might end up a legalist. And you can decide, is that best or worst case scenario?

But you won't walk in intimacy with him because even obedience is a gift. You have to run to Jesus and let him stir up obedience in your life.

And so here's the summary that you already had a preview of. The application summary. One, consider your ways. Are you willing to see the truth of God's word? Two, repent. Are you willing to change whatever needs to change? Three, accept grace. Are you willing to believe in faith that God is with you because of Jesus?

[39 : 55] Four, pursue obedience. Come again and again and again to God and let him stir up obedience in your life. Give you the strength and the desire to obey him.

Now this is probably where I should have stopped the sermon. But I just couldn't not tell you the rest of the story. So this is why we're not singing that extra song, okay?

The epilogue. Okay, this is just, you know, I've told you guys before I do get caught on rabbit trails. This one's better than Elvis impersonators, okay? This is really, this is just amazing.

Okay, let's look at Haggai chapter 2 verses 1 through 9. And I just, I just have to show you something. You probably won't be as excited as me but maybe you will. Okay?

Haggai chapter 2 verses 1 through 9. It says, And when we go through Ezra, you'll get to see some more of that.

[41 : 15] But just let me stop for a second here and point out something. You know, when we get caught up in focusing on the results of our obedience or the product of our following after God, it usually ends badly.

Okay? And if you get caught up in comparing, which is, you know, what he's talking about here, comparing the temple they were working on to Solomon's temple, it usually ends poorly as well, which is one of the reasons why I hate social media because that, we're a little early on that but anyway, so social media tends to get you to the point of all you do is compare all the time, right? So don't do that. Look at verses 4 through 9. It says, Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehoshadak, the high priest.

Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came up out of Egypt.

My spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. Verse 6, For thus says the Lord of hosts, Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.

[42 : 33] The silver is mine, the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.

In case you wondered, he says the Lord of hosts six times in those verses. Here's the thing I want to show you. From this. It's not about the product.

It's about the person. Okay? Our obedience isn't about what we can produce. It's about being with Jesus.

Right? Isn't that what he says? He says, I am with you. My spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. And so often we look at our lives and we think, you know, what I'm doing for God isn't enough.

My efforts, just they don't really turn out or it's not very impressive or I'm not really doing anything that great for God. I'm just, you know, here living this little life. If I was, you know, a missionary in China that would be something impressive.

[43 : 33] But here, just living my life for Christ is just unimpressive. It's not big. But what we see here is a promise from God that if you will just be content to be with him, he will do big things.

Now, I know, you don't get it yet, but you see the picture, right? You see the picture? Let me give you a little more history. A little more history on the very temple they were building.

The very temple that they were building, which is called Zerubbabel's Temple historically, it really was insignificant. They're right. I mean, when they looked at it and they thought, this is a terrible little temple, they must be right because we really don't know anything about it.

But what we do know is 500 years later, that little temple, Herod the Great comes in and begins to restore that little temple and expand it.

And now, you can look at that picture and see that is Herod's temple and how it dwarfs inside. You can go to the next slide. Check this out. Look at the size comparison.

[44 : 44] They were looking back at Solomon's temple and thinking how great that is. But God is saying to them, you just walk with me and I will do great things. 500 years later, he moves on Herod's heart to rebuild the temple.

Look how much bigger it is. And that center section right there, that's the temple part. This is the temple mound, the complex that ends up being all of the temple.

500 years later, God keeps his promise. And takes that little temple that they built in obedience and makes it something amazing. But that's not the best part.

The best part was verse 9. Did you see what it says in verse 9? And in this place, I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.

Do you get it? In this place, I will give peace. We just finished Christmas, so hopefully at this point you realize that this is the very temple where Jesus is presented.

[45 : 53] And God keeps his promise again. In this very place, I will give peace. That little temple that they thought was good for nothing was the foundation that God was laying for where his son would come and where he would be presented, where Simeon and Anna would say the salvation of Israel has come.

Isn't that awesome? 500 years later, they couldn't know, but of course, God knew and had a plan all along. So let me just encourage you in one last thing, and it's this.

As you come into the new year, take some time and consider how your life might need to change to bring greater pleasure to God. Pursue being with him and trust that if you will be content to be with him, he will build a great and glorious trophy of grace out of that effort.

Let's pray. Amen.