



There are times when we are called to return to the basics. Vince Lombardi, the esteemed coach of the Green Bay Packers, always began his first summer practice the same way. He gathered his team together and he would hold up a football and say, "Gentlemen, this is a football." When we forget the fundamentals we get sloppy. Like a football, every device we use every day has certain fundamental rules that go with using that device. When we use the device for something that it isn't designed for, we have problems. I learned that this week.

Take a fire alarm for example. Let's take one right here at church. Our fire alarms have cases around them that sit about five feet off the ground. It doesn't say on the case, "Caution, please do not back up against this case and rub your back against it even when it serves as an excellent backscratcher."

I was talking with someone on Tuesday afternoon in our hallway and I had an itch, so I rubbed my back on the fire alarm case. I rubbed so hard that the case fell off and that immediately set off the room alarm right down the hall. In the deafening noise, I panicked. You know that lever that says, "Only pull in case of fire"? Well, my mind just seemed to disconnect from my body and in a panic to stop the noise, I pulled the lever. Three minutes later we heard the sirens of Foster City's finest and our staff had an unplanned fire drill. My lack of attention to the fundamental purposes of an important device led to a major disruption at CPC as well as for our fire department. Not to mention the ribbing I took this week from my co-workers!

I also learned this week that there are other devices that we must protect from misuse. If we treat them poorly, these amazing devices will not function correctly. Take a lap top computer. It doesn't say on the computer, "Please do not pour coffee on the keyboard" or "don't place your cup of coffee 3 inches from your keyboard." Well, on Thursday I was talking with someone in my office as I often do and I grabbed for my coffee as I often do, but this time I sloshed some coffee on my computer keyboard. This wonderful device made for my convenience and blessing now has an appointment at the Apple store. I needed a big "L" for loser taped on my forehead! So I must say this got me to give careful thought to my ways.

Our passages this morning are about returning to the basics. Our passages in *The Story* reveal to us God's priorities. This part of *The Story* revolves around a particular building called the temple of God. "Gentlemen, this is the temple!" This building reveals so

much more than architecture and design, it reveals the heart of God, and how we can connect with his heart especially when we feel like such a loser.

Going back two weeks, we looked at the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians and read that the temple of God was ransacked and destroyed. It was one of the darkest times in Jewish history. It was a time of sorrow and suffering and death. There was no doubt, in the lower story for those people who endured it, that God had removed his blessing. It was hard to even imagine an upper story of hope that God would somehow redeem this situation for their descendants. They had screwed it up. The fall of Jerusalem took place in 586 BC.

The conquering King Nebuchadnezzar attempted to erase Jewish culture and faith. Those he didn't kill he exiled to parts of his empire to immerse them into Babylonian culture. Last week we read about Daniel and his friends in Babylon who courageously kept their faith in unholy places.

Today we begin 48 years after the fall of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, who was the most powerful man on earth, was now dead and his kingdom became a small paragraph in world history and a new empire has risen. It was the Persian Empire led by King Cyrus. I wouldn't say that Cyrus was a follower of God; he was more likely a follower of many gods. But he did recognize the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the special city of Jerusalem. So in 538 BC, Cyrus issued a proclamation recorded in the book of Ezra. *"This is what the Cyrus the King of Persia says: 'The Lord the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them'"* (Ezra 1:2-3).

Can you imagine how this generation of Jews must have felt? We get to go home! We get to rebuild the place where God will dwell with us. We have the blessing and the financing from this king of Persia to return to our promised land to go and worship our King. Ezra tells us that almost 50,000 left with oxen, camels, and donkeys and 200 singers.

Two years later Temple construction began. Within two years they had laid a foundation. It was hard work, and while they worked on the temple they were trying to establish their houses and livelihoods. Also, there were non-believers around them

who felt threatened or jealous by these Jews returning and building. So they did everything they could to make it frustrating for them.

Ezra tells us that two years later in 534 BC construction stopped on the Temple. So a foundation had been laid and it just sat there. Soon it became overgrown and almost forgotten. It painted a sad picture of a change in priorities. Sixteen more years passed. In that time King Cyrus was killed in a battle and a guy named Darius took over as the new king of Persia.

Enter Haggai: A prophet who likely arrived in the first wave of 50,000. Theologians refer to him as the successful prophet. His main message was the temple project and in only two recorded chapters we see how God used him among his fellow Jews. So in 520 BC we read:

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

What Haggai said next revealed the heart of the people. It revealed their priorities.

