

Haggai

Did you ever play with dominos as a kid?

You would line up the dominos in a pattern, so that when the 1st one was pushed, they would fall in the pattern in which they were placed.

What if while putting the dominos up you needed to add one to the middle of the design? Failure – they would get bumped and start dropping and falling in all different directions.

When working with dominos you have to go by the rule of first things first.

As we finish up the last Sunday of a very odd year, let us re-evaluate what it means to put first things first in our lives. Specifically, rededicating ourselves to put God first in our lives.

In the book of Haggai, the prophet shows us that we must see how this is to be done – we see that when first things are first God will take care of the rest. If not, just like the dominos – a mess is in our lives that He is not there to help in.

Let's look at the small book of Haggai (end of the OT and turn back a few pages) – Only 2 chapters.

- Haggai is one of the most encouraging books in the prophets.
- Haggai is known as one of the postexilic prophets – Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi all preached after the return of the Babylonian exile
- Haggai & Zechariah were contemporaries and Malachi preached one century later.

History

- Oct 19, 539 BC – Persia conquered and entered Babylon
- 538 BC – Zerubbabel as governor and Joshua as high priest led a group of Jews back to Israel under the approval of Cyrus.
- April or May 536 BC – The foundation was laid for a new temple.

- Quickly the local Samaritans attempted to join the building and were rejected. This caused issues and the work was halted for the remainder of Cyrus' reign and during the reign of the next 2 Persian kings (Cambyses & Smerdis).
- Aug 29, 520 BC – Haggai began preaching.
- Sept 20, 520 BC – The work on the temple resumed.

Book Overview

- 4 main people used during this time
 - Zerubbabel – Governor of the land, grandson of King Jehoiachin, and descendant of King David
 - Joshua – High priest
 - 2 prophets – Haggai & Zechariah
- Haggai preached 4 Sermons – All preached over a 4-month period
- “Haggai” means “My Feasts” or “Festal One”
- Haggai most likely an old man during this time and had been taken captive and raised in Babylon now to return to the work.

When Cyrus gave the decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem the people had grown at ease in their new homes in Babylon.

- Of the 24 orders of priests only 4 took Cyrus seriously – 74 Levites responded to return. Ezra tells us that 42,360 free men and 7,337 slaves returned with Zerubbabel.

Those that had returned had started off so well in building, but after the work stoppage (16 years) the people had grown complacent.

There were two concerns

1. It was a bad testimony to the surrounding people groups.
2. Their spiritual life was in peril without a place to worship.

So, God calls Haggai for just 4 sermons over 4 months.

Although, it's probably apparent, let me draw that slight comparison to where we find ourselves today.

- They found themselves in a situation that was thrust upon them by the surrounding circumstances of life.
 - o None of could have foreseen this year's changes to nearly every area of normal life.
- They were a people that were representatives of God in a land that used to be the land filled with God's people but was now filled with unbelievers.
 - o We likewise find ourselves as ambassadors of God in a land that used to follow the Word of God but is now filled with unbelievers.

The message of Haggai's 4 sermons speaks to us today as well.

1st Sermon – Build (1:1-15)

- **Vs. 2** – “This people say, the time is not come, that the LORD's house should be built.”
- They were misinterpreting Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years captivity and using it as an excuse not to build.
 - o There's the 70 years between Jehoiakim's submission to Babylon to Cyrus' decree.
 - o There's the 70 years between when Nebuchadnezzar surrounded Jerusalem to Haggai's prophecy.
 - o They were allowing prophecy to be an excuse not to serve the Lord.
 - o Prophecy should spur us on as Christians to be holy, to evangelize the unbeliever and build the work of Lord.
 - o Don't allow prophecy to stop you out of fatalistic thoughts – “What's it matters, there's no hope anyway”
 - o We have unprecedented opportunity with family and neighbors during this fresh start of 2021 to share Christ – life and word
- **Vs. 3 & 4** – Haggai went to the people on the 1st day of the 6th month. The 1st day of the month was a full moon day, and all the people would have been gathered for worship.

- Haggai gained their attention with a little sarcasm – “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in cieled houses, and this house lie in waste?”
 - Their excuse was that it wasn’t time to build God’s house, but apparently it had been time for them to build wood paneled homes for themselves.
 - We do this as well – May we not let slowing and closing of so many “events” make us feel that we can’t be about God’s Work.
 - I would desire nothing more than to be serving beside you in a ministry here at the church, but that is not where God has us building today.
 - We need to be building exactly where we have openings in front of us.
 - This is not a rebuke, but a CALL to reopen our eyes to God’s work in front use.
 - If it comes as a rebuke to you, follow the Holy Spirit’s prompting in your heart.
 - Matt 6:33 – “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...”
- **Vs. 5-6; 9-11** – “Consider your ways” Haggai instructed them to do some self-examination.
 - They had been toiling for themselves, yet they had nothing to show for it.
 - The brake in many areas of life has been nice, but may we not let our relationship and obedience to the Lord be put on hold.
 - They had not put God first. First things first puts God first in our lives.
 - God doesn’t need our time, talent or treasure. However, we need to place God first in our lives.
 - We need to be careful that we don’t become lukewarm.
 - Their efforts were profitless. God had told them in Lev. 26:18-20 and Deut. 28:38-40 that if they followed Him, they would be fruitful and if they didn’t, they would be spinning their wheels.

- Although in the church age we aren't promised yields because we follow the law, when put God first with our time, talent and treasure it is amazing the blessings.
 - If you are serving God for pay, it won't pay. If you're serving God because of the love, it pays a hundred-fold (not always in ways we can measure).
- **Vs. 7 & 8** – Haggai continued his sermon, by instructing them to get to work and start preparing the wood for the temple.
 - Ezra 3:7 we're told that wood had already been purchased for the temple from Tyre & Sidon with Cyrus' money. The same place from where the first temple's wood came. Where was it?
 - The wood had probably been sold or used to build the houses that Haggai spoke of in Vs. 4.
 - They were instructed to go to the mountains and do some hard labor to prepare the wood.
 - This instruction was specific, so that they didn't use second rate wood. Serving God takes our best, not our tips and what's left.
 - God doesn't bless laziness and leftovers.
- **Vs. 12-15** – Here's why I call this an encouraging book. Zerubbabel (the governor), Joshua (high priest) and the people responded with obedience.
 - **Vs. 14** – “And the LORD stirred up the spirit...”
 - Vs. 14 – “LORD of hosts” – 10x this name was used to assure them of God's ability to protect and keep them.
 - Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy – “Faith is not believing in spite of evidence; it's obeying in spite of the consequences.”
 - May the Lord stir our hearts by the Holy Spirit to respond when we hear God's word preached.
 - May we decide to put God first with all they we are and all that we have.

2nd Sermon – Behold (2:1-9)

The people are back to work on the temple, which obviously pleased God. God inspired Haggai to preach his second sermon to nip in the bud the next coming potential discouragement.

Consider a ministry, church or team that you were instrumental in helping build. You put your blood, sweat and tears in to building it. You sacrificed, you prayed but latter it was changed or removed.

- Now you return and you see the same type ministry, church or team being built by new people. Possibly younger and less mature people – It looks different, it hasn't reached its potential yet, or it is gone down a completely different path.
- What's the first thing that happens when we look at it through historical eyes? We become disheartened and discouraged, because most of us long for "OUR" glory days.
- This year, we miss the days of ministry as usual – discouragement can take hold.
- This was the point of Haggai's 2nd sermon, but note what God revealed to them and to us.

The timing of this is what makes this even more impactful. Haggai brought his 2nd sermon on the Day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a feast devoted to praising God for the harvest and for remembering Israel's pilgrimage in the wilderness.

