



Four weeks ago God sent prophets to warn His people that judgment would come if they rebelled against Him. Three weeks ago the Northern Kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians due to their constant rebellion against God. Two weeks ago Judah and Jerusalem were conquered by the Babylonians due to their constant rebellion against God. Last week Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego modeled for us what a faithful life to God looked like while living in exile.

Today, as we continue in *The Story*, the people of God, called The Remnant, have returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. After living in Babylon for 70 years, King Cyrus is now in charge and he says in essence, “go back to Jerusalem, rebuild your temple, worship your God. Any Jew who wants to go back home is free to do so.”

Then he went further. He went into the Persian treasure vault, got all of the gold and silver and precious gemmed items that were taken from the former temple and gave them to the Jews. He said, “put these back into your temple.” About 45,000 people returned. Thousands of others stayed in Persia. An interesting side note, the return of this remnant occurred one year after Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den.

There are five conversational exchanges in these verses:

- » People: “We’re busy”
- » The Lord: “You’re busy with the wrong activities”
- » The Lord: “It’s time to rebuild My house”
- » People: “We will rebuild Your house”
- » The Lord: “I am with you”

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:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house’” (Haggai 1:1–2).

People: “We’re busy”

The temple was the most vital building in Jerusalem because it was the center of all their spiritual activities, their holidays, and their entire society. When these people returned to Jerusalem, 10 years prior, they had clear instructions and funding from the King Cyrus to rebuild the temple. But they’ve hit a snag. The

surrounding nations of Israel were concerned with the return of the Israelites and their non-compromising beliefs. When they walked faithfully with God, they wouldn’t negotiate or compromise. And their God had crazy supernatural power. As a result of their pressure, the Israelites stopped construction of the temple and turned their attention to rebuilding their personal lives: their houses, farms, livestock, wells, etc.

Note God’s patience. He’s waited 10 years. Note that God is frustrated enough with them that He doesn’t call them “My people” but instead “these people.”

We can relate. Almost every time I ask a person “how are you?” the answer is “busy.” We are busy doing good things, important things. And it’s hard to say no when someone needs help or when some activity looks like it might fall apart if you don’t get involved. Think of how hard it is to say no to all the good stuff at Costco! No way you can get out of there for under \$100!

If we fill our lives to the edges with our business, we no longer have room for God’s priorities. And to make it worse, if we fill our lives to the edges with our business, we stop asking what God’s priorities are.

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 a ruin?”

Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 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” (verses 3–6).

The Lord: “You are busy with the wrong activities”

The Lord Almighty is a title meaning “The Lord of Hosts.” This emphasizes the invincible might behind His commands. Note the sarcasm in verse 4. The people have plenty of time to do what they have determined to be important. Maybe that looked like dual income to save for a child’s college; longer work hours to pay for a cabin in Tahoe; more income; a relationship with some person. The people had plenty of time to prioritize **their** activities while the most important activity to God was ignored.

In an attempt to get their attention, the Lord describes the ongoing lack of satisfaction the people are experiencing. How frustrating would this be? Nothing is bringing a sense of “ahhh.”

Nothing brings a contented heart. The state of their hearts is perpetual restlessness.

We learn later in the chapter that the Lord is the cause of their restlessness. He is causing their frustration because they are living with upside down priorities. They thought they would use all their intelligence and education and energy to live a great life and build a great city. And God said, "No you won't! You'll never attain your desires. I will work to frustrate you because the end of your work is death. I'd rather you feel frustrated now and maybe this will get your attention and you'll turn to me and experience a true and full life before you reach the end of a pointless life and death."

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into 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 a 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" (verses 7–11).

The Lord: "It's time to rebuild My house"

After 10 years the Lord has determined that circumstances have changed enough to end the upside down priorities. After waiting 10 years of failed attempts of this remnant to fit Him into their business, God pushes the reset button. You don't fit God into your priorities. He'll never fit. You make God your **top** priority and fill what's left with the room that's left. Everyone has enough time to serve God. Everyone has enough money to give to God. But we don't have enough time and money to do everything we want and God.

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 (v. 12).

People: "We will rebuild Your house"

The leaders and the whole remnant acted together; no dissenters. They had been startled wide-awake by the voice of God. Notice they didn't say, "This seems reasonable. We agree God. We've gotten our lives in order and now it's time to give a little back to you." No. They heard the Lord and they completely re-prioritized their lives. They made God's top priority their priority. They acted. True inner change always leads to outward action.

What does "the people feared the Lord" mean?

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, 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 (verses 13–15).

The Lord: "I am with you"

After agreeing to act in obedience, the Lord does what He's been doing all along—He supernaturally empowers and equips the people do the work He's calling them to do. He tells them, "I am with you." He stirred up the spirit of the leaders and the whole remnant. Author David Platt wrote: "This is how God works. He puts his people in positions where they are desperate for his power, and then he shows his provision in ways that display his greatness."

