

Haggai 1; 2:1-9; Motivated to Rebuild I. The Reason Work Stalled II. The Call to Work III. The Return of the King

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever started a job only to get half finished? Either because you run out of time, money or motivation, the work remains undone. Like the foolish builder of Luke 14- a bare foundation is laid while the unfinished project is a testament to your lack of motivation and preparation! Well, that is what we find in our text for today. The temple had its foundation stones set in place- but now the work had stopped for the past year. What happened- that the temple remained unfinished? Remember that as we come to Haggai we are now reading the post-exilic prophets. Haggai and Zechariah were contemporaries- writing at the same time. Haggai's focus was on the temple. We find ourselves in the year of 520 BC- as God had warned the Babylonian army had come and destroyed the city and the temple. The 70-year captivity has come and gone- just as Daniel had prayed for. But now- a few years have passed- and still the temple has not been rebuilt. As 1:1 says- we are in the 2nd year of Darius. It was Cyrus that gave the decree- go back and repopulate the land- rebuild the city and the temple as Ezra and Nehemiah read- and Darius followed Cyrus as king of Persia. Today we find that this theme: Jesus Christ calls His people to work in obedience to His command.

I. The Reason Work Stalled

In our first point we will consider why the work on the temple had stalled. In Nehemiah 2 we read that not only was the wall around Jerusalem being rebuilt, but material was being collected for the reconstruction of the temple. Ezra 3 records the laying of the temple's foundation. But why did the work stop there? Well, as you may remember from reading Nehemiah there was a lot of persecution during those days. The surrounding people did not want the wall nor the temple built- so they opposed, frustrated and even frightened the people. But that is not the reason we find in our text. No, the reason that the work had stopped is not because the people were discouraged but because the people were distracted! As Haggai 1:4 says- is it time to build paneled houses for yourself while the house of the LORD

lies in ruin. Now having paneled houses is not a bad thing in itself- but when those panels were supposed to be used in the temple - well- then we have a problem! The problem is one of priority- the people were busy building their own lives- their own mansions- making their homes really nice- while the temple remains a blank slate! To be fair, their homes were likely in ruins when the people arrived- and it may have started out as simply getting a safe and warm place to live. But the paneling points to the extravagance- it would be like building a mansion today- with all the modern comforts for yourself. In doing so- they forgot and neglected their call to rebuild the House of the LORD. Like a person living in a multi-million-dollar home while the church property where that individual worships cannot pay their electric bill. They were disregarding God- refusing to bring in their tithes and offerings -refusing to pick up the hammer and get to work rebuilding. To this failure the LORD says in 1:5- consider your ways. The LORD hosts- the great I Am of Sabaoth! I see what you are doing- and you must consider your way. Literal- give care to your heart paths! Consider what you have set your heart on- whose way are you pursuing? Your way- or God's way? What are you setting your heart upon- the things of this world or the things above? Be careful- and guard your heart! Consider your actions? What do they say about your desire and priorities? That is a pressing question for the church of all ages? Where your treasures are- there your heart will be also as Jesus says in Mt. 6. How we use our time, money and strength says something about what we think is important. All of God's people are called to give due diligence to their heart! There is always a temptation to build our own kingdoms- to pamper our own luxuries- to build our own homes while we neglect our spiritual responsibilities. Now this is not really a sermon on the need for us all to bring in the tithe and the offering- but simply to ask the question- what do we think is important? Is obedience to God of first importance to us? Do we love and seek to obey Him from the heart- with all our heart- or do we only give a passing thought to His ways? Consider you ways- don't get distracted with the worldly things while you neglect the things above? Don't be rich towards yourself while you are poor towards God as Luke 12 puts it. And as a warning, Haggai reminds us that actions have consequences. If

you sow to the world, you will reap worldly things. Sow to the wind, you will reap the whirlwind. If your life is run according to the laws of natural man, don't be surprised to find yourself bankrupt! For these Jewish exiles now returned, they were met with high inflation, low wages and empty fields. God was getting their attention. If you are not faithful with the little wealth God gives you, why would He give you more- why would He give you true riches? Obedience does lead to a blessed life- happy is the man who walk according to God's way- but rebellion leads only to sorrow and loss! Poor investments have a way of showing themselves over time. To trust in your wealth- or to use your time and money to benefit yourself at the expense of the church and others- is a poor investment. But if you are a faithful steward- using your money to be a blessing to others- you will gain a good reward. Living a life of ease at the expense of obedience will bear bitter fruit! When Nehemiah was asked to come down off the wall he said- I can't, I am doing important work! But for these people when they were asked to do the work of the Lord they said- I can't, I am too busy!

II. The Call to Work

Now that Haggai has rebuked the Israelites for their lack of work- their wrong motivations and priorities- he calls them back to faithful diligence. In 1:12 we have the second message from the LORD to Haggai and the people it is word of encouragement. They obeyed the voice of the Lord and the word of the faithful prophet. They heeded the rebuke and picked up the work -they started to rebuild once again. Why? Because as v. 12 ends- they feared the LORD! They were men and women of faith- who has fallen into sin to be sure- but they were still living by faith. These are the ones who had heeded the call to return- committing themselves to rebuilding- and when the call to repentance is heard- when their sin is exposed- they repent and respond accordingly! To be clear- as v. 14 continues- it was the LORD who stirred their hearts! The Spirit of the LORD remained active- and the people were still being sanctified- because God had begun His good work in them- He would be faithful to complete it! It is encouraging here to be reminded that although God's people can and do fall into sin- sometime we fail to do the good we are

called to do- sometimes we do listen to the siren call of sin which hails from this world. But God will call His people back- He will stir their hearts by His Spirit- and they came and worked as 1:14 says. It is not a contradiction to say that works of obedience are a necessary part of the Christian faith. To be sure, we live by faith- saved by grace alone- but we are also called to work out our salvation with fear and trembling as God gives us the will and the way as Phil. 2:12 states. It is important to remember that Haggai is not preaching works righteousness- nor the prosperity gospel. The people were already brought back from slavery in exile according to God's promises. But there is a consequence to rebellion in this life. God's people are called to live by faith- we are saved by grace- but living faith is active and saving grace changes us! The call to work is not Arminian- hard work is a Calvinistic principle! But that work does not earn anything from God- it is a response of gratitude for all that God has already done for us- it is work done in light of God's promises and grace we have received! So the Lord calls them and equips them for work- as His Spirit goes forth and the hearts of leaders and the people are stirred. And then we have these wonderful promises. I am with you- 1:13. You are not alone- my presence will remain- My Spirit goes before you. And again in 2:4- be strong- work- for I am with you! My Spirit remains in your midst- fear not! Do not be afraid of those who would undermine your work or attack you. Do not be discouraged when you temporarily fall into sin- for I am with you! This sound remarkably similar to Joshua 1:5- I will be with you- I will not leave you or forsake you- Now be strong and courageous! So there is the promise of God's presence- but also of future blessings! Although the glory of God had once left the temple as we read in Ezekiel 10- one day that glory will return as 2:7 says. God will again dwell with His people- His Spirit will be in our midst- and we will have peace. Jesus said that it was better for us that He leave after His resurrection- better because He would send His Spirit. Having received the Comforter at Pentecost- now God truly does dwell in our midst- and we have the very peace that was promised all those years ago.

III. The Return of the King

In past weeks we have considered wicked kings, rebellious priest and deceptive prophets. But our book opens in 1:1-3 by identifying Zerubbabel the governor- a godly ruler of the line of David. Joshua the holy and obedient High Priest- and Haggai the prophet who spoke the words of the Lord! After the rebellion, destruction and deportation, we finally have a glimmer of light- some hope and good news as we find these faithful leaders in Israel! Now in our last point we are going to focus on this one man- Zerubbabel who is exalted in 2:20 and following. Zerubbabel was a district ruler- called a governor- who was the recipient of God's call to work- found also in Ezra and Nehemiah. He was from the lineage of David- and by and large he was a godly man who took up the work set before him. But this man- and his position- are elevated to an exalted status or a royal ring in these verses. Back in Jeremiah 22, this same image is found. In Jer. 22:24, Jehoiakim the son of Josiah is sternly rebuked and rejected. King Jehoiakim is told by the Lord- you are like a signet ring that I am taking off. I am removing you from my right hand- I am taking the kingship away from you - I am tearing you off- and the kingdom is being torn from you- and I will give you into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. As the Lord did to King Saul- the Kingdom was being ripped from the line of David - as a royal ring being taken from the finger. But in our reading- there is a reversal and restoration. Now- in Haggai 2:23- Zerubbabel is made into a signet ring- the line of David is being restored- the monarchy resurrected- and the fallen tent of David's house is rebuilt as Amos 9 promised. The lineage of David is made into a royal ring- replaced on God's hand. Now we know little more about this man- Zerubbabel- he falls off the pages of history- until we come to Matthew 1- after the deportation to Babylon Mt. 1:12 says- Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel and Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel- and down the line until we come to Joseph the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born. The Davidic lineage had been restored- until the King who was promised of old should arrive! So it was in Zerubbabel that the monarchy was restored in part- the promise made to David would not be broken- a child from your loins- your offspring will sit on your throne forever as promised in II Sam. 7. It would be this King who would be Immanuel- God with us- as well as the Prince of Peace!

And speaking of offspring, it is important to remember why the building of the temple was so important. The OT temple was always meant to be a sign- a picture of the perfect and true temple that was to come. The temple that was here being built- the very stones that were being laid- would remain in place until the true temple arrived. Although this temple would be expanded upon by Herod- it did remain the same temple. So the temple rebuilt during the days of Haggai would be the very place that Jesus would be presented as a child- where Anna would take Him in her arms. It was this earthly temple that would soon fade away and fall- because the true temple had come. As Jesus said in John 2:19- tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in 3 days. Which temple would be rebuilt in 3 days- as John applies- the temple that Jesus was referring to was the temple of His body that would be raised after 3 days. So as important as it was for the Israelites to be faithful to the call- to respond to the command to work and rebuild. It would be the perfect Israelite and King who would rebuild the destroyed temple in 3 days! It is this Jesus who now provides access to the Father- having atoned for us by the shedding of His blood!

To conclude, understanding the context for the call to work helps us understand exactly what we are called to do- and why we will desire to do it! As our theme states, Jesus Christ calls His people to work in obedience to His command. Jesus went before us- doing the perfect work of rebuilding and restoring the true temple of His body after His resurrection. And when it comes to building of the temple of God today- or the building of the church- again this is the work of Jesus which He continues to perform! Only when we understand the work of Jesus- can we understand the reason why we would joyfully follow and heed the command to work- to build up others and use our gifts for the glory of God's name. So let us each work- using the gifts and opportunities that God has given us- to be a blessing to those whom God has placed around us. Build up- do not tear down what Jesus is doing! That why we come to church- as Heb. 10 says- we refuse to forsake the gather of the saints- so that we might encourage each other and stir one another to love and good works. Let us each work- using our gifts- for it is Christ by His Spirit who works in us!