

PostExilicProphets 21-04-15b

Let's return now to our study in Haggai. We have a lot to cover. As promised, the psalm that is read every day starting with the day that this prophecy was delivered in the month Elul is Psalm 27.

To which, please turn. We're going to watch for two things here. What are the two big ideas in Haggai chapter one? I talked about them.

One is, what time is it? If you listen to the band Chicago from the good old days, you know, does anybody really know what time it is? Well, God knows and the people of God should know. So what time is it? The other subject is the house of God. Now what's important about the house of God? Is God just interested in the returned Israelites who live in Jerusalem building a building? Is it going to satisfy him? Is his objective that there be a pile of rocks on the foundation where the temple of Solomon used to sit? If y'all will just get this house built, everything will be great.

It's not right that you're living in a panel house and I don't have a house. It's time for this thing to be built, right? Is God's objective to get the physical structure up? Is that going to please him? Is that going to accomplish it? It's kind of like we just saw on Face Palm Sunday. Was Jesus really interested in the people acknowledging him as king and saying, Hosanna and blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord and the accolades and the recognition of him coming down across the Kidron Valley and up through the gate and going to the temple? Was that Jesus' objective? If y'all will just wave branches and throw down clothes and say, Hosanna, it's all good.

What is the next thing that happens in the gospel account after Jesus dismounts the foal of the donkey? Where does he go? To this temple. It's almost completely rebuilt by Herod, but it's this same location. It's this same house.

It's the second temple. And what does he do when he gets there? You remember the chronology. Matthew is not chronological.

Mark is chronological. What does Jesus do? He dismounts the foal of the donkey, goes to the temple and does what? He looks around and seeing that the hour is late, he leaves. He goes to the temple and nothing happens.

One of the most significant events in the Bible. Jesus goes to the temple. He didn't go to the throne.

He didn't go find Herod and kick him off his chair. He went to the temple because that is God's throne. The Ark of the Covenant is God's seat, right? But he gets there.

He looks around and leaves. No more crowds, no more shouting, no more celebration, no more

clothes flying, no more branches. He looks and he leaves because it's not the standing temple that is the issue really, is it? What does the temple represent? It is the presence of God in the midst of His people.

What did God tell David when David said, I want to build you a house to dwell in? God said, I never asked anybody to build me a house because it was my presence that counted. I was happy to dwell in a tent to be with my people while they wandered. When the people moved, I moved.

When I moved, the people moved because I was with them. What did Nathan tell David when it was in his heart to build God a house? What was God's reply through the prophet Nathan? Do what is in your heart. Why? God is with you.

It's, hear me now, if you don't get anything else out of this session, it's not the house, it's the presence. The house represents the presence. The house is worthless and meaningless without the presence.

The celebration of Jesus entering Jerusalem on quote unquote Palm Sunday is not the issue. It's the presence of the Son of God. The people are hailing Him and even as they hail Him and celebrate Him and throw their clothes down and wave these branches, they're missing.

They're looking at Him and they're missing Him. This ought to be, to me, this is the scariest thing in the Bible. It is scarier than the top coming off of Carmel.

It is scarier than anything to me that you can be looking at the Lord Jesus and miss Him. You can be the Pharisees and the Sadducees. You can be the people who are His disciples, who He's been teaching for over three years, looking at Him and not discerning the time, not understanding the purpose of God, that this is not crown time.

This is cross time. Jesus, how many times do I review it? What did Jesus say to His disciples? He sternly charged them. He warned them.

He said, let these words sink down in your ears. The Son of Man must be delivered over, crucified, die, be raised again. This is the next thing.

This is what time it is. It is time for sacrifice. It is time for atonement.

The spring feasts come before the fall feasts. We're not in the fall. We're in the spring.

Jesus told His disciples, it's Passover. Thump, thump, thump, knock, knock, knock. Anybody home? This is the spring.

Spring is the time of Passover. It is the time of unleavened bread. It is the time of first fruits, the time of harvest, the time of reconciliation, the time of judgment, and the time of dwelling with the Feast of Booths.

It begins with the trumpet. It continues through the day of atonement, and it culminates with we are dwelling with God, the way God dwelt with us. We're thinking about the days when God followed us wherever we went.

We followed God wherever the pillar of fire and the pillar of God went. It is all about the presence. So if you don't remember anything else from the book of Haggai, right above the title on the first page of the book, right? It's about the presence, not the house.

