

Haggai 1

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[0 : 0 0] Could you please open with me again in Haggai chapter 1? Haggai chapter 1. And I want to consider the whole of the chapter under three headings this evening.

In some ways, I'm taking a risk with the subject. In some ways, it is a taboo subject for guest speakers. In some ways, particularly for those engaged in mission, it is the untouchable subject. I'm drawing your mind to think on what it might be. And that is the subject of money and mission. I don't take this type of subject with folks that I haven't already built up something of a measure of trust. And therefore, to come on a second occasion to this church, a church which has supported us so wonderfully well, I seem to be taking something of a risk.

But as it was in Haggai's day, so I believe with you good folks. Haggai was speaking to a spiritual remnant, and he was speaking to spiritual people, and he issued a challenge. And I want to do that in that light, to come to you not to lambast you or to simply shout down those judgments of God upon the stingy giving of the church. No, I want to challenge you in the similar way as Haggai, by God, challenged the people of his day, the spiritual people of his day. The young woman on a first date will not ask her prospective date or her even prospective husband, how much do you earn?

The young man will not ask, how much do your parents have? They might ask on the second date. So we're on the second date here this evening, as I've come among you. The marriage of church and mission. Sometimes we must talk about other things, but this time I want us to talk about money.

The Bible talks about money more than we perhaps care to think. Satan has us thinking that it is unspiritual to consider the subject, and so we pay. Present company accepted, I don't know the situation I trust, but sometimes preachers are paid low salaries because we can keep him humble, and the church is often strapped for cash, and the missionary budget is often kept fairly low.

[3 : 0 2] I've also seen in church life churches that have fantastic facilities, and they spend so much on themselves, and yet mission and ministry gets the short change. I trust that is not the case, so please don't think I'm getting at you. But I don't want to talk about fancy buildings. I don't want to talk about poorly paid preachers. I want to talk about money for mission, and I want us to see that in our calling, in the three score and ten or four score, as the Lord gives us strength, that we have been given by God a time and resources and gifts, and it must all be laid on the altar for God.

In the time of Haggai, people were living relatively comfortable lives and relatively spiritual lives. The problem was there was a mission, and they didn't see it, or rather they chose by a theology, which we'll come to in a moment, to justify their lack of engagement and funding in the work to which they were called, and they said it's not God's time, and so they got comfortable.

Three points. I want us, first of all, to compare, or rather the Lord would have the people compare the houses. Secondly, they are called upon to consider the crops. And finally and thirdly, there is a challenge to change. So, compare the houses, consider the crops, and then a challenge to change. First of all, verses two to four, 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? The Lord is quite blunt in this. He is saying, compare the houses. He says, look at your house, look at my house. Now, with their theology that it wasn't God's time, they were justifying all kinds of inactivity, and their money was going on their comfortable living. When I was in a former congregation, I had people repeatedly say to me, oh, we can't really do anything until revival comes. We must wait until the Lord revives. And I know there is a sovereignty of

God in revival, but do we sit with a do-nothing attitude until revival comes. And sometimes we blame our lack of spiritual advancement, our lack of knocking down hell's gates. We blame our lack on God's providence and God's sovereignty, and that is diabolically awful. How many times have you heard, many times have I heard, oh, it's a day of small things? It's a day of small things. How do we know that? Maybe it's just a day of stingy things. Haggai was faced with a situation of frustrating inactivity, and it was all justified by religious comment. It's not the time.

And please don't get me wrong. Haggai is speaking to a religious remnant. They aren't pagans. They're spiritual people. They're people who have sacrificed much. They had left Babylon. They had made their sacrifices. In fact, the first thing they did when they left Babylon was to take up an offering, and I'm told by the commentators, I don't know how they work it out, but I'm told by the commentators that it would be around five million today. So, this is not a stingy.

[7 : 27] This is a sacrificial godly remnant, but to this godly remnant, Haggai issues a word not to devastate them, but to deliver them from neglect, and I want to do that similarly.

