Kingdom Priority
Haggai 1:1-15
BPC – 12/04/2026

I think one of the great joys of parenting is watching your kids develop their own passions and interests. We currently have walls full of hand drawn dinosaurs and mercats, pretend pizza shops, and enough Lego on the floor to keep the emergency room busy.

But with those growing interests and passionate investments, I've come to truly resent a certain phrase: "In a minute." Can you please wash your hands for dinner. Can you please pack that the Lego and get ready for bed? Are you ready to leave?

And one of the challenges in hearing IAM over and over again is when does IAM actually just mean no. I'm not doing it, because I'm doing this. Just a refusal to the request but without the consequence of saying no.

But an even bigger and more unsettling challenge is realising I do exactly the same thing, except I can even do it without even saying it out loud. Whether it's mowing the lawns, emptying the dishwasher, putting put the bins, helping build lego, my default is IAM but without having to say it.

As we enter the world of Haggai, it's 520BC, and God's people have become experts of the delay tactic, of saying in a minute to God – they've been doing it for over a decade!

But it will help us to step back to the broader story: almost 500 years earlier King Solomon took Israel into wealth and splendour, building himself a glamorous palace and a temple for the LORD.

God dwelled with them in the temple, the people could approach him for forgiveness and hear God's words through the prophets. On top of that, they had a king who was so wise, people travelled far and wide just to come and hear him. Life in Israel was great.

But despite the wonder of this temple and goodness of God, Israel were unfaithful to God, Solomon was unwise and made terrible decisions, he also was unfaithful to God and things fell apart.

The united 12 tribes of Israel split into the North and South. The North was then destroyed by Assyria in 722BC.

10/12 tribes of Israel are gone and never to return. And the 2 in the south didn't learn their lesson from this and so God sent Babylon to punish them and take them into exile for 70 years.

It's now 66 years since Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. Babylon has been destroyed and replaced by the Persians who actually allow Israel to return to their own land, even giving them money so that through the leadership of Ezra they begin to rebuild the temple.

But as they are rebuilding some of the Persians decide it isn't good! So they begin by making trouble for those building then even come at them with threats of violence, prison, or death if they continue to rebuild. And so the building stops (and you can read about this in Ezra 4).

God's people are back in the land, the temple project has started but now stopped. And things haven't moved or changed in about 16 years. God's people are discouraged. Nothing seems to be changing, the excitement of being out of Babylon and back in the land is surely gone.
God doesn't seem to be doing anything about Persia and we might start to wonder what they are thinking. And that's when God sends Haggai with four messages recorded in these two chapters for the people that will be a ministry that lasts just four months.

And so in vv.1-4 Haggai arrives on the scene to address the people's priorities by confronting their excuses or reasons for not rebuilding the temple.

In v.1 we are told that Darius the Persian is King, it's the 29th August 520BC and Haggai is sent by God to speak to God's people, especially Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the governor.

In Ezra we see they are the main leaders of the time who oversee the building project that has now stopped. And God goes straight to what the people are saying in v.2, their reason or excuse that building hasn't resumed: *These people say, the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house.*

Now is not the time for building God's temple. And we can imagine why they are saying it… "How can we build the temple when people keep telling us not to?"

"If we get building again, people might attack us." Or maybe they even thought, "if God really wanted us to rebuild the temple surely he would have made it easier… you know give us more money, more influence, more power, or at the very least, get rid of those Persians who in charge and opposing us!"

So many things may have been behind their excuse that now is not the time to build… We aren't told how they are justifying that now is not the time but that was their excuse to not obey God and rebuild the temple. And did you notice what a godly excuse this is…

They aren't saying they won't build the temple, of course they will, just not yet, in a minute you might say. Not while things are the way they are… To which God responds, well isn't that interesting…

Not the time to build my house, but you've decided there is plenty of time to build you own: ***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?"*

What started as persecution or pressure to stop building over time has become a change in priorities. Which is why my kids, and I think we have to admit you and I, like the excuse of "in a minute."

We aren't flat out saying no, it saves the conflict of just rejecting the request, it's the perfect mask to hide behind because we know that what we are being told to do just isn't the priority.

