

Haggai, Week 3
It's Not Like the Good Old Days
October 1, 2017

Charge to Baptismal Candidates.

I'm excited for you, our baptismal candidates,
because today is evidence that the Lord is on the move in your hearts.
Today is for you a marker in time.
A day you can always look back to and say,
On October 1st, 2017 the Jesus met me, and I chose to follow him.

As you mark this day, I have a charge for you.
From this day on, look forward, and don't look back.
This is a New Beginnings.

And I'm certainly not the first one to say this.

The prophet Haggai delivered this very message from God
Because the children of Israel really needed to hear it!
As you all may remember, at this point in their history,
The people had recently returned to Jerusalem
After 70 years of captivity in Babylon.
They enthusiastically began the work of rebuild the temple.

But then *life* happened.
The seemingly unavoidable demands of their personal lives
consumed all their time and energy,
and work on God's house stopped.

They got trapped in the rat race of life
No matter how hard they worked, they could never get ahead.
They were busy, busy, busy, but had little or nothing to show for it.

It never occurred to the that God was trying to get their attention.

That's when the prophet Haggai shows up,
and his first oracle, on August 29th, calls them to account.

You have only yourselves to blame for the futility of your efforts.
The problem is you're running after your own lives, and my house is neglected!
You've got your priorities all backwards!

When they woke up and realized what was *really* going on,
they had exactly the right response –
they got scared.

A holy fear gripped their hearts.

A holy fear is the *RIGHT* response to troubled times.

It the right response to the growing violence in the world

It's the right response to the growing animosity between factions in America.

It's the right response to escalating racial tensions.

It's the right response to the violent shakings of planet earth over the last few months.

It's the right response when we get caught in the rat race of life,

And can't seem to catch a break.

It's the right response to the way too many empty seats in our sanctuary.

Holy fear of God is the right *first* response –
with the second following close on its heels –
Repentance.

The people in Haggai feared God, and repented.
They rearranged their schedules and their lives
and got to work on the things God loved.

The Lord excited and rushes in to reassure them, “I am with you!”
And then he stirred up the spirits of the leaders
and stirred up the spirits of all the people,
and they got to work *together* to build the house of God.

They're now about a month down the road
when discouragement again begins to set in.
Time for another oracle from God through Haggai.

Haggai 2:1-9

Then on October 17 of that same year,
the Lord sent another message through the prophet Haggai.
“Say this to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah,
and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest,
and to the remnant of God's people there in the land:

‘Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor?
How, in comparison, does it look to you now?
It must seem like nothing at all!

You see, as the second temple was being built,
There's an older group of Jews in Jerusalem who aren't terribly impressed.

It was understandable.

These older folks had seen *Solomon's* temple before it was destroyed.

Now Solomon's temple was big and glorious.

Why Solomon's temple housed the Ark of the Covenant!

(which disappeared after the Babylonian blitz) (Raiders . . .)

They could still feel the awe when on the day the temple was dedication,

fire fell from heaven on the altar of sacrifice,

and the Shekinah glory of God's Spirit filled the Holy of Holies.

Whow! They had signs and wonders.

But *this* house of God?

It was a poor substitute for the the way things USED to be.

This temple didn't even *begin* to compare with the splendor of day's gone by.

Now, there was some truth in their comparison.

Zerubbabel's temple *was* built on a much smaller scale

and with much fewer resources.

And there isn't going to be any fireworks.

No grand displays of power.

No Holy Ghost goosebumps.

And so the old folks were right, but they also were very wrong.

Their negative comparison

demoralized the people *and* the leaders,

and the work almost came to another screeching halt.

Their negative comparison (as us older folks are particularly prone to do)

The temple back in the day . . .

was the birthing room of a critical spirit.

And their critical spirit damaged the very work that God had initiated.

This work here doesn't hold a candle to what I've seen.

To how it *used* to be

It's not like this ministry over here

or like that church over there

You'll never win if you're trying to compete with an idealized past.

So candidates, as this for you is the marker of a New Beginnings
May you take to heart . . .

Negative comparison is the birthing room of a critical spirit.
A critical spirit always undermines the very work that God has just begun.

The people of Israel are about to conclude . . .

Well, if we can't be like *that* – then what's the use.

Don't ever let negative comparison make you conclude . . .

Well, If *we* can't be like so and so – then what's the use.

Cause this is what Haggai goes on to relay to the people:

But now the Lord says:

Be strong, Zerubbabel.

Be strong, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

Be strong,

Names of candidates
all you people still left in the land.

And now get to work, for I am with you,

says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

My Spirit remains among you,

just as I promised when you came out of Egypt.

So, do not be afraid.'

The words you'll find written on the bottom of your baptism certificate today are

2 Corinthians 2:14

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ,
and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.