

**“Longing for God’s Presence”
(Haggai 2:6-9):
Pastor Peter Yi
August 19th, 2007**

Haggai 2:6-9 ⁶ "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. ⁸ 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. ⁹ 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Historical Background

We're in the final stretch of looking at the minor prophets, the last 12 books in the Old Testament. After today there remains only Zechariah and Malachi. And in case you missed the brief history of Israel in the past sermons, here it is again. Israel's monarchy began in 1050BC under King Saul, then King David, then King Solomon and then it became a divided kingdom—Israel to the north and Judah to the south. After many kings, most of which were bad, in both northern and southern kingdom, God judged and punished first Israel and then Judah by allowing them to be invaded and then exiled to a foreign nation. The Assyrians exiled Israel and the Babylonians exiled Judah. This Judean exile occurred in 586BC.

So there were prophets who lived and ministered before the exile, during the exile and after the exile. Haggai was a prophet that lived during the post-exilic period in Babylon. Other post-exilic books that would give us a better understanding of what was going on would be Ezra and Zechariah. Haggai is giving his series of oracles to God's people who are living in Babylon in exile in a span of just 15 months in 520 BC, 66 years after the exile.

From the book of Ezra we get a more detailed backdrop for the book of Haggai. These two books and Zechariah should be read together. So from Ezra we find out that in 538 BC, the Persian emperor Cyrus gave a decree that allowed some Jews to return to the land of Judah and at the site of Solomon's temple they built an altar and reinstated the sacrifices that were originally instructed by Moses. And they prepared to rebuild the temple, but the work stopped because of heavy opposition from neighboring enemies. And this stoppage occurred for sixteen years. And during those sixteen years the house of the Lord continued to remain in ruins, but the people of God carried on with life as usual and instead built themselves houses. It's as if they were saying, "yeah it was a great idea to rebuild the temple, but it ain't worth my life, and so in the meantime, I'm just going to work on my own stuff, my house, my family. And that's what they did for sixteen years.

Sixteen Years

So for sixteen years the people of God put God on hold, on the back-burner. They hung up their bibles. They stopped going to church. They stopped giving their offerings. They stopped serving God. Sixteen years is about a 5th of a typical person's life, given we live to eighty. The first fifth of your life, we're winding up and the last fifth we're winding down. So sixteen years is in reality, 1/3 of our productive life. That's a long time. For many people who grew up in church sixteen years is a pretty standard length of time of falling away from God. We go to church from when we were children. We attend youth-group and begin to get a taste of the world. Our faith has yet to

weather enough storms to make it strong, so during 11th and 12th grade, we start to drift...and then by the time we hit university we make a conscious decision to leave the church. We graduate, we go to grad school or get a job...along the way we find a spouse...and buy a house...then we have a kid or two...and what do we discover when we're about 34 years old? My kids need God, and my family needs God and we go church shopping and resettle into church life. You left the church at 16 and you're back at 34. That's sixteen years, literally the youthful and energetic prime of your life, lost and wasted. Perhaps the time when we could have given our best and our most to the Lord...and we wasted it on drink and worldly ambition and the like. That's how quickly sixteen years go by.

And we don't even have had to physically leave the church. Some of us during those years, and it may have only been five years or pick whatever length of time, but we may have been coming out to church quite regularly and consistently, but during that time, something happened where our compass stopped pointing North to God and did a 180 and pointed back to ourselves. We stopped serving. We stopped giving. We stopped caring. We removed ourselves from intimate community. It used to be all about God, but now it's become all about me.

And so yeah, because of that 16 year hiatus, we might have a nice career lining up for us. We might be in the neighborhood and home we always dreamed of owning. We might be driving the cars and wearing the clothes and taking the vacations that we envisioned we would have. But in the meantime, God and his Kingdom and his priorities and his centrality have all been put on hold.

This is what Haggai is addressing. This is a message for all of us.

Let me explain how monumental the sins of the Israelites were. I don't even think you and I have a modern day equivalent to the experience and history of the Jews.

The centrality of the temple

For God's people the temple of God was at the very center of everything. It was the center for each individual and it was at the center for the whole Israelite society. It was at the center both physically and metaphorically.

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and they began to settle in the land of Canaan, God gave some very specific instructions about things that dealt with worship, namely the tabernacle. Whenever the twelve tribes of Israel stopped and established their camp, the tabernacle was to be situated at center with three tribes lined up on each of the four sides. And the tabernacle became the place the people of God, met with God. It was the place where worship happened. It was the place where if because of my sins, my relationship with was jeopardized, I could make sacrifices for sin and my relationship with God would be restored. It represented the presence of God himself. The cloud, the sign of the presence and leading of God, didn't just rest near it or above, but actually in it. Within the tabernacle was the holy place and the holy of holies. In the holy of holies, the innermost place was the ark of the covenant and over it the mercy seat where atonement for sin was made. And the worship articles were inside the tabernacle like the lampstand, table, altar and stuff. So this is how God dwelt or tabernacled among his people. It was a symbol of incredible intimacy. Where the statement, you will be my people, and I will be your God became a real experience. No other nation had in their false God's what the Israelites had in the tabernacle. God's people, at that time being very nomadic lived in tents so they could pick up and leave when they needed to. And God too chose to live in a tent...to identify with his own. Isn't that incredible?

Now some of you, who are bit more familiar with the bible, are already seeing the connections with the New Testament). For example in the nativity story when the angel says that his name will be Immanuel...God with us...floods of images of the tabernacle could rush into our minds...and we begin to understand...God wasn't just Immanuel when Jesus was born. No. He was always Immanuel to his people. We'll see more New Testament connections in a bit, but for now, back to the tabernacle in the Old Testament.

