

Haggai 1:1-13
“Lord’s Day Worship”
September 26, 2021
Pr Josh Anderson
Ordinary Time

So far this morning we have heard God’s word read from Leviticus 23, Psalm 84, Hebrews 10 and Luke 4. Now, I want to add one more reading to that list as we consider together the centrality of the worship of God in our lives as Christian people, and in particular the public worship of God that we participate in here each and every Lord’s Day.

Listen now to God’s word from Haggai 1:1-13. The context for this passage is that God has delivered Judah from her exile in Babylon. The people have returned to Jerusalem and to Judea, and they have built up their own homes and dwelling places, but they have not yet begun to re-build the temple.

And so God sends a prophet named Haggai to call them to repentance - to re-order their affections, and to prioritize above all things in their life as a people the public worship of God.

Now, to be clear, I am not reading and commenting on this passage from Haggai because I think that we as a church have fallen into the kind of sin that Judah has in this passage.

But I am reading it because I believe this passage is a prophetic word the Scripture speaks to remind us of the centrality of public worship for God’s people, and the reality that all of us are tempted to not value public worship as highly as God does.

Listen now to God’s holy and inerrant word from Haggai 1:1-13.

1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: 2 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord." 3 Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, 4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? 5 Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 6 You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. 8 Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. 9 You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. 10 Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. 11 And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors."

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. 13 Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, "I am with you, declares the Lord."

Thus far the reading of God's word. It is absolutely true, and it is given to you because your Father in Heaven loves you.

Prayer...

One of the fascinating things about the Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath commandment is that it is a positive commandment.

Most of the Ten Commandments, eight out of the ten, in fact, are phrased as prohibitions. You shall have no other Gods. You shall not make for yourself a carved image. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. Etc.

But the fourth commandment is a positive command. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*, we are instructed. In more colloquial English we might express it this way: *Orient your life around the Sabbath day, so that you set it apart for God in a way that is different than other days.*

And the way we keep the Sabbath day holy, the Scriptures tell us, is not by doing nothing, but by filling it up with worship and rest and granting rest to others.

It's not that the Sabbath day is free from activity. It's that the Sabbath is full of a different kind of activity than the other six days - activity that is holy and set apart for God.

Embedded in the Sabbath commandment is the assumption that God cares about time, that God keeps and marks time, and that he invites into his time keeping. Are we to worship God every day, in some sense? Yes, of course.

But God keeps time for us — that's been true ever since the creation of the world — and one day of every week he has set apart for the special purpose of gathering his people together so that he might meet with them in their worship of him. Even as our Westminster Larger Catechism puts it in question 116, which is printed for you on the back of your order of worship:

“The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word, expressly one whole day in seven.”

I bring this up, because beloved, one of my most central desires for us here at Colleyville Presbyterian Church is that we would be a people who, by both their affections and their actions, prioritize Lord's Day Worship above all other commitments in our lives.

In other words, I want us to love our weekly Lord's Day worship above all other activities and commitments and experiences in our lives.

And to be clear, I want us to love our Lord's Day worship not because the sermons are so inspirational, or the music is so remarkable, or the prayers are so amazing, but to love our Lord's Day Worship because this is holy time — because it is during this time each Sunday that our God has promised to be with us and near to us in a unique and special way - and we know that that is what we want and need more than anything else in our lives.

What I'm saying is that I want us to be at least a little sad on Monday that Sunday is six days away.

And I want us to wake up on Wednesday morning and wish it was the Lord's Day already.

And I want Saturday to be a day when we think about all the things we're going to get to do tomorrow, where we even spend some time reading through the Scripture passages and looking at the lyrics of the hymns because *tomorrow* is the Lord's Day, and *tomorrow* is the day that we get to be with God's people and *tomorrow* is the day that God promises to renew his covenant with us and feed us with his own very self.

In Psalm 84, our Old Testament reading today, the Psalmist is in a situation during his life when he is prevented by his enemies from gathering with God's people for worship, and he laments and burns and longs for it to be otherwise.

The Psalmist writes: *"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD....Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!...For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere."*

What I want you to see is that the Psalmist is not talking about heaven here - he is talking about something he is currently exiled from - the public assembly of God's people in weekly worship, and he is describing how he longs to partake in that assembly, and how devastated he is when he is unable to do so.

