

Haggai 1

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[0 : 00] Home, sweet home. The story goes of a developer who bought himself a bargain property, Lot 8C.

! It needed renovating so he hired some workers to get on with the job. But when they finally finished, he discovered that the house they'd been working on was actually the wrong house. It wasn't the house that he had bought. It belonged to William and Elnera Washington. The house was one digit difference from the real house.

And in a series of misunderstandings with the vendor, he spent \$25,000 on decoration. Opening up the kitchen, making it open plan, repainting the walls, redecking the garden.

Money which the court said he couldn't reclaim on the wrong house. The right house was in the street next door in the neighbourhood. Deserted, unfinished, unkept.

[1 : 11] Busy, busy, busy. Sprucing it up. But the work was misplaced. He couldn't enjoy it. No satisfaction.

Mr and Mrs Washington enjoyed it though. There's something wonderful about a good home, isn't there? But not if it's the wrong home. In Haggai's day that was a problem too.

Two houses, but which one to work on? Which one to spend money on? To spend our lives on? Well look at verse 9.

The Lord says, My house lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with your house, with his house. The people are doing lots of renovation work, but they've got the wrong address.

No satisfaction. It's the 29th of August, 520 BC. And a small group of God's people are back in Jerusalem, back from exile.

[2 : 16] They've been through a lot. They're tired. They're a tiny little group of believers. And they're only there by permission, do you see, verse 1, by King Darius.

Who's not an Israelite. Things are not great, are they? And after the initial excitement of returning, apathy has set in.

Yeah. It's pretty unspectacular. Actually, everyday life is hard. No satisfaction. There's a famine. Money is tight. You've got to feel sorry for them, haven't you? But actually, it's not just a bit of bad luck here. Because they've been working on the wrong house. The temple of God, in Jerusalem, lies like a skeleton.

Like a monument to an old, beautiful relationship. A statue of a God that they once loved. But no one seems to notice.

[3 : 19] No one seems to care. It's got all of the safety barriers around it. Hard hats must be worn in this area. But no builders.

The diggers have no one to operate them. The project is on hold. Indefinitely. But the Lord is interested in his house.

And he speaks to them. Can't get no satisfaction. Well, firstly, I question your priorities. I question your priorities.

In these days of hardship. Money is tight for them. Life is really hard. And when life is like that, the tendency is to turn in on ourselves.

We hoard things, don't we? And we get paranoid about our own lives. We get a big TV. We lock ourselves up in our living rooms. We try to forget our problems in whatever way we can.

[4 : 19] We become isolationist. The English man's home is his castle, as they say. And we raise the drawbridge and lock the doors and adopt siege mentality.

We become individualistic. And our priorities become self-centred. So, verse 2, thus says the Lord of hosts, these people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.

Lord, it's just not the right time. It's not as important as Samuel Johnson said, that there will always be a part and always a very large part of every community that have no care but for themselves, and whose care for themselves reaches little further than impatience of immediate pain and eagerness for the nearest good.

It's a short-sighted kind of fixation, isn't it, on immediate pain, on immediate desire, and immediate good. And their priorities are skewed.

But the urgent is always the enemy of the important, isn't it? Lord, we will do it, but just let us do this. Let us deal with the problem in our backyard.

[5 : 39] It's not the right time. Let us deal with our pain, with our dissatisfaction. And oddly, it's collective selfishness.

The world's biggest social movement, did you know? It's individualism. And notice what it does to the relationship with God. They are his beloved people here.

He's brought them back from exile into Israel, back to Jerusalem, a remnant, the cream of God's people, if you like. But look at what he calls them in verse 2.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, These people say the time has not yet come. These people, not my people, as you might expect, these people.

Can you sense the detachment there? The break in the relationship? Things are different now, as to when, before the exile, as we've been going through Isaiah.

[6 : 41] The problem is just idolatry all of the time. Well, that is maybe not the case now. Their behaviour has changed, but there is spiritual slowness, isn't there here? The temple, is it worth it?

Can we spare the expense? Can we spare the time? Is it a priority? I question your priorities. He asks them, verse 4, Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in panelled houses while this house lies in ruins?

Do you hear the emphasis there? You yourselves. You've made this all about you. It's not just about how much DIY they're doing at home.

It's not a prohibition on getting a house extension. Half of you will be glad to know. It's not a prohibition on going to Ikea, is it? Or making a home a good place to live.

That is a good thing. There's nothing wrong with that. But it's an indictment of an entire lifestyle. Of a focus, of a whole outlook, of a whole series of priorities in life.

[7 : 52] The lifestyle, the lifestyle, that slots everything in to fit with my needs. With my desires. They're working really hard. They're harvesting.

They're earning money. They're trying to build up their life. But the order is, lifestyle first, temple last. The temple must fit into my lifestyle rather than the lifestyle fitting into the temple.

And that is so often how we think, isn't it? The lifestyle sets the order of our lives. The lifestyle defines how much money I need and want.

