

Consider Your Ways Haggai 1:1-2:23

After this week, we only have two more MP to go...

- Zechariah is one of the hardest, and so I'm giving it to someone else: Professor Branch will expound it! He will tell us about the Righteous Branch!
 - It's got a lot of apocalyptic imagery, and thus challenging, but glorious.
- Today is Haggai. I have a friend who did a series entitled: "Haggai and the One Hit Wonders" (Haggai got the lead role in the band because of 2 chapters) [pray]

This is an important date in the life of IDC. We turn 8 years old today.
... So today we're celebrating by studying... Haggai!

Haggai is a book with several significant dates listed.

Haggai's recorded sermons fall on three particular dates, all in 520BC.

In modern dating, these dates are August 29, Oct 17, and the last two December 18.

God used Haggai in these four months in a remarkable way.

It reminds us this principle: Sometimes God takes an individual whose ministry would not be called extraordinary, but then mysteriously and suddenly and gloriously, makes this individual's ministry extraordinary – for a special time and for a special work.

The story has been told of a particular preacher in the land of Wales named David Morgan. His preaching was faithful but he had not seen remarkable fruitfulness. But then something happened. He put it like this: "One night I went to bed one night like a lamb. And I woke up like a lion." God's unusual unction came upon Morgan for a special time, and thousands were converted under his ministry. He saw tremendous fruit for two years. When this season of awakening had ended, he said, "I went to bed like a lion. I woke up like a lamb." (SF).

There are seasons in which God turns individuals *into lions* it seems.

- There are seasons in which God's hand of blessing is plain to see;
- Times that are never again repeated.
- It has nothing to do necessarily w/ the minister's personal growth, education, or age.
- It has everything to do with God seizing one of his servants and doing something spectacular through them. (SF)
- That was true of Ezra, who had been faithfully teaching for years, and then suddenly we read of the revival in Nehemiah 8.

It was true also of Haggai.

- He was simply known as "The Prophet." Everyone in Jerusalem likely knew him.
- But then, God seized this man and for four months time turned him into a lion.
- And in Dec 18, 520BC (date for his third and four sermon), he may have gone to bed like a lion and woke up as a lamb, simply being the local prophet again.

Ezra records the historical background of his ministry in Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14-15

Ezra 5:1-2¹ Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them.

Ezra 6:14-15

¹⁴ And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; ¹⁵ and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

Haggai's message is simple.

He encourages the people to finish the work of the temple.

- For us, it is that **we must commit ourselves to God and His Kingdom.**
- **This is not a building campaign text!**
- **“What are you guys doing sitting in your nice house while we can't raise 63 million for our building!”**
- **We have One greater than the Temple, Jesus. He's where we met God.**
- **The application is more searching, as Haggai regularly calls the people to “consider their ways” (5, 7, 15, 18); literally “set your heart [on these things]”**

Haggai is the first prophet to preach in Jerusalem after the return from exile.

(Neb 586– Cyrus, 538)

- **Work began soon after the first Jews returned from exile around 538BC, but after the foundation had been laid, it was halted for about 16 years due to opposition from outside enemies (Ez 4:1-5, 24).**

Whenever God is on the move, opposition arises. The enemies used two tactics:

(1) Deception (acting like they wanted to help but had evil intent);

(2) Discouragement (by hiring people to frustrate the project during the entire reign of Cyrus to the reign of Darius). See Ezra 4:1-6.

- **Haggai called the people to finish the work.**
- **The people obey his message and finished the temple four years later.**

4 exhortations from these four sermons, as we “consider our ways.”

1. Prioritize God's Kingdom (1:1-15) [A Rebuke]

- Some include 2 sermons in ch 1: the first in v 1-12, and the 2nd in v 13-15, but I would call it “1B.” The primary message is 1-12; then Haggai responds in 13-15..

2. Rely on God's Power (2:1-9) [An Encouragement]

3. Experience God's Blessing (2:10-19) [Understanding]

4. Anticipate the Reign of God's Servant (2:20-23) [Hope]

So he first rebukes the people for their spiritual lethargy (1:1-15).

Then he encourages them in discouragement after they start to rebuild (2:1-9)
Next, he tells them to give attention to their hearts as they build.
Finally, he offers a glorious, Messianic promise to Zerubbabel (2:10-23)

#1: Prioritize God's Kingdom (1:1-15)

[Aug 29, 520]

A. The People's Lethargy (1:1-2)

1: Haggai delivered his message (Aug 29) to two people: the governor and the high priest.

