

# Seek First the Kingdom of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good afternoon and welcome to our lunchtime Bible talk. Please do be making your way to a seat and grab a Bible. We're going to be beginning a series on the book of Haggai over the next number of weeks.

And so we'll be studying today Haggai chapter one. So perhaps you could turn that up in your Bibles. Before we read. And whilst you do that I'll pray. Father we thank you that we can join together in the middle of a week.

And open your words confident that you speak to us. And so we pray that you would help us to leave aside anything that will be bothering us.

Anything that will be weighing heavy. That we might listen to you. And respond with all of our hearts. We pray that you would minister to us now through your words.

In Jesus name. Amen. Haggai chapter one. In the second year of Darius the king.

[ 1 : 17 ] In the sixth month. On the first day of the month. The word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. To Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel. Governor of Judah. And to Joshua the son of Jehozadak.

The high priest. Thus says the Lord of hosts. These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet.

Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses. While this house lies in ruins. Now therefore. Thus says the Lord of hosts.

Consider your ways. You have sown much and harvested little. You eat. But you never have enough. You drink. But you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves.

But no one is warm. And he who earns wages. Does so to put them into a bag with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts. Consider your ways.

[ 2 : 16 ] Go up to the hills and bring wood. And build the house. That I may take pleasure in it. And that I may be glorified. Says the Lord. You looked for much. And behold it came to little.

And when you brought it home. I blew it away. Why? Declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins. While each of you busies himself with his own house.

Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew. And the earth has withheld its produce.

And I have called for a drought on the land. And the hills. On the grain. The new wine.

The oil. And what the ground brings forth. On man and beast. And on all their labors. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel.

And Joshua the son of Jehoshaphat. The priest. With all the remnant of 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.

[ 3 : 14 ] And the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai the messenger of the Lord. Spoke to the people with the Lord's message. I am with you. Declares the Lord.

And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel. The son of Shealtiel. Governor of Judah. And the spirit of Joshua. The son of Jehoshaphat. The high priest. 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. On the 24th day of the month. In the 6th month. In the 2nd year of Darius. The king.

Amen. This is God's word. Do keep that open. Halt. About turn. Quick march.

To anyone in the military. There is no doubt. What that order means. Stop going. In the direction that you are going. And turn to the opposite direction. And move there quickly.

[ 4 : 13 ] That is what repentance looks like. And that is at the heart. Of what we see in Haggai chapter 1. Israel have experienced exile. Their high point. Is well and truly over.

But there was the opportunity. For restoration. Haggai's day. Is the day of small things. Small recoveries. Of some of what they once had. But there is a danger.

That it could all unravel. Yet again. If Israel continued to repeat. The same mistakes. Of yisteryear. How did it get to this? Well the story of the Bible.

Is the story of the progress. Of the kingdom of God. Right from the beginning. In the garden. Man was to fill the earth. And subdue it. To extend the perfection. Of the garden. With God's glory.

To the ends of the earth. Through the covenants. Israel were promised. That they would be a people. With their own place. With God's presence. And the purpose. Of blessing the world.

[ 5 : 11 ] And extending God's kingdom. And God kept these promises. As they reached. A high point. Under King Solomon. They finally had a temple. Built.

So God would no longer dwell. Only in a tent amongst them. There was permanence. They had their own place. They had a mighty king. And it was prosperous. But it all went wrong.

Israel endured exile. For continually being unfaithful. To God. The kingdom was broken up. The temple dismantled. The people taken captive.

And David's throne lay empty. Then. Twenty years. Before Haggai prophesied. There was a new empire. And miraculously. The king Cyrus.

Issued an edict. So that the Israelites. Could return to the land. And so they could start. To rebuild its temple. We can read about that. In the book of Ezra. But now.

[ 6 : 07 ] By Haggai's day. Work has stopped again. There'd been opposition. And discouragement. At every turn. And so the great hope of restoration. Ends up looking deeply.

And tragically disappointing. No king. No temple. They're in the land. Yes. But it's a shadow. Of what had gone before.

The days of Solomon. Are long gone. But God has not. Given up on his kingdom. And he never will. Verse one. God's word comes to his prophet.

And we know that whilst God speaks. There is still hope. And so there are two parts to Haggai's opening word to Israel. First. When God speaks. He graciously shows our faithfulness.