This is what I want for us, beloved - to long for Lord's Day Worship as the psalmist longs for it, to desire it above all other things in this earthly life, and out of that longing to gladly to structure our lives around Lord's Day Worship so that whatever other commitments and responsibilities we have conform to the prioritization of the Lord's Day rather than the other way around.

There is no doubt that the Scriptures teach us again and again about the absolute primacy of the gathered worship of God - both for our personal good, and for the good of our neighbors as well.

One of the places we see that most clearly is in Haggai 1.

As I mentioned earlier, Haggai the prophet comes to Judah at a time when she has allowed the public worship of God to recede to the margins of her life. Judah has returned to her homeland after about 70 years of exile in Babylon, and she has worked hard to restore her dwelling places and her homes and her fields and her commerce, but she has not yet restored the Lord's House and consequently, the Lord's Worship at the center of her life.

Now, this is not to say that laboring to preserve our homes and our crops and our commerce is not important. All of those things matter.

But the point Haggai makes is that none of those things are more important than the public worship of God, and in fact, none of those other aspects of our lives will be satisfying or blessed unless we prioritize worship above them all.

The Lord speaks through Haggai to his people, and he says:

"Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes."

What is the solution that the Lord proposes for Judah - to work harder at her crops and rebuilding her homes and rebuilding her commerce? No, the solution is to re-center her life around the public worship of God.

As the Lord says through Haggai: *"Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build [my] house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord."*

The argument that Haggai is making here, simply put, is this.

It doesn't matter how hard you work on other things in your life.

It doesn't matter how much success you have in your work, it doesn't matter how nice your house is, it doesn't matter how much money you accumulate, it doesn't matter how many extra-curricular activities your kids have the chance to participate in, it doesn't matter how many vacations you take — if you choose not to love the public worship of God over all these things and put it first, then you will be unsatisfied.

You will be frustrated. There will be an emptiness that you can't fill. There will be a franticness that will leave you exhausted.

Haggai is saying that your life won't work right if worship isn't at the center of it. You will sow much but harvest little. You will eat but never have enough. You will drink but never be satisfied. And I think that at least some of us know what that feels like.

And so, as Haggai argues, we must re-orient our lives around the worship of God in order to receive the satisfaction and contentment and gratitude he has for us.

But we don't only gather on Sunday mornings to worship God because it's good for us.

We also gather because God calls us to come into his presence with one another.

Each Lord's Day, God renews his covenant with us. Each Lord's Day, God is the one who takes action.

As our order of worship states with our five "C"s - God is the initiator in our worship.

God Calls Us into his presence. God Cleanses Us from our sins. God Converses with us through his word. God Communes with us in the Lord's Supper. And God commissions us again as his people, sending us back into the world with his blessing.

And all of this happens, in a special and unique way, on this day that God has set apart to meet with his people.

In our call to worship this morning from Leviticus 23, we heard these words: "*Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation.*"

Right at the beginning of Israel's history, God gave her the sabbath day, a gift that continues in the New Covenant on the first day of the week rather than the seventh.

And on that day, the Lord wasn't primarily telling Israel negatively what she shouldn't do, but rather positively what she must do on the Sabbath day.

She *must* rest and she *must* gather with God's people for worship.

That's what this word *convocation* means that is used here in Leviticus 23.

It means a gathering. An assembly. And not just any gathering, but a *holy* gathering, an assembly called by God.

Three times a year, Israel was called by God to assemble in Jerusalem at the temple for the feast of Passover, the feast of Pentecost, and the feast of Booths. But every Sabbath, they were to assemble in their local town for worship, led by their Levitical Priest.

And this is why each worship service we hold each Lord's Day begins with a call to worship.

In some ways, I think the call to worship is the most important pastoral task that Patrick or I will ever perform for you.

Every Sunday, one of your pastors will stand up in this sanctuary and call you to worship God, call you to be gathered together in his presence, and the questions at some point becomes — will you heed that call that goes out every week?

Will you listen to that call that is rooted in God's own command for us to be gathered in this church as a holy convocation every Lord's Day?

And here's something I want to point out.

We know that Jesus himself heeded that call, he himself came each week to the gathering of the people of God during his earthly life.

