**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 7-16-2023
Majoring in the Minors – Haggai**

I remember growing up, one thing that I did a lot of was play baseball. I remember experimenting with different batting stances and how I would hold my bat and things to work on with my swing. All those things were important and helpful. But the most important thing to remember when batting is to keep your eyes on the ball. A batter needs to be locked in to picking up that baseball coming out of the pitcher’s hand.

And when they see it and follow the ball, it is so much easier to know the answer to things like: is this a good pitch to swing at? What type of pitch it is? Is it a fastball or a curveball or whatever?

So keeping your eyes on the ball is the most important thing. Everything else is secondary.

Please keep that in mind as we now turn to the Bible.

As we turn to the Bible and in our journey through these minor prophets, we find ourselves today in the Book of Haggai. Many things have happened since the time of Zephaniah, whom we looked at last week. A few decades after Zephaniah’s prophecy, the Jews were conquered by the Babylonians. Yes, there was a revival under King Josiah, as Zephaniah’s prophecy was headed for a time. But sadly, it was not a permanent one. And eventually, the nation turned away from God again.

With the conquest of Judah and Jerusalem, many of the Jews were taken to live in Babylon. This would include people that we read about elsewhere in the Bible, such as Daniel. The beautiful Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed. The city where God had set apart to be His home on earth had been conquered because of its sins against the Lord.

But God was far from finished with the people of Israel and with His plans for the world. And things begin to look brighter when the Babylonians themselves were conquered by Persians. And this new superpower was very supportive of the Jews. A former professor of mine referred to them as the Persian housecats.

It was the Persians that permitted the Jews to go back to their homeland and to rebuild. And that’s just what the Jews did.

Haggai the prophet was among those that returned to Jerusalem. But by the time that Haggai writes his prophecy in approximately the year 520 BC, eighteen years had passed since the Jews were given the freedom to return to their homeland.

But one big problem was very clear to Haggai --- the Jews had taken their eyes off the ball.

Please turn with me to Haggai 1:2-9

**2This is what the Lord Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.’”**

**3Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: 4“Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”**

**5Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 6You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”**

**7This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 8Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the Lord. 9“You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the Lord Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house.**

So what is going on in this passage? God’s message through Haggai was that the Jewish people were misaligning their priorities. The focus of those returning to the Promised Land was on building their homes and on tending to themselves.

Now the Lord is certainly not against His people caring for their homes. But what the people were doing was they were taking their eyes off the ball. And the ball, in this situation, was God.

For centuries, the Temple was set apart as an earthly home for God to dwell among His people. Certainly, God has never been confined to any place.

But God chose to manifest His presence in a special way in Jerusalem and specifically, in the Temple.

And the Lord was stirring the prophet Haggai to tell the people that they are guilty of neglecting the most important thing. It’s been 18 years and God’s house was still in ruins.

What kind of a priority is God to them if they are neglecting to rebuild the place for God’s dwelling, the place for appointed festivals to the Lord to be celebrated.

And basically, the Lord is saying through Haggai that God is not blessing them because they are not blessing God. Instead, they are ignoring God.

Within Haggai and other places in the Old Testament, there is an acknowledgement that what would be rebuilt would not compare in magnificence to the glorious Temple that King Solomon had build centuries earlier.

But please, dear Jewish people, let’s get to it! Let’s put first things first. Let’s focus on God before ourselves.

Friends, it was through godly servants of the Lord, like Haggai, that the Temple was rebuilt and the worship celebrations began again in Israel. And it would be this Temple that would stand for centuries. It would be the Temple where Jesus would go on many occasions.

And sadly, this Temple as well would eventually be destroyed. This time in the year 70 AD by the Romans, after the Jews revolted under them.

As Christians today, what is the main thing to remember? What is the big takeaway for us? And I believe it’s this. The Lord deserves the number 1 place and the number 1 focus of our lives.

There is nothing wrong with tending to your homes and your employment and your family. These things are all important to attend to.

Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, the New Testament teaches us. Jesus is to be the center, the focus, the number 1 thing on our lives. There is a popular devotional book written many years ago by a man named Oswald Chambers. Does anyone know what it is called? It is called *My Utmost for His Highest*. Even in this book’s title, it is a reminder that our utmost is to be offered to His Highest, to our Lord and God.

Now, in our context today, there are some things that are changed. Haggai was all about rebuilding the Temple because of its connection to worship and celebration of God.

But because of what Jesus has accomplished and with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, we are told in Scripture that we, the church, are now the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

It is certainly good practice to care for the space of our worship gathering. We had a work day here just recently. And there are people that volunteer to help clean this building and mow the grounds.

This is important. But more important than that, the message of Haggai reminds us that attending to God and focusing on God and seeking to worship God and grow in our relationship with God is the most important thing in life.

Practically speaking, what does this look like? It looks like making sure you are talking with God every day. It looks like being intentional to worship God every day and attending worship whenever possible.

It looks like attending to your spiritual growth studying the Scriptures. It looks like discovering your spiritual gifts and seeking to use them to the glory of God. It looks like sharing Jesus with others.

In other words, Jesus is looking for followers that are all in. Jesus desires His church to not just add Jesus to their lives, but to make Jesus the center of their lives.

We build God’s house as we build up ourselves and one another in the Lord.

I love how the Apostle Peter writes in his first epistle. He says, **“As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

Peter is writing to various church communities and telling them that you (sisters and brothers in Christ) are being built into a spiritual house.

Isn’t that amazing? As a believer in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you. You individually and we collectively are God’s Temple, God’s house.

Our lives are not our own. We were bought with a price. We are to honor Him with our bodies and seek to have our minds transformed to think more and more like Jesus.

It is so profound to realize that we are vessels of God’s glory. And we are not confirmed to any place and we shine brighter than God’s glory did in the Tabernacle or Temple.

How we live our lives, whether we are keeping our eye on the ball --- on Jesus --- or living for Him every day --- it will make a huge difference on if we are fulfilling what God has for us in this world.

We believe the Lord has called us as Chestnut Grove Church to be a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ. This can only be accomplished as we all put Christ first and foremost every day and in every way.

If there is some way that Christ is calling you to yield to Him in your life, please do not ignore His stirrings.

We are His vessels. He wants us to have Him on our minds everywhere that we go. How can we be salt and light here? How does God want me to respond to this? What does Jesus want to do through me in this world? These are great questions to ask ourselves.

But the key is to keep our eyes on Jesus and God. As we keep our eyes on Him and make Him of first importance in our lives, God will bring everything else into a healthy perspective. And perhaps, as you are watching a baseball game, may we be reminded to keep our eyes on Him.

Let’s pray…

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament – chapter 36 by Eugene H. Merrill