You’ve Got What It Takes - Part 1

# Don’t Give Up

# (Haggai 1:1-8)

I am excited to be starting a new message series called “You’ve Got What It Takes” as we look at the Old Testament book of Haggai. This is such a timely message, because for many of us life can kind of be unsettling at times, because the dream that God put on your heart, the calling, the ministry, or even the words of comfort that he whispered to you seem so unrealistic, so far out of reach, even beyond your wildest expectations. For many of you, you wake up and you’re discouraged because you thought that by this time in your life, by the time you’d done this, accomplished this whatever, that there would be a change, something different, or something better. And so, you may begin the day with a feeling of resignation, disappointed, looking around just wishing that there was a sign, some sort of evidence, just a glimmer of hope. Anything!

For some of you, you just graduated from high school and you thought you’d know what you wanted to do with your life but you still don’t have a clue. Maybe you thought you’d have a real job with benefits and the potential for growth; you know to climb the ladder, but what you’re doing is far beneath your abilities. Others of you were certain that you would’ve been married by now and still others of you are married but you thought you would’ve been happy and yet you don’t really like your marriage the way you should. It’s just that you thought there would’ve been something more, a sense of fulfillment, a feeling of contentment or satisfaction.

Some of you today, thought you would try going to church, but then things don’t get easier, and you really hoped that there would be something more. I believe this was the feeling of God’s people during this time that we’re going to study today. Many of them thought that things would be different, but day after day they woke up and they had the same doubts, that same little voice telling them that they can’t do it, they’ll never complete it, but those voices were wrong. Before we look at the book of Haggai I want to give you a little bit of the context.

The focus of our time is the temple of God and long ago, long before Haggai came on the scene, King Solomon had built the most amazing temple. It was incredible, it was magnificent, and people came from all over the world just to see the glory of this temple. However, after King Solomon died, the people became distracted, they turned away from the worship of God and they began to worship idols. As we see time and time again throughout the Old Testament, God allowed a series of events to take place to try to get their attention and bring their focus back to him.

It happened, that in 587 BC, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian army crushed the Southern Kingdom of Judah and destroyed the temple which was the house of the living God. Not only that, but to add insult to injury, the Babylonians took the Jewish people into captivity. In other words, as the government surrendered to the Babylonians, the citizens of Judah, the Jewish people, were taken as captives, they were kidnapped and deported to a foreign land. Not only was their temple destroyed where they worshiped God, but they were now no longer citizens of their nation, they were captives to another King. They couldn't worship as they wanted to and the people were devastated.

And so, for over fifty years the people of God were in captivity, and you could just imagine the sense of relief when in 536 B.C. Ezra with about 50,000 people were allowed to go back and rebuild Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the people went back to their homeland and upon returning their first priority was to worship and so they went about rebuilding the temple. They began by building the foundation and they rebuilt the altar, began to give sacrifices again, when suddenly the Samaritans came in and opposed their work. And don’t you know it, no sooner did they meet with a little resistance, no sooner did things get a little bit too hard and they gave up. And so, for 14 years the temple sat there unfinished, nobody was working on it, nothing was happening.

Well, something was happening, but the people weren't working on the temple. As a matter of fact, for 14 years they actually started building their own houses, and they built a very nice houses, and they forgot all about God's house, so God raised up the prophet Haggai to awaken these people who had gotten distracted by the world and encourage them in finishing God’s temple. That's the context, and so for 14 years the people neglected to work on the temple until God sent Haggai to say don’t give up!

That’s where we’re going to pick up today, it was on September 1, 520 B.C., that Haggai delivered this message. Now 16 years had passed since the laying of the foundation and Haggai gets right to the point. Reading from Haggai chapter 1, verse one says,

“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 Jehozadak the high priest: This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'" (Haggai 1:1-2, NIV).

And the reason why they thought the time had not yet come was because they ran into opposition. But how many of you know that when you run into opposition it’s not a sign that God’s against you? In fact, most of the time it’s a sign that you’re doing exactly what God wants you to do. But when the Jewish people began rebuilding the Temple, as soon as the Samaritans began opposing them, they began to doubt that it was God’s will. And so, number one, you need to know that we all have doubts…

## 1. We All Have Doubts

But you just can’t give up. Things may get hard, the work may be difficult, but we need to understand that when we’re doing the will of God it’s most likely that we’re going to face some opposition. As a matter of fact, when I run into opposition, when I come against a roadblock, it actually inspires me, because I know that when I begin to do something that God has called me to do there’s going to be opposition. I’ll tell you what I worry about, I begin to worry when no one’s opposing me, because then I know that I’m not causing the demons to tremble, I’m not shaking the gates of hell, I’m not doing much for the Kingdom of God.