Go to seminary, you get an overview of all the books. Well, you know, Haggai and Zechariah both are calling the people of God to build the temple, rebuild the temple. It's time to rebuild the temple.

Yes, but is Palm Sunday about the triumphal entry? No. That's the big event, but that's not what it's about. It's about the same thing that we're looking at.

It is about the presence. You can be all about the external and miss the heart and miss the purpose and miss the point. And it has been a plague for the people of God ever since there has been a people of God, whether it's the patriarchs, whether it's Old Testament Israel, whether it's the New Testament church, we are so easily led away by the superficial and the easy.

I've quoted this many times and I'm going to quote it again. The best thing I ever heard Charles Stanley say, pastor of the Baptist church in Atlanta, best thing I ever heard him say is if you think you're a healthy Christian because you come to church every time the doors are open, you're letting yourself off the hook. It's too easy.

Being a faithful Christian is not about church attendance. That's too easy. It's superficial.

It's external. You can habituate that. It's all the rest of the time.

Are you living for Christ? Are you walking by faith and not by sight, not living by the externalities? It's about the presence, not the house. Look at Psalm 27. These are the things we're going to be watching for.

We're watching for the house. We're watching for the dwelling and what that actually means. And we're watching it for the presence.

So Psalm 27 read every day now in the month Elul and all the way through to Sukkot. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life.

Of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell. Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war may rise against me, in this I have confidence.

One thing I have desired of the Lord that will I seek. What? Read it with me that I may dwell. And I'm going to start again.

Verse four, Psalm 27. One thing I have desired of the Lord that will I seek. What? That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Why? To behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. Doesn't get any clearer than that. How does Psalm 23 end? Just a few psalms before this.

Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And what? I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Why? That I may behold the beauty of the Lord and inquire in his temple.

The house has a purpose. The presence has a purpose. Why? Verse five, in time of trouble, he shall hide me where? In his pavilion, in his house, in his dwelling place, in the secret place of his tabernacle, he shall hide me.

He shall set me high upon a rock. Verse six, now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around. Therefore, I will offer sacrifices of joy in his tabernacle.

I will sing. Yes, I will sing praises to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, have mercy also upon me and answer me.

You said, seek my face. My heart said to you, your face, Lord, I will seek. Stop and think now every day, starting on the day of the prophecy of Haggai, this psalm read in Israel.

Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger. You have been my help.

Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my deliverance, God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me in a smooth path because of my enemies.

Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries. False witnesses have risen against me and such as breathe out violence. I would have lost heart unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord. Wait.

Sensitivity to time. It is not always the time of deliverance. It is not always the top of Mount Carmel.

Sometimes it is the brook Jareth. It's waiting for the birds to fly over. Wait for other pieces in God's plan to move into place.

Wait, I say, on the Lord. Wait expectantly. Wait confidently.

Wait in faith. There is a time. This is not always that time.

Sometimes that is the time. But you notice the things here. Looking to the Lord, not just the

facade of the house.

And notice the interchangeable terms here. Sometimes it's a pavilion. Sometimes it's the temple.

Sometimes it's a house. Sometimes it's a tabernacle. Because it doesn't really matter what the external form is, what it looks like.

What matters is God is there. God is present. So, what do we take from this? Well, we talked about David in 2 Samuel 7, looking around at where he was dwelling and asking himself the question, where is God dwelling? And how can I live in this cedar-paneled house when God is in a tent? It is unseemly that my circumstances in the external, in appearance, look better than those of the Lord.

It shouldn't be this way. And he takes his heart to God. And God responds and says, what's the first thing God says? I am with you.

Do what is in your heart. I am with you. Now, turn with me to Jeremiah 22.

We're going to look at these same issues. You remember Jeremiah, the weeping prophet? He's prophesying in Judah right before and at the inception of this captivity that these people have just emerged from, right? Jeremiah is one of the last prophets that you can call pre-exilic. Ezekiel and Daniel are exilic prophets, right? And now we're looking at the post-exilic.

So Jeremiah is prophesying. And what does he say? Look at chapter 22 of Jeremiah. Thus says the Lord, go down to the house of the King of Judah.

Where? Where does he go? He doesn't say, say to the King of Judah. He says, go there, because every word counts. Every circumstance counts.

Go to the house of the King of Judah. That's where the first King of Judah was dwelling, David, in his house. Go to the house of the King of Judah and speak this word and say, hear the word of the Lord, O King of Judah, you who sit on the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates.

