

Haggai 2:18-19
November 19, '17

“IS YOUR SEED STILL IN THE BARN?”

LAST SUNDAY, OUR SCRIPTURE READING WAS A VERY LONG ONE – ABOUT AS LONG A PASSAGE AS WE’VE EVER READ HERE IN WORSHIP.

TODAY, WE’LL GO THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION WITH OUR SCRIPTURE READING BEING ABOUT AS SHORT AS ANY WE’VE USED.

THE REASON FOR THE LONG READING WAS THAT IT WAS NECESSARY TO GET A COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEANING OF THE PASSAGE.

THIS WEEK, THERE IS BUT A SINGLE STATEMENT THAT’S FILLED WITH MEANING.

BUT I THINK A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE CAN GIVE THAT STATEMENT EVEN GREATER SIGNIFICANCE.

WE’RE READING JUST TWO VERSES FROM THE RARELY-READ PROPHET HAGGAI – THE 18TH & 19TH VERSES OF THE SECOND CHAPTER – HAGGAI 2:18 & 19.

(After Scripture)

I’VE TOLD YOU IN THE PAST ABOUT A COLLECTION OF POSTERS I HAD HANGING ON THE WALLS OF THE FIRST CHURCH OFFICE I OCCUPIED WHEN I WAS A YOUTH DIRECTOR.

I PROBABLY HAD 20 OF THEM –SOME I CONSIDERED PERMANENT POSTERS WHILE OTHERS WERE THERE JUST TEMPORARILY.

ONE OF THE ONES THAT WAS PERMANENT READ – “*NOT TO DECIDE IS TO DECIDE.*”

I THINK OF THAT POSTER & ITS MESSAGE WHENEVER I WADE THROUGH THINGS ON MY DESK THAT I DIDN'T DISCARD WHEN I FIRST RECEIVED THEM – A REGISTRATION FORM FOR A CONFERENCE THAT SOUNDED INTERESTING OR AN OPPORTUNITY TO PURCHASE A NEW BOOK AT A SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED PRE-PUBLICATION PRICE.

BY THE TIME I LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT THEM, THE TIME TO ACT HAS ALREADY PASSED AND SO, THE DECISION I HAD DELAYED, HAS BEEN MADE FOR ME & I CAN THEN JUST TOSS THEM AWAY.

“NOT TO DECIDE IS TO DECIDE.”

NOT TAKING ACTION WHEN AN OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED ITSELF PREVENTS ME FROM TAKING ANY ACTION AT ALL.

I THINK THAT'S PART OF THE MESSAGE IN THESE VERSES WE'VE READ THIS MORNING.

BUT TO FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT HAGGAI IS SAYING HERE, WE NEED TO PUT THIS PASSAGE IN ITS PROPER HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES IN SCRIPTURE WHERE WE'RE GIVEN EXACT DATES OF THE EVENTS THAT ARE TAKING PLACE.

SOME OF THE ISRAELITES HAD RETURNED TO JERUSALEM FOLLOWING THEIR EXILE & THEY CAME WITH THE EXPRESS PURPOSE OF RE-BUILDING THE TEMPLE THAT HAD BEEN DESTROYED.

THEY BEGAN WORK IMMEDIATELY BUT WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THEY WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO RETURN THE TEMPLE TO ITS FORMER GLORY, AFTER TWO YEARS, THEY PRETTY MUCH GAVE UP ON IT.

THEY ABANDONED THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION & TURNED THEIR ATTENTION TO THEIR OWN SELF-INTERESTS.

THEY TURNED INWARD & BEGAN BUILDING LUXURIOUS paneled houses for themselves.

THEY USED THEIR RESOURCES, THEIR TIME & THEIR TALENTS TO BUILD THEIR OWN LIVES WHILE THE TEMPLE & WORK OF GOD LAID IN RUINS.

