



Date: August 24-25, 2019
Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: Haggai 1:1-9

Are you a dreamer? I mean at night, when you sleep. Dreams are a strange thing, aren't they? I don't know whether you have ever done any research on the meaning of dreams but it is an interesting subject for sure. A quick google search informed me that the most common things that people dream about are:

1. **Falling**
2. **Being naked in public**
3. **Dying**
4. **Being chased**
5. **Being late for something**

Perhaps you can relate to those dreams, but something I dream about didn't make this list. I often dream about not finishing things. Do you ever have these types of dreams? For me, it is finding out that I haven't really graduated from school because I have one more paper to write or one more class to complete.

I put myself through university as a roofer. In fact, if you had a roof put on your home in London about 35 years ago by College Pro Roofers that was me. How did it work out for you? The strangest thing is that to this day, I occasionally dream about not having a roof completely finished. Something distracts me and I leave the roof half-done which is not good, to leave a roof exposed to the elements. These dreams about not completing something I have started are disturbing to me, maybe because I lean a little obsessive compulsive and I am not quite sure what they mean.

Have you ever taken on a project and were gung ho about it at the beginning? Things start so well but for some reason, the enthusiasm dies down and it never really gets finished. It sits discarded and forgotten somewhere in your room or garage. Oh,

the intention was good but the follow through not so much.

Anyone ever been to Barcelona, Spain? If you have, perhaps this building is familiar to you. It is a major tourist attraction. The Sagrada Familia. The Basilica of the Holy Family. It is a large, unfinished Roman Catholic Church. Construction began in 1882 and now almost 140 years later, it is still not completed. You thought your home renovations dragged on! There have been numerous reasons for the delay.

The original architect resigned within the first year. The second architect died with the project less than a quarter of the way completed. The Spanish Civil War interrupted the building. Then, there was a fire that further delayed things. There was also bickering about the design and because the project relies solely on private donations, they can only build when the money comes in. There is a light at the end of the tunnel however, as it is anticipated that the Sagrada will be fully finished in the year, 2026. That means that it would have taken 146 years to complete. An incredible story of incompletion.

Today, we find ourselves in the final week of our summer message series at North Park that we entitled, *Majoring on the Minors*. I hope by now you know that it is a series on the Minor Prophets in the bible. Their writings comprise the last twelve books of the Old Testament. They're described as "minor" not because they're less important than the books of the Major Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, but because they're shorter in length. These books contain some challenging words mostly directed at God's people, the Israelites, by his chosen spokesmen, the prophets. Why? It is because they had forgotten or disregarded the relationship they had with God, Yahweh and had

turned and worshipped other gods. They had been unfaithful and rebellious towards their heavenly Father.

All hope is not lost, however. The Minor Prophets also serve to remind the people of God's faithful and restorative love. So far in this series, we have been challenged by the words of seven different prophets, preached by five different people at North Park, isn't that incredible? Today as we conclude the series for now, we come to Haggai.

Haggai is a book about an unfinished project. Let me give you a bit of background about Haggai before we dive into the text. It is the second shortest book in the Old Testament after Obadiah that we looked at earlier in the summer.

As we have learned throughout this series, *Majoring on the Minors*, for centuries God's prophets have accused the Israelite people of breaking their covenant with God. Remember this covenant symbolized that they were in a mutually exclusive and committed relationship with God alone, like a marriage. But, the people had continually turned their back on God and worshipped other gods and committed acts of injustice.

The prophets warned the people that if they didn't turn from their evil ways and turn back to God, He would send the great empire of Babylon to take out Jerusalem, destroy the temple and haul the people off into exile. Unfortunately, they refused to listen and around the year 587 BC, Babylon invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and took the Israelite people into exile, away from God and their homeland. But the prophets always believed that there was hope that one day, God would restore his people, bring them back to live in a new Jerusalem where God's presence would live in their midst.

As we turn our attention to Haggai, the year is 520 BC, nearly 70 years after the exile and the Babylonian empire has collapsed and the world is now ruled by the Persians who allowed the return of any exiled Israelite who wanted to go back to Jerusalem which lay in ruins.

So under the leadership of a high priest named Joshua and another leader named Zerubbabel, a group of exiles return and begin to rebuild Jerusalem and their lives. Our hopes are high and

the future seems bright for God's people that they will finally get their acts together and commit wholeheartedly to their relationship with God.

Haggai the prophet, doesn't necessarily see it that way. That sets the scene as we open chapter 1. Are you following along? At the beginning of this book, we see that the Lord has a message to his people from his spokesman Haggai.

Haggai 1:2

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: The people are saying, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.'"

The people have just returned from 70 years in a foreign land, in exile away from God and their homeland. God provides a way for them to return back to Him but notice what they say to him in this text.

