

Haggai 2:1-5 – Sermon Final
Theme: Work! For I am with you

Brothers and sister's, my name is Mark Zondag, missionary on the Asia One Team that primarily serves the people living in Thailand. It is my privilege to bring God's Word to you today. Our text is Haggai 2:1-5. Let's pray:

Dear Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our constantly present Rock and Redeemer. Amen

Disappointment is real.

For about 180 years, the Protestant church has faithfully worked and ministered in Thailand. The Catholic Church has worked for about 300-400 years. Yet, if 100 Thai people stood in a room, how many do you think are Christian? Take a guess. Maybe one. If you are in Northern Thailand, you are more likely to have one, maybe two Christians. If you are in any other part of Thailand, you will need around 300-400 before you might get a Christian in the room. That number includes all ethnic groups in Thailand, such as Hmong or Karin. You would need at least 500 people in the room if you want just one ethnic Thai Christian in it. This is after a few hundred years of Christian mission work in Thailand. Often, missionaries, Thai pastors, and church leaders feel disappointed and discouraged when they see these numbers. Much resources, money, people, and effort of Christians all over the world was spent for not a lot of obvious gain.

Our own local Lutheran pastors especially struggle with disappointment. One pastor told me a story about a supposedly Christian evangelist that came to his village. This evangelist invited members of the community to his new church plant to be healed and evangelized. People came including a few curious members of our local Lutheran church. This evangelist healed a few people. People in the community were so impressed that, after the service, his church plant suddenly had about 100 members. It took years before one of our churches had numbers like that. What's worse is that some members of this pastor's church came to him and asked him to heal a relative. This pastor patiently explained that God doesn't always heal us, even when we pray for it. He went and prayed for the relative. Yet, when this pastor's prayed and the family member remained sick, the member left his church for the church of this Christian evangelist. Often, this causes discouragement among our pastors.

Disappointment is real. It is a powerful tool for the devil. Why? Disappointment starts by not meeting an expectation. When the expectation isn't met, then we become discouraged. We lose heart for work. We lose desire to work and apathy sets in. When apathy sets in, we stop. We stop doing God's work.

The Jewish people in Haggai struggled in the same way. After 70 years away from their home, there was not much that went there way. They planted, but harvested little. They ate, but aren't full. Their clothes don't warm. They earn money, but it gets sucked out of their wallet. Enemies surround them. The Persian government isn't helping. They expected success, after all,

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they came back to rebuild God's Promised Land! Yet, they have only met failure and frustration. Disappointed, apathy sets in. They look to their own needs, instead of God's will and command.

So, God sends Haggai, his messenger. Haggai comes to encourage God's people to restart work on the temple. Chapter 1, he shakes them out of apathy and they get back to work! However, after only one month, the disappointment sets back in and then follows apathy towards God's house.

Disappointment took less than one month. They started building September 21 and God sends Haggai again on October 17. Haggai 2:3 reveals their disappointment, "*Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?*" Doesn't it pale in comparison? Even in less than a month, they realized it would not measure up to the beauty of Solomon's temple. Solomon's temple had the expensive stone cut at the quarry "and no hammer, chisel, or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built" (1 Kings 6:7). He had the best wood sent from Lebanon to panel the house so no stone could be seen (1 Kgs 5:6, 6:18). It was covered with gold (6:21-22). Their temple was a shell, if that, of its former glory. Was their work even worth it?

The Jews saw it fell short of their expectations and became discouraged. Apathy crept into their hearts. The attitude of their heart changed from joy to apathy. They did what they wanted, instead of what God told them to do. They didn't expect much from God or his promise.

We do the same thing. A church can spend weeks planning a Christmas Eve service. The music is beautiful, the sermon is on point, and the members are welcoming. Interested people attend the service. Old members come back to worship. It looks like the result is worth the effort. However, the interested people become less interested. The old members return to their normal life after the season is over. The church looks as it did before. Was the work even worth it?

You can feel the tension in your relationship. So, you try to show love and care for the other person. You ask them how they are doing. You get them coffee. You try to help them with their work. You try to break the tension. Yet, your effort is met with hostility and even more tension. Was the work even worth it?

You're at your wits end. Nothing seems to be going your way. So, you fall to your knees in prayer. You know what, you actually feel better. Then, you jump up ready to take on the challenge that just forced you to your knees. Yet, back in the same situation, nothing has changed. Was the prayer even worth it?

Disappointment is real. Discouragement is close behind and brings along apathy. When the apathy sets in, we wonder: is God's command (loving neighbors, evangelizing, patience, etc) even worth the effort? Unfortunately, we answer 'no' way too often and give up. But, we don't only give up on God's command, but also expecting God to do great things through our work!

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We lose confidence in God. We lose confidence that God cares about our work or us. Apathy chills our hearts toward God and all of his promises for us. It drives the warmth of his love out, till we freeze to death on our own.

Brothers and sisters, when anyone looks at the result of their work to confirm God's presence, they are looking in the wrong place. God isn't found in the result of work, but in his Word. There, his voice comes. His voice comes to encourage the discouraged. His voice warms hearts frozen dead by apathy. His voice tells them to buck up and work because he is with them.

God needed to remind the Jews that he is not found in the result of their work. If the Jews could confirm God's presence in their work, God would look weak or absent. However, God confirms his presence not in the result of their work, but in his promise. He is standing with them, just like in the wilderness. The visible cloud of fire is gone. Yet, his presence is there all the same. Though signs and results may change, God's promise never did. Even when it looks like God is gone, he is still there. He said so.

So, they got back to work. God's reminder of his presence ignited their desire to finish the temple and they did. Though it wasn't grand like Solomon's, God filled it with his presence and glory. Not in the same way he did in the desert, through signs and miracles. Instead, God used Mary and Joseph to bring baby Jesus to this temple. Simeon saw Jesus and declared, "*For my eyes have seen your salvation...the glory of your people Israel*" (Luke 2:30, 32). This temple would be the place Jesus would come as a 12-year-old boy to question the leaders after witnessing first-hand the sacrifice that pointed to him. Twenty years later, God tore the curtain of this temple from top to bottom. This showed the world that nothing separated God from his people anymore. God used this humbly built temple in greater ways than they could ever expect. He used their work, which was way below their expectations, way beyond what they would ever expect. He does this, because God is with them and their work.

Brothers and sisters, God is with you too! He is with you because he took away everything that could separate you from him on the cross. He is with you, because you became his child through baptism. He is with you, because he gave his body and blood for you to eat and drink. He is with you, because he said so. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19b).

So, let's get back to work! He is with you. He will use your work for his will, no matter how humble, no matter how far it falls below your expectations. Undoubtedly, he will use it for far greater purposes than you can ever imagine! Go follow his will and do what he asks. Let him take care of the results. As I read the news and see the signs of his coming, you have plenty of work to keep you busy! He's got you. Don't be afraid. Amen!

Let's pray:

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Dear Lord, to your true servants give the grace to you alone to live. Set free from sin to serve you, Lord, they go to share your living Word, the gospel message to proclaim that all may know your saving name. When all their labor seems in vain, revive their sinking hopes again; and when success crowns what they do, O keep them humble, Lord, and true until before your judgment seat they lay their trophies at your feet. Amen.