I want to deliver us from that neglect. I want to deliver us from the wrong priorities. I want to deliver us from the saying that says, oh, we're in a day of small things. Oh, we're not in revival yet. Let's just settle down. I'm looking at the clock there, and I think it's about the right time. I sometimes preach in places where the clock is at the wrong time, and I sometimes preach where the clock is way at the wrong time, and I sometimes abuse the privilege, and I say, well, there's the time it is, and so that gives me another hour to preach. No, I'm not going to do that. If you're looking at the wrong clock, or if the clock is at the wrong time, you're going to misinterpret the time. And these people were saying it's not the right time. It's not the time, and they were excusing their neglect. And I do believe, as I have a ministry that stretches across many, many churches. I think all too often there is a mindset that says, well, it's not quite the right time. Haggai says, or the Lord says through Haggai, compare the houses. Compare the houses.

Well, let's compare the houses. I'm told that in the USA, 98 percent of church income is spent on the church themselves. 1.7 percent is spent charitably, and 0.1 percent is spent on foreign missions. Now, I used that statistic in an American church not so long ago, and I got a slap across the wrist because that certain church was actually giving 20 percent away to missions. You need to be careful. But that's the big picture generally. But many churches are spending huge amounts of money on making themselves comfortable in their own surroundings, and the world is lost. Well, what would a comparison check reveal about yourself or about this church? How much do we spend on ourselves?

How much do we spend on the kingdom work? And can I press it perhaps? How much do we spend on reaching the ancient people to whom we have a debt? We have a book. We have a man. We have a message that has come to us from Jewish missionaries of the first century to whom we owe a debt of gratitude in the extreme.

And so how much are we paying on the debt to bring the gospel to those who brought it to us?

[10 : 39] John Brand, missionary writer, he comments, in wartime, we spend money differently. The luxury liner becomes a troop carrier. I stood here this time last year, not knowing what lay ahead of me. I drove to Glasgow, or my colleague drove me to Glasgow on the Monday last year. And around lunchtime or early afternoon, we got an emergency phone call. My mother had dropped dead, 76 years of age and relatively good health.

That has changed my life. And we rushed back, we had many things to do. It has changed my life. It has changed my outlook on life. My mother was a self-confessed hoarder. She was born in 1933, a child of wartime, daughter of an Aberdonian soldier. She was a child of that era, so she knows and knew about the ration books and the Red Cross parcels and times were tough. And throughout her life, she kept everything. And I mean everything. Junk mail. I went through her materials in clearing her house, and I don't know how many companies offering conservatories and windows and guttering were available to me. She had drawers full of envelopes, empty envelopes, empty envelopes. She kept everything. Sewing baskets. If things got broken, they were kept. The broken bits were kept, maybe not repaired. The materials, sewing materials. She grew up in wartime. Everything had a value. And I'm clearing her house, and I'm sorting it all out, and I'm dealing with what is precious and what is to be dumped. Without any disrespect, while I've taken those very special mementos, most, most of what she had is in the bin. We live in different times.

John Brand quote, he said, In wartime, we spend money differently. We are in a different time. So, what time are we in? What time are we in today? What time were they in in Haggai's day? They were saying, now is not the time. My friend, there is a world to win for Christ. There is a mission that we have been given. What time is it? What time is it regarding Jewish mission? And those of you who have supported Jewish mission perhaps will be more aware of this than some others. Can I make an important announcement? Now is the time for Jewish mission. Never before has there been such openness in all of New Testament history. Fact. As God in His mercy and grace is grafting in again the natural branches in a measure never before seen. What time is it?

Brand continues, if we truly showed God's heart for the lost of this world and were utterly convinced of their eternal fate, then we would stop pampering ourselves with luxuries and spending ever-increasing amounts of time and money on ourselves. Our churches would no longer be comfortable hotels and would become barracks and military outposts from which war was engaged against the enemy.

