

SPIRITUAL CAT SCAN

HAGGAI

In Real Estate jargon a run down house in need of repair is labeled “a fixer upper.” You’ll never see an advertisement for a “*shack*” or “*dump*.”

Nobody wants to purchase a “*condemned domicile*” – but put out an ad using the term “a fixer upper” – and some energetic, young handyman might just see it as a challenge, and take *the dump* off your hands.

At the time of Haggai, the Temple in Jerusalem was *a real fixer upper!*

For two centuries there was nothing like the grand and glorious Temple built by Solomon. It was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It served as the center of Judah’s national life. Now it was a patch of weed and rock.

In 586 BC the dreaded Babylonian army burst through the city walls and demolished Jerusalem. They *toppled the Temple*, and took the Jews back to Babel. As they served out a 70 year sentence in captivity, what was left of the Temple lay in ruins. The *Temple* had been reduced to *rubble*.

But in 536 BC the tide turned. The Medes and Persians conquered Babylon. The new administration - headed by Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian - were friends of the Hebrew prophet Daniel.

They were fond of the Jews. King Cyrus allowed them to return home. That's when God could've said: *Anyone interested in a real fixer upper?*

It was God's goal for His people to return to the land He promised, and rebuild their place of sacrifice and worship, the Temple. And there was an ambitious, young handyman who loved God and accepted God's call.

Rubble was right up Zerubbabel's alley.

Think of Zerubbabel as a combo builder, organizer, pioneer, pastor...

He was appointed governor of Judah. And along with Joshua the Priest, he led 50,000 *eager and energetic, patriotic and pioneering* Jews – to pull up stakes, return to Judah, reconstruct the city, and rebuild God's Temple.

And they got off to a good start. They laid the Temple's foundation in the 2nd month of the year 535 - *but that's as far as the construction got!* Zerubbabel ran into problems. And the work came to a screeching halt.

Enter the Prophet Haggai... God sent him to light a fire under the Jews.

His job was to cause them see the significance of God's Temple, and reprioritize its construction. *God wasn't happy with the building delays!*

And this, my friends is a message to you and me. We also have been called by God to construct His Temple. In our case it's this church.

The prophecy of Haggai is as relevant to us, as it was to the Jews who returned from Babylon. Like the Temple of old, the church is the one place in the world today where people can gather and be assured of meeting God. It's a place of worship, and community, and sacrifice, and love...

It's been said, "Every chair in the church should be a love seat."

People tend to measure the importance of a church by what we do...

They count the folks we feed, or material we distribute, or buildings we erect, or aid we offer, or organization we provide, or funds we collect... but the real value of the church is not *what we do*, it's *what we are*.

Our church and other churches are the dot on the map where a person in our community can reach out and find God. We're their tangible point of contact. Folks should be able to walk through our doors - feel God's love through His people, and hear God's truth through His Scriptures.

When God looks down on a community the spiritual hot spot isn't city hall, or the police station, or the university, or the business center, or the parks and rec, or restaurant row - it's His church. We are *the God spot*.

Other groups feed, distribute, organize, and fund - but only the Church can be the house and Temple of God. I've heard it said, "The church has many critics, but no rivals." The church serves a unique and vital role.

And every Christian has a divine calling to help build the Church.

Haggai begins in 1:2, "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.'" Here's the first clue God is angry with the Jews... Usually He calls them "*My people*," here He says "*This people*."

And *this people* lived by a motto, "*Always put off until tomorrow what you can do today*." The resettled Jews were procrastinators.

It reminds me of the pastor's son.

He was just 8 years old, but being raised in the church he had heard all the biblical terms – *justification, sanctification, propitiation, revelation* – all the "*ations*." The boy had been exposed to these terms countless times, but didn't know what they meant. He just knew they were *church words*.

