



The Book of Haggai *Seeking God First*

**Christ Redeemer Church
Sermon Series Study Guide
Spring 2021**

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Special thanks to Anna Kaye Schulte for the sermon series artwork

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INTRODUCTION

"Since the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider: Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you."

~Haggai 2:18-19 (ESV)

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."
~Matthew 6:33 (KJV)

"If instead someone takes pleasure in himself and wills to enjoy his own power in a perverse imitation of God, he becomes more and more insignificant as he desires to become greater. This is pride, the beginning of all sin; and the beginning of pride is apostasy from God."

~Augustine of Hippo, On Free Choice of the Will

The Prophet Haggai: An Introduction

Difficult times have a way of sharpening our focus. We may take time to examine our priorities and emphasize what is truly important. We may take stock of our relationship with God and begin to seek Him with renewed vigor. At the same time, when a period of intense suffering or trial comes to an end, anxiety over the future and desire for comfort tempt us away from seeking God's kingdom. To combat this tendency and train our desires, God's people have always observed seasons of fasting.

We live in a peculiar time of stress and anxious worry. While we hope to see a return to normal, we can learn from the history of God's people how to return to normal while sharpening our desire for God and His kingdom. When the first group of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem, they faced a daunting set of tasks: to rebuild the city, rebuild the temple, and rebuild their lives. In one sense, the worst was over. They were no longer captive in a foreign land. They had experienced God's discipline and were living in the fulfilment of His promise to them. Even so, in 520 BC Haggai was called to preach a difficult message of criticism and encouragement to people who were barely hanging on.

Like us, the people were worried about their own future. Where would they live in the ruins of Jerusalem? How would they obtain food, clothing, and the necessities of everyday life? Would there be any comfort after their long period of anxious waiting? Like us, they focused their attention on improving their lives, and like us, they tended to seek their own interests at the expense of worshipping God. Haggai's message likely sounded harsh, even impossible, to the people struggling to survive and hoping to thrive: focus on building God's house before you build your house, seek Him before you seek your own needs and desires. More than this, Haggai made it clear that God Himself was behind their disappointing harvests and the lack of progress towards comfort and security. God was not just calling to his people, He was disciplining them, too. If they would not seek Him, they would not find their own happiness either.

At the same time, if God's people would listen, there was also a tremendous promise: in seeking God first, they would find God AND their own happiness. It would require trusting God's Word in the face of difficult and anxious times, but God was willing to be put to the test, if the people were willing to listen. As Haggai's contemporary, Malachi, said:

"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."

~Malachi 3:10 (ESV)

As we look for a future, as we hope, beyond the scope of pandemic and political turmoil, we face a greater challenge. Will we seek the Lord, even though it may seem foolish or counterproductive? Let us seek the Lord, in the confidence that God is seeking us!

How to Use the Study Guide

The date at the top of each page notes the Sunday for the respective week. The Scripture verse listed under each heading is a suggested memory verse for that week. Below that you will find a passage of Scripture, followed by "*Reflection Questions*." In general, these readings will allow you to reflect on the previous sermon or prepare you to hear the sermon for that upcoming week. We estimate that each day's "lesson" should require no more than 15 minutes.

This study guide is meant to be an aid, not a requirement. It is a way for us as a congregation to walk together as we explore God's Word. Not only will it help us to prepare to hear the preaching of the gospel each Sunday, but our prayer is that as we grow in our understanding and practice of daily prayer and meditation, we will grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and so grow in our love for Him and one another.

May God bless you richly!

Ryan Bouton
February 2021
Quechee, VT

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 21st

Memory Verse:

"Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: 'I am with you,' declares the Lord."

~ Haggai 1:13 (NIV)

MONDAY:

Scripture Reading: Haggai 1-2

Reflection Questions:

- What is Haggai about? Why was it written?

- Who is Haggai?

- What are some things that stood out to you? Observations? Questions? Thoughts?