The parallel between these verses and our lives today is strong: While the Israelites were called to build the temple, we are called to build God's kingdom. God's top priority is to build His kingdom and He wants our top priority to be the same.

What is involved in building God's kingdom? Let's look at what God Himself said when He walked the earth. Jesus' words and actions revealed His single-minded passion to do one thing.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10).

Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?" (Luke 15:4).

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

God is calling us, His people, to make this our **top** priority; to seek and save the lost. God is calling us to rearrange the priorities in our lives to make room for this. This might inspire you to act. I hope it does. In fact, I've been regularly praying this exact thing for our church for two months. This might move your heart and you determine, right now, that you will obey God and put this into action. I hope it does.

Let me share a story about two guys I know. One is named Roger. He said he's heard I'm a pastor. I ask him if he ever goes to

church; he says no. I ask him if he grew up going to church. No. I ask him if he ever thinks about spiritual things. No. So I let it go; I pray for him and wait. I invite him to Easter. I ask him what they do for Easter. They just have a family meal; they aren't religious. As of today, Roger is still lost. But that doesn't mean I've stopped making Jesus' top priority mine.

Then there's Bo. I met him at church. I knew he was lost and I offered to meet up with him if he'd like to talk. He said yes. Five weeks went by... nothing. I prayed. I saw him again. He reaffirmed that he wanted to talk so we set up a coffee. We met; talked about Jesus' love for him. It was great. It was obvious that the Lord was working in Bo's heart. We met many times for coffee over a few months and Bo was more and more interested in Jesus. Eventually, in the quiet of his room, Bo wrote out his belief in God and Jesus and ended it with these words, "I believe your love calls me back to you. I humbly request that you, Jesus, take away my sins and come to know me personally."

Four Tips for Moving Ahead

Confess

Confess the power of jealousy or lust or hatred or despair or control. I don't know about you, but I find that my ego constantly wants to take control. My flesh wants to be in control; to set my priorities; to pursue my goals. We fill our lives with trips, meals, sports, cleaning, friendships, work and tiny slivers of rest but "it's all small stuff, pitifully shriveled if it is disconnected from Jesus' one great master work" (Jack Miller).

So confess your rebellion against God regularly. Recalling the deep hole of our depravity from which Jesus' love rescued us is the perfect place to be when we seek and save the lost.

Pray

By praying our heart is aligned with Jesus' heart. "Jesus' soul is full of salvation fire" (Jack Miller). As we pray He brings to our mind that the world isn't supposed to be this way, that my friends need the unconditional love of Jesus. There's a revealing that happens in prayer that changes us. Author Jack Miller wrote this prayer: "That the truths of redemption would become deeply felt realities in our inmost being, that we would hate the sin of apathy in ourselves and others, and passionately love the lost with boldness, tenderness and brokenness."

Then, pray, and I mean beg, for the Spirit of God to move. He stirred the spirits of the people to rebuild the temple. He will stir the spirits of people to see their need for a Savior. Pray for that! And He will stir your spirit to empower and use you to explain Jesus' unconditional love to them.

Know the realm of hearts

The Israelites became expert builders with wood, rocks and mortar. They used their hands, arms and shoulders to cut, sand, hammer, lay stone in a straight line. Their skills were honed to exactness. And a sharp mind was needed to accurately interpret the drawings to build accurately. We should become experts with matters of the heart.

Do you know your own heart? You should. You won't be able to help someone else navigate their heart if you haven't navigated your own. This is done by asking thought-provoking, open-ended questions to ourselves and others. Let me give you a few examples.

» Because of insecurity some people talk all the time, some people hardly say a word. When she said that, why did I immediately share my own experience? What more did she have to say? Why did I feel the need to defend myself in that situation? Why do I hide my failures and talk about my successes? By asking yourself questions like these you start to learn what's beneath the surface in your heart.

» John Eldredge says that most men are living with an unfulfilled dream. Men, what's yours? Women, what's your husband's? What about the people you know?

» Psychologists have observed that the strongest motivator is fear. You can't determine this by asking straight out.

» Many people carry regrets for a lifetime.

» Author Tim Keller describes four Core Idols: Power, Control, Comfort, Approval. What's yours?

Act in unity

In Haggai 1 when the people heard the Lord, it says that the whole remnant obeyed. With unity, there's support, there's accountability, there's motivation.

Get some training

You probably could use some training, the basics being, What scriptures would you use to explain Jesus' love to someone who doesn't yet believe?

"Drifting does not take any effort at all; just stop cultivating the knowledge of Christ, and the evil current of secularism does the rest. All passion for the lost seems increasingly a fading memory. Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, Paul willing to be cursed for the sake of his countrymen, those things become very remote to the point of being unreal" (Jack Miller).

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

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