FOR 16 YEARS THIS WENT ON AND EVEN THOUGH THE PEOPLE THOUGHT THEY WERE DOING EVERYTHING THEY POSSIBLY COULD TO MAKE THEIR LIVES BETTER, IT WASN'T WORKING.

THEREIN WAS THE PROBLEM.

ALL OF THEIR ATTENTION WAS FOCUSED ON THEMSELVES WHILE THE WORK OF GOD WAS COMPLETELY IGNORED.

THIS IS THE SITUATION THAT HAGGAI WAS ADDRESSING.

IN THE YEAR 520 B.C., THE PROPHET STEPPED ONTO THE SCENE & DELIVERED THREE POWERFUL MESSAGES THAT HE HAD RECEIVED FROM GOD.

HERE'S WHERE WE FIND THIS DETAILED TIMEFRAME THAT IS SO UNUSUAL IN THE BIBLE.

THE FIRST MESSAGE WAS IN THE SIXTH MONTH AND THE SECOND IN THE SEVENTH.

WHAT WE'VE READ THIS MORNING IS PART OF HIS THIRD MESSAGE THAT WAS DELIVERED – AS WE'VE READ – ON THE 24TH DAY OF THE NINTH MONTH.

IN THE HEBREW CALENDAR, THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN DECEMBER 18TH, 520 B.C.

IN HIS PREVIOUS MESSAGES, HE TOLD THE PEOPLE IT WAS TIME TO QUIT FOCUSING ON THEMSELVES & BEGIN TO TURN THEIR ATTENTION TO GOD.

HE TOLD THEM THAT WAS THE REASON THINGS WEREN'T WORKING OUT AS WELL THEY HAD HOPED IT WOULD.

THE MORE THEY FOCUSED ON THEMSELVES & THEIR OWN DESIRES, THE HARDER LIFE WAS GOING TO BE FOR THEM.

IT WAS ONLY WHEN THEY TURNED THEIR ATTENTION OUTWARD THAT THEY WOULD EVER FIND TRUE FULFILLMENT IN LIFE.

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED.

THEY BEGAN TO DO THE WORK NECESSARY TO RESTORE THE TEMPLE & THINGS FINALLY BEGAN TO TURN AROUND.

BUT THEY WEREN'T YET CONVINCED THAT THEY COULD COUNT ON GOD TO BLESS THEIR EFFORTS.

ALL OF THAT LEADS US TO THESE TWO POWERFUL VERSES WE'VE READ THIS MORNING.

HAGGAI, SPEAKING FOR GOD, ASKS TWO QUESTIONS & THEN MAKES ONE POWERFUL DECLARATION – *“IS THE SEED STILL IN THE BARN? DO THE VINE, THE FIG TREE, THE POMEGRANATE, AND THE OLIVE TREE STILL YIELD NOTHING? FROM THIS DAY ON, I WILL BLESS YOU.”*

BECAUSE OF THEIR PAST FAILURES & DISAPPOINTMENTS, THEY'D GROWN WEARY & WEREN'T EXPECTING A HARVEST.

THEY'D GIVEN UP & LEFT THEIR SEEDS IN THE BARN.

BUT GOD ENCOURAGES THEM NOT TO GIVE UP BECAUSE THEY WILL BE BLESSED - MORE SO THAN EVER BEFORE.

I THINK THAT'S THE REASON FOR THE EXACT DATE BEING GIVEN BY HAGGAI.

“FROM THIS DAY ON – BEGINNING ON DECEMBER 18TH – THE DAY I’M SPEAKING THESE WORDS – YOU WILL BE BLESSED!”

LET’S BE CAREFUL HERE, THOUGH.

IT’S NOT DECEMBER 18TH THAT’S IMPORTANT.

WHAT’S IMPORTANT IS “TODAY.”

“FROM THIS DAY ON” – THE DAY THE WORD IS SPOKEN.

