

LESSON 11 – PUTTING FIRST THINGS FIRST

JUNE 14, 2020

Background Scripture: Haggai 1

Lesson Passage: Haggai 1:2-11, 14-15 (NASB)

Introduction: What are you pursuing in life? The answer is not found in what you think your goal is but in what you are doing. For instance, you may claim that the Lord Jesus has first place in your life, but are you pursuing Him above all else, or have you gotten sidetracked with your own desires? This was the case with the Jews who returned to the land of Israel after being in Babylonian captivity. They had the goal of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple, but they became distracted with construction of their own homes and kept postponing work on the Lord's house. As a result, God was challenging their efforts. The Lord described it this way: "You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away" (Haggai 1:9). The people mistakenly thought that they could put their own financial interests ahead of God's and still prosper. Today they would probably say, "The faster I go, the behind I get." The same thing was happening in Malachi's day. When the people failed to bring their tithes and offerings, God called it robbery. He admonished them to "bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" so he could open the windows of heaven and pour forth abundant blessing (Malachi 3:10).

This principle reaches down to us today, and it encompasses more than financial matters. Peter has given us a list of qualities God wants us to diligently seek (2 Peter 1:5-11). Neglecting them for other pursuits is shortsighted, but those who practice them will avoid stumbling.

Scripture Reference: Haggai 1:2-11, 14-15 (NASB)

2 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'This people says, "The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt." 3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways! 6 You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes." 7 Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways! 8 Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the Lord. 9 "You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?" declares the Lord of hosts, "Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. 10 Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. 11 I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands." 14 So 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 sixth month in the second year of Darius the king (Haggai 1:1-15) NASB

Memory Verse: *7 Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways! 8 Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the Lord. (Haggai 1:7, 8) NASB*

Topic Explored: “*Putting First Things First*” ~ Every day you exchange a day of your life for something. It’s as if at the start of life each of us were issued a certain number of coins. They’re hidden inside a large machine so that we don’t know how many we were issued or how many we have left. Each day, the machine issues us a new coin. It may be the last coin we get, or we may get many more. All we know is that the average person in America gets between 70- and 80-years’ worth, but some get far less; a few may get more. You take each day’s coin and exchange it for something: a day at work or school, shopping, church, leisure, or whatever. Once spent, you can never get the coins back to spend them differently. The art of living wisely is largely a matter of spending your coins on the things that really matter considering eternity and not frivolously wasting them. Living wisely is difficult because often the choice is not between the bad and the good, but between the good and the best.

The Book of Haggai, second shortest in the Old Testament, has a potent message. It tells us to *put first things first* in our lives. It was written to people, like us, who would have told you that God must be first. They believed that; we believe that. But they had drifted into a way of life where their intellectual belief in the supremacy of God was not reflected in the way they were living. They gave lip service to the priority of God, but in fact they lived with other priorities. God sent this prophet to help His people get their priorities in line with what they knew they should be.

Lesson Focus: Haggai 1:2-11, 14-15 (NASB)

Verses 1-4~The historical setting is the early chapters of Ezra (Ezra 5:1). In 536 B.C., a remnant of about 50,000 Jews had returned from Babylon to Judah under the decree of Cyrus, King of Persia. They quickly rebuilt the altar and began offering sacrifices. Two years after returning, they had laid the foundation to rebuild the temple. Their Samaritan neighbors had offered to join in the work, but the Jews refused their offer. The Samaritans, in turn, threatened the workers and sent men to Persia to lobby against the Jews, bringing the work to a halt.

At least 14 years had passed. The people got caught up in the routine of life—farming, building houses, raising families, and that sort of thing. They got used to life without a temple. Even their leaders, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, had gotten used to things as they were. Into that scene, God raised up Haggai and Zechariah to proclaim His message to this returned remnant. They were saying, “The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt” (1:2). If you had asked them why the temple had not been built, they would have responded, “Don’t get me wrong! I’m all for rebuilding the Temple. It’s a great cause. But the timing just isn’t right. We’re in an economic downturn right now. Everyone’s pinched for money. There aren’t enough good jobs. It’s all I can do to provide for my family. But times will get better, and *then* we’ll rebuild the temple!”

Verses 5-8 ~ Twice the Lord tells the people, “Consider your ways”. That means to stop long enough in your busy schedule to evaluate your life in the light of God’s Word and fearing Him. The people in Haggai’s day were having problems. They sowed plenty of seed, but there was a drought and the crops didn’t yield as much as they had hoped. That meant that they had less to sow the following year, even though they needed to make up for the previous bad year. No matter how hard they tried, they just seemed to be spinning their wheels. Inflation seemed to gobble up the little bit that they earned. It was like putting money into a bag with holes. By the end of the

month, there was nothing left. Of course, the hard times meant that they didn't have any extra to give toward the temple building fund. But surely God understood their difficult circumstances!

Verses 9-11 ~ Some of these people had a measure of material success. They lived in fine, paneled houses. But the point of verses 6 & 9-11 is, even if you get what you're working for, it never satisfies, unless your priorities are lined up with God's. Solomon, who tried money, fame, knowledge, sensual pleasure, and everything a man could dream of, ended up cynically saying, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" (Ecclesiastes. 1:2). In the words of the Rolling Stones, "I can't get no satisfaction"! What they didn't see was that God; not only understood their circumstances, He had caused them! They were working harder but getting behind faster, but they hadn't stopped to consider that they were missing God's message. Haggai came along and said, "Hey, folks, it's God who controls the rain and the harvest. He is withholding His blessing because your priorities are not right! Put His house first and He will bless you. Seek first His kingdom and all these things will be added unto you."

Verses 14-15 ~ The difficulties in the way of building the temple had stopped the work, but during this long suspension of sixteen years, Zerubbabel and the rest of the people had been busy in building costly houses for themselves. But in the second year of Darius, a light dawned upon the darkness of the colony from Babylon. In that year the spirit of prophecy suddenly blazed up with a most brilliant light among the returned captives. In a moment Zerubbabel roused from his apathy, threw his whole strength into the work. After much opposition and many hindrances find delays, the temple was at length finished, in the sixth year of Darius, and was dedicated with much pomp and rejoicing. Although Zerubbabel's temple was less in size than Solomon's, God affirmed a greater honor: "*The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,*" said the Lord (Haggai 2:9). The glory given onto Zerubbabel's temple came many years later when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the temple halls.

Let's talk about it. . .

- 1. Is it okay for a Christian to have and enjoy nice things? Where do we draw the line? Is "luxury" sin?**
- 2. How can a Christian tell if they are putting their prosperity above God's house? What do you think about the people who had to leave their established way of life in Babylon to make the dangerous journey back to the land of promise? They had jobs and homes there. Most of them had been born and raised there.**

Making it personal:

- What are you pursuing in life? The answer is not found in what you think your goal is but in what you are doing. For instance, you may claim that the Lord Jesus has first place in your life, but are you pursuing Him above all else, or have you gotten sidetracked with your own desires?
- Christians who slip into putting their prosperity above God's kingdom have lost the spiritual perspective they need to get out of the quicksand they've fallen into. They're working for the food that perishes, but not for the food that endures to eternal life (John 6:27). They're forgetting that if their ways are pleasing to the Lord, He will give them all that they really need. They need to stop and consider that they are working against God, who merely blows on their take-home pay and scatters it (1:9). He does that to get them to reconsider their mixed-up priorities.

Closing Prayer: *“Dear God, please help us to place You and Your desires first in our lives, remembering that You gave us Your first and Best. You gave Your only Son to live and die so that we could be forgiven to live with You forever. We thank You for Jesus. In His Name we pray. Amen!”*

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