Prayer:

- Pray in response to what you were reflecting on above.
- God, please help me to grow in my love and understanding of you and your people as we begin this study in your Word.

TUESDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:14-37

Prayer:

- Father in Heaven, in Jesus Christ you gave yourself to us, so may we give ourselves to you, living according to your holy will. Keep our feet firmly in the way where Christ leads us; make our mouths speak the truth that Christ teaches us; fill our bodies with the life that is Christ within us. In His holy name we pray.

WEDNESDAY:

Scripture Reading: Haggai 1:1-6

Reflection Questions:

- What messages were given to Haggai and then the people? What is the significance of these?
- How does God describe Himself? What does this mean?
- What are the people prioritizing?

Prayer:

- Oh, Heavenly Father, my life's work is but a vapor! My work is fleeting and without purpose apart from you. You breathe life, worth, and value into the work of my hands.

THURSDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:38-10:12

Prayer:

- Our Father in Heaven help us to discern your still, small voice. Open us to change and growth, that we may walk with Christ.

FRIDAY:**Scripture Reading:** Haggai 1:7-15**Reflection Questions:**

- Given the message/call of Haggai (God speaking through him), for the people to wake up from their spiritual apathy, how is God challenging you in this? List below.

- Spend some time meditating on your priorities. How do you spend your time? How do you spend your money? How do you spend your talents? How are you approaching your relationships with friends, colleagues, and family?

Prayer:

- Father, I ask that you show me the ways in which I am apathetic to you – the ways in which I neglect you or do not consider you in my daily life. Show me how I am prioritizing my house over yours, my will over yours, my way over yours.

SATURDAY:**Scripture Reading:** Haggai 1-2**Prayer:**

- Lord in Heaven, please prepare my heart for our gathered time of worship. May you open my eyes that I may see your beauty, glory, and priority.

- In the same way, Father, may your Spirit move and work to reveal yourself and to convict us of sin, judgment, and righteousness. May you bring comfort to those who need comfort, rebuke to those who need rebuke, encouragement to those who need encouragement, and may you build and transform your bride into the glorious image of your Son!

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 28th

Memory Verse:

“According to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.”

~ Haggai 2:5 (ESV)

MONDAY:

Scripture Reading: Haggai 1

Reflection Questions:

- What stood out from the sermon yesterday?
- How do these things inform the way we think about how to live today, especially in light of knowing Christ?

Prayer:

- Pray that God would help us to avoid becoming those who “dwell in our paneled houses, while [the Lord’s] house lies in ruins” (verse 4).
- Pray that the Lord would reveal where we are avoiding looking outside of ourselves to the needs of others.

TUESDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 42:1-5

Reflection Questions:

- Are there any things in your life that are keeping you from thirsting after God as the Psalmist describes? If so, what makes them so compelling?

Prayer:

- Pray that God would give us/maintain the joy the Psalmist speaks of remembering his worship in the house of God in verse 4.

WEDNESDAY:

Scripture Reading: Haggai 2:1-5

Reflection Questions:

- What does this passage imply about God's presence among His people, even when they are living deeply sinful lives? Has He abandoned them? Why?

- How might fear get in the way of what God wants to see happen among His people?

Prayer:

- Pray that we would all seek the Lord more deeply and persistently.
- Imagine the level of faith and love that Haggai must possess in order to deliver this message to the Jewish Leaders. Pray that our knowledge of the Gospel would lead to a similar confidence in the Lord to work even in the hearts of those we struggle to believe would ever receive Him.

THURSDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: Revelation 1:12-18

Reflection Questions:

- Here we see Jesus depicted in a much different way than He appears in the majority of the Gospel accounts (excluding perhaps the transfiguration). Is this what you imagine when you pray to Jesus? How might a recognition of His glory change the way we pray?