And that's Israel. No time to build God's house that's sat unchanged and in ruins for 16 years, but plenty of time for their panelled houses. And the panelling on their houses isn't about luxury. Israel are poor and don't have money for luxury, the panels are a picture of priority.

These panels were a key material used on the first temple by Solomon and were going to be part of the new temple. It's such a clear picture of their priority: the very things they were meant to be giving to God and building his house, they were using on themselves. They're focussed solely on themselves.

Although they know the clear command of God to rebuild the temple, their time, effort, energy, and priorities are going into their own houses instead.

And I don't know about you but that is just a little bit familiar and uncomfortable isn't it? If God came to confront me for the excuses I make to not do what he says would be a pretty big list sadly.

But perhaps even worse, unlike Israel I don't need persecution or opposition to make excuses. It might just be that it takes effort, involves people I don't know, I'm tired and grumpy, and on and on the excuses go which like Israel boil down a familiar and uncomfortable story…

Whether it's fear or apathy, lacking confidence or a small view of what God commands, or just busyness, I know it doesn't take much to persuade me to avoid doing what is clear in God's Word.

Deep down I value my comfort, my pleasure, my own control over what I do far more than I value doing what God says. My priority is my own earthly needs and comfort more than God's glory.

And like Israel I never say 'No way! I'm not doing that!" I make excuses about why it can't be done right now or all the obstacles God really should remove before I wholly do what he wants.

So what about you? Is this a bit familiar? What are your priorities? And one of the ways you can answer that is to think what you value: how you use your time and your abilities, and how you use your money. Or for alliteration, the three T's of your time, your talent, and you treasure.

These often really the best way to show where our priority is rather than simply talking about where we think it should be. As Jesus says in Matthew 6, where you treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So what about you? As you hear God's Word time after time, are you saying yes, God I'll obey, or is your default to make excuses? And this can happen in so many ways: we can ignore or put off responding to God in the first place. We can accuse God of being unreasonable for what he expects.

We can immediately count the cost and all the reasons what God demands won't be good for us or is beyond us. Or perhaps simply we think about doing it but that's as far as it gets. Full of good intentions but no action, no change, no obedience.

And I wonder if you can relate? Because as Christians we can be so good at this. That year after year we think, I really need to reconsider how I'm using my time, how busy I am, my generosity or serving at church, but then never actually do anything.

Kind of happy to fall back on the excuse, It's not the right time, or perhaps even convince yourself you have a better way to go, or worse, it's God's fault for not making it easy for me to make that change.

Whether it's apathy or laziness, fear or counting the cost, our ability to hear God's Word and think now is not the time is more familiar, more comfortable, than we might like to admit.

Yet some of us might even be thinking, isn't God being a bit harsh on Israel? The opposition and threats they experienced while building was real. The cost could have been severe. What's the big deal if they put off rebuilding the temple?

Well it's because the temple stands at the heart of their relationship with God. The temple is where sin is dealt with, the temple is God's provision for right relationship with him as the priests offered sacrifices that would bring about forgiveness and cleansing.
And so their lack of priority to build the temple was a sign of their low view of sin and small desire for their relationship with God to be restored – or flourish. Knowing God, enjoying his forgiveness, living for God was of little importance compared to their own comfort and safety in the world.

But what about us? There is no temple building we are meant to build today and there is a rumour that churches don't preach on Haggai until there is a building project needing funds. Yet while calling Christians to give to a church building may seem a simple connection it misses the point.

The temple was where God dwelled and where God brought people into right relationship with himself as sin is dealt with. And for us, Jesus is that temple. Remember Jesus said "destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days" (Jn 2:12) because he was talking about himself.

He is God dwelling amongst us, and his death is the sacrifice that atones for our sin to bring us into relationship with God. So if we want to meet God, know God, enjoy forgiveness from God and relationship with him, we don't go to a building but a person: Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

But there is another key development in our understanding of the temple. As Jesus saves us through his death and gives us the Holy Spirit, a Christians together – as the church – are the temple of God – the place where God dwells, where forgiveness is found as we hear the Gospel together.

And so Paul says it this way in 1Corinthians 3: ***16*** *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?*

And so to be a temple builder as those saved by and joined to Christ, is not about church buildings or giving money but actually investing in seeing people know Jesus and grow in Jesus.