One day in class his teacher asked if anyone knew the meaning of the word "*procrastination*." The little boy's hand shot up. He stated, "*I'm not sure what it means, but I know it's something my church believes in!*"

Sadly, many churches seem to believe in procrastination – it's their *modus operandi* – it characterizes all they do... Its one thing to wait on the Lord - but what if *the time is now*, and *God's tool is you*?

I believe we need to trust in God... but we need to *trust*, not *rust*.

When Zerubbabel and the Jews returned to the land they immediately went to work on the Temple. *They took an offering, built an altar, hired stone masons and carpenters, imported logs, and laid the foundation...*

But then work shut down. You could say, “**They tossed in the trowel.**”

Zerubbabel butted heads with county officials – (*sound familiar?*)

While the Jews were in Babylon a people called “**Samaritans**” moved in and occupied the land. Now, these Samaritans are uncomfortable that the land’s rightful owners are coming back. They oppose and try to sabotage Zerubbabel’s efforts. Eventually they secured an injunction from Persia.

It gets cleared up, but in the meantime the momentum was lost... The once *enthused* Jews started to battle *frustration*. *Distraction* takes hold.

And for the next 15 years the rebuilding gets neglected... **until** the year 520 BC. In that one year, over a four-month period, the Prophet Haggai delivers four fiery sermons designed to jump start Temple construction.

Haggai’s 1st sermon deals with the people’s **self-centeredness**.

His 2nd sermon shows the people’s **short-sightedness**.

The 3rd sermon addresses the people's **self-righteousness**.

Sermon 4 addresses Zerubbabel's tendency to **second-guess**.

Today, God is building a spiritual temple, this church, and the biggest problems we face are the same four encountered by Zerubbabel.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This means the victory has been won – the outcome is certain. Nothing can defeat us. The Church is invincible.

In the years I coached Little League I'd gather up the team, and look all twelve players eyeball to eyeball. I'd assure them no other team in our league could beat us. The only team that could defeat us... *was us*.

If we don't think, and try our best, and work together we'll self-destruct.

And the same applies to this church. The only way for us to lose is if we get **self-centered**, or **short-sighted**, or **self-righteous**, or we sit in the peanut gallery and **second guess** ourselves. I believe the message of Haggai is a timely word from God to CCSM (C316). *I'm praying for our church today...*

Haggai's first sermon was delivered on August 29th. It begins in 1:3...

"The word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your

paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" Notice the prophet's sarcasm. The Jews said it wasn't time to build God's house, but it had certainly been time to build their own houses.

And not just *houses*, but "paneled houses." The Jerusalem suburbs looked like the Atlanta Home Show – everyone was styling the newest designs and most elaborate decors. These Jews were living in luxury.

Ezra 3:7 tells us when construction on the Temple began Jews bought cedar logs from Lebanon. It's my suspicion their fancy cedar-siding came from building material they'd lifted from the Lord. Imagine, stealing cedar planks intended for God's house, and using them to build your own.

Here were people who started out serving God, but over time their attention shifted from *God's house* to their *own house*.

And I can't tell you how often I've seen this happen.

The couple who hung out at the church – were really involved – one day drop a down payment on a house and we rarely see them again.

And it's not just a home that can cause people to grow self-absorbed.

A whole host of distractions prompt people to retreat into their own little world. Their hearts ends up no bigger than their own four walls.

Careers, and kids' activities, and hobbies, and youth sports, and lawn work can become a deadly diversion... We all want and expect a strong church when *WE* need one, but what are you doing to make it strong?

Four guys were playing golf on Sunday morning. After a few holes it started to rain. They returned to the clubhouse, but lightning struck the power line, forcing the restaurant to close. The whole day was a wash.

On the way to the car one guy says to his partner, "**We could've just as well gone to church this morning.**" His friend responded, "**Nah, I couldn't have gone to church anyway. My wife is sick, and at home in bed.**"

There's a Temple to be built... and you have a part to play... but how far down your priority list has the building of that Temple sunk?

Haggai warns us in verses 5-6, "**Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.**"

In other words, live for yourself and the rewards never equal the investment. **Self-centeredness** produces a hollow existence.

