

Money is For Kingdom Building

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Haggai 2:20-23

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Synopsis:

If we remember that God's Kingdom, not our kingdom, is what matters most, then God will change our vision of the role we can play in his exciting redemption of human history. It's a matter of faith.

The only good use for our money is to build for the coming Kingdom of God here on earth. Every other use of our resources is futile.

Participating in Kingdom building is far more than giving to the general budget of the church.

I.

The past three weeks we've been focusing on the subject of stewardship by listening to the prophecies of a little-known prophet named Haggai. In 538 BC, some 50,000 exiles returned to Jerusalem by the edict of Persia's new ruler, Cyrus King of Persia, where they began to rebuild their homeland.

Imagine having all your hopes for a king and nation building crushed as you are carried off into exile for 70 years. And then, by the grace of God, your captors are overthrown and you are suddenly instructed to go home. **Where do you start picking up the pieces?** Half the people you know have died of old age. Your houses have been demolished by war, and the markets where you used to trade your wares no longer exist. It's easy to imagine how overwhelming that moment would be. Why bother even trying to get back to normal, especially because in the back of your mind you're thinking that everything that went wrong in the first place could happen all over again.

And yet, God uses Haggai to redirect the focus of the returned exiles, as despondent as they were. Where the people saw rubble, God saw grandeur. Where they saw chaos, God saw a promised future. And where the people saw futility, God saw a Kingdom being built that would last forever.

Haggai's prophecies may be little-known, but they pack a big punch. And now we come to his final oracle as we look to verses 20-23 in chapter 2. Let's pray together as we begin to listen to this last word from the prophet Haggai.

Prayer: Loving God, open up your word to us this morning. We need to learn from you. Teach us to labor for your purposes and make your name great in our own time and place. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

II.

The story is told of the foreman on a building site who asks one of the builders what he is doing. The builder replies, "I'm breaking rocks."

Another worker is asked the same question, and he answers, "I'm earning for my family."

The same question is posed to a third worker. And with glint in his eye, and a smile on his face, he responds, "I'm building **a cathedral!**"

It makes a difference how we see things, doesn't it? When we see the bigger picture of our actions, it gives meaning to all the other things that we might consider inconsequential.

III.

Are you like that? Are you assured that *who you are* and *what you do* has eternal significance beyond your daily tasks—driving the kids to school, writing a friend a letter, or balancing the books at work?

IV.

Zerubbabel and the people of Jerusalem wondered whether *what they were doing* made any difference at all. The **temple looked miniature** compared to what they had imagined. It's foundations seemed paltry compared to the exaggerated dimensions of Solomon's temple before it. Zerubbabel himself appeared rather weak and pale compared to the legends of King David. After all, he was just a governor of Judah, hardly the king of a great nation.

And so each day the people trotted off to work thinking that what they were doing, building a rather smallish temple, and thinking who they were, Judeans in a third rate town with a fourth rate governor, had little or no significance at all.

After all, who cared what happened in a backwater little town like Jerusalem with a bunch of hillbillies like the Judeans? Well, God cared, and he used Haggai to paint a bigger picture for them. *What they were doing* and *who they were* had more than just fleeting significance; in fact, it was eternal. Haggai shows up with one last oracle:

“Don't you realize what's happening here?” the Lord asked them. “Don't you realize who you are Zerubbabel?” The Lord queried. “I made this world, and I can shake it up. And when I do, people will finally see what is really real. This temple may look like a roadside shrine, but it's the temple of the living God. And

Zerubbabel, you may look like a small town sheriff, but you wear the signet ring of God Almighty. Get the picture?”

V.

God took Zerubbabel and the people behind the scenes of the present world order and showed them the bigger picture. **“It isn’t as it appears,”** God tells them. **“When you build for me, you build eternally. When you rule for me, you rule eternally.”**

When we build, that is, when do anything for God, we work eternally. When we offer our gifts, whether they are gifts of leadership, like those of Zerubbabel, or other gifts, we offer them for eternal purposes.

VI.

I’m not a fan of bumper-sticker religion. So much of what I see on the back of cars seems to belittle God’s character rather than celebrate it. Nonetheless, I can’t deny that bumper stickers *sometimes* express spiritual truths.

I’ve seen stickers that say, “Pumping Iron for Jesus,” “Cycling for Jesus,” and even “Truckin’ for Jesus.” My first reaction is, “Yep, bumper-sticker Christians are the most tacky people in the world.” But I have to confess, after reflecting on their messages, that they do make Haggai’s point.

