

Build The House

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and with the Lord's enabling, this evening if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of the prophet Haggai, Haggai chapter 1. Haggai chapter 1, and if we take as our text the words of verse 7 and 8, Haggai chapter 1 and verse 7. Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. 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. Build the house, that I may take pleasure in it, and that I may be glorified, says the Lord.

Eighty-five years ago, this text was preached in this church from this pulpit. And this text was preached in this church from this pulpit as the opening address after the church had been refurbished. Because during the 1930s, the roof of this church, it was raised, and then the balcony was put in, and then the staircases up to the balcony, they were also put in. And then the roof, it was reslated, and the church was completely refurbished. And while the works were going on in the church, the congregation, well, they didn't have the privilege of the clan Macquarie like we did. The congregation, they worshipped in a makeshift building just across the road, made of corrugated iron, and the foundations, they're still there to this day. And I'm sure that many of you have read about this in the Pranakan booklet, which gives the history of Barba's Free Church. But in 1933, when everything was completed, and the church was officially opened, 85 years ago, the opening address was taken from this text, and it was preached in this church, and it was from this pulpit, that the words, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it, that I may be glorified, says the Lord. Those words were preached. And the reason I want us to consider this text this evening is not for any sentimental reason, but I want us to remind ourselves, as the congregation of 1933 were reminded, they're sitting, they were sitting in the same pews that you're sitting in this evening. And you know, I want us to remind ourselves that the challenge, the command, and the comfort from the Lord, it's still the same. Because this word, this living word that we have before us, it hasn't changed. And the Lord is still speaking to us in our day and in our generation. The Lord, the Lord, he first spoke to the congregation of the Israelites, two and a half thousand years ago, in their day and in their generation. The Lord spoke to this congregation in 1933, in their day and in their generation. And tonight, the Lord is speaking to us, and he's bringing before us the same challenge, the same comfort, and the same command, so that we will live out God's word in our day and in our generation. And you know, these words, they're so relevant to us because the issues that the congregation of the Israelites, the issues that they were facing two and a half thousand years ago, they were the same issues that were facing the congregation in 1933. And they're the same issues that we are facing here in 2018. The same issues because the issues we all face, regardless of our day and our generation, the issue we all face is when the Lord is not first.

And the Lord is not priority. And yet, we read here that the Lord, he sent a clear message through his prophet Haggai, for the Lord's people to consider their ways and seek first the kingdom of God. And you know, there are three things that I just like us to consider from this passage, because there are three things that the Lord does in this passage. The Lord challenges complacency, the Lord commands construction, and the Lord conveys comfort. They are the three things that the Lord does. The Lord challenges complacency, the Lord commands construction, and the Lord conveys comfort. So we look first of all, the Lord challenges complacency. He challenges complacency. Look at verse one. It says, in the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Sheldiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Thus says the Lord, these people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. Now the period of history which this short book finds itself in, it comes after the Israelites have returned from exile in

Babylon. The Israelites, as we said, as we were singing through these different Psalms, the Israelites, they were exiled into Babylon for 70 years. And that 70 year period, it was a period of chastening because the Israelites, they had repeatedly failed to turn away from their idols and turn back to the Lord. And in the years leading up to the exile, the Lord had warned them again and again. The Lord had sent prophet after prophet calling the Israelites to repent and turn back to the Lord, but they didn't listen. And the Lord promised them again and again that judgment would come if they didn't change their ways. But still, they didn't listen. And so in 586 BC, Jerusalem was invaded by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and the Israelites. Some of them, as we read in Psalm 79, most, a lot of them were slaughtered there and then. But many of them were taken into exile in Babylon. And in Babylon, the Israelites, they were made to live in a foreign land under the rule of a foreign king and they were made to worship foreign gods. But after 70 years had passed, God in his mercy, he allowed, and in his providence, God allowed this Persian king by the name of Cyrus. He overthrew the powers of Babylon.

And Cyrus, he issued this decree authorizing the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and to restore the city and to rebuild the temple. And as you would expect on returning to their own land, the Israelites, they returned with the hope of a new beginning. The past was the past. They were starting something new. And as you would expect on returning, they returned with this enthusiasm, this excitement to rebuild the city and to restore the temple. Everything looked so promising as the Israelites began to lay the new foundations. But you know, it wasn't long until they ran into problems. And we're told in verse 1, in the second year of Darius the king, so he was after Cyrus, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Sheltiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Thus says the Lord of hosts, these people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. You know, Haggai, he gives the exact date when the Lord spoke to him, which was about 15 years after the Israelites had returned from Babylon. And so 15 years on, after they've returned, the work of rebuilding the temple, it's at a standstill. The site is deserted. No one is there.

