

Today we're going to start a short series in the book of Haggai and it's called, '**The time is now**'. If you have a bible you might want to look it up – it's just after Zephaniah and before Zechariah if that helps. I am going to refer to verses from the reading and it is good that you check them for yourself and make sure I'm not making things up.

Sometimes we get a bit dissatisfied with life and think by the time that I reached this, whatever this is, that there'd be something different or something better. I'm kind of surprised that this is where I am. I had hoped I would have a better job, a better car, my family with me. Maybe you have these and you have the children you wanted and you discover you're really busy and broke.

I know some people who would say, "I'm going to try religion. I'm going to try religion," and so we try to do the religious thing and then life doesn't really change and they wake up and think, I really thought that by this point, there'd be something more, something better, or something different.

That's kind of where the people were in Haggai's day. It all started with Solomon. He built an amazing Temple for God and it was so amazing that people travelled from all over the world to see it and to worship God. After Solomon died people started worshipping other gods and idols so God eventually allowed them to be taken captive to Babylon so that they would turn back to him. The temple was destroyed and the people were in slavery for 70 years.

Then in 538 BC some Israelites were allowed to travel back to Jerusalem to rebuild after King Cyrus destroyed the Babylonian Empire. Most of them would not have been there before but they would have heard all about it in their time in captivity. They went back and started to rebuild the temple but then the locals came and started harassing them because they didn't want the temple rebuilt – That story appears in the early chapter of the book of Ezra and you can also read about it in Nehemiah. So the Israelites stopped building the Temple for God and started building their own houses. They did nothing to the temple for 14 years due to fear and apathy – they had their house and everything was fine.

If you have children you'll understand when I say, "You'll never guess what your child has done?" That's what it's like when God says "These people" in verse 2. Throughout the OT they are referred to as 'my people' – heard the cries from Egypt – God was angry with them – not something we like to think about today

Why had they decided it was not time to build the temple? Because they were facing opposition. The thing is, when we are doing something that will honour God we will face opposition. When we take steps of faith we will face opposition. However, with God's help we can learn to ***choose the hard right over the easy wrong***. It would be so easy to hold a grudge against someone who has hurt you, however, it's hard but right to forgive. It's hard but right to be extravagantly generous.

I want you to think for a moment if there is something in your life that you think is unfinished, (pic of jigsaw) an unfinished assignment. It could have been recent or from years ago but it's something that God put on your heart: maybe you were to share your faith with a friend; volunteer for something in church; give something to somebody; start journaling; write a book; help with young church – whatever it is, you feel it was from God and it hasn't really gone away.

Well today I believe God is saying, "Now is the time". Vs 3-5 *Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways."*

Panelled houses were very upmarket. This was high end living. And God says they are to think about what they have done – they have the best for themselves and have ignored God. They have it the wrong way round. It's not that God doesn't want us to have nice things or expensive things. It is ok for us to have nice things. But God doesn't want nice things to have us.

It's about getting our priorities right. So, are you putting something ahead of his calling? Are you consumed with yourself instead of being consumed with God and showing His love to other people? Is there something that you're putting ahead of God? *Give careful thought to your ways.* **God wants us to choose the hard right over the easy wrong.**

Look at verse 6: *You 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."*

Let me give you the modern translation. You're working your backside off and you still don't feel like you have anything. You're pouring your life into your career and it just feels empty and hollow. You have more than you've ever had before and you still don't feel satisfied. You entertain yourself. You watch your large screen tv. You go to movies. You eat out. Yet there's still a longing for something more.

God tells them again to think about what they're doing and then he tells them what they need to do – but he breaks it down for them

- Go up the mountain
- Bring down wood
- Built the temple

Go up to the mountain. Now wait a minute. Going up to the mountain, that's kind of hard. That's like have you seen that mountain? That's hard. Choose the hard right over the easy wrong. Bring down the timber. Oh, no, that's hard again. Choose the hard right over the easy wrong. Come down and build the temple step by step.

Here's a problem. So many of us are going, "God, what about steps four, five, and six? I need the details, but who's going to pay for this and how is it going to happen and where are we

going to go and what's going to go on and who's going to be there? Who owns the trees? I need to know details, God. How much time is it going to take and how long do I have to do this and how's it going to work out?

God says, "Don't worry about steps four, five, and six, just do one, two, and three. My word is a lamp unto your feet, a light unto your path." If His word is a lamp unto our feet, He may show us steps one, two, and three and we won't see four, five, and six until we take one, two, and three. You see, you have to do what God showed you first before He reveals more to you.

That's kind of where we are with Path of Renewal: we've taken steps

1. Applied and been accepted
2. Asked for and received money from Presbytery
3. Training, reading and homework for David
4. Asked for volunteers and now have a team together
5. More training in October
6. Listen for God speaking.....
7. ?
8. ?

Sometimes you say, "I want the details." God says, "You can't handle the details. I'll give you what you need when you get there, but you need to take the first step." What do you do?

What would be the first step for you to honour God's calling on your life? You see, this is what it means to walk by the spirit. That's what we're commanded to do as followers of Jesus. We are supposed to follow the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit, but I want to know details. I want God to show me everything. God's not going to show me step four, five, and six until you take steps one, two, and three, so there's an unfinished assignment. What do I do? Very simply the way to get started is to stop talking about it, thinking about it, planning for it and start doing it. That's it. Just stop thinking about it, stop talking about it, and go up to your mountain today. Do something today. Do the next thing that God has showed you and do it today. Be faithful to God today.

The thing is they thought they were ok and that they were avoiding trouble from their neighbours by ignoring God but they had actually made it harder for themselves because God brought famine to them to get their attention. Life was harder because they ignored God. If your life is difficult right now would you please take time to ask God if it's because you have somehow been ignoring him – it may not be, but if it is you know what to do: repent, accept his forgiveness and do what he asked.

The last verse of the reading shows us something of the compassion of God for his people – he starts off calling them 'these people' and ends up assuring them of his presence. You can be sure that if you are being obedient to the call of God on your life, no matter how difficult that is, God is with you.

