

Background

Today we come to one of the minor prophets, the book of Haggai.

As we come to the text before us this morning. I think it is helpful for us to have a little background to better understand the context for this passage.

Back in the book of 2 Samuel , we read in chapter 7:10-16 of a covenant that God makes with David.

In this covenant that God makes with David, he promises that the universal blessing that he had promised will come through the offspring of Abraham will be realized through the offspring of David.

The way that this blessing will come is through a king and through the rulership of this king , God's rule will be expressed.

This was the anticipation of the people of God during this time in redemptive history.

Universal blessing will come through an offspring of David who will be a king and through which God's rule is expressed.

In the book of 1st Kings, we then read about the building of the temple in Jerusalem by David's son Solomon.

The building of this temple in Jerusalem becomes important in redemptive history because the tabernacle which used to be the place of God's dwelling is now replaced by the temple.

In the replacement of the tabernacle by the temple what we see is a picture of God's intent to dwell with his people permanently.

The dwelling place of God which was portable is now unmoveable.

God's desire in the construction of the temple was that men would behold his glory.

After the construction of the temple we then read that under Solomons rule there was a time of peace, blessing and security for the people of God.

We soon read however that as Solomon gets older he ends up turning away from God.

As a result of his sin, the kingdom of Israel during his Son's Rehoboam rule then split into two.

Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

Israel would be taken by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians and in roughly 586 BC the Babylonians would also destroy the temple and take many of the Jews into exile.

The Jews would then be in Exile for many decades and in roughly 538BC The Babylonians were then conquered by a guy by the name of Cyrus the great. As a result of this, Cyrus's Persian Empire then took over the land of Judah.

What then happens is that Cyrus issues a decree and in his decree he permits the Jews to return to their homeland this was in fulfillment of a prophecy made by the prophet Jeremiah.

So in 536BC roughly around 50,000 Jews as we read in Ezra 2 return and they begin the task of rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem.

Upon their return, we read that they were able to establish an altar to offer sacrifices and to lay the foundation for the temple

This however would be the only things they were able to establish as they were opposed by their neighbors the Samaritans and as a result they ceased building the temple.

This leads us to our text this morning.

It is roughly 520 BC and during this time a guy by the name of Darius has now been reigning as king for 2yrs.

So as we come to this account it's been 16years roughly that the Jews have been in the land since their return as scholars suggest.

This morning as we hear what God has to say to us from this text, I trust we would be admonished, encouraged and edified.

I believe this morning God has a word for us especially in light of the season we are going through as a church of rebuilding.

As Pastor Tony reminded us recently this past week, we are in a season as a church of rebuilding. We are in a season of rebuilding trust, rebuilding relationships, rebuilding habits and rebuilding culture.

So family let's embrace every step of the way the Lord has for us.

This leads us to the main point for us today as we seek to rebuild together.

Main Point

God's presence dwells with his people, when God's people prioritize him with their lives.

We will see this truth by looking at 3 points which will be our outline.

We will first see this by looking at The Call (vs 1-2)

Secondly we will then look at The Excuse (vs 3-11)

Then we will see this by looking at our last and third point which is The Promise (vs 12-15)

These will be our 3 points for today:

The Call

The Excuse

The Promise

This leads us to our first Point for today.

1)The Call (vs 1-2)

Look with me at vs 1-2

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 Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: 2 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord."

Now we have to ask why has God given these words to Haggai to speak.

Notice with me, that these words that Haggai speaks assumes the people who Haggai is speaking to have an understanding of the purpose to which God had called them to in their return to the land.

Notice what God through Haggai says about them, he says in vs 2, **the people say** the time has not yet come to rebuild the House of the Lord.

What we see from these words is that there was an understanding from the Israelites that they were to be involved in rebuilding the temple.

This was why God had moved on the heart of Cyrus to release them and the purpose why they were freed to return to Jerusalem.

To better see this , turn with me quickly to Ezra 1:1-4

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:

*2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: **The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.** 3 **Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.** 4 **And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.**"*

We see in these words clearly that God moved upon the heart of Cyrus to issue a decree to the people of Israel to end their exile for the purpose of allowing them to return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

This was God's purpose for them in returning to Jerusalem: **to rebuild God's temple**

Furthermore what we also learn is that the Israelites return to Jerusalem was in fulfillment of a prophecy Jeremiah had made as I had noted before.

See Jeremiah had prophesied years before that the Jews would return after 70 years of exile in Babylon we see this in Jeremiah 29:10-14

In the words of this prophecy of Jeremiah we learn that God's intention was to bring his people back to his promised land, where they would experience his presence and enjoy his blessing.