As we heard repeatedly in Nehemiah, it's about heeding God's call to proclaim the Gospel and see people find relationship with God & keeping going and growing once they have. That's our call.

And how easily do we make excuses to avoid that call? Most of us are really good at finding ourselves too busy or consumed for the routine parts of being a Christian: to read our bibles, to pray, to meet with God's people, to encourage and serve others.

But when it comes to investing in telling others about Jesus how easily do we say, "now is not the time!" It's too awkward, I wouldn't know what to say, it might cost me friends, I'm not very good with words, I might be rejected, they aren't interested anyway, and the list goes on.

But perhaps like Israel that's actually not the central issue. Notice they weren't saying they wouldn't do it, or didn't want to – they weren't necessarily apathetic or lazy. What started as persecution and fear drifted into just busyness. Building wasn't on the agenda as they were consumed by other things.

And aren't we familiar with that? When it comes to investing in opportunities to help people meet Jesus, or to grow and flourish in their faith in Jesus, it is often simply a matter of time…

And so while being busy with work, family, sport, and even renovating are not bad in themselves, but so easily become consuming that the priority of the temple – of building God's kingdom – is squeezed out or just forgotten.

There is a subtle danger for the believer here. Priority and passion for God's glory through God's kingdom can just drift away under the banner of busyness.

Where the salvation of others, the encouragement growth of Christians around us, or even in our own growth and encouragement as followers of Jesus is just no longer takes precedence.

As C.S Lewis put it: "Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

Subtle, gradual, yet deadly. So we need to see God's confrontation to his people through Haggai because this is no small or insignificant matter. We are talking about where people spend eternity, whether they will face the righteous anger of God for their sin, whether they will enjoy the life they are made for, knowing the God who loves them, and will save them as they turn to Jesus.

And so if Israel and we put this in the too-hard basket, convince ourselves now is not the time and make excuses or drift into busy disobedience, it is no small deal but ignores the most important reality in the universe and most important need of every person: knowing Jesus.

And because it's such a big deal God has been working to shake them out of the excuse making. In vv.5-11 he shows them the problem of ignoring God: namely that it always leads to disappointment.

He says in v.5, *Give careful thought to your ways. 6 You have planted much, but 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.*

Even though Israel invested themselves in their own houses, prioritised their own comfort, were busy trying to enjoy life, it hasn't worked. Life is a constant disappointment for them. They never get enough, earn enough, enjoy enough.

And God says this wasn't random or just an accident. *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 your own house.*

For Israel, these are the covenant curses God promised would come on them if they disobeyed him. And while we don't' suffer these covenant curses as those forgiven and saved by Christ, God

can and does use the circumstances of life to warn and challenge or event shake us out of complacency.

You see the problem with ignoring God is that he's God. He is at the centre of the world and reality. We are made for relationship with him, life is best when he is at the centre, living his way under his good rule, and life will always be unfulfilling and just a bit lost while he is not central to our lives.

And God is saying he actually works in this for our benefit. He disappoints and frustrates for our own good! So we won't think ignoring reality will be somehow better of for us.

And I think this is the perfect summary and explanation of our world right now: a deep investment in our own comfort, pleasure, and control over our own lives while ignoring God with one problem – it isn't working. Despite our world's investment in our own happiness, we aren't getting it!

John Dickson recently pointed this out: he says "We are the wealthiest, healthiest, most comfortable, most pleasured society in history. We have more comfort and convenience than any of the great nations or leaders before us. But we are also arguably the least happy culture in history."
He says we need only to look at the rates of mental illness, loneliness, and despair show this clearly. And isn't this what we see and experience?

We have movies and TV streamed into our homes by the thousands, we have the best healthcare available to us, we are given the most freedom to define our own identity and reality, we told to flourish however we want, and we can't do it. Most liveable city that can't satisfy your heart!

And it never will when God is forgotten, ignored, or rejected. So God lovingly calls Israel to give careful thought to your ways! You've invested heavily in being happy without me.