[8 : 22] The work has stopped. The temple is still in ruins. And as you would expect, Haggai, well, he wondered, what's the problem? What's holding the work back? Why is the temple not rebuilt by now? It's been 15 years.

And in verse 2, Haggai receives his answer. Thus says the Lord of hosts, these people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. The reason the temple was still in ruins was because the people claimed that the time had not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. But the truth was the time had come.

That was the very reason the Israelites had returned to Jerusalem in the first place. It was because the time had come to rebuild the temple. And when the Israelites, when they returned from exile, they had every intention of rebuilding the temple because they had so much zeal, they had so much enthusiasm.

They were desperate to rebuild the Lord's house and worship the Lord there in Jerusalem. They believed that they had learned from the past. They were starting afresh. They wanted this new beginning.

They wanted to follow the Lord wholeheartedly. They wanted to rebuild the city. They wanted to restore the temple and rededicate their lives to the Lord, ensuring that they weren't going to make the same mistakes again. But sadly, what started out with good intentions very quickly fell away.

[9 : 48] And the Lord reveals to Haggai what the problem was. He says in verse 3, Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses while this house lies in ruins?

And what the Lord says to Haggai is, instead of first rebuilding the temple and rededicating their lives to the Lord, the people stopped building the Lord's house and they started building their own houses. Of course, there was nothing wrong with the Israelites building their own houses for themselves. But it was the fact that they were trying to make their houses so big and so grand and so luxurious that their houses, they were going to be as glorious as Solomon's palace.

Because, you know, the only other house in the Bible which had panelled walls and was finely decorated, the only other house was the palace of King Solomon. And so the reason the work of the temple stopped was because the priorities of the people had changed. They were no longer focused upon building the Lord's house. They were now focused upon building their own houses

and having their own comforts. And because the Israelites had become so comfortable in their finely decorated and grand homes, their enthusiasm, it petered away. Their zeal for the Lord disappeared. Their heart towards the things of God grew cold. And you know what? They became complacent. They were content with what they had and saw no need of commitment to the things of the Lord and his house. In other words, they'd lost sight of their priorities.

They'd lost sight of the importance of putting the Lord's things first before everything else. They'd lost sight of making the Lord central to their lives. They were no longer seeking first the kingdom of God. And as a result, the temple was left lying in ruins. And so what does the Lord do?

Well, he sends his servant, as he always does. He sends his messenger, Haggai, to challenge the complacency of the people. He sends his messenger to question their motives.

[12:17] And the Lord says to his people in verse 6, You have sown much and harvested little. 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. Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. Consider your ways.

You know, my friend, the Lord challenges the complacency of his people by telling them that they're too busy with their own things. And they're not focused upon the main thing, which is worshipping the Lord. They're too busy sowing their own seeds. They're too busy eating their own feasts. Too busy drinking their own wine. Too busy dressing for their parties. Too busy throwing all their money away. He says they're too busy. In fact, they're so busy, he says, that they've forgotten about the Lord and his house. It's not on their mind. It's not their focus anymore.

And you know, my friend, these words might be two and a half thousand years old, but they're so relevant for us in our day and generation. Because, you know, we've never been so comfortable, not only financially, but also in one sense spiritually.

Because we never had so much access to the Bible. We can read the Bible in any language. We can read it on paper, on a screen, on a phone, on a tablet.

The Bible has never been such an accessible book. And yet the Bible has never been such an avoided book. Because in our day and generation, reading the Bible is avoided.

[14:10] Whether you're a Christian or not a Christian. And we avoid reading the Bible. Because we're too busy. We're too comfortable. And when we're comfortable, it's easy to become complacent.

But the truth is, being a Christian in Scotland today, you could say, well, it's relatively easy. There's no threat of persecution surrounding us.

Like it is in other places throughout the world. There's no fear that someone would put us in prison for confessing the name of Christ. That will probably come. And it may come sooner than we think. But the reason it will come is because, you know, the greatest persecutor of the church in Scotland today is our apathy. That's what's persecuting us.

Our apathy towards the things of the Lord and our lack of dedication to the Lord and commitment to His cause and devotion to His day. Our comfort.