Thanks God, but the time is just not right to rebuild your temple.

Why do you think that concerned God? What was so important about the temple? Why did the invading forces of the Babylonian army destroy the temple in the first place? It is because the Temple was the place where the presence of the Lord dwelt with his people. It was the most important landmark in all of Jerusalem. Do you remember the story back in the time of King Solomon? God has him build the temple and when it was completed and Solomon dedicates it to the Lord,

Chronicles 7:1-3

When Solomon finished praying, fire flashed down from heaven and burned up the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the glorious presence of the LORD filled the Temple. ² The priests could not enter the Temple of the LORD because the glorious presence of the LORD filled it. ³ When all the people of Israel saw the fire coming down and the glorious presence of the LORD filling the Temple, they fell face down on the ground and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying, "He is good! His faithful love endures forever!"

The temple in Jerusalem and Mount Zion where it sat, represented God's dwelling place on earth. The temple's destruction by King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 587 BC amounted to the ultimate act of blasphemy. The only way to rectify the situation was to rebuild the temple. A temple that lay in ruins and had not been rebuilt represents God has left the building. God has left the city. God is not present or He is not welcomed. He is just not a priority in the lives of the people right now. The temple at this point in Haggai is an unfinished project and God wants to know why.

About two months ago, I happened to walk into the main bathroom in our home and for whatever reason I glanced up to the ceiling and I noticed that around the fan, the paint was starting to peel. I thought that was a little unusual considering we had just had the bathroom renovated last year.

So I kind of made a note to myself, *I should get a ladder and see why the paint is peeling*. Carolyn noticed it as well and she kind of made a mental note to herself, *Paul should get a ladder and see why the paint is peeling*.

Every day I walked into the bathroom and now my eyes just automatically went to the ceiling as if hoping that miraculously, the problem has fixed itself. Nope, the paint was still peeling. I thought maybe there is too much moisture from the shower so instead of dealing with the peeling paint, I started showering in the other bathroom. I had to lug my toiletries from my bathroom and back every day. Why didn't I just fix the peeling paint! Honestly, it just seemed like too much of a bother.

I would have to get the step ladder from the garage and set it up. Remove the cover of the fan. Scrap the paint peelings. That is going to cause a mess so I would have to get the vacuum out, shake off the rugs and clean out the sink and shower area. What if I find a bigger problem underneath the peeling paint? What if there is a water leak and the whole ceiling needs replacing and then we have to redo the whole bathroom again? I have this tendency to catastrophize things, have you noticed? Maybe that is why I dream of leaving things unfinished. Do you see what my wife has to deal with?

Just so you know, because of the topic of the sermon this week, I was prompted to take on the job and alas, it was nothing more than peeling paint that I scrapped off and primed and repainted.

You can imagine that there are all sorts of reasons why projects remain unfinished. In the case of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona that I talked about at the beginning of the message, it was the resignation of one architect, the death of another, a civil war, a fire, and a lack of funds that has delayed the project. Some things you can control and others are completely out of our control.

Haggai 1:2

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: The people are saying, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.'"

Why the delay? Why are the people putting it off and stalling? They did have what they thought were legitimate excuses. It is important to remember that for most of the returning exiles, all they had ever known was life away from Jerusalem. They had been born and raised in Babylon. That was home to them. Many of them had established a decent life there. The thought of returning to Jerusalem and facing the uncertainty, danger and hard work of rebuilding the temple did not hold a lot of appeal for them. It was just too much work.

They would have had to put their lives on hold to go into the forests and cut down the trees for wood. They would have to carve out rock and move it all without the aid of modern technology and machinery. It was a massive undertaking of their time, not to mention the cost for materials. This was one excuse.

Secondly, the political system was rather unstable at this time with leaders coming and going. Some were favourable to providing assistance to the project and others not so much.

Thirdly and perhaps the biggest problem of all that the exiles faced in rebuilding the temple was opposition from other people groups who now lived in the land. They didn't want the temple rebuilt because they didn't worship Yahweh. They didn't care if it lay in ruins.

For these reasons and others, some out of their control and some within their control, the Israelite people were resisting rebuilding the temple of the Lord insisting that, *it is just not the right time!*

Have you ever said that to God, *it is just not the right time?* I hear what you are saying God, but now, *is just not the right time.* I regret to inform you as your pastor that I have on more than one occasion informed God that it is not the right time. When I felt his call to leave a career in teaching to become a Youth pastor in the local church, I told God, *it all sounds well and good Lord, maybe someday, but now, it is not the right time.* I am loving this teaching gig. I was a youth pastor within 6 months.

When I was asked by our church leadership of my former church to step into the role of Lead Pastor during a particularly turbulent time I responded, *Wow! Sounds too good to be true, Lord, but now? I don't think it is the time is right. Maybe when things settle down a bit.* I was the Lead Pastor within six months.

