

# The Present Matters

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[ 0 : 00 ] Now as we look at this chapter 2 in Haggai, we have this pronouncement from the prophet that that which they have begun to do the Lord will bless.

And despite the fact that he has in a sense judged and cursed them in the past for good and sound reasons, and we'll come to that, yet he intends now to bless.

And the particular word is to Zerubabel, the son of Sheerah, and to Joshua, the son of Josedek, the high priest. These two being what we might call the leaders of, I was going to say church and state, but it's really the other way around, it's state and church.

Zerubabel was the governor, he was the one in charge of civil affairs for the exiles having returned to Jerusalem, and Joshua, the son of Josedek, the high priest.

The sort of emblem or the lead figure of the religious authority, the priest, the church of the Old Testament, as it were. So these two have a leadership role, working of course in perfect harmony there together, as ideally is the case in the, as it's called, establishment principle.

[ 1 : 07 ] But let's leave that aside for the moment. The context is that which we find in, for example, Ezra, the opening chapters of Ezra 3 and 5 and so on. And if we look at Ezra 5, verses 1 and 2, we see precisely the situation described.

Then the prophets Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubabel, the son of Sheerah, and Jeshua, the son of Josedek, and began to build the house of God, which is at Jerusalem.

And with them were the prophets of God helping them. So that's the context being described here, as the people have begun to build, to rebuild, the temple which was in ruins when they came back to Jerusalem.

Previous to the building of the actual foundation and the building itself, they had, of course, if we're to turn back to Ezra 3, they had set up the altar. They had begun the worship of God again in, as it were, the empty shell of where the temple had been.

And we read towards the end of that chapter 3 in Ezra. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers who were ancient men, that had seen the first house when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice.

[ 2 : 28 ] And many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people. For the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

But this kind of mixture of emotions of both sorrow on the one hand for the glory that had departed and joy that a new start was being made, that's the kind of emotions that are being described here in verse 3 of the chapter we read.

Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

Yet now be strong, Ozele of Abel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua the son of Josedeim, the high priest. Be strong, all ye people of the land, and work. For I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts, according to the word that I commented with you when ye came out of Egypt.

So this is the setting, this is the context of this rebuilding work. And yet we might say if we had to think in terms of a title for this particular passage, we might call it the present matters.

[ 3 : 39 ] The present matters. There is a tendency, as we see here, both with them in Ezra and also here in Haggai, of on the one hand looking back and saying, well, those were so much better days.

We all tend to think of the days of our youth as better days. Because these are days which, well, those are days which we remember with a certain rose-tinted glow.

We tend to sort of filter out the things that were bad. And we remember that we were young, and we remember that people looked after us, and we didn't have responsibilities or worries. And everything had a sort of comforting familiarity about it, and we knew where we stood, and so on.

And it always tends to make that look better. And there's an element of this here with Haggai and Ezra as well, that those who remember the old temple are looking back and saying, how much better it was.

But there's also a sense in which we may, perhaps, if we are following the Lord or the believers in it, we may look forward and say, ah, well, it doesn't matter too much about just now. Because, you know, at the end of the day, the Lord's going to take control of it.

[ 4 : 46 ] Oh, the Lord will come back, and he'll sort it all out, and he'll build his kingdom, and so on. And there is a hint of this as well, at the end of chapter 2, where we have this looking forward.

Where the Lord says to Zerubbabel, the governor, shake the heavens and the earth. And this, of course, a prophecy of Messiah coming over, throw the throne of kingdoms, and so on. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet, for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.

Now, of course, if we recognize Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, where he fits in, the grand scheme of things. We know if we turn to Matthew chapter 1, that he is in the second part, or rather, when we've got the third part of the genealogy of Jesus, where you've got, from the time of the return from exile, when they were brought back, brought to Babylon, we've got, he's in the third generation of those in that sort of section.

In verse 12 in Matthew chapter 1, And then, just a couple of verses further on, it says, So, Zerubbabel himself has a key role in the eventual coming of the throne.