But has it happened? No. And it never will. C.S Lewis says it perfectly: "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

And because of that, God then calls them to again give careful thought to their ways in v.7, but this time to get building! *7 "Give careful thought to your ways. 8 Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the Lord.*

God calls them to get building. But the notice the motivation to build is not because it will remove the curses and disappointment they are experiencing. The motivation is not themselves but God: his pleasure and honour.

The temple was always connected with God's pleasure and honour because it is God's pleasure to forgive our sins (Lev 1:4); to dwell with and be in relationship with us. God is pleased and honoured as he saves sinners and dwells with them and that should be the priority of his people.

So God is calling them to invest in the temple because it will mean God can keep forgiving and welcoming them! Isn't that amazing? The focus is not about improving their circumstances at all. It's not a matter of build the temple so your crops grow and the wealth will finally come.

It's a call to prioritise their relationship with the God who forgives them, loves them, and dwells with them. Because the assumption is that if you really understand how wonderful and extraordinary it is to dwell with God it will transform your whole outlook on life.

Being Christian doesn't add to your priorities but overhauls them. And it's worth asking if that's happened or happening to you? Is your salvation in Christ so captivating that it's changed what matters to you – what you invest in and want to see happen in your life or through your life?

Jonathan Edwards says, "The first thing that is wrought in a truly awakened soul is a new taste and relish for spiritual things**;** they now appear desirable and lovely… When the soul is truly enlightened and renewed, it delights in God, and in whatever is truly good…"

For the Christian, true joy and fulfilment is found in making life all about God not ourselves. Which to world around us seems miserable and will impoverish your life – yet for those who knows the character of God, grace and truth revealed in Christ, it's the most rational and wonderful thing.

And I wonder if that's what Easter did for you last week? Gazing upon the love and mercy of God should so capture our hearts that it transforms our priorities. What will you invest in?

So let's not gloss over this but pause and ask: is the salvation of sinners, the growth and perseverance of the Christians – those that God has bought into your life – a priority for you?

As Israel make excuses or just neglect and ignore God, he frustrates their plans, confronts them and calls them to get back to building the temple for his pleasure and honour which ultimately is for their benefit of enjoying relationship with him again! That is immense kindness isn't it?

As we hear God speak through Haggai 1 this morning, as we just come from Easter, now is a great time to reflect and give careful thought to our ways. To our priorities and investment.

And perhaps to our surprise, vv.12-15 tell us Israel responded. They get building. And how does God take them from excuse making to confident builders? Well notice it's not by promising them that it will be easy or go well for them. Nothing changes about their situation at all.

But God's Word changes them as Haggai preaches: v.12 *they obeyed the voice of the LORD their God.*

What do we need to have our priorities transformed? What does God provide to motivate and sustain the obedience of his people? Well it's God's Word bringing conviction of who God is that they fear him in v.12, are in awe of his greatness and grace and respond wholeheartedly to him. Which is also met with the assurance of God's presence in v.13, *I am with you declares the LORD.*

And as they heard God's Word and knew God was with them, v.15 says just 23 days after Haggai starts preaching, the people are changed and they get building after 16 years of nothing.

God's Word revealing God's character and assuring us of the presence of our loving God is all we need to get building. Which is exactly what we have in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So although it might confront us, we do not need more than that. We do not need God to make the path of obedience and investing in his kingdom purposes easier before we obey.

If you are in the habit of telling God now is not the time, if you've become so busy and consumed that God's priority for your life has been squeezed out, ignored or forgotten, then hear the word of the Lord through Haggai and give careful thought to your ways.

Now is the time to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Mt 6:33). We have all we need to give ourselves wholeheartedly to that work. To build his kingdom, to see people know Christ and grow in Christ.

We have enough to change, we are able to invest in God's kingdom purposes, not because of our circumstances or even our strength; not because of how good the timing is or even how sure you are it will work out well for you. It's about how great our God is: who speaks, is with us, and loves us.

Our God is gracious, compassionate, amazingly patient, he warns rather than judges. But our call today to give careful thought to our ways, because there is nothing more important, nothing that matters for eternity, and yes, nothing that will satisfy our hearts like enjoying right relationship with God through Christ that so transforms us that we give ourselves to be his kingdom builders.

But will we? Let's pray.