When Carolyn and I felt a call away from the role as Lead Pastor and North Park contacted me about the role of Teaching Pastor here, I said, *Really God? I know those North Parkers must be wonderful people. Maybe someday God but now is not the right time. Our parents are older and need us close by and some of our children are still in high school. Maybe in a few years Lord, but now is not the right time.*

I was introduced as the teaching pastor here within six months.

I could go on, but you get the idea. I have told God it is not the right time on numerous occasions. You think I would have learned. Our timing is rarely God's timing. If we were to continue to say, *later* to God because His plans don't fit into our schedule, we would never take a step out in faith and follow him.

The timing is almost never, *just right* in our minds and according to our schedules and agendas to do the Lord's work have you noticed? Has that been your experience? That is the problem. We make it

about us and not about God. We put ourselves and our own needs first and not God.

Oh, we can sing the worship songs in Church.....
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee, How Great Thou Art, How Great Thou Art

*Show Me How to love like you have loved Me.
Everything I am for the Kingdom's Cause*

We look to Yahweh. And He shall reign forever.

But, do we truly understand what we are singing and proclaiming? Those words indicate that God is first in our lives. He is our number 1 priority but do our actions truly reveal that reality? Unfortunately, my confession to you is that mine don't sometimes. That is what God is calling the Israelites out on in this passage. They have returned from 70 years in exile away from God because of their indifference and apathy towards Him. This was supposed to be a new day. Things were going to be different now, weren't they?

The expectation was that they would return and their priority would be on their relationship to God. What better way to demonstrate this renewed commitment than to rebuild the temple? But then the distractions came and the obstacles and excuses. The project was abandoned and after 16 years it was still not rebuilt. Instead of working on the temple, the Israelite people focused on their own needs.

Look at the message God sends to the people through his prophet, Haggai.

Haggai 1:4

*"Why are you living in luxurious houses
while my house lies in ruins?"*

Haggai's God ordained charge to the people is that they are putting their own concerns and comfort before God. They have finished building their own houses but had let the project of the reconstruction of the house of God, the temple lapse. They were couching it all with this excuse that it just isn't the right time for the Lord's house to be built. How convenient. The right time for whom?

Now, if you walk away from this message only believing that God does not want us to have comfortable homes, you have missed the entire

message of Haggai. God is not against our comfort and security. There is nothing wrong with living in a nice home but there is something wrong with neglecting God's priorities to pursue our own.

Our values and priorities are reflected in how we use our resources-time, money, gifts and talents. Often our actions contradict our words. We say God is number 1 in our lives but then we relegate him to a lesser number on our "to do" list. At least I do.

Haggai is a voice calling the people back to God's values.

"Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?"

Look at what's happening to you!

Look at what is happening to you!

It is like Haggai is taking the people by the shoulders, giving a shake and a proverbial slap across the face. *Wake up! Can't you see the effect that your misguided priorities are having on your life? Can you? No? Let me tell you.*

Haggai 1:6

You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!

These are five abrupt statements that on the surface may appear different but what Haggai is saying to the people through these words is,

"all the effort that you have been exerting concentrating on your own needs, it is all in vain"

Because the people have not given God the priority in their lives, their work has not been fruitful or productive. Their material possessions do not satisfy them. When they concentrated on building their own homes, putting their own interests and needs first, God's blessing was withheld from them.

When they put their own needs and interests first, God's blessing was withheld from them.

Do you ever feel like you have planted much but harvest little? You eat but are not satisfied? You drink but are still thirsty? You put on clothes but

you cannot keep warm? Your wages disappear just like you have holes in your pocket? Do you ever feel like that? Have you ever thought that it may be because you are so preoccupied with yourself and have not put God as the first priority in your life? I am just putting that out there!

Oh, we think all of those things are going to satisfy and fulfill us but it is all empty, meaningless unless we put God first. Worship Him first.

Do you know that each time I fought God's call on my life and put my own priorities ahead of Him, I suffered? There was lack of sleep, I tossed and turned at night.

I was short and distant in my relationship with those close to me, particularly Carolyn and my children. I was unsettled in my spirit. I can remember it vividly. Those were turbulent times because I was fighting what God determined was best for me.

Here's the thing. In my younger years, I thought I was a pretty good guy because I attended church most weeks. I served a little here and there and gave a little money in the offering and generally tried to be a good Christian but most of those things were about me. How it made me feel or how it made me look to others. Most of the time I had confused priorities. At the end of the day, my family, job, leisure activities, money and comfort all seemed to rank higher on my list of importance than God and what He wanted for my life.

I was working on building my own luxurious life and giving God the scraps, the leftovers. I was neglecting the life I should have had with Him and leaving it unfinished and incomplete.