And so, today I want to encourage you not to give up, if it gets difficult, if it gets challenging, if it’s really hard, you’re probably doing the right thing. As a matter fact, God’s word encourages us saying,

“Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left…” (Proverbs 4:25-27).

In other words, what Solomon is saying is that when you’re tempted to doubt choose the right thing. When it would be easier to quit focusing on God and start focusing on yourself, don’t give up. With God’s help you can continue building the temple and he’ll empower you for the task ahead of you.

And so, this morning I’d like to ask you to consider where you’ve doubted God? You see, it’s easy just to give up, it’s easy not to make a difference, but as followers of Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit you’ve got what it takes, you can do the right thing. We can take the ways that are firm, looking straight ahead, not swerving to the right or to the left. That’s what Haggai was encouraging the people to do and he says the time is now.

For the remainder of our time, I'd like you to think about what you’ve left undone, that unfinished business, something you’re supposed to do, maybe the call of God into a particular area of ministry. Whatever it is, doubt has crept in and maybe it was just this past weekend, you know maybe it was something Jason said to you, maybe it was a month ago, or maybe 14 years ago, but what was that thing that God put on your heart?

For some of you, it might have been someone you were supposed to reach out to and share your faith with. Or maybe you felt like you were supposed to serve somewhere in the church and so you felt this call to a particular area of ministry. Or you were supposed to give something to somebody. Whatever it was, there was something that you felt like you were supposed to do, but doubt crept in, it was going to be difficult, it was going to be hard, and so you chose the easy way out and you didn't do it. What is that thing, that burden on your heart that you really felt was from God but you didn’t do it?

This morning, God may speak to you in the same way he spoke to the people in the time of Haggai. And the prophet doesn’t beat around the bush. The people are making excuses, they’ve neglected God’s house, and so he’s going to say, number two, give careful thought to your ways.

## 2. Give Careful Thought

Now we’re going to see God say this over and over again and he points out their selfishness, that they’d built their own houses, but chose to neglect the building of God’s house. In other words, they’d put their own plans, their own agenda, ahead of God’s. And so, God says, “Just t for a minute” Continuing in verse 3 here’s what God said,

“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?" Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways” (Haggai 1:3-5, NIV).

And so, here they were living in their paneled houses, while God’s house remained in ruins. In other words, they were living in luxury, they’ve got all this top end stuff, and they’re putting their own desires ahead of the will of God. And it’s not that God’s against them having nice things, but he’s against them putting nice things ahead of him. He’s against them being lazy and making excuses for not doing God’s work. And so, he says, "Give careful thought to your ways."

What is your unfinished business? I’d like you to ask yourself, “Where you’re putting your own comfort ahead of his calling, maybe a new car, a hunting trip, or shopping spree?” Haggai warns that it’s our loss, that we really lose out when we put ourselves ahead of God. And so, he warns, “Give careful thought to your ways.”

Is there something that you’re putting ahead of God?

You know, maybe you're more concerned about making a name for yourself than you are making a name for God? Are you putting your yard or your house before God’s house? Are you consumed with yourself, pleasing yourself, instead of being consumed by the heart of God? He says, “Give careful thought to your ways.”

I'm believing that there are some of you right now who know there's something you're supposed to do, but you’ve been procrastinating, you've been putting it off, and you're taking the easy way out. But God says the time is now, and honestly, things haven't changed much since God gave this message to Haggai. Here's his reply. Here’s what he says to them in verse 6,

“You’ve planted much but have 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" (Haggai 1:6, NIV).

Isn’t that amazing? Give careful thought to what he says. You’re working yourself to death and you still don’t feel like you have anything. You’re pouring yourself into a career and it just feels empty and pointless. You’re better off than you’ve ever been and yet you still don’t feel satisfied. You try to entertain yourself, to please yourself, and yet there’s still an insatiable desire for something more. Are you putting your house ahead of God’s house? Is there some unfinished business?

The people of God here, they’re walking around, they’re kicking the dirt, they’re looking at the foundation, they’re thinking we’ve got to build this, but we really don’t feel good enough, capable enough, or even have the passion to do it. And so, things aren’t going very well, there’s this opposition, it’s become very difficult, it’s hard, but watch what God says in verse seven. God is so good. Haggai says,

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the Lord” (Haggai 1:7-8, NIV).

