

Talks – Haggai

INTRO

The prophet Haggai was called by God to challenge the people of Judah to re-build God's temple. The people were living in great comfort while the temple lay in ruins. Haggai had a message from the Lord to the people to re-build and he faithfully passed on the message. The book is a great one as it's short but full of so many spiritual points and applications (as the whole Bible is). So here we go..

The Word of The Lord

In many verses in Haggai 1 we find that the prophet Haggai spoke the word of the Lord. Time and time again he speaks what God says to him, at least 8 times in the 15 verses of Chapter. Where the Bible repeats something it is fair to say that it accords that thing a priority.

God gave Haggai an authority and importance to his words. The Lord was actually speaking through him, as a prophet he was speaking the voice, the heart of the Lord. Today, there are many people who claim to speak from God but they should be subject to testing in what they say. In Deuteronomy 13 we see the Lord warning the Israelites about false prophets. We see that the punishment for those who are false prophets is death. As Derek Prince used to say, if this principle was applied more today we'd see people much slower to claim words were from God. True fear of the Lord! For Haggai, he knew of this and made the prophecies. We know that the Holy Spirit was truly speaking as we have Haggai recorded in the Bible, importance in itself of God according claiming it as His words.

In our lives, what do we say that truly comes from the Lord? How much do we need to control our tongues, check with our Bibles, seek God's face in prayer, before we can say with the same authority that 'this is the word of the Lord'. This is why we need to be careful what we prophecy and make sure it tallies with the Bible and at the very least, Biblical principles.

Fancy Houses

Is it OK to be living it up when people are starving in the world? Is it good that I bought an North Face hoody for £50 or a Montane down jacket for £100? Should you buy Nike trainers you like as opposed to fair trade shoes that you don't like? It's a hard one isn't it, balancing our resources, choices and riches here in the West while so many go needy through the world.

In Haggai, God had a challenge for the people of Judah – 'Is it right for you to be living in fancy houses while the Temple is still in ruins.' But in this statement we find an answer to the question above..

See, it's not wrong to have resources and to be blessed by God here in the West. But it is wrong to have the wrong priorities with what you do with your time, your money and resources, energies. God didn't say, 'Is it right for you to live in fancy houses?' period. No, God asked whether it was right considering that the Temple was STILL in ruins.

What would the modern equivalent of this be? I'd say the same. Except we can see the Temple as God's people, the buildings where God's people minister and the temple of the Holy Spirit, that is you and me if we are disciples of Jesus.

So what does this mean in practice?

Let's keep the corporate temple clean: let's encourage one another, spur people on to good deeds for God (Hebrews 10.24), let the church rise up shining light for God, encouraging people, seeking truth together, loving one another more (John 13:35 – 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.') Let's keep sin out of our lives. 1 Corinthians 5-7 says, 'Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are.' The word yeast here represents sin – and Paul was encouraging the Corinthian church to deal with sin, deal with the infection, before it spreads. Same for us.

The temple where God's people meet. I know that church is the people and that people must come before programmes. I also recognise it is the Holy Spirit that convicts, saves, changes people. But we have our part to play. In the Old Testament (from Exodus 36 on), we see skilled craftsmen at work, we see the best materials being gathered for God's temple. Yes, these were Old Testament times where the physical temple built was the place where God rested on earth for his people. Today's equivalent (since Jesus) is our bodies if we are Christians, where the Spirit of God is active.

Despite this – there is Biblical principle for keeping buildings tidy and organised, having the physical building in good nick, keeping a place clean, healthy, uplifting and lively. Let's not see church buildings that look like a bomb has hit them. Let's honour God by investing into buildings and work that will benefit God's kingdom, the church, and especially the local community who may not know the church building is even a church. Do we honour God by people tripping over on broken concrete, do we honour God by microphones that don't work, do we honour God by having no-one on the door on a Sunday morning to look out for people and make them feel welcome as a whole church policy?

Finally, the temple of the Holy Spirit. That is, you and me. This is what 1 Corinthians 6.18-20 says:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.

