

Last Judgment Sunday/2nd Sunday of End Time

Haggai 1:1-11

Sermon #1199

November 6, 2022

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1:1 In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

2 This is what the LORD of Armies says. This people has said, “It is not the right time for the House of the LORD to be built.”

3 So the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet.

4 Is it time for you to live in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins?

5 Now this is what the LORD of Armies says. Consider your ways carefully. 6 You sow much seed but you harvest little. You eat but you are never satisfied. You drink but you never become drunk. You get dressed, but no one is warm. The one who makes money puts that money into a bag with a hole in it.

7 This is what the LORD of Armies says. Consider your ways carefully. 8 Go up to the mountains, bring lumber down, and build the House. I will be pleased with it, and I will be glorified, says the LORD.

9 You expected much, but look, there was little. When you brought it home, I blew it away.

Why did I do that? This is a declaration of the LORD of Armies. It is because my house lies in ruins while each of you is busy with your own house. 10 So it is because of you that the heavens have withheld the dew and the earth has withheld its produce. 11 I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the olive oil, on everything which the soil produces, on people, on livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.

Dear Friends and Fellow Redeemed,

Live like no one else now, so later you can live like no one else! Maybe some of you recognize that line from the popular financial advisor Dave Ramsey. His advice is pretty simple at the root level. Live like no one else now – dedicate yourself to paying off debt and saving more than those around you – and later on you’ll be able to live like no one else because that hard work and saving will have paid off and you’ll have far more to live with! If you’ve ever watched any of Ramsey’s seminars or listened to his radio show, you’ve seen the applications. Drive cheap cars now, and you’ll be able to drive nicer ones later when you’ve gotten to a better financial place. Put off major purchases now and later you’ll be

able to more easily afford them. It's common-sense financial advice that is backed by a proven track record of success.

Even though they lived nearly 2500 years before Dave Ramsey, today's scripture reading shows us some of the Israelites embracing a surprisingly similar sounding mantra as they worked through the financial implications of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Many concluded "Now is not the time." We can't afford this yet. The setting was this. Some seventy years earlier, the Israelites had been conquered by the powerful Babylonian Empire. They devastated the land of Canaan, killed many of the people, plundered the towns, broke down the walls of Jerusalem, set the temple on fire, and carried thousands of people off to a life of slavery and captivity in the far away city of Babylon. But God did not forget about his people in their time of hardship. He sent prophets to encourage them, and after 70 years he led the king to send the people back to Jerusalem with the command and the funding to rebuild the city and the temple and start public worship of God once again. For those who had been waiting for decades, here was the chance to get things back to the way they were supposed to be!

For as exciting as all that was, it didn't take long before reality started to set in, and the people realized the magnitude of the project they were taking on. There was no way these people returning from slavery would be able to decorate the temple in the wealth and lavishness that the oldest among them remembered from seventy years earlier. In addition to that, economic hardship crippled the region, and opposition from enemies slowed construction efforts. Doubts tugged at the minds of the people and their leaders. Was this a project they would be able to complete? Was this a project they could afford to complete? Was this the kind of project they should complete? Had they bitten off more than they could chew? Work on the temple ground to a halt, and year after year passed with little progress. It was into this situation God sent his prophet Haggai. **¹In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. ²This is what the LORD of Armies says. This people has said, "It is not the right time for the House of the LORD to be built."** Given some of the challenge they were facing, perhaps at first glance this concern seems completely understandable – maybe even prudent and wise!

But a closer look reveals that there was more going on here than harsh financial realities. ³ **So the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet. ⁴ Is it time for you to live in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins?** The adjective used in the phrase “paneled houses” is used elsewhere in scripture but only to describe lavish furnishings – the construction of Solomon’s original temple, the king’s palace, things like that. A paneled house seems to have been a luxurious place, and that little detail changes everything. What were the priorities of the people? The temple was in ruins because “now is not the time,” we can’t afford this right now, but the homes of the people? They were finished, and not just finished, but paneled to use the Hebrew description – apparently somewhat lavishly decorated! The economic malaise that prevented work on the temple had not prevented work on the homes of the people! The lack of financing for temple decorations had not prevented the financing of beautiful homes!

What sounds like prudent financial advice was in this case nothing more than a façade covering up the sin of idolatry – misplaced priorities in life – and sadly, this was nothing new for the people. Just seventy years earlier, God had allowed the people to be taken into exile because they chose the religions and gods of the pagan nations around them over the true God. Now, seventy years later, the physical idols were gone but the same sinful problem with priorities remained: once again other things had quietly replaced God in the lives of his people things that not only separated the people from God, but things that in the end, couldn’t provide the contentment and satisfaction the people wished for, no matter how much or how little they actually might have had! Haggai describes the fallout: ⁵ **Now this is what the LORD of Armies says. Consider your ways carefully. ⁶ You sow much seed but you harvest little. You eat but you are never satisfied. You drink but you never become drunk. You get dressed, but no one is warm. The one who makes money puts that money into a bag with a hole in it.** Idolatry robbed the people of satisfaction and contentment in life, because no matter how hard they tried they never had enough, and if allowed to run rampant, this idolatry would eventually destroy their relationship with God!

