

Seek first the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] the Lord of hosts. These people say the time has not 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 therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. You have sown much and harvested little. You eat but you never have enough. You drink but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring word and build the house that I may take pleasure in it and that

I may be glorified, says the Lord. 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 the hills on the grain. The new wine, the oil and on the ground brings forth on man and beast and on all their labors. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shittai 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.

Then Haggai the messenger of the Lord spoke to the people with the Lord's message. I am with you declares the Lord and the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shittai a governor of Judah and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak the remnant of the people. And then they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts their God and on the 24th day of the month in the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king. Well may God bless his word for us all this evening. Let's stand.

So King Darius has sent God's people back to Jerusalem to build a temple only to realize as everyone else does here that when they get there they do anything but rebuild the temple. And a modern day equivalent of that would be your next door neighbor who's not a Christian but knows that Jesus has said that you're to love your neighbor and your next door neighbor knows whether or not you do. That's the kind of tension and setting that we have here in Haggai chapter one. So here's a summary I'll break it down for you the first chapter. Verses one to four Haggai's proclaiming the message from the Lord God.

He's speaking to God's people on God's behalf. Then he tells the people to pay attention. Have a look at what you're doing. You're sowing much but you're harvesting little. In other words work out what's going on. Verses five to eight. You're working really really hard but you're getting nowhere.

[3 : 57] Psalm 127. That unless the Lord is in the work the laborers labor in vain. And then he explains the reason why this is the case. That God because you have not put him first has frustrated your plans. Verses nine through to eleven. And when the people realize the connection between working hard in a small harvest and not putting the Lord first it's at that point and only at that point do they obey God and return and fear him. And then at that point it says in verses 13 through to 15 that God stirred them in their spirit to do the work.

So we have the challenge. We have take notice of what's going on around you. We then have the explanation. We then have the people realizing that there is a connection between small harvests and not putting the Lord first. And then we have them returning and the Lord stirring their hearts.

So let's deal with the first one first. Focus. You know is it right to put God first? Yeah no one's going to argue with that. Is it difficult to put God first? Extremely difficult. You know I think one of the challenges of the Lord's day is the fact that it is a specific day. I'll give you an explanation.

You know growing up my mum would ask me to do several different things. They were always much easier when I could do them when I wanted to do them. They were always much harder when she said you have to do them now.

See the issue that I had was never doing the work. But actually when did I do it? Did I want to do it now or did I want to do it later? And then you begin to realize and I didn't realize this until I was much older until I was in the past read. Of just how deep sin is in your own heart.

[6 : 02] I look back on my life as a teenage boy not listening to my mum. And beginning to realize that you know when my mum went out the door or something she says can you get this can you get this done in that and she comes home and it's not done.

And then she goes out the door another day and she doesn't say anything. And I go ahead and sort of do as best I can to tidy the room and it comes back and oh it looks great.

But there's no well done for tidying your room. I used to think that was incredibly unfair until she pointed out to me well that's the way it's meant to be anyway.

You know that's the way it's meant to be anyway. You know sometimes we live a Christian life and we you know we obey more we pray more and we think okay God let's have the blessing.

And God basically says that's the way that it's meant to be anyway. You know that's the way it's meant to be anyway. You know and God's people forever lose this kind of focus.

[7 : 18] That we think if we're praying more somehow you're meant to be doing it anyway. That if we put God first yeah but you're meant to be doing it anyway.

And that's the real challenge because it's a challenge that we keep coming back to over and over again. You know too often you know the Lord's Day is a challenge not because we find it hard to come and sing and pray and worship but simply because it can get in the way of something else that we might want to do on that day.

That's the real rub. And the reason God sets a time and a place is for that very reason. Because it takes the time and the place to reveal in our own heart where our priorities stand.

As Haggai is saying nothing different. There has to be something happening in the land in order to draw out where people's priorities are.

And so here's the challenge that he brings. That the people are taking care of themselves. They've moved back to Jerusalem. And not only do they build houses but they build very very nice houses.