God's desire was to have his presence dwell permanently among his people in the land of promise.

To see this accomplished at this point of redemptive history would require that God's people rebuild his temple which represented his presence.

This was why the rebuilding of the temple was so important.

God through the Prophet Haggai therefore speaks these words to the people to get their attention and to move them towards attending to his work that he wants to see accomplished through them.

There however is a problem as we see the Israelites are saying the time is not now to rebuild and this poses a huge problem with God.

You see, the Israelites when they first arrived in Jerusalem had started rebuilding the temple. Overtime however they allowed other things to hinder their progress and eventually they no longer gave attention to God's work anymore.

I wonder for us today, how many of us are in a season just like the Israelites were where we have made excuses for obeying God's call to us to serve him.

Overtime as a result we have lost enthusiasm, zeal and concern for the things of God.

This drift can happen to any of us, and when this happens family our priorities are no longer in alignment with God priorities

As a result we become stagnant in our walk with God and dull to God's presence and activity in our lives.

See this was the issue.

God wants his temple to be completed but yet the people have been inactive in working on the temple for 16years.

This brings us to our next point where we learn what led to their inactivity towards God's work.

2)The Excuse (vs3 -11)

Look with me at verse 3, it says:

3 Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, 4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"

The Lord speaking through the Prophet challenges what's at the heart of the peoples inactivity.

At the root of their excuse and inactivity to rebuild the temple is that the presence of God and tending to his work was no longer a priority in their lives.

See the people were more concerned with building their own house rather than building the place that expressed God's presence and represented his presence among his people.

The issue wasn't time.

The issue was that the people had drifted to the point where their priorities were misplaced and God's presence neglected.

As a result they no longer gave attention to God's work.

I think here at this point there is an application for us to draw from.

Family when we are complacent in our pursuit of God and his presence in our lives overtime we can find ourselves living our lives experientially distant from God.

When this happens our hearts can drift to the point where we become apathetic to God and his purposes for us.

This is what we see happening in the lives of God's people in this passage.

They had the right theory about the Temple which represented God's presence.

They knew about its importance.

Though they knew about its importance they were not however actively seeking God's presence and as a result they were not experiencing the fullness of what God wanted for them.

They knew about God and the importance of his temple in theory but not experiencing it in reality.

Family may this be instructive for us.

We don't just want to be a people who have right theory about God but are not experiencing him in reality.

Tony Evans words I found helpful here. Talking about the neglect to rebuild the temple listen to what he says

In neglecting to rebuild it, the people were saying that it was not important to have God in their midst. We, unfortunately, are often the same in our attitudes toward God: We are happy to have God in our vicinity even though he is not in our midst. We like to have God in general but we think we don't need him in specific.

Do you see what he is saying, we are happy to have God in our vicinity even though he is not in our midst.

Another way we can say this is we can be content with knowing God in theory but not experientially.

Let this be a reminder to us family.

God doesn't just want to be known doctrinally in theory but he desires to be experienced relationally and enjoyed relationally.

That is his heart for his people in this text and that is his heart for us brothers and sisters.

Now what causes this drift in our heart away from passionately pursuing God and actively engaging in his work in our lives?

Three things I want to draw us to that we see in the historical accounts of the lives of the Israelites that was a hindrance to their pursuit of God and caused their passion for doing God's work to lessen.

1)Discontentment

In the book of Ezra at the ending of chapter 3 in vs 11-13, the writer lets us know that after the foundation of the temple had been laid many celebrated.

Though there was celebration, the elders however wept.

The reason the elders wept was because they remembered the glory of the first temple.

You see though the foundation of this temple was laid there was still a longing for things to be the way it used to be.

We get a sense that discontentment seemed to be a wrestle for the Elders of this group as God address the elders discontentment again in order to encourage them to continue on in finishing the temple

We see this in Haggai 2: 2-3

Look at what God says

*Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, **3** 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?*

We see from these verses the tendency of some of God's people to not see the value in the work God was calling them to because of discontentment.

This same tendency to become discontented is in our hearts as well.

When we become discontented this often reveals in our heart a preoccupation with self rather than God.

As we become preoccupied with self we often lose perspective and don't see clearly what God is doing in the present.

This seemed to be a challenge for those Israelites who had seen the former temple. The reason for their discontentment is that they were comparing the present with the past. They compared what they were rebuilding to the former temple.

How often in our hearts do we do the same?

We remember seasons where we had more time and we get discontented in the present because we feel responsibilities in the present has constrained us.