And faithlessness. And why we face frustration. Verses one to eleven. And then secondly. Verses twelve to fifteen. When God is heard. He draws us to repentance.

[ 7 : 09 ] And brings about restoration. So first. One to eleven. When God speaks. He graciously shows our faithlessness. And why we face frustration.

Commitment to God. And his kingdom. And its growth. In this world. Must be a priority. For God's people. When it isn't. We're ignoring him.

Having returned to the promised land. The remnant of Israel. Have become complacent. Verse two. They're saying that the time. Is not right. To build the temple. But God disagrees.

In response to what the people are saying. God speaks through his prophet. To say verse four. If it isn't a time. For the temple to be rebuilt. Then is it a time. For you.

To dwell. In your well-built houses. Notice that their houses. Are described as paneled. This is a reference. To the roof of the temple. And what it would have been like.

[ 8 : 09 ] The message. They're not lacking. What's needed to build it. God is saying. These people care more. For their own houses. Than mine. It's got nothing to do.

With it being the wrong time. They've been able. To finish their own houses. To make their own suitable. They've got the resources. They've got the effort. But all the while. God says in verse four.

My house lies in ruins. And because of the people's ambivalence. And their lethargy. Look at how God addresses them in verse two. These people.

God doesn't call them his people. But just these people. They've been faithless to God. The exile happened. Because Israel chose to ignore God.

To rebel against him. And what followed. Was an almighty flattening. Of the kingdom of Israel. So that almost nothing was left. No temple. No king. And the people were carted off.

[ 9 : 07 ] By a ruling superpower. But now. Now that there's a glimmer of restoration. The returnees are repeating. The old mistakes. By making excuses. Now isn't the time.

First we need to earn enough money. Before we can commit to God. And his kingdom. First we need to. Get our kids through their education. At Jerusalem college. First we need to.

Fill in the blank. Bottom line. God isn't our priority. His presence with us. Is an afterthought.

And for their faithlessness. Haggai has a further message. The frustration that you knew. Is God's curses on you. That's what he's saying.

In verses 5 to 11. Verse 6. They've been busy. They've been busying themselves. With their own priorities. Work. Food. Drink. Clothes. Money. Only to be frustrated.

[10:07] Sewing much. But harvesting little. They eat and drink. But they're never full. They wear clothes. But they're never warm. And in the end. All that they earn.

Is poured into a bag with holes. Frustration. They have busied themselves. With their own priorities. And yes. Of course. We all need to eat. And earn money.

And clothe ourselves. Of course we do. But our most fundamental need. Above all of these things. Even food and money. Is our standing with God.

Without him. In the end. All will be left. With his frustration. And futility. Verse 9. They looked for much.

But it came to little. And then Haggai says. That God is the one. Behind their frustration. What they brought home. God. Blew away.

[11:03] All this. Because his house. Lies in ruins. Verse 10. The heavens withhold their dew. And the earth its produce. At God's hand. Verse 11.

God has called for a drought. On everything around them. Haggai is spelling out. That Israel are under the curses. Of the covenant. They've forsaken God.

Neglecting his temple. Is neglecting him. So God brought these circumstances. On this people. Just as he said he would do. In Deuteronomy. And so Haggai offers.

A way forward. In response to this. To avoid a repeat. Of the exile. Verse 8. Go and gather things. To build God's house. That he may.

That he may take pleasure in it. And be glorified. Build the temple. That you might worship God. And so bring glory to him. Build the temple. So that you can once again.

[12:01] Experience God's presence. With you. Build the temple. So that you can once again. Enjoy the blessings. Of the covenant. Now we'll draw together.

Some implications. Of all of this. As we think about. The people's response. But for now. We mustn't take this. As a formula. That tells us. That if things are not. Going well materially. That we need.

To serve God more. Rather. What this passage. Tells us. Is that if we. Completely disregard God. Then we will in the end. Fall foul.

Of the ultimate. Covenant curses. If we don't listen to him. If we scorn him. If we refuse him. At the last day.

We'll experience. The full weight. Of God's just wrath. These curses. Point to greater curses. At the last day. But as it is.

[12:54] The warning. Around these curses. Serves to help. The Israelites repent. Death. And that's what we see. In verses 12 to 15. When God is heard.

He draws us to repentance. And brings about restoration. When God's people respond to him. And commit. Or recommit.

