

INTRODUCTION

Since this is the Sunday before Christmas you're probably expecting another Christmas sermon—maybe about the star, the shepherds, the manger or the wise men.

You've probably never heard a Christmas message from the little book of Haggai, the shortest book in the Old Testament. But let me remind you Jesus is found in EVERY book in the Old Testament. The Bible is a Him Book because it's all about Him.

In Genesis Jesus is the Ram at Abraham's altar. In Exodus He's the Passover lamb, in Leviticus, He's our High Priest, in Numbers He's the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, in Deuteronomy He's the City of our Refuge. In Joshua, He's that scarlet thread hanging out Rahab's window. In Judges, He is our judge. In Ruth, He's our kinsman redeemer. In Kings and Chronicles He is our Reigning King, in Ezra, He's our faithful scribe. In Nehemiah, He's the rebuilders of everything that is broken. In Esther, He's the Mordecai sitting faithful at the gate. In Job He is my Redeemer that ever lives, in Psalms He is My Shepherd and I shall not want. In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes He is our Wisdom. In the Song of Solomon, He is the beautiful bridegroom. In Isaiah He's the Suffering Servant, in Jeremiah and Lamentations it is Jesus who is the weeping prophet. In Ezekiel He is the wonderful four-faced man. In Daniel He's the fourth man in the fiery furnace. In Hosea, He is my love who is forever faithful. In Joel He baptizes us in the Holy Spirit. In Amos, He is our burden bearer. In Obadiah He's our Savior. In Jonah He's the great foreign missionary to take the Word of God into all the world. In Micah, He's the messenger with the beautiful feet. In Nahum, He's the avenger. In Habakkuk, he is the watchman ever praying for revival. In Zephaniah He's the Lord Mighty to Save. In Haggai, He is the restorer of our lost heritage. In Zechariah He's our fountain, and in Malachi he is the Son of Righteousness, risen with healing in His wings!

In every book in the Bible you will find Jesus. And if noticed, we see Jesus in Haggai as the One who restores our lost heritage. And as a nation, we desperately need to have our spiritual heritage restored and rebuilt.

Haggai 1:1-9. "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 Jehozadak, the high priest: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.' 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 have 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.' This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the 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 his own house.'"

First, let's examine the historical setting of this prophecy; then look at how it applies to America. Finally, we'll talk about how this truth applies to each of us personally.

I. THE HISTORICAL SETTING: A remnant returned to Jerusalem from exile, but had failed to rebuild God's Temple

We've been studying the 12 Minor Prophets in chronological order this fall and the first nine of them had something in common that is very different from Haggai and the last two, Zechariah and Malachi. Those first nine prophets wrote and preached BEFORE the catastrophic event of the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

All the previous prophets preached that unless Israel and Judah repented and returned to God, their nations would be destroyed. In 722 B.C. the Assyrians captured the northern kingdom and its capital in Samaria. Then in 587 B.C. the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and leveled the city. They destroyed Solomon's beautiful temple, which was considered one of the ancient wonders of the world. The French artist James Tissot has captured the heartache of this destruction in his painting entitled "The Flight of the Prisoners."

Imagine how they must have felt to watch the temple burn. It was probably a little like we felt that day on 9/11 when we saw those massive twin towers in New York City crash to the ground. We thought we'd never see that. But to the Jews, the Temple wasn't just the largest, most beautiful building in the city—it was God's house! Why didn't God defend His own house?

King Zedekiah tried to escape through a secret passage, but he was captured on the plains of Jericho. His enemies made him watch while they killed his grown sons, and then they blinded him. He was taken as a prisoner to Babylon where he remained until he died.

After the Babylonians captured Judah, they deported many of the finest young people to become servants in their culture. Four of these deported young men included Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

So for several decades, these deported Jews lived in a strange land. It was a sad time for them as they remembered the glory of Jerusalem. You can see this in some of the Psalms written when they were in exile. "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:1-4)

Meanwhile, the Medes and Persians overran the Babylonians. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell us that the Persian King Cyrus has pity on the Jews and allowed a number of them to return to Jerusalem. According to Ezra 2 we know that about 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem only to find their holy city in ruins and the temple of Solomon only a heap of stones and a haunt for wild animals.