[15:15] It has made us complacent. Because we've lost sight of our priorities. Because our priority, our chief end, it's not to be entertained by the world.

Our chief end is not to busy ourselves and plough all our energy into the things that have no eternal benefit for us. My friend, our chief end is to bring glory to God in the highest.

But you know, our priorities change when the church becomes too like the world. And when the church seeks to live for the things of the world.

That's when the Lord is neglected. That's when His word is put to one side. That's when His cause is ignored and His day is marginalized. And like the Israelites, our priorities change when we become too busy with our own thing.

We become too busy with work. Too busy with our feasting. Too busy with our drinking. Too busy with our parties. Too busy wasting all our money. Too busy. So busy that we can't make church.

[16:21] We can't make the prayer meeting. We're too tired to come to the Lord's house. And like the Israelites, we say, it's not time to rebuild the Lord's house. We'll do it later.

We'll do it another day. We'll do it when we have more time. We'll do it when, I'll do it when I'm retired. When I finish doing my own thing. It's not time to rebuild the house of the Lord because there are so many other things that I want to get through.

And you know, the Lord's house and the Lord's cause, it lies in ruins. But what's the answer to all this apathy and complacency? Well, some say, well, what do you expect living in a day of small things?

Others will claim, well, we just need a revival to sort out all our problems. But you know what the Lord's answer was to the people's apathy and complacency?

It wasn't wait for change. It wasn't send a revival. The Lord's answer was for the people to consider their ways and get to work.

[17 : 30] Consider your ways, he says. Build the house. The Lord's answer was to command construction. And that's what I'd like us to see secondly.

We've seen that the Lord challenges complacency, but secondly, the Lord commands construction. The Lord commands construction. He says in verse 7, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways, 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.

We said earlier that this text was preached in this church from this pulpit as the opening address of the refurbishment of the church in 1933, 85 years ago.

But I'm sure I've mentioned this to you before that this text is also the reason why I'm your minister.

This was the text that the Lord confirmed to me that I was to accept the call to minister here.

And I always go back to this text because when I'm struggling in ministry with doubts or discouragement, thinking, yes, I do think it that I should never have been a minister and maybe wanting to give up altogether.

[18 : 48] When I'm struggling, I always go back to my call, my call to the ministry and my call to Barvis. Because sometimes when everything else is stripped from you, all you have is the promises of God's word.

And these situations, I go back, in these situations, I go back to this text and I remember how the Lord spoke to me so clearly and so powerfully. And I'll just remind you if I haven't told you before. When I was a student, I preached this same passage in this church from this pulpit. But after the service, session clerk, Angus, he drew my attention to the history of Barvis Free Church from that Pranakin book.

And as you know, as I've said, the opening address was from this text. And at the time, I thought, well, that's an interesting history to read. But that night, I asked the Lord that if the Lord was going to call me to be the minister here, it would be through that text and that text alone.

And you know, a few weeks went past and then I returned to the Free Church College for my final semester wondering where the Lord was going to call me. And anyway, on the first Tuesday after coming back to college, we had worship as we always did in the afternoon.

[20 : 06] and we started reading through the book of Exodus. So on Tuesday, we read Exodus 1. On Wednesday, it was Exodus 2. On Thursday, we read Exodus 3. But on Friday, Professor John McIntosh, he stood up and announced that we're going to read from Haggai chapter 1.

And in the professor's reading of this passage, he stopped at verses 7 and 8 and he stressed this text and its relevance for us as a church today. That as preachers of God's word, we are to urge the people of God in a day when God is not central.

We're to urge them to build the house that the Lord may take pleasure in it, that his name may be glorified. And from that moment, I knew that the Lord was calling me here.

And to this day, that text is precious to me. And it confirms and reaffirms my call to this parish. And until that text is taken from me and the Lord calls me elsewhere, I will remain here.

Because the command of this text is for construction. We're not here to wait for change. We're not here to wait for a revival.

[21 : 20] No, my friend, we are here to consider our ways and build the house. We're to consider our motives, our mindset, and our mission. We're to consider our ways and build this house.

Because as it was for the Israelites in 2500 BC, and as it was for this congregation in 1933, it's the same for us tonight.

In 2018, the Lord is commanding construction. Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways, 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.

And you know this phrase, consider your ways, it was repeated in verse 5 and then it's repeated again in verse 7. Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways.

The phrase literally means set your heart on the right path. Set your heart on the right path. And this was important because the Israelites, they had put their own interests before the Lord's interests.