To the growth of his kingdom. Then he is present with them. It is always a gracious thing. On the part of the Lord. To speak to his people. Even if it's a warning.

For it gives the opportunity. To listen. And to turn again to God. The way forward. Has been spelt out. Verse 8. Build the temple. And the people.

Hear God's words. They're confronted by it. And they respond. With real action. Look how complete. The response is. Verse 12. From Zerubbabel.

[13:50] Through Joshua. To all the remnant. All of the returnees. Obeyed God's voice. Because of the words of the prophet. Because God spoke to them.

What a demonstration. Of the power of God's words. Instantly a whole people. Drop their self-interest. And turn to serve the living God. As an aside.

If ever there's a hope for Scotland. It is God's word. Faithfully. And clearly spoken today. Just as the prophets did of old. That's what brought about.

This real repentance. That's what brings about. Any hope. And the repentance we see here. Is a good picture. Of what repentance really means. Hearing God's word.

That exposes wrong. Halting. Turning around. And going the opposite way. Not just apologizing. But obeying. No longer self-interested.

[14:50] But having God's word. At work within us. And with repentance. Comes restoration. Look at verse 13. God's response is to declare.

I am with you. In verse 2. Israel were described as these people. However. Post repentance. God says.

I am with you. You are my people. I will be with you. I will be your God. Only four words. But they're the words of covenant renewal.

The covenant was at stake. Once again. Israel had experienced exile in the past. For their sustained faithlessness. They'd continually broken God's law. And despite his prophets. Calling for their repentance. Telling them to turn again to God. They didn't. And now their attorneys. Those who had the prospect of restoration. They're facing the same thing all over again.

[ 15 : 48 ] They're under curses again. And if they didn't listen to their prophets. It would inevitably end in another exile. This is what Palmer Robertson says.

A restored people cannot assume. That they will forever occupy. The place of God's blessing. Continuation. In unrepentant sin. Will eventuate in a repetition.

Of the awesome judgment of the exile. That they've already experienced. And from this second one. There can be no expectation of return. But. Because they have repented.

That previous exile was not in vain. Failure to take God seriously. Through prioritizing his temple. Is a grievous thing. But God in his grace.

Offers the chance to turn again to him. And he promises to be with his people. That's what the temple was for. It was where Israel's sin could be dealt with.

[ 16 : 48 ] And where they could be sure. That God was present with them. And so graciously. Because of their repentance. God says again to them. I am with you.

You are my people. I'll be with you. Now there are two. Real implications. For this. In this for us. We'll look at them. A brief one. And then a longer one. First. We now have. A greater. Renewed temple. The greater. Renewed temple. In chapter 2.

Haggai speaks. Of the greater glory. Of this latter temple. And in the era. Of small things. In which these people were living. It wouldn't. Have looked like that was possible. How could it possibly be better.

Than Solomon's grand temple. Temple. But we knew. That the truly glorious temple. Is the Lord Jesus himself. He said of himself.

[ 17 : 47 ] I tell you. Something greater. Than the temple. Is here. And Jesus spoke. Of the destruction. Of the temple. But he also said. It will be raised again. In three days.

The truer. Greater. Renewed. Temple of God. Is the Lord Jesus. And so for us. The temple of God. Where we can have our sin dealt with. Is Jesus. And the temple of God.

Where we can enjoy God's presence. Is Jesus. He. Is the assurance. That God is with us. And that we are his people. And so how much more.

Do we have the hope. Of ultimate restoration. How much more. Do we have the hope. Of God's kingdom. Spreading throughout the world. And his covenant. Coming to full fruition.

And so how much more. Ought we to seek first. God's kingdom. Prioritizing his purposes. Secondly. [ 18 : 48 ] We are still. To devote ourselves. To building the temple. And so extending the kingdom.

We do truly. Have a better experience. Of the kingdom of God. And the temple.

But the priorities. And the responsibilities. Of God's people. Don't change. Responding to God. Is still. Prioritizing. The building. Of his temple.

But what that looks like. For us. Is not gathering wood. But building. With living stones. To take Haggai. Seriously. Now. Isn't to start.

A new building project. To redecorate. It isn't about. Bricks and mortar. Jesus. Is the renewed temple. And as Christians. We are joined. To him. The church.

