

First Things First! Luke 9:57-62

Introduction:

- A. Charles Hummel, author and educator, tells of some advice given to him once by an older and wiser friend. "Your greatest danger," said this friend, "is letting the urgent things crowd out the important." The important things are those matters which are ultimately significant but usually don't have to be done today. The urgent things, on the other hand, insist on our immediate attention even though they usually don't amount to much in the end.
- B. You know the choices: Should I go home and spend time with my wife or do I squeeze in another hour at work? Do I play with the kids or do I cut the yard? Can I learn to be content with what I have or must I spend my life in the pursuit of more? Esau did it when he sold his birthright to satisfy his hunger. You and I do it all the time.
- C. We live in constant tension between the urgent and the important. We find ourselves making choices daily, hourly, almost minute-by-minute between devoting ourselves to those things which are truly important and those which seem so urgent but, in the end, lack real substance. They compete constantly for our time and energies. Both have their place and need our attention. Unfortunately, the urgent often crowds out the important. We end up majoring in minors and minoring in what is truly major. We lose sight of priorities and waste away our lives on trivialities.
- D. Where this issue becomes most clear is in our decisions about God. It is in the religious sphere that we find ourselves most tempted to sell the important for a bowl of the urgent. Weeks pass and you realize you haven't spent time in prayer - are you stressing the important or the urgent? Months pass and you realize you haven't shared the gospel with anyone - are you stressing the important or the urgent? You don't have time for the work of the kingdom, you don't give what you should to the Lord, you go to church a lot but you're not sure you really worship - are you stressing the important or the urgent?
- E. The preaching of Haggai confronts this issue head on. He was dealing with people just like us - people who had forgotten what was important in the press to take care of the urgent.

I. Going Home

A. From Jerusalem to Babylon

- 1. Nebuchadnezzar's three deportations: (**2 Kings**)
 - a. 605 B.C. - Daniel and companions carried away.
 - b. 597 B.C. - Ezekiel taken to Babylon.
 - c. 586 B.C. - Solomon's Temple is destroyed.
- 2. The **prophets** had foretold both captivity and release.
 - a. Captivity: The Babylonians are coming!
 - i. The consistent message: Repent! The time is near.
 - ii. But they knew there would be no repentance and that the Lord would wipe away Judah just as he had Israel.
 - b. Release: 70 years would see the restoration of Judah.
 - i. Jeremiah (25:11-12) understood that after 70 years Judah would be restored to their lands.
 - ii. Even as they spoke of the punishment, they also foretold the relief.

B. From Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra)

1. The decree of Cyrus, King of Medes and Persians
 - a. **Read Ezra 1:1-4**
 - b. Cyrus ended the Jewish exile 70 years after the first deportation under Nebuchadnezzar.
2. The mandate to rebuild the temple, vs. 3.
 - a. It wasn't just that he allowed the people to return.
 - b. He ordered them to rebuild the temple.
3. About 50,000 Jews were the first to return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel.
4. Half-hearted effort to start on the temple.
 - a. Three months after returning, they rebuilt the altar.
 - b. One year after returning, they began to rebuild the temple.
 - c. Quickly opposition arose from the Samaritans and all work on the Temple came to a halt, for about 14 years.

C. A Question of Priorities

1. *Personal Agendas* — There were many loose ends to tie up after an absence of 70 years. Housing, business issues, political questions all had to be addressed.
2. *God's Agenda* — "Seek my kingdom first; rebuild the temple."
 - a. God, who had moved Cyrus to release the Jews, had also moved him to command the rebuilding of the temple.
 - b. God's "business" had also been neglected for 70 years and he wanted true worship begun once more.

D. Enter the Prophet Haggai

1. We don't know much about his background:
 - a. Did he return with Zerubbabel?
 - b. Did he come from Babylon later (like Nehemiah)?
2. 520 B.C. - 16 years after the return of the captives, nothing had been accomplished in rebuilding the temple.
3. August 29, 520 B.C. - Haggai begins to preach.

II. Get Your Priorities Straight!

A. A Problem of Priorities

1. **Read Haggai 1:1-4**
2. "*The time has not yet come . . .*", vs. 2.
 - a. "There are too many obstacles standing in the way. When God really wants us to rebuild the temple, He will remove all the difficulties in our path."
 - b. "There are so many other things demanding our attention. Let us get settled first and then we will see to the Lord's work."
3. The message of Haggai - "*Your priorities are messed up!*", vs. 4.
 - a. Living in fine houses while God's house is in ruins.
 - b. Always letting personal agendas super-cede the goals of God.

B. The Consequence of Majoring in Minors

1. **Read Haggai 1:5-11**

2. *"Give careful thought to your ways . . ."* Even when they pursued their personal agendas, they did not succeed in attaining their goals.
3. The consequence of majoring in minors is that you don't even do a very good job on the unimportant things. God does not bless efforts that do not put him first.

C. The Blessing of Putting First Things First

1. **Read Haggai 1:12-15**
2. The beauty of obedience:
 - a. They stopped rationalizing and excusing and delaying.
 - b. After 16 years, they started obeying!
3. The blessing of obedience:
 - a. *"I am with you,"* declares the Lord (**vs 13**).
 - b. *"From this day on I will bless you"* (**2:15-19**).
 - c. Because they sought first God's kingdom, everything else would be added to them.

Conclusion: Haggai - Where are you now?

A. We have Problems with Priorities as Well. Our greatest danger is letting the urgent crowd out the important.

1. *Personal Agendas* — So many urgent little things pressing for our time, demanding our attentions, clamoring to be taken care of. In the end, how trivial they all are.
2. *God's Agenda* — *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well", Mt. 6:33.*

B. We Need a Haggai to Help us Major in the Important.

1. *To help us see that our priorities are messed up!*
 - a. Living in fine houses while God's house is in ruins.
 - b. Always letting personal agendas super-cede the goals of God.
 - c. 2 Timothy 2:4, Paul's warning to Timothy.
2. *To help us see the consequence of majoring in minors.*
 - a. We are wasting our lives on the inconsequential.
 - b. And we don't even do a very good job on the unimportant things. God does not bless efforts that do not put him first.
3. *To help us see the blessing of putting first things first.*
 - a. The beauty of obedience: no more rationalizing and excusing and delaying, Lk. 9:57-62.
 - b. The blessing of obedience: Because we seek first God's kingdom, everything else will be added as well.