

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: HAGGAI.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Haggai 1:1-15

Introduction.

To apply a baseball analogy to the Minor Prophets, we are rounding third and headed for home. Literally. The final three books of the Minor Prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, all deal with the Israelites return to home. This is an entirely new chapter in Israel's history. The seventy year exile in Babylon is over and the people have returned to Jerusalem and Judah under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel and Joshua.

God had moved through the heart and will of one pagan king to attack and destroy Judah. That had been prophesied by Habakkuk and Zephaniah and it happened when Babylon attacked in 586BC and exiled all the people of God.

Before they left they looted and ransacked everything, what they couldn't take they destroyed or burned. Nothing was left standing in Jerusalem, the king's palace, the temple of God, the walls and all the homes.

God then moved through the heart and will of another pagan king to attack and destroy Babylon. Cyrus king of Persia did so in 539BC. God also moved his heart to allow God's people to return to their homeland. About 50,000 jumped at the opportunity and returned.

But they were a small remnant, they were a lot of priests and Levites, they were poor. They found Jerusalem in shambles, completely destroyed. They would have to start completely over from nothing. There was no economy and all the national wealth was plundered.

They came home with the goal of rebuilding the temple, the symbol of God and His presence. Their excitement gave way to discouragement through the unrelenting harassment and torment from the surrounding neighbors, especially Samaritans, who didn't like the presence of the Jews back in the land. You can read about this in Ezra and Nehemiah.

The temple rebuilding ground to a halt after two years of work on the foundation, they ceased their labor for the next 16 years, from 536 to 520BC.

They turned to rebuilding their homes and businesses and everything else while the temple of God remained unfinished. They came with one goal, but through discouragement and distraction they lost their focus.

God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, men of God's Word, to call the people to faith and faithfulness, to reorient their priorities.

God used Haggai and Zechariah to motivate the people to resume the task. Haggai's message is a message of challenge and encouragement, of rebuke and reassurance. It covers a period of four months. As a result the temple was finished in four years and dedicated in 516BC.

Unlike some of the Minor Prophets we have encountered, this one is precisely dated.

Haggai 1:1 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 ...

Outline of Haggai, Five Short Sermons:

Haggai 1:1-12: First sermon, How is it that the Lord's house remains in ruins? Rebuke.
September 1, 520BC.

Haggai 1:3-6, 9-11 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? 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. ... 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."

Haggai begins this prophecy with a call to consider your ways, examine your lives, look at your priorities. How is it going for you? How is neglecting God and God's work going for you?

They had been back about twenty years, they rebuilt their homes, reestablished their businesses, replanted farmland and vineyards, yet despite all their efforts things had not gone well for them. They lived in constant frustration and discontentment.

If you live for yourself, you will live in a constant state of discontent, insecurity, stress, anxiety and fear. Life doesn't go well when lived for the glory of man or the glory of self.

The love of things can so consume us that we become distracted and disinterested in the eternal things. They came back to rebuild the temple but quickly got discouraged and distracted and soon became focused on themselves.

When it comes to doing God's work we will always have opposition. Satan will make it as difficult as he can. He will throw up road blocks, he will bring along more attractive options, he will try to discourage or defeat us, he will get us to compare ourselves to others, he will send extra bills to weaken our trust in God's provision.

We so easily and so quickly get focused on the present and the temporal and what leads nowhere and forget the future and the eternal and what leads to blessing.

Where is our identity? Where is our contentment? Our peace and rest? In us, in our will and ways or in the Lord?

God sent Haggai to wake them up from their indifference. Haggai says put God's work first. Make God's kingdom your highest priority. The first commandment is to love God, to seek God and His righteousness. Without love for God we will grow selfish and self-centered.

Notice verse 1:8 “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.”

Haggai 1:12-15 Second sermon

Three weeks later, September 21, 520BC

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.

After 18 years of neglect and frustration, the people responded quickly and within three weeks they are back on task.

This is a remarkable display of obedience, of submission to authority, of surrendering to the will of God. How often do we see this kind of response to a rebuke of sin? How often do people take a message from God to heart and respond?

Haggai 2:1-9: Third sermon, How will this temple compare with the first? Courage.
Four weeks later, October 21, 520BC

Just a short four weeks later the people were once again discouraged, but for a different reason. They became discouraged again that their efforts would be too little, too small, nothing compared to the past.