Is joined to him. And he become. And we become. Part of his body. We are now. The temple. We now. Build with people.

[ 19 : 43 ] As we're joined. To Jesus. Building the temple. For us. Is building the church. Of which Christ. Is the head of the body. It is building the church. With living stones. Of which Christ.

Is the corner stone. Temple building. Is doing what we can. To see people. Become Christians. And mature as Christians. Haggai's word.

Is utterly contemporary. For how tempting. Can it be. To fit church. Around our wants. And needs. Rather than the other way. Round. Whilst you dwell.

And dwell in. And build your homes. My church lies in ruins. Or whilst. We're busy with work. And education. And family. And hobbies. My church lies in ruins.

We can't presume. Upon God's grace. Whilst putting our fingers. In our ears. About God's priorities. If we look around. The reality is.

[ 20 : 43 ] That the church in Scotland. Lies in ruins. The need for building. The church is great. And urgent. If playing our part. Only happens.

When it fits our plan. Then Haggai is urging us. To rethink. So maybe if we have. Children. Or grandchildren. What is it we want most.

For them? Is it a comfortable life. With some involvement. In church. Around the age. Or will it please us most. To see God's word. Bearing fruit in them.

As they give themselves. Generously. To their church's ministries. At the expense of. A successful career. Or whatever it is. We would also want for them.

Or perhaps we've been going to church. For a while. We're committed to being there. Someone asks us. To begin to serve. Where there's a need. The opportunity. To play our part. In church.

[ 21 : 40 ] And seeking to build up. With living stones. But at the prospect. Of giving up. A Friday night. The prospect. Of missing our favorite TV show. Or the football match.

We just say. Oh well. This isn't quite the right time. This isn't a great time. For me at the moment. Haggai says.

Building the church. Must be a priority for us. And it can't just be. When it suits. Not after we've achieved. What we want. But always a priority.

Now there'll also be some of us. Who are told. By caring family members. Or friends. That we do too much at church. That we need to focus more. On ourselves.

Well if that's you. Be encouraged. That being busy. With God's priorities. Is the fruit. Of God's word. At work in you. And so he's present.

[ 22 : 35 ] With you. As we're serving. Faithfully. Week after week. As we're trying to bring. Friends to church. As we want to introduce. Them to Jesus. As we prioritize.

Our family's life. Around church. Then be encouraged. God's word. Is bearing fruit in us. To those who gladly. And freely.

Give themselves. To serving. The church's mission. To those who sacrifice. To be part of. Their church's ministry. Whether it be. By faithfully.

Praying at the prayer meeting. Or by doing things. Behind the scenes. That people don't notice. But support others. God says. I am with you.

You've heard my word. You're my special people. I am with you. And we need to be assured of that. Because as we do all that we can.

[ 23 : 30 ] To reach out with Jesus. It can be awfully discouraging. The situation that we're in now. Isn't too dissimilar to Haggai's day. We have a greater experience.

Of all that God has promised. But it can still feel. Like we're in a day of small things. Our values and beliefs. Are now in a minority. It can feel like nobody we know.

Will ever come to faith. There's so many competing worldviews. We're silenced. Hushed. Pushed to the sides. It can feel like we're only going to find things.

Increasingly difficult in Scotland. If we're faithful to God. But. As we invest in our work now. We are looking ahead.

To the day when the temple of God. Will fill the whole earth. Where the whole world. Will be the dwelling place of God. And his people. We can look forward to the day.

[ 24 : 26 ] When the I am with you. That God says. Is revealed to us in full sight. Vivid technicolor. Full ultra high definition.

That's what we're building towards. That's what must concern us. And so nothing can supersede our priority.

Of building. With living stones. The church of Jesus. Haggai tells us. To seek first the kingdom of God.

So just like the soldiers in the military. As we march. Let our marching not be away from God. To do what we want. But towards God.

Hearing his word. And prioritizing his kingdom. Amen. Amen. Let's pray.

[ 25 : 26 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's pray. Father we thank you. That through the Lord Jesus. We have the great assurance.

That you are with us. And that we have a great hope. For the future. Where your covenant. Will come. To its full consummation.

That your temple. Spread throughout the world. And that your people. Will be with you. Forever.  
And so spur us on. To serve you with all that we've got. For we pray it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.  
Amen. Amen. Thank you. Next caffeine.