In the midst of Christ, several generations away, the future is going to get even more glorious and even better. And it might be the inclination for such an individual to sit in his hands and say, Ach, well, in the fullness of time, the Lord's going to bring it all about, and I'm going to have a key part of it.

[ 6 : 34 ] That'll be nice, won't it? But that doesn't happen until many generations, after which, humanly speaking, Zerubbabel is dead. And yes, he'll be in glory, we trust and believe, but he is dead, and his time and his opportunity to serve, to impact, and to make a difference for the Lord's kingdom will have passed.

The future may indeed be glorious. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's what we pray for. And the past may look better than the present does, but the fact of the matter is the Lord didn't really put us there, or he only put us there for a time.

And we may remember something of the past, but we have now been brought on from that. And it is in the present day when the Lord seeks us to serve him, and to make a difference, an impact, a contribution for his kingdom here and now.

The present matters. The past will never come again to us. The future is not there yet. The vehicle for our arriving there is the present. Nobody lives tomorrow.

The present is the only time when duty may be done, grace may be received. When we get into what we now think of as tomorrow, it will still just be the present. We cannot actually afford to let the water just flow under the bridge and just say, well, it doesn't really matter.

[ 7 : 56 ] Nor can we think that, well, I've done enough now. I don't have to worry too much because, you know, the Lord knows where I stand. I've clocked up so many years. I can let go a bit.

Don't you think that's what Solomon possibly did? When after he had built the first temple with all its glory and all the wonder and splendor, then we read towards the end of his reign that King Solomon loved many strange women, and then all these different foreign pagan wives and concubines, they turned his heart away from the Lord.

And the end of that reign in that kingdom was degraded into paganism. And all the subsequent trouble that that laid up for the kingdom of Israel, which did not stay united for long.

And if you think of poor Judas there, I say poor Judas, of course we know that ultimately he's lost. But, you know, how close up to the very end did he stay, a diligent apostle?

And I just thought, well, come on, I've done three, three and a half years with the Lord. You know, even if I slip up in the last 24 hours, come on. Surely I've clocked up enough time. It's only the last wee bit that I've failed in there.

[ 9 : 03 ] So that must be enough. I can take my foot off the pedal. I can relax a wee bit. Maybe we might think like that. It doesn't matter too much what I do now because look at all I've clocked up in the past.

The present still matters. And as long as we are in the present, it still matters that we keep on going with the Lord right up to the end. He's the one that calls time, not us.

The present matters. Looking ahead with Sadijah Babel. The Lord says at verse 23, I will make thee as a signet that I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.

Well, signet means a particular kind of ring of authority. It may or may not be that, or that question with which you might seal or stamp the wax in an old-fashioned letter. But it certainly means a means of delegated authority.

We think in terms of what we read in Esther, when, remember, Haman is plotting the overthrow of the dukes. Read in chapter 3 of Esther, verses 10 and 11. And the king took his ring from his hand and gave it unto Haman, the son of Hamadathah, the Agagai, the Jew's enemy.

[ 10 : 09 ] And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, and the people also to do with them, as it seemeth good to thee. Whilst he had that ring, that signet, he was acting with the king's authority.

Anything he sent out, anything he sealed, was sealed with the king's ring. It is a position of delegated authority. And Zele of Abel, yes, he has that authority for his time, for his generation.

You know, sometimes you park your car in a car park, and it says on the wee ticket you get, not transferable. What they mean is they don't want you lending your ticket to somebody else when you're finished and there's still a bit of time left on it.

How are they going to stop you doing that? I don't know. But the fact of the matter is, authority from the Lord is not transferable. The Lord chooses, anoints, and picks out those whom he will give for a time as authority, and their authority is not transferable.

Zeke of Abel can't just say, Well, I'll let my pal so-and-so be governor for a day. I'll give him the charge of the holy things of God and the ruling of the people. It's not transferable.

