

PostExilicProphets 21-05-06b

Thank you, Dan and Lori and Chipper for that, uh, inspiring choice. Uh, if you haven't looked at the words of that song, no, not one, um, it's a wonderful comfort, God pays attention to detail and I'm so glad, uh, I was working on a list this morning for my morning employment and realized that I had, had slipped up a few times across the years, had some duplications, had some repetitions and, uh, my total count of things is, is affected by this because things that were only supposed to be done once were done twice. And a couple of times they were even done three times.

And when you're trying to explain to the higher ups, uh, why the numbers don't match exactly, and you think, oh, I really wish I had been able to, to be perfect in my attention to detail and not overlook something or inadvertently, uh, duplicate, replicate, or otherwise foul up, but God is perfect. And I'm so grateful that he knows every single one of us, uh, at the rapture, not a single church age believer will be overlooked. Every single one of us is in the books.

It's perfect record keeping. I'm just so glad God is perfect. Uh, and the more I look at my own imperfections, the, the more appreciative I am that he isn't, let's take a moment now to resume our study and we're looking at why the ultimately, and you've, uh, it's like a bad movie.

Sometimes you can see the, uh, the big idea that the movie is working its way laboriously up to, and you know where I'm going with all of this. Why does the glory cloud not show up on the day of dedication? Why isn't God there? Is he less supernatural? Is he less present? Is he, uh, well, it's getting closer to modern times and there's more historians around, so he's not going to do the glory cloud thing like he did in the mystical days of old. Uh, why doesn't this temple on the day of its dedication, the day of its completion, why doesn't God fill it with his presence and with his glory in tracing the causes, conditions, successions, and relations for that? You come back to Ezra and realize that even though it is being completed, it isn't being done in a God glorifying way that follows the pattern of the past that follows the pattern of scripture.

These people are going to parse the scriptures and tease out things that they can find to drub each over, over the head with in terms of who did you marry and what kind of kids have you got, but the larger things of the law honoring God in the way that his house is built doesn't enter into it. And this is part of the problem as we return. And I wish we had time to do more with, uh, Ezra, but if you look in chapter six of Ezra in chapter six, verse 15, uh, in verse 14, it says the elders of the Jews built and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai, the prophet and Zachariah, the son of Iddo.

And they built and finished it according to the commandment of the God of Israel. And according to the command of Cyrus Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar or Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

What year did we start the book of Haggai in? Was the second year, right? So how long did it take them to do this? Took them four years, four years, the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, the rest of the descendants of the captivity celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, a hundred bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel, they assigned priests to their divisions, Levites to their divisions over the service of God in Jerusalem. As it is written in the book of Moses, descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the 14th day of the first month.

Priests and Levites had purified themselves. They were ritually clean, slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for the brethren of the priests and for themselves, the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel. They kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy.

You notice that we're in the spring here. They're keeping the spring feast, Passover, Unleavened Bread. They turned the heart of the King of Assyria toward them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

After these things in chapter seven, and you should have a note if you don't have it there, after these things, put a little uptick or a little arrow. After these things, 57 years later, in the reign of Artaxerxes, Ezra, the son of Sarai, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, came up from Babylon. 57 years after these things, there's a long time where nothing happens.

My dad's got a plaque down there on his fireplace, on this spot in 1749, nothing happened. And for 57 years, nothing happens. And when it does happen, it's awful.

But back to Haggai, we see in chapter two, that God continues to focus on their hearts, and he sends his prophet Haggai to talk about this. So the people obeyed in verses 12 and following in building the temple. We just saw that over in Ezra.

And God says, be strong in verse four. This is Haggai chapter two, verse four. Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? That was verse three.

And you remember Ezra talked about when they first laid the foundations, that there were people weeping at the contrast and how dismal it looked and how dismal it was compared to its former glory. And it just made them weep. Be strong, Zerubbabel, be strong, Joshua, son of Jehoshadak, the high priest, be strong, all you people of the land and work for I am with you.

He doesn't say for you have a decree from Darius that quotes the decree of Cyrus. Be strong because you've got political authorization. Be strong because you've got tax money behind you now.

Why should they be strong? What should their motivation be? I am with you. It is the presence that counts. According to the word I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt.

So my spirit remains among you. My spirit is here. Do not fear.

