

PostExilicProphets 21-05-20b

Let's resume our study now in Haggai chapter two. We've seen the importance of this day, the 24th day. And there is, among other things, there are six work days left in the month.

Six days, shout out labor and do all thy work. And so there's the suggestion that you've got a week left to get this program right, to take these words to heart and begin to take advantage of the teaching points that came from this judgment. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens.

He disciplines the sons whom he receives, scourges them with a whip. And the point is correction. The word of God is profitable for doctrine, reproof and correction.

So do we take correction? Are we correctable? Are we amenable? Are we impressionable? Can we be moved by the word of God and the spirit of God? And the answer is either yes or no. We can answer that question ourselves when we examine ourselves, when we consider our ways, remembering that God is with us, his spirit is with us. And we talked about that in Hebrews chapter six, those who have become partakers of the heavenly gift and the presence of the spirit.

And you see that in Zechariah when he says, return to me and I will return to you. Turn from your evil ways and your evil deeds. We saw it in Haggai chapter two.

My spirit remains among you. Do not fear. Haggai 2.5, my spirit is with you.

And this is somewhat unusual in the Old Testament to see an emphasis on the presence of the spirit, but it is a harbinger. As I say, these post-exilic prophets not only encourage the people who have returned from exile, but this section of scripture is looking forward. I think these dates are resonant.

The people who received it at the time would not have known that it was in anticipation of Hanukkah, or it was in anticipation of the week following the Lord's crucifixion, that 10 days. And the question, are you going to believe? How much evidence does it take for you to believe and to trust? And isn't it interesting that Thomas is one of those disciples about whom nothing further is heard in the apostolic age. We know John, we know Peter, but so many of the disciples, despite their training with the Lord, you figure the average is if you take 12 men and you get basically Peter, James, and John, there's some traditional information in the early church.

But in terms of the scriptural record, that which is going to live and abide forever, how many of the original apostles learned from their experience with the Lord Jesus? Not just coming to him, but functioning after his departure. When the Spirit comes, Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit on the 11 disciples and Paul, restoring the number 12. And so you've got Peter, James, John, and Paul.

What about Bartholomew? What about James the less? And the rest of those guys? Nothing further is heard. Matthew, that's a good point. Don't want to leave out Matthew.

He got his gospel written. We are pretty sure that he is the tax collector there. But it's still dismal that less than half of the original disciples do anything with their experience with the Lord Jesus.

And this goes back to a point that I made some time ago, and I ran across it here recently, that people think, well, if you could just impress on someone the reality of God, if you could impress on them that heaven is real, that there is a future and so on, they would certainly come to faith and salvation. No, they won't. It is everyone gets the maximum dose of convicting revelation.

Everyone gets it. You can't make it any clearer than the Holy Spirit makes it. You can't make it any clearer than the Lord Jesus made it to his generation.

He was God in the flesh. And look at the eyewitnesses to him, his words and his works who rejected him and helped to put him on the cross. Don't kid yourself.

A lot of people haven't really thought through things like all babies go to heaven. If all babies do go straight to heaven and great into the presence of straight into the presence of God, which sounds great. There's going to be no more of them that are going to be saved than there would have been if they'd stayed here, come to the age of accountability, been convicted by the Holy Spirit and made their choice.

They will make the same choice in the throne room of God that they would have made had they stayed here. So at whatever point those little people are given the opportunity to make their choice. Nobody is judged without making a choice.

So if they didn't get to make it here, they're going to have to make it sometime later, either come back to this earth in the millennium or make it in heaven. But these people who have died before they had the opportunity for whatever reason that they weren't capable of making a responsible decision for or against salvation, they'll make the same decision in the realms of glory or in the realms of the millennium that they would have made had they been able to make it here. And it's just that simple.

If there is no other answer by taking someone to heaven before they're old enough to think and make a choice for themselves and assigning them eternal salvation, you violate the justice of God. You violate responsibility. It is grossly unfair.