The People's Priority

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'These people say, the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD'S house'" (1:2).

Notice it is "these people," not the normal "my people." Even that is a rebuke. This was a rare phrase in the Old Testament. It meant that God wasn't pleased with them. Was Haggai thinking, "Why are God's people waiting so long to do the very thing they came back to do? How did they lose their focus?" They had started out so strong. Notice they didn't deny that building it was their responsibility. I'm sure that there was a lot of economic struggle and political instability, and from a human perspective it maybe made sense to put off the rebuilding.

Yet you and I know that God isn't bound by economics and politics. The real problem was misplaced priorities. We can get so easily caught up on our own life circumstances that we miss out on what is so important. We lose sight of the concept that we were created to bring God glory. The temple was significant because it was where you met God. The temple revealed the heart of God. The Lord of Almighty, The Lord of Hosts, didn't want to be high up on a mountain; he wanted to be down in the valley next to his people. He wanted to be accessible.

I have learned for the one who wants to do what is right, the time, resources and the energies seem to become available. But for those of us who are great at inventing excuses or hiding behind excuses, the right time to obey never seems to come.

The Lord's Response

"Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: 'Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains in ruin?' Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways'" (1:3-5).

"Give careful thought to your ways..." Like Lombardi holding up a football God is saying, "Gentlemen, this is my house. You mistreat it, there are consequences." To paraphrase: Why each weekend are you running down to Home Depot to buy more supplies to rebuild, renovate and panel your own house when my temple remains a foundation and a pile of rubble?

"You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it" (1:5-6).

In the Hebrew the arrangement of these verbs adds force that this is timeless truth for all people, as applicable to us as it was to the 50,000 in Jerusalem. See the irony? The harder these people worked for themselves and the more they invested massive energies to beautifying their lives, the less they had materially because they ignored their spiritual lives.

The principle is clear: No one cheats God without cheating himself at the same time. But the reverse is just as clear. If we put God first, he will provide for our deepest needs and those secondary things follow. Jesus said, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Mt. 6:33).

It's not wrong to want full lives. It's natural to seek safe and comfortable places to live, jobs that provide, the financial security, good food and great relationships. What is wrong, or what I should say, what is sinful, is trying to scratch our itch for fullness by pursuing things that are not designed to be #1 for finding fullness. Seeking the things of this world first is like trying to scratch an itch with a fire alarm. It pretends to satisfy for the moment, but then a screeching alarm goes off and there are consequences. In Lombardi fashion, "Gentlemen, putting God first is where satisfaction is found."

The Lord's Priority

"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. Go up to the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored says the LORD. 'You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?' declares the LORD Almighty. 'Because of my house which remains in ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine,

the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands” (1:7-11).

I think among us this morning there will be three different kinds of reactions to a message on priorities. Some of us already know that our priorities are out of whack. And we're afraid of what God may be asking us to do. You are asking, "What are the implications of rearranging your priorities for how I am living today?" You're afraid that rearranging your priorities is going to cause conflict in your marriage, or you will have to give up things you really enjoy. If this is you, I believe God wants to remind you today that he loves you more than you can ever imagine. You can trust him because he is not out to get you. God wants to do extraordinary things in your life and you can trust him to guide you in ways that are trustworthy and good. And to your fear? The Bible says there is only one thing that casts our fear. It's God's perfect love for you no matter what your circumstances and present troubles.

Others of us feel pretty good about where our priorities are. But we know that there is always room for improvement. Maybe you have worked hard to align your priorities with the teachings of the Bible. But you also know that keeping your priorities focused is a process, and you know through your own experiences that priorities can drift gradually away from God's plan. Today you are open to reexamine them, even fine-tune them in a way God might lead you. God is pleased when we are open to the leading by his Spirit.

Finally there are some of us who are totally convinced that our priorities are just fine and don't need any reevaluation. Some might be feeling a bit defensive this morning. You feel you are spending your time and money and energy exactly the way God wants you to. You may be thinking this sermon on priorities is for someone else. To you may God bless you as you seek to be humble and open and not so proud to think you have life all figured out. Be open to refocusing, take new steps of faith, and don't be shy about helping the rest of us on our journey as well.

We have looked at the people's priority, the Lord's response, the Lord's priority. Now let's look at the people in Jerusalem's response.