Comparison check. Compare the houses. That's the first point. Secondly, consider the crop. Verses 5 through to 7. Compare, consider the crop. 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. Just as they were commanded to compare the houses so they are now commanded to consider the crop. God had blighted their sowing. There was a lot of activity going on but little fruit.

[15 : 32] I, as I said, travel around so many churches and I see so much activity and I see so many organizations and I see so many meetings and I see meeting after meeting after meeting and theological hot potato after theological hot potato being discussed and endlessly debated and I see all the sowing and I see all the teaching and I see all the meetings and I look and see what is the crop of it all. No, it's not the time.

It's a day of small things. Well, maybe we need to start to consider the crop and maybe we need to see that God has not given the increase and maybe we need to start to ask why.

God has a way of showing us when we're wrong. He lets us work away and work away and work away and then he blows it away. Now, we don't believe in the health, wealth and prosperity gospel. Don't misunderstand me. But there is much in Scripture about God's prospering. Psalm 1, in all he does he prosper. And the word is a lot to teach us also that if we do not prosper we perhaps need to consider and give careful thought to our ways. We need to look at the lie of the land. We need to look at the fruitfulness or lack of it in all our engagement, in all our activity. When we recognize what time we're in, when we recognize the mission that we have been given, then we also need to see what is the situation around us. We've been sowing a lot, haven't we? We've been reaping very little. And is this a divine blasting? The parable of the talents. You know it well, I trust. It's not a parable about abilities, talent as we understand it. It's about money. Laying up treasures in heaven. Not just about spiritual activities, but the whole comparison is with earthly treasure that rots and rusts.

We know so much, don't we now, about the economic downturn and recession and plummeting shares and, well, Haggai 1 verse 6, put on clothes or not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it. Your purse, the money that you thought you had is leaking away. It's not what it used to be.

It's not worth what it used to be. There's inflation there in the book of Haggai. So instead, maybe we need to look about releasing the funds. Maybe we need to look about some sacrificial sowing. Maybe we need to look at the talents that we've been given, money talents, and putting them to work in the Lord's work. We need to look at the lie of the land, and we need to look at whether we have been building our paneled houses. We need to look at the lie of the land and consider whether God has blasted and blighted what we've been doing because we haven't learned the lesson.

[18 : 49] The lie of the land for Jewish mission is, dear friends, the fields are white unto harvest. I know we use it far too often, but the fields are white unto harvest. And we need workers, and we need prayers.

And putting it bluntly, we need funders. Now maybe it's just my time of life, and maybe it's just that, well, this guy has recently lost his mother, and maybe he's lost his marbles, or maybe I'm just feeling my age. But we're drawn to see the realities of life, heaven and hell, the great realities of why we are put on this earth in the first place. I heard the story of Alexander the Great, conquered the world, I think, before he was 30, is that right? And when he was buried, he said, I want you to bury me with my hands showing. Why? To show that there's nothing in them.

The world and its toys are fading away, friends. My mother walked out of her house this time last year. She walked out, met with her sister, did a little bit of shopping, and a couple of hours later, she was gone. She was translated, we may say. We entered her house in the evening. It was all there as she had left it. She expected to return.

This is the lie of the land, friends, for all of us. This is the lie of the land. We have our three score and ten, if we have it, by the Lord's grace.

And so we're to compare the houses, and we're to consider the crop. And so doing, Haggai then, in forging that theological re-evaluation, he challenges them to change.

[20 : 59] There's the challenge to change, third point. They had met with inflation, verse 6. They had met with a divine blasting of their labors, verse 10. They had met with that withholding, or divine blasting in verse 9, the withholding in verse 10. This godly remnant were hopeful. They had expected much, but they had got little. So think about it. Give careful thought to it. And then, here's the change. Verse 8, go, bring, build.

I like the Nike adverts. I think they're very cleverly done, and those that like sport, obviously, are well entertained by the expertise and just the way in which the advert is put together. But I even, even more so, I like the slogan, just do it.

Here's the deal. Compare the houses. Have you got the message? Consider the crop. Now, just do it.