We remember seasons where it seems God used us mightily in previous settings but we get discontented because we are not experiencing the same thrill of being used by God mightily in the present.

We remember previous relationships we once enjoyed and that spurred us on in the Lord but we get disontentented because those relationships are no longer there anymore and we are finding it hard to grow deep with others in the present.

We get discontented because maybe our economic status, our relational status , or our vocational status presently is not as it used to be.

Be reminded brothers and sisters that remembrance of God's past graces and goodness is never meant to keep us from pressing forward in the present.

God's past graces and goodness is meant to strengthen our faith and spur us to trust and obey him in the present.

This is one of the causes of drift in our hearts away from pursuing God and engaging in his work.

The second thing that can become a hindrance to us pursuing God and engaging in his work is opposition

2)Opposition

The words of Ezra in Ezra 4:4-5 is helpful to see this.

Listen to these words, in talking about the enemies of the Israelites who were still living in the land hear what is recorded in the book of Ezra

Ezra 4:4-5

Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build 5 and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Do you hear that?

The Israelites constantly faced opposition and this opposition to their work was a main cause to their inactivity in attending to God's work.

The same is true for us as well

Whenever we actively pursue God and seek to advance his kingdom we can rest assured there will be opposition.

It is inevitable for the Christian

Let's be reminded that we have an adversary as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:8. That prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

The devil's intent is to keep us from enjoying Christ and experiencing the fullness of all he has for us.

We can therefore expect opposition and when we experience this opposition our tendency can be to fear and retreat in our engagement in God's work and in active pursuit of him.

Rather than retreating, when we face opposition we are to stand firm in Christ and fight.

As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:58

*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, **always** abounding in the work of the Lord, **knowing** that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

This brings us to a third hindrance to us pursuing God and engaging in his work.

This is comfort

3) Comfort

We see this in the verse we read earlier in vs 4 of our text this morning.

In this verse we see the people of Israel were dwelling in paneled houses while God's house lied in ruins.

Now this use of the word paneled houses is interesting.

The use of this word would seem to suggest that probably their houses had walls and ceilings covered with cedar wood.

You may ask well what's the big deal with that?

Well to have one's house decorated this way during that time was a sign of prosperity as it was very hard to get this type of wood.

You see, the people would have been spending their resources in abundance to get this material. This was a problem with God.

The reason being because: While God's house laid in ruins the people had prioritized their own comfort.

They had sacrificed their time and energy giving attention to the details of their own house while neglecting God's house.

Hearing this we may tell ourselves well how could they do that?

But family this illustrates to us the tendency in our own hearts as well to do the same.

Just like the Isralites in this passage, when we face opposition outside of us and we begin to internally become preoccupied with self becoming discontented our default is to chose to live a life of ease and comfort.

When we do this , we diminish God's glory in our lives because we are living for our own glory rather than his.

These are three hindrance we often experience in our pursuit of God and engagement in his work

Discontentment, opposition and comfort.

This poses a question for us this morning

Question

Are you allowing discontentment and opposition to cause you to choose a life of comfort and ease instead of a life of sacrifice, passionately pursuing God and engaging in his work?

Family as we look at the next couple verses in our text we see the consequences of the Israelite's actions and God's response to them for neglecting to rebuild his temple.

Look at vs 5-11

5 Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 6 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.

7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 8 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.

9 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. 10 Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. 11 And I have called for a drought on the land and 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 God's response towards the people.

As a consequence of neglecting him and his work God brings **fruitlessness and frustration**.

Every intention and plan of the people are frustrated and the things they are laboring for don't bring forth the fruit they are looking to get in return.

Notice what he calls them to do twice in these verses, you see these words in vs 5 and verse 7 :
Consider your ways .

He calls the people to consider the outcome of what their actions have caused.

Look at what he tells them.

You sowed much but harvested little
You Ate but never had enough
You Drink but never have your fill
You Clothed yourselves but no one is warm
You Earned wages but the wages earned goes into a bag with holes meaning what is earned goes away quickly.

Do you see what God is trying to get the people to see?

Everything they laboured for lacked the blessing of God and was therefore fruitless.

They couldn't enjoy anything, nothing they laboured for completely satisfied them. Everything seemed meaningless.

Not only that, listen to what God says in vs 9

You looked for much and behold it came to little And when you brought it home.

Look what God says next.

I blew it away.

God's response was to bring frustration and why? **Because the people did not prioritize him and his house.**

So as God explains in vs 10 and 11 to summarize, he caused the heavens and the land to bring forth frustration towards God's people instead of blessing.

He made the the heavens withhold the dew
He made the earth withhold produce and God also called for a drought that affected all things.

This is an illustration for us of what life looks like when God is not the priority he deserves to be in our life and his presence is not sought in our lives.

Frustration and fruitlessness.

We become ineffective-fruitless and life no longer feels like it has any purpose.

We lack the peace , the hope and joy in pursuing and serving God that we once had.

This is the consequence we experience when we compromise in our walk with God and make other things of higher priority than him.

What we see is : God's people are in God's place without his presence.

Family may that never be true of us

May we never be a people who are not passionately pursuing God and his presence and engaging with him in the work he has called us to in our lives

Let me pause to ask this question: Is that you this morning.

Have you been neglecting God and wavered in your commitment to him and his work?

Has life seemed pointless, meaningless.

Has your appetite for the things of God dwindled.

If that is you, hear God's word :Consider your ways.

That may be you and you may ask yourself this morning what do I do

Well praise God in our text the story doesn't end here.

Praise God however though we disregard him and though we pursue other things above him, he still pursues us.

Family don't miss the point that this was God's doing and his reason for doing this was so that Gods people also would return to him.

As we read on we see after God calls the people to return to building the temple we read of what happens in vs 12-15.

Thus leads us to our last point : The Promise

3) The Promise

Look at vs 12 -15

Haggai 1:12-15

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, 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. 13 Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, "I am with you, declares the Lord." 14 And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, 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, 15 on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

The Israelites after being confronted by God to consider their ways respond in obedience to the voice of God and we read that they also feared the Lord (they lived in reverence before God).

The people of God now have turned back to the Lord in repentance and are doing God's will.

Notice what happens next as they are obeying the Lord and doing his will, we read the following words in vs 13 that Haggai spoke to the people with the Lord's message "I am with you, declares the Lord"

What wonderful words and promise : I am with you.

Gods, People are now in God's place with Gods presence as he desired.

Notice what results next in vs 14 - And the Lord stirred up, he stirred up the spirit of the people and they worked on his house.

Before he had caused the heavens and earth to frustrate his people and bring fruitlessness, now he is empowering his people to bless the work of their hands.

What a wonderful picture and family what we see here is a picture to us of what God intends for us today.

Application

I think it beneficial to point out to us, that God's intention to have a place where his presence can dwell with his people hasn't changed.

See God has always desired to have a place where he has a people who know him and where his presence can dwell in full.

This is the goal of his redemptive work and the desire of his.

A good text where we can see this is Revelation 21:1-4.

John in giving us a prophetic picture of what is to come at the end of all things as God's purposes are fulfilled says.

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Family this is the end goal of everything God is doing in this world.

There will come a day when we as God's people will live for eternity in God's place (new heavens and new earth) where God's presence will dwell unmediated and unrestricted for our everlasting enjoyment as we reign with Christ for all eternity.

I think this morning we ought to be reminded of this.

Just like God wanted the Israelites to tend to his temple which was to be the place where God met his people and the place which represented his presence. He still asks the same of us today.

See the temple was just a shadow of what was to come. Which was Christ.

Jesus accomplished what the temple never could.

He was our representative who lived a life of perfect obedience and submission to God on our behalf.

Jesus then sacrificed his life and took upon himself the wrath of God our sins deserved.

After three days he then rose victoriously from the grave proving his power over sin and death.

As a result those who confess and repent of their sin and trust and believe in him by faith can know God relationally.

We can now know God and God can now Dwell with us no longer in a physical building and location but in Christ.

But Not only does God dwell with us but also in us.

Those of us who are in Christ are given God's Spirit who resides in us and we have been made into God's temple his church.

We the church of Jesus Christ like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2:5 to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This is what we have been called to

Just as God promised that he was with his people then, in Christ we are promised that he is with us now as we tend to building up his church

And how do we build up his Church: by seeking to know Christ and by helping others do the same.

This begs the question for all of us this morning: Is knowing Christ and helping others do the same a priority in your life ?

As you hear this question, if that is not you this morning. Hear the good news, Christ doesn't waver in his pursuit of you this morning.

He longs to fill you afresh with his Spirit and longs for you to experience the joy of his presence as you serve him.

He is more than able this morning to renew a fresh zeal to serve him.

If you draw nigh to him acknowledging you have made other things a priority in your life and commit yourself to him and his purposes . He promises he will draw nigh to you.

Today as a church his promise to us is also that he is with us as we obey his commission.

And here is his commission to all of us today:

Matthew 28:18-20

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