Prayer:

- Spend some time reading through and imagining the experience of seeing Jesus in all His glory one day. Thank God for the hope that we have because Jesus holds "the keys of Death and Hades" (verse 18).

FRIDAY:**Scripture Reading:** Haggai 2:6-9**Reflection Questions:**

- What does it mean that the Lord will “fill this house with glory?”

- We know that the temple is eventually rebuilt, but, in Ezra 3:12, we see that those who had seen the former glory of the first temple wept because they knew the second temple would never be as glorious. Considering this, what do you think is meant by “the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former,” if we know that the rebuilt temple is less beautiful than the original?

Prayer:

- Many scholars believe that the time the Lord is speaking of in verses 6-9 refers to Jesus’s second coming. The Israelites likely would have suspected that this word from Haggai implied much “quicker” action on the part of God. Pray that we would have hope in God’s long-term plans for this world and His people rather than in any perceived need for God to act in a certain way on our timeline.

SATURDAY:**Scripture Reading:** Haggai 2:1-9**Prayer:**

- Pray that the Lord would prepare the congregation to hear His Word tomorrow morning.

- Pray for those who are involved in the service: that they would be seeking to glorify God through their work, and that those participating in the service would know God more deeply because of Sunday morning.

WEEK OF MARCH 7th

Memory Verse:

“But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

~ Matthew 15:18-20 (ESV)

MONDAY:

Scripture Reading: Haggai 2:1-9

Reflection Questions:

- Take a moment to jot down two or three things that stood out to you from yesterday’s sermon.
- How might these things reorient you in what you are facing today?
- In what practical ways can you respond to what you learned and highlighted?

Prayer:

- Pray in response to what you were reflecting on above.
- Pray that God would cause His glory to be seen in and through His new temple, the church, as His Spirit works in our midst.

TUESDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 25:4-5

Reflection Questions:

- Why does the psalmist want to know God’s ways and be lead in His truth?
- What do you think it means to wait for God?

Prayer:

- Lord, because You are the God of my salvation—because You are the one who has saved me and because salvation is knowing You, I long to walk more faithfully in Your ways. So often my anxiety causes me to go ahead of You or disengage in fear. Help me to wait on You all day long and teach me to walk Your paths of steadfast love and faithfulness.

WEDNESDAY:

Scripture Reading: Matthew 15:1-20

Reflection Questions:

- Why do you think that we are prone to look to external things to make us clean? What kinds of things are you prone to look to?
- What is it that *actually* defiles us?
- What seed forms of defilement are you aware of in your own heart?
- Are there any hints in this passage of how we can be made clean?

Prayer:

- Praise God that Jesus has come to make us pure!
- Confess the places that you look to external things to make you clean.
- Confess the defilement you sense in your own heart.
- Pray that God would purify your heart, and that His Spirit would reign in your heart over your flesh.

THURSDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: James 4:1-10

Reflection Questions:

- What are the promises for those who draw near to God with hearts that are genuinely broken over their lack of faithful love for God?

Prayer:

- Lord I confess, that I do not feel broken over my sin the way that I should. Please help me see the places that I am being adulterous in my relationship with You and help me, by Your gracious Spirit, to come near to You so that You might come near to me.

FRIDAY:**Scripture Reading:** Haggai 2:10-19**Reflection Questions:**

- What do we learn from this passage about our ability to make ourselves clean?
- What seems to be the reason that God is going to begin to bless the people with good fruit after such a long time of their work yielding nothing? What does this teach us about what to prioritize?
- How can you practically prioritize the kingdom of God today?

Prayer:

- Lord Jesus I cannot make myself clean, but when You came to earth Your touch made the defiled clean and the sick well. Please help me know the power of Your cleansing blood that makes me whiter than snow.
- Father, I confess that even waking up today my mind is on everything but how can I see Your kingdom come. Help me to prioritize Your kingdom functionally and practically above my own agenda. I ask this in Jesus name, amen.