Zerubbabel's distracted workers were involved in an empty pursuit - *a vain gain*. Haggai paints a graphic

picture... He says living for yourself is like shopping with a bottomless shopping bag. Imagine walking the aisles at Walmart – purchasing item after item - then stuffing them into a bag...

But the bag never fills up... and you go broke in the process.

Sounds like the words of Jesus, “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” Real fulfillment comes when I lay down selfish ambitions, and throw myself into a great work for God.

This is God’s suggestion in verse 8, “Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified.”

Speaking of great works for God - let me talk for a moment about the kind of Temple we envision and are building here at Calvary...

We’ve got no interest in swapping sheep with other churches. We want to reach folks who’ve never tasted God’s love... And we’re trying to gather all types of people – not just the folks who look, or act, or live like us.

In God’s presence there’s fullness of joy. We want to be a joyful place.

Neither do we hammer folks with the mallet of morality. That’s not how we believe people become holy. Believers should learn to live and abide in God’s grace, and trust His Spirit to change them from the inside out.

How tired we are of human opinion. We want to trumpet God's Word.

We want Jesus - without the religious trappings and traditions of men.

Cookie-cutter Christianity isn't for us! *You don't have to be like me - to be like Jesus.* *We crave reality, and despise hypocrisy – even when it appears in us.* Our pursuit is an authentic, Spirit-led, life with God.

We believe life starts when you give it away. To be unhappy just get selfish... God's forgiveness is free, and we want to give it freely.

In a nutshell, these are the values of our church – this is what we're all about. I hope you agree building such a church constitutes a great work.

And you have a contribution to make. Be it your money, or time, or gifts, or prayers, or service, or encouragement, or just your attendance...

It reminds me of the fellow who stayed overnight at the monastery.

For dinner the brothers served the best fish and chips he'd ever eaten. He was so impressed he went back into the kitchen to compliment the cook. Actually two priests had worked on the fabulous fish and chips.

The first priest introduced himself, *"Well, I'm the fish friar."* The second priest chimed in, *"Yea, and I'm the chip monk."* You may be *a fish friar*, or *a chip monk* – but each one of us has a place in the Temple.

Read God's conclusion in verse 9, "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away."

They landed in Jerusalem with great expectations, but God made sure life was a letdown. The little bit they did accumulate, God blew away.

God sent lean times. Nothing they tried worked as they'd planned.

And in verse 9 Haggai asks, "Why?" God answers him, "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house."

Life didn't work *right* because their priorities were all *wrong*. And here's my question for us, *why do we think God will treat us any differently?*

You need to remember, and your kids need to learn, there's something more important than *another dollar, the next ballgame, the TV special, a day at the lake*. **Your house** should be helping to build **God's house**.

Haggai preached his first sermon on August 29. Construction resumed on the Temple, September 21. Haggai's second sermon came three weeks later on October 17. And understand what went on during those 3 weeks...

The Jews celebrated their Fall Feasts - Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles – fell in that three week

time period. At least 13 of the 26 days had been holy days. As a result very little work got done.

But here's what did happen... During the feasts Jews came to town from the surrounding regions - and a group of cynics became verbal.

These were old men - geezers, geriatric Jews – who remembered the majesty, beauty, and grandeur of Solomon's temple. They could tell this rebuilt Temple was going to be a shack in comparison to the former.

And they voiced their cynicism and negativity...

Imagine the results... Folks were pumped up, primed, raring and ready to do a great work for God – when along comes these party-poopers who throw a wet blanket on the project. They douse the flame of enthusiasm.

Let me testify, as a church leader nothing can discourage you quite like uninformed cynicism and negativity. It sucks the wind out of your sails.

This is why God moves quickly to strengthen his construction bosses.

In 2:4 He says, “Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you...'

The way to fight through a cloud of negativity is *to stay strong and keep at it*. Don't let the sideline cynic or critic distract you from playing the game.