Our bodies are the place where the Holy Spirit lives. This is no ordinary thing. Your body was bought at a great cost, the death of Jesus on the Cross and his resurrection. When you buy a new top, if you're like me, you'll wear it out a bit, look after it, put it on a hanger, look after it. When something is valuable like an antique, you see people put it in a case, behind a glass door or something. When something is worth something it is looked after carefully because it's precious (you don't see a new born baby being slung into a bed at a hospital, it's gently laid down). Jesus paid the ultimate price, so our bodies deserve to be looked after in the ultimate way.

In fact, the Bible says that we honour God with our body. Therefore when we speak, act, live, treat our body for good, get fit, we honour God. When we despise ourselves, hate on people, use our bodies for violence, feed our body bad stuff like cannabis, alcohol, even loads of fatty foods – we're not looking after our bodies and not honouring God. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul is speaking specifically against sexual sin. This is one area (both physically and mentally) where we need to be as clean as we can be. The practicalities of this are between you and God but the Bible does give us basic principles to live by to avoid sexual immorality and perversion (going against God's way).

Then the Bible goes a step further still – telling us that if we have asked Jesus to be Lord over our lives, we are no longer our own, we belong to Jesus. When you become a Christian and fully commit to live for Jesus, you are no longer in charge of your own body, God is. What an awesome thought. You are so precious that Jesus personally owns you.

So let's keep the temple clean.

Wrong Priorities

Do you ever get accused of having the wrong priorities? Probably you do. Maybe you spend too much time out and not enough time in, maybe you've been accused of not doing enough work, homework, too much work even?! Sometimes this is justified, sometimes it's not.

In Haggai, God spoke to the people of Judah showing them how they harvested very little compared to what they planted; they drank but were always thirsty; they ate but were never full; they had clothes but were never warm enough; they had money but it seemed to disappear. What was the reason? We find out in the next few verses, if we didn't know already. Reason was they were not putting God first.

Do you feel like things never satisfy you? I feel like that, partly because I'm the kind of person that sees more potential, sees what's not happening that should be. But also because I don't put God first enough. It's the same for every Christian and it's the same for many more non-Christians. Some people talk of a God-shaped hole in all of us. That's the solution. Putting God first, letting him be first in all we do and say and are. But it's hard, it takes work, time, commitment. But most of all it takes an attitude willing to make it happen.

In verse 9, God says, 'You look for much, but you find little.. because you all work for your own houses while my house is still in ruins.' Making God your priority, not self, is the way to find a lot, do a lot, be more satisfied and more fruitful in all you do.

Working for Quality

In verse 8 of Haggai 1, we find God asking the people to 'go up to the mountains, bring back wood and build the Temple. Then I will be pleased with it and be honoured.'

Let's break this sentence down to identify what God is getting at here:

1. Go up to the mountains. The people were told where to go, what to do but they had to actually go. This was no trip down to the beach, they had to go up the mountains. God will

stretch you and refine you, call you up the mountain, maybe call you closer into his presence, ask you to do stuff that involves a bit of climbing. Don't worry, God knows what he's doing!

2. Bring back wood. You don't do anything for God that is a waste of time. It all has a purpose. God didn't say go up to the mountains, period. No, he said go bring back some wood. Cut down some trees, organise a system of getting this wood down from the mountain, carved up and ready to use. God is a God of action not of passivity. God didn't say go grab some scraps off the floor either. The wood was to be quality (how else would it last, why else did they need to go 'up the mountain' to get it).

One thing that really annoys me in churches is lack of evaluation, lack of quality. People settle for 'oh it's OK, it'll do'. But no it won't do. Why do we honour God with less than our best, how can that be pleasing worship to God? Know what, when we use the main church building, we tidy it up and clean it better than the state it was left in. Why? Because that's what we need to do. When we buy a microphone, we buy quality. When we ask a speaker to our evangelistic events, we choose men and women who are gifted, anointed, are quality. We aren't perfectionists, we constantly train up young people, but we aim for quality, we are committed to quality. This is a sea change in attitude for some – but one that needs to happen. God's Spirit brings growth, transformation, but we are called to give God our very best in all we do.