2: His message: "These people say" ... "the time has not yet come to rebuild...."

Tell God he can wait" they are saying.

This **lethargy** is unacceptable.

Notice: **"These people."**

- Not, "My people." But "these people." They are not acting like God's people.

Notice the excuse: "The time has not yet come..."

Ben Franklin: "He that is good at making excuses is seldom good for anything else."

Their excuse was very **pious** sounding, "The time has not yet come" (**procrastination**, but holy procrastination right?) and "The Lord's House" (they have the vocabulary).

- It's the kind of thing you hear today: **"We need to pray about it."**
- You do need to pray about some things – **but not that which is clear in Scripture.**
- You need to do it. That was the case here. **They had been commissioned to do this.**
- **It's amazing how people can speak so spiritually about their indifference and complacency.** This lack of activity flows from a heart attached to other things.
- This had nothing to do with opposition at this point. There was no valid reason for their excuse.
- The time had come.

Jesus said, "Zeal for my Father's house consumes me" (Ps 69:9; Jn 2:17) – that's the model. Jesus was zealous for the Father's glory.

My friend, is your spiritual life marked by excuses, procrastination, and pious language that is masking an inward indifference to God's kingdom?

- **Allow this book to call you make to what's most important: God and his kingdom.**
- If you are not acting on that which you know you should act on, what gives you any assurance that you will do it in the future?
- **"Not yet" sometimes really means "Not ever."**

God is coming in mercy here; saying, "I know your heart – your complacency, indifference" but I'm bringing this word to you so that you can get your priorities in order. So that you can prioritize **my work, my presence, my people, my glory.**

B. The People's Lack of Commitment (1:3-11)

God uses Haggai to say, "Think again. Consider your ways [Literally, "Set your heart"] Pause and think about what your saying. Think about your lack of commitment."

3-5: He calls them to examine their priorities.

- **God's house, God's worship were not the priority of their life.**
- It was their own comfort, self-interest – "**panel**" here was an expensive style: houses fit for kings (1 Kings 7:3-7; Jer 22); Kings built these.
- Ezra 3 – wood that was intended for the temple was likely used for their own houses.
- **They were robbing God; and consequently robbing themselves of blessing.**

Who/What is your chief priority?

- In your personal life – how's your devotional life and your relational life?
- What do your finances say about your priorities?
- In your corporate life – are you devoted to God's people?

Here's the thing: disobedience always leads to dissatisfaction....

6: Little harvest, not enough food/drink; clothes aren't warm; money doesn't last.

- It is language meant to convey dissatisfaction and discontentment; the lack of blessing and flourishing.
- Haggai makes clear in verses 7-11 that these conditions were due to God's discipline of them.
- It's God's kindness to make you unhappy when you are not prioritizing the kingdom; he is drawing you back to first things.

7: Examine yourself.

8: A positive part of the message [read]: After telling them what not to do, he tells them what to do. **Get the wood. Get to work. Glorify God.**

9-11: Divine commentary on verses 4-6. [read]

- They were frustrated and unfulfilled because of their disobedience, or their partial disobedience.
- **Half-hearted Christianity is miserable Christianity.**

God's blessings includes more than material; it includes inward peace, joy, contentment, love, etc. These are most important.

- **"I am with you"** is what the blessing announced when they repent (v. 13).
- **"There is no more for heaven now to give"** when we have Christ!
- Some of the most blessed people in the world don't have a lot of stuff.
- **"As poor, yet making many rich."**
- **But in this case, God made their dissatisfaction observable through the lack of material blessings, especially the blessings of creation: rain, produce, etc; it was a sign of God's judgment/discipline.**

The point is: If God is not your priority, then nothing will satisfy.

- **Expensive food, wine, clothes, houses – ask Solomon how that worked out. Vanity.**
- **Matthew 6:33** hangs over this chapter for me.

C. The People's Awakening (1:12-15)

Remarkably, the people respond in obedience! Immediately!

- **What good is preaching? Consider Haggai. It transformed them.**
- **We should always come expectant when we hear God's word.**

God is on the move.... 3 Evidences of Grace here:

i. Transformation (v. 12)

12: They repent of their sin and commit themselves to God's word.

