

07-10-16 – Operation Facelift

Haggai 1:1-11

Today we are up to the book of Haggai. This is a short two-chapter book that speaks about the rebuilding of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Haggai prophesied ~520 BC. He was a contemporary with Zechariah who also spoke about the rebuilding project. If you remember Ezra and Nehemiah, Israel and Judah were captured by Babylon, and the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC. King Cyrus allowed some of the captives from Judah return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple. This effort was led by Ezra and recorded in his book. The people were enthusiastic and built the foundation. But soon, opposition and other distractions caused them to lose motivation, and the work slowed down and eventually stopped.

Sometimes we are so motivated that nothing can discourage us in what we set out to do. Other times it doesn't take much to derail the project.

“The famous mystery novelist, Rex Stout, considered himself a very capable amateur architect and builder. In the 1930's he designed a fourteen room house and built it with his own hands on a picturesque hill in Connecticut. Then, he invited one of the world's great professional architects, Frank Lloyd Wright to come see it and give his opinion. He led Wright to the hill where the house stood, and Wright examined Stout's handiwork with a careful, and practiced eye. Stout held his breath, hoping to hear a word of praise and encouragement from the master architect. Finally, Wright spoke. Leaning against Stout's house, he said, 'Beautiful spot, Rex. Someone should tear this thing down and build a house here.'” (Adventuring Through the Bible, Ray Stedman, © 1997 Elaine Stedman, p. 441).

At first glance, the book of Haggai doesn't sound all that spiritual. His focus was to get God's people to work on rebuilding the Temple. It's only a building. God doesn't reside in buildings – although in this time, He made his presence known in the Temple – now WE are the temple. But, the building needs to also be an act of worship in its design, construction, and maintenance. The building should be a symbolic picture of the true house of God – US.

“The buildings we use to worship in are still important to us and to God. Haggai keeps us in touch with those times in our lives when repairing the building where we worship is an act of obedience every bit as important as praying in that place of worship.” (The Message Study Bible, p. 1452, © 2007, 2012 by Eugene Peterson).

God is building His house in us as He molds and shapes us to be His dwelling place. In Haggai's time, *“the people didn't know that the temple was actually a symbol of a greater reality.”* (Adventuring Through the Bible, Ray Stedman, p. 442, © 1997 Elaine Stedman).

So they returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the sacred Temple. *“It was a modest beginning for a much smaller, humbler temple than the splendid original built by Solomon.”*

But the work was very difficult, and there was opposition. Soon, they ran out of steam, and the project halted for 15 years.

ENTER HAGGAI: READ: Hag. 1:1-11 In the second year of Darius the King, God raised up Haggai, the prophet, for an encouragement project. He was to motivate the work on the temple once again. He delivers four messages to the people. Of course, the prophetic message has an immediate focus for that time period, and a future focus, that still applies to us today.

1 - The Reconstruction of the Temple Commanded (Hag. 1)

People's excuse # 1 – *It's not the right time to work on that... (1:1-2)*

When IS the right time? Look around us here in our church. Is this the best it could be and look like for God? NO! This church was built by the congregation in the 1960's. They were excited, enthusiastic, motivated and completed the project and praised God. That was then – This is now!

It is time to rebuild this house of God; time for a facelift. But – we don't have the money; we don't have the attendance... Let me ask you this... How many of you have made some large or even major renovations on your homes or even moved and upgraded since the 1960's? (don't raise your hands). When is it the right time to renovate the House of God?

Our Operation Facelift – John Mercurio is spear-heading this project. Will it be expensive? YES! Absolutely! Are there enough funds coming in weekly to cover this? NO! Do we move forward in faith? Is this something God is directing? I think so!

Hag. 1:2-4 – I think God is speaking to us here...

“This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: The people are saying, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.’

Then the Lord sent this message through the prophet Haggai, ‘Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?’”

It is never the “right time” to take on a major project. But Haggai turns this around on them. Is it the right time to live in luxurious homes while the house of God is neglected and in need of a facelift? **Theme: “Build God's House!”**

Vs. 5-7 are written in poetic style... ***“Look at what's happening to you! ...”***

- 1) ***“You have planted much but harvest little.”*** A lean harvest. A vicious cycle... If you harvest little, you tend to hoard some away for next year's planting to make up for it. Year after year the situation worsens. Maybe they/we are looking at things through worldly eyes, and not the eyes of faith? Donations are down; attendance is down. Save what we can for next year. Who knows what will happen then? Save; sock it away! This is not a good time to plan an expensive renovation project. It doesn't make sense.