And the lesson for us is that we are to be about the master's business. The lesson for us is that we have a great commission. The lesson for us is that as in Haggai's day, so in our day, we have a mission mission for which we're given breath. Mr. One Talent Guy, he buried his talent. Now is not the time.

The others utilized and doubled. The one with the loaves and fishes gave them all. They were multiplied. The widow gave in all she had more than anyone else. The woman with the alabaster jar, she broke it, poured it over Jesus, and she was rebuked. What a reckless waste. That could have been given to the poor.

[23 : 06] No, that was a beautiful thing. Some may have huge sums that they need to break open for mission. And some might say, well, you're going to give all that? That's foolish, stupid. No.

When done before God, it is a beautiful thing. Some might have a widow's mite. You might think, oh, that's foolish. What can that do? No. The Lord takes and multiplies and uses.

The Lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and he looks at the motive, you see, in all our giving. So Tozer said, in God's sight, my giving is measured not by how much I give, but by how much I could have given and how much I have left. Break the jar. Just do it. Throw in the mite. Go, bring, build, because now is the time. Now is the time to do this. God in your life gives you certain things. He gives you abilities.

He gives you gifts. He gives you years, maybe. He gives you wisdom. He gives you money. You have an amount of life's stuff. Young people, old people, you have an amount of it. And you are a steward, and one day you will give an account of how you used your wisdom, your time, your money.

Are you ready to give an account? Let me illustrate. You plan to invest 10,000 pounds in a company. Two companies are given for you to choose. This is just a fictitious story, but just by way of illustration. Two companies, you've got 10,000 pounds. One of them promises a high yield. It's a little bit more risky. The other one is a little bit more secure.

[25 : 02] Which do you go for? Are you the risk taker? Are you going for the secure one? Well, let me give you your names. Maybe that's a little bit more of a company. You can give you a little bit more of a company. You can give you a little bit more information about the two companies.

The high risk one actually has a lot of corruption in it, and the managers are known thieves. Well, the choice is obvious, isn't it?

My dear friends, godly, godly people, stop investing time and money in dodgy lending limited. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Build for eternity.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust. Martin Lloyd-Jones, he tells an interesting story of a farmer. This farmer had two lambs.

And he decided when the two lambs were born that he would dedicate one to the Lord. So, he came in and the wife asked him which one was he dedicating to the Lord. And he said, I don't really know yet. They were very different lambs. They were very different in color.

[26 : 26] And the wife had asked him, you know, is it that one or no, I haven't decided yet. The lambs grew and grew and grew and he still hadn't decided. And one day he came into the house and his face was downcast and he said, well, one of the lambs has died. And the wife said, well, which one? And he said, oh, it was the Lord's one. And the point is that the Lord, the Lord often gets shortchanged.

Compare the houses, consider the crops, and heed this call to change. When you look at this world, when you look at all the running to and fro and all its stuff, fading is the worldlings' pleasure, all its boasted pomp and show, solid joys, lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know.

And wasn't it the missionary that said, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. I want to impress upon you that we Gentile believers owe a debt to Israel. We'll impress that point maybe a little further later. The early Gentile believers saw that in 2 Corinthians 8. They regarded it was a privilege and so they took up an offering to assist Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the gospel to Jerusalem, the gospel to the Jew, is a privilege, a privilege that you can share in. And as you compare, as you consider, and as the Lord challenges you, so may we go from this place with a different attitude to our three score and ten. For my mother, her time is over. Her testimony was clear. It was job well done, good and faithful servant. Her limited stuff, it's all in the charity shop or in the rubbish bin. Her hands are empty.

And you know what I've learned since being with you this time last year? Travel light, and you'll be able to run without hindrance. John Piper said Jesus wanted his people to move towards simplification, not accumulation. Let's release the resources. Just do it. Go, bring, build.

Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Jehozadek, 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. And I pray that this word may have a similar response from you godly people. Let's pray together.

[29 : 46] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.