[ 11 : 12 ] The signet is given and chosen for Zeke of Abel. And ultimately, of course, it becomes passed on to his most holy descendant of all, after the flesh speaking.

And that is our Lord Jesus Christ, who says, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. And you could say, in one sense, that's a delegated authority, because the Father has given it to the Son.

And we could say that truthfully, but at the same time, say it hesitantly, because you don't want to imply that any one of the persons of the Godhead is less than any other.

But the Son receives his authority, or his power to exercise it. It is given from his Father, and he acknowledges that. And by the same token, his fleshly speaking ancestors, Elie Babel, is taken as being a signet.

The Lord delegates a certain authority to him, for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts. So the past, yes, has its place, and the future will have its place, but the present matters.

[ 12 : 17 ] As we said at verse 3, they'll be very conscious that what they are seeking to build here is a pure imitation of the glory of what Solomon had raised, the Temple of Solomon.

But, you know, the Temple of Solomon had already been debased and degraded. Remember, foreign kings gave it stripped away all the gold and so on, and they had to replace it with bronze, and then they would take other treasures out of it to go and pay ransoms to other foreign kings, and then eventually other bad kings made set up sort of graven images and idols inside the Temple.

It had been debased and degraded by idolatry, and by theft, and by impoverishment, and so on. But even so, it was still, had still been the glory of Israel.

But it had, because of its idolatry, because of its association with unfaithfulness, the Lord had destroyed it. He had caused it to be destroyed by the Babylonians, and justly so, because at the end of the day, it was merely a receptacle.

It was merely a shell in which he had chosen to meet with his people, chosen to make his symbolic presence dwell there. But if the people of Israel were going to defile it with idolatry, the Lord would just smash it to bits, which he did.

[ 13 : 38 ] He doesn't owe them anything. They owe him everything. That was the reason why it was destroyed. It was because Judah and Israel had descended into so much evil.

But still here we see the stonework now of what they're using would not have been anything like, as glorious as that which Solomon used. The stonework, and the cedar work, and the gold, and so on.

Because they are returning exiles. They quote them refugees, working with what they've got. Such tools as they have, such stone as they have.

They don't have a special arrangement with Hiram the king of Tyre to float down massive cedar trees and logs, all the way down to Joppa, and then take them off into the mountains. They don't have huge gangs of workers quarrying stones in the mountains, and then bringing them into Jerusalem and setting them in place so that they're exactly measured already, so that not a single sound of a tool is heard lifted up on the stonework, and so on.

They simply don't have the kind of resources that Solomon had. But with what they have, they are doing what they can to honour the Lord.

[ 14 : 48 ] And the attitude of saying, oh, well, we can't do anything. Nothing we can do. Let's just sit in our hands. Let's just go about their own business. This is precisely what Haggai had criticised them for in chapter 1.

Verse 2. Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, this people say, This people say that time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your sealed houses?

And this house do I waste? Now, therefore, let's say the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. They could say, oh, well, a better time will come when we'll have more money, more resources. Then we can make a proper job of building the temple.

Let's just put it off for now. And don't we hear that echoed so often in the foolish ideas of so many people? It's time enough for me to pray for the Lord if we're going to do that.

For now, I want to eat, drink, and be merry. I want to get on with my life. I want to make a bit of money. I want to do some of the things I want to do, store off a few in my bucket list. And then, then maybe I'll give the Lord the leftovers in my life.

[ 15 : 52 ] It's not time yet. There's plenty of time. And we think the future will be some kind of golden open-ended time of opportunity when everything will fall into place.

And then we'll say finally, well, now, I think maybe it's time for me to think about seeking the Lord. People don't do that. No matter how much the Lord blesses them with, no matter how good their lives may be, how much money they might make, how well they do in their careers, they never, ever of their own back will say, okay, I think I've got enough now.

Yeah, maybe I should start thinking about my soul and about the Lord now. Because they never think they've got to that stage. And if they say, oh, well, I'll think about it when I'm old. Such is human vanity.