And then jump a couple hundred years to the times of the Kings. David, living in the lap of luxury, feels burdened that God still only remains in a tent and being a man after God's own heart, he longs to build for God a temple. You know folks, just on a side note...when pastors and church leaders...cast a vision to build a new church building...it all starts here with David. It's because God has placed a burden in men's hearts to serve and worship and glorify the Lord that they want to build churches for Him. And even moreso for us now, living on this side of the cross, knowing that Jesus, loves more than anything, next to his Father, loves the church.

Anyway, David isn't allowed to build a house of God because David was a man of war. I can imagine how devastated that news must have come to David. But God is truly amazing in what he promises David instead. He says, David, you can't build a house for me because you were a man of war, but instead you know what you can do? Allow me to build an everlasting house for you. There will be a king, similar to you, but infinitely greater, and he will come from your loins, and for his kingdom, his house, there will be no end. David received the greatest promise. From your lineage will come the King of Kings, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, the Saviour of the world. (2 Samuel 7)

So who gets to build the house of God? David's son, Solomon. And did he go all out! He built the mother of all temples uses nothing but the best of all the materials available to him. He spared no expense. He used the best artisans. And during his reign, he completed the construction of the temple of God in Jerusalem, on Mount Zion. And do you remember the part of the bible that accounts the dedication ceremony. (1 Kings 8) It's awesome. The cloud of God fills the temple, the priests can't but stop what they're doing. And Solomon lifts up an incredible prayer of praise and petition to God. (We don't have the time to read it, but go to 1 Kings 8 and read it on your own.) The temple now became the place that the tabernacle used to be. It was the place to meet God. It was the place to receive forgiveness of sins. It was the place where it represented God dwelling among us.

The tabernacle, the temple was always at the center both physically or geographically, and at the center spiritually and religiously for the Jewish people. And to be exiled from their home land where the temple was, to have foreigners come in and have the temple desecrated was just unfathomable. But while living in exile, they longed for the time when they would return to Jerusalem and finally after decades, the Babylonian king gives them the green light to go and rebuild. And instead of jumping on the opportunity, the Israelites collapse under opposition...they soon forget about the temple all together and they focus their attention on much less important things.

This is why the sin of the Israelites was so great. In refusing to rebuild the temple they were in essence saying to God, "It's okay that you don't dwell among us." All their priorities were shifted the wrong way. Their situation was one of captivity. If there was ever a time they needed God's presence, it was now. God had opened the door when the king allowed them to return to

Jerusalem and they squandered it. And God says, that's why you aren't getting any return on your labours. That's why you keep coming up empty handed. Because obedience and blessing always go hand-in-hand.

And aren't we the same way? Don't we treat God like a spare tire; like some sort of good-luck charm? Don't we make God into a pocket-sized deity? For us the rejection or neglect of God or Christ is even more severe than what the Israelites were guilty of.

Haggai tells us what the results will be if we repent and obey.

Haggai 2:6-9 6 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. 7 I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 8 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 9 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Now the question that this passage raises is this. History has shown us that the temple that Nehemiah rebuilt was nothing like the temple that Solomon had completed. It was pale in comparison. But in verse nine, it says that, "the desired of all nations will come" and "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house." So either Haggai and God are lying or they have something else in mind. Let's look to the New Testament.

Christ the Tabernacle

When we shift over into the New Testament, the images and themes of the temple are there just as they were in the Old Testament. But now the focus on the temple shifts to a focus on Christ and what happens is that in the person of Christ, we find the tabernacle and the temple.

In John 1:14 it says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

In the Greek, the original language the word for dwelling is tabernacle. So what John is saying, is Jesus, the eternal Word of God, when he became human and lived and walked the earth, he tabernacled among us. So here's one connection between the OT tabernacle and Christ.

Move over to the next chapter and Jesus drives out the businesses from the temple's Gentile court. And after that encounter he has a dialogue with the religious leaders that went like this.

*John 2:18-22 18 Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." 20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 **But the temple he had spoken of was his body.** 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.*

And this is what they accuse him of during his trial before the his crucifixion.

Move over another two chapters to his dialogue with the woman at the well. And in this dialogue they get on the subject of worship and she says people should worship on this mountain and the Jews in Jerusalem, where the temple is. And listen to what Jesus says,

John 4:21 "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." And he says it doesn't have to do with where you worship, but with how you worship and whom you worship.

And then if we move into the book of Hebrews, it teaches us that within the temple, Jesus is not only the ultimate high priest, but he's also the ultimate sacrifice that does away forever any need for future animal sacrifices. Jesus replaces the need for any temple. So the next time you read Hebrews, read it in the light of the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament. Let me give you just one excerpt.

Hebrews 9:11-15 11 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! 15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance-- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

And then finally in the New Testament another remarkable thing happens the Old Testament temple is now the church, the people of God which is the place where God dwells. Remember in 1 Corinthians it says things like,

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

This is how Haggai's prophecy came true. The glory of Christ far exceeds any temple. And the nations only enter the temple after Christ, in and through the church.

Application

So for us, today, on this side of the cross, to reject Christ, to backslide, to stop going to church, to stop fellowshiping with other believers, to begin to live a sinful and worldly lifestyle, is in essence saying Jesus, I don't need you, I don't want. It's saying I don't love that which you love the most. When we get out of prayer and out of scripture, we're merely saying, Jesus, I don't want to talk to you, and I don't want to hear from you.

And for that we must repent. We must admit our guilt. We must call it what it is, namely sin. And we must throw ourselves upon the mercy of Christ and turn and rededicate ourselves to him.

After Haggai's message, that's what the Israelites did. They repented and God blessed them.

Conclusion:

Folks it's a terrible thing to turn away from God and to neglect his church. You and I must not waste any more time and return to God and to his priorities. And God will relent and forgive and bless us.