[8 : 35] They take a great deal of time and care over their houses. The emphasis here is on the panelled houses. In other words you've not just built a shelter which is all that you really need.

But you've actually, you know, you've gone in and got the decorators in. You've gone to town and making sure that you have the best of everything in your house.

But you've done it at a time when God remains homeless. That's the challenge. You said it's not time to build the temple.

Right, okay. But is it time for you to live in luxury while God remains homeless? That's the challenge that comes to God's people from Haggai.

And you've got to remember that the issue here is not rebuilding the temple. It may look like it. Rebuilding the temple or rather it not being rebuilt is the consequence of the issue.

[9 : 35] The issue is the people don't want to do it. You know, we must distinguish between what is the issue and what is the consequence of the issue. The consequence of the issue is that the temple hasn't been rebuilt.

The issue is because they have been concentrating on their own priorities first, over and above what they should be.

The emphasis here is on paneled houses. In other words, their appetite for making sure that they live in luxury is greater than making sure that God has a presence on earth.

That's a deep challenge to us all. They don't think that it's time to rebuild and so Haggai's challenge is, well, is it time for you to build your own house?

That's the challenge. Which comes first? You know, God doesn't want any of his people to live without shelter. You know, they can both happen at the same time. The issue here is that it's not that, you know, they've got houses and God hasn't, but the fact that they've got shelter, but now they've turned it into luxury homes while God remains completely homeless.

[10 : 45] No presence on earth. And here's the issue. That a temple lying in ruins is really a relationship lying in ruins. That's the issue that you have here.

Do you know, I think one of the great sins of today is that houses are no longer considered a shelter. I think it's a terrible sin because of what follows from it.

That houses have gone from being considered shelter to being considered assets. And even in some cases, assets to be accumulated. You know, where some people have two houses, three houses, maybe even four houses.

And do you know what Jesus says? If you have two of anything, one of them belongs to you. The other belongs to the poor. One of them belongs to you.

The other belongs to the poor. Seek ye first the kingdom. It's challenging, isn't it? We don't even have to scratch the surface. It's only a cursory look.

[11 : 55] Paneled houses. It's where a house has gone from being a shelter to an asset. That's the challenge here. It's very modern.

Very up-to-date challenge for the world that we live in. And is it any wonder why the country and the world at large is suffering such economic difficulties where people are sowing much but harvesting little right across the board?

And we think it has nothing to do with God. It has everything to do with God. It has everything to do with what Jesus says. And the thing is that these people don't take any notice.

Paneled houses is the way for me. Well, Haggai says, that's the problem. That's the problem. You know, Haggai demonstrates a truth that we see today.

Someone said to me the other day, do you know what? They weren't saying it about me, or they could have been, but I hope not. You can't hide money. Do you know what? You can't. It turns up in where you live.

[13 : 00] It turns up in what you wear, the cars that you drive. You can't hide money. Haggai got there first. And he said, do you know what? You can't hide your spiritual condition. It turns up in what you do and where you go and what you don't do.

You can't hide it. The fact that the temple lies in ruins is an indication of the spiritual condition of God's people, of where they're at with God.

Remember, this is not an issue about working hard. They're working very hard. They're sowing much. Rather, this is an issue of they're working hard to their own ends.

They're forgetting about the future kingdom. They're forgetting about God's presence with them on earth. And they're forgetting that essentially salvation is a relationship.

As I said this morning, what is the gospel? What is the proclamation of the gospel? We're not proclaiming a message. We're proclaiming a person. Salvation is not believing a set of certain facts.

[14 : 02] Rather, it's belonging to a God who saved us. It's no different here. So secondly, take notice, Haggai says.

Take notice. Verse five, you work really, really hard. You have done everything that you have can. You have sown much, but you have harvested little.

You eat, but you don't have enough. You have clothing, but you're never that warm. And you have wages, but your wages just seem to disappear.

So he says, verse seven, consider it. Consider all of it. Consider all your ways. In other words, wake up and make a connection between the circumstances that you're living with and the priorities that you have.

