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Haggai 1:1-15: *The Time is Now*

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In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest:

² This is what the Lord Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.’”

³ Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ⁴ “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”

⁵ Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶ You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

⁷ This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸ Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the Lord. ⁹ “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the Lord Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”

¹² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.

¹³ Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: “I am with you,” declares the Lord. ¹⁴ So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Let's just start right out with what was going on...

Start with the problem and see how we got here.

Here's the problem that comes out of our passage:

Israel's priority is not the Lord.

"Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your fancy finished houses, while my house is in ruins?"

We get this picture of the Israelites back in Jerusalem...

They're sitting in their newly constructed homes...

Probably sitting with their feet propped up on their new furniture...

With a fan blowing on them sipping a cold glass of lemonade.

Then we pan to another scene...

We see the unfinished Temple.

We see some blocks laying on the ground...

Tools scattered all around, but not a builder in site...

Just tumbleweeds blowing across the foundation.

And the Lord says, "Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your fancy finished houses, while my house is in ruins?"

What's going on?

How did we get here?

Haggai is writing to the people coming back from exile.

For 70 years they lived in Babylon...away from Jerusalem, away from home...

...under the control of the Babylonians.

But when the Persians take control of the area, the Israelites are allowed to go back...

They're told to go back home and rebuild the temple that was destroyed.

Isaiah prophesied about this day...

He wrote about the glorious return of God's people to their land:

“The wilderness will rejoice and blossom...it will burst into bloom. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it...only the redeemed will walk there and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing...Gladness and joy will overtake them...” (Isaiah 35)

Isaiah paints a dream-like picture of Israel’s return to Jerusalem.

But this is not what happened...

The return is nothing like what Isaiah says...

The desert did not bloom;

All of those in exile did not come home;

Zion was not glorified;

And the nations did not bow down in subjection to Israel. (Donald Gowan)

Those who first came back to Jerusalem came back to desolation...

There was no temple and no walls to protect the city...

So they were exposed.

They came back to opposition from their neighbors who didn’t want to see them rebuild...(Ezra 4)

They came back to hard economic times...

And rough conditions...

They came back and faced a drought:

They planted much but harvested little;

Not much grain, not much wine, and not much oil...

Three staples in their everyday lives.

They started to rebuild the Temple when they first arrived...

In fact they laid the foundation.

But then the work stopped.

The Lord’s house laid in ruins while the people lived in their finished homes.

The Lord wasn’t looking for a real-estate agent or a home to live in...

He wasn’t so much concerned with the physical structure...

He was concerned with what it represented.

Israel’s attitude toward the Temple is reflected their attitude toward the Lord (von Rad).

The Lord wanted to be the center of their lives.

The Temple was the place where the Lord met with his people.

It was the place where sins were forgiven.

It was the place where they went to remember how the Lord saved them from Egypt.

It represented God's presence among his people.

The people's lives were supposed to be centered around the Lord...

Centered around the Temple...

But we see that their concern was in not rebuilding God's house.

The Lord was not Israel's priority.

People of God, consider your ways...

Is the Lord our priority?

Is the Lord *your* priority?

A big one for us is family...

We love our families and would do anything to protect and provide for them.

This is a good thing.

But have we taken a good thing, and made it into an idol?

In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller defines an idol as:

“Anything more important to you than God;

Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God;

Anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”

As our passage says, let's consider our ways.

Are we so concerned with the success of our children that we arrange and orchestrate their lives to the point where God gets left out?

As parents you commit to your children, before the Lord, to instruct them in the truth of God's word;

You commit to instruct them in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ;

To pray for them...and to teach them to pray;

And you commit to train them in Christ's way...

By your example and in the nurture of the church.

We are raising up little disciples of Christ...

Stewarding the gift God has given to us in them...

This is our job as parents...

But are we so concerned that they'll be well-rounded athletes, musicians, performers, and working professionals that we've made these things the top priority for their lives?

Are our identities so wrapped up in them that their success in this world becomes our priority?

Do we seek out their approval more than the Lord's approval?

We want good things for our families, but do we have the right priorities?

Are we better at planning family vacations and camping trips than we are at planning family devotions?

Maybe our families are so close and important to us that we put up a fence around our gathering.

Instead of welcoming the stranger or new-comer to lunch we save only enough room for the family.

What about the lonely widow who just lost her husband?

Or the young man you know who's struggling to connect in the church?

Have we made our families into an idol?

So that they become more important than God's family?

This is something that Kristi and I struggle with.

It's important for us to protect our time as a couple...

Making sure that we're nurturing our marriage...

And this is definitely a good thing...

But I think there comes a point when the relationship becomes more important than God and his plans for us...

When the relationship becomes an idol.

Not too long ago Kristi was having a tough day.

I was at work and she was at home struggling physically and emotionally.

She was looking forward to me getting home and us spending time together...

And there was nothing more that I wanted than to just sit on the couch and be with her.

When I came home though I told her that I needed to go see someone in the hospital.

The Lord was calling us to expand our view of family...

From our idea of family (the two of us)...

To his idea of family (all of his people).

From our priority...

To his priority.

So we both went to the hospital for the visit.

And we were wonderfully blessed by this person's spirit...

We were so encouraged in our time with a member of God's family...

Our family.

