

A Time to Build 2-3-02

Hag 1:1-15 (NIV)

The wisest man to ever live told us that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. There are seasons of life. Each has its own importance given it by Almighty God. I have a number of friends who are going through a season of suffering. I try to encourage those in the season of suffering that it will be over in due time, and you will look back on it from a place of blessing. What seems to be so impossible today will one day be a lesson that we value, an experience with which we relate to others who are hurting.

One little girl in church had sat quietly by her mother trying to understand the longwinded pastor. After she had given all the attention she had, she decided the season for preaching was over. She sat real tall and whispered in her mother's ear, "If we give him the money now, do you think he will let us go home?"

Some of us have a hard time with the particular season we are in. Sometimes we are there because of the Lord's timing and training. Other times we are there because we won't make the changes in our life to move on to the next season. The known is always more comfortable than the unknown. That was true with the remnant that had returned to Judah. After 15 years of working on their own homes and fields, Zechariah and Haggai came to tell them the season had changed. It was time to work on the house of the Lord. Two weeks ago we looked at the heart cry of Nehemiah for a restoration of the testimony of the name of God. As Nehemiah and Daniel and Ezra cried out to God for the change of season, for God to begin again the building of the temple, God sent his word through Zechariah and Haggai. Haggai is the shortest book of the Old Testament, third from the last, between Zephaniah and Zechariah. We have reason to believe he was quite elderly. He must have been called late in life and only ministered from August to December of the year 520BC. It's anybody's guess, but I think he died that January of old age in his early 80s. You're never too old to begin to yield to God's Spirit for some special purpose in your life. It would be great to go out in a blaze of glory, an instrument in the hand of God.

I want you to know that there are people all over this nation, if not the world, that pray for Sedona. I know people in Canada, Oregon, Kentucky, New York, California, and I'm sure there are many I don't know in other places, praying for the body of Christ here. They know this is the capitol of the New Age. They have heard the stories of the testimony of the church here, and God has given them a burden to pray for us. All around this area there are people praying for a change. When God moves His people to pray – get ready, the season is about to change!

Let us examine this passage and see how it relates to us right here and now.

¹ *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:*

² This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'"

Now remember, the temple of the living God is not this building we sit in this morning, but the building you personally are in, and the building we together make up. If in this day we talk of building His house, we are speaking of believers being added to the faith, of the church finding each member's calling and place within the body. The temple of the living God being built up today is each member operating in the gifts God has given them to edify the whole.

Why would the people of that day say it wasn't yet time? Wasn't 15 years a long enough wait? They might have looked at problems of unity amongst them. They may have considered the strength of the enemy around them. They may have just selfishly not wanted things to change, because it would mean sacrifice. There is always a reason not to go forward. But what does God say? Man always has an opinion, and ten men will have ten different opinions, but what does God say? I have had people unrelated to this church imply it isn't time yet. They think it is too big a challenge, too many obstacles for me. I agree! It is too much for all of us. But thank the Lord, it is not too big for Him! God is glorified when man can't do it. When it is beyond our ability and yet it somehow miraculously gets done, we better give Him all the glory. Is it time to for the Lord to build up the body of Christ in Sedona? I believe the time has come.

³ Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai:⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

I have a nice home, and many of you have nice homes, thank the Lord. The spiritual picture here is that they were taking care of the things that concerned them and not the things of God. They all had their way but the house of God wasn't being built. This is a city wide, if not nation wide problem. Christians are focussed on a style, a format, and pet doctrines. They have built up their paneled houses of preference and the house of God remains in ruins. I notice that the men of God living in this time – though they themselves did not commit some of the sins – prayed as if they did. They prayed like they were a part of a whole that had done evil. Is that not our situation in the church today? We are members in the body of Christ. Some wont go anywhere to worship because it does not fit their style. Some churches will not adjust so that all will find something they can relate to. "I got my paneled house the way I want it. If you don't like it get your own."

⁵ Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways.

⁶ You have 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."

They preferred to look after their physical needs rather than the house of God, and so God did not bless their endeavors. This is about fruitfulness. How much work goes into the average church? How many meetings? How much money? And yet, where is the fruit to show for all that labor? We often think of fruit as new believers and that is a type of fruit. Fruit is also growth in Christ, acting like Christ, exhibiting

the fruits of the Spirit. Fruit is also lives touched by the ministry of the fellowship. If fruit that remains is evident, you are on the right track. If not, the Lord Almighty says, "Give careful thought to your ways." In Hebrew this literally means "to put your heart upon your conduct". Is it your way, your personal agenda or God's? Is it politics or prayer? Is it a walk of faith or sight; the plans of men or of God? Is it a tender heart toward God or self-centeredness? Put your heart upon your conduct.

⁷ *This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways.*

In Hebrew, a repetition is to add emphasis. This repetition is meant to reinforce the urgent edict to examine our conduct and see if it is in God, led by the Holy Spirit or if it is of man. He doesn't just recommend we think about it. He says, "*Give careful thought..*"

Jesus told us He is the Way. Are our ways in the Way, that is, in Christ? Or are they our best efforts? Jesus' way was to do nothing except as He was directed of the Father. "*I can of my own self do nothing.*" John 5:19 If Jesus said that how much more is it true of us? Look at the fruit He bore! Some may have looked at the 11 cowering disciples and said, "Not much fruit there!" But wait, give it a little time. There are another 500 on the outskirts. And once the Holy Spirit was poured out there are the thousands, not to mention the Gospels in writing. Now the whole world has been touched and changed by their example of the Way – and that way was to listen and act at the Father's direction. One of the first labels on the early church was "the Way". Give careful thought to your ways. Be in the Way of obedience to the Holy Spirit, not that of man. This requires submitted hearts in listening prayer.