The People's Response

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD (1:12).

I don't think we should skip over the fact that getting priorities right begins with leadership getting their priorities right. This is why we believe that our pastors, elders and leaders set the pace for us on priorities. And the people responded by fearing

the Lord. In the Bible to fear the Lord is an attitude of reverence toward God that leads to trust. Notice in the prior verses leading up to these they didn't just say, "Okay God, our bad, we will start building again," then go to pick up their hammers and chisels and start pounding away. What did they do before they started re-building? They considered their ways. They evaluated themselves. They checked their motives. Ministry without the right motives is meaningless. It wasn't important that they just get busy and rebuild, it was important that their motive for rebuilding was the right one. Once they had committed to be obedient they received the encouraging word. My favorite verse in this passage:

"Then Haggai, the LORD'S messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: 'I am with you,' declares the LORD" (1:13).

For some of us here today we need the reminder. We need this encouragement. God is with us as we step out and align with his priorities.

"So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel... and the spirit of Joshua... and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month" (1:14-15).

When they put themselves in a position of trust and surrender to God, he stirred up their hearts for action. There is an excitement about being aligned with God's priorities. There is an excitement that comes with doing the things God calls us to do. Our true priorities are revealed not in what we say but are revealed through our actions. As God said through Haggai back in verse 5, "Give careful thought to your ways."

The Lord's Priority For Us

Maybe you are wondering what happened. Did they ever finish the temple? They did. And in a couple of weeks we will learn some wonderful lessons on leadership as construction continues. The temple that these 50,000 started building was the same temple that Jesus went to as a boy. Herod the Great spruced it up quite a bit but it was never as large and grand as Solomon's Temple. It was the same temple that Jesus and his family went to every Passover to offer sacrifices. The colonnade area was the same area where Paul gave sermons. You can actually walk on some of the original stone steps that were placed there 500 years before Christ. Does the temple exist today? No, only the foundation. In 70 AD about 40 years after Christ's death Roman soldiers destroyed the physical temple while putting down a Jewish rebellion against Rome.

As we finish this morning, it's important that we try to move from a physical temple to a spiritual temple. It's important that we introduce a new picture of God's temple. That temple in Haggai's day was a picture or a type that pointed to Christ and

his church. Do you remember reading about when Jesus chased the moneychangers from the temple courts? The Jewish leaders asked for a sign to prove he had the authority to do that. Do you remember Jesus' response? *"Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days."* They responded, *"It took years to build the temple and you can rebuild it in three days?"* But John said in chapter 2:21, *"But the temple he had spoken of was his body."*

His Body is the Temple. His Body is the church. Today we are part of God's spiritual temple in this world. The Apostle Paul said, *"... you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the LORD. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit"* (Eph. 2:19-22).

The Lord is the cornerstone of this holy temple. Then there is a foundation laid by the apostles and prophets through the Word of God. And then there is the rest of the temple. That's made up of sinners like us who come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. When I came to faith in Christ another brick was added. When you came to faith in Christ another brick was added to this spiritual temple that God is building on earth, this place where God dwells with us.

As God stirred in the heart of these Jews in Haggai 1 to build God's temple, may we "give careful thought to our ways." May God stir in our hearts more and more the motivation and then the action to reach out to people who do not have that saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to build God's Temple on earth. *"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but*

chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Now stay with me on this. These scriptures reveal the church to be a worldwide body as well as the local body here at CPC. But the scriptures also speak of each individual believer as the temple of the Lord. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16, *"Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"*. That is the beautiful mystery of the church with Christ as the head of his body. So the church is corporate (throughout the world), local (CPC is an example), and individual (the individual believer is also the temple of the Lord).

What are God's priorities for me? He says, "I am with you." He wants to be close to me and connect with me. He calls me to become a living stone. I am to be built up in him into a spiritual house where I am linked up with other believers. We minister to each other as a holy priesthood, loving each other, bearing each other's burdens, and serving each other, really living in Christian community joined together like bricks in a wall. I don't know what is going on in your life, but I do know these fundamental priorities he has for me are the same priorities he has for you. They are timeless and for every generation and circumstance.

I hope the Lord has stirred your spirit regarding his heart for his church this morning. In Lombardi fashion, "Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the church!" The church is the hope of the world. Let's be all about what the church is designed to do.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.