It's worth asking ourselves today if it's possible for the same sinfulness to plague our lives today, damaging our relationship with God and robbing us of satisfaction and contentment. We easily find ourselves looking for contentment and satisfaction in hobbies, recreation, relationships, financial security, and any

number of other things, and those are certainly things that God uses to bring great blessing into our lives, but when those things are all that there is, eventually they fade away and we find ourselves left empty and unsatisfied. Despite that reality, how often don't we find ourselves filling our calendars with jobs and hobbies and recreation and responsibility, but struggling to find time to help other people, time to spend in God's word, or even a few minutes for prayer? Poor priorities – really a form of idolatry!

What about our life together as members of a congregation? I don't think anyone would say that here at Holton we are guilty of leaving God's house in ruins – we are blessed with a beautiful facility that is well maintained – but there are still times when things are tight and each one of us has the chance to examine our own priorities. Could it happen that when doing our own personal budgeting we might find ourselves claiming financial prudence but really joining in with the Israelites in saying "Now is not the time" for me – someone else can take care of it this time – maybe I'll be involved later on. Sadly, if we leave our sinful natures in charge, "Now" will never be the right time. There will always be some excuse. Poor priorities are idolatry.

Questions like these are uncomfortable to talk about and uncomfortable to think about, often because they can hit close to home, but they take on a critical importance on a Sunday like this one where our attention is fixed on Jesus' return on Judgment Day. Spiritually speaking, the clock is ticking! The day is coming when Jesus will return and gather his followers and take them to heaven, and for anyone who doesn't know about Jesus, or who has gotten distracted by other things and wandered away from him, it will be tragically too late! Does our use of what God has entrusted to our care reflect that urgency? Or, do we find ourselves lazily joining in with the Israelites and saying, "Now is not the time," I'll worry about that later? Poor priorities are idolatry.

But as the clock ticks towards Jesus' return, and as God's people continue to struggle with our own sinfulness, it's worth looking at the other side too. What are God's priorities in this whole thing? Why was he so concerned about the Israelites finishing the temple? It's not like God needs a spectacular temple filled with beautiful things – there was nothing the Israelites could possibly build that would even remotely resemble God's throne room in heaven! Think instead about

what would happen at the temple. This would be the place where the almighty God come to be with the people whom he loved. This would be the place where the people would see time after time, day after day, through sacrifices and burnt offerings the promise of a Savior to come who would forgive their sins and restore their relationship with God! This would be the place where God's forgiveness and mercy would be on continual display, the place where people would see their Savior pictured, the place where people would realize why their relationship with God was so critically important. That's what God was talking about when he said, **⁷This is what the LORD of Armies says. Consider your ways carefully. ⁸Go up to the mountains, bring lumber down, and build the House. I will be pleased with it, and I will be glorified, says the LORD.** God wanted to live with his people. He wanted to come to them. He wanted them to build him a place where his promises could be on display for everyone to see – on a daily basis!

God's priorities have not changed today as the clock continues to count down toward Judgment Day today. His priority today remains being with his people, just like it always has been. That's why he sent Jesus to be the fulfillment of all those years of sacrifices at the temple. That's why every weekend God invites you into his house to hear once again that your sins are forgiven, he is with you, and he will take you home to heaven. That's why God leads us to gather together in congregations, schools, and church bodies. His priority is being with his people. Speaking through his word. Coming to us in his sacraments. God wants us to be with him - forever!

Seeing God's priorities gives us guidance in understanding our own priorities. God has given us a tremendous amount of talent, time, money, relationships, and so much more in life, and as we manage all these blessings God invites us to realize why he has given us so many things. For other people. God doesn't need your time, your money, your energy, your anything. But your neighbor does, and that's why God has given it to you – so that other people might find out about God's love through the lives and testimony of his children. That's the priority!

And so as you make use of what God has given you, it is a wise thing to plan for the future – but realize that the future is a lot bigger than driving a nicer car, living a more comfortable lifestyle, or being able to retire without financial fears. The future is life in heaven with God, and not just you but all the other people who

might find out about Jesus through you. It all starts at Judgement Day, and the clock is ticking! There are a lot of people who need to know their Savior. There are a lot of people who need encouragement, and far from what the Israelites embraced, **NOW IS THE TIME**. Don't delay! Jesus is going to return, and it might be very soon! Let's dedicate everything that we have to preparing for that day. Amen.