Nobody ever accepts that they are old. You ever see that with celebrities doing all the Botox and the plastic surgery and so on, and desperately trying to disfigure their faces and bodies to make people think they're still young?

Of course they're not. We do age. We do get old. But so few actually admit it. Say, oh, I'm not old. I'm not old. No, no, I'm still young. Well, your parents and grandparents would have been much, much younger than maybe some of us are now, or we would have thought they were really old.

[ 17 : 06 ] We never get to the stage where we think, okay, maybe it's time to seek the Lord. We don't think that of ourselves unless we are told it through God's own mouthpiece.

Now, Haggai the prophet was God's mouthpiece there in chapter 1. And sometimes the Lord strikes directly into our lives, like he did with Saul of Tarsus. Other times he may convict our hearts through his word or through the testimony of somebody else, or through an incident that happens.

But it never happens just by itself. Because we in and of ourselves are fallen creatures. There is no good in us that we can work accompanying salvation.

Nothing that we can do to prepare for it. Nothing we can do to make it happen in and of ourselves. It is the Lord who makes it happen. So we can't say, ah, time and now, let's leave it for later.

It's not time for us to come and seek the Lord yet. The future will do. It is the present that matters. The present is all you've got. You don't have any promise of the future.

[ 18 : 09 ] Now, you've had plenty of the past, and what did we do with it? The present matters. Now, the Lord says that, I am with you, saith the Lord, that they are strong, all you people of the Lord, and work for I am with you, saith the Lord of us.

Do what you are able to do. And then he said, according to the word that I commented with you when you came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you. Fear not ye.

You might think, came out of Egypt. Oh, come on. That's centuries ago. Maybe as much as a thousand years earlier. Come on. He's still talking about when he came out of Egypt. Things have moved on.

Surely things have changed now. Surely it doesn't quite apply now like it did then. No, it still applies. Because in our way of understanding, that's centuries before the time of Haggai.

In God's way of understanding, it is right there as though it is present. Because we have an eternal God, for whom the past, the present, and the future are all as though they were just right there in the present.

[ 19 : 11 ] That's another reason why the present should matter to us. Because for God, it is always the present. Even if the bringing out of Egypt was centuries earlier, it's still every bit as relevant because he is an eternal and unchanging God.

And the fact that he was able to do something like that then indicates he is still able to do something like that now or in the future because God hasn't changed. And there is nothing in the conditions of the world that are too much for God to handle.

If he could do it then, he could do it now. He could do it tomorrow if he chooses. So he makes reference to something that is centuries earlier as though it were directly relevant there and then.

Because it is. Because he is an eternal God. Now what does he mean with that?

The desire of all nations? Well, this is a prophecy of the Messiah. The desire of all nations. Remember how Abraham was told not only when his name is changed from Abraham to Abraham, he becomes a father of many nations.

[ 20 : 24 ] But also the prophecy that in him would all the families of the earth be blessed. And that promise was reiterated again to Isaac and reiterated again to Jacob.

So the desire of all the families of the earth, all the nations of the world, something was going to occur which would be the blessing of all the nations of the earth.

And the desire of all nations shall come. The desire of all nations ultimately is for redemption and salvation. They don't necessarily realize that.

They don't necessarily know that. And it's one of those things which until we have tasted it, we don't realize how much we need it. Until we experience something of it, we don't realize how desperately our soul was yearning for it.

You see, fallen man in his ordinary condition does not recognize a need of salvation or repentance. He doesn't need, they recognize a need for redemption in his soul.

[ 21 : 28 ] He doesn't realize that that is the desire, the deep-seated desire of his heart, of his entire life. That it will never be fulfilled until it is fulfilled in Christ.

All that he knows, an ordinary fallen man or woman knows, is that, oh, that's so hard. James, there's so much wrong with it. You know, this isn't right and that isn't right. Oh, the government's bad.

