

Build Lest Your Labor Be in Vain

Scripture

“In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, "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.'" Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, "[Is it] time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple [to lie] in ruins?" Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! "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." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. "[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. "Therefore the heavens above 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 all the labor of [your] hands.'" (Haggai 1:1-11 NKJV)

Devotion

The people of God attended to their own needs while the temple remained un-built. God speaking through the prophet tells the people that their lack of fruitfulness was a just recompense from the Lord. All their efforts to gