

## SEEK HIM FIRST

Haggai 1:1-11; 2:5-9

How many of us have enough **time** to get **everything** done that we have to do? Is this not the way we do life? “I have to do this and I must to do that. I would like to do this other thing, but I have to do something else.” There are so many demands on our lives for **time** and every **other resource**. It almost seems as if we move from one crisis situation to another. We do what we (need, must, have) to do and feel as if we had a pretty good day if another crisis did not come up.

How can we **possibly** deal with this kind of stress? I can tell you objectively “how to do it.”

List everything that creates a demand on your time and other resources.

Divide your list into “have to’s” and “want to’s” and maybe even “nice to do.”

Try it sometime. I would image that you already made such a list in your mind in the last few seconds – it may not be very complete, but some things came to mind. How many things are on our “have to do” list that are related to the work of God’s Kingdom? For MOST OF US the list of items related to the work of the Kingdom is likely to be very short, indeed.

If the question had been, “What is **the** most important, number **one** priority in your life?” most Christians who are in the category of “committed or dedicated Christians” would know that the correct answer is “Jesus.” Knowing is a result of the process of being involved in Sunday School lessons, hearing sermons, listening to tapes, and reading religious literature.

If that is really the answer, then why isn’t Jesus on the *Things To Do* List?

**Knowing** is one thing, but **doing** is a different matter. Why is there a disconnect between knowing and doing? This is a common problem for most of us. It takes on many forms. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed a similar disconnect: that of **hearing and doing**. In Romans Chapter 7, Paul talked about people’s inability to do the “good that we would like to do.” Remember he said, “the good that I would, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.”

I think that part of the problem is the tyranny of time-pressure, lack of resources, and failure to get our priorities straight. When we start to explain away the disconnect between “knowing and doing” we normally list the causes in this order: time, resources, and maybe we will include priorities. Of those three, which one do you think is the most important consideration? Time? Resources? Or Priorities?

We typically put the blame on something over which we have no control. We have no control over time. We get 24 hours every day. We get 365 days each year. I get the same amount. Bill Gates gets the same amount. The President gets the same time. The homeless man gets the same amount of time. We are not going to change that. The next thing we blame is Resources. Everyone does NOT have the same amount in this case. However, the resources I have will not change very drastically no matter how much I complain about it. So what really makes the difference in what gets accomplished with a fixed amount of time and resources? Priorities are the major consideration. We can perhaps get a better appreciation of priorities as we consider how God saw the misplaced priorities among the Jews in Haggai’s day.

### What Is Happening? – 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup> In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘This people says, ‘The time has not come, *even* the time for the

house of the LORD to be rebuilt.”<sup>3</sup> Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying,<sup>4</sup> “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house *lies* desolate?”<sup>5</sup> Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways!”<sup>6</sup> “You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is not enough* to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is not enough* to become drunk; *you* put on clothing, but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages *to put* into a purse with holes.” Haggai 1:1-6 (NASB95)

The message God sent was addressed to two leaders He had raised up. Haggai was the messenger. The responsibility for action was with the leaders rather than with the messenger. Zerubbabel and Joshua were the leaders for civil and religious matters for Judah. Zerubbabel was a descendant of David and is listed in the genealogy of Jesus (He is the last in the list of common ancestors of both Joseph and Mary). Joshua had the title of high priest. His name is the same as that given to Jesus (the Hebrew equivalent is Joshua). These two are representatives (types) of Jesus in His Lordship over the physical and the spiritual affairs of the world.

In the world today, we (Christians) have the responsibility of being representatives (ambassadors) of Jesus. Any equivalent message today would be to us as the “Body of Christ.” (See Revelations 1:6 “And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” The phrase Kings and Priests unto God speaks of civil and religious responsibility.)

In Haggai’s time, the foundation of the Temple had been built some 17 years before. The people had begun with much enthusiasm but that enthusiasm cooled with some opposition from their enemies. Nothing was happening. Apparently, they had built a good foundation.

Could things like what had happened in Haggai’s day happen in today’s world? I noticed an interesting parallel in our own church. In 2003 we were seriously into a building project that resulted in this structure that we are in now. In April of that year, we had owned the 22 acres of land on this site for – guess how many years – 17! By April of 2003 we had a foundation in the ground and we were ready to build. Just as the foundation of the post-exile Temple had been sitting there and nothing had happened to the construction, the 22 acres that we had owned since 1986 had been waiting for something to happen. Why did it take 17 years? There were a lot of “things to do.”

During that 17 years, many thought “the time is just not right for us to do this.” Sometimes we said, “We just don’t have the money to build across the road.” At times we had the question in our mind, “I wonder if it really is God’s will that we build?” Looking back on where we have been, we could ask, “Did we have any reason to doubt that God’s hand was on this church?”

#### What Should Be Happening? – 1:7-8

<sup>7</sup> Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways!”<sup>8</sup> “Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD. Haggai 1:7-8 (NASB95)

God’s expectation for His people when they returned from Babylon was to do what was necessary to restore Judah and Jerusalem. They had started well in that they had seen the need and put some priority on getting the temple started. So they essentially did only what was necessary for survival for their own needs and concentrated on building the foundation. Having a good foundation was essential and was an absolute necessity to allow them to get the temple constructed so that proper worship could be restored.

