

If I were to make a movie about the book of Haggai, I think I would call it, “What About God?” Many of you have seen the classic 90’s comedy starring Richard Dreyfuss and Bill Murray called, “What About Bob?” Dreyfuss plays a wealthy N.Y. psychiatrist who has a good-natured patient with lots of issues. During their first session together, Dr. Marvin is preoccupied with getting away on vacation so he rushes through the appointment with Bob, hands him a book he wrote and heads off to the lake with his family. Much to his surprise, Bob shows up uninvited of course, and that’s where the fun begins...for everyone except Dr. Marvin. He can’t stand Bob. Bob is an impediment to Dr. Marvin’s perfect life. He can’t shake Bob because the Marvin family takes a liking to Bob. Eventually Bob sabotages not only an interview with Good Morning America promoting Dr. Marvin’s new book but he also sabotages the doctor’s self-centered agenda. In the end, the psychiatrist loses his grip on reality.

The people of God returned to Jerusalem after 70 years in Babylonian captivity and began rebuilding their lives. They rebuilt their houses and businesses. They planted crops and vineyards but they showed little enthusiasm for rebuilding the temple...1:3-4. Haggai says, “What about God?” He confronts their misplaced priorities and challenges them to consider their ways. 1:5, 7.

Their lack of concern for the things that matter most to God led to some painful unintended consequences...1:6. The temple was important, but God’s primary concern was not stone and mortar. He wanted the temple restored but, more importantly He wanted their relationship restored. That’s why He wanted to see their worship restored, their service restored and ultimately their obedience restored. The renewed Temple was not a substitute for a right relationship with God. Righteousness does not come by having a nice building or by attending services. It comes by believing and trusting the promises of God.

Chapter 2 records Haggai’s second message which comes a month after they began to rebuild the temple. As the foundation was going down the discouragement was going up. Some of them, probably the elderly men, realized that the glory of God, the cloud affirming His presence, had not returned. So, Haggai reassured them with the words, “As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!” 2:5

Today we come to Haggai’s third and fourth messages delivered on the same day two months after the second message. Once again, you can hear the prophetic question, “What about God?” 2:10-14...Haggai’s challenge sounds confusing to those of us who did not grow up under the Jewish law. This point of the Law is explained in Numbers 19:11, “He that touches the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.” The Mosaic System taught that ceremonial cleanliness was not transferable from one person to another or one thing to another but ceremonial un-cleanliness was transferable. Anything an unclean person touched was considered unclean. God says that even after their customs and observances they were as unclean as before.

It seems that some of the people were working under the assumption that mere contact with the temple would make them clean. Sort of like going to church will improve your chances at getting a job...or a husband...or a winning lottery ticket. The holiness of the temple did not rub off on them. In fact, just the opposite – their sin was defiling the temple. So, even though they began to correct their neglect of the temple it appears they were still neglecting their sin.

Haggai reminds them once again that this is the reason their crops would not produce...2:15-17. They harvested half of what they would have brought in had they been obedient.

The book of Haggai serves as a warning about our indifference to the glory of God. As surely as the night follows the day, there will be consequences for seeking our own glory and neglecting the glory of God. We are not under the Old Covenant so we will not experience the curses God warned Israel about if they were disobedient. However, the NT is clear that God does discipline His people. He will be very creative in getting our attention. Haggai repeats a word we have seen before, “consider.” 2:18-19. God’s people should make a habit of getting alone before God and taking a fierce inventory of our lives.

The good news is that even though we may experience God’s chastening, God will not forget His promises to His people. Isaiah addresses feelings of being forsaken. “But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.” Is 49:14-15.

Haggai’s final message in vv. 20-22 is a reminder of God’s promise. I can’t think of a more encouraging word from the Lord than the words of Haggai who says, “I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.” He did. History shows that these nations did destroy one another. The empires and kingdoms of that day are now gone just as those that have replaced them will disappear in the future. But one kingdom has survived, God’s kingdom. And God’s King continues to rule on the throne of King David. All the kingdoms of this world will one day be shaken again. They are but the scaffolding for God’s spiritual temple, His church built with living stones, and the scaffolding will be thrown down when their purpose is accomplished. That is why Jesus said to seek first His everlasting kingdom.

In the meantime, Haggai says Zerubbabel is like a signet ring...2:23. What is a signet ring? In ancient times, a signet ring contained an emblem unique to the king. This emblem was a sign of the king’s authority. Official documents were sealed with a dollop of soft wax impressed with the king’s signet, usually kept on a ring on his finger. The seal certified the document was genuine, much like a notary public’s stamp today.