Why did they stop 17 years earlier? Fear. How many times in scripture do you have the example of those who seek to fear God and honor the king? But if the king gives a bad command and it interferes with worship of God and obedience to God, fearing God comes ahead of honor the king. So the midwives in Egypt did not destroy the first born baby boys in Israel.

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah did not bow down at the sounding of the musical instruments and the trumpets and the sack butts. And I just love saying sack butts. You know what? I don't know what it is, but it sounds great.

And went to the fiery furnace. Daniel did not stop praying to his God three times a day when a royal decree prohibited that the apostles did not stop preaching the gospel when they were ordered to by government authorities and so on. But yet these people demurred and desisted and ceased when the government said, stop building the house of the Lord.

They didn't resist. They didn't dig up Cyrus's decree. They didn't send an emissary.

Somebody didn't bravely go to the king and say, we must build the house of our God. There's no point in coming back to our land. What's the point of being in the land if God is not with us? You remember Moses making this case when God said after the golden calf, I'm going to destroy this people and make a new one out of you.

And Moses said, no, you can't do that. And God said, fine. Well, I'll send you all into the land, but I'm not going to go with you.

And Moses said, if you don't go, there's no point in us going. You've got to go with us. We need your presence.

What happened to that heart of appreciation for the presence of God? And where is it today? Are we allowing ourselves to be intimidated by social pressure? Are we intimidated out of attending church, out of worshiping, out of doing things that relate directly to our spiritual life? Now, I'm not talking, I'm not fomenting civil disobedience. I'm not saying, you know, run out in traffic and stop cars. What I am saying is there should be nothing to impede the free exercise of our religion in this country in the same way that the decree of Cyrus granted the power for Israel to return to their land and rebuild, particularly rebuild the temple.

That's like our constitution and no subsequent king like Artaxerxes or someone can come along and say, well, you are not allowed to do what the big decree allows you to do. Those decrees were irreversible. Remember, Xerxes in the days of Esther, a royal decree cannot be reversed.

Well, our constitution in this country cannot be reversed. And don't let people big deal the population into thinking that they can, they can't, they shouldn't and they won't, especially and particularly in the area of the free exercise of our worship of God, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of worship. All three of those are necessary for us to worship.

If someone interferes with our communications and we're trying to have Bible class, that's illegal, it's unconstitutional. We have the freedom to listen to the preaching and the teaching of the word of God and to engage in it. We have freedom of assembly, we have freedom of speech, we have freedom of worship and people can't say, well, the parts of your worship are against what I think and believe and think is socially or politically correct or moral or whatever.

That's your problem. We have freedom in this country. It's like the decree of Cyrus.

You get that decree, you wave it in front of somebody and tell them, go away. We're having church. We're going to learn and live by our scriptures, period.

Unashamedly, unapologetically, unabashedly. We have not resisted to the point of blood. You remember that? You look at the apostles, you look at the people in the early church, this weird little social pressure stuff that they're throwing around now is a harbinger and a precursor.

It is the inch you give that is going to make people start taking miles. Stop them now. Resist them now.

Don't listen to them now. Stand up for your decree of Cyrus constitutional rights now or watch them evaporate. There's a guy on the ham radio club.

Every time I hear him check in, he quotes that little saying, those who are willing to exchange liberty for security deserve neither and will have neither. So the heart of the people here is wrong. It's wrong.

It's wrong to be cowed into submission and stop work on the house of God. Do you seriously think that God would have allowed the temple workmen and Joshua and Zerubbabel to be annihilated and destroyed when their sole goal is to get God's house built according to God's decree and command? God's going to come years later and say, what's the matter with you? Why is this thing not finished? He doesn't say, well, I can see that you had good reason because my duly constituted earthly authorities told you to stop. And God doesn't give them a pass because the government said quit.

God says, what's the matter with you? Consider your ways. This thing should be done. That's why he sends Haggai and Zechariah.

Now, I've been trying to get to this point and we're going to get there. God says, according to the word I covenanted with you, my spirit remains among you. Verse six of Haggai chapter two, for thus says the Lord of hosts, once more, it is a little while I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land.

This is the God who shakes the universe at its foundations. He built it and he can shake it. You want to compare that to some individual who puts his robes on one arm at a time off in Persia somewhere.

I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land, I will shake all nations and they shall come to the desire of all nations. And I will fill this temple with glory, says the Lord of hosts. I will fill this temple with glory, I will shake the heavens and the earth, these nations that you're submitting to and being intimidated by, they are going to come in obeisance with tribute.