3. Build the Temple. What you sow you reap. The people sowed investment of time and energy for a reason – the best reason – building, re-building God's temple. There will be times to re-build God's temple in your life. Time where you need to get away with God, with the Bible, pray, get prayer, get encouraged, lifted up. There are times when you can help build the 'temple' in other people's lives too. We are a body in the church. God doesn't ask only the limbs and the nose to work, he asks the whole body to work together for a purpose – building his kingdom, his temple.

4. Then I will be pleased and honoured. God is not some cruel dictator, forcing his people into slavery for his joy. No, he asks us, wills for us, longs for us, to bring him joy by honouring him. You can make God happy and pleased by obeying him, giving it up for him, living for him, honouring him.

Work going to Waste

'Because of what you've done' the Lord said, these things happened:

- the sky holds back the rain
- the ground holds back the crops

God called for a time without his blessing on the rain, the crops, the land, farming, new wine, olive oil, plants and all the work of the people's hands. Sounds very dramatic. But sometimes that's what happens to stir up God's people.

Let's not allow things to get to that stage in our lives, our nation, before we rise up and obey God fully, commit our lives to God fully, to make his kingdom reach all the peoples of all the nations.

How can God bless what is not offered to or honouring to him? The less that is offered to God, the less that will be blessed in our lives, our church and our nation. It's so simple it's untrue. Yet so often we can't figure it out – you go figure..!

But the flip is true too. If we honour God, obey him, live for him, fear him, then God will not withhold his blessing. In fact, he will pour it out. If you've seen the Transformations videos there is an example in I think Guatemala where the people turned back to God and all the infertile lands were given new life, so much so that they are producing massive amounts of fruit and veg, massive in size too! That's one awesome God, believe, if you ain't seen, go check out.

Obedience leads to blessing

I used to think the word 'blessing' was a Christian word. I still do. But I use it as I don't know what other word sums up what God is and does for people. A true 'blessing' can only be something from God though people understandably use the word freely.

But the way to blessing (having, doing God good in your life and beyond) is through obedience to God. Let's see what happened in Haggai.

In verse 12 we read that the leaders and the **people who were left alive (!!)** obeyed the Lord their God and the message from Haggai the prophet and they feared the Lord. Then the people heard from the Lord who said, 'I am with you.' So the people came and worked on re-building the temple.

Let's do the whole break-down thing again..

1. The leaders were key in this. Leaders have a very great responsibility before God and under God. It is through Godly leaders that the church will right itself, that lives will be helped to be impacted through God's Spirit. Where the leaders turn to and fear God, there will be blessing and this will pass on to the people and the nation and the land.

2. The people obeyed God, recognised Haggai as the Lord's prophet and in turn they began to fear the Lord. (For more on the fear of the Lord visit our Talks > Fear of God. But obedience to God is our response to God's knock on our hearts door. Obedience leads people to see God in his glory, see the world as it is, hear God's message and place God in his rightful place as king over our lives.

3. As a result of the people's obedience and response to God's message, God spoke to encourage them and let them know that he was with them. The Bible says that if we draw near to God he will draw near to us. Hebrews 10:22 also says, 'let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.' God longs to encourage you, to use you, to be with you. All you need do is ask and obey, put him first and he will put you first.

4. God gives purpose to life. The people came and worked on the temple. There's nothing quite like being part of a team working for God. I've done it in many ways (mission in Lithuania, youth work team, schools work team etc.) and it's awesome to be able to be on team working for God. Thing is, team is found everywhere. As we say in hip hop, 'we all fam'. Which means we're all family, all God's people.

You can bet that on the temple there were carpenters, people carving statues, artists, musicians, sculptors and more. Loads of different people offering all their different gifts to work on different parts of God's temple. It's a beautiful and God-ordained picture of the Jesus and the church. Jesus is the cornerstone, we are his craftsmen, working in different ministries, to build the kingdom of God. Let's never forget this is how God works, he uses all of us in different ways to reach different people at different times. Let's be open and ready to build our part of the 'temple' and let's do it to the highest standards we can. You see, if we don't build a building to high standards, it may collapse. The same danger is true of the church. We're all one family!