

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 43  
Consider Your Ways! The Book of Haggai  
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church – May 18, 2008

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Have you ever heard someone say, “*If only such and such would happen, then I would do this for God.*”, but when they got their wish, they conveniently forgot their promise? I’ve heard it often. I’m sure you have too!

Such was the case with the Old Testament people of Judah. They had been taken out of their land into captivity by the Babylonians. While there, I can just imagine the promises they made to God...

The day came when they had that opportunity. In the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia, some were sent back to Jerusalem, along with supplies, to rebuild the Temple.

You can just imagine how excited and motivated they would have been! When they got back into the land, they went right to work, and in a very short time, they completed the foundation of the Temple. It was a day of rejoicing! They blew trumpets, banged cymbals, and sang praises of thanksgiving to God! The noise of their rejoicing was **so loud** it was heard many miles away! On that day you would think nothing would ever stop them. But their work **did not proceed** any further.

What happened? Basically, other things became more important. In response, God sent a man named Haggai with a message for the people, his message “***Put God first!***” That’s a message we still need to hear as well. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus said...

Those things are the things we work for. The things that keep us busy. God recognizes we need such things, but wants us to know **He** must come first.

Open your Bibles to the book of Haggai... (3 from the end)

In this little book, we will discover the problems the people of Judah found themselves in, were not much different from our own, and God’s solution is the same for both then and now.

There are **four messages** God gave His prophet for the people.

And it is important to notice these were not the babblings of an old saint to a new generation. These were messages of God through a messenger of God. Look at what is said in verse 13...

So these four messages came from God through His messenger and therefore needed to be heard and obeyed.

### **Message #1 - Consider Your Ways!**

Listen to the first chapter...

The Jews had returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. and laid the foundation of the Temple, but no further work got done for over fifteen years Why? Haggai hints at a number of reasons or excuses:

(1) We know from Ezra 4, one excuse was opposition...

That is seemingly a legitimate excuse. However, they never questioned the order. They just stopped.

Too often, the least bit of opposition causes us to quit doing what we know God wants us to do. But God finishes what He starts (Philippians 1:6), and when He calls us to a task, unless He says, "*STOP*" we need to continue!

(2) God's timing was an excuse. Look at verse 2...

There are a number of explanations as to what they may have been thinking. But generally they were thinking, it wasn't God's time.

God's timing keeps us from doing a lot of things doesn't it? We use it as an excuse not to witness... not to serve... etc... But maybe God's timing has nothing to do with it...

(3) Home and Family were also an excuse. In verse 4, the prophet asked...

They had plenty of time to build their personal mansions but no time to build the house of God.

I would admit too often our homes and families get neglected, but it's never because of what the Lord wants us to do. God's Word gives special attention to the home, and God's Work **never** interferes with it! Sometimes we get out of balance, but God's Work is not the cause.

(4) A fourth excuse was the economy. Verse six tells us they were working harder, making more, and getting further behind. Tell me that don't sound familiar! Our personal economic conditions do sometimes discourage us and keep us from serving the Lord. We wonder, "*Does God care?*"

Yes, He does! And so He says in verses 5 and 7, "*Consider your ways.*" Literally, *take it to heart*. Think about your life. What's the real problem? Their problem wasn't opposition, God's timing, the need for time at home, or the economy.

*The problem was **their priorities!***

Their lives were filled with things to do and God's work was way down the list. And so, their lives were a mess.

Why? It may surprise some, but in verse 9, God takes the blame. He says, "*I did it.*" Why? Because, *they needed to put Him first!*

Sounds pretty relevant, doesn't it?

What do we live for? What do we work for? 1Corinthians 10:31 says...

Perhaps we too, should consider **our ways!**

Well, the people of Judah took God's message to heart, they adjusted their ways, **and after fifteen years** went back to work on the Temple.

If God is speaking to you today about priorities in your life, then do something about it! Make the necessary changes! God promises, just as He did them in verse 13, to be with you every step of the way!

## **Message # 2 – Don't Compare!**

Look at 2:1-9...

About four weeks into the work, the people started getting discouraged. The reason is indicated by three questions asked in verse 3...

As they got some of the work done, it became obvious (especially to the older folks) this Temple would be *nothing like* the former Temple. That comparison got them discouraged, and the work was in danger of stopping again.

Have you ever allowed comparisons to get you discouraged, and keep you from doing what God wanted you to do? Comparisons with the past! Comparisons with other people! Comparisons with other ministries! An on and on we could go!

