

People of the Book: Haggai

Haggai 1:1-15

July 18, 2010

You graduate high school...go to college...get a job...then get married. Before long here come children. You need a bigger car. It's time to move from that small apartment into a house. Pretty soon it seems like you've outgrown the house and you need a bigger one. Your oldest is almost 13 years old and you haven't started a college fund yet; and, if you don't start concentrating on your 401k you'll be moving in with the kids when you retire. Athletic fees, club dues, car payments, mortgage payments, credit card payments, orthodontics...where does it end? And why doesn't your income seem to last as long as the month does?

Demands, expectations, family, friends, job – they all push in on all sides of you. Before long we don't think we have anything left to give. Then, when we lay our head on the pillow at night and review the day, we find that we tended to the immediate, the emergency, the pressing. But the truly important got left in the dust. We took care of the good, and never got around to the better or the best.

If this sounds like your life, then I want to suggest that the prophet, Haggai, is talking to you today. His message to you today is the same as it was to the exiles who had returned home to Jerusalem some 2500 years ago.

In 586 BC the Babylonians conquered the people of the southern kingdom of Judah, destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, and marched the people almost 1000 miles into exile in Babylon (present-day Iraq). That's like walking from Holly Springs to North Bay, Ontario, Canada. When Cyrus came to power in Babylon, he allowed the exiles to return home and to rebuild the Temple. Overjoyed, they went home and started work rebuilding the Temple. But before long they got distracted. Work on the Temple ceased and the people began to focus on their own lives. They forgot their purpose, their values changed and their priorities followed their values.

By the time the prophet Haggai brings them God's message, over 10 years had passed since any work had been done on the Temple. As the Lord sees his Temple languishing and the people now focused on themselves instead, listen to what he says to them.

Then the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai: "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you! You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes! (Haggai 1:3-6)

Did you notice that in the scenario I presented at the beginning of this message there was no mention of God – no mention of any time or resources directed toward a spiritual life of any kind. All of them, from kids to job to home, are good things to focus on. However, when we focus on the stuff of our physical life to the exclusion of the author of life, our priorities are wrongly ordered. And when our relationship with God and God’s will are not at the top of our priority list, then all of the rest of our life falls apart.

Haggai reminded the people of Jerusalem that God was not a part of their life, and that’s why their lives were so messed up – they were not able to be satisfied with the material things that they accumulated more and more of.

However, there was good news for the people then, and there is good news for you now. When the people heard the call from God, they responded by re-ordering their priorities and changing their values. They placed God first again and began work on the Temple once more. Once they did those things, God assured them that he was as faithful to them on that day as he was when he brought them out of Egypt. In fact, because the people returned to him in faith, the Lord assured them, “*The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory.... And in this place I will bring peace. I the Lord Almighty have spoken!*” This is a messianic prophecy reminiscent of Isaiah 61:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,
for the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted
and to proclaim that captives will be released
and prisoners will be freed.
They will rebuild the ancient ruins,
repairing cities destroyed long ago.
They will revive them,
though they have been deserted for many generations.*

Though the people had voided their hearts of any presence of the Spirit of God for generations, God was faithful. As you look at your own life – your values, your priorities – where is God in the hierarchy? If he is not where he is supposed to be, you can change that just like the Israelites did.

The Lord said that he would bring peace into the lives of his people when they responded to his love. He will do the same for you today. Jesus promised release to the captives and that the prisoners would be freed. He’s not talking about physical captivity – he’s talking about you and me. He wants to release our spirits from the bondage we tend to inflict upon ourselves. If you want to be part of something more significant...something bigger than yourself... then listen to

the words from Haggai, and respond. Put God first. He has especially chosen you to be part of his Kingdom. Rejoice and embrace life in Christ.