- They **"feared God."** They were changed.
- They did not reject the word, but allowed it to transform them.
- The word had fallen on good soil and would produce fruit.

ii. The Felt Presence of God (v. 13) (another word from Haggai)

13: God quickly responded by saying that renewed fellowship and his blessing would return in light of their repentance. "I am with you."

- The felt presence of God.
- You remember when David had sinned and said, "Take not your Holy Spirit from me"? **There are times in which his presence feels distant. But there are seasons when we are aware of his nearness.**
- Previously it was "these people" (1:2); but now it's the language of love and covenant promises, "I am with you."
- His nearness would be their highest good and greatest joy.
- This is what matters: **He is with us.**
- This is what has always marked out God's people: It is his presence.
- "Unless you are with us, we don't want to go." (Moses said, Ex 33)

iii. Unity (v. 14a)

14: God **"stirred the spirit"** of his leaders and the remnant to lead the rebuilding the temple on the 24th day of the month 520BC. **[read]** – This is like what the Lord did among Cyrus' heart.

- Previously there was disunity; Haggai had preached to the leaders, but now everyone was together.
- In seasons of renewal, there is wonderful unity among God's people.

iv. Service (14b).

- They "came and worked"!
- **What can we do to serve? That's the question we ask when the Lord is stirring among us.**

- When the Lord is stirring us to renewal we stop asking self-centered questions: What can this do for me? But “How can I love and serve others?”

This was only 23 days after Haggai preached his first message!

- So this chapter ends with a word of hope: if you have not made God and his kingdom your priority, **you can!**
- Follow their example of heeding God’s Word, that you may prioritize His kingdom.

#2: Rely on God’s Power (2:1-9)

[Oct 17, 520]

Now we read of Haggai’s encouragement.

They are told to continue in the work because God’s power will ensure their protection and success.

2:1: The word comes again....

Why were they **discouraged**? Two related reasons:

(1) **Slow Progress**. That can lead you to discouragement.

- This was backbreaking labor and they saw little progress.
- Katrina – it was like you could work all day and see no progress in certain places.
- Ever had a monumental task in front of you? Feel like your making no progress?
 - *Raising Kids? – Your building more than you see?*
- Further, the seventh month was punctuated with festivals, so work would have been delayed. They would have fallen behind schedule.

(2) **Past Glory**. They wanted to quit because it paled in comparison to Solomon’s.

- Every felt like that? What’s the use?
- But their work and your work was not trivial because God was with them, and this work was doing more than they could see!

2:2-3: [Read] Solomon’s temple was a wonder in the ancient world.

- It took **seven years to build, with almost 200,000 workmen!**
- But now there were only 50,000 returnees and limited resources.
- To those who had seen Solomon’s temple, this seemed like little to nothing.
 - It was a day of “small things” to use Zechariah’s language.
- When **the foundations were laid 16 years earlier, some people actually wept.**
 - Some moaned and complained, “It’s nothing like it used to be.”
 - But people who have this attitude, can never see the good things happening.
 - Beware of the, “It was so much better then” attitude.
 - It is most discouraging to those who are actually engaging in the work to hear someone say something cynical and negative like this.

2:4-5: How Haggai motivates them [read]

(1) He says, “Resist Discouragement!”

- **Be strong** (language of Joshua before Jericho). You must have courage.

- This is one of the great marks of a faithful believer: courage, boldness.
- **Fear not.** Again, have courage. Don't be passive and cower in fear. Act.
- **Work.** Do your job.

(2) He tells them why this work is not trivial/small: God's Presence, Promise and Power
a. The Assurance of God's Presence and Power (4-5)

"I am with you"; "My Spirit remains in your mist"

- Remember the Exodus! Remember the Gospel! Remember my promise! "I am with you" – this is what God tells this discouraged man.
- **Gideon, this discouraged people, this little man, "I am with you."**
- Disciples: "I will be with you" (Matt 28)
- This is the secret: Zech 4:6
- God gives the resources to fulfill the exhortations.
- We overcome by relying on God's Spirit. (See 1 Kings)

Jesus Christ has conquered the greatest discouragement; namely, death, and given us the promise, I will never leave you nor forsake you; he has poured out his Spirit on us.

b. A Promised Display of God's Power (6-8)

2:6: A shaking. Earthquake? No. It's warfare language. God reminds them of who is sovereign.