- 2) ***"You eat but are not satisfied."*** Bodily sickness – a digestive disorder perhaps, where food is eaten but it doesn't nourish the body as it should to bring health and strength to it.
- 3) ***"You drink but are still thirsty."*** Their wine was weak and watered down. It did not satisfy or fulfill its purpose.
- 4) ***"You put on clothes but cannot keep warm."*** Clothing was not heavy (warm) enough to keep out the winter chill.
- 5) ***"Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!"*** Their income failed to meet their expenses. They were running in the red. Money seemed to disappear through holes in their pockets. Inflation, misuse? What is our church financial situation? What is yours? Are we in the red or marginally in the black? Are we wise stewards of God's blessings to us? These are things to think about and question at our annual meetings. Everything should be scrutinized not just approved as presented. This is your church. Your donations run this place. You pay all the expenses including salaries, equipment, upgrades, maintenance, and giving to our denomination as required. It's your money that will pay for Operation Facelift in one way or another. There is no other source of income. If you are a member, you have a say in how money is used in all areas. Take your responsibility seriously. Review, scrutinize, question, show up to vote, and most of all pray...

God had to get their attention, so He caused their fleshly investments to begin to fail over time. All the normal things we do almost instinctively are of little meaning to God. They are only signs that we are more concerned about ourselves than God.

Are you pre-occupied with your own interests? It's normal! It may not be God's plan or will, but normal. I am – most of the time. I am not thinking about the church building and its needs – I'm thinking about my house and its needs. I'm working out how much I have for my stuff.

*"Pressures, demands, expectations, and tasks push in from all sides and assault our schedules. Do this! Be there! Finish that! Call them! Everyone seems to want something from us – family, friends, employer, school, church, clubs. Soon we have little left to give as we run out of energy and time. We find ourselves rushing through life, attending to the necessary, the immediate, and the urgent. The important is all too often left in the dust. Our problem is not the volume of demands or lack of scheduling skills, but values – what is truly important to us. **Our values and priorities are reflected in how we use our resources – time, money, strength, and talent.** Often our actions belie our words. We say God is number one, but then we relegate Him to a lesser number on our "to do" lists." (Life Application Bible, NLT, p. 1497)*

v. 10 - It's because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops.

Here is the solution God gives to Judah by the mouth of Haggai...

v. 8 – “Now go up into the hill, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord.” God wants His house rebuilt for two reasons? **1 – That He may have pleasure in it. 2 – That He may receive honor in it.**

v. 9 - Economic disaster is a result of God withdrawing His blessing because we fail to keep Him and what pleases Him first on our priority list.

v. 10-11 – Not tending to the upkeep of the house of God yields economic catastrophe. An agrarian culture has the source of their success removed – No rain. The harvest was poor because each man cared more for their own house and needs than the Lord’s. We are easily persuaded that what we see is of utmost importance. God through Paul says – “Walk by faith and not by sight.” This is very hard to actually accomplish!

Grain and grapes were withheld by God to teach them a lesson. Their three basic crops failed. God was getting a message to them. Would they hear? Will we?

v. 12-15 – YES! They got the message! They listened and heard. They repented and moved. Why did they listen to Haggai? It was God speaking to them through him – not Haggai himself. We need to hear and respond to God as well. Today – NOW – In our church. In our lives! I pray I am speaking God’s words to you today, as each of us do when we stand up here before you.

v. 13 – “Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave the people this message from the Lord, ‘I am with you, says the Lord!’”

That was encouragement enough to get the job done. The temple was rebuilt in four years from the time of Haggai’s message in 520 BC to 516 BC. That was remarkable. We can accomplish remarkable things when we realize that God is with us. He is saying the same thing to us today, **“I am with you.”** Get busy! Get to work! Don’t worry about materials! Don’t worry about workers! Don’t worry about the money! Don’t quarrel over esthetics – pews, chairs, paint, carpeting. God is directing this project. It will work out for the best. It’s time now to rebuild. Let’s get moving!

Let’s not get discouraged by how long it is taking to see results or finish the project, as they did in Judah. **“We’ve been working on the temple for two months now, and life is still hard.”** Don’t be impatient; just be obedient. We will not have instant gratification – that rarely happens. But don’t get discouraged because God doesn’t seem to be blessing in your eyes. The people wanted God to reward their obedience and their work. God didn’t perform to their standards, so they lost motivation.