HAGGAI’S MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE WHO HAD RETURNED FROM EXILE & HIS MESSAGE TO US IS *“BEGINNING TODAY, THE LORD WILL BLESS YOU FOREVER.”*

TO REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT HAGGAI IS SAYING HERE, I THINK IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO GO BACK TO WHAT WE TALKED ABOUT LAST WEEK.

DON’T FOCUS ON THE BAD TIMES OF LIFE – THE TIMES WHEN THINGS DON’T GO WELL – THE TIMES OF SORROW & SADNESS – THE TIMES WHEN YOUR HEALTH ISN’T AS GOOD AS WHAT YOU’D LIKE IT TO BE – FOCUS, INSTEAD, ON THE GOOD TIMES BECAUSE THEY FAR OUTNUMBER THE BAD.

AND, EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, EVEN IN THE BAD TIMES YOU KNOW THAT GOD HAS WALKED BY YOUR SIDE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY – AND BEEN EVEN CLOSER TO YOU THAN WHEN THINGS ARE GOOD.

BEGINNING “TODAY,” GOD IS GOING TO BLESS YOU.

MAYBE IT WOULD BE GOOD TO READ THESE WORDS EVERY MORNING – *“TODAY, GOD IS GOING TO BLESS ME.”*

AND THAT LEADS US TO THAT FIRST QUESTION THAT IS ASKED OF THE PEOPLE – “IS YOUR SEED STILL IN THE BARN?”

THINK OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THAT QUESTION FOR ALL OF US.

YOU HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN THE BLESSINGS GOD SEEKS TO BESTOW UPON YOU.

IS THERE SOME GIFT THAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU THAT YOU HAVEN’T UTILIZED?

IS YOUR SEED STILL IN THE BARN?

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO OFFER THE WORLD THAT YOU’VE KEPT HIDDEN INSIDE?

IS YOUR SEED STILL IN THE BARN?

DO YOU HAVE A TALENT YOU’VE BEEN UNWILLING TO EXERCISE FOR GOD’S GLORY?

IS YOUR SEED STILL IN THE BARN?

I KNOW YOU CAN THINK OF SO MANY PEOPLE OF WHOM THAT’S TRUE – PEOPLE WHO HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER BUT, FOR ONE REASON, OR ANOTHER ARE UNWILLING TO DO SO.

YOU CAN ALSO, THOUGH, I’M SURE, THINK OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN WILLING TO SOW THEIR SEED TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

RIGHT HERE – THIS VERY DAY – I THINK OF WONDERFUL EXAMPLES.

ROLAND SMALL HAS OFFERED YET ANOTHER COLORING BOOK TO OUR CHILDREN TODAY.

ROLAND’S SEED ISN’T STILL IN THE BARN.

JACK TURPIN JUST COMPLETED ANOTHER CD – “WHEN GOSPEL MEETS COUNTRY.”

JACK'S SEED ISN'T STILL IN THE BARN.

LOOK AT THIS MAGNIFICENT WORK OF ART FOR STEWARDSHIP CREATED – WITH YOUR HELP – BY MARK NICHOLSON.

MARK'S SEED ISN'T STILL IN THE BARN.

AND WE'RE NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT CREATIVE ARTS.

YESTERDAY, RON SPROATT WILLINGLY & JOYFULLY DROVE OUR CHURCH BUS FOR A GROUP TRIP.

RON'S SEED ISN'T STILL IN THE BARN.

MELBA HUTCHINSON & PATSY SPROATT MET THIS PAST TUESDAY – AS THEY DO EVERY WEEK - TO CREATE BEAUTIFUL QUILTS FOR MEMBERS OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY.

MELBA & PATSY'S SEED ISN'T STILL IN THE BARN.

YOU CAN LOOK ALL AROUND YOU & SEE ONE PERSON AFTER ANOTHER WHO HASN'T LEFT THEIR SEED IN THE BARN.

THEY'VE SOWED THE GIFTS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN THEM & NOT HELD ANYTHING BACK IN THE ASSURANCE THAT THEIR EFFORTS WILL BE BLESSED.