Thus says the Lord, execute judgment and righteousness and deliver the plundered out of the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong and do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless or the widow. Do not shed innocent blood in this place.

For if you indeed do this thing, then shall enter the gates of this house, riding on horses and chariots, accompanied by servants and people, Kings who sit on the throne of David. If you will abide by this exhortation in verse three, you're going to have a perpetual line of Kings and servants and people blessed. But verse five, if you will not hear these words, I swear by myself, says the Lord, this house shall become a desolation.

If you do not honor the presence of the Lord in his house, your house is going to become a

desolation. He's talking about the house of the King of Judah. For thus says the Lord, verse six to the house of the King of Judah.

Do you notice a frequent allusion here to house, house, house? Thus says the Lord to the house of the King of Judah. You are Gilead to me. This is like saying you are paradise to me.

You are a lush and verdant land to me. The head of Lebanon, yet the height of Lebanon. This is the place where the best trees grew, the best cedars.

Yet I surely will make you a wilderness, cities which are not inhabited. I will prepare destroyers against you, everyone with his weapons. They will cut down your choice cedars and cast them into the fire.

Now, remember where cedars are and are not native. What does it mean when God says, I will cut down your choice cedars? Where are the choice cedars in Israel? They're the paneling of the houses that the paneling of the King's house, the house David originally sat in looking at the paneling saying, this is not right. God is not being sufficiently honored.

I want to do something about this. These people are sitting in their panel houses, not observing the law of the Lord, which is summed up. How? Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself.

If you will execute judgment and righteousness, deliver the plundered out of the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong. Don't do violence to the stranger, fatherless and widow.

Don't shed innocent blood in this place. And if you do so, there will be Kings riding horses and chariots accompanied by their servants and people sitting on the throne of David. It's a promise.

If you keep covenant, if you do what the people of God are supposed to do, God will bless you perpetually. But if you do not, even though you are favored by me, you're like the sweetest agricultural spot in the land, Gilead. There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul.

You can look up that song sometime. It's a great tune. I will make you a desert cities uninhabited.

You will be a wasteland. It'll be post-apocalyptic nuclear Holocaust. They will cut down your choice cedars.

This is not cutting down trees. This is demolishing houses and cast them into the fire. Many nations will pass by this city and everyone will say to his neighbor, why has the Lord done so to this great city? Notice it doesn't say why they've done this to this forest of cedars.

The cedars got cut down in the city. Then they will answer verse nine, because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord, their God. That's what was expressed in verse three.

What's in your heart, people, when you're living in your house, they forsaken the covenant of the Lord, their God, and worshiped other gods and serve them. Weep not for the dead or bemoan him. Weep bitterly for him who goes away.

This is going away into captivity. This is going away to Babylon for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus says the Lord concerning Shalom, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah, his father, remember good king Josiah.

And then the sons that reigned kind of out of order. And some of them only reigned for a month or three months. Shalom is one of those.

Tell him he shall not return here anymore. He shall die in the place where they have led him captive and he shall see this land no more. To him who has, more will be given, Jesus said, but to him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Notice verse 13. What are we talking about? Presence, houses. Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice, who uses his neighbor's service without wages and gives him nothing for his work, who says, I will build myself a wide house with spacious chambers and cut out windows for it, paneling it with cedar.

The word paneling here, very same word as in Haggai chapter one, paneling it with cedar, painting it with vermillion. Shall you reign because you enclose yourself in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? It was well with him. Why? Josiah, good king Josiah, justice and righteousness.

It was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy and it was well. Was not this knowing me, says the Lord, enjoying cultivating fellowship and presence of God.

I don't have time to review Josiah. You remember all the wonderful things that happened under his reign. Yet your eyes, verse 17 and your heart, eyes and heart, the externalities and the internalities are for nothing but your own covetousness for shedding innocent blood and practicing oppression and violence.

Therefore, thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, another one of the brothers, he has four sons. They shall not lament him saying, alas, my brother or alas, my sister. They shall not lament for him, alas, master or alas, his glory.

He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem. Wish I had time to cover the rest of this, but you get the point, right? Everyone's heart is on trial. Whose house are we trying to build? Are we building our own house or are we seeking the presence of God and building a dwelling place for him? Very quickly now turn back to Haggai chapter one because this condemnation, consider your ways in verse five.

God says, did you not get a clue? You have so much and brought in little. You ate, but you don't have enough. You drink, but you're not filled with drink.

