

Good Things, Little Packages, Haggai 7/23/17

I've mentioned to you before that I haven't always been a "man of the cloth"...in another life I was more of a "man of the coin." After college I had a brief few years in the investment world, eventually working as an advisor in DC. I'm going to give you free investment advice...write this down. My advice for virtually every client was 1) Invest in a diversified portfolio. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. 2) Invest in companies with a proven track record. Avoid speculative ventures. But the most important piece of advice was 3) Invest according to your priorities. Priority is retirement, buying a house, paying for college... I can't begin to tell you how to invest unless I know your priorities. Principle- Priorities determine investment.

In the little book of Haggai, we are going to encounter a group of people that were investing themselves in the wrong things. And the reason was because they had the wrong priorities. God is going to ask this question to his people in Haggai's day, but he's asking us the same question today. What do our investments reveal about our priorities?

Author, Dating, Recipients:

Haggai the prophet Now if you are looking for a great baby name, I suggest Haggai. Sounds gender neutral...Listen in a day in age when we have people naming their kids after fruits, Haggai isn't so bad!

520BC, under Persian King Darius Rule.

Recipients- Jewish Remnant and their leaders.

In this little two-chapter book there are 4 messages

1st Message: A Present Call to rebuild the temple 1:1-15

2nd Message: A Promise of a Future Glory: God's glory will fill the temple 2:1-9

3rd Message: A Promise of a Future Grace: Blessing for an unholy people 2:10-19

4th Message: A Promise of a Future Governor: The Ruler to come through Zerubbabel 2:20-23

We are just going to study the first message: **A Present call to rebuild the temple, 1:1-15.**

First we will see

The Problem of Inverted Priorities

Haggai 1:1-4

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest:

This is what the Lord Almighty says "These people say, "The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house." Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet

Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

Now it's not a good thing when God gives you a rhetorical question is it? We do this with our kids right? "Is now the time be playing on your iPad when your room remains in ruins?" What is it that they were supposed to be doing? Do understand that let me give you a little context.

In 538 B.C. Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple, remember from our study on Nehemiah that the Babylonians destroyed the original temple back in 586 BC. About 50,000 Jews journeyed home and began work on the temple. It was about two years later they were able to complete the foundation of the temple amid great rejoicing. Their success aroused the Samaritans and other neighbors who were enemies of Judah who applied enough pressure that they halted the rebuilding project...and it stayed that way for nearly 16 years! That was their mandate when they came back into the land. While the mantra of the remnant under Nehemiah's building project might have been "Hard work and Dedication"... **their mantra was, "Not Yet!"** Doesn't have the same ring to it does it?

What was their priority?

v. 4- Working on their **paneled houses**. This was a means of beautifying your house using cedar wood like wainscoting... **Fixer Upper, Israeli Edition... (Picture)**. King Cyrus had provided the Jews with money to buy cedar timber to rebuild the temple. It's likely that they were using this superior wood to remodel their own homes rather than to rebuild the temple.

Before we go any further, we need to understand why this was such a big deal. You might be asking, why was the building so important to God? It's just a building isn't it? Doesn't God want them to be happy and have a nice house? Because it would be a clear and public statement that His people still wanted Him, that they still valued him as the priority above all the things that clamored for their lives. God dwelling in the center of the community, among His people. See, it was all about relationship with God. The priority really wasn't a building, that was a means to an end- his relationship with his people.

The Consequences of Inverted Priorities

Haggai 1:5-6

Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

Over these years of saying "Not yet" to God, he didn't leave them without warning. He was trying to get their attention but they were hardened to it. He says- "Haven't you noticed the poor return on your investment? The stock market bubble burst>

The economy's a wreck? Planted much, harvested little... All this effort, all this energy and there is little to show for it. Do you think that is coincidence? A streak of bad luck?

In fact God doesn't leave them guessing, He tells them directly.

Haggai 1:9-11

"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house."

They should have picked up on this connection if they remembered God's law in Deuteronomy 28. If they disobey and turn away from God these are the very things they should expect God to do in disciplining them. But they weren't picking up on the connection. Selfish priorities have the tendency to blind us to God's work in our lives. One theologian said- *their self-seeking comfort became a plastic bag around their heads, suffocating them from the air of faith and the priorities of God.* When he's trying to get our attention, when he's bringing something into our lives to discipline us. Or when you are chasing after your priorities (relationship, family, money, status, stuff) and they are leaving you unsatisfied and disappointed. Are tuned in to God's frequency? Pain and disappointment don't always mean we have the wrong priorities- it may just be the consequences of living in a broken world. But God is willing to allow failure, disappointment and frustration to wake us up to his call. *"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."* –C.S.Lewis, Problem of Pain

The Call to God's Priorities: Now is the Time!

So after getting their attention God answers the question, "Is now the time to rebuild the temple?" The answer is a **resounding** yes!

