

A RIGHT SENSE OF TIMING

(Haggai 1:1-15)

I have discovered that success in just about every arena of life involves a good sense of timing. This is true in athletics. The difference between a major league star and a good amateur baseball pitcher is often simply timing. The difference between a professional golfer and a weekend hacker is timing.

This matter of timing is crucial in one's ability to make money. The difference between one who does well in the stock market and one who takes a beating is timing—you have to know when to buy and when to sell. As Kenny Rogers spoke truth when he sang, "You gotta know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, know when to run. Don't count your money while you're sittin' at the table. There'll be time enough to countin' when the dealin's done." It is all a matter of timing.

Timing is crucial in the world of entertainment. The difference between a person who can tell a joke and one who can't is timing. The difference between a successful trapeze artist and a dead one is timing.

This matter of timing evens plays a huge part in our ability to serve the Lord faithfully and well. The difference between a believer who brings honor to God and one who does not is timing. Those Christians who make a real contribution to God's kingdom have a right sense of timing.

On Sunday mornings we have been examining the last twelve books of the OT, which are commonly referred to as the Minor Prophets. So far, we have looked at the first nine of those 12 books. There is a big difference between the first nine and the last 3 because that first group of letters were all written before Judah was destroyed by the Kingdom of Babylon and the majority of the populace were taken into exile. The last three were written after some of the Jews had returned to the City of Jerusalem. We come today to the book of Haggai. In Haggai, we learn that a select group of Jews had returned to Israel from their

captivity in Babylon. This took place after Cyrus had issued an edict in 536 BC allowing the Jews to return and giving them permission to rebuild the temple.

James Montgomery Boice commented that the ones who returned were **the right people**. Not all the Jews returned—only a few of them. The ones who came back were a remnant. God always has a remnant of faithful people. The ones who returned were in **the right place**. They returned to Jerusalem. This was the capital of the Jewish nation. Jerusalem is where the temple had been. It was where God caused His name to dwell.

The ones who came back were doing **the right thing**. They were rebuilding the temple. This is what God wanted them to do.

Furthermore, they were rebuilding the temple for **the right reason**. Their goal was to give honor and praise to God. They weren't trying to make a name for themselves. They truly wanted to exalt God's name.

But things didn't go well. They experienced opposition from others. Although they got the rebuilding process started, after a while, the project stalled, and then the people quit altogether. The problem is this group of people who were the right people, who were in the right place, who had been doing the right thing and for the right reason suffered from **a wrong sense of timing**. They didn't know what time it was.

In 520 BC, sixteen years after they had returned, very little had been accomplished because for fifteen years the people had not done a thing to rebuild the temple. The prophet Haggai came and preached God's word to the people. He called upon them to get to work. Haggai helped them discover what time it was.

If you and I are going to be successful in the Lord's work we need to have a keen sense of timing, and that involves two similar but different things.

Let's begin by reading Haggai 1:1-4.

I. A RIGHT SENSE OF TIMING TELLS US WHAT TIME IT IS NOT.

According to v. 4 the temple still lay in ruins. The reason for that being the case is that the people quit doing what they had started. From this we learn what time it is not.

1. It Is Not Time to Be Negligent.

It is not uncommon for us as believers to do the right thing for a while, but then somewhere along the way we lose heart, and we begin to let things slide. God's word warns us against this tendency. We read the counsel of Paul in Galatians 6:9, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Is there something you are on the verge of giving up or have already given up because you got weary? Have you gotten weary about prayer . . . daily Bible reading . . . witnessing . . . Sunday School involvement . . . or some other ministry? Don't give up! To give up would demonstrate that you have a poor sense of timing.

In a sermon entitled, "Strong to the Finish," Craig Brian Larson spoke about the difficulties we face as we run the Christian race. He said:

Sometimes we face "Heartbreak Hill." In the Boston Marathon, there is a legendary obstacle called Heartbreak Hill. Starting at mile thirteen of the Boston racecourse, there are a number of hills, climaxing at mile nineteen with Heartbreak Hill. It's the longest, steepest hill in the race. What makes this hill even worse is that world-class runners "hit the wall" around mile eighteen or nineteen. That is, their bodies have depleted the glycogen stored in the muscles. That glycogen has been replaced with lactic acid.

The muscles are screaming for oxygen. And when you hit the wall, you just feel like you're going to die. Heartbreak Hill tests runners to the very core of their determination and their strength.

There are Heartbreak Hills in life. Life is not on a level grade. We have problems. We have bigger problems. And at times we face Heartbreak Hill.

When you face disappointment and heartache, and you want to give up, don't do it. It is too soon. It is always too soon to give up. It is not time to give up.

2. *It Is Not Time to Make Excuses.*

The people in Haggai's day were adept at making excuses for why they hadn't been working on the temple. Look at v. 2. The minute they experienced opposition they concluded that it wasn't time to build, so they would just go about their own business and wait for the opportune moment to build.

We often use the very excuse the people gave for not building the temple. When that special mission offering comes around, some are tempted to say, "With the way the economy is going, I need to conserve. It's not time to promote that mission need." I would like to see the church grow in its reach, but that outreach ministry costs money. "I just don't think it is time to begin anything new."

Some say, "I know the Bible teaches we are supposed to give to support the Lord's work, but now's really not the time." We may say, "I know we are supposed to serve the Lord, but I'm so busy now that I just don't think this is the time."

Humans have an amazing capacity to come up with excuses. We can rationalize and explain away all kinds of failures to do what we are supposed to do. Sometimes our explanations are just ridiculous.

The following are actual explanations which motorists gave when filing accident reports with their insurance:

- I thought my window was down, but I found out it was closed when I put my head through it.
- The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.

