Give Careful Thought to Your Ways

Haggai 1:1-15

Key Verse: 1:5 “Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways.”

Unlike the previous Thanksgiving week, we will study the book of Haggai, one of the twelve minor prophets in the OT. Haggai is a contemporary prophet along with Zechariah, who encouraged the Israelites to rebuild the temple of God. In today’s passage we learn what God told his people through Haggai and how they responded to God’s command. Above all, in this Thanksgiving week we want to study the spiritual meaning of rebuilding the temple of God in us and among us.

Verses 1-2 explains the background of rebuilding the temple. Look at verses 1-2. “***In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest: This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, “The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house.***” Here King Darius indicates Darius the Great, king of Persia, who is different from Darius the king of Mede who appeared in the book of Daniel. King Darius in the book of Haggai appears long after King Darius of Daniel died. It was around 520 BC, 18 years after Cyrus the king of Persia had allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple of God. (Ez 1:1-7) In 538 BC God moved the heart of Cyrus to support and allow the exiled Israelites to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. At that time the king sent Zerubbabel to Jerusalem as governor along with 42,330 besides many other slaves and cattle. (Ez 2:64-67) Under the king’s order and royal support with materials, Zerubbabel and the returned Israelites began to lay the foundation of the temple. Even before completing the foundation, they offered burnt offerings to God out of their joy and thanks. (Ez 3:6) But when they were about to build the temple, they confronted strong opposition. The enemies of Israel and Benjamin who had resided there became jealous and demanded their participation in the building. When Zerubbabel refused them, they began to discourage the Israelites and threaten them not to continue to work. (Ez 4:4-5) Even the enemies bribed officials to work against the workers and frustrate their plan during the entire reign of Cyrus and down to the reign of Darius. The construction had been delayed for 16 years until God’s message reached Haggai in 520 BC.

In verse 2 why did the Israelites say that the time had not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house? They might have been afraid of opposition and persecution from their enemies. They did not want to fight against them. They thought that rebuilding the temple was not urgent work. They were also selfish. Look at verses 3-4. “***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***?” According to God’s words, the Israelites were busy in doing their own work and business. Here living in their paneled houses means that they were living in comfortable and good-looking houses. While they worked for their own houses, God’s house was ignored, remaining in ruin. In fact, they did not have time to think about the rebuilding of God’s house. Rebuilding God’s temple was not their priority. Building their own houses and working for their own businesses became their first choice.

People often say, “The time has not yet come to commit myself to church. I need more time to meet God in my own way.” They do not want to commit themselves to God not because they are waiting for God’s time, but because they do not want to submit themselves to God. Jesus said in John 3:19-20, “*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil*.” They do not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. They have a fear of being changed, fear of loss, fear of commitment. They make excuses not to come to God by saying these. They also want to fit God’s time to their own time schedule.

Others say that their time has not yet come. But their time never comes until they die. No one says that they will preach the gospel when the time comes or when they are ready. We preach the gospel simply because we love Jesus and obey his command. We preach the word in season and out of season whether we are prepared or not. The time when we obey is the time God wants. Amen! The sin of the Israelites was exposed by God through the prophet Haggai. God has been patient with them for the last 16 years. Now God commanded them to repent and obey his word.

Look at verse 5. “***Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways***.” In verse 7 God said the same message, “*Give careful thought to your ways.*”, and he repeats it in chapter 2:15,18. What does it mean to the Israelites “give careful thought to your ways”? I answer this with three ‘R’s: *Repent, Remember, and Rebuild*. First, repent. What is repentance? Repentance is to grieve our wrongdoings and change our direction from sin to God. They went the wrong way. Therefore, God told them to give careful thought to their ways. They had to remember why the temple had been destroyed 66 years ago. This was because their ancestors had sinned against God. They disobeyed God and worshiped idols. They did not like to put God in their hearts. So, God sent Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, to Jerusalem to destroy the city and take them away to Babylonia. If they reviewed their history, they could have stopped repeating the same mistake.

God also taught them that abandoning God is the source of curse in verse 6 and v 9-11. 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***.” God continued in verses 9-11. “” ***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 your own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and all the labor of your hands.***” In these verses God taught them that famine and poverty were the result of their abandoning the LORD Almighty, who is the source of blessing. Jeremiah 2:13 says, “*My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water*.” Of course, we cannot say that all disasters came from the LORD, but many of them are caused by their sin. In modern terms they work hard day and night, and they make more than $ 200,000 a year, but they always are in debt. In their lives something unexpected frequently happens which drains out all their money. Even though they live in a luxurious mansion, eat delicious food, and drink expensive wine, they cannot enjoy them all. This is because they are not healthy enough to enjoy all of these.

God pointed out their selfishness. They did not put God first, but themselves. In verse 9 God said that they were busy with their own house but left God’s house ruined. They might have made excuses with many reasons such as opposition from their enemies, lots of demand from their business and building their own houses. But they were wrong in their priority. Many European Christians crossed the Atlantic Ocean and arrived in the land of America. What they did first as soon as they arrived was to build their church. They built their church first, and then their houses. Then, God blessed this country abundantly. We need to restore this spiritual order in this country, our ministry, home and even each person. Wrong priority! This was the topic which they should consider.

Second, remember that our God is the LORD Almighty. The word, “LORD Almighty’ appears more than 90 times in the book of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. This indicates that God wanted the Israelites to believe that our LORD is Almighty God in whom all things are possible. God wanted them to remember that all things came from the LORD Almighty. Their harvest, wealth, health, and all things came from the LORD. Each year this time we celebrate Thanksgiving Day. On Thanksgiving Day, we remember how God has blessed each person, family, and this nation. We remember God and thank him who has protected us from all harm and danger, provided all things necessary, and guided us into the right path. Our God is the LORD Almighty who makes impossible possible. God wanted the Israelites to trust in him and depend on him only. Amen!

Third, rebuild the temple of the LORD. Look at verse 8. “***Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD.***” God does not want to see his people just sitting down sorrowful and despaired. He wanted them to go up to the mountains, cut timber, and build his house. The construction had been delayed for 16 years. There was no time remaining for thinking and discussing. They had to get up and rebuild. Real repentance accompanies action. Repentance without action is fake.

The temple of the LORD was the symbol of God’s presence. The temple was the heart of the Israelites and the center of their life. The previous tabernacle was called ‘The Tent of Meeting.’ where God and his people met together. God wants to dwell in the temple and to be worshiped and honored. What is the spiritual meaning of rebuilding the temple for us? God wants us to restore our priority. God wants us to put him in the first place of our heart. God wants us to love him with all our hearts, with all our mind, and with all our strength. Today rebuilding the temple of the LORD is to receive Jesus Christ in our heart as Lord and Savior and accept his lordship over our lives. Jesus is the incarnation of the temple. Jesus said in John 3:19, “*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days*.” John said that the temple Jesus had spoken was his body. (Jn 3:21) Jesus destroyed the temple through his death on the cross and rebuilt it in three days through his resurrection.

Look at verse 12. “***Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD***.” Zerubbabel, Joshua and all his people obeyed God and the message of Haggai. When Haggai delivered his message to his people, the LORD said, “***I am with you***.” (13) Look at verses 14. “S***o the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubabbel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God.”***  Here the LORD stirred up their spirit means the LORD moved their hearts. They all went up to the mountain, cutting timbers, rolling stones, and began to build the temple of God. It was the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month. 4 years later God’s message was delivered through Haggai, finally the rebuilding of the temple was completed in 516 BC.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday we give careful thought to our ways: give careful thought to our way of thinking and our way of life. Now we check how we worship God, how we serve Him. You check how you spend your life, how you spend time and money. Do you give a whole tithing to God? Give careful thought about how you make schedules, what you choose, where you go, whom you meet, and so on. Give careful thought to whatever you do in all aspects of your life. I pray that the Holy Spirit may give you wisdom and guidance when we do so. Amen! Happy Thanksgiving!