Understand, not every faithful pastor presides over a mega-church.

I pastor a wonderful church, but other churches are larger in number, better equipped, and have more resources. I feel my ministry is more an example of a *sanctified stubbornness* than a *screaming success*.

I think of the stonecutter who pounds the rock with his mallet over a hundred times. All he sees are a few hairline cracks. He later steps aside, and on his replacement's first swing the rock splits in pieces.

That doesn't mean the first man's efforts were futile. His role was strategic. What if our job is to *keep working* – *keep pounding*? It's the generation that succeeds us that gets to split open the rock?

Zerubbabel needs to be strong and keep pounding...

God gives Zerubbabel a *pep talk*, but He also makes a *promise*. God gives a staggering promise that overshadows the old boys' cynicism.

He says in the last half of verse 6, "I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory..."

Verse 8, "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says the LORD of hosts." Then verse 9, "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace..."

If you were alive at the time you'd wonder, "*How can this be?*"

Solomon was history's richest man. He could afford frills and extras – he hired more skilled craftsmen – imports from around the world - *how could Zerubbabel's Temple ever be more glorious than Solomon's?*

In fact, the Babylonian Talmud tells us there were at least five strategic pieces missing from the second Temple that were present in the first...

The Ark of the Covenant - the fire that burned on the altar - the glory that filled the Holy of Holies - the Spirit of prophecy - the voice of God - and the Urim and the Thummin (stones the priests used to determine God's will.) Zerubbabel had definitely built a bare bones temple.

How could his *holy hut* be more glorious than *the loaded Temple?*

Here's God's answer... He tells Zerubbabel in verse 7, He'll send to this 2nd temple something the first temple never had. He calls it, "*the Desire of All Nations.*" A term the Jewish rabbis understood to refer to the Messiah.

What made Zerubbabel's Temple more glorious than Solomon's?

Here's the answer... *It was visited by the Son of God Himself.*

Jesus came to this Temple. God incarnate graced its halls - taught in its porticos - worked miracles in its courtyards. Indeed the glory of God filled the 2nd Temple

in a way that far exceeded the glory evident in the first Temple. Jesus the Christ was the 2nd Temple's *greater glory*.

The glory of Jesus more than made up for the trimmings the 2nd Temple lacked. The problem with the pessimists was their **short-sightedness**.

God makes a point in verse 8, **"The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine."**

If God had wanted Zerubbabel's Temple to be as elaborate, and ornate, and embellished as Solomon's Temple *He could've paid for the bling!* It was obviously, not God's concern to make a fancy, splashy Temple.

The old guys had made superficial evaluations. They saw only the brick and mortar. They didn't see the purpose God had in store for this Temple.

And we too can make similar judgments. We think a church of 15,000 people is more glorious than a church with 50 – or spacious, new facilities have a greater glory than a storefront church or a warehouse sanctuary.

Don't be deceived. God has an individual plan for every church.

The church is where Jesus dwells. Its splendor and size mean little to God. In Matthew 18:20 Jesus tells His disciples, **"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."**

Jesus has a purpose for every church – large or small – glitzy or gritty – whether it meets in *a big house* or *an*

outhouse or a warehouse. If Jesus shows up every week, how dare you consider that church insignificant?

There are some churches in our community that look like they were built by Solomon. They have the best programs and pastors. In comparison this church and its pastors are Zerubbabel-like – *barely up from the rubble.*

I suppose if you look hard enough there's lots of reason to be cynical and skeptical about your church and its pastor. But I want you to know...

There's a reason you should love this church, support this church, and get involved in helping to build this church... God has promised us, **"the Desire of All Nations."** Jesus fills this church with His grace and glory!

In 2:7 Haggai writes of God **"I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations"**. I believe there's a shaking going on today...

