

Just Do It

Tell God He Can Wait!

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Bible Text: Haggai 1:12-15
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Gracious God and ever blessed Father, we thank you for the Scriptures, for a book of your words, your divinely inspired and authoritative words to help us find the way of salvation, to help us grow in grace, to navigate for us how we are to live our lives for your praise and glory, and we ask for your blessing now as we turn to the prophecy of Haggai and ask that by the power of the Holy Spirit you would write this upon our hearts and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated.

Now turn with me to the prophecy of Haggai. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, the third book from the end of the Old Testament, short little prophecy of just two chapters. The ministry of a prophet that covers the span of just four months in his life and we pick it up this morning at verse 12. Chapter 1, verse 12.

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD. 13 Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD." 14 And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, 15 on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

Well, may the Lord add his blessing to the reading of his holy and inerrant word.

Now in the early 1740s, a period known in church history, a period known as the Great Awakening, a sovereign revival took place in many parts of the world, Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and in the Colonies of New England, and down here in South Carolina, and one of the great preachers, perhaps the greatest of all the preachers in the Great Awakening was George Whitefield, an extraordinary man whose preaching and

temperament was quite extraordinary and God used his preaching in a powerful way to bring hundreds of thousands of people to saving faith in the course of just a few years. One, there was an incident, just one of many but in Philadelphia he was preaching on the hill near to where the city center is today, and in the course of his preaching and there were tens of thousands of people there listening to him in the open air, and he at some point in the sermon, in the discourse, he said, "Are there Episcopalians in heaven? Father Abraham, are there Episcopalians in heaven?" "No!" said the crowd. Now wait for it. "Are there Presbyterians in heaven?" And the crowd said, "No!" And then he jabbed his finger in the air and he went through a whole list of Baptists and Independents and Congregationalists and others, "Father Abraham, are they in heaven?" "No!" said the crowd. "Then Father Abraham, who is in heaven?" And the crowd taught now by George Whitefield responded, "Only those, only Christians are in heaven, those washed in the blood of the Lamb and clothed in the righteous robe of Jesus Christ." He had been teaching this for some time and he was now catechizing his audience, extraordinary moment, I think, in the preaching of George Whitefield. God blessed his preaching at a specific instance in the course of his life to bring about what we can only call a revival and that's exactly what's taking place here in Haggai.

This is now three weeks later. The book opens in mid to late August in the year 520 BC. The people of God have come back from Babylon under the decree of Cyrus the Persian. Cyrus is now gone and Darius is now the ruler of the Persian Empire, and they've been back in Jerusalem some 16-17 years or so. We've noticed in the last few weeks how Haggai the prophet is raised up for a ministry that's only going to last, at least in recorded history, for a space of four months. And Haggai has chastised them, God has chastised them because they had been living comfortably, making fine houses for themselves while the temple still lay in ruins.

And he's called the prophet. He's God's preacher in Jerusalem. The voice of the Lord is the voice of Haggai, and the voice of Haggai, the words of Haggai the prophet are the words of Almighty God. And we read here in verse 12 that, Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, and "all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him." Then in verse 14, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and the spirit of Joshua and the spirit of all the remnant of the people." And the verb "stirred up" is the verb in Hebrew "to wake up." It would be the verb that you would employ of waking up in the morning. God woke them up and it implies that they had been asleep. They were the Lord's people, they were God's covenant people, but God hasn't referred to them yet as his people. "These people," he had referred to them in the opening verses, as though there was some distance between him and his people, but now they had been in a slumber, they had been asleep. They hadn't been cognizant of the Lord's word and the Lord's command upon them. They had been living for themselves rather than for God, and then all of a sudden in September of 520, and it's as definite as that, it's something that happens at a particular moment in recorded history, and God wakes them up from their slumber. He shakes them and wakes them up.