We become accustomed to a lifestyle that we choose. We get accustomed to things that we have around us. And we build up certain standards. And before too long we're in too deep, aren't we? And so the job must be right to fit the lifestyle. Then comes the home. We choose a home in an area that we like. It's all about the location, location, location to fit the lifestyle.

[8 : 58] And then there's the church. We hope there's a good one in the area. When we retire, we're going to move to the seaside. But when we get there, we discover there's no church.

But that's okay because the lifestyle is king. What are we saying when we do that? We are saying, like the Israelites, we don't need the temple.

We don't need the building. We don't need the institution. Actually, we can be kind of spiritual Christians at home. We say with the IKEA slogan, home is the most important place in the world. And home is the most important place in the world. But not when it's the wrong home. When it's the wrong house. Of course, I can pray at home and we should.

But God has given them another house. The temple. And that house is to be the prime means of their spiritual life. No satisfaction. Well, God says, I question your priorities of lifestyle first.

[10 : 06] The Lord questions our priorities. Secondly, He calls us to consider our ways. He calls us to consider our ways. He says that twice, doesn't he, in these verses, verse 5 and verse 7.

Verse 7, the Lord of hosts says, consider your ways. Brian Appleyard wrote an article in the Sunday Times called Distraction.

He talks about our modern inability to just stop and think. He says this, I feel that much of my life is ebbing away in the tide of minute by minute distraction.

He talks about our society's attention deficit disorder. Culturally, our culture struggles with that, doesn't it? Maybe you're struggling with that now.

Just stopping and thinking. And God's people, we can be bad at that too, can't we? We love content, we love Bible, and we should.

[11 : 12] We should listen to sermons on a Sunday, put a high value on Bible reading during the week. And there are so many good books, aren't they? devotional books, theological books, and we're always telling you to read them, and we should.

And you should read them. But actually, are we prone to a bit of spiritual ADD? We love content, sometimes at the expense of thought.

We stop to read and listen and download. But when do we stop to think? to think about what we are doing with our lives.

To think about what God is saying. Consider your ways very, very carefully, God says. Just stop. Think about what you're doing. Take a good look at yourselves, he says. You are barely surviving. Look at you, verse 6. You've sown much and harvested little.

[12 : 15] 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.

No satisfaction. So, Mr and Mrs Israelite, they wake up in the morning, but sleep is unsatisfying because their mattress is getting old.

They can't afford a new one. Mr Israelite, instead of having his usual three wheat a bit, has half a wheat a bit. He eats, but he's still hungry.

No satisfaction. He puts his suit on, but it's cold because it's got holes in it. He can't get warm. No satisfaction. They notice that their house is gaining negative equity, and their savings are worth less and less.

Anything they earn just falls into a hole in their pockets. Can't get no satisfaction. Always working, but never resting. Always eating, but never full.

[13 : 20] Always earning, but never enjoying. Always looking for the next thing. Maybe that's you. Just stop, the Lord says, and think why that is.

And it comes back to the question in verse four, doesn't it? If you think that lifestyle is king, you say church can wait, is it really, is it really a time to think like that?

To dwell in panelled houses while mine sits in ruins? Is that really the time that we live in? Is there such a time where that kind of ordering of life actually works?

A time to burn ourselves up for the lifestyle, a time to feather our own nests. Henry Ward Beecher said, no man is more cheated than the selfish man.

There is a link here, isn't there, between their poverty and their dissatisfaction with life and their spiritual piety. The Lord says, you can read the signs here.

[14 : 30] Verse nine, you look for much, but it came to little, and when he brought it home, I blew it away, declares the Lord, because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.

Your suffering is compelled by your spiritual selfishness. You're busying yourselves with your own house, but you've got the wrong house and it's futile, because my house is your everything.

My house is your source of blessing and of life. My house is the key to my presence amongst you. My house is the source of your atonement and comfort and life.

Without my house, you do not have my presence, and without my presence, you are nothing. No satisfaction. Your busyness in the whole of your life is not necessarily the same as obedience.

Your conscientious work is no guarantee of a reward or return, because my presence, my glory in your lives, is your everything.

[15 : 50] Now, it's not always the case that suffering is caused by sin directly. It's important to say that. We live in a fallen world, but sometimes, sometimes we might need to read the signs to consider our ways.

Our dissatisfaction with life may just be the look of the draw, or it may be that our selfishness is cheating us. It may be that while we're busy, we're not actually working on the right house.

Even in church, if we're involved in church things and we're busy in church, busyness is not always the same as obedience. And we can still be working on our own houses, can't we?

Secretly building our own little castles of prestige within the church. And we can procrastinate, we can put off the things that God has actually told us to do.

And all along we're dissatisfied. It doesn't seem to be paying off. The Lord says, consider carefully what you're doing.

[16:59] He questions our priorities. He says, consider our ways. Thirdly, what's the answer? He commands them to build a house. He commands them to build a house, his house.

You know, the model that we tend to go off for life has an ordering. We kind of put things in order of priority, don't we? And often it goes like this. Number one, lifestyle.

Number two, leisure. Number three, job. Number four, home. Number five, church. Number six, serving in church.