God has challenged me on that attitude multiple times over the years. *Paul, I want it all. I want all of you, 100 % devotion. I want to be your number one priority*, just as He desires to be your number one priority. Just as He desired to be the Israelites number one priority.

Listen as Haggai confronts the God's people on their misplaced priorities.

Haggai 1:7-9

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you! Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. You

hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, while all of you are busy building your own fine houses.

Just take a look around here. I am sure that you would agree with me that this house of the Lord, North Park Church is far from being in ruins. We worship in comfort don't we? We have lush theatre seating, air conditioning in the summer and heat in the winter. We have top flight sound and video equipment. Apart from the odd leak in the roof that can make rainy days an adventure for our facility staff, we have an amazing building.

Our building at 1750 Huron Street also is a great facility and our new site in Stratford is being renovated as I speak to be a useful launch pad for taking the gospel to the neighbourhood. All of that is thanks to you and God's provision for providing funds to ensure that these houses of God do not lay in ruins.

But a church building can be intact and the worship and mission of the people lay in ruins when God and His Kingdom Values are not the number one priority. Did you know that? That is what Jordan reminded us of last week when he preached on Amos.

Amos 5:21-24

*"I hate all your show and pretense—
the hypocrisy of your religious festivals
and solemn assemblies.*

*²² I will not accept your burnt offerings and
grain offerings.*

*I won't even notice all your choice peace
offerings.*

²³ Away with your noisy hymns of praise!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

*²⁴ Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of
justice,
an endless river of righteous living.*

Instead of all the show, God says through Amos to his people, I want to see 100% commitment to the way that I have called and empowered you to live. Anything else is half-hearted and half finished. It is incomplete devotion and God says that when we behave like that, we are settling for less than the best that He has in mind for our lives.

Will you allow me to say this to you as your pastor and someone who loves you and this church so much?

I think some of you are building luxurious lives by the world's standards but you are living less than the best life God has in mind for you. Why? You have stopped putting Him as the top priority in your life. He is somewhere further down on your "to do" list if He hasn't dropped off of it altogether.

I can say that to you because I know that it needs to be said to me sometimes. I can fit into this category too.

That's not to guilt you or shame you but instead to challenge you like Haggai challenged the Israelites. There is a better life possible but it only comes by declaring and then living as if God is the number one priority in our lives. Then finishing what we started when we made a commitment to follow him.

Do you ever feel like you have planted much but harvest little? You eat but are not satisfied? You drink but are still thirsty? You put on clothes but you cannot keep warm? Your wages disappear just like you have holes in your pocket? Do you ever feel unsatisfied and discontented? What you have never seems to be enough? Can I ask you another question? Is God the number one priority in your life? The answer to the first question may lie in the way that you answer the second one.

Throughout this summer in our time together, we have looked at the words of God directed towards His people through eight different prophets. In some cases, the people ignored the words. In other situations, they listen for a time and then brushed them off but in Haggai's case, the people actually responded favourably to the challenge he had for them.

He implores the Israelites,

Haggai 1:8

*Now go up into the hills, bring down timber,
and rebuild my house. Then I will take
pleasure in it and be honored, says
the LORD.*

and the people actually do it!

God's message through His servant Haggai became the catalyst for finishing the work of restoring his temple and his glory returned to his people. At least

for a time. Haggai's encouragement to God's people to finish building the temple brings to mind the words of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

His challenge to the followers of Jesus around him and to us is to build our lives on the foundation of Christ and do you remember what he called our bodies?

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Are you building a life that reflects your status as a temple of God? Where He is your top priority and Jesus is the foundation?

Can I encourage you today, don't leave the job half done, incomplete or unfinished. Turn to Him today and renew your desire to make Him number 1 in your life and invite Him to continue to do a good work in you so that you live the best life He has for you.

My prayer for this community is the same as the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Philippian Church.

Philippians 1:3-6

Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

I pray that you and me, will allow God to continue the good work that He has started in each of us and this church, as we make Him the top priority of our lives.

Points to Ponder

Majoring on the Minors

Haggai 1:1-9

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Have you ever taken on a project and were enthusiastic at the beginning but then found yourself losing interest? Describe your experience and what was that caused you to quit or leave it unfinished?
2. Have you ever said to God, "it is just not the right time"? What was the situation and what were the ramifications?
3. Share a circumstance when you have made a life choice that indicated that God was the top priority in your life. Share a circumstance when you made a life choice that seemed to indicate that God was not the top priority in your life? Compare the two and share some of the learnings that came out of those decisions.
4. What are the distractions or interruptions that cause you to not place God as the top priority in your life?
5. Are you building a life that reflects your status as a temple of God? If so, what is motivating you? If not, what is holding you back?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray specifically for what it means for you to place God as the number one priority in your life and pray against anything that seeks to distract you from that goal.