YOU CAN GO BACK TO THE CONTEXT OF THIS PASSAGE & SEE ANOTHER MESSAGE IT SENDS US.

THE PEOPLE WERE SAYING, *“IT'S NOT THE RIGHT TIME TO RE-BUILD THE TEMPLE. WE HAVE TO BE FOCUSED ON OTHER THINGS RAIGHT NOW.”*

THINK OF HOW OFTEN IN SOCIETY THAT REASONING HAS BEEN USED.

“IT'S NOT THE RIGHT TIME.”

THE VERY TITLE OF A BOOK OF SERMONS BY MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ADDRESSES THAT EXACT ARGUMENT.

WHY WE CAN'T WAIT WAS WRITTEN IN RESPONSE TO THOSE WHO WERE CONSTANTLY SAYING TO THOSE IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT - *"IT'S NOT THE RIGHT TIME."*

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF EVEN MORE CURRENT SITUATIONS OF WHICH THAT HAS BEEN SAID & CONTINUES TO BE SAID.

"IT'S NOT THE RIGHT TIME."

A LOGICAL RESPONSE IS "IF NOT NOW, WHEN?"

OR, TO QUOTE THE LYRICS OF A SONG MOST OF YOU HAVE NEVER HEARD, *"WHAT BETTER PLACE THAN HERE...WHAT BETTER TIME THAN NOW?"*

AND YOU CAN GO BACK TO THE PERSONAL EXAMPLE I USED OF THOSE OPPORTUNITIES ON MY DESK THAT GO UNADDRESSED.

"NOT TO DECIDE IS TO DECIDE."

THERE MAY COME A TIME WHEN YOU'LL REGRET HAVING NOT ACTED ON SOME OPPORTUNITY THAT STANDS BEFORE YOU – SOMETHING YOU CAN DO TODAY FOR THE GLORY OF GOD THAT YOU WON'T BE CAPABLE OF DOING TOMORROW.

WE GO BACK TO THAT DIVINE PROMISE THAT HAGGAI PROCLAIMS AT THE END OF THESE VERSES.

"FROM THIS DAY ON, I WILL BLESS YOU."

IN THIS WEEK OF THANKSGIVING, PERHAPS THAT'S THE GREATEST REASON FOR GIVING THANKS – THE ASSURANCE THAT GOD HAS RICHLY BLESSED US IN THE PAST & PROMISES TO DO SO EVERY SINGLE DAY THAT STANDS BEFORE US.

**BUT THOSE PROMISED BLESSINGS ARE PART OF OUR
COVENANT AGREEMENT WITH GOD.**

**WE ARE GIVEN THE ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE THAT WE WILL BE
BLESSED...BUT WE HAVE TO ACT ON THOSE BLESSINGS TO FULLY
RECEIVE THEM.**

**WHAT BLESSINGS HAS GOD GIVEN YOU THAT YOU'VE KEPT
HIDDEN IN YOUR PROVERBIAL BARN?**

WHAT SEEDS HAVEN'T YOU SOWN?

WHAT CROPS HAVEN'T YOU PLANTED?

WHAT GIFTS HAVEN'T BEEN USED?

**THIS WEEK, I URGE YOU TO GIVE THOUGHT TO THOSE
BLESSINGS OF GOD THAT YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN THAT WILL
ENABLE YOU TO TURN YOUR ATTENTION AWAY FROM YOURSELF.**

**THINK OF THOSE THINGS THAT CAN BE OFFERED TO THE
GLORY OF GOD.**

**FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER THE
WORLD THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO FIND THE FULFILLMENT IN
LIFE YOU SO DESPERATELY SEEK.**

IS YOUR SEED STILL IN THE BARN?

**GOD PROMISES THAT WHEN YOU SOW THAT SEED IN THE
WORLD AROUND YOU, A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST WILL SPRING
FORTH.**

"FROM THIS DAY ON, GOD WILL SURELY BLESS YOU!"

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