2:7: The phrase "treasures of the nations" is debated. It can mean:

- (1) the desirable things of the nations that would be brought to fill this temple
- (2) The Messiah who would come – The "desirable one" or as we sing at Christmas, "desire of nations." Hark the Herald Angels Sing & Come Thou Long Expected Jesus.

It is true that He is the Messiah of the nations; and will one day be the desire of all nations, but that's not what Haggai is talking about here.

See **verse 8:** God is speaking about actual silver and gold.

- **They don't have to worry about resources because he owns it all.**
- Everything in the universe is at his disposal.

The mention of all the nations is a prophecy that surely looks ahead to something more magnificent – God gathering the nations to worship him.

- It is a longing and anticipation of the OT (Ps 96-100)....
- We are living in the fulfillment of it on this side of Pentecost; God has shaken the nations, and *is* shaking the nations, and he is not finished yet!

C. A Promise of something beyond what they could see! (V9)

Here is a verse that gets us to Christ. A greater temple is coming.

- How could a greater glory happen?
- After all some things would never reappear

- The Holy Fire
- The precious stones that gave guidance
- The ark of the covenant had disappeared
- The shekinah glory cloud

- How on earth could this temple be more glorious? It doesn't speak of the fact that Herod would eventually expand it.
- **"In this place, I will give peace"** – that's how.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

- He was brought to this temple as a young child; he sat with the wise and astonished them with his wisdom;
- As the Holy One, who drove the money-changers out of the temple and said, "This is to be a house of prayer *for all the nations*" (He had the vision of Haggai);
- He came in the last week of his life, like those animals had been brought in for sacrifice; He was the pure sacrifice that would bring lasting peace to sinners.
- This little house would see greater glory than Solomon's temple because the Prince of Peace would appear in majesty and glory and accomplish his work.
- Jesus Christ said **"Someone greater than the Temple is here."**
- It is through Christ that we enter God's presence, not through a temple.
- And further still, when John tells us about a new heaven and earth he says, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb."
- The whole earth will be filled with this glory; the whole earth will be filled with his presence.

And you see this is where we look when it comes to serving God: We look to God's presence. Because of Christ we can serve our God in the power of the Spirit.

Because of this glorious promise of the end of the age, we press on!

On that day, we will know that nothing we ever done in Jesus' name was small!

#3: Experience God's Blessing (2:10-19)

[Dec 18, 520] – In many ways this is repeating the same themes in his first sermon...

- Blessing comes from obeying and fearing God; dissatisfaction and discipline comes from disobeying God.
- The ultimate blessing would come through Messiah, as God fulfilled his promise to Abraham to bless the nations through his offspring (v. 19), and it's only through Him that we can be cleansed and acceptable to God.

12-13: The Lord asks Haggai to have the priest make a ruling on two matters (read):

1. **[v. 12]** Can ceremonial holiness be transferred to other food when it comes into contact with ceremonial meat? **No!** (Though I think **bacon on anything makes the meal better, but that's a different subject**).
- Spiritual consecration is not transferable to something else.
- **You can't catch holiness.** The Lord must do it – in the heart.

- Attending a church service does not make you holy.
- **Sticking your head in an oven doesn't make you a biscuit.**
- Your heart has to be changed.
- Having Christian parents doesn't make you a Christian.
- Going on a mission trip doesn't make you holy.
- Here, the people can build a great temple but not have hearts of worship to match it.
- Our works are filthy rags; that's why we need Christ's forgiveness and new life.

2. **[V. 13]** Can ceremonial defilement be transferred to others by a person defiled by contact with a dead body? **Yes!**

- **Your uncleanness affects everything! Your sin affects others, and other things.**

More down home example: Ever tried to cough on someone who was sick because you were healthy? But the opposite happens a lot. You can't transfer health.

Or, if you grab a handful of mud wearing a white glove, the glove becomes muddy, but the mud doesn't become glovey (Selah).

14: Now, it's kind of a surprising twist here, as he states the principle.

- Despite the work, they are dirty before God. What? They're doing the right work!