Remember in the Millennial Kingdom when tribute from the nations is going to flow in and it isn't going to be this temple, this temple is gone. But in the same way that the Lord Jesus. Announced and pronounced the blessings of the coming kingdom in his day, and those people missed it and it was not fulfilled, it will yet be fulfilled, but it wasn't fulfilled at that time because the heart of the people wasn't in it.

There was a small remnant, but there wasn't enough. There were not 10 people in Sodom to preserve it in the same way. God says, I will fill this temple.

Now, this temple is not yet built. The silver is mine, the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. What's the problem with the way this temple is going to be built? The silver and gold are not God's, they're Darius's, it's tax money from the Persian government.

The silver and the gold are mine, says the Lord. Pay attention to detail, people of God. The glory of the latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts.

And in this place, I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts. They should have stopped and thought about those words, but they didn't. Now, right here, you need to make a mark.

Between verse 9 and verse 10, I've got a convenient gap here where it says in my New King James, the people are defiled. But there is another message that was delivered at this point. Turn the page to Zechariah chapter 1, remember now, Haggai chapter 2 was 7th month on the 21st of the month.

That's when that message was given. Verse 10 is the 24th day of the 9th month. Two months go by before, between verse 9 and verse 10 in Haggai.

God gives a message in between those two messages and it is Zechariah 1, 1 through 6. This is the interlock. This is the sandwich between Haggai and Zechariah and the first six verses of Zechariah come next. Between verse 9 and verse 10 of Haggai chapter 2, you need Zechariah 1, 1 through 6. This is the order in which these people heard the words of the Lord.

So when God says, the glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former. And in this place, I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts. The very next message in the 8th month of the second year.

Just a few weeks after verse 9, here comes Zechariah. We get the impression that he's a younger man. He's more vigorous.

Haggai is thought to have been old enough, maybe to have seen that first temple. Zechariah

comes in the 8th month of the second year of Darius. The word of the Lord came to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet.

Notice, we suspect he's younger because Iddo is listed in those who returned with Zerubbabel in Nehemiah chapter 12. So Zechariah's grandpa is a contemporary of Zerubbabel. So we think he was he was young.

And of course, he ends up recording a much longer set of prophecies. Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying the Lord has been very angry with your fathers. We're back to the point in the first session.

What should the people have learned? What should be foremost in their minds, what mistake have we just paid for? With captivity and exile, now that we've returned, what's the big mistake we should absolutely not make now? The Lord has been very angry with your fathers, therefore say to them, thus says the Lord of hosts, return to me. Now, why does Zechariah come to the people and say this captivity was the anger of the Lord against your fathers? So the Lord says to you, return to me now, all the people that are sitting here in the room with me, I can't really say return to me because they're here. What does the situation have to be if you say to somebody, please return? This this puts me in mind of throwing the pearls before swine, if they're going to turn and tear you to pieces, that means they're leaving.

Right. And you're throwing pearls beyond them, hoping they'll see the pearls and turn around and be kindly disposed. Stiff necked people are disobedient and stiff necked people.

When God calls them stiff necked, it literally means they are showing the neck. What is the situation if someone is a showing the neck person? They're leaving. They're like the swine.

They're leaving and going away. They're showing you the back of their neck, disobedient and going away. People, this is the kind of person to whom God will say, return to me, return because you're not here.

You're not where you should be. You're not in my presence. You're not doing my work.

You're not living the life to which you've been called. You are not maintaining your end of the covenant. Return to me because you're not here.

When you see the words return, it means the people being addressed are gone. Not where they're supposed to be, not doing what they're supposed to do. These are the people.

Think about the timing now. This is after Zerubbabel and Joshua have finished the temple after they've done the stuff in Ezra, celebrated the Passover, set up the new moons and the daily sacrifices and the feasts year by year. And what does God say? They have finished the temple and they've started this worship.

They started this. This. Fulfillment of those things that they were doing just at the altar, now

they've got the house, now they've got the whole system set back up.

It's all finished. Why doesn't God say, thank you for heeding my voice? I appreciate my finished temple. I appreciate that now not only are you observing the feasts and doing the sacrifices, but the whole complex is back together.

Let me fill it with my glory. Let's enter into a wonderful time of blessing and restoration and rebuilding and then moving into the peaceable kingdom. I told you in this place I will give peace.