But that is not the order that the Lord commands. Look at verse eight. 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. Stop putting it off, stop procrastinating, get the right priorities, let the first thing be the first thing, the one thing, my house, which is not an extra, but it's indispensable to your life.

[18:08] It must be central. But it's interesting, isn't it, in that verse, because the only reason he gives in verse eight as to why they should build a house is that I may take pleasure in it, that I may be glorified, says God.

Actually, while it will do you good to be involved in the building of the house, actually the real reason is, isn't it, that it will pleasure the Lord.

You are so sure about your own needs, and you do things for your own desires, but have you thought about my desires, have you stopped to think about what pleases me?

Because my house gives me pleasure, my worship and my glory gives me pleasure, and the Lord would be no God at all, would he, if worship of him wasn't the right thing to do.

The priority is my glory for my pleasure and for your satisfaction, salvation, because my presence is your everything. Better is a day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.

[19:26] This house is the home we long for, that actually we spend a lot of our lives working so hard to build.

That house is not in the cathedrals of our day, in the Ikea's and the B&Q's. It's not the house that is in here, in the self.

It is the house that is in here, the church. So what do we do? What does building the house look like?

Let me just say this is not a subliminal way of getting you to donate more to the building project, but we are going to talk about that more as we go through Haggai. Some people say, don't they, that the church building, just as a kind of aside, the church building is just a rain shelter.

It doesn't really matter about the church building. I really can see where they're coming from on that. There's a lot of truth in that. But the people's attitude to the building of the temple says something about their attitude to God himself, doesn't it?

[20:38] It was left unfinished. And what they were doing was that they were over-spiritualising things, weren't they? We don't need the building. We can just be spiritual Christians.

I think there is a link there with today, even though the temple has changed a lot. We lose, don't we, that sense of place, of togetherness on the Lord's day, in a particular place, in a particular building. We shouldn't over-spiritualise things. We are physical people. And the Lord has given us physical things that we could understand, spiritual things, the sacraments.

We are physical sensory beings. And so the physical does matter. The kind of building, in one sense, does matter.

It doesn't need to be a cathedral, but it's not unimportant. Some say real Christians don't argue about paint colour on churches, but maybe we need to be a bit more interested, actually, in the building.

[21:47] Just after the Reformation in England, the Earl of Bedford wanted a church to be built. And he asked the architect, Inigo Jones, to complete a design. He said, just build me a barn.

Jones replied, if it's a church building, I'll build you the handsomest barn in all of England. The physical does matter. But, but, most of us, most of us are not going to be doing bricklaying, are we, in the next few months.

We're not going to be mixing cement. And really, that's not where the real punch of this passage is. Because underneath what the Lord is saying to Haggai, it is really a message about the heart, isn't

it?

It's not about bricks and mortar, but about the heart, about priorities. God's people know what the Lord has already said about his temple. He says this in Isaiah 66.

Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What is the house that you would build for me? What is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made.

[22 : 59] And so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look. He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Isaiah 66. The temple that pleases God is a church built upon humility and obedience and trembling at his word.

No satisfaction. salvation. Actually some of the most satisfied people that I've ever met and that we know today are people who have given their lives for this building.

For the church. In humility, obedience and trembling at his word. And they have asked the questions, haven't they, how can I use my gifts?

How can I serve? How can I build relationships? How can I use my gifts for the good of Jesus' church?

[24 : 03] They have asked, haven't they, how can I reverse the order that most people live by, lifestyle church? How can I put church first?

How can the lifestyle fit into church life? That is the order, isn't it, that we so often think, but there was one who taught a different model to that.

A different way round. The most satisfied human being who ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, don't seek what you're to eat and what you're to drink, nor be worried.

For all the nations of the world seek after these things. Your Father knows that you need them.

Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

The Lord Jesus reverses the priorities. The lifestyle can come last because the Lord knows what you need.

[25 : 05] The lifestyle should fit the church, not the other way round. So don't cheat yourself. Don't work on the wrong house in your life.

A house that you will never get satisfaction from ultimately. A house where you will always be working, but never resting. A house where your pockets will have holes.

A house where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. will. But work in God's house for his glory and for his delight, for your satisfaction.

Consider your priorities. Consider your ways and join in. Get building. Just as we close, if this feels like a bit of a guilt trip sermon, maybe it should.

But I want to say that actually, as we hear Haggai's message, we'll see that in this great building project of the temple, we are not the main builders.

[26 : 11] We build because God builds. And that becomes clearer. He has done what God's people have failed to do throughout the centuries.

to build a house for him to take delight in. A house for us to find satisfaction in. And he has done that, hasn't he, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When there was wood and hammers and nails. But he wasn't going up a hill to chop down a tree to build a physical house.

He was ascending a hill for death. He considers it his own ways to me. And there he was, building his church, giving his life, his lifestyle, for his father's pleasure.

He was working on the right house, with the right priorities in the right ways. And so we can do that because he has. We build and serve him the chief builder.

[27 : 25] And we are sure that this is the right house. This is home, sweet home.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.