Haggai 1:8

"Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the Lord.

God speaks clearly in His Word and God's Word still speaks just as clear to us today. How will they respond? Will they harden their hearts to the prophet's words? Will they write him off as over zealous? Or will they take it to heart as a wake up call?

The Response to God's Call

Haggai 1:12-15

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah,

and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

It's so encouraging to have a good ending to the story. They obeyed! Here you have a beautiful picture of **biblical repentance**. Notice the sequence:

1) True repentance begins in the heart. (v.12)

-They acknowledge the source of the admonishment was God. They didn't brush it off as opinions, you have your truth, we have our truth. That's good for you, but not for me. No, they said, God sent this.

-They humbled themselves. Feared the Lord. There is an appropriate fear- an awe, a respect, a seriousness that we should have for God.

2) True repentance is empowered by God (v. 13-14a)

"I am with you" and "stirs all their hearts"- He gets behind them, and he empowers them to carry out obedience. Whatever God asks us to do He will empower us to do.

2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

3) True Repentance always results in action. (v.14b-15)

What did they do? They sharpened their axes, put on their work sandals and headed to Lebanon to chop some trees! They turned from their inverted priorities- their own houses, and worked on God's priority- God's house. This is what repentance looks like. Recap- When confronted with the reality of their inverted priorities by God through the prophet Haggai the remnant responds in true repentance.

What about you and me? We likely aren't guilty of neglecting to build an ancient middle-eastern temple. Have we found ourselves as a church guilty of saying "Not yet" to God? There were many churches in the south in the 1960s saying not yet to racial reconciliation. In a Birmingham jail on April 16, 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. wrote a letter in response to clergy telling him "not yet" about racial reconciliation. But he and many others obeyed God who was saying- "Now is the time." Are we sensitive to God's voice telling Brandywine, "Now is the time" about something we are neglecting? We believe as leadership that God is telling us now is the timing to address the local needs around us, both inside and outside of our church- poverty, racial reconciliation, partnering with churches, ministering to broken families, those with addictions and hurts...

Christian- What about for you individually? Is there an area in your life where God is saying "Now is the time" and **your Mantra is "Not yet?"** Get serious in your relationship with him, commune with him... but you have been too busy, share your faith with your friend and you are saying "Not yet?" Is the Spirit telling you take up your cross and follow him in suffering or sacrificing something you don't want to give up and you are saying, "Not yet?" Is the Spirit telling you to forgive someone you have been saying "Not yet?" Is God telling you to confess and repent of that sin that is gripping your life and you are saying, "Not yet." Ex: Sexual sin

Unbeliever- I'm really encouraged that you are here because this is a place you can encounter Him. Maybe you've been saying, "Not yet." I'll deal with that when I'm older, I'll get spiritual after I live my life and accomplish some of my goals. I'll do that after I get my act together, clean myself up. Just like with the Israelites, he loved them and wanted to dwell among them. God loves you and wants to have a relationship with you. God is pursuing you today. Christianity is different than every other religion. **All other religions tell you- here are all the things you need to do to find God. Christianity says- Here's what God did to find you!** What did He do? He sought you. He chased hard after you. The temple was eventually rebuilt, but it wasn't enough. He wanted more. So he replaced it with something even better, something much more personal and permanent:

John 3:16

For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

No one is guaranteed another day. God is saying "Now is the time!" So what should we do? Well what did we see as a portrait of true repentance?

1) Begin with your heart

-Trust that this message today is a Word from the Lord to you today. God is speaking to you about your salvation. God is speaking to you about your porn addiction. God is speaking to you today about your anger, your spending problem, your fear of sharing your faith.

-Humble yourself before the Lord. "God you are holy, perfect and just. I am not. I'm going to take you seriously today and I don't know if I'll get another opportunity. I'm going to trust what Jesus has done for me today . instead of myself. I'm going to take this sin issue in my life seriously.

2) Trust God's empowerment

-He promises He will be with you. He promises that He will empower you through the Holy Spirit to give you what you need to carry out what He is calling you to do. "But my life is a mess!" I can relate, but Christ lived the perfect obedient life for you and can live through you. Trust him! "But I feel weak!" I tell you that you're "empowered" but you feel weak. Don't sweat it. God empowered Jesus to do it in your place. All the power you need is found by coming to Him.

3) Commit to action

-Don't procrastinate, don't go halfway or hedge your bets. When I gave my life to Christ- it was all in, trusting Christ to figure out the rest for me...And the very next thing God called me to do was change my school and major. The next thing he called me to do was break up with my girlfriend. With my sexual sin- It meant that I needed to get accountability, I needed to delete files, I needed to get a filter for my devices, I needed to read books about it...

In response to God's admonishment about their wrong priorities, in response to God's call- "Now is the time" the people of Israel responded in true repentance. What is your response today? I pray it will be "I'm all in!"