Well, why didn't God take me? And I'm an unbeliever and I'm headed for the lake of fire. But if he had just arbitrarily chosen in his grace to take me to glory and proactively apply the heaven for those who can't believe and God in grace, it sounds great. It's a wonderful, easy answer to give bereaved parents.

And it is as unbiblical as all get out. There's not a shred of evidence in the Bible that God takes

little babies who die in the first few months of life straight to heaven and grants them eternal salvation automatically, bypassing the volition test, bypassing the necessity for faith clearly stated in Hebrews 11, 6. Without faith, it is impossible to please him. If you're going to come to God, you must believe Hebrews 11, 6. Those who come to God must believe.

If you say, well, they went straight into the arms of Jesus and straight into the presence of God. Of course, they believe the demons have that kind of belief and tremble. That doesn't mean they are saved.

So I say that to say, when we look at Haggai and we are confronted with the need to make a choice, if we have the rain falling many times upon us and we have tasted the good word of God and the power of the age to come, and we've been partakers of the Holy Spirit, what kind of experience shall we be thought worthy if we trample underfoot the Son of God and put into an open shame? If we do not respond to correction and reproof and instruction in righteousness, if we do not evaluate ourselves, do we really want God to send a flaming angel, a thundering prophet, fire and brimstone from heaven to wake us up? The word of God is sufficient. Abraham told, I just reviewed this in the last week, Abraham told the rich man in torment, Moses and the prophets are sufficient to convince your brothers. And if they don't believe Moses and the prophets, if they will not respond to the word under the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, they won't respond even if somebody comes back from the dead.

Experience isn't going to teach us, it is incumbent on us to respond and we have to consider our ways. Consider your ways, return to me, I will return to you. And we can't just pick one little area of life where we're doing great and say, you know, I stick in my thumb, pull out a plumb and say, what a good boy am I? What about all of the other areas? You see people in government all the time who want to point to one accomplishment and ignore a crate load of failures and bad decisions and poor policies.

Well, but look, this one thing turned out good. It doesn't say consider your way, it says, consider your ways. And it's taking every thought captive for Christ, every thought.

If there's a bad habit, break it. If there's a misuse of time, quit it. If there's a shuffling of priorities that is needed, then shuffle.

But we've got to heed this warning. If we don't heed this warning, we're not going to heed any warning. And when we get to glory, we're not going to be any different.

And we're going to be looking at the dim glow of the new Jerusalem over the horizon, waiting for a creaky old wooden wagon with ever drying leaves from the tree of life to come out there and give us a crunchy salad. And it's tragic. There's no need for it.

We have every opportunity. As Paul asks the Galatians, who's hindering you? What's holding you back? You don't like glory. You don't want God's presence.

You're not interested in building his temple and enjoying his presence. You don't want his glory

shining forth from you. What do you want if you don't want that? And that's the question that Haggai and Zechariah are posing to these people.

So when he picks up this prophecy and he says, look, if you think that you can be corrupt and that a few holy sacrifices coming onto this ground is going to sanctify you, you're wrong. Ask the priests. Verse 12, if one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil or any food, will it become holy? Will sacrifices by contact sanctify common things? The priests will tell you, no, they won't.

Well, if one who is unclean from a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean? You all are spiritually dead, not dead in the sense of no salvation, dead in the sense of no fruit. If God puts his holy temple and his holy presence back where it belongs, and these dead people come up and try to worship there, what's going to happen? They're going to defile it. They're going to corrupt it.

The presence of the temple, the presence of that building is not going to change the hearts of the people. The hearts of the people are going to corrupt the temple. You look at government and culture today and the rapid negative changes that are taking place, and people say, well, we can't let this piece of the system fall apart.

We can't let this be canceled. We can't let this be changed. We can't let this be obliterated.

We can't have this law changed. We can't have this policy changed. Listen and hear me closely.