Do you think a behavior pattern or condition of a building that took years to come about will change overnight? Not gonna happen! I have the same condition in my own home. Twenty or thirty years of neglect of leaving things the way they were will take a monumental effort and a

lot of time to fix. BUT – Paul says – ***“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*** (Gal. 6:9)

They worked hard, but then they began to feel the pain. The work was too hard for them and they again faltered after only three weeks. But God spoke to them again through Haggai.

2 - The Glory of the Reconstructed Temple (2:1-9) –

Then on October 17 of that same year, the LORD sent another message through the prophet Haggai. ² “Say this to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of God’s people there in the land: ³ ‘Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all!

Us older folks can’t stop living in the past. Our stuff was always better than the stuff today. When I was a kid ... The same mentality ran during Haggai’s time. *“You call this a temple? Let me tell you what the temple was like... There was gold and silver decorations, beautiful tapestries, all kinds of beautiful things. This? This is a temple of God? Feh!”* Don’t get hung up on the past.

God had a much bigger plan in mind. He wasn’t seeing the current building, but the temple of the future. We are that temple! The Spirit of God resides in us. We hold the presence of God within us. How are you maintaining this temple of God? Are we only looking at the building we gather in and worship in as something sacred? It is important, but more important is the temple we are together. The relationships we have together, and the disciplines we adhere to make us the Holy temple of God. That’s where He wants to dwell.

v. 9 - The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. And in this place I will bring peace. I, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, have spoken!”

3 - The Blessings of Obedience (2:10-19) –

After only two months on the job, the people again lost their motivation. God again had to smack them in the head to get their attention and turn them back to Himself. When we find ourselves down in the dumps and have no motivation to continue the work for God, we need to assess our lives in relation to Christ. Almost everyone in this building today is here because we have had an encounter with God through Jesus Christ somewhere along the way. It may have been many years ago, but it happened, and it was awesome. If you are discouraged, remember that time when you first met Jesus and the blessings at that time. Apply them now! There were and still are blessings in obedience to following God’s plan for you – now and always.

4 - God's Promise of Blessing (2:20-23) –

The book ends with a great word of encouragement for Judah and beyond...

v. 2:20-23 – THE MESSAGE – “God’s Message came a second time to Haggai on that most memorable day, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month: “Speak to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah:

²¹⁻²³ “I am about to shake up everything, to turn everything upside down and start over from top to bottom—overthrow governments, destroy foreign powers, dismantle the world of weapons and armaments, throw armies into confusion, so that they end up killing one another. And on that day”—this is God’s Message—“I will take you, O Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, as my personal servant and I will set you as a signet ring, the sign of my sovereign presence and authority. I’ve looked over the field and chosen you for this work.” The Message of God-of-the-Angel-Armies.

This word of the Lord was not fulfilled by Zerubbabel. But Zerubbabel was in the line of David, and 500 years later Jesus Christ became the signet ring of God the Father. He fulfilled this prophecy and still has all the authority of God. He will ultimately rule all nations of the world.

*“Build now. Do not wait. The work of God needs to be done today, not next year, not ten years from now. **NOW!** A great harvest field is before us, here and around the world. Are you using your resources to build His House, to build human lives? Are you using your time, your home, your talent, your spiritual gifts? You can help to build God’s house today: Serve in your church. Witness in your neighborhood and on the job. Go on short-term missionary ventures around the world. Invite international students to spend a year in your home. Conduct seeker-friendly Bible studies in your home or job and invite friends and neighbors. The possibilities are endless – but the opportunities will not remain open forever. So build now – before it is too late! Are you and I doing all that we can to build the house of the lord?”*

That includes rebuilding this church physically. It has to be inviting to today’s people, not a dingy, old, worn torn, I-saw. This project is part of our worship of God.

Spiritually, when all is said and done, it’s only the work of the Lord that will stand... We are the house of God, the temple, God’s eternal work. *“That is Haggai’s encouragement to us, Gods builders. Let us invest all that we are and all that we have in making ourselves a fitting and consecrated dwelling place for our God.”*

(Adventuring Through the Bible, Ray Stedman, p. 449, © 1997, Elaine Stedman).

Maybe we have some spiritual rebuilding that is needed individually before we can embrace and be motivated to complete a major Facelift of this building. Take care of that business now. There is a special meeting after service today to discuss our Operation Facelift – Please attend.