

Seek First the Kingdom of God

Matthew 6:33

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). Jesus also said, *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”* (Matt. 7:24). In other words, “Hear and do.” It is not, “me first and Jesus last.” It is also not the philosophy of family first, no matter what. Our success as children of God is based on hearing and doing God’s word.

At the beginning of our Christian life, we confessed, “Jesus is Lord” and we are baptized to have sins washed away (Rom 6). Jesus commands us to repent, believe, and love God and one another. Jesus has received all authority from the Father. We are to obey everything he commands, as taught by His word. I want to look at the book of Haggai.

Around 536 BC, fifty thousand people of the Jewish remnant returned from Babylon under the guidance of Cyrus. What was the purpose of their return? They came back to rebuild the temple that lay in ruins, as Cyrus commissioned them to do:

This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1:2–4)

Yet the people failed to rebuild. It is true that they laid the foundation of the temple and offered daily sacrifices, on the altar of burnt offering. But they failed to finish building God’s house so that he could dwell in it and bless his people as the Lord of hosts, the Lord Almighty.

Cyrus, God's choice servant who defeated Babylon, would later die in battle. It was he of whom Isaiah prophesied that God would use to let his people go: ***“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut”*** (Isa. 45:1). Jesus runs his universe as He sees fit.

In Haggai, several years had passed, and the remnant failed to complete the purpose for which they had returned—to rebuild God's house. There are eleven references to the house of the Lord in this very short prophecy. These people had stopped building and failed to resume until God sent his prophet Haggai in the second year of Darius, in the sixth month of 520 BC, on the first day.

The name “Haggai” means happy. It is good to see a happy elder or a happy preacher. Haggai prophesied to the leaders of the remnant: Prince Zerubbabel, whose name means “born in Babylon,” who was a grandson of King Jehoiachin, and to Jeshua the high priest. Let me suggest that the most precious thing in this world is the word of God. Without it, how can anyone be saved? But it is not always easy to find. In Samuel 3:1 we read, ***“The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.”*** The Lord was refusing to speak to Eli and his wicked sons.

When the Lord speaks to us, He shows us love. Paul writes, ***“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent [by God]? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of salvation!’”*** Rom. 10:14–15.

Thank God for His teachers, who feed us with the word of God! God's word is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training God's people to do righteousness for God's glory. So, God sent Haggai, the happy prophet, to speak God's word to the remnant, God's covenant people.

God's Charge against His People

Haggai begins, *“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built.’”* Then *the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?’”* (Hag. 1:2–4). The people were saying, “The time to rebuild God’s house has not yet come.” **That was a lie. It was an excuse for not performing.** But Haggai exposed their hypocrisy. Instead of calling them “my people,” he called them **“these people,”** a derogatory term. That designation disclosed God’s displeasure with his disobedient people. These were not covenant-keeping people. They had time to build mansions for themselves, but they said they did not have time to build God’s house.

They said, *“It is not yet time to build the house for the covenant Lord, Yahweh, the Lord of hosts.”* They were saying, “me first, God last.” The Lord himself spoke to them about this: *“‘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 his own house’”* (Hag. 1:9).

This is a “me first, God last” philosophy. Such people will think that God can always wait. Such people may live seventy years or more, and yet they will not take time to trust Jesus for their eternal salvation, even though they might die at any time. If you are such a person, I ask you to repent and trust in Jesus Christ today. Seek ye first the kingdom of God by seeking the King, Jesus Christ.

People of God, Give Careful Thought

Five times the Holy Spirit spoke through Haggai, telling the people of God to give careful thought to their ways: Haggai 1:5: *“Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways.’”*

Haggai 1:7: *“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways.’”*

Haggai 2:15: *“Now give careful thought to this from this day on—consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the Lord’s temple.”*

Haggai 2:18: *“From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid. Give careful thought.”*

We must think carefully about the word of God when we hear it. Pay attention! Christianity is for people who think clearly, that is, biblically. Paul reasoned with the learned, the rich, and the powerful people of his day with a single argument. To these mighty, brilliant people he said, *“Why should any of you consider it incredible [unreasonable] that God raises the dead?”* (Acts 26:8). I am an educated man, and I believe every word the Bible says. Bright people believe in the Bible.

The infinite God of heaven, the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God, who created the universe—this God is in the business of raising the dead. And the resurrection is reasonable when we understand who it is that is raising the dead.

The God of the Bible created the universe. Chance did not do so, it was God, as revealed in the Bible. The same God by his mercy converts unbelievers who then become salt and light. That is amazing isn’t it? It is this same God who raises the dead. He does all things.

So, Christians, think! Analyze! Reason! Use logic; there is cause and effect. “Be thankful so you can be thankful”, thankful to God. The heart of the covenant is, “I am your God and you are my obedient, covenant-keeping people.”

We must serve this God whom we confessed as Lord wholeheartedly. Jesus said, *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money”* (Matt. 6:24). James, his brother, said, *“A double-minded man is unstable in all he does”* (Jas. 1:8).

My experience tells me that a double-minded man is single-minded in doing evil. We are to serve God wholeheartedly. In Luke 10:27 we read, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

Jesus is in His church, telling her what she needs to hear. Concerning the church in Ephesus, he says, *“I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.”* The Sovereign Lord does not like such double-minded people. Double-mindedness says, *“me first, God second.”* The Lord continues, *“Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place”* (Rev. 2:1–5). Jesus is saying: **Get back to your first love.**

Listen brethren, if we allow anything to become more important in life than Jesus, we’re not thinking clearly. It is our duty to love Jesus with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. If we choose not to do this, we have left our first and most important love. Seek first His kingdom. Not a suggestion – rather it is a command from He who died for us.