Those are symptoms. They are not the cause. What is the cause? The hearts of the people in this country are far from God as a rule, as an average, as a group characteristic, the center of mass of the American people in thinking, in philosophical approach to life, in morality, in ethics, in what is considered good and what is considered bad cannot discern good and evil anymore.

They're calling evil good and they're calling good evil. And it doesn't matter if you could wrap bailing wire around the institutions of our government and our policies in colleges and universities and the laws that are supposed to be upheld in our courts. If you could manage to keep those from changing, if you could keep them in effect, it wouldn't help.

When something dead touches something that is holy, the deadness spreads. Trying to keep the Judeo-Christian ethic alive in the institutions is not going to sanctify the people. Hearts have to change.

Ways have to be considered. There has to be response to God. Well, it's easy to see it in society, easy to see it in culture.

Look around and be shocked. Well, now let's take that clear gaze. You know, do those same glasses work up close? Do we have bifocals where I'm wearing trifocals right now? I can see far away.

I can see clear across the room through the top of them. But if I want to turn around and look at myself, I got to look through the bottom and make sure that I've got an equally sharp focus on myself. I can't change the hearts of these people.

There's only one heart that I can truly change, and that's the one right behind this shirt pocket. So where should I spend my time in consideration? Should I be endlessly reading about this, that, and the other that's happening? And, oh, here's the next trend on social media, and here's the next thing the government said and didn't say and did and didn't do, and here's what's happening internationally, and here's what's happening on this issue, that issue, and the other issue. That's attractive in many cases because it keeps us from having to turn everything off and turn the glasses around and look at ourselves.

So much easier to look and find out what's wrong with everything else. But this book, we're about to finish Haggai, and when you have Haggai in your Bible and you flip across this title page right across the top of it, consider your ways. It's the message of the book.

The context of it is they've already been chastised and disciplined because their ways were terrible. Now they've been given a chance, a fresh start, and they're not availing themselves of it. So as this prophecy continues now, carefully consider from this day forward, and forward is, as I mentioned last time, the period of time under consideration is forward from the day the foundation stone was laid, 18 years earlier until now.

638 is when they got the permission to rebuild and came back, and now, I'm sorry, 538. Now it's 520. There's been plenty of time, and the thing is not finished.

Lit a fire under them before the new year, the civil new year, before trumpets and so on, and here it is, the ninth month now, and they're still being rebuked. Since those days, verse 16, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty.

Remember, this was the earliest form of warning discipline given by Moses in Deuteronomy before it gets progressively worse and worse. It got the worst. They went through all five cycles, if you've ever studied it under that rubric or that structure, the five cycles of discipline in Deuteronomy.

There are five phases of divine discipline, the final one of which is being driven out of the land, taken captive, and serving in slavery of foreign masters. They have just emerged from that, and God says, you know what? I'm already having to put phase one on you again. You just got back, and I'm having to start the cycle all over.

It's going to start here, and the fifth phase is going to hit in the generation of the apostles, and by 70 A.D., they're going to be gone, and the second time, they don't come back. They won't come back until they're resurrected, and the resurrected who qualify for the land, who have demonstrated by faith and patience that they are worthy to inherit the promises, the third

occupation of the land will take place in the millennial kingdom, but this second one, no time passed. They didn't even have a Josiah revival.

They didn't even have a Hezekiah sort of come-to-Jesus moment. As soon as they get back, they immediately come under the first phase of discipline, mildew, loss of prosperity and loss of the multiplying kind of 30-fold, 60-fold, 100-fold harvest that one would hope for. Their crops are decimated.

It's meager. It's measly. It's moth-eaten, and that's a warning from God, and they just got back.

When you and I receive a rebuke from God, and I say this as much to myself as to anybody, we have to listen and change our ways. Zechariah 1, verses 1 through 6, change your mind about your evil thoughts, change your mind about your evil deeds, change your mind about your propensity for failure. Otherwise, history is going to repeat itself, and we as individual believers reflect what God does in His dealings with national Israel, and when Israel goes out under judgment, you and I can go out under judgment, and it's not always visible.