And so many things in my life are wrong. And I haven't got this, I want it, and I haven't got that. I can't get this because I don't have it, unless my other people are so privileged and they've got this and they've got that. And look at me, I don't have anything.

All that we are conscious of is that unfulfillments of life in our ordinary fallen state. There is nobody in their fallen, sinful state, unsaved state who thinks, Isn't life great?

Isn't life brilliant? I've got everything I want. I've got everything I desire. I've got no ambitions. Everything is just perfect. Nobody thinks that in their ordinary fallen condition.

[ 22 : 30 ] They are conscious of dissatisfaction. They are conscious of unfulfillment. They are conscious of this hole in their life that they do not recognize until the Lord causes the scales to fall from their eyes.

That the desire of all nations is for that redemption and salvation which is only in Christ Jesus. The desire of all nations shall come.

In other words, the Messiah shall come. What will be the relation between the Messiah and the temple? He will come to his holy temple. He will come and he will not simply dwell.

He will visit it. He will become the glory of it. We turn to the last prophecy in scripture. That of Malachi. We see in chapter 3.

Behold, I will send my messenger. He shall prepare a way before me, saith the Lord. And the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple. Even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in.

[ 23 : 32 ] Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts, for whom ye abide the day of his coming. And so on. Now Christ comes to his temple. He comes, yes, as a boy, he would have come every year with his parents and so on.

But when he comes in his ministry, the first thing he does, he cleanses it. Of all the commerce and the haggling and the busyness and all the impurity that was in it.

And he says, my temple shall be called the house of prayer for all nations. He reclaims it. And then in the forms of time, having visited it, having come to it, having worshipped in it, having taught in it, having been the glory of it.

And the physical presence of God the Son in his Father's holy temple throughout that time then finally is taken out of it.

And like with the prophet Ezekiel, when he prophesies and sees the glory of God that initially fills the temple and then lifts up and then goes and settles on the Mount of Olives and it never returns to the temple.

[ 24 : 34 ] So likewise, Christ never went back again to the temple after he had left it. But before he left it, he came to it. The desire of all nations inhabited it.

He filled it. The glory of this house shall be greater than that of the former. That's what the Lord says. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former.

Verse 9. And in this place will I give peace, said the Lord of hosts. Because that is the only way to peace, is through Christ. But at a physical level, you know, one might think it's all very well.

Yeah, okay, that's it all fulfilled in a kind of spiritual sense. But nobody would have recognized that that was the real meaning at the time. He'd only have thought of a physical temple. That's very true.

They'd only have thought of a physical temple, which they were making the best of, but in no way could it rival Solomon's temple. As far as the Israelites and Jews are concerned, there's only ever been two temples on the Temple Mount.

[ 25 : 35 ] There's the Temple of Solomon, the first temple. And then there's the second temple, the one that was built in Nehemiah's day. That Haggai is now talking about here. But, of course, the temple in the days of Jesus had been rebuilt by Herod on such a scale of magnificence as to make, you know, the outward glory.

Not quite so much the inward glory with all the gold that Solomon had inside, but for the outward glory, it would have dwarfed and overshadowed Solomon's temple. But, crucially here, in Jewish eyes, Herod's rebuilding of the temple is precisely that.

It is a rebuilding of the second temple. It is not a third temple. There's only ever been the two. So, what we have by the time of Jesus is that Herod the Great, in order to try and carry favor with the Jews, basically rebuilt on a magnificent scale.

Massive, huge, and gloriously, outwardly glorious scale, this temple which they are currently building just now. So, when the Lord says, the silver is mine, the gold is mine, said the Lord of hosts, you know, I can bring gold out of anywhere.

I can make anybody want to bestow the lavishness of their riches on this temple. And Herod the Great was, to put it mildly, a godless man. That's putting it just about as charitably as we can.

[ 26 : 57 ] He would have no religious reason to beautify the temple or rebuild it. Why did he do it? He wanted to do it partly as a statement of how glorious he was, and also because he thought it would make his Jewish subjects like him.