We could easily imagine that when the foundation was completed, the people breathed a sigh of relief and then thought that we need to spend some time with other parts of our lives such as having a place to live, educating our children, raising crops, and earning some money. All those things were needed. The problem was that they had become absorbed in these activities and no priority was being given to building on the foundation that had been laid.

God's message to them was "think about what you are doing or not doing." The next thing was that they needed to take some action that was deliberately directed to the purpose of building the temple structure on that foundation that had been prepared. It does not take a lot of creative imagination to see how this situation applies to every one of us in our individual spiritual growth.

For us as individuals, what is the foundation that is available for us to build our spiritual house? In 1 Corinthians 3:11 we see these words of Paul: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." That's a no-brainer. Every Christian has been provided with an essential and more-than-adequate foundation for building his spiritual life. Now the question that each of us needs to ask ourselves is "how is the building project coming along?"

So often, we find many who make a profession of faith in response to an invitation during an evangelistic message and nothing happens beyond that. The foundation has been provided. That is just the beginning.

The Great Commission was to "go make disciples" – it does not read "go make converts." New believers can build on that foundation by immersing themselves in the very character and nature of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The building process involves what Paul wrote about in Romans chapter twelve regarding being transformed by the renewing of our minds. Evidence is seen in the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of grace, and the fruit of righteousness.

It is rather sobering to realize that we can have the right foundation and not be building on it because we have not made that a priority in life. I know it is true. I made a profession of faith when I was 13 years old but nothing happened of any significant change in the way I did life for 17 years. I was 30 years old before I could honestly testify that "old things had passed away, behold all things have become new."

Just as the people of Haggai's day needed to go find building materials and incorporate these materials into the structure that was being built on the foundation, we are to take initiative and be about building a house with which God is pleased and in which He is glorified. By neglecting to build on the foundation, we miss the many blessings that belong to us.

### What Are the Results? – 1:9-11

<sup>9</sup> "You look for much, but behold, *it comes* to little; when you bring *it* home, I blow it *away*. Why?" declares the LORD of hosts, "Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. <sup>10</sup> "Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. <sup>11</sup> "I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands." Haggai 1:9-11 (NASB95)

If we are really honest with ourselves, we know we are not doing an adequate job of building the (spiritual) temple of God on the foundation we already have (Christ Jesus). Why? Most often, the reason given is "I don't have time." What was the excuse of the Jews? "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'" Is this not another way of saying, "We haven't found time to work on the Temple?" What was God's reply through Haggai? "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" It is as if God were saying to us, "Well, you had time to do other things." What is our Number 1 priority? We **say** "Jesus Christ and His Church" but we **do** "me and my house."

So, what are the consequences of neglecting God's Great Commandment and God's Great Commission? [The Great Commandment is "Love God supremely, and your neighbor as

yourself.” The Great Commission is “Go, make disciples of all people, baptizing them and teaching them to obey my commandments.”] For the Jews of Haggai’s day, the consequences were frustration and ineffectiveness in everything they did. They planted and got little return. They made money, but it was never enough. They ate, but were still hungry. Do we see things such as this happening today? Is God trying to tell us something? I think so!

### What Has God Promised? – 2:5-9

<sup>5</sup> ‘As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!’ <sup>6</sup> ‘For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. <sup>7</sup> ‘I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts. <sup>8</sup> ‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,’ declares the LORD of hosts. <sup>9</sup> ‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares the LORD of hosts.” Haggai 2:5-9 (NASB95)

Let’s claim that promise that His Spirit abides in us and it is God Who is at work in us in the building process. God will bless us (we will bear fruit) as we take steps of faith in proceeding with building a spiritual life that He can use to carry out the work of the Kingdom of God. What do we need to do, now? What should be our next step - our priority? Just as God told the Jews in Haggai’s day - “think about it” or “give careful thought.” What did He want them to think about? In verse 19 of chapter two God asks the question “Is there any seed left in the barn?” Seeds are resources we have that can be planted or invested. When we plant a seed, we expected to get a return on what we plant. We invest the resources we have in whatever is our **priority**. Think about it!

While we are thinking about it, we might also want to think about Who is the ultimate Source of all our resources? Who owns the silver, who owns the gold, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills? If God is the ultimate Owner, then as we “think about it,” we should be considering what **He** would desire to see happen with those resources which He has entrusted to us? The answer is pretty obvious. I think He would use the resources for the work of the Kingdom. Why is it important for that to happen? It won’t be long and He will be shaking everything up.

The building **is** being built and it **is** going to be filled. What part will we have in it? Anything that is accomplished that has lasting value requires a sacrifice. The fulfillment of the promise that the latter glory of God’s house would be greater than the former glory could be looking forward to the time when Christ would actually enter the temple during His earthly ministry. It might also be argued that this is a reference to Holy Spirit coming to fill Christ’s Church.

The sacrifices we are called to make today (are not for guilt but) are demonstrations of our devotion and these give witness to our priorities in life. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome (12:1): “I beseech you, therefore, brothers and sisters, because of God’s great mercy (as demonstrated in His substitutionary sacrifice for us) that we (because of our devotion and as an expression of the priorities in our lives) present everything we have, even our bodies, as living sacrifices.”

We look around us and we see so many things that compete for our priorities and it is helpful to remember the words of Jesus who told us to “Seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things which demand our time, resources and attention would be added to us.”