You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. He who earns wages earns wages to put it into a bag full of holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts, as he said in verse five, he says again in verse seven, consider your ways or to put it in new Testament terms, examine yourselves and see if you are in the faith.

Are you keeping covenant? They had the covenant delivered by Moses. We have the covenant delivered by the Lord. Jesus go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified.

Says the Lord, you look for much. It came to a little when you brought it home. I blew it away.

Why says the Lord of hosts because of my house that is in ruins. While every one of you runs to his own house, therefore the heavens above you withhold you and the earth withholds its fruit. I have called a drought on the land and the mountains on the grain, the new wine, the oil, whatever the ground brings forth on men and livestock and on all the work of your hands.

Nothing is going to prosper. Why now? It's a trick question. Is it because the house hasn't been built? Is it just the physical house not being built? What is God really talking about? You have not cultivated and valued the presence of the Lord in your midst.

It's not about the building. It's not as simple. Charles Stanley said as just showing up, doing something physical, something visible, something easy, and yet your heart has not changed.

One of my favorite gospel songs, Matthew and I heard it from the time we were old enough to put a record on a portable player and listen to Jake Hess saying, I don't want this modern religion. Uh, it's not about the externalities. It is the presence of God that the house represents.

Same thing in the new Testament to which we are now going to turn. But you look at verse 13 down here. When Zerubbabel and Joshua obey the voice of the Lord, their God in verse 12 and the words of Haggai, the prophet, as the Lord, their God had sent him, the people feared the presence of the end of verse 12, circle it.

The people respected, they were in awe of, they feared the presence of the Lord. This is the right answer. This is the right response.

What is the Lord's response? God has a great, huge, long prophecy here consisting of just a couple of words. Haggai, the Lord's messenger spoke the Lord's message to the people saying what? I with you. I am with you.

The very same thing he told David, I'm with you. The presence is what counts. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and the spirit of Joshua.

And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God on the 24th day of month. Three and a half weeks after the prophecy is delivered by Haggai. Not sure why it took them 24 days, three weeks, three and a half days, but on the 24th day of the month, they get

with the program.

Notice this is also a week ahead of Rosh Hashanah. You get the idea that the presence of the upcoming feast schedule. We'd better get ready.

They don't seem to do much for over three weeks, but they do get with the program. And God says, look, belated as it may be, I'm with you. Well, with you, with you turn back real quickly to Deuteronomy chapter 20.

Again, the law has been taught and read inculcated by the exilic prophets all during that time of captivity and into the time that the Persians took over Deuteronomy chapter 20 verse one. When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you do not be afraid of them. Why? For the Lord, your God is with you.

You don't need to fear regardless of the numbers, regardless of the appearances, regardless of the apparent strength and superiority have no fear. Why? The Lord is with you. You can flip over a few pages to Deuteronomy 31 verse six.

There's a host of these. I'm just going to sample a few. Moses spoke these words to Israel says I'm 120 years old.

Not going to be around much longer. Verse six, be strong and have good courage. Do not fear nor be afraid of them.

The people of the land. Why the Lord, your God, he is the one who goes with you. He will not leave you.

He will not forsake you. Isaiah 41, 10, most of us have memorized it starts out. Fear thou not for I am with thee be not dismayed for I am thy God.

I will strengthen the year. I will help thee. Yeah.

I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Fear thou not for I am with you, the presence of God. That's the purpose of the house.

Well, I could give you any number of old Testament scriptures, but turn now to the book of Matthew, where we are currently. I remember I took a class from Dr. Alan Ross on the book of Leviticus and the catalog. It was listed as a exposition of Leviticus, but it was such a deep and Dr. Ross was such a wonderful scholar and professor that everybody soon began to call it excavation of Leviticus, excavation of Leviticus.

And we're currently doing an excavation of Matthew, but you'll remember this from chapter one, from the mouth of Gabriel, the angel, Matthew chapter one, verse 23. All this was done that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is translated, what? God with us. God with us descends the slopes of the Mount of Olives through

the Kedron Valley, up the opposite slope on the eastern side of Jerusalem through the gate goes directly in a straight line to the east facing door of the temple into the holy place, looks around and leaves.

God with us comes to the place where God should be with us and God's not there. That's the problem. That's why Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

How often I would have gathered you, you would have none of me. He came into his own and his own received him not. Was there a standing temple ornate decorated through Herod's largess over decades? It's not the building.