Options:

1. This is a reference to the past before work got started (how they cared about their economic well being but not the worship of God).
2. It could be a reference to the unfinished temple; it is unfinished and consequently the effects of it (like a dead corpse in their midst) has affected the whole group.
3. This is a reference to the present group; perhaps a minority that was not walking in faithfulness thereby affecting the purity of the whole group. **This may have even halted the project again.**
4. This is a reference to whole group, underscoring the nature of sin, pointing to their need for radical cleansing. Just being in the Holy Land didn't make them holy. They need something more than a temple to root out sin.
5. Some combination of these.

- However we read it, the principle is clear: **God is not just concerned with this physical structure, he wants them to have clean hands and a pure heart – this is the path to lasting blessing.**

- Engaging in the **right work is one thing; working with the right heart is another.**
- God is not just concerned with external actions; he's concerned with the heart.

God is wanting a rebuilt temple and a rebuilt people.

- **Just working on a temple project couldn't solve the problem.**
- **They needed repentance and full obedience in order to enjoy the blessing of God.**

Beware of having a form of godliness without the power.

- Our worship of God must be our chief delight.

15-19 Now Haggai asks, “Will you experience divine blessing or will you not learn from the past and consequently experience divine discipline?”

15-16: Learn from history: How did you dare? Not good. Dissatisfied.

Without heart consecration you can never experience the satisfying blessing of God.
“Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.”

17: examples of curses. They still didn’t turn.

- Implication: **It is folly to go on in sin now.**

18-19: More positive: Here’s how you should live now. Let Dec 18 be a turning point! God wants to bless his people.

- Is the seeds still in the barn? No. It’s in the ground, sown in hope of future harvest.
- The vine, the fig tree...yielded nothing. He’s **saying we’ve had lousy crops...**
- But the Lord says, “But from this day on I will bless you”
- God is turning to his people in grace in their desperation and need, and says, if you walk in my ways, trust Me, trust my promises, from this day on, I will bless you.”

Piper: “The time for fruit-bearing is coming. I am not against you. I am for you and will help you. So consider your ways. Cleanse your hands, and keep working on my house. I promise to bless you.”

To summarize: Look at your past and avoid that frustration experienced because of sin; and consider what kind of blessing you can experience if you press on in the work with clean hands and a pure heart.

An exciting new day was in store for them if they would heed this word.

- Repentance leads to grace and blessing; unholiness to dissatisfaction and sorrow.
- **So let us work with clean hands and a pure heart;**
- **This is how we experience blessing.**

How? By looking to Christ, who is the promised Messiah - through him we are blessed, cleansed, renewed.

#4: Anticipate the Reign of God’s Servant (2:20-23)

This message is aimed at Zerubbabel but the promise is for all believers. **[read]**

God is giving him a personal word of encouragement...

They are a little remnant surrounded by mighty nations...

- (1) **God will be victorious over all nations (21-22)** (inc Persia, the language Exodus looked back and looked forward) ... sword against brother - chaos

- “The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ”
- “We are receiving “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28)
- Be encouraged by your future, dear Saint.

(2) He was God’s chosen servant whose rule (23)

Signet Ring: A ring that marked **authority and royalty**.

- It was worn as a ring on the finger (Gen 41:42; Esth 3:10; 8:2) or around the neck (Gen 38:18, 25).
- It was used to put the official seal on royal documents (1 Kgs 21:8; Esth 8:8, 10).
- Here it speaks of Zerubbabel’s appointment God’s representative for the restoration project, the **rebuilding of the building of the temple**
- **Haggai is restating the Davidic covenant.**
- But Zerubbabel goes off the pages of history
- **The fulfillment of this goes far beyond Zerubbabel to the one with all authority.**
- God gave authority to Zerubbabel to build the temple; He gave His own Son, authority to build a temple with living stones, his church.

“My servant” – a phrase applied to the Messiah (Isa 42:1; 52:13; 53:11)

- Zerubbabel was a descendent of David, and is in the genealogy of Jesus in Matt 1.
- **The ultimate Servant was Jesus Christ.**
- He will rule the world in righteousness in a glorious new creation.
- **The power of the wicked will be no more.**
- This promise of a new world is one that we constantly must live in view of.

“On that day” – a future day of the Lord.

Are you anticipating this kingdom?

To recap this lions message:

- Let’s Prioritize God’s kingdom.
- Let’s Rely on God’s Power.
- Let’s Experience God’s Blessing
- Let’s be devoted to, and live in anticipation of God’s Servant, Jesus Christ, the Greater Temple, the Chosen Messiah, and the King of the Nations who will come