

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 16 Oct 2022

Sermon Title : Haggai Sermon Series
Think Again: Hard Work = Good Returns

Speaker : Rev Reuben Ng

Text : Haggai 1:1-15

INTRODUCTION

In this first sermon of our 4-part Haggai Sermon Series calling us to “Think Again”, we shall reflect upon the notion of whether hard work equates to good returns. The Book of Haggai talks about the process of rebuilding the Temple of God (God’s house) and highlights that the priorities of the people were in the houses they had built for themselves instead of in God’s Temple. To understand the Jews’ predicament and why the Temple of God was in ruins, we delve first into historical milestones that explain what led up to the events in Haggai.

Before going into the timeline proper, keep in mind three anchor points:

- 1) 960 BC – King Solomon built the first Temple of God
- 2) 586 BC – Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple of God
- 3) 521 BC – God’s word through Haggai calls for the rebuilding of the Temple of God

Timeline

1000 BC: David became the king of Israel.

960 BC: King Solomon (son of king David) built the Temple of God. Prior to this, the place of worship was the Tabernacle; a tent-like structure made of cloth.

931 BC: King Solomon passed away and Israel was split into two regions:

- a) Northern Kingdom – Israel (capital: Shechem)
- b) Southern Kingdom – Judah (capital: Jerusalem)

721 BC: Israel (Northern Kingdom) had many bad kings who worshipped other gods. This resulted in the Assyrians crushing Israel earlier than Judah and deporting the people.

586 BC: Judah had some good kings who led the people to turn back to God now and then, with spurts of revival. However, there were generally still more bad kings than good kings and the people also turned away from God. This resulted in the Babylonians (led by king Nebuchadnezzar) conquering

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Jerusalem later in 585 BC, destroying everything (including the Temple of God) and bringing the Jews to Babylon.

538 BC: The Persians (led by king Cyrus) became the superpower and overtook Babylonia. King Cyrus told the Jews that they could return to Jerusalem.

521 BC: This was when the book of Haggai began, Jerusalem was under the rule of another Persian king, Darius. It had been 17 years since the Jews returned to Jerusalem, they had rebuilt their houses but not the Temple of God.

With a clear picture of the events that led us to the start of Haggai, we delve into what was taking place in Jerusalem and the state of the people's hearts.

Significance of Elul 1 (1st day of the 6th month in the Jewish calendar)

Why did God choose this date to release His word, His heart, and His thoughts through Haggai the prophet, to the people?

- Elul 1 marked the beginning of a time of reflection and repentance, with the shofar blown every morning, calling the people to reflect on the things of the past year in preparation for the two holy days in the Jewish calendar:
 - a) Feast of Trumpets: celebration of the beginning of a new year
 - b) Day of Atonement: a very solemn day where everyone comes before God and remember that all transgressions and sins must be atoned for
- Elul 1 was a date of historical significance to the Jews as they believe it was the day that God calls Moses to ascend Mount Sinai a second time to receive the second set of Ten Commandments from God (Exo 34) after he smashed the first set upon seeing the Israelites worshipping a golden calf in his absence. It was a poignant reminder that they had done something wrong in the eyes of God at Mount Sinai and similarly calls for their reflection and repentance.

Think about our priorities (Haggai 1:1–5)

God spoke through Haggai to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, descendent of king David and ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:12) and Joshua (the high priest), with His word for the people.

God could see in their hearts that they had not prioritised rebuilding His Temple (Haggai 1:1), yet their own paneled houses were richly decorated and luxurious. (Haggai 1:4)

- God was not against the people building their own houses but asked them when they were going to look at His priorities and His heart. He wanted them to think carefully about their ways. (Haggai 1:5)

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- God was not so much concerned about the physical building but rather questioned where the people's priorities lay.

Think about "Hard Work = Good Returns" (Haggai 1:6–11)

God points out to the people that the above equation was not balanced; the magnitude of their work did not match their returns and they were not experiencing "*shalom*". (v.6)

- "*Shalom*" is not just a flat and one-dimensional feeling of peace inside. It means being satisfied, full, and fulfilled in every aspect of our lives: physical, emotional, and spiritual; with no lack.

God further explains the reason for the imbalance (v.9) and once again questioned where their priorities lay:

- When would be the time they would think about what was on His heart or what they should do for Him?

Think about what is on God's Heart (Haggai 1:12-15)

Sometimes, for the people back in those days and maybe even for us now, we hold back on asking what is on God's heart. We think that if we channel our hard work, resources, and energy into fulfilling what is on God's heart, then we would be missing out on what we want in our hearts. And so, we think about what is on our own heart first.

- King David (around 1000 B.C.) was a man after God's own heart. Unlike the people during Haggai's time, king David recognized that there was something wrong with him living in a house made of precious cedar wood while the ark of the covenant of the Lord was under a tent. (1 Chronicles 17:1) God saw that king David prioritised God's heart and He blessed David and his lineage (house) greatly. (1 Chronicles 7–8, 10)

As for the people who originally prioritised their own hearts, their spirits were ultimately stirred by the word of the Lord. They saw what was on God's heart and began to work on God's Temple on Elul 24.

CONCLUSION

After hearing the hard truth, it may take a while for us to repent and turn around to head in God's direction, but it is necessary. While hard work does not necessarily equate to good returns, hard work according to the desires of God's heart will have good returns. Let us always have an eye on what is on God's heart and be prepared to give hard work for God, trusting that by seeking first His Kingdom and righteousness, we will receive from Him all things. (Matthew 6:33)

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A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?

- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

- 2a. Get a volunteer to read Haggai 1:1-5 aloud slowly, take some time to meditate on what was read and share what comes to your mind.
Repeat for Haggai 1:6-11 and then Haggai 1:12-15.

- 2b. Why does each thought/scene come to your mind?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

3. What do you understand by prioritizing what is on God's heart?
 - a. If you were to ask your classmates/family/friends/colleagues, on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest priority and 10 the highest, what would they say about your prioritizing God's heart in your daily living?
 - b. Think about why God is in this position in your priority list and share.

- 4a. Is there something in your life that you have worked hard on/for but have not received your expected good returns?
- 4b. Think about "Hard work = Good returns" in Haggai 1:1-15. How does it speak to your situation in 4a?
- 4c. What are some possible steps you can take to improve your situation?
- 4d. How can your group members encourage or help you to achieve 4c. above in the following week(s), till your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies, Prayer and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your testimony on an occasion where through reflection and repentance, God opened your eyes to see and prioritize what was on His heart instead of yours, and how you were greatly blessed when you turned around.

OR

Give thanks to God that because He sees the priorities in our hearts, when we seek first His Kingdom and righteousness, we will always have His “shalom” of lacking nothing.

6. As a group, take time to pray for each other and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas in your life that need your re-thinking for reflection and repentance so you may seek what is on God’s heart as your first priority. Pray for guidance and perseverance for your group and our church as we prepare to step out in faith to seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. That’s the Power – Hillsong <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYjppzHLt2s>
2. Sovereign Over Us – Michael W Smith
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lay-r2g52SQ>
3. Reward – Josh Yeo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-uGMWCWkAI>

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