

PostExilicProphets 21-04-22a

Good evening, welcome to the Thursday night study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. Appreciate everyone's presence, whether hither or yonder. We're going to be looking once again at our continuing study of the post-exilic prophets picking up in the book of Haggai.

We're in chapter one and we are looking at the exhortation and the command, the wake-up call that God gives to the people who have been delivered from exile back into the land to build his house. What does it mean? What is their response? And most particularly tonight we want to look at having come to an understanding, at least what I think is an understanding, of what the pertinence and application of this is for us. What are the practical steps we take to implement that understanding? I like to know what it is I am supposed to do now.

So if I'm supposed to be in some way, shape, or form ensuring that God has a house, how do I do that? What does the scripture say about our responsibility when it comes to ensuring that God's presence is at home in our midst? So we're going to see what scripture has to say about that this evening. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study, and we'll get started. Father, we are so grateful not only to have the scriptures before us and wonderful resources and helps to understand it more perfectly and to grasp it more thoroughly, but to have the presence of your Holy Spirit, to impress it on our hearts, to enable us to see the individual application and the corporate application that we as families, as a body of Christ, have when we learn these wonderful truths.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word and the connections that it makes to the rest of scripture tonight, that your Holy Spirit will teach us, help us to gain a better understanding, improve our humility, our perspective on what we can and should be doing in the light of what we see tonight in the pages of your word. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, as you recall, over the last few weeks in Haggai, we have seen God send Haggai the month before the start of a new year. It's similar in some ways to what we think of as a New Year's resolution. You're back in the land, you're back in Jerusalem, you've established your own dwellings.

What are you doing in the upcoming new year to ensure that God has his place and that God is honored? And so God sends Haggai and he says, is it time, verse four, chapter one, for you yourselves, it's very emphatic in Hebrew, there's a suffix that says you all, and there's the emphatic second person plural pronoun, you yourselves. And it's quite striking in Hebrew. Normally you almost never see this double emphasis of the pronoun, but it's used here.

You yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this house is in ruins. Consider your ways. So we could say, based on what we've seen thus far in this study, that the first point of application is consider your ways.

This is much more easily said than done, isn't it? I can take a cursory glance at my ways and say, well, I'm getting by. I think I'm as good as the average guy. I'm doing most of the things I should do.

I attend Bible class when I can. I'm kind to one another and I think I'm doing okay. That's what these people thought because what are their measure? What is their standard? What are they measuring? Well, how am I treating others? How am I being respected and thought of by others? What is the issue in the temple of God? What did we decide last week? It's not about the house.

It's about what? It's the presence. It is the active and meaningful presence of God. You're sitting in your house.

Now, why would people want a paneled house? Is it just for their own amazement and amusement? What do people do in their greatly furnished and carefully decorated paneled houses? They feast, they have people over. Hey, check out the new wing. Look at my sumptuous banquet table and how well the food has been prepared and such.

So at best, at most, if someone does a superficial considering of their ways, what would they say as they're all going about visiting in each other's houses? I'm fulfilling the second greatest command. I'm finding one another and loving them. I'm having them over for chow and they're having me over for food and banqueting and feasting and conversation and fellowship.

We're glad to be back in the land. We're celebrating. We're saying l'chaim and hoisting a cup of good cheer.

And there's nothing wrong with that unless the first and greatest commandment has not been observed. Nothing wrong with a nice house, nothing wrong with feasting, nothing wrong with entertaining, nothing wrong with hail fellow well met, and let's all get together and have fellowship amongst the people of God, except it is no good if the first and greatest commandment has not been observed. And that's the problem here.

So God says, you've got your houses that you're dwelling in. What have you done to look to my house? This people says, well, it's not time. How many of us have had this common experience? Well, I know my garage is cluttered, but today's not the day to clean it out.

I know that the lawn needs mowing, but not today. I know this chore, this task, this need should be met, but not right now. Now, it's not intrinsically wrong to do that.

If there's a choice between taking care of the baby or answering somebody's phone call, which do you typically do? Baby comes first. People have lost their children drowning in swimming pools because they got wrapped up in a phone call and forgot to watch the toddler. They fall in, tragedy ensues.

What do we call this where we decide what is most important in the moment, what it is time

for? The people say it's not time to build God's house. God says, is it time for you yourselves to be dwelling in fancy houses? And my house lies in ruins. What do we call this decision about what to do with our time? This is priorities, right? It's not goals.

Goals are our long-term objectives. It's not values. This is our mores, our morals, our ethics.

This is priorities. If Bible class is a priority on Thursday night and Sunday morning, you're here, which you are. Praise God and God bless you.

You have a priority about spiritual life that includes, but is not limited to Bible class. Bible class is not your spiritual life. It is a component and a support for your spiritual life and for mine, by the way, right? Attending Bible class, that's not your spiritual life any more than eating bacon and eggs is health for you.

It contributes to health. It supports health, but it's not healthy in and of itself. It contributes to your energy and what you do with your physical life.