When the people got done building the foundation they wept (Ezra 3:12-13) because it was so much inferior to the previous.

The older people must be discouraging the younger people. The older saints remembered Solomon's Temple, the gold, the marble, the most magnificent structure in the ancient world. How things used to be? “We came here to worship and we were inspired and filled with awe. There is no way we will ever get close to that. Where is the glory?”

God gives Haggai a vision of what is to come and what it will be like.

Haggai 2:6-9 For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. 7 And *I will shake all nations*, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord of hosts. 9 *The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former*, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.”

Take heart, God is sovereign, everything belongs to Him. He is in control, He will rule and overrule. God's enemies are all unwilling participants in His plans and purposes.

We lose God's blessing when we put our needs first, and we lose God's blessing when we judge things by human terms or standards. We judge the church as small or weak or insignificant, and other things as better or more important.

Haggai 2:9 The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts.

How could there possibly be a temple of greater glory and splendor than Solomon's Temple? The book of Hebrews was put in the NT to help us interpret and understand the OT. In Hebrews Jesus is the greater Moses, Jesus is the greater sacrifice, Jesus is the greater temple, Jesus is the greater glory. In Jesus dwells the fullness of God's glory.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Haggai says, be strong and take courage, the future is in God's hands. The promises of God are true and trustworthy. He is with us always and will never leave us or forsake us. Take courage, be strong, trust in the Lord.

Haggai 2:10-19: Fourth sermon, How can blessing come to a defiled people?

Two months later, December 21, 520BC

They think that their work on the temple will make them holy, that the holy place will rub off on them, but the truth is just the opposite. Their own sin is defiling the holy place.

What they are doing is unclean because they are unclean, they are living and acting in sin.

Consider how you lived before and how that didn't go well. Seek now to rebuild spiritually, for the glory of the Lord. Seek me, seek holiness, and I will be with you and I will bless you.

Haggai 2:20-23: Closing words of Haggai to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah. Assurance.

Same day

Key text, major point in the minor prophet.

Haggai 2:23 On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts."

Matthew 1:10-13 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of *Zerubbabel*, 13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud ...

He is a sign of God's faithfulness to His promise that there would always be a Son of David on the throne and from David would come a Son of David, the Messiah.

Nations will rise and fall, governments would come and go, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Syrians, Egyptians, Greek, Romans, they all fell and are no more, but the remnant of God's people would remain forever.

Three terms are used by Haggai to describe Zerubbabel and they all have Messianic implications.

My servant.

This is a term or title used of Jesus in the OT, such as the Suffering Servant chapter in Isaiah 53.

My Chosen One.

Another Messianic title.

A signet ring.

A signet ring has a raised surface that is used to make a seal, an impression in wax. That seal was a sign of authority and power. It was the symbol representing its owner. It represents the king.

Jesus is like a signet ring, a sign and symbol of God's presence, power and authority.

What He seals is final, it's secure. It cannot be revoked. No one is more secure than a person redeemed by the blood of Jesus and sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Application and conclusion.

When God wants to do a work on earth, He does it through people, through His chosen servants, through leaders of His people, through humble saints.

He wants us to focus our priorities on Him and His kingdom, and He will take care of the cares and concerns of life. If we keep the first things first, He will see to all the rest.

The central most important thing is our relationship with God. We must earnestly strive to seek God and love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Our chief end and purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Life becomes futile if we make it all about us and getting what we want and trying to secure our future.

Haggai 1:6 sums up our generation, our culture, our Western, American consumer mentality. Yet all our feverish activity is vain, ineffective.

What are you anxious about? What are you fearful or nervous or worried about? What are you preoccupied with? What do you ask for more than anything else in your prayers?

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:5 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Matthew 6:31-32 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

Your Heavenly Father knows all that you need, He is perfectly able to provide and bless. Cast all your cares, all your anxieties on Him, rest in Him and in His perfect peace and provision. Trust Him and watch and wait and see what He will do.

Make your relationship with Jesus Christ is the central priority of your life. Heed the warning of Haggai and give careful thought to your ways. Make God and His glory your chief end. Make God’s house and God’s work foremost in your prayers, your service and your giving. Take courage, your efforts are doing much more than you can see or know.

And look forward with great anticipation to the coming glory when we shall dwell in the temple of the Lord forever. The best is yet to come.