It's the presence. The people saw the building and missed the presence. And in the shadow of that building, you have the money changers and the sellers of doves and so on.

Oh, we're doing a great service here. We're helping the people of God offer their sacrifices. And it's all superficiality.

Man looks on the outward appearance. The Lord looks on the heart. What is in your heart? David, I see what's in your heart.

I'm with you. Zerubbabel, Joshua, I see what's in your heart. God's got one message for you, says Haggai.

I'm with you. And they undertake to build the house because they understand what the house means. We in New Testament days are that house.

The story in Matthew begins with I am with you, Emmanuel, God with us. How does it conclude? How many times have Christians memorized Matthew 28, 19 and 20? Go therefore make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. And what? Lo, I am with you.

I am Emmanuel, even to the end of the age. Call his name Emmanuel. One of the last thing he says before he leaves, I am with you.

I am with you. That's what counts. He said the same thing.

You could turn back a few pages. I think that's such a wonderful symmetry. But in Matthew chapter 18, verse 20, it's kind of easy to remember.

You've got 28, 20 and you've got 18, 20. You go back 10 chapters exactly. And Jesus says where two or three are gathered together in my name.

What? I am with you. I am in the midst. Two or three gathered in my name.

I am with you. I am Emmanuel. Any of you get together.

I'm there. Well, many other passages we could look at, but let's turn to John 14 as we close.

Next time I'm going to quickly review.

You can go to first Peter chapter two. Remember the spiritual house that is built on the foundation with Christ as the cornerstone. You as living stones are being built into a house for the presence of God, a temple for the Holy Spirit.

Paul says over and over again, you are God's building. You go to Ephesians, the whole body knit together and built up by that which every joint supplies. It's not just the individual believer.

It is the fellowship of believers. It is the building up of those living stones. We stack up.

It is all of the parts of the body that are joined together by the spiritual gifts, by the presence of the Holy Spirit that comprises, that makes up, that builds the house of God in this age. That's what we should be looking for. That's what we should be endeavoring to have the heart to build.

I asked the question not long ago, are we willing to pray the prayer, Lord, let me drink a cup before I enjoy the blessings of the crown. Do we have the heart of sacrifice, the heart that says, I don't want to dwell in a paneled house until God's presence is firmly established. I don't want comfort.

I don't want security. I don't want to be at ease in Zion when the presence of God is not there. I want the heart David had.

David had that heart and God said, David is a man after my own heart. That's genuinely building the house. That's what the book of Haggai is about, is building this house.

And it's not about cedar and stones. It is about respecting, cultivating, craving the presence of God. That's the heart we should have in our lives.

That's why David was so happy when the ark came to Jerusalem, but it wasn't enough to get the ark there. That's kind of like salvation. But does God have his place? Is God at home? Is there fellowship and presence? I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

That's what we're after. That's what Haggai is about. And it's an exciting study.

Look at Jeremiah 22. If you want to see the converse, the reverse, the obverse, the opposite, the adverse, every kind of verse you could think of is in Jeremiah 22. You've got your paneled cedar house.

Where's the presence of the Lord? And here is Haggai calling to these same people. That was the prelude to the captivity. If you don't respect my presence, you're not going to be where my presence has been located.

I've built a house for my name. You don't respect it. I'm going to tear that house down and I'm going to drive you clear out of the land.

You're going to be back like you were in Egypt. It is as though you were never delivered. Now that they have come back, the call of Haggai is, do you still have the same attitude that got your fathers kicked out of the land and they never saw it again? Are you still more consumed with your house than you are with the presence of God? That's the great question of the book.

And we'll continue looking at it next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the powerful way your word cuts to the very quick, cuts to the dividing asunder of our soul and our spirit, the joints and the marrow, and lays bare the thoughts and intents of our hearts. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, as we pray over them and allow their power to be at work in us, that your Holy Spirit will show us clearly how we can ensure that your presence is firmly established in our midst.

That as the Lord Jesus told us in John 14, if we have your words and keep them, that reflects genuine love. And you will come, the Lord Jesus will come and join the Holy Spirit in our hearts as an abiding presence. And we can be both individually and collectively that house where you dwell and where your glory shines forth.

And in that way, we can shine as lights in the midst of our generation. And those who see the hope that is in us will ask us what the reason is, and we can share with them the wonderful truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, your grace toward us through him. We pray all of these things in Jesus name.

Amen.