You don't break out in leprosy, and people say, whoa, what did he do to incur God's wrath? The loss is going to become clear at the judgment. If we would judge ourselves, we wouldn't be judged, right? If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. If we don't judge ourselves, we will be judged, and the loss is going to come on that day when we say, Lord, Lord, I was in Grace and Truth Bible Church.

Lord, Lord, look at all of the hard work I did and the wonderful things I did. Look at my resume of spiritual accomplishments. Haggai says it doesn't cut it.

God is watching, God is signaling, God is sending warning discipline for those areas of our life where we're not healthy and we're not prioritizing as we should. So, verse 18, consider now from this day forward, from the 24th day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid. Take that span of time, take that 18 years, look at the trend.

What does this mean? When we consider our ways, we've got to look back. We like to say, well, but I, 1 John 1, 9, that, I don't have to think about it. I confess my sins and He was faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse.

That is all true. When we confess our sins, God is faithful and God invokes the justice that recognize the paid penalty for that sin on the cross. He is faithful and He is just and we are forgiven.

However, if you remember our study of the barrier that separates man from God and all the different elements of salvation and why God can recognize the propitiatory work of Christ on the cross on behalf of the whole world and yet the whole world is not saved. Propitiation alone is not enough for salvation. You need those other things, redemption and reconciliation as well as propitiation.

1 John 2, 2 Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, but the whole world is not saved. We're not universal Unitarianists, Unitarian Universalists. Why? That by itself is not enough.

And guess what? 1 John 1, 9 alone is not enough in dealing with our failures. You can't just confess it and forget it. Look at what God tells Israel through Haggai.

He doesn't say from this day forward, let's all, let's have a brand new day, New Year's resolution. That's not what this says. It looks like it in your King James and even New King James and that's not what it says.

He says, I want you to review your failures from the time the foundation stone was laid and this house was supposed to be built and look at all of the failures from that day to this. Review your failures, God says. It's an important concept.

Confess and forget is a really bad idea if we don't consider our ways and detect patterns of failure, patterns that lead us into places where we can almost do nothing but sin. You've got to break those. So he says, consider, it says from this day forward, actually it's from the 24th day of the ninth month forward from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid.

Consider this past span of time from that day to this and ask yourself the question, verse 19, is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not yielded. What does this speak of? You've got seed, you've got grapes, figs and pomegranates. All of these are foods.

All of these are staples, right? The seed, the wheat, figs, grapes, this is the beverage part of your meal, pomegranates, olives, the staple foods. And these are things that are grown and reflect prosperity and fruitfulness. So he says, look, you've got the seed, but the seed's not in the ground germinating and growing and sprouting.

The seed is still in the barn and you've got these trees, but they are not producing. You've got these vines and they're not producing olives, pomegranates, figs, grapes. Where are they? Do you not remember the former prophets talking about, I planted a vineyard and I cultivated it and I set a watchtower and put a hedge around it, but it's not producing.

And if it doesn't start producing grapes, I'm going to have to tear it out. Give me one more year. Well, you've had 18 years to produce this fruit.

Where is it? Ask yourself the question, is the seed still in the barn? Is the potential, is the opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge, is the opportunity to apply what we have heard and what we have learned still sitting in the barn or are we putting it into practice? Is it making a difference in our lives? Bible class makes a difference on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings, right? Because it determines where we are and what we're doing. Does it make a difference in all of the other waking hours of all of the other days? Is its potential being fulfilled or not? Then look at the last phrase in verse 19, from this day, I will bless, could scratch out

everything in italics because this is really more of a question. There is still time.

If you heed this warning on the 24th day, if you review these past 18 years from the time the foundation was laid until now, if you realize that your seed is still in the barn, if you heed the message of rebuke and warning and exhortation from this day, I will bless. Haven't been able to bless you so far, but from this day, I will bless. Now, is he going to bless unconditionally? No, this is a conditional blessing.