He probably succeeded in that regard. But the fact of the matter is, how else do you motivate a bloodthirsty tyrant to lavish such wealth and splendor on something that is to the glory of God?

As the Lord says, the silver is mine, and gold is mine. I can bestow it how I want it. I can make anybody want to expend it on my house. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former, said the Lord of hosts.

And in this place will I give peace, said the Lord of hosts. So even in a physical sense, the Lord causes that temple to be built and then to be rebuilt on a glorious scale.

Although the ultimate spiritual fulfillment of the glory of that house is when the Messiah, the desire of all nations, comes into it. And as it were, dwells in it, abides in it, teaches in it day by day, worships in it, cleanses it from all its impurities.

[ 28 : 10 ] So it is both physically true and spiritually true. We tend perhaps to think in terms of, when God makes his promises, we tend perhaps to think in terms of, yeah, okay, yeah, I get that.

God is going to do it, but, you know, just in a spiritual sense, as if that's somehow less real. And we don't mean to be disrespectful, but what we mean is, well, it's not actually really going to be glorious and rebuilt.

I mean, it's not physically going to have all his blessing. It is going to be sort of spiritually, you know, up there, pie in the sky when you die. And however irreverent such thoughts may be, and however much we ought to check them when possible, there is a niggling sense in which we tend to think, oh, when God brings all these things, it's not really going to be physically here and now that he does it, is it?

It's going to be some kind of spiritual distant fulfillment. Remember that God always keeps his promises. God is no man's debt. And we spoke about how the physical temple would be rebuilt in such glory as even Solomon had not been able to give.

And that was true, as well as the spiritual glory of it. Also, if you think of the promise to Abraham, the promise to Abraham that his seed would be as the stars of heaven from multitude.

[ 29 : 26 ] Now, within the physical seed of Abraham, of course, only one very narrow line would be the covenant line. Only that little narrow line of Jacob's 12 tribes, and then within the 12 tribes, of course, very few of them would actually stay faithful to the Lord, and then the tribe of Judah, and then ultimately produce the Christ.

But that physical fulfillment, that was only a fraction of the actual offspring of Abraham. Remember that before Isaac was born, he had had Ishmael with Hagar.

Now, Ishmael had umpteen children of his own, and then after Sarah died, Abraham remarried, and he married Keturah, and then he had at least six, I think, was sons with her, and they all had offspring, and so on.



And all Ishmael's offspring would have had kids. So, even those who were not worshipping the living God, even those who were not of the covenant line, those who were not Israelites, those who were not faithful to Jehovah, in any meaningful sense of the word, they would still be physical descendants of Abraham.

They would still be his physical offspring, and God would be physically fulfilling his promise to Abraham. God is no man's debtor.

[ 30 : 44 ] He's not trying to shortchange anyone. He's not saying, oh, yeah, but when I said that, I really meant it in a spiritual sense. So, in other words, you're not really going to get it here and now. You are.

You will get everything God has promised. Abraham, of course, would only, if we can say it this week, from glory have seen the way in which that physical promise was fulfilled for his descendants.

But God still did it. He still fulfilled his work physically and earthly, as well as spiritually and eternally. But what I'd like us to see in these verses, briefly, verses 11 to 14, is the business of a holy flesh and a priest's garment and so on.

You cannot transfer holiness any more than you can transfer authority. You cannot transfer sanctity. And this is what Haggai is questioning the priests about.

You can't transfer it by touching something ordinary with something that's holy. It doesn't confer holiness. You can't transfer holiness. But, my goodness, you can transmit sin. You can start to transmit uncleanness quick enough.

[ 31 : 51 ] And every generation that is produced in the normal human way inherits that fallenness and that original sin. So, you can transmit sin. And you can make the suggestion of sin.

And somebody else will take it up. And you can tempt. And somebody else will say it. You can spread contagion very, very easily. You can spread the infection of sin. But you cannot spread sanctity by any human means.

