



## **IS THE LORD'S HOUSE IN RUINS?**

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Welcome to Let the Bible Speak, a half-hour time of bible study. That's our only mission here is to point you to the word of God for the answers to life's questions. We're not here to advocate for a political party. We're not here to review the book of the month but rather to preach the book of the ages. AND we're not here for your money. You will never hear us solicit donations nor will we ever mail you anything asking for money. The only thing we desire from you is your time and attention to the word of God.

Our scripture reading today comes from the Old Testament book of Haggai. Haggai was one of the minor prophets – minor, not because his message was minor or unimportant – quite the contrary -- but rather because his prophecy is one of the shorter prophecies in the Old Testament. He prophesied after the people returned from captivity to their burned-out city of Jerusalem and destroyed temple. The people, however, were not doing what God wanted them to do and this is Haggai's indictment. In Haggai 1, beginning in verse 1, the scripture says: "In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built." ' " Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house." So reads Haggai 1:1-9. Haggai's message was not only needed in his own day. It is needed in ours as well. Our sermon today: "Whose House Are We Building?" After a song from the congregation.

About 600 years before Christ, Judah was captured and carried off to Babylon. Jerusalem, and its holy temple was plundered and burned. Seventy years later, the Jews were allowed to return. They faced the daunting task of rebuilding the city and their lives. It was God's intention for them to rebuild the temple. In fact, God caused Cyrus to allow them to do just that. But once the people got to Jerusalem, they had other priorities and other things began to take precedence over God's house. They set in to rebuilding their own homes while the temple still lay in ruins. So, God sent His prophet Haggai to them with the simple message: to get busy and built the temple! The Jews had procrastinated about rebuilding the Lord's house, though, and made excuses and tried to rationalize their decision. The bible says in Haggai 1:2 that they had said: "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built." The reason they thought the time had not come was because they were more concerned about putting a roof over their own heads. Simply stated: they put building their own homes before the Lord's house. So, in verses 3-6: "Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, (a paneled house simply refers to an enclosed home, protected from the sun and from the rain, etc.) and this temple to lie in ruins?" (In other words, they were more worried about making a comfortable place for them to live and allowing the precious things of the temple to be exposed to the elements.) "Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." What He means is that they had been working on things that in the big scheme of things didn't much matter and they were neglecting the things that were of greater importance.

They were 'earning wages to put into a bag with holes.' Now, isn't that what many of us are doing today? Aren't we spending most of our time and energy trying to accumulate possessions that at the end of the day will be worthless? Don't we forget about judgment and eternity and think only about the here and now or at best, a few years down the road? Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21). You see, we're working for wages to put into a bag with holes. That's the Jews were doing in being more concerned about the houses in which they lived than they were the house that God dwelled in. And Haggai goes on to illustrate the mess they were in because of how their attitude toward spiritual matters. It was a sorry state of affairs in Judah because they were placing their own lives and their own interests above the Lord's house. Well, the preaching of Haggai proved successful because the people humbly listened and obeyed and set out to complete the construction of the temple.

We, today, are faced with a similar task. I'm, of course, not talking about building a physical structure, but I mean the task of building up God's house, the church. Building up the kingdom of Christ in our own heart and in the hearts of others. Oh, there's something to be said for the fact that if the church has a place to meet it ought to take care of it. It tells me something about a church when I see its members living in nice homes and keeping their grass cut and the place looking nice and see the place where they gather for worship looking neglected and dilapidated. But with that said, friend, the church itself is not a building; it has nothing to do with a building.

Now, in the Old Testament, God dwelt in a physical place. When the Israelites carried the tabernacle about, God's presence with the Ark of the Covenant, followed it about. When Solomon later built the temple, the Shekinah Glory came down and filled it. It was where God dwelt among His people, Israel. In

this New Testament dispensation, the temple of God is the church, which is not the place where the church meets, but rather, a group of people that gather and join together in the work and worship of God in that community. And when it comes to building THAT house, there is always much to do. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, refers to the local church at the temple of God. That group of people constitutes a spiritual structure which we are to build up and maintain. Its foundation is Christ, and His apostles and prophets. It grows as the gospel is preached and souls are converted by that preaching. And it builds itself up in love when that church is functioning as it should with each member supplying its part. (Ephesians 4:16) God has placed the charge to build up and maintain His church in our hands.

Is Haggai's message to Judah then applicable to us today? Does the Lord's house lie in ruins while we run to our own homes, as the prophet said of them so long ago? I'm afraid in many places and in many a life, that's exactly the case. Friend, the greatest cancer on the church (particularly in America) today is apathy. You may say, "no, our problem is sin and immorality". Well, that's because of our indifference. If we were really interested in serving the Lord and we spent our time being led and transformed by His word, we wouldn't see people in the church living immorally. You say, "the problem is worldliness!" Oh? And why has the church become so worldly? And it has. Do you suppose it is because we spend more time in the things of the world than we do the things of Christ? It doesn't take much to see the connection, does it?