As crude as they are, these stickers at least demonstrate that someone gets the bigger picture. They *cycle* not for themselves but for God, they *truck* not for themselves but for God. And because of this simple fact, *who they are* and *what they do* carries significance beyond their ability

to ride bicycles or drive trucks. They get the fact that **when we offer our talents and gifts to God we offer them for eternal purposes.**

That means that when we see *who* we are, God's beloved—the ones for whom Christ died, and *what* we do—housewife, retiree, or business person, in light of the bigger picture, we have hope, a hope that no one can snatch away.

The same is true for a church. When we see who we are and what we do in the light of faith, in the light of God's bigger picture for human history, we have hope.

VII.

These past few weeks we have been talking about stewardship, our use of what God has given us, both our money and our talents. When we give our money and our talents to God, we build his Kingdom, and not our own.

We may never understand fully the impact our investment in God's kingdom makes, which is proven by the other ways we spend our money. We give to our alma matters, buy bigger houses, larger life insurance policies, better health plans, but do these expenditures really compare to building a community of people who live by God's rule and grace on earth? When I think of how I sense God's presence in my life, and how other people come to know the Lord, I think of the relationships I have with sisters and brothers in Christ. That's the sweet nectar of fellowship that we get to drink when we live our lives with sisters and brothers of faith. That's the offering that we make to God that pleases him as much as our obedience to his commands.

Think about that for a moment. What's the bottom line here? Jesus asked his disciples, "What does it profit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul?"

He asks the same question to us today. If I want to invest in what is eternal and not fritter it away in things that don't make any long-term difference, then what better place to invest than in what God is doing in the world to establish his loving rule?

VIII.

You see, stewardship is not really about what God needs—God has all the money and resources in the world. "The silver is mine, the gold is mine," says the Lord of Hosts. Stewardship is not about what God needs; **it is about what you and I need.**

We need to taste the eternal in what we're doing now, in on our own relationships, neighborhoods, schools, and work places. God offers this through investing our lives with him and for his purposes. We gain eternally, because we give locally.

IX.

The idea of giving, and trusting, and committing ourselves to God *is a biblical* concept, but those are things we are called to do **every** day of our lives out of obedience to him. Commitment Sunday or Pledge Sunday is merely a celebration of what we ought to be doing daily.

In that respect, every day is "Pledge Sunday." We pledge ourselves every day to being God's people and doing God's work on earth. The financial pledge we make this day is merely a reflection of how much we trust God to do what's best with all the other days of our lives.

X.

The prophecies of Haggai challenge us with the question of vision, the dominant factor that governs our lives. The people say that “the time has not come to rebuild the Lord’s house,” (1:2) but Haggai faithfully delivers God’s word and God’s Spirit changes people’s hearts, so that eventually, they take up God’s work.

It’s not that the Temple itself that so important or grand, it’s that rebuilding the Temple is an expression of *who they trust* to help them rebuild their lives. In a way, God is asking them, **who will sit on your throne of your life? And he asks the same to us today.**

Brennan Manning, author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, put it this way:

The splendor of a human heart that trusts and is loved unconditionally gives God more pleasure than Westminster Cathedral, the Sistine Chapel, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Van Gogh's Sunflowers, the sight of 10,000 butterflies in flight, or the scent of a million orchids in bloom. Trust is our gift back to God, and he finds it so enchanting that Jesus died for love of it.

When we give to Kingdom work, whether it’s our talents or our money, we tell God that he is on the throne of our lives.

XI.

C.S. Lewis once said in his essay, “The Weight of Glory” that when we meet people on the street we do not meet individuals on their way to the market or the train station, but individuals on their way to an eternal destination.”

This morning at the 9:30 service we’re going to baptize [we baptized] little Ella Kathrine Jertberg. She is a child who is on her way to an eternal destination. As I move to baptize her, I will ask Ella’s father and

mother if they trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and if they will train up Ella to the point that she too would one day profess Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior.

I know that is their heartfelt desire, because in talking to Ella's Mom this week, she said something very profound. She said of all the things they wish for their children—good health, intelligence, a fine education—none of these compare to their desire for Ella to have a life-giving relationship with the Living God. “If she's got that,” she said, “then she'll be able to handle anything that life brings her way.”

XII.

Today we give witness to who we really are. We can be people who build kingdoms with little “k's,” or we can invest in eternal things and build a Kingdom with a big “K.”

If we remember that God's Kingdom, not our kingdom, is what matters most, then God will change our vision of the role we can play in his exciting redemption of human history. It's a matter of faith.

We are the only people on earth with our relationships, with our jobs, in our schools, who live in our families, so we are the people God has **chosen to use** to do great things for him.

May the way we give and live today, and tomorrow, and the next day, reflect our faith in the God that holds our lives together by his love and grace. Amen.