Same thing here. This is spiritual food and it's mealtime and we are partaking and we hope that it's nutritious, beneficial, that God blesses it to our hearts, even as he addresses and blesses our physical food to our bodies. But priorities, is it time? The issue here is what are my priorities that transcends the dividing line between old Testament and new, between old covenant and new, between the physical temple that God is talking about and the spiritual temple that we are interested in.

The first overarching universal principle here is God questions the people about their faulty priorities. My needs, my comfort, my gratification is my first priority. Otherwise, I would have been asking questions about where is the place of God's presence.

Now, to understand the priority and you can write priority out in the margin and circle time in verse two and time in verse four. What time is it? What is it time for right now? And sometimes we make faulty decisions about that, don't we? Something really should be done. Something has a higher priority, but it doesn't get the attention it deserves.

It doesn't get the investment of time and effort that it deserves. It gets short shrift, it gets set aside. And that is a fault.

That is a shortcoming and a failure on our part. So what is the solution? How can we, and this is the practical point, point of application number one, how do we ensure our priorities are good and proper? How can we make sure we're observing good priorities? What does God tell the people here? Circle it in verse five. Consider your ways.

We have to take time to stop and think. In the Marine Corps, this is called an after action report. You go into action either for real or more often in peacetime for training purposes.

You have a training exercise. We would have these anywhere from one to five days on Okinawa

and down in the Philippines and in Thailand and had training exercises in Lebanon and various places where I've personally been and been in charge of or some part of the training. I was the training officer for my battalion.

So ahead of time, you figure out what is the goal of this training? What should it accomplish? You go out and do the training and then there is an assessment. There is a meeting that people prepare for and say, how did that go? Did we accomplish our objectives? And not just, oh, yeah, I thought that went great. Measurable standards.

Do we have more people who can properly perform the following task to this given standard? We'll find out when we test them. Did the training accomplish its goal? In school, you have reading, you have lecture, you have exercises, then you have a test. Have you achieved the learning objective? And it is measured, hopefully objectively measured according to a standard.

Of course, this has all gone out the window. Education doesn't work this way anymore. So back to my question.

How do we make sure our priorities are good? This is the question God raises. These people say it's time for one thing. I say it's time for something else.

How do you fix that? Consider your ways. So we need to stop and schedule an after action report, let's say at the end of our day. Instead of collapsing and vegging in front of the TV and then blowing out the lights and falling into a horizontal position, a little time.

How did this day go? If time is the capital that God has given me, if it's like the parable of the talents and God gave me 12, 14, 16 hours, however much he gives you, however many hours you're conscious, that was my capital today. How did I invest it? Did I take five talents and make five more? Can I look back and see that I had some spiritual challenges and I met them with faith, with prayer, with obedience, with looking out not only for my own interests, but also for the interests of others? Was I master of my tongue? Was I master of my emotions? Was I master of my time, my time, my tongue, my emotions? Or did I sort of zone out and go through the day doing what any unbeliever can do? Consider your ways. We cannot tell if we are properly observing priorities unless we consider our ways.

The man who loves the law of the Lord reflects on it day, application, and night, review, consideration. In the daytime, we try to apply it. What should I do now? How can I best serve? How can I observe love for God, love for one another? Does this that I'm about to do, this investment of time I'm about to make, does it count on eternity or is it just self-indulgence? What am I doing with this capital of time? We do our best to apply, to obey in the moment, meditate on it day, then reflect and consider our ways, which is generally in the evening.

By the next morning, I've forgotten half of what I did yesterday, right? Day and night. We love the law of the Lord. We meditate on it day and night.

It's not accidental. Day is application. Night is consideration.

So that's point one. If we want this book to make a difference, we've got to observe what it encourages, exhorts, and motivates us to do. And number one is make sure our priorities are straight.

And to do that, we consider our ways. Clear? So God says, consider your ways in verse five. He says, you people, verse six, are sowing a lot, but you're reaping a little.

And you can think we can sow a lot into circumstance and into human endeavors and human objectives and human goals. But what are we reaping? If we're reaping little in the realm of eternity and in the realm of spiritual things, in the realm of effect and ministry and reflection of the Holy Spirit and the glory of God, you can sow a lot, but you're only reaping a little. Why? Bad soil, bad plan, bad scattering of the seed, not putting it where it counts.

How can we fix that? Consider your ways. Verse seven, circle it. Consider your ways.

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 should know that there's a problem because you looked for much, verse nine, and indeed it came to little. When you brought it home, I blew it away.

Why? Circle the word. Why? I'm spending time and I'm spending days. I'm spending effort.

I'm exhausted. I'm flagging at the end of the day. My anchor is dragging, but in actuality, it amounts to very little.

Why? Consider your ways. Why? Because my house is in ruins, every one of you runs to his own house. If you're living life primarily to please self, that's a problem.

That's a priority problem. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew and the earth withholds its fruit. So many believers, so many of us wonder, and we get a little bit fatalistic and say, well, I don't really know why things are the way they are.

God's got a reason somewhere. We need to go a little bit further. I would suggest, I would opine that there are few times where God doesn't want us to know why things are happening.