They started rebuilding Jerusalem and the wall around the city. They laid the foundation for the Temple, and there was a great celebration with weeping and music. But over the next fifteen

years they forgot about the Temple and put all their time money and effort into rebuilding their own homes. So God sent them a prophet named Haggai, whose name means "celebration." But they weren't doing much celebrating because they had neglected the job of rebuilding the Temple. And without the temple, there could be no sacrifice and ministry. Here's what God said to them to rouse them out of their apathy. "The Lord Almighty says: 'These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built' ...Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?...My house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.'" (Haggai 1:2-4, 9)

Everybody was so obsessed with their own houses that the House of the Lord was forgotten. The foundation that had been laid was covered with weeds and rubble. God used Haggai to challenge the Jews to come together and restore their spiritual heritage.

II. THE NATIONAL MEANING: Americans must rebuild our spiritual heritage

Like Israel, America has a great spiritual heritage. Our nation was founded by people seeking a place where they could freely express their faith in Jesus Christ. All of the early documents from the Mayflower Compact to the original constitutions of the thirteen colonies included clear language giving honor and glory to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. Dr. Odell Shepard, who was an English professor at Trinity College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, wrote: "Did we bring the Bible to these shores? Did it not rather bring us? The breath of the ancient prophets was in the sails of the tiny Mayflower. From those beginnings until now, the Bible has been a teacher to our best men, a rebuke to our worst, and a noble companion to us all." (*The English Bible and American Men of Letters*, p. 14)

The Bible provided the spiritual foundation upon which our nation was built. But many of us are alarmed because we are seeing this strong moral foundation begin to crack and when a foundation cracks and sinks, the building will begin to crumble as well. The Psalmist asks an important question: "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3)

If you don't believe we were built upon a strong Biblical foundation, just visit the Capitol in Washington D.C. and see the evidence yourself. I recall visiting the Capitol building with Congressman Louie Gohmert a few years ago—he's the best guide to show the evidence of America's Christian heritage. We stood in the Capitol Rotunda and looked at the massive paintings on the walls. One shows Columbus landing on an island he named in honor of our Savior, San Salvador. A cross is being raised and a couple people in his party are bowing in prayer. Another portrays the discovery of the Mississippi River by Desoto and they are raising a cross and kneeling in prayer. A third painting is the embarkation of the Pilgrims. There's an open Bible and they are having a prayer meeting on the Mayflower. A fourth is a picture of the baptism of Pocahontas the first Native American to convert to Christ. Now get this straight, in our Capitol building there are two pictures of prayer meetings, one picture of a Bible Study, and the picture of a baptism, but now can't display a nativity scene on public property? What's wrong with this picture?

Governor Mike Huckabee appeared on the Neal Cavuto show a few days after the tragic school

shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Cavuto asked him, "Where was God?" Governor Huckabee replied in part: "For the last fifty years we've systematically attempted to have God removed from our schools and our public life, but when disaster strikes, we always ask, 'Where was God?' It's more than taking prayer and bible reading out of public schools. It's that people are suing to have nativity scenes removed from public area, that lawsuits are filed to remove a cross from a memorial to fallen soldiers. We've gotten to a place where we've abandoned bedrock moral truths, then we ask, 'Where is God?' From where I see it, we've escorted God out of our culture and marched Him off the public square and then we express our surprise that a culture without Him reflects what it has become."

Daniel Webster was one of the greatest American statesmen of the 19th century. He served in Congress for 29 years, served as Secretary of State under three presidents, and ran unsuccessfully for President three times. And while doing all that, he still had time to write Webster's dictionary! (No, actually, that was Noah Webster.) Daniel Webster was a committed Christian and he made this prediction about America: "If we abide by the principles taught in the Bible, our country will go on prospering; but if we and our posterity neglect biblical instructions and authority, no man can tell how sudden a catastrophe may overwhelm us and bury all our glory in profound obscurity."

We've become a nation of affluence and abundance, but we've lost the ability to determine the difference between right and wrong. Our spiritual foundation is crumbling, but it's not too late. I am still extremely hopeful that Christians and churches around America are going to be shaken out of our apathy and complacency and are going to be a part of the greatest Spiritual Awakening in our history.

III. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION

Like every book in the Bible, there are some valuable spiritual lessons we can apply to our lives. Here are three that we learn from Haggai's prophecy.

A. Riches can never satisfy

In some ways the Jews who returned to Jerusalem were like Americans. They were more concerned about their own comfort than the ministry of God. They built beautiful houses for themselves while the Temple only had a foundation. Their love for possessions had turned their hearts from God. Here's what God had to say to them: "The Lord Almighty says: 'Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have 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.'" (Haggai 1:5-6)

That's a powerful statement about how material things like food, drink, and money will never satisfy you. Oh, those things may satisfy you for a while, but they don't provide any lasting satisfaction. You can eat today, and you'll be hungry again tomorrow. You can drink today, but you'll be thirsty again tomorrow. You'll make a little money, but you put it in your purse, or your bank, or your investments and it just seems to leak away—like a purse with holes in it.

We are the most materialistic culture in the history of the world. We all have so much stuff that we can't even store all our stuff in our houses. We rent storage buildings so we can make room for more stuff. And then what do we do? We go out and buy more stuff.

I drove in front of Best Buy on the Monday before Thanksgiving, and I couldn't believe there were already about 20 people camping out there waiting for Black Friday, which has now encroached on Thanksgiving Day to become Black Thursday. We've all seen the horror stories of mobs charging into stores on Black Friday and even trampling some people to death. Just search "Black Friday fights" on YouTube and you'll be shocked to see how crazy Americans are about getting stuff. And if you break in line when they're trying to get their stuff, get ready to fight.

I'm a Shania Twain fan and she has a song called "Ka-Ching" that says: "We live in a greedy little world; that teaches every little boy and girl; to earn as much as they can possibly; then turn around and spend it foolishly; We've created a credit card mess; We spend the money that we don't possess; Our religion is go and blow it all; So it's shopping every Sunday at the mall; All we ever want is more; A lot more than we had before; So take me to the nearest store!"

It was true 2,500 years ago in Haggai's time and it's true today: Stuff can never satisfy your deepest longings, which leads to our next lesson:

B. Only Jesus can fulfill our deepest desires

There are many Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, and one of them is found here in Haggai. These verses are actually some of the first words in Handel's Messiah. God says, "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. (Haggai 2:7) Jesus is called The Desire of all Nations because He fulfills the deepest desires of every person in every nation.

Every Christmas, we sing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," written by John Wesley's brother, Charles. But in our modern versions we omit several of the original verses. This one is my favorite because it carries a deep spiritual truth based upon Haggai's prophecy. "Come, Desire of nations, come; Fix in us Thy humble home; (Jesus wants to live IN you) Rise, the woman's conqu'ring Seed, Bruise in us the serpent's head. (that's from the first Bible prophecy about Jesus found in Genesis 3) Now display Thy saving power, Ruined nature now restore; Now in mystic union join; Thine to ours, and ours to Thine."

Here's a pop culture trivia question. Of all the singers in America, who has sung in person to more people than anyone else in the world? Elvis? Paul McCartney? Stones? Justin Beiber? Here's a hint. If he lives a couple of more months, he'll be 104 years old. The answer is George Beverly Shea, who sang with Billy Graham. He has sung to over 220 million people in person, and he holds the record. And the one song that he has sung most was a song that he wrote the tune to when he was just 23 years old. It says: "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold; I'd rather be His than have riches untold; I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land; I'd rather be led by his nail-pierced hand. Than to be the king of a vast domain; And be held in sin's dread sway; I'd rather have Jesus than anything, this world affords today."

As the philosopher Pascal said, there is a God-shaped vacuum inside every person and our hearts are never at rest until we find our rest in Jesus. But we try to fill this void with all kinds of spiritual junk food. But only Jesus can satisfy your soul.