Paul said to the Corinthians "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:1) The word carnal means they were earthly minded. And consequently, the church in Corinth was spiritually in ruins at the time. The Corinthians were controlled by the culture around them. The wickedness of Corinth had influenced the church. They were not a spiritually minded people but rather a worldly-minded church. What kinds of things does your mind dwell on? Are you obsessed with what's going on in the world around you or are you obsessed with what's going on in the kingdom of God? Do you spend more time in the newspaper or on Facebook or Instagram than you do reading and studying the word of God? Or what kinds of things do you get excited about? Do you lose sleep over what you saw on the evening news, or do you perhaps lose sleep because the word of God convicted you of some sin in your life? Do you get more excited about your favorite football team and whether they win or lose than you do over whether the church grows or declines? Are you more likely to talk to someone about politics, sports, business, hunting, or fishing than you are to talk to them about the Lord Jesus and the church for which He died?

Where does most of your time go? There are 168 hours in a week. Do you even spend one of those hours every week with the local church in worship? Most people in America no longer attend church services on a weekly basis and a growing number of people RARELY attend. And I'm just talking about an hour or two on Sunday morning. Never mind Sunday night or Wednesday night or other times when the church gathers to work and worship. Most people don't put forth much effort to be there on Sunday morning anymore. And we wonder why news reports tell us that we're living in post-Christian America! That's not the world's fault; it's the church's fault. It's because in trying to keep up in the rat race we've created over the past century, we have allowed the Lord's house to lie in ruins while we run to our own homes.

Notice, how the people then reasoned: "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built." In other words, "we'll get to that eventually. The time is just not now. Let's get our own homes rebuilt and secure and THEN the time will be right to build the Lord's house." Isn't that the way we often reason today? "I would serve the Lord and be faithful in the church but, you know, a man must work. A person must feed their family. A person needs to get an education so they can do those things..." Listen,

friend, I don't deny that a man needs to work. In fact, the bible says that if a man refuses to work and provide for his own, he's worse than an infidel and has denied the faith. (1 Timothy 5:8) A man who won't provide for his family isn't worth the salt that goes in his bread. But Jesus taught that the things of life must be arranged by priorities. There are many things that are important in their own rite, but other things are even more important!

Jesus said in Matthew 6:31-33, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Now, is the Lord saying that a person doesn't have the responsibility to work? Of course not! He's not telling us to just sit back and wait for God to rain manna down from heaven. He's talking about priorities, and He makes a sacred and a wonderful promise to the person who seeks the kingdom of God before anything else and that is that everything else, we need will find its rightful place. That's called "living by faith." It's not standing around waiting for God to do it for us. It is putting Him before the physical things of life and trusting Him to make those other things possible and available.

Now, the bible says in Hebrews 10:25, that Christians are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner (or habit) of some... but we're to regularly come together as a church to edify and encourage one another. The early disciples saw the first day of every week as an appointment to come together and eat the Lord's Supper, according to Acts 20:7. Now, what if that conflicts with my workplace? Does it occur to us when we take that job that should make it clear that we're a Christian and we're a part of the church and we have an appointment with God and His people that day? There are plenty of people who have no devotion to religious life who can work that shift on Sunday. Now, it may very well be that you may have to go somewhere else and find another job, but didn't Jesus say, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you?" David once said that he had lived a long time and had never seen the righteous forsaken by God or His people begging for bread. I've preached a long time and I've seen many Christians make some hard decisions when it came to a job or a college career or many other things to put their loyalty to Christ and to the church first in their life. I've seen Christians be forced to leave a job and find another. In 30 years of preaching though, I have never seen a Christian go without the necessities of physical life because they chose to put Christ first and do what they had to do to be faithful in the church. You may say, well, others can worship, my job forces me to make an exception. Well, why doesn't it force the others to make exceptions? How many does it take before the church is abandoned altogether? If you're a member of the church, you're just as necessary and important as the next Christian is, and if you're not, you need to examine your Christian life and your dedication to Christ in other ways as well. Again, are we dwelling in paneled homes, and letting the Lord's house lie in ruins?

Haggai tells the people to "consider their ways." Things were not well with them spiritually and it was because their priorities were all out of order. Everything they set out to do was for nothing because they were neglecting the house of God. Perhaps there is a reason for the spiritual drought in your life today. Perhaps you're finding it hard to live a Christian life and remain unspotted from the world. Is it because you're too caught up in the things of the world to begin with? Have you neglected the house of God? Have you run to your paneled home and let the Lord's house lie in ruins? Friends, the church desperately needs revival today. The state we find the church in in many, many places is not the world's responsibility. Don't say, if the world ever straightens us and becomes a more spiritual place then people will return to church, and we'll see a revival. It doesn't work that way. The world will never become a more spiritual place. It's up to the church to be a spiritual place and to influence the world

outside of it. Revival in the church – raising up the ruins of God’s house and building it into a beautiful temple for the Lord – relies upon the church itself. And it relies upon you and upon me. The question we should perhaps ask today is: what if everyone in the church were just like me? Would the church meet each Sunday? If everyone gave as much time to the church as I do, would anything get done? What if everyone contributed to it as much as I do, would it have the means to do its work? What if everyone were a strong spiritually as I am? Would the church be strong and vital or weak and flailing? Would it die altogether? You see, it is up to you, and it is up to me, if we’re members of His body. Let us consider our ways! Are we building our own homes while the Lord’s house is in ruins?

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