SATURDAY:**Scripture Reading:** Mark 1:40-45**Prayer:**

- Lord thank you for being willing to be excluded, to become an outcast, to become as one who is unclean to purify us. Please cause your Holy Spirit to fill our time worshipping together tomorrow, bringing deeper levels of your transformative grace. Please purify our hearts as you help us to see Your Son, and it is in His name we ask this—Amen.

WEEK OF MARCH 14th

Memory Verse:

“On that day,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”

~ Haggai 2:23 (ESV)

MONDAY:

Scripture Reading: Haggai 2:20-23

Reflection Questions:

- What is one significant take away from this past week and/or yesterday’s sermon?
- This may seem like an abrupt ending to the Book of Haggai. It is both foreboding and promising. Whether you fully understand it or not, what elements of this passage do you find promising and why?
- In the first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, both Zerubbabel and Shealtiel are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (v. 12 & 13). How might that offer some insight into the last verse of this book?

Prayer:

- Four times in these verses God says, *“I will...”* Turn to Matthew 6:9-13 as an inspiration, asking that God’s will would be done in our world at this time in history.
- Pray for the church at large, asking God to enlighten, empower, and use His *“body”* to accomplish His will in the world, beginning with us.

TUESDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: Haggai 2:20-22

Reflection Questions:

- In these verses Haggai cites several things on earth that God will shake up and overturn. What kinds of earthly hopes do you see within this list?

- During this Lenten season, what sorts of earthly hopes have you been identifying in your life?

Prayer:

- Ask God to use the shaken-up situation that our world currently finds itself in to turn the eyes of the world towards Him.
- Ask God to continue to reveal to you those things in your life that need to be shaken and overturned. Give thanks to Him for this gracious work in your life!

WEDNESDAY:

Scripture Reading: John 6:25-29

Reflection Questions:

- The most essential work that God is asking of us is to rest the weakness of our trust upon Jesus – the One that He has sent to us. Can you identify any situations in your life where you're needing to engage in this essential work?

- What connections do you see between verse 27 here and the last verse from the book of Haggai?

Prayer:

- Praise God that our hope does not rest upon the works that we have or will accomplish, but on the finished work of Jesus Christ, the one whom the Father sent!
- Praise God that His seal of approval and authority is found in none other than Jesus our Savior!

THURSDAY: *Lenten Reflection*

Scripture Reading: John 6:25-29

Reflection Questions:

- In verse 26, Jesus uncovers some of our broken tendencies in following Him. In what broken ways might you be seeking out Jesus for what you can derive from Him?
- Jesus comes to us with the approval of the Father, and He alone can provide us with the approval that we desperately look for in the world (v. 27). In what ways might you be seeking approval apart from Jesus?

Prayer:

- Ask God to increase our hunger for those things that will last, and to decrease our appetite for those things that will not.
- Praise God for the full and sufficient approval that we receive in and through Jesus!

FRIDAY:

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:22-29

Reflection Questions:

This passage speaks of us doing four things:

Coming (3 times the author says, "...but you have come...")

Listening (v.25)

Receiving (v.28)

Worshiping (v.28)

- As we come to the end of the book of Haggai, in what ways can you begin to make these practices more of a priority in your daily life?
- When we come to God through Jesus Christ, what are some of the "*unshakeable*" things that we encounter and receive? Carefully go through this passage and make a list.

Prayer:

- Give thanks to God that we look forward to a Kingdom that cannot be shaken!
- Pray for one person that you know right now whose life has experienced a lot of *shaking up* in difficult ways. Ask God to increase their experience of the unshakeable reality, power, and reconciliation of Jesus.

SATURDAY:

Scripture Reading: Haggai 2:20-23

Prayer:

- Ask God to encourage and inspire all who will facilitate our worship service tomorrow morning.
- Ask God to fill all who will gather tomorrow morning with a sense of wonder and awe over the realities and implications of His Gospel.



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