[22 : 30] They had made themselves and their lives and their homes, they had made all these things their priority over the Lord's house. But they weren't being faithful to the Lord.

And the Lord was calling them to consider their ways, to set their heart on the right path. The Lord was calling his people to covenant commitment.

The Lord was calling them and commanding them to remain faithful to him because he had certainly remained faithful to them. And you know, that's what the Lord often reminded his people when they became wayward and disobedient.

The Lord would remind his people who he is and what he has done for them. He would say, I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the house of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

And with that, the Lord would remind his people that he is their covenant king and he's the one who has redeemed them. He's the one who saved them. He's the one who delivered them. And therefore, as their covenant king, he has a right to command them to be obedient to him.

[23 : 36] And that's what the Lord is doing here. He says to his people, consider your ways. Set your heart on the right path. And you know, the Lord has the same command for us tonight.

Because Jesus Christ, he is our covenant king. He's the one who has redeemed us. He's the one who has saved us. He's the one who delivered us. He's the one who died in our place.

Therefore, as our covenant king, Jesus commands us to be obedient to him. And he commands us to consider our ways and to set our heart on the right path.

And my friend, the right path is to build the house that the Lord may take pleasure in it and that his name may be glorified. And as it was for the Israelites, until we make the Lord our priority, until we put him first and get to work on building his house, there will be no blessing.

That's what the Lord affirmed to the Israelites in verse 9. The Lord said to them, You looked for much and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away.

[24 : 49] Why, declares the Lord of hosts, because of my house that lies in ruins while each of you busies himself with his own house. Therefore, the heavens above you have withheld the dew and the earth has withheld its produce.

And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast and on all their labours.

The Lord promised that there will be no blessing until the people set their heart on the right path and seek to build the Lord's house. The Lord promised that there will be no blessing until they seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And you know, the same is true for us. There will be no blessing on this house until we are more active in prayer, more attentive in the prayer meeting, more dedicated to studying God's word, more committed in outreach, more faithful in our Christian witness, more devoted to the Lord's day, more constant in our church attendance.

My friend, we need to consider our ways and we need to set our heart on the right path. We need to think about our priorities as Christians and make sure that we have the Lord as our number one priority because that's our confession.

[26 : 10] That's our confession as a Christian. If you have confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord, then he is Lord over every area of your life.

not just Sunday, not just Wednesday, every day, every moment, every hour, every minute. And as your Lord, Jesus is first.

He's foremost. He's priority. He gets the glory. He has the preeminence. He's prophet, priest, and king. He's Lord. He's your saviour.

He deserves that. Therefore, we're to give it to him. And as our Lord and saviour, he's commanding construction. He's commanding construction.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways, 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.

[27 : 12] The Lord is commanding construction. And so in this passage we see that the Lord challenges complacency. The Lord commands construction and then lastly the Lord conveys comfort.

The Lord conveys comfort. Look at verse 12. Then Zerubbabel, the son of Sheltiel and Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord

their God and the words of Haggai the prophet as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message. I am with you, declares the Lord. What we see in these verses is that the people respond to the Lord's challenge and the Lord's command. Because we're told that Zerubbabel, who was the governor and Joshua, the high priest and all the remnant of the people, this remnant that came back to Jerusalem, we're told that they all responded in obedience. They all responded to the voice of the Lord to build the house that the Lord may be glorified. And when they responded in obedience, the Lord conveyed to them the greatest promise of comfort. [28 : 29] I am with you, says the Lord. I am with you. And you know, this promise of the Lord's presence when working to build his church, it's a glorious promise.

And it's a promise that was given again and again throughout the history of the church. I am with you. It was the promise that was given to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob. The Lord said, I am with you and I will keep you wherever you go. It was the promise that was given to Moses when he thought that he was unable to speak to Pharaoh. The Lord said, I will be with you and with your mouth and I will teach you what to do. It was the promise that was given to Joshua as he stood at the banks of the river Jordan. The Lord said to him, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. It was the promise that was also given to Gideon when they were in the land of promise. When he was called to go and fight the Midianites, the Lord said, I will be with you. I will strike the Midianites as one man. It was even the promise that was given to the Israelites before they went into exile. [29 : 36] That even though judgment was coming, the Lord affirmed his promise to his people through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said, fear not, I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God.