⁸ *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.*

What are we here for? We are here for the pleasure of God. We are here to bring Him glory. Is the way we fellowship, work and live pleasing to Him? Does it bring Him glory? The temple we should be is a place that honors Him. Let's get to work, but at His direction. Ps 121:1,2 *Lift up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help. Our help comes from the Lord that made heaven and earth.* First we go up, up into His presence in prayer. This is what the mountain symbolizes, the place we meet with God in prayer. Moses met God on Mount Sinai. You will recall that after feeding the 5000 Jesus went to pray on a mountain. And then there is the Mount of Transfiguration. It is a place we get alone with Him and hear His heart.

Then we can come down to labor on the temple with the materials and the direction He has given us. When we operate at His direction He is pleased. The reason that is true is simply that His direction is best for us, and He delights to bless us. How sad it must be to the heart of God to see us running around trying to please God but not at His direction. In our effort to do it our own way we end up causing problems and hurting others. Today men are successful at building a mega-church and so they write a book. The story always begins with them seeking God's direction. Then it goes on to tell what God led them to do. But what man does is skip the first part and go right to the direction to that person in that place. Man follows the pattern

and ends up fruitless and can't figure out why. The reason is they skipped step one – find out the heart of God for you in the place you are. Listen to God not His direction to someone else. Sedona is unique. It reminds me of the Pharisees. They had all their little rules and regulations to try to please God but the end result was that their ways drove people from God. It is easy to check ourselves. Just ask yourself if your ways are full of the fruit of the Spirit. Are you led by the Holy Spirit or by man? We need to pray with a listening heart and expect God's direction!

⁹ *"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops.¹¹ I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."* The Lord tells them why they are unfruitful. They are busy with their own thing. It is time to build the house of the Lord, but they want other things. And as a result, all those other efforts turned out to be fruitless. God determined for them to be unfruitful so his people would wake up and turn back to Him. We can get so busy doing good things, but if they are not at His direction are they really good? The so called 'good' is the most common enemy of the best. It is easy to miss that, so the Lord helps us see it by making it unproductive. How much of our efforts for the Kingdom of God fall under this curse, because they emanate from us and not from God? Why didn't that meeting get anywhere? Why was that outreach a failure? Why didn't the church grow? The mercy of God kept us from what looked like fruit. Many things have the appearance of fruit, but God is after fruit that remains.

¹² *Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.*

They obeyed God! How wonderful it would be if every church in the Verde Valley would submit themselves to obeying God's word, to loving one another, to refusing to slander one another. Oh how we need the fear of the LORD! When we slander our brother we have no fear of the Lord. Every idle word man shall speak, he will give an account of in the day of judgement. That should instill the fear of the Lord in us. God help us not take His grace for granted.

Look what a wonderful verse this is. They obeyed! They did not justify themselves or say it applied to someone else, they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God. They had a fearful respect for the holiness of God. That gives us hope. If they can obey, we can too! We are all men of like passion. If God could help them obey, He can give us willing hearts to obey also.

¹³ *Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD.*

Now that they have obeyed, the Lord is with them. He is in their midst and working through them. He is building the temple through them. I'll tell you, there is nothing

more fulfilling than knowing the Lord is building through you. Anyone can tear down. Anyone can build. But the real Temple is built by the Lord Himself. Jesus said, "I will build my church." And what a thrill it is when we see Him building it! We stand back and marvel at the folks coming in and their lives being changed. When the Lord is in our midst, working through us, the fruit remains. There is something to show for the labor. You don't mind the extra time spent because you see God working in lives, and instead of being a drain, you are filled to overflowing with the Joy of the Lord. Malachi 1:13/Nehemiah 8:9,10

Notice that obedience precedes the Lord's declaration that He is with them. His presence is always with us, but now we have come into harmony with the Lord so that He can build His church. We have the same expression today, "I am with you on this." We don't mean we are standing beside them, we mean we are united in purpose. When we are with Him, He is with us. It reminds me of Moses when he said, "Lord, if you aren't going, I'm not going!" Oh how we need Him with us.

¹⁴ So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God,

¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

The Lord stirred up the spirits of the whole remnant of the people. Isn't that what we need? We need the Lord to stir our spirits so that we come and focus on Him and let Him build the temple, the testimony of Jesus here. We need Him to end all gossip. We need Him to help us forgive and lay aside our differences. We need His love to love one another, and then we will find the work on the house of the Lord Almighty our God has begun. With man it is impossible but with God, nothing shall be impossible. "Is anything too difficult for me," asks the Lord?

Two weeks ago I told you my focus, and that direction I believe the Lord would have us focus on, to loving one another. We need to pray for that. Let me add that part two of that direction in which I feel led is to pray. Pray for us to come to the place that these people of the remnant came, humbled and dependent on God. We are up against spiritual powers and if we are ever to get there, we need to pray recognizing only God can do it. We aren't wrestling against men, though the enemy of our souls would like to get us sidetracked in that direction. We are wrestling against spiritual powers, and the way you do that is to learn to pray the will of God. If you decide to call me to serve here, I would ask you to pray for protection for me. Very few pastors have ever finished their ministry here without scandal or cancer. This is a war. I'm willing to fight, but I need your prayers to keep me from the Evil One, to hold me up to the Lord for His protection.

Love one another. Pray always. And the Lord will be with us and stir our Spirits. He will bring us into a season of building up the body – the testimony. We can see the testimony of Christ restored in Sedona if we will lay our plans and our ways at the foot of the cross, and seek the wisdom and direction that comes from above.