- The older men that had seen the original temple of Solomon were discouraged by what the new temple was beginning to look like. They obviously felt its grandeur was significantly less.
- In walked Haggai on the Feast of Tabernacles day. Note – The same day (**1 Kings 8:2**) that King Solomon prayed and dedicated the original temple.
- **Vs. 1-4** – Haggai preached – Be strong Zerubbabel, Be strong Joshua, Be strong all ye people
 - o 3x he instructed them to be strong – These were not empty words - This was a significant phrase filled with meaning to the Israelites. 3x

Moses told Joshua to be strong, 3x God told Joshua to be strong & 3x David told Solomon to be strong in his preparation of the temple

- Haggai told the people to be strong. The look might have been different, but it was still God's temple and more importantly it was still God's glory that would indwell that temple.
- Friends – Times change, ministries go on – It's the same ministry, it's the same worship because it's the same God.
- We can keep moving forward because the same God that built and matured us is maturing new believers – Our foundation is based on Him.
- **Hebrews 13:5b** – "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."
- Next time you look at something new and try to compare it something in your past. Instead of looking back decide to look up instead.
- **Vs. 7-8** tell us God will show His glory and He will provide the resources to accomplish His tasks.
- We must realize that to stay motivated in the work of the Lord our eyes can't be fixed on what is in front of us, but on the Lord Himself.

Criticism, disillusionment and history can dishearten us, but a view of God will keep us spurred on. Once again – First things first. Keep God first.

3rd Sermon – Behave (2:10-19)

Haggai went back nine weeks later and now was dealing with their behavior. He asked two questions.

- **1st Question (Vs. 11-12)** – Dealt with holiness – Can a holy thing make something else holy by touching it? They replied – No
- **2nd Question (Vs. 13)** – Dealt with uncleanness – Can an unclean thing make something else unclean by touching it? They replied – Yes
- In today's terms – Can we put a good apple in a basket of bad apples and make the bad apples good? Can we put a bad apple in a basket of good apples and make the good apples bad?
- There are several meanings to this, but let's look at it this way.

- A person can catch zeal, work ethic and knowledge, but they cannot catch holiness. Holiness comes from putting God first and the Holy Spirit works in our life to make us more like Christ.
- On the flip side, sinfulness, corruption, laziness can all be caught.
- We all know from this year that we can share sickness, but not healthiness
- Put God first – Vs. 19 God tells them that He will bless them.

4th Sermon – Believe (2:20-23)

Haggai preached this sermon the same day as the 3rd sermon, but this one was directed to their leader, Zerubbabel. Haggai ended his preaching with a word of encouragement.

- Zerubbabel had to be a discouraged man. He was the grandson of a king in the royal line of David, yet he was a governor not a king. The people had followed him for a while and then for 16 years they did what they wanted.
- Haggai spoke directly to Zerubbabel to let him know that God was in control (Vs. 22).
- **Vs. 23** – Haggai encouraged him by letting him know that God would make him a signet. The seal of a king. He stated that God had chosen him.
- Craig Brian Larson, Pastoral Grit – In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. The satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph it and its moons, and beam data it collected about this giant planet back to earth. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, because up until then no satellites had gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it would ever get to Jupiter.
- But Pioneer 10 accomplished its mission and much, much more. Flying past Jupiter in November 1973, the space probe continued its incredible journey toward the edge of our solar system. At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past the planet Uranus, then past Neptune, at nearly three billion miles, and Pluto,

at almost four billion miles. By 1997, 25 years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun.

- And it's still going. Though now nearly 8 billion miles from the sun, the satellite keeps sending signals; some were received as recently as April 27, 2002. And despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continues to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth.

- "Perhaps most remarkable, is the fact that those signals emanate from an eight-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night-light and take more than nine hours to reach Earth."

"The Little Satellite That Could" was not qualified to do what it did.

Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of only three years. But it has kept going and going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny eight-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.

- So, it is when we offer ourselves to serve the Lord. God can work even through someone with only eight-watt abilities. God cannot work, however, through someone who gives up and doesn't put God first.
(Craig Brian Larson, Pastoral Grit: The Strength to Stand and to Stay; Bethany House, 1998)

May we put God first and focus on Him versus our surroundings.