And too often, we don't do that. Too often, Christians take on almost an atheistic view that if something isn't working out in their life, it's bad luck.

[15 : 07] Maybe. If you believed in such a thing as luck. Well, I doubt it very much. Do we not believe that God holds all things together? That he sustains all things? That he directs all things?

And so, you know, we have to take into measure that God here does not make the harvest profitable. And why doesn't he do it?

Well, because the people's priority is themselves. So he says to them, collect wood, build the temple that God may be glorified.

In other words, put me first. Put me first. So the people fail to make this connection. And the connection is this, the third point, the reason.

that there is a connection between the people sowing really, really hard and a little harvest. And the connection is not that they haven't sown properly, but rather that God has not blessed the harvest.

[16 : 09] You know, how often do we take something that really is in the hands of God and think that we can mechanically just do it without God? Well, if I sow, I'm going to get a harvest.

As long as I sow it, I'm going to get a harvest in return. Haggai's saying, not necessarily. Because whatever you deal with in life, you're always dealing with God. And that's a real challenge.

That means that God is involved in everything that we do. And the people here haven't made the connection. They haven't put the work of the Lord first, but they do work really, really hard.

but it's because they haven't put the work of the Lord first that they end up with poor harvests. One of the things that we need to realize as Christians is that God is a promise-keeping God.

And what that means is that that's really good when it comes to salvation. It's wonderful when it comes to eternal security. but there's a whole load of other promises that God has made.

[17 : 13] Such as to the people here that if you obey my voice and you follow my ways there will be countless blessings. However, if you decide for any reason that you have not to listen to my voice and not to obey my ways, according to Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, if you fail to keep the covenant, that agreement, that promise, then you will have poor harvests.

You will have lack of clothing, a lack of food, a lack of economic stability. In other words, God is trying to teach his people that there is an absolute correlation between how they treat God and the type of material possessions that they can have and expect to live in.

Jesus says exactly the same in the Sermon of the Mount. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and then all these things will be added unto you. What does that mean? Well, think about it for a moment.

It means that if you don't seek first the kingdom of God, they don't get added unto you. And that's not a health, wealth, and prosperity message. That's simply taking Jesus at his word.

In other words, the challenge is this. Just put God first. put Jesus first. All the time. Difficult? Yeah, it's really difficult.

[18 : 40] But it comes with blessing. It comes with the promise. And so wherever there is a covenant and you break the covenant, you have what's called biblically an anti-covenant.

And that's dysfunction. Dysfunction in the family, dysfunction therefore in society, and dysfunction between countries. Just dysfunction after dysfunction.

And remember, as we said this morning, there are only, there is only one division in the world between two people. Adam and Christ. So, finally, the people, fourthly, make the connection.

They finally see that there is a connection between their circumstances and their misplaced priorities. They turn and obey the Lord. They fear him. They begin to listen to God and they begin to listen to the messenger of God, Haggai.

And God's after one thing. In other words, he wants the relationship that you have with him to be renewed, to be good.

[19 : 48] See, God understands and so should the people that as long as this temple lies in ruins, so does their relationship. God's not trying to build the temple just for his own glory in the sense that this is all for me and nothing for you.

No, God, at his very heart, has the people in mind to restore a right relationship with them so that they may have his favorable presence.

But as long as the temple lies in ruins, so does their relationship with him lie in ruins? The lesson, I think, is fairly simple.

God is saying to us, your choices as a believer really matter. I mean, they really matter a lot. Every choice you make really makes a difference to your relationship with God.

Consider that. I'm not sure what that means for you this evening as you listen, but consider what that means. That your choices matter. That they have an impact on things that you think, it can't be because of that.

[21 : 00] No, what if it is? What if it is? So our faithfulness matters. Our choices of putting God first matters.

So the people turn around, they begin to obey God, and then God stirs them up in their spirit, and they get to work on the house of the Lord. God begins to get back to the place where he's no longer homeless.