In Luke 4, in our gospel reading this morning, Luke tells us that *"As was his custom, Jesus went up to the synagogue on the Sabbath day."*

One of the profound gifts of the record of Jesus' life in the gospels is that we learn, by watching him, what it is to be truly human, what is to actually live a good life as God ordained us to live.

And Jesus' life did not include many of things our society considers part of the good life. He didn't have a lot of money. He didn't have a nice home. He didn't get married and have beautiful children. He didn't have a successful career, apart from three years of substantial notoriety that ended in a horrific and public death.

But still, we know, that Jesus' life was a good life. In fact, it is the model human life.

And if we look closely at Jesus' life, we see some of his practices coming to forefront - practices that characterize a truly human life - a life lived *with* the grain of creation rather than against it.

Jesus spends a lot of time eating with other people. Just eating with them. Conversing with them. Talking.

Jesus spends a lot of time reading the Scriptures, as evidenced by his ability to quote them widely and freely from memory. Especially the Psalms, which he quotes more than any other biblical book combined.

Jesus spends a lot of time praying - both alone and with others.

Jesus spends a lot of time with the poor and with sinners and with the socially marginalized.

And, every Sabbath day, Jesus goes to church. It is his custom. It is what he did every week.

It's fascinating, actually to think about this.

The incarnate Son of God humbled himself, and when the Levite in his local town called the assembly to gather in worship each Sabbath day, Jesus was there. He didn't miss the call to worship.

And I'm sure Jesus listened to some sermons that were not that great, in that little Nazareth synagogue. I'm sure he sang the psalms with some people whose musical skills were not especially profound. I'm sure some of those synagogue services weren't awesome. But every Sabbath day he was there, ordering his life around the gathered worship of God.

And so, in some sense, I think the question becomes - do we think that we are spiritually superior to Jesus? Do we think that we don't need to do what Jesus did every Sabbath day?

Because Jesus pretty clearly ordered his life around going to church every week on the day God appointed.

He showed up on the day the Levite in his town called the people to gather. And his life was a good life. It was a life that included pain and sorrow, but but also joy and resurrection.

And at the heart of Jesus' life was the keeping of the Sabbath day, remembering it and keeping it holy.

As we close this morning, I just want to comment on my own experience of Lord's Day worship.

I think one of the very real benefits of the pastoral life is that, by the nature of my calling, my whole life, and my family's whole life, is ordered around the Lord's Day. It's just part of the deal. And it's a huge blessing.

On Tuesday morning, I wake up thinking about what's happening on the Sunday to come. I'm praying for God to help me prepare and plan. I'm praying for him to gather our church together. I'm praying for you, by name, friends, that you will be here when the call to worship goes forth.

And it affects our family's whole week. We plan our Saturdays differently because the Lord's Day is coming up the next day. We're preparing for worship. We're preparing for our hospitality after worship. We're preparing to be ready for whatever God has for us - which will, above all things, include worship and rest and giving rest to others.

And all this summer, when we were on sabbatical, this prioritization stayed true for our family. No one would have known any different if we had changed our habits. And we couldn't even attend our own church, the church that was comfortable for us.

But every Lord's Day, we went to church. We went to church in Texas, and Florida and Tennessee. We worshiped with long established churches in beautiful sanctuaries and with church plants in rec centers - wherever we could find God's people gathering.

We went because Ami and I share a belief that Lord's Day Worship is the most important thing in our lives. Even when we're on sabbatical.

And let me tell you, friends, there is not one of those slightly awkward Sundays that we came home from worship without experiencing again the goodness of Lord's Day worship with the people of God. It was such a profound gift to go and receive the means of grace again and again with brothers and sisters in Jesus.

And friends, I want to tell you that this is good way to live. It is good to put Lord's Day Worship before all other commitments in your life.

All of us orient our lives around certain priorities.

All of us order our weeks according to important things we won't miss.

And the gift that I want you to experience, beloved, is the gift of orienting your life more fully around participation in Lord's Day worship, because I truly believe that if you do that, if you trust God in that way, the blessing of God himself will be with you, and you will know, as Haggai promises, what it is to sow your seed and harvest a great crop, what it is to eat and have enough, what it is to drink and to be filled.

All of this is offered to you each Lord's Day.

At this great feast of God, at this holy convocation of his people.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.