The whole preceding portion of this book is that warning. And now look at verse 20. And again, the word of the Lord came to Haggai on the 24th day of the month, same day, different prophecy, different target.

Again, the word of the Lord came to Haggai on the 24th day of the month saying, speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah saying, speak to Zerubbabel. Who is he? And who is he not? There've been two individuals involved in this effort, right? To rebuild the temple. Who was it? Zerubbabel and Joshua, the son of Jehoshaphat, the high priest, right? This is Zerubbabel.

Which part of the government is he? He is the civil side. He's the governor. Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah saying, I will shake heaven and earth.

I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and those who ride in them.

The horses and their riders shall come down, everyone by the sword of his brother. Why is he telling this to Zerubbabel? He doesn't say I'm going to slay the priests at Mount Carmel. I'm going to break down their altars and tear down their high places.

I'm going to run off the false pagan prostitutes and destroy the images of Molech and Baal. I'll break the hands of the fish god Dagon on the threshold. This is not talking about worship, is it? This is all in the realm of kingdoms, military chariots and horses.

This is projection of force with cavalry, right? This is the closing message from Haggai and it is to the governor of Judah. What's the difference in the governor and the priest? Who does the priest serve? God, right? Who does the governor serve if he's doing his job right? The people. Government is of the people, by the people and for the people, or it used to be in this country, right? But it is lateral in its focus.

Government and governors are on the surface of the earth. It's lateral. It's between people.

It's for people. It's to ensure that there is justice for the poor and protection from outside invasion. It's earthly.

It's lateral, right? The priest, Joshua, is vertical. This is spiritual. The spiritual has already been identified as a huge problem.

Right now, Joshua's got nothing to do because the hearts of the people are not interested in the

presence of God. So God's got no word for Joshua the priest. Joshua is sitting on the sidelines because the defense is on the field and the offense is warming the bench, so to speak.

There's nothing for Joshua to do. God gives him no word from Haggai on this day because we just read why. They need to heed Zechariah's message and change their evil ways in their evil hearts and consider their ways and get to the point where they desire the presence of God enough for the priest to have a job.

I used to wonder why I would look around at seminary and have a hard time finding guys that really were interested in digging into the word of God. When I went to seminary, I expected that there'd be little groups on the campus and in the fellowship hall there after the cafeteria where you could eat your lunch and all that. You'd walk by a group and they would be talking about some passage and you'd go down here and there'd be something else about the deity of Christ or what did Paul mean here? Was this cultural? You'd just want to be everywhere at once listening to everything that was being said because it would be so invested in the things of God and in the word of God.

It was an enormous disappointment to me when I couldn't find any of that. I didn't find it anywhere even in our classes when we would be looking at a specific book or a specific passage or a specific issue. I was a systematic theology major and in my systematic theology classes where you're supposed to be gathering all the scriptures that pertain, there were no sparks, there was no fire, there was very little interest.

I'm not saying, they're all gone but me, I alone have escaped to tell thee, but it was far from being a characteristic. It was far from being an environment and an atmosphere. There were isolated individuals and if you were blessed enough to find them and get to know them and get to talk with them, but nothing like the kind of fellowship we have in this church.

Nothing approaching it. In all of my years of seminary and I crammed a four-year degree into 11 years, I never found that at seminary where you're supposed to be having guys who are going to go out and foster that kind of environment in every church they go to. And it just, I was so disappointed.

Well, and I thought, why aren't there more, you know, no wonder the church is falling apart. We don't have pastors who are on fire to preach and teach the word of God who are just invested in it and can't stop talking about it and thinking about it. That's why the church is in the handbasket on its way to Hades.

Well, it's the reverse. I believe that God has not raised up many and listen, there are a lot, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of really great, wonderful, godly, teaching, invested, dedicated, go-to-the-wall pastors all over this country, but you don't see them and you don't hear them because they are lost in the fog of all of those who aren't. There are 7,000 that haven't bowed the knee to Baal and I'm in no way, shape or form making any suggestions about our little group or about myself.