And so, God’s like, “I’m going to make it really easy for you. Here’s what I want you to do. Number one, go up into the mountains. Number two, bring down timber. Number three, build My house." Give careful thought, here it is step-by-step, as easy as one, two, three. And yet they were just like many of us thinking that we need details, you know who’s going to do what, how’s it going to happen, how long is it going to take, and am I going to get a tax write off for this? I need details, I need steps four, five, and six. But God simply calls us to be faithful to him. He says, “So that I may take pleasure in it and be honored” (Haggai 1:8).

## 3. Be Faithful to God

You see, the problem is that you've got to do what God showed you first before he reveals more to you. He may show you steps one, two, and three, but he won't reveal more until we take the first three steps. And so, we just need to trust him and do what he said, trusting him like David wrote in the Psalms,

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalms 119:105, NIV).

And so, it’s the Word of God that illuminates the way before us, but you’ve gotta trust God, you’ve gotta trust what he said in his Word, and you’ve got to do what he’s already revealed before he reveals more to you. In verse eight, God says to the Jewish people, “Go up into the mountain, bring down timber, and build the house.” You see, when they first arrived in Jerusalem everyone was committed and enthusiastic, but after months of difficulties and opposition the work slowed until it finally stopped. But the Lord would impress upon them and us today, we all have doubts, but we’ve got to give careful thought to our ways, we need to get to work, we need to be faithful to what he’s revealed, faithful to what he said.

And so, today, I want to encourage you, because you've got what it takes. You can't let the voices of the opposition discourage you and keep you from finishing the work. You see, the opposition is wrong. You've got everything you need. You were created to make a difference, and so you don’t give in to doubt. You've got what it takes, so let's walk by the Spirit. And if there's an unfinished project, let's go up to the mountain today. Let's do what God showed us. Let’s bring down some timber. Let’s be faithful and let's get to work. Do the next thing that God has showed you and do it today; be faithful to God today. The apostle Paul said it this way as he was encouraging a struggling church, he said,

“Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it according to your means” (2 Corinthians 8:11).

That's what we're commanded to do as followers of Jesus and you’ve got what it takes. But he's not going to show you step four, five, and six until you take steps one, two, and three. And so, what do I do if there's a dream, a calling, a project, something unfinished? What do I do? Well, I’m going to go up to the mountain, bring down the timber, and build the house. Step by step, and so you don’t miss a step, you’ve got an opportunity, and there are blessings on the other side of your obedience. You do what God has called you to do, you do what you’re supposed to do, and you trust God with the outcome. And so, if I want to get in better shape I start exercising, I start burning calories, I eat healthier and I consume less calories. I’m not going to give up, I’m going to be faithful to God, and I’m to be faithful to myself.

Some of you today need to know that you’ve got what it takes. You can do it, but you’ve got to get to work. You’ve got unfinished business. God has called you. He’s prompted you. The opportunity is there. It’s laid out before you, but you’re not sure what to do. You just get to work. You don’t give up. Just begin step one, two, and three.

For some of you, you've got a secret, a sin that you can't overcome. It's been plaguing you and you're keeping it a secret. And honestly, that's the easy way out, to just give up. But God’s calling you to something greater. It’s hard, but you get to work, and you don’t give up. You take step number one, two, and three. You confess your sin, you ask for help, and you get to work on it. You resist that temptation. You’ve got what it takes.

Now maybe this past weekend Pastor Jason spoke something over you or God prompted you at some point in the past to do something or to serve in the church. And you know that you should, because you know that should be making a difference after all Jesus said,

“You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14).

And so, you see the need, you see your opportunity and you say like Samuel, “Yes, God.” Like Isaiah, “Here am I, use me to make a difference." Step number two, you don't leave the building today without getting connected, without saying, "Sign me up." And then number three, you get to work.

Others of you today, you need encouragement. You need godly fellowship, and you need Christian community. You haven’t been doing well alone. You’ve thought about committing to the church. You know you need it, but you just haven’t done it. This morning, God’s leading you to make church your priority because life is better together as we celebrate around God’s Word. And so, I want to encourage you, if there’s some unfinished business, don’t make God raise up a Haggai in your life to call you back. Whenever God calls us, he expects us to be faithful, and so we’re going to be obedient, because we know that we’ve got what it takes. The time is now.

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