You cannot spread holiness. Just because you had a godly granny does not mean that you or I will necessarily be saved or holy ourselves. The number of people who may trust in the fact that they were brought up in a good Christian way, doing the books and so on, that somehow that will stand them in any good stead of the last day.

No. They'll be doubly judged for having tied their backs on it. You cannot transmit or transfer holiness. And that is part of the message of these verses 11 to 14.

But rather, in the sin in which Israel was dwelling, God judged them. And that's what these verses 15 to 19 are talking about. That there was barrenness.

[ 33 : 01 ] That there was a fruitlessness in all that they tried to do. Because they were trying to do it unmindful of the Lord. It's not that they'd stop being Israelites. It's not that they weren't returning Jews from exile.

It's not that they hadn't obeyed God's word and come back to Jerusalem. Tried to make a go of it. But they were trying to live, if you like, as secular Jews. They were trying to live as sort of the Lord's people without being too religious about it.

You know, let's just sort of outweigh. Yeah, we're Israelites. But, you know, we're only concerned with the things of this world. You leave God out of the picture. And all your best efforts will fall short.

In terms of blessing. In terms of prosperity. And, of course, in terms of any attempt at righteousness with the Lord. We will always fall short. You know, you went to the, put your 20 measures and there was only 10.

You came to the press flat to draw out 50 vessels out. There were only 20. I smote you with blasting and nilled you with hail in all your labours and your hands. And you turned not to me, said the Lord.

[ 34 : 05 ] Because, by and large, disaster doesn't make us turn to the Lord. Punishment doesn't tend to reconcile us to the one who desires to bless.

But what do we find here? Consider now from this day and forward and upward. Verse 18. What's happened now? What has happened now is that Haggai and Zechariah have spoken to the people.

And through the leadership of Zehub Abel and Joshua, the son of Josedach, they have begun to build. They have begun to focus their energies. Not on their own fields and their own wine plants and their own houses and beautifully sealed homes and so on.

They have turned their attention to rebuilding the work and the kingdom of the Lord. And because they have done that, once they have got that underway, the Lord says, is the seed yet in the barn?

Yea, as yet the vine and the fig tree and the pomegranate, the olive tree, if not yet brought forth, from this day will I bless you. Turning to the Lord brings forth blessing.

[ 35 : 06 ] He doesn't wait for the temple to be finished. He doesn't wait to say, well, you finish it and I'll see if it's good enough. And they'll say, well, okay, maybe I'll bless you after that. Our efforts will never impress God.

What he sees is a turning around of the people. That's what the word repentance means. A change of direction. A repenting. They have begun now to focus their priorities upon the Lord.

And because they have done that, in this instance, with the physical rebuilding of his temple, which has now been begun and the foundation has been laid, he who has been, if we can say it reverently, just bursting to bless them, desperate to bless them, but unable to do so because of their rebellion and because of their forgetfulness of it.

Now, when they turn to him, at last, he is able to let the blessing out. He is able to confer his blessings of love upon them.

From this day forth, from this day will I bless you because they have turned to the Lord. Now, does that mean, oh, well, we somehow managed to get by with hardly anything in the barn or in the white plant.

[ 36 : 17 ] No, God gave us to make prosperity. The things that you were breaking your back to try and achieve. And so that's why you didn't have time for the Lord. Was it why you made me your priority?

I can add all these things to you. Jesus put it so succinctly in the common heart of me. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. All these things will be added unto you.

The Lord knows you have made of these things. But he demands, he calls for us to seek him first and to seek him now.

We have, it's a bit of a cliché, no promise of tomorrow, but it's true. The future, especially the distant future, we have absolutely no guarantee of. Nobody can live in the future.

And you can't go back to the past. What are we going to do now? With the Lord. What are we going to focus on now? What is going to be our priority now?

[ 37 : 15 ] The present matters. And that is in one sense all that the Lord has given us. But what he has given, he has given for a purpose.

And when he has given it, you can know, as he gives it, that it will always be enough. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Why? Let's pray.