C. The glory of God's temple is greater now than ever

Remember, these were people whose grandparents had seen the amazing glory of Solomon's temple. And now they were tasked with the challenge of rebuilding it. They were a poor people who were still under the rule of the Persians. They thought that there would be no way they could build a temple to match the glory of Solomon's. But Haggai makes this amazing promise: "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." (Haggai 2:9)

Let's do a quick history of the Temple of God. First there was a tabernacle in the wilderness God instructed Moses to build. This was a portable tent that could be set up and taken down as the Israelites moved toward the Promised Land. And whenever the Tabernacle was set up, everyone wanted to set up their tents as close to it as possible—they wanted to be as close to the presence of God as they could. Whenever the Shekinah glory would fall on that place, they wanted to be near the place of safety and security.

Then later when Israel was a strong nation and David was King he planned to build a temple. But because there was blood on his hands God told him that his son Solomon would build it. And build it he did! It was a magnificent building. It looked rather plain on the outside, but on the inside, it was made of pure gold! With almost half a ton of gold and four tons of silver, the cost of the building in today's prices would be about \$21 billion. If that still doesn't register, think of it like this: You could build 17 Cowboys Stadiums for the cost of Solomon's temple! And when Solomon dedicated the temple, the Shekinah glory of God fell from heaven like fire and consumed the sacrifice. Solomon's temple was considered the eighth wonder of the ancient world. And then, after it was totally destroyed, this rag-tag group of refugees is going to rebuild something with greater glory?

Zerubbabel's temple, called the second temple, was only a shadow of Solomon's temple. It was smaller and much plainer. But the Jews used it for several centuries. Then about forty years before Jesus was born, a great builder by the name of Herod the Great came on the scene. He wanted to buy the people's love so he undertook a massive renovation of Zerubbabel's temple that took forty-six years. It was even larger and more ornate than Solomon's temple. But the thing that made the glory of that second temple greater was the fact that JESUS entered that Temple! When he was eight days old His parents took Him to be dedicated, and many times He visited that temple. And whenever He did, the TRUE glory of God was in that Temple but not in the Holy of Holies. The glory of God was seen in the person of Jesus. As John wrote, "The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling [tent] among us." And John went on to say "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father." (John 1:14)

That's why Jesus could walk up to that temple and say to the Pharisees, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it back." They thought He was talking about the building, but we know

He was talking about His body! He was the Temple of God who had come to live with us—
Emmanuel, God *with* us!

What happened to the body of Jesus? It was crucified and buried, and as He promised, three days later He rebuilt it and He is forever alive! But what happened to Herod's temple? It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

So how can I say that the glory of God's temple is greater now than ever before? It's because God still has a temple, but it's not one made of stones. It's us. The Bible says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19) In the Old Testament God had a temple for His people, and now God has a people for His temple. Emmanuel means "God with us" and that is awesome, but the fact that Jesus wants to live IN you is life-changing. According to Colossians 1:27, here is God's mystery that was hidden for ages and ages but now it is revealed. It is CHRIST IN YOU, the HOPE of glory. There is peace in this temple because the Prince of Peace lives in me!

CONCLUSION

A woman was Christmas shopping with her two young children in a crowded mall that had many levels. Her kids had been asking her for everything they saw on every shelf and she was tired and frustrated by the lines and the pressure. She was trying to buy just the right gift for everyone on her list and soon her arms were full of shopping bags and she was doing her best to corral her two children. She found herself on the top floor of the mall just after one of her kids had a meltdown. She punched the elevator button over and over hoping to make it arrive sooner. When the elevator arrived and the door slid open, it was jam-packed with other tired frustrated shoppers. She wasn't going to wait for another one, so she crowded her way in and pulled her two kids with her. The atmosphere in the elevator was so full of fatigue and tension that you could almost cut it with a knife. As the elevator started down the exasperated mother said, "Whoever started this Christmas thing should be hung up and shot!" There were smatters of nervous laughter that ended when a calm voice from the back corner of the elevator said, "Don't worry ma'am. That's already been done. We crucified Him."

The rest of the elevator ride down was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. And as the crowd shuffled out, they were all deep in thought about the One whose birthday we celebrate. He wasn't just a tiny baby in a manger. He is a Savior who wants to live in you.

We don't have to go to the manger. It's empty. We don't even have to go a cross. It's empty as well. And the tomb of Jesus? I've been there many times and I can testify that He ain't in dere. But the glorious truth of all that emptiness is that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith – and when that happens you can have fullness of joy!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes