

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

Introduction: This morning I'd like to change our "normal" preaching schedule – the gospel of John in the morning and a book in the Old Testament at night.

Tonight we'll preach part two of "A Faith that Can't Be Tested" that we started last Sunday a.m.

This morning we're going to consider the message of Haggai

In the evenings we have been doing a book overview each week and we've reached Haggai

I believe that the message of Haggai is especially pertinent for us this morning

Haggai is called a "minor prophet" ... why minor?

Haggai is called a "post exilic" minor prophet ... the people of God have returned to Jerusalem after a period of exile.

The exile refers to the time when Israel was removed from their homeland by the Babylonian empire under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar

Maybe you would understand it better if we called the exile a major "time out"

The historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the events surrounding the return of the exiles to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city walls which had been destroyed by the Babylonians under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar

You may remember the stories of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego recorded in the book of Daniel – events that took place while Israel was in exile.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are prophets who spoke for God to His people at the end of the exile and after they returned to their homeland – mainly to Jerusalem

A major problem that is addressed in Haggai's prophecy – the second shortest book in the O.T., is that the returning exiles had so much to do that they didn't have time for God.

Maybe you can relate? Between work, family, kid's activities, hobbies, a trailer or cottage, etc – God and His dwelling place – the church of Jesus Christ, have been moved from the center of your life to the periphery.

It isn't that you are involved in anything necessarily sinful. You haven't forgotten your relationship with God completely ... it just isn't your highest priority.

How easy is it for that to happen?

The change is usually gradual enough that you hardly notice it or recognize the danger.

Let's see what we can learn from the message of Haggai to a people who were too busy for God.

Prayer

To appreciate Haggai you have to put it in the context of the O.T. story

1. The Context for Haggai's Message

A) God's covenant with Israel – to live with them / be their God / they would be His people

> God's commitment to Israel – made / renewed with them in about 1400 B.C.

To bless Israel if they are faithful to their covenant with God (Lev. 26:1-5, 9-12)

To discipline or punish Israel if they neglect or disobey their covenant with God (Leviticus 26:14-17)

Read Haggai 1:5-11

> What would God do if Israel refused to repent and be faithful to their covenant with God?

Ultimately, He will remove them from the land (Lev. 26:33)

If they confess their sin in a foreign land He will forgive and restore (Lev. 26:40-45)

B) God's faithfulness to His covenant with Israel

> After about 800 years of God's mercy and patience, God sent His people into exile (Jeremiah 25:1-12)

> After 70 years in exile, God opened the door for His people to return

Interesting, Haggai uses the phrase, "the Lord of Host" 14 times in two chapters

The Lord who is Lord over all of creation

The decree of a foreign King – Cyrus, in about 538-536 B.C., "All who are willing to go back to Jerusalem to build the house of God" (Ezra 1:1-4)

50,000 return to the city that had been demolished / burned to rebuild the temple

> On a mission and with great passion those who returned set out to rebuild the temple of God

Remember, the unique characteristic of Israel was that God lived with them

To love them, provide for them, protect them, and be worshipped by them

Remember, Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord leaving His temple Jerusalem

In Jeremiah we read how the Babylonians looted and then destroyed the temple

* A "first priority" for the returning exiles is to rebuild the temple – God's house

The foundation is completed (Ezra 3:10-11)

> And then significant opposition and an edict from a new ruler forces the halt in the construction of the temple (Ezra 4)

So ... the returning exiles begin to focus their attention on building their homes, planting their crops, starting a new life again

Nothing wrong with that – all good and necessary aspects of life

Except the delay went from days ... to weeks ... to months ... to years

15-16 years later the temple foundation lay abandoned

2. Haggai's Message

A) Haggai confronts a people who had become “too busy” for God

> Listen to them ... “the time has not come” that the Lord’s house should be built (Haggai 1:2)

They aren’t saying that the Lord’s house is insignificant or that rebuilding it is unnecessary

Rather, their schedules were already full ... they were too busy right now / 15 years

B) Haggai confronts a people who cared more about living in the land than living with God in the land

> Remember, Israel’s unique identity was their relationship with God who dwelt with them

C) Haggai points to the futility of their lives without God (Haggai 1:5-6)

> The book of Ecclesiastes ... “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity ... a chasing after the wind.”

D) Haggai reveals God’s displeasure with their attitude toward His house - toward Him (Haggai 1:7-11)

> God had been trying to get their attention through discipline according to the covenant

Why couldn’t they see what is seemingly obvious?

They weren’t, “considering their ways” (Haggai 1:5, 7, 15, 18)

3. The Response to Haggai's Message

A) A willingness to obey God’s Word (Haggai 1:12a)

> Notice: they obeyed the voice of “the Lord **THEIR** God”

Contrast: the response of the inhabitants in Jerusalem to the message of Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:12-13)

The response to Haggai is very different because the people were sensitive to God's voice and His will because He was **their** God

> Notice: their obedience was motivated by the fear of God (Haggai 1:12b)

Sometimes, unintentionally, God can become pretty insignificant in our lives

It isn't that we are blatantly disregarding Him or outwardly rebelling against Him

Rather, we're just preoccupied with the details of life ... and instead of God being central in our lives He becomes peripheral

B) A willingness to obey God's Word expressed through obedience

> The excuse of "now isn't a good time" is abandoned

> They made finishing God's house a priority (Haggai 1:13-14)

4. God's Response to His People

A) He will dwell with them again (Haggai 1:13)

> The restoration of God's house pictures God's desire to restore covenant relationship with them again

B) He encourages them with a promise (Haggai 2)

> Although the current temple is not as grand or glorious as the former temple (Haggai 2:1-3)

But be strong and courageous – for God is with them (Haggai 2:4-5)

A wonderful encouragement for others in the past

Josh 1:6-9 - Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

A wonderful encouragement for the present

> A future temple will be the greatest ever (Haggai 2:6-9)

When God is present in the flesh and dwells with His people forever (Heb. 10:25-29)

APPLICATION:

The message of Haggai wasn't given to an idolatrous people in blatant rebellion against God

God sent Haggai to confront a people who had become too busy for God

The business of their lives justified in their minds that it was okay to say, "not now"

Not "never" ... just not "now"

They didn't want to exclude God from their lives ... just move Him from the center to the edge

Consider the direction of many in the church in America – the "people of God"

25 years ago – Sunday morning, evening, and mid-week services were the standard

Anyone who was serious with God was committed to participate in all

Week long missions conferences / revival meetings were normal and fairly well attended

Today? Many churches have dropped Sunday evening services / mid-week services

Week long missions conferences? Who would come?

Why? Our lives are too busy!

A common reason given is "we are so busy we need to spend more time as a family."

Is family a bad thing?

Does family justify neglecting God and His presence ... revealed in His church.

Please know ... I am not encouraging a legalism that says if I attend all the services I am holy

Rather, if God is central in your life ... how can you be too busy to help build His church?

Five times Haggai says, "consider your ways"

In closing this morning let's take some time for personal meditation ... asking yourself the question

Where does God fit in your life?