I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you by my righteous right hand. And my friend, this promise of the Lord's presence, it's the same promise which Jesus gave to the disciples before Jesus ascended to heaven. Jesus said to them the last words of Matthew's gospel, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. This promise, it's a wonderful promise and it's been given to the church throughout every century and this promise still stands and it still conveys the Lord's word of comfort to his church. I am with you. I am with you. And you know, this is the greatest comfort word to us as Christians when we think that we can't speak up for Jesus. Jesus says, I am with you. I am with you. When we think that we're inadequate like Abraham, the promise, I am with you. [30 : 51] When we think we're inarticulate like Moses, I am with you. When we think that we're inexperienced like Joshua, I am with you. When we think that we're insignificant like Gideon, I am with you.

When we think that we're weak like the Israelites or uneducated like the disciples, the Lord says to us, I am with you. I am with you. How do you think I stand in this pulpit week by week? The Lord's promise. I am with you. The Lord is faithful to his promise. And as his people, the Lord has promised to be with us wherever we go and whatever we go through. And his promise to us is that he's not only with us. He promises he will never leave us. And he will never forsake us. You know, it's a wonderful promise to those who have the Lord as their priority and are committed to seeking first the kingdom of God. And you know, maybe thinking about maybe there's someone in your heart whom you would love to speak about their soul. Maybe there's someone you'd like to encourage to come to church. [32 : 04] Someone you're praying for all the time and you want to invite them or speak to them or whatever it may be. Well, I can only encourage you to spend this week praying for an opportunity to do so.

Pray for an opportunity. because the Lord has conveyed to you his promise of comfort. I will be with you. I will be with you. That's the promise the Israelites had as they got to work on rebuilding the temple. They started work three weeks later. We're told in verse 14, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Sheltiel, governor of Judah, the spirit of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the

spirit of all the remnant of the people.

And they came and worked in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the 24th day of the second month, in the 24th day of the month, in the sixth month, on the second year of Darius, the king.

Three weeks later, the people got to work. The people responded in obedience. When the Lord challenged complacency, when he commanded construction, and when he conveyed comfort, they got to work.

[33 : 28] And you know, my friend, we need to do the same. We need to hear the word of the Lord. We need to respond in obedience.

We need to get to work. Because the Lord's command to us tonight, as it was two and a half thousand years ago, as it was in 1933, and as it is in 2018, the Lord is saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways, go up to the hills and bring wood and build a house, that I may take pleasure in it, and that I may be glorified, says the Lord.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word, that thy word is unchanging.

It is like thyself. It is a word that is without error. It is a word that is so true. It is a word that is powerful.

And Lord, help us, we pray thee. Help us, Lord, to consider our ways, to respond in obedience, and to seek to build this house. Thou hast given to us a commission and a command.

[34 : 47] And help us, Lord, to be faithful. We know there are many distractions. There are many things to take our mind and our heart off the work. But help us, we pray thee, to keep looking to Jesus, that we might know him and love him and follow in his footsteps, because he is the author and he remains the finisher of our faith.

Bless us, Lord, we pray thee. Bind us together. Help us, Lord, to work together for the furtherance of thy kingdom, to lift up the name of Jesus, knowing that at one day it will be at the name of Jesus, that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Go with us then, we pray, into a new week. Keep us in whatever we face and help us to know thy presence, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

We shall bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 69. Amen. Psalm 69. We're singing from verse 32 down to the end of the psalm. Psalm 69. Psalm 69. Psalm 69. Psalm 69. Psalm 69. Psalm 69. Psalm 69. It's talking about the promise of the Lord building.

[36 : 23] This building his house. When this the humble men shall see, it joy to them shall give. O all ye that do seek the Lord, your hearts shall ever live.

For God the poor hears and will not his prisoners contemn. Let heaven and earth and seas him praise and all that move in them. For God will Judah's cities build and he will Zion save that they may dwell therein and it in sure possession have.

And they that are his servant's seed inherit shall the same. So shall they have their dwelling there that love his blessed name. These verses of Psalm 69 Acts of the chapter these ■■■ böse in theshankst.

To God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. This the humble man shall see, Yet joy to them shall give. All ye that do seek the Lord's Pure heart shall ever live.

[37 : 34] For God the poor here shant will not His prisoner contend.

Let him land earth and seize him great, And all that move in there.

For God will Judah's cities build, And he will Zion save.

And they may well lay in a day, In true possession of.

And they that are his servant's seat, In heaven shall the same.

[38 : 52] So shall they haunt their dwelling there, Than love this blessed name.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with you all, Now and forevermore.

Amen.