And not just in Haiti. Society is in upheaval. We're shaken economically. Marriage is in decline. Divorce is up. Children are victims of broken homes. Evolutionary propaganda is destroying our respect for human life. Moral relativism has stripped us of right and wrong. Pornography tortures the minds of millions. Violence runs rampant. Our courts are ineffective.

I heard of a New York judge who was mugged. Afterwards he called a press conference to assure his constituency his experience would in no way affect his legal decisions. An elderly lady stood up, and shouted,

"Then mug him again." *When are we going to stop the violence?*

There's a *shaking* going on - and this *shaking* is producing a *seeking*... People are looking for answers and their looking in a spiritual direction.

When this building was under construction I came up one day to find a young man who'd wandered over to the church. He told me he'd had a fight with his wife, and said he just felt God's peace in this place.

I was able to share some Scripture and we prayed together.

If you go to the back walkway on the west side of the building you'll see a Scripture reference written in the concrete - **Haggai 2:9**. This verse has been prophetic. We believed Jesus would reveal Himself here in greater glory than in our former facility - and this building would be a place of peace. That's exactly what's happened... *if these walls could talk...*

I'm more excited today about our church than every before... not because I expect a mega-church... but Jesus works in this place.

We're a brown bag operation for sure, but God's grace is here.

The last two of Haggai's sermons were preached on the same day, *December 18*. Two months had expired since his second sermon.

Enough time for another problem to arise among the workers.

Zerubbabel's band of merry men had gotten proud. They developed a toxic case of **self-righteousness**.
"Look at what we've built for God."

Here's a potential pitfall for any church. The church was meant to be *a source of pleasure to God, not a source of pride for His people.*

Haggai humbles them with a lesson in Levitical law. In 2:11-14 he explains that holiness is non-communicable – you don't get holy by hanging with holy people, or visiting holy places. It's not a virus.

Holiness is not contagious. If Billy Graham sneezes on you it won't make you more godly or spiritual. You can swim in a sea of holy water, and you won't come out any holier than you were when you dove in.

Here's the point, erecting a Temple is no substitute for commitment, and purity, and faith. What we do *with our hands* is no excuse for what happens *in our hearts*. Don't get puff up, attitude matters even for Temple builders.

Haggai's fourth sermon was directed to Zerubbabel. Apparently, the governor did a lot of **second-guessing** – he wondered about his own decisions and leadership. Zerubbabel was plagued by self-doubt.

Haggai encourages him. He assures him that God will exalt him in a wonderful way. In verse 23 God tells Zerubbabel he'll make him **"like a signet ring."** The signet

was the king's official seal. It was a sign of great authority. Zerubbabel will occupy an important post.

In this lifetime, Zerubbabel was one of many governors - assigned to a distant outpost called Judah. Few of his peers even knew he existed.

And when it comes to Bible heroes – he doesn't fair much better.

When you think of great men of the faith does Zerubbabel come to mind? He's eclipsed by men like Moses, David, Daniel, Peter, Paul...

But verse 23 causes many Bible scholars to believe Zerubbabel will play a vital role in the last days - when Jesus reigns. In this life, he was overlooked, but in the Kingdom he may be known around the world.

This is why I think heaven is full of surprises.

Christians who served faithfully in anonymity will occupy the important posts, while those who labored in the spotlight may take the backseats.

God may *use you in this life* to do great things, or *use this life* to prepare you for great things in the Kingdom come. Temple builders aren't always appreciated in the here and now. Their promotion is still future.

Zerubbabel is a reminder of the promise – “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much...” If not in this lifetime, in the life to come...

Like the Temple of old, the church today is the most strategic institution on earth. We connect people to Jesus. We don't deserve it, but Jesus is in our midst. We can take *God's hand* and *your hand* and put them together.

What other institution can deliver such a service? No corporation, or team, or charity, or institution, or enterprise... We're *God's hot spot*.

Beware of *self-centeredness*, *short-sightedness*, *self-righteousness*, and *second-guessing*. *Be strong – believe - be humble - be assured!*

Hey, there's only one team that can beat us - *and that's us!*