And what we see here is a revival and I want us to think along two lines of thought and the first thing I want us to think about is the cause of this awakening. Let's call it an awakening. The 1740s in New England and elsewhere is referred to in church history as the Great Awakening, and then later there's the Second Great Awakening, and some church historians even talk about a Third Great Awakening. There are examples of it in the Old Testament under the ministry of Hezekiah, for example, or the ministry of King Josiah when King Josiah discovers the Pentateuch and especially the book of Deuteronomy once again and begins to implement the teachings of the book of Deuteronomy, and there's an awakening, the people of God seem to come alive. Sin, there's a conviction of sin. There's a discovery of sinful habits that have occupied the lives of God's people for far too long and unconfessed sin, and then all of a sudden there's an awakening, there's a burden about confessing sin to the Lord and looking to the Lord and wanting the Scriptures, wanting the Scriptures to be read. We'll see it later in church history of some 60 years from now under the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and you remember there's that extraordinary moment in the eighth chapter of Ezra where the people cry out with one accord, "Bring the scrolls! Bring the book!" They want the book to be read. They want the Bible. They don't want announcements, they want the Bible. They want the Bible to be read and the Bible to be expounded. There's a spiritual hunger and a spiritual thirst for the truth. "We want more of Scripture," and a fervor, a fire kindles in their hearts and in their souls.

Well, next week's fun Friday is John Hooker, who's buried in our churchyard, and John Hooker is a descendant of the great Thomas Hooker, one of the great leading Puritans in Connecticut and he's often, he got involved in politics in the latter part of his ministry in the formation of the formal formation of the laws and statutes of Connecticut, and he's often referred to as the father of American democracy. He wrote extensively on universal suffrage. But he was an extraordinary Puritan, a Calvinist, Reformed in his teaching, and he experienced in his ministry something like Haggai experienced, an awakening of the people of God and at one moment he memorably said it was when he was preaching that it was as though he could pick up a king and just put him in his pocket. It was just a metaphor that he's using but just the sheer power of the word of God to transform society and to transform the church and to transform and awaken the people of God. These people here, the governor of Jerusalem and the high priest of Jerusalem and all the remnants of the people, and their spirit is stirred, their spirit is woken up.

You remember how Jesus speaks in the parable of the soils or the parable of the sower, and in the first set of seeds that fall along the path and the birds come and devour them, and there's no produce, there's no effect. And in the second seed, they fall on rocky ground and there's not much soil and immediately they spring up but because there's no depth of soil, they wither. And then there's a third kind and in the third kind the seed falls among thorns and the thorns grow and begin to choke the plant. That's what you have here, I think, the third kind. These are God's people and worldliness, thorns, have choked out their zeal, their commitment, their liveliness for the things of God. God stirs up the people. What is the cause of it? The cause of it is an awakening. The cause of it is, it's a God thing. God opens up the windows of heaven. Yes, Haggai speaks. He's flesh and

blood and he speaks words and he's their preacher, but when Haggai spoke, God spoke, and when they heard Haggai's message, they were stirred up, they were awakened.

Well, like you, I'm trying to look into the future. I'm trying to wonder how long is this going to last, this strange season. Is it here for months? Is it here until next year? I speak to people all over the world that are experiencing what we're experiencing and all of us want it to go away. We would go away, we want to wake up tomorrow and it's gone. But what might happen? What is God doing? And maybe God is winnowing, separating the wheat from the chaff, separating those who have a deep longing and passion for the things of God and those for whom Christianity is just a habit, it's just a part of society, it's just part of their upbringing, it's part of their culture. But God needs to wake up his people. Well, that's my prayer, that's my longing, that in this season good may come and God would wake up, stir up the spirit of his people by a sovereign powerful work of the Holy Spirit just as he did in the time of Haggai.

What was the cause of it? Well, in one sense it was the words of the prophet. It was the words of Haggai, but in another sense, it was the word of God that impacted them. The word of God impacted them and the word of God came across to them as something powerful. All Scripture, Paul says as he writes in his final letter to Timothy, as Paul is about now to be taken away and he's handing over the mantle, as it were, to young Timothy and he reminds Timothy what is the greatest instrument that he has to grow the kingdom of God, and he tells him in no uncertain terms, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for doctrine and reproof and correction and instruction in the way of righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto every good work." And that's what's happening here in the ministry of Haggai. God's word, God's breathed out word, his infallible inerrant word, and that word is powerful, it's profitable, it's profitable for teaching, it's profitable for the mind.

It's, you know, the reason why God's people stray is because they don't think correctly. They need to think correctly. They need to have their doctrines sorted out. They need to know what it is that God wants them to know, the A, B, C's of Christian truth. They need to be taught. They need to be corrected in the navigation of their thought processes. How many times does Paul say in his epistles, "Reckon on this"? It's a mind thing. You need to think properly. It's profitable for teaching and it's profitable for reproof, probably addressing the conscience, and when the word of God is read and expounded, our sins are laid bare before us, our hearts are opened up for God to see and our sins, sins that, patterns of sin and patterns of behavior are exposed for what they are, falling short of the glory of God. And when revival comes, when the word of God does its work, that sin is exposed and the people of God confess their sins and they experience the joy of forgiveness and the joy of peace with God. And profitable for teaching and reproof and correction and training in righteousness, the navigating what the Christian life actually looks like, navigating a Christian lifestyle.

Well, that's what Haggai was addressing. Their lifestyle was turned in upon themselves. Their lifestyle was all about them and not about God, and now all of a sudden that has changed and it has come about by the power and authority of the word of God, the

preached word of God. And oh, that God would do such a thing in our own time here in First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, among our own church family, and elsewhere to be sure, but to begin here. Oh, that he would rend the heavens and come down like he did in September of 520 BC by the powerful and authoritative word of God.

Well, that was the cause of it and what was the nature of this awakening? What happened when God opened up the heavens through the ministry of Haggai the prophet? And there was a transformation. And Haggai when he writes this prophecy, they came at the end of verse 14, "they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God." They had a task to do and their task was a bricks and mortar task. It was to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed some 80 years in the past by the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem. And they had to rebuild it and it was a work of construction and wood needed to be purchased again and carpenters and stonemasons and others clearing rubble. It was a work and it wasn't something at first sight that sounded very spiritual, but it was the task that God wanted them to do. It's almost a Nike moment, "Just do it." What do I need to do? Just do it. Just build the temple so that God in his glory can come and dwell in the temple once again.

Notice how in verse 14 at the end, "they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God." You notice the contrast between how Haggai began? When he began he referred to the people of God as "these people," and now it's "their God," as though fresh and renewed fellowship and communion has come; that God now has drawn near to his people once again; that his covenant which is yes and amen Christ, that covenant that cannot be broken and now there's something experiential about this. It's not just an academic truth. It's not just something that resides in the mind, although that's vitally important. But it has now touched their affections and there's a sense here of renewed fellowship.

Now in one sense, God is omnipresent. When we think about God, we talk about his attributes and one of the attributes of God is that he is omnipresent. There isn't a zip code in the entire universe where God isn't present. He's everywhere. He's everywhere all at once. He is the infinite eternal and all-wise God and he's present everywhere. He's present even where sinners are, where rebels are, where the greatest rebels on earth and God is present there. He's present in his being and he's present in his wrath.

Now there's a sense too in which Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered together, there I am in the midst." When God's people congregate together, there's a sense where that the Lord Jesus, God comes and he dwells among his people. But here there's something more here, there's an awareness, I think. I think Haggai is trying to draw attention to the fact that the people of God are aware in an experiential sense of the presence of God. When you read about Great Awakenings, when you read about the Great Awakening in the 1740s and the ministry of George Whitefield and others, and here in South Carolina, especially in Charleston and its environs in the 1740s, and testimonies about what that was like, what did they experience, and all of these testimonies speak of a sense of God's presence.

God has, well, God turns up. He shows up as though something of the power and greatness of God is in the midst of his people. And what does that do? Well, it brings a sense of fear. You notice in verse 12, "And the people feared the LORD." Not fearing here, I think, in the sense of being afraid of God, although it is as John Murray once said in his wonderful book, "The Principles of Conduct," he says it is the height of folly not to be afraid of God when there's a reason to be afraid of God. If you're living in sin, you ought to be afraid of God. But here, I think, the sense is a little different. It's the sense of awe, awesomeness of God. You know, I've reprimanded you several times for using the word "awesome" for trivial things like Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, which is a wonderful thing. God bless ice cream. It's a wonderful thing in moderation, but you need a vocabulary to describe what God is like, what is it like to be in the presence of Almighty God, to know that he is around us and in us, and that he is communing with us, he's speaking to us through the Scriptures, and we are speaking to him in prayer, those days when prayer seems easy, those days when you feel God is here and he's in the midst of his people and there's a sense here in which the people of God bow down in the presence of the awesomeness of God and the only word that Haggai and other prophets. Think of Isaiah, for example, in that definitive vision that he saw in the sixth chapter of Isaiah that so impacted the life and ministry of Dr. R. C. Sproul. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth is full of your glory." And what was the prophet's response to that? He was a believer, he had assurance of his right standing with God. He was more than that, he was a prophet. He had the cleanest lips in all of Israel but when he was in the presence of God, he says, "Woe is me for I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips!" His sinfulness, his ongoing sinfulness is exposed in the presence of God. There's a sensitivity now to sin. There's more than just a conviction of sin but it's as though they are sensitive of their frailty, they're sensitive of their small human condition, that God could blow them away in a moment, and there's an extraordinary sense here that God is in their midst and the prophet describes it as they feared, they feared the Lord. Well, may God grant to us a sense of that fear, that godly fear that impels us to live for him, to do whatever God is asking us to do. This fear of God, "How great thou art." That's a hymn that we love, isn't it? How great thou art. How great, how great thou art.

They knew their theology. They understood the A, B, C's of who God is and what God is like but there's now a renewed sense and it's impacted not just their minds but it's impacted their spirits, it's impacted their souls, it's impacted their emotional and affectional lives, and there's a desire, a desire to work for God. Sometimes doing the work of God can be difficult. We experience days and it's like walking uphill, isn't it? And we have to chastise ourselves and work ourselves into a pitch in order just to keep going, to put one foot in front of another. But now in this season when God has opened up the windows of heaven through the ministry of Haggai the prophet, there's a desire, something now from within. It's a work of the Holy Spirit, of course, that creates this desire to work for God, to do what God has asked them to do. "Lord, what will you have me to do? What is that task that you would have me do, and let me do it with joy, and let me do it for your glory, let me do it for the benefit of the kingdom of God. Let others be first and me second and third and fourth and fifth. May Jesus increase and we decrease."

And in this season, one gets the sense here that ministry, and this was hard work, stone masonry and carpentry and all kinds of manual work, and you get the sense here that this wasn't a burden to them. It was a joy. It was a joy to serve the King and to do his bidding. It's not a frenetic attempt on the part of the people of God to curry God's favor. No, it is a response to the fact that God has shown them favor, that God has been merciful to them, that God in covenant has visited them once again and reminded them, "I am your God and you are my people and we are in a covenant relationship together."

He has shown us mercy and what is there, what is there that we cannot do for the Lord? "Wherever you are," Jim Elliot wrote, Jim Elliot the extraordinary missionary who died at that young young age, Jim Elliot said, "Wherever you are, be all there. Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God." Well, he certainly did that. Wherever you are, be all there. Not half there. Not there and whiny. But be all there and tonight for God and for the kingdom of God and the glory of God.

Well, a revival. It's a God thing and it happened in the month of September in 520 BC. May we experience something of that in our lives, in our ministries. May the Lord open up the windows of heaven and come down in this difficult season that we might serve him as the people of God served him in 520 BC and feared him.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you, thank you for your word, thank you for its encouragement. We long to see such days when ministry, as it were, is a joy and not a burden, when something of your presence is felt, palpably felt in the gathering of your people. Help us as Jim Elliot exhorts us that wherever we are, to be all in, to be all there, every part and fabric of our being. Help us to be 100% serving you and the kingdom. And we ask it all in Jesus' wonderful and mighty name. Amen.