I'm so happy God doesn't measure our success by comparing us with others or even our own past. Instead, He works with us *where we are*, and **not** where we've been. Philippians 3:13-14 tells us, "*Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" That's how God wants us to think, to keep Him and His calling first in our life.

To help the people of Judah, God provided a series of **5 encouragements**:

**# 1 – God's Presence**. At the end of verse 4, He says...

It isn't the size of the work that makes it significant. It's the presence of the Lord in the work that makes it significant! ***How we must never forget that!*** Too often when we are doing what the Lord wants us to do, it seems too small and we think it should be bigger. But bigness is not what makes a work significant. It is the Lord's presence!

**# 2 - God's Promise**. He reminded them of His covenant. Look at verse 5...

God promised them, and He promises us, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Hebrews 13:5).*" God doesn't abandon us just because what were doing might seem small. In fact, He prefers the small. (1 Corinthians 1:27 – He has chosen the weak and the small to confound the strong.)

**# 3 - God's Purpose**. Look at verses 6-7...

God is in control, and He's got a plan for this world from start to finish. At the center of it all, is *The Desire of the Nations*. If you've got a different translation than the King James, you might not see those words, but it is the right translation. The early Jewish scholars and the early Church fathers understood this to be a reference to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. As *The Desire of the Nations*, **Jesus** is the One who brings glory to every work. It is not what we're doing but what **He** is doing that brings glory to our work.

#### **# 4 - God's Provision.** Verse 8...

In Ezra 6:8-12, it describes what happened when they reached this point. They looked around and realized they didn't have much. They didn't have the supplies, or the financing they needed to do the job. But once, by faith, they began to build, their enemies started complaining to the king again and so he looked into it and discovered they did have an order to return and rebuild. He also discovered the financing was to come from the king's treasury. So he ordered that the taxes from the land would go to rebuilding the Temple. As a result, *their enemies* ended up paying for the project!

God has the means for us to accomplish what He wants us to do. I think back a few years before we built...

God is able! He says, "*All the silver and gold is Mine.*"

#### **# 5 - God's Peace.** In verse 9, God promised...

That is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. See Isaiah 9:6-7 & Luke 2:25-33...

It was the presence of Christ in this Temple that would make it more glorious than the latter.

The lesson of this 2nd message is - Nothing we do is too small or insignificant when God is involved. **He** makes it significant! I like what the old English preacher, F.B. Meyer had to say concerning this passage, "*Do not wait to do a great thing. The opportunity may never come. But since little things are constantly claiming your attention, do them for a great motive - God's glory.*"

If we keep God first, He will keep what we do significant.

## Message # 3 – Keep Clean!

Listen to what it says in 2:10-19...

With 2 simple questions, Haggai made his point: If something clean touched something unclean would it remain clean? The answer was no.

If something unclean touched something clean would it become clean? Again, the answer was no.

What was his point? Throughout the time they had returned to the land (for 15 years) they had remained unclean. Now, they were beginning a holy work and for it to be clean, they needed to be clean. Haggai drove this point home with the use of the word, “*consider*” 3 times in verses 15 and 18, ***Think about it! Think about it! Think about it!***

There was something missing that made everything they did unclean and caused them to lose out on God’s blessing - ***obedience*** Remember what God told Saul in 1Samuel 15:22? “*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.*” It doesn’t matter how hard we work if we’re not doing what God wants us to do.

And here, God uses Haggai to communicate something especially encouraging. Look at verses 18-19...

*From this day, the day they started to obey, “I will bless you!”* Isn’t that neat! If we want to keep God’s blessing, **then we must obey Him!**

## Message # 4 – You’re Chosen!

Listen to what it says in verses 20-23...

Zerubbabel was the grandson of the final king of Judah before Babylon carried them into captivity. He was in the royal line, destined to be king, but now was a governor, a seemingly insignificant role, over a small fragile group of people. Maybe he wondered if all the work amounted to *anything!* Well, God called him **a servant**, **a signet ring**, and **a chosen one**. Those descriptions were all intended to communicate his special place with God.

It's exciting to me, when we look at the line of Christ in the gospels of Matthew and Luke; you know whose name is mentioned? Zerubabbel! Though seemingly insignificant, his part was indeed important to God!

His blessing can and should be our blessing. *In Christ*, **we are** God's servants. *In Christ*, **we are** special to Him. *In Christ*, **we are** God's chosen ones. And ***everything*** we do is important to Him. So let's keep Him first!

Keep Him first instead of other things! Keep Him first by living obedient lives! Keep Him first in everything!