- I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law and headed over the embankment.
- I had been driving for 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had an accident.
- I was on my way to the doctor with rear-end trouble when my universal joint gave way, causing me to have an accident.
- An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car and vanished.
- The indirect cause of the accident was a little guy in a small car with a big mouth.

In his book *Something Else to Smile About* Zig Ziglar wrote:

My brother, the late Judge Ziglar, loved to tell the story of the fellow who went next door to borrow his neighbor's lawnmower. The neighbor explained that he could not let him use the mower because all the flights had been canceled from New York to Los Angeles.

The borrower asked him what canceled flights from New York to Los Angeles had to do with borrowing his lawnmower. [The neighbor replied] "It doesn't have anything to do with it, but if I don't want to let you use my lawnmower, one excuse is as good as another."

If you don't want to serve the Lord, one excuse is as good as another, but it is not time to make excuses.

3. *It is Not Time to Indulge Self.*

Look at v. 4. It is quite apparent that the people had time for themselves but little time for God.

Like those in Haggai's day, we expend our money, our energy, and our time in an effort to acquire things for ourselves.

Steve Malone wrote, "Everybody wants more. A little child wants more toys and more TV time. A teenager wants more clothes, more freedom, more popularity. Most adults want more, too—a nicer house, a newer car, a better job, more prestige."

We are living life in a self-indulgent way.

One man said, “It is my conviction that a very large part of mankind’s ills and of the world’s misery is due to the rampant practice of trying to feed the soul with the body’s food.”

Have you been trying to do that? It won’t work.

What happens when we become negligent, make excuses, and indulge self? God has ordered the world in such a way that those approaches to life will never bring satisfaction. There will be, instead, a sense of inner emptiness (v. 6). If we still do not turn back to Him and seek to serve Him, He will actively work against us (vv. 9-11).

Before I was one-year old, the Rolling Stones released a song in which they sang, “I can’t get no satisfaction.” Despite the incorrect grammar, the message of the song is true to life. It is truly the theme song of the person who does not actively and faithfully serve the Lord. No matter what they experience or acquire in life it will never be enough to quench their thirst and satiate their appetite. Contentment will continue to elude them.

The people in Haggai’s day were supposed to work together to build the temple. You and I are supposed to work with God to build His church. To use another analogy, we are to plant, and water, and harvest. There is work for us to do.

If we fail to work with God in the Kingdom responsibilities that He gives us, we will never know true joy, real meaning, and the wonderful peace of a satisfied life. Jesus taught when we lose ourselves for His sake, that is when we truly find life.

In addition to knowing what time it is not, there is something else involved in cultivating a right sense of timing.

II. A RIGHT SENSE OF TIMING TELLS US WHAT TIME IT IS.

Let’s look at vv. 12-15. When Haggai was faithful to deliver God’s message to God’s people, the people received the message, and they acted upon it. They got to work, and it didn’t take long. Compare v. 1 with the latter part of v. 14 and v. 15. It

took only 23 days for the people to get to work after Zechariah delivered God's message.

Based on what we've read, what time is it? That question can be answered in two ways.

1. It Is Time to Believe God—Receive His Word.

Before we will act on God's word, we must believe that what we have heard or read is, in fact, from God Himself. You have every right to doubt what I say, but you have no reason to doubt what this Book says. It doesn't just contain God's word; it is God's word. As such, it is fully reliable and completely authoritative.

If we want God to work through us then we must believe Him when He speaks.

One of the sobering warnings that comes from the NT was occasioned by Jesus' visit to His hometown of Nazareth. He spoke in the synagogue, but the people said to one another, "This is Mary and Joseph's boy. We know who he is and where he comes from. Why is he acting like such a big shot? He's just a carpenter's son."

Matthew concluded that account with this editorial summary, "And He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (Matthew 13:58).

It is time to believe God—to receive His word for what it is—the unerring and binding declaration of our Lord.

2. It Is Time to Obey God—Do His Will.

In addition to believing God, it is time to obey Him. We are to do what He says. We are to do what God has told us to do. We are to not do what God has forbidden us to do. It is not time for excuses. It is time for obedience.

What will happen when we are found to be obedient? When we take to heart what God has said and do it, He will act on our behalf. He will be with us, stir us up, and give success to our efforts (vv. 13-15).

I want our church to grow, and I believe that most of you want our church to grow, but I also believe that God wants that even more than we do. As we are obedient to Him, He will be with us, and He will help us to grow. He will help us to:

- Grow Warmer Through Fellowship
- Grow Deeper Through Discipleship
- Grow Stronger Through Worship
- Grow Broader Through Ministry, and
- Grow Larger Through Evangelism.

In his autobiography, Buck O'Neill tells of being a black man who played professional baseball before African-Americans were allowed to play in the all-white major leagues. By the time the color barrier was broken in 1947, O'Neill was considered too old to play in the big leagues, as were most of his teammates. Many of his friends grew bitter about their missed opportunities. O'Neill wrote:

At a reunion of Negro league players in Ashland, Kentucky, a reporter from *Sports Illustrated* asked me if I had any regrets, coming along as I did before Jackie Robinson integrated the major leagues. And this is what I told him then: "Waste no tears for me. I didn't come along too early—I was right on time . . . I don't have a bitter story. I truly believe I have been blessed."

The title of O'Neill's autobiography reveals his faith and belief in the sovereignty of God. Despite missing fame and fortune, O'Neill chose to title his autobiography *I Was Right on Time*.

God is always right on time because He has a keen sense of timing. You and I will have that same sense of timing when we learn that it is always time to believe Him and time to obey Him.