

I. **Introduction**

- A. In **Nehemiah 4:6**, the Jews have returned from captivity in Babylon to find the city of Jerusalem in ruins.
1. At this point, they have rebuilt:
 - a. Their homes.
 - b. The temple.
 2. But, the city wall still remains in ruins.
 3. Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem with a plan for rebuilding the wall.
 4. In **Nehemiah 4:6**, we read, “**So we built the wall...for the people had a mind to work.**”
 - a. The power of positive thinking!
 - b. The Jews were able to accomplish a marvelous task in the face of tremendous odds, because they had a mind to work!
 - c. They were zealous for the work of the Lord; therefore, they were able to accomplish great things.
- B. The same thing holds true for us today.
1. The Lord's church has the power to accomplish some mighty things when we come together with a mind to work for the Lord.
 2. The problem is that there are so many barriers in the world that oftentimes prevent us from doing the work of the Lord.
 3. The book of Haggai is book that deals with barriers to doing the work of the Lord.
- C. Context:
1. The book of Haggai was written shortly after the return from Babylonian captivity.
 - a. In **2 Chronicles 36:17-21**, we are told that God sent Babylon to invade Jerusalem as a punishment for her sins.
 - (1) The Babylonians ransacked and destroyed the

- temple of God and the palaces of the nobles.
 - (2) They led the remaining survivors off into captivity.
- b. At the end of seventy years, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to begin the process of rebuilding.
2. While the people had rebuilt many of the houses, we are told that the temple of God remained nothing more than a ruin.
3. So, God sent Haggai to warn the people of the need to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem.
4. Within that context, we learn some important things about various barriers to working for God.

II. **Barriers to the Work of the Lord**

A. **Barrier Number 1: Procrastination.**

“Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, “The time has not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built.”’”
(**Haggai 1:2** NKJV)

1. The first problem with the temple was the fact that the people were guilty of procrastinating!
 - a. They had just kept putting it off.
 - b. They had said, “**The time has not come, the time that the LORD’S house should be built.**”
 - c. The book of Ezra records the historical information about the returns from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple.
 - (1) In **Ezra 3:1-7**, we are told that one of the first things the people did upon returning to Jerusalem was to try to restore their worship.
 - (a) In **Ezra 3:6**, we read, “**From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.**”
 - i) So, we see them worshiping on the *site* of

the temple, even though the temple itself was not yet rebuilt.

ii) Ezra says that the foundation had not even been laid for it.

(b) In **Ezra 3:7**, we are told that they had even paid some carpenters and ordered some of the necessary supplies for the temple.

(2) The point is, the people had immediately recognized the need for rebuilding the temple.

(a) They knew the importance of worshiping God.

(b) They knew that the temple played an important role in their worship to Him.

(c) They had even taken some steps to prepare for the eventual building of the temple.

(d) They had simply failed to follow through with it!

i) They had not done the work.

ii) They just kept talking about it and putting it off.

iii) Haggai says that they just kept telling themselves, "**The time has not come.**"

2. The first barrier to work is procrastination.

a. There is a time to talk, and there is a time to do.

(1) It is all well and good to make plans in life and in the service of the church.

(2) A failure to plan things out will generally lead to disaster.

(3) We need to talk things through.

(4) We need to seek input from our members.

(5) We need to prepare for any task that is before us.

b. The time comes when we have to stop talking and start doing.

(1) We cannot be content with the fact that we have

talked about it.

(2) We have to actually go out and do the work.

3. The people may have been content with waiting to rebuild the temple, but God was not content.

a. God tells the people in **Haggai 1:8**, "**Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified.**"

(1) God tells them to get to it!

(2) "Go up, get the materials, and build My temple!"

b. God goes on to tell them in **Haggai 1:10-11**, because they have not built the temple yet, "**Therefore the heavens about you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on the labor of your hands.**"

(1) God tells them that they will suffer from a drought until they rebuild His temple!

(2) If they want to eat, then they had better stop putting off the rebuilding of the temple!

B. **Barrier Number 2: Priorities.**

³ Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴ "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" (**Haggai 1:3-4** NKJV)

1. The second barrier to their work was the fact that they did not have their priorities in order.

a. They were too busy doing what they wanted to do to be burdened with the things of God.

b. They had rebuilt their own houses, but they had left the house of God in ruins!

(1) They had taken good care of themselves.

(2) God had been left out.

2. How often is that the case today?
 - a. There are several people that I have talked to at different times, tried to set up studies with, or invited to worship services who are always just too busy.
 - (1) Some of them work six days a week, so that Sunday is their only free day to rest or run errands.
 - (2) Some of them have kids, so that all of their free time goes towards various children's activities.
 - (3) I do not know how often I am told, "I would love to come, but I just do not have the time..."
 - b. The same problem can plague those of us who are in the church.
 - (1) We have:
 - (a) Jobs to provide for our families.
 - (b) Spouses and kids who need our attention.
 - (c) Houses that need to be cleaned.
 - (d) Yards that need to be mowed.
 - (2) We live busy lives.
 - (3) Where does God and the church fit into our busy lives?
 - (a) How do we find the time to attend every worship service and every Bible class, not to mention VBS and gospel meetings?
 - (b) How do we find the time to prepare for and teach Bible classes?
 - (c) How do we find the time to knock doors and visit the shut-ins?
 - (d) How do we find the time for personal prayer and Bible study?
 - (e) How do we find the time for God?
3. Notice some of the things that God tells the Jews:
 - a. In [Haggai 1:5-6](#), we read, "[5 Now therefore, thus says the](#)

- LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways! ⁶ You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes.'
- (1) God tells them that they are never going to obtain prosperity so long as they neglect His temple.
 - (a) They put all of this effort into planting their crops, but their crops produce little food in return.
 - (b) They are able to eat, drink, and clothe themselves, but it is only enough to survive.
 - i) They are never truly full.
 - ii) Their thirst is never fully quenched.
 - iii) They are never truly warm.
 - (c) They earn money, only to place it in a bag with a whole in it, so that the money is lost.
 - (2) God tells them that they are working hard to meet their ends, but their labors are for nothing.
 - (a) They are just barely making it in life.
 - (b) No matter how hard they work, it will never get any better - so long as they neglect God.
- b. God continues this line of thought in [Haggai 1:9](#), "["You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. 'Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house.'](#)"
 - (1) Again, this same idea continues.
 - (2) God tells them that He will continue to actively prevent them from succeeding in life, so long as they fail to show concern for the affairs of God.
 - (3) As long as they are more concerned with their own house than with the house of God, they will fail.

4. Brethren, I know that we are busy in life.
 - a. It is a hectic world that we are living in.
 - b. At some point, we have to stop and ask ourselves, "What is the point of it all?"
 - (1) What is the point of a bigger house, a better education, more open doors for our children, if we do not have God?
 - (2) Life is meaningless without God!
 - (3) If we do not have the time to devote to His works because we are so busy in our own lives, then something has to give!
 - (4) We have to learn the meaning of Jesus' message in the Sermon on the Mount, when He said, "**But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**"
(Matthew 6:33)
 - (a) God's work must become a priority in our lives!
 - (b) If we will focus on *His* work, then God will take care of the rest!

C. Barrier Number 3: Negativity.

"Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?" (Haggai 2:3 NKJV)

1. God asks the people if they are making comparisons between the new temple and the former temple of Solomon.
 - a. In **Ezra 3:10-13**, we read:

¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. ¹¹ And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they

praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. ¹² *But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy,* ¹³ *so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.*

- b. What we have taking place here is the fact that the people have responded to God's warnings, and they have begun rebuilding the temple.
 - (1) They get the foundation laid, and the people are excited.
 - (a) They are singing and blowing trumpets.
 - (b) They are praising God for His goodness and mercy.
 - (c) They are shouting out for joy, because the foundation is completed.
 - (2) In the midst of the celebrations, we are told that there is a small group of people who are weeping.
 - (a) They are bemoaning this temple, because they are convinced that there is no way that it will ever match the glory of Solomon's temple.
 - (b) In the midst of this celebration, you have this one small group who are weeping and wailing and detracting from the joy of the occasion.
2. There is an old saying, "There is one in every crowd."
 - a. It does not matter how great the work, it seems like there is always that one individual who cannot be pleased.
 - (1) It is just never good enough, or it just won't work, or it is just a waste of time.
 - (2) More good works have been stopped in the Lord's church because one person (or one small group of

people) found some reason to grumble and complain about it.

- (3) One person's bad attitude can zap the joy out everyone else's hard work.
 - b. That kind of attitude, when it is allowed to fester, will destroy a congregation!
3. I want us to notice some things about those who grumbled about the temple:
 - a. First, in **Ezra 3:12-13**, we are told that the celebration of those who were excited was so great that those who wept could not be heard.
 - (1) Sometimes, you just have to ignore those who are always negative and complaining.
 - (2) You cannot allow the negative attitude of a few to overwhelm the joy of the multitude!
 - (a) We need to be positive in the work of the Lord.
 - (b) We need to be energetic in the work of the Lord.
 - (c) We cannot allow bad attitudes to destroy that energy.
 - b. Second, in **Haggai 2:4**, we are told that God sent a message to the people that they are to be strong, because God is with them.
 - (1) Sometimes, you just have to have faith.
 - (a) God says, "**Be strong...and work.**"
 - (b) God was on their side, and that is all that mattered.
 - (2) We have to remember why we are doing the work of the Lord.
 - (a) It is not to bring glory to ourselves.
 - (b) It is not to please a handful of "nay-sayers."
 - (c) We are working to please God.
 - (d) If we are giving our best in our service to God

(according to His commands), then we have to trust that God will be with us in that service.

- (3) The fact is, God will go on to say in **Haggai 2:5-9** that this temple would enjoy a glory that far exceeded the temple of Solomon.
 - (a) Solomon's temple may have been more beautiful to the eye of man.
 - (b) This temple would enjoy the presence of God when Jesus would come to walk its halls.
 - (c) Just because these few individuals could not see the glory of their work did not mean that God did not see its true glory.
- (4) We have to be positive and trust in God.

III. **Conclusion**

- A. If we will eliminate these barriers, then we, too, can have "**a mind to work**" and accomplish great things.
- B. This evening, are you working for God, or are you busy tending your own house?