Zerubbabel was not only the governor of the rebuilt Jerusalem but he was a descendant of David, grandson of Judah’s King Jehoiachin. Years earlier, Jehoiachin, the last King of an independent Judah, was deported to Babylon. God pictured Jehoiachin as a signet ring being removed from God’s finger (Jeremiah 22:24). Now, God calls Zerubbabel the “signet ring,” but this time it won’t be removed.

In Haggai’s prophecy, God is giving Zerubbabel encouragement and hope. He was “chosen” for a unique and noble purpose. As God’s signet ring, Zerubbabel is given a place of honor and authority. God is reinstating the Davidic line and renewing His covenant with David. Judah still has a future as they look forward to the coming Son of David, the Messiah, who would one day “overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms” (Haggai 2:22).

What is the message of Haggai to us today?

1. Never overestimate the importance of this world. When you are distracted by the pursuit of worldly things, remember, **“The world is booby-trapped. It’s rigged for disappointment. On earth, everything falls short of some hoped-for ideal. Everything good down here has a tragic brevity and a funny aftertaste to it. It all falls short and shortly falls apart. None of it possesses any ultimacy...We can become so cynical that we poison ourselves, so self-indulgent that we devour ourselves, so despairing that we collapse into ourselves. In fact, self-pity and self-indulgence, boredom and despair, envy and greed – such are only yearning gone sour. They are just the greasy residue that remains after yearning has gone unfulfilled too many times.”** Mark Buchanan, *Things Unseen*, p. 50

If you are disappointed with life or discouraged because things haven’t worked out the way you thought they would, get alone and answer the question, “What about God?” Where does God fit into your plans? Seek first the kingdom of God and not the kingdom of this world.

2. Never underestimate the importance of your work. You are God’s chosen signet ring. The temple was a signet ring pointing people to God. The Jewish people were God’s signet ring pointing people to the promises of God. Zerubbabel was God’s signet ring pointing people to the promised Messiah. If you have Christ in you then you bear God’s signet ring. That’s why Jesus said to His disciples, “All authority is given to me in Heaven and on earth, now go, make disciples of all nations.” The implication is that the authority given to me by My Father, I give you to make disciples and represent me on the earth in my absence.

What about God? It’s a good question to ask on this special day because today we begin a process that has occurred only three other times in the past 40 years. We begin the transition from one pastor to another. Some of you may not really care about this process. You are too busy building your own life. I would say to you, “What about God?” Some of you do care about this process, so much so that you have been sizing Kurt up. You have been busy comparing Kurt with me, or Bill Counts, or T.D. Jakes, or Superman. I would say to you, “What about God?”

I want to make it clear that we are not changing Senior Pastors. The Senior Pastor of this church has been and always will be Jesus Christ. He is the Chief Shepherd. I have been, for a little while, His under shepherd. From now until next September I will share that responsibility with Kurt, then it will be Kurt’s turn to lead this body. What I am saying to you is no small thing. God brought this church into existence for a purpose – to show forth His glory in the city of Dallas. The promise of the Bible is that God will take the fruit of our little labor and make it glorious beyond measure no matter how trivial or how insignificant it may seem now. From cover to cover the message of the Bible is that God uses small, imperfect people, places and things to show off His glory. So, nothing we do is trivial if it is done for the glory of God. Nothing we do is insignificant if we do it in the name of Jesus Christ.

So, to you Kurt, I would remind you today that there is only one kind of pastor – flawed, broken, inadequate and hopelessly insecure. You are following a cloud of witnesses desperate for God to show up. You are simply the next man up. And my challenge to you is that in times when you feel inadequate and even on the rare occasions when you think, “I got this,” stop and ask, “What about God?” When the criticism comes. When they say you are too harsh. When they say you are too weak. When they say you are too worldly. When they complain about your preaching.

When they question your credentials. When they compare you to me. When they tell you how much better you are than me. When they criticize you for going on vacation or you get called back from vacation for a funeral or you just can't enjoy your vacation because you just can't get this flock off your mind until you have been reduced to a quivering mass of availability, stop and ask, "What about God?"

You were chosen for this task. You were not picked at random. God has equipped you with everything necessary to fulfill His call upon your life. So today, we joyfully affirm God's choice and we want to pray for God's blessing upon you and your family.