The Lord took us from a time of drought, to a time of being full.

He knew that our priorities needed shifting...

And he provided what was needed.

Consider your ways:

Have we put someone or something before the Lord?

Money, career status, finding a spouse, being liked by people at school, or the way we look?

Is the Lord our top priority?

Have we taken our gaze off him and his plans for our lives?

Through the prophet Haggai, the Lord says, "The time is now."

"Now is the time to rebuild."

"Now is the time to get your priorities straight."

"Even in the midst of drought;"

"Even though things aren't as you expected;"

"Even though there are people opposing you..."

“Now is the time to rebuild my house!”

The Lord says, “I’m not your priority right now, but I want to be!”

The Lord desires to give himself to his people again.

He brought them back from exile...

He brought them back home into the land he promised to give to them...

And now he is offering himself to his people again.

It is evidence of grace that the Lord comes to his people through Haggai.

The way this passage is written, there is no mistaking whose message this is.

“The word of the Lord came through Haggai...” (v. 1)

“This is what the Lord Almighty says...” (v. 2)

“Then the word of the Lord came through Haggai...” (v. 3)

“Now this is what the Lord Almighty says...” (v. 5)

You get the idea...

The Lord is revealing himself to his people.

When he could have just as easily remained silent he chooses to reveal himself.

He’s coming to them through his spokesman...

Making his will known to them.

And through Haggai he says, “I am with you.” (v. 13)

The message he gives to his people is “I am with you.”

Even before the people take action—

Before the first stone is laid on the foundation—

The Lord says, “I am with you.”

He is always the one to initiate relationship...

He is always the one to offer grace.

The people don’t need to pray for his presence to be near...

He’s already with his people...

Because he’s a faithful God.

And as a faithful God he also moves them to do the work he desires.

“So the Lord stirred up the spirit of the governor, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.”

“They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God.”

The Lord moved their spirits to rebuild the Temple.

He moved in them to make God their priority once again.

Can you see it?

This is all the Lord’s action:

Sending a messenger to reveal himself to the people;

Being present with his people in the midst of their sin and distorted priorities;

And moving his people to good works...to changed priorities.

The Lord says, “The time is now,” and he provides for it.

To us the Lord Almighty says, “The time is now.”

“It’s time to rebuild.”

In the midst of busy schedules, competing priorities, and a society that does not recognize my place in your lives...

“The time is now.”

He’s not advocating for a new church building (I don’t think)...

No, he’s calling for something that hits us deeper...

Something that is harder than just reaching into our pockets...

Something that is only possible by his power.

He’s calling for a change in priorities.

The Lord wants to be first...

He wants *his* priorities to take precedence in our lives.

He is calling us to use these good things in our lives to make his love known:

To instruct our children in the truth of God’s word...

Telling them the story of God’s love time and again as it’s told in Genesis through Revelation.

Taking time to have family devotions.

Teaching children to pray prayers of thanksgiving for the many gifts in our lives...

Teaching them to pray prayers for those who don't know God...

For those who are lonely, or doubting.

Teaching them to cry out to God for all of our needs.

Teaching them that there is no person or thing more important than the Lord.

He's not calling us to stop taking family trips...

But to order these around his purposes.

To see this as a time of Sabbath rest; as a foretaste of our eternal rest in Christ...

As a time to connect with God's creation...

And a time to devote ourselves to him in unique ways that we can't do at home.

Maybe part of the next family trip involves a service project...

Picking up trash around the camp ground...

Instructing your kids on God's role as creator and our role as stewards...

Or maybe it's caring for the homeless when we make a trip into the city...

Saying "hello" and breaking down barriers...

Showing your kids that they too are created in God's image.

Always having our priorities ordered around God and his concerns.

God has given us our families not so that we can selfishly protect our time together...

But so that we can welcome people into his family.

So that we can care for the lonely...

Or reach out to the new people in our church...

Those people whom God has called into *this* family...

God's family.

It's Mother's Day and many of us probably have lunch and dinner plans...

How about expanding our view of family and inviting a lonely mother to the table?

Making God's people and God's priority our priority.

What does it look like to order your priorities at work so that God will still be number 1?

What does it look like to keep God #1 at school?

As a single person or a couple without kids...

Where do your priorities often land?

What does it look like in the midst of your busy schedule to make God top priority?

All of this is for his glory.

It's what he's called us to do as his people...

To share his love and his concern with the world—

To order our lives so that all may know the love of Christ and the forgiveness of sins.

The time to rebuild is now.

Just as God was revealed to the Israelites through the prophet...

God is revealed to us in his word.

He has given us his word so that we would know him:

So that we would know his character;

So that we would know his plan of salvation for us in Christ;

And so that we would know how he desires us to live in gratitude.

Always pointing the world back to him.

And he promises us, "I am with you."

Before we begin trying to reorder our priorities...

He has already taken the initiative.

"Behold, I am with you always...even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

God has revealed himself to us in his word...

He has given himself to us in the person of Jesus the Christ.

And now he is present with us by his Spirit.

And just as he stirred the people to rebuild the Temple...

He's stirring us to rebuild.

This is God's work that he's doing among us.

And he's inviting us to participate.

He's inviting us to find our life in him.

Amen.