God enables his people to work. He has, through their reordered priorities, able to use them to do his work on earth and looking forward to a future kingdom.

So remember, this isn't about service. Rather, this is about their relationship with God, putting him first. Here's the exhortation, and I began with this.

It's an Old Testament book. So the temptation is that now we live under grace, God doesn't deal with us like this anymore. I think that's quite a dangerous approach to take, because you have to come up with a good reason for why God doesn't work in the same way that he has always worked in.

[22 : 15] You know, the book of Corinthians tells us to look back on the Old Testament because of what it can teach us. It's there for our learning. The question is this, does God treat the church in the same way as he treats his people here?

In other words, let's put it right down to the ground. If the church, any church, really put God first, would the church see more blessing?

I'll quote Richard Lovelace again as I did last week. If believers really lived by faith, would we see the blessings that come with faith?

I think the answer to both those questions is yes, but too often we don't see it because they don't happen. You know, and that's not an accusation, it's just a challenge to us all.

And no one here is exempt from this kind of challenge. And none of us is better than anybody else. You know, as a church, this affects us all. And just to cement it in your mind that God does treat the church in the same way as he treats his people here, go read Revelation.

[23 : 34] And go read the letters to the churches of how Jesus is knocking on the door, expecting them to change. and then he blesses. Read Revelation chapter 3 in particular in the church at Sardis, who is in such a spiritual decline, they're almost on a tipping point of never returning.

And Jesus is there saying, wake up and return to me. So yeah, this same kind of connection happens even within the church today.

I think one of the reasons why we don't come to that conclusion too often is the same reason why God's people here didn't come to that conclusion too often.

And that is very simply this. They forgot the covenant. They forgot what God had said, not rocket science. You know, why do people get away with building temples and saying, this is your God?

Because, you know, people forget. It happened to God's people time and time again. Biblically, we call it a memory hole. That wherever you have a memory hole, almost anything can fill it.

[24 : 50] And God's people fail to recognize how God deals with them because they fail to remember the promises and the covenants that God made. You know, I think the church is almost living beyond the Bible.

that instead of the Bible, God's word being the very guide that it's meant to be for Christian living and the very guide that it's meant to be for structuring the church so that it can bring blessing and fruitfulness and prosperity and lead us into the future that God has promised.

I think too often we live a Christian life and only occasionally make reference to scripture. scripture. I think that's a challenge to us all.

I think that's why we go wrong. The church in the world, not just us, generally, why we go wrong. So remember this. Seek first the kingdom.

Challenging every day, in every area of our life, yeah, really challenging. But it is the thing that God calls us to do. And he calls us to do it with a blessing that follows it.

[25 : 59] Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. And remember this. You can't hide money.

You can't hide your spiritual condition. It'll show up in what you do, how often you pray, whether or not you read his word, whether or not you truly worship, whether or not you carry one another's burdens, shows up everywhere.

You can't hide it. And that's the challenge, that the Christian life, for better or for worse, is lived out in the open. We all live that in the open.

You know, someone said to me, you know, the way that you chase after your son in the morning, you need to realize that your life is constantly on show. People are going to judge everything that you do, whether you pick him up, take him out, and what you say to him.

Well, okay, that's fine. But that's not the point. The point here is this, that we all recognize, don't we, that the Christian life is a visible life.

[27 : 08] And a restored relationship with God is what good witness is. The people of Haggai's day, their witness is poor. God's homeless, and they do their own thing.

Their witness is, God's spoken. We're just doing whatever we want. You know, the church can't afford to make the same mistake as the people of old did. You know, we really do need to put God first.

I'm not saying you don't. It's just a reminder so that we don't have a memory whole of our own that we fall into. So may God bless you and keep you to seek him first and follow his ways.

Amen. Amen. Okay, we'll stand.

here we go. Alright, maybe a ■■■■■rine come , there we go. I said, you'll be here, I said, that come in as it Operation the table and sold him, that I said, ole the man in service with Shaw andielen Thank you.

[29 : 14] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 44] Thank you.