What I'm saying is the reason there are not more pastors is there is no need. Why prepare and train and raise up invested on fire, Holy Spirit inspired pastors and teachers when there's nobody to listen to them. God is efficient and God's not going to waste his time raising men like that up when there's no place to put them.

There's no audience. So that's what I see reflected in Haggai. That's why this last message, first message goes to Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Get the thing underway, let's go, let's get the house built, but at the end it's only to Zerubbabel and it's what this last section does not say that is so heart-rending, so sad, so tragic. After Haggai and Zechariah prophesy in the spirit and might of the Lord, there's nobody for Joshua to be priest for. He's got no fresh message from God and the glory of God never does show up at the building.

So he's only talking to Zerubbabel and what does he say? I am going to handle the governmental, military, international area. And in that day, verse 23, I will take you Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel and says the Lord and make you like a signet. Now, what is a signet? It's a symbol.

It's a signet ring. It was used to sign things, right? To impress into a wax seal. It is the representative.

It is the emblem of authority for the monarch, right? God says, Zerubbabel, you are going to be my signet. I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts. Zerubbabel, you remember his name means seed of Babel, seed of Babylon.

He was born in Babylon. He's come out of captivity. He's come out of that bondage and he's going to go from that to being God's signet.

Now he's called Zerubbabel governor of Judah at the beginning of this, but now he's called Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel. Do you remember what his father's name means? Sha'al is to ask. This name is very similar to Shemuel, but Sha'al is to petition, to plead and to ask.

Sha'altiel, asked of God. Somebody asked God for him. Jesus says, you're not going to see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, until he is asked for.

God is basically saying here, Zerubbabel, you have been faithful. You have done what you could do and you are going to be my signet. He is the ruler of Judah.

He foreshadows the Lord Jesus who is the true signet, but Zerubbabel doesn't appear until Shealtiel asked for. So the concluding application from the book of Haggai is when we do consider our ways and we do heed the call of God, the word of God, the warning of God, the discipline of God in many cases, and we don't fall back into our old ways, we are transformed by the renewing of our mind. When does the glory come? When we are not just brought back from bondage, Zerubbabel, but we ask for God.

We ask for that presence. The people, even when they build the temple, remember Solomon makes a whole series of prayers asking God to inhabit the place and remain in the place and God says, I will. When my people who are called by my name humble themselves and seek my face, I will answer from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.

When these people come and seek my face, the Shealtiel reference to Zerubbabel in this closing verse is a reminder that it is not enough to reform. It is not enough to heed. It is not enough to obey.

If you want the presence of God, it is a desire of the heart. I am doing these things out of the motivation of my heart. I am building God's temple because I want his presence.

I am asking, I am petitioning God as one who has been delivered from bondage. I want to be Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, someone who is asking and petitioning God, recognizing where I have come from and what I have been delivered out of and I want his presence. God says, that is the person that is going to be my signet.

That is the one that is going to be in my presence. That is the one that is going to represent my authority on earth. If we endure, we will reign with him, Paul says.

It is an overcomer promise to sit with Christ on his throne, to be Zerubbabel, delivered from bondage and now representing the ruling authority of God himself. But we have to want it. Well, that concludes our study of Haggai.

We are going to pick up in Zechariah next time and see what happens after verse 6. There are eight visions in the book of Zechariah. Why are they there? What do they mean? We will undertake that study beginning next time, but we will close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the promise.

Thank you that there is seed in the barn and that there is every opportunity for us to be fruitful, to heed the exhortations of your word, to avail ourselves of the power of your spirit in our hearts, to be sanctified, to be cleansed, to be blessed and to represent you through the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth. We pray that as we reflect on these things and consider our ways, that God the Holy Spirit will give us clarity, give us focus, help us to see clearly where we can change, how we can improve, and enable us and empower us to do so. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.