If we are suffering for blessing, we should be able to tell that that is the case. If we are suffering for correction and instruction in righteousness, if we are suffering to wake us up and get us to consider our ways, to be fatalistic and say, well, I'll find out why this is going on when I get to heaven. We're missing the correctional value that God places on withholding the dew and blowing away the results of our efforts.

And to ignore such guidance is dangerous and it wastes time. If we're facing challenges, there's nothing in the Bible that says God doesn't want you to know why. Ours is not the reason why.

Ours is but to plot along and we'll find out in glory. We don't have an unintelligent, a blind, or an absent understanding in our faith. We should be able to discern what God is doing in our lives.

And if we don't know why things are tough, we need to consider our ways. Examine yourselves. See if you are in the faith.

It's a command. It's not an option. And sometimes God gives us attention-getting exceptions to the promise of provision, attention-getting exceptions to the promise of presence and power.

The Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot deliver us. His ear isn't heavy that he can't hear us. Sometimes it is our problems, our iniquities, our shortcomings, our insensitivities, our quickness to run to our own house that separates between us and God.

And that sinful misprioritization hides his face from us and he does not hear. It is very important that we pay attention and know why God is doing what he is doing. When Israel went into captivity, was there any doubt why they were sent to Babylon? Was there any lack of clarity about why they suddenly lost the land, lost the city, lost the temple, lost the inheritance that God had given them back in the days of Joshua? Was there any doubt? And was there any doubt about how long it would last? God communicates clearly to his people exactly why judgment has come, why challenge has come.

When he puts us to the test, he lets us know this is a test. So if we don't know why things are so tough, we need to consider our ways. And many times, yes, it's hard.

Yes, it's a challenge. Yes, there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel. But I know whom I have believed.

I'm persuaded he's going to keep what I've committed to him. And I understand that this is not judgment. I know what I know.

And I know that I'm on good terms with the Lord when I come before him in prayer and I lay my heart and my sins bare before him. I know he forgives me and cleanses me. I ask and I seek and I knock.

I see his hand. I feel his power. I know that he is with me.

I sense his presence, not just emotionally or mystically. I can see his hand at work in my life. And whatever challenges I'm facing right now are not to wake me up because I am asking and seeking and knocking.

I have asked him for two by four in the head guidance if that's what I need. And I am anxious to please him. I want to run to his house and not to my own.

We know this about ourselves. We can look at our heart of hearts and appeal for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit where we need it. David prayed this prayer.

Look at Psalm 51. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me, make me whiter than snow.

Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me. Show me my secret false, my hidden false. Lord, show me.

If I'm screwing up, make it apparent to me. Shout it in both of my ears until I get the message. I don't want to move forward if I'm not living as I should.

If you've got that heart, then any challenges you're facing, you will know that they are not for discipline. You will know that they are not wake up call judgment. These people didn't have that heart.

They were happy to run to their paneled house and be comfortable. Comfort was what they were seeking, not God's approval, not God's presence. That's why they didn't care that his house sat in ruins.

So consider your ways. So in verse 12, once 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 what you can circle that people feared the presence of the Lord. They respected it.

They were in awe of it and realized that the one place where the presence of God makes contact on earth is his house. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and the spirit of Joshua 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, 24th day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

Now, if we are people who value the presence of God, and we want to do this, we want to ensure that his house is built. There are two critically important things. First of all, why build the house of the Lord? Why? It's the place of God's presence.

Oh, okay. Well, why? What should happen when the place of God's presence is built? In other words, to put a finer point on it, what is the temple for? If you and I ought to be and build a place for God's presence in our individual and corporate midst, what is the function of that temple? Not surprisingly, it's going to be the same, whether it is the physical temple of the Old Testament or the spiritual temple of our dispensation. So if we're going to build it, one of the ways we'll know it's built and it's functional and that God is pleased is the purposes for that temple are going to be accomplished, right? So, be helpful to know what those purposes are.

If I can see these purposes being accomplished in the midst of me and in the midst of our fellowship, I know that we've successfully responded to the call to build and to have God's temple central in our lives, right? So that's what we're going to look at when we come back from the break. We know that the first issue is consider our ways. It's kind of like 1 John 1, 9, we need to confess our sins, cleanse ourselves, allow God to cleanse us by confessing our sins.

That really comes first. We can't produce works in keeping with sanctification and in keeping with salvation if we've got unconfessed sin in our lives. If we're defiled, we can't even enter the camp, much less the temple precincts.

So that comes first. That's why consider your ways is first. Make sure time is being used as it should and that priorities are being established and followed as they should be.

That's first. So we're going to assume that we know that and we're going to accomplish that. What's the next step? All right.

I know my priority and I know what time it is. It's time to build the house of God. I'll know that it's built and I'll know that it's ready and functioning when the purposes for it are being accomplished.

So that's what we're going to look at next. When we come back from the break, how can we measure? Remember learning objectives? It's not enough to say, well, we reviewed the principles of physics pertaining to meteorological happenings and I'm pretty sure everybody got the drift, got to measure. We've got to have an objective standard of evaluation.

So if we've accomplished this in our lives, what's the measure? The Word of God tells us what the measure is, how we will know if the presence of God is meaningful and active when those functions that the temple was designed to support are happening. That's what we'll see when we come back from the break.