Let's do that. What is the message of God through Zechariah to these people that just finished the temple, actually just received the message from Haggai to finish the temple? What have they got to do to really finish the temple, to really create a place for the presence of God? What's the message? Return to me and I will return to you. He doesn't say finish the temple and I will return to you.

He doesn't say do a better job on the feasts and offerings and sacrifices. What does he say? Return to me, Haggai said, consider your ways. Zechariah says, return to me.

I come first. You are in covenant relationship with the God of the universe and you have left. You went when your fathers went.

You stayed where your fathers went. Spiritually, your bodies may have returned, but you're still far away. Physically, you have returned.

Physically, you are building, but the building physically stopped. And that's representative and symbolic of your spiritual problem. You have not spiritually rebuilt.

You have not spiritually returned. Why else would God say at this particular time, return to me so that I can return to you? They're in the land, they're building the temple after some prodding, letting it lay waste for nearly two decades, but they're building it. God doesn't say, OK, as soon as you finish, you build it, I will come.

He says, return to me because this people draws near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And teaching his doctrines, the traditions of men. And the commands of God for worship and sacrifice and offering and rotation of Levites and so on have become traditions.

There's lots of accretions, there's lots of additions. There's lots of fleshing out and they're not doing it because they see it as obedience to the command of God. They're seeing it because, well, this is what happens at the temple.

Is it right to have priests and Levites ministering at the temple? Is it right to have the temple built? Is it right to observe the feasts and offer the sacrifices? Is it right? Absolutely, those physical things are right, but you can do them all wrong when. The heart is far away, this is why God can say after the restoration, now they have continued with that altar sitting there in the

forlorn precincts for 20 years, offering sacrifices, rotating Levites without a temple. God says, get the thing finished.

They're going to take four years and eventually finish it. But what they are not going to do, they are not going to do this return to me. How do I know that? How do I know they didn't respond to Zacharias prophetic exhortation, no glory cloud.

No presence, it's all about the presence, it's not the house, it's not the priest, it's not the altar, it's not the physical accoutrements, we are so easily fooled by form. Well, but I go to church, I have a Bible, I have a cross, I have a fish on my bumper, I have verses on the wall, I say, Lord willing, and I pray before my meals. It's not enough by itself, those things do not count by themselves.

Hear me carefully. These are good things. I love verses on the wall, I love asking God's blessing on the food, I love coming to church, I love all of the things I just mentioned.

And they are wonderful expressions of genuine faith and genuine interest, genuine love for God and genuine love for others. But the love can leak away and be gone. Think about the Ephesian church that lost its first love.

You can have all of the forms and none of the substance. And that's what's happening in Haggai and Zechariah. God chastens them about the forms and they rebuild the forms.

They return physically to the land, but their hearts never come back. That's why they're not going to be ready when Jesus comes, even though they are going to have 500 years to get ready. They're going to have half a millennium to get ready for Jesus and they won't be ready.

This temple is going to be adorned and expanded and decorated and refurbished and refurbished and more and more priests and more and more Levites and more and more songs and more and more shovels and pans and dishes and accouterments, much physical glorification. It is going to be as ornate as the most ornate Catholic cathedral you ever saw. And God's never going to show up there until the Lord Jesus walks into its precincts, looks around and leaves.

Return to me and I will return to you. Circle it. This is the only thing that counts.

If their hearts had returned to the Lord, they wouldn't actually need the building and the priests and all the rest of it. Those are outward symbols of what is supposed to be an invisible truth. But the symbols without the truth are no more helpful than a crucifix hanging on the wall.

Doesn't mean anything has no power. All the movies notwithstanding, no demon is afraid of a crucifix. There's no power in it.

There's no truth in it. Do not be like your father's, Zachariah says, and look, they've listened to Haggai and that's great. But God sends a fresh voice, a young man to startle them and say, pay

attention to this message.

This isn't part two of Haggai here or part three of Haggai. This is a new prophet, a fresh voice coming and saying, listen, don't miss the point here. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

Do not be like your fathers to whom the former prophets preached, saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, turn now from what your evil ways. Consider your ways, turn from your evil ways and your evil deeds. But they did not hear nor heed me, says the Lord.

Your fathers, where are they? The prophets, do they live forever? Yet surely my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants, the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? Physical things come and go. Physical people come and go. Physical structures come and go.

What abides and remains? The word of our God abides forever. The grass withers. The flower fades.

God's word never changes. And it's not just the entity of God's word. It is the meaning.

It is the truth. It is the message. It is the exhortation.

It is the call of God's word that never fades away. Return to me and I will return to you. God has said this down through the ages in many ways and shapes and forms to his people century by century.

Fathers and the prophets don't live forever. But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants, the prophets. Overtook your fathers, they returned and said, just as the Lord of Hosts determined to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds.

It's not according to your ways and your deeds of external forms and superficial structures. It's your ways and your deeds in keeping with the exhortation of the prophets. They didn't say build to no purpose.

So he has dealt with us. Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart.

What is in our hearts? So what is the application of this now? What is what is the application in our day? We can bewail the disintegration of morality and Christian influence and Judeo-Christian ethics and all kinds of other things. We can bewail the loss of our scripturally founded God-given rights as detailed in the Constitution. And we can realize that we need to stand up for some of these things while we can.

But don't fall in the desert like the fathers. Don't go into captivity like the fathers who in the days of Hezekiah or the days of Josiah had a great revival, superficially celebrating, superficially sacrificing, superficially returning to God. But hearts still far away.

God doesn't care ultimately nearly as much about the fate of the United States or its individual

communities or its laws or its economy as he does your heart and my heart. And whether or not we wake up in the morning with the desire to please him, with the desire to draw near to him so that he can draw near to us, that we seek him and his presence, that we look ahead to his kingdom, which will never end. There's not going to be any social justice movements in God's kingdom.

There's not going to be any rampant political conflicts and weird trends and socio-political forces at work in God's kingdom. Only people whose hearts are qualified, only those of us who let the word sink in deeply and bear its fruit 30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold. What does that mean in practical terms? What is the measure? If I say, Sam, I am on board, I am with you a hundred percent.

I see what Haggai is saying. I see the difference between the physical and the spiritual. I want to be one of these spiritual people.

I don't want to make the mistake these people made. I don't want to make the mistake that people made in Jesus day that we're seeing in the gospel of Matthew on Sundays. I really want to get this right.

So what do I do? How do you build the temple? Well, we just covered that a couple of weeks ago, didn't we? What is the temple? How do you build it? Romans 12, 1 and 2. We are the temple. We are sacrificial. We are a place of sacrifice.

We offer ourselves a living sacrifice the way the Lord Jesus as a high priest. The thing about the Melchizedek priesthood, Melchizedekian priesthood, the high priest, what sacrifice did he offer? In the Levitical priesthood, the high priest did not offer himself. He offered animals, right? But the high priest after the order of Melchizedek, what did he offer himself? Romans 12, 1 and 2 as priests under the Lord Jesus, our high priest, what do we offer? What's our sacrifice? Ourselves.

How can we know what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God? Don't be conformed to this world. That's powerful. If you think about it, look at the world and look at conformity and look at Romans 12 to be not conformed to this world.

Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds. That's what we hope to do as we look at scriptures like this. It's not enough to listen to me.

It's not enough to listen to anybody. Consider your ways. This is a separate and distinct function from listening to the word of God, reading the word of God, the reflection, the meditation from Psalm one.

That's a separate thing. You don't do it in Bible class. We're going to close for this evening in a word of prayer.

And then we have the opportunity to do that far more important, critical, essential step to consider our ways to return to God, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds doesn't

happen in Bible class. I say again, the transformation of our minds doesn't happen in Bible class. And if this is all you do, you're done.

It happens outside. It happens afterward. It happens in the temple of our hearts.

When we offer that sacrifice, when we come through that new and living way and approach the throne hearts, having been sprinkled from an evil conscience, bodies washed with pure water, that doesn't happen in Bible class. That happens at other times. So the key to be ready, the key to be sanctified, the key to return, the key to the presence is what we do when we're not in Bible class.

Romans 12, one and two. Think about it. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for how powerfully it speaks to us. Thank you for the ministry of your Holy spirit to convict us, to wash us with the washing of regeneration and your word. We pray that as we do reflect on these truths that you will help us to see clearly where we can improve, where we can do better, where we can change our minds, reorder our priorities, reevaluate our goals and our values, and truly become those who are qualified for your presence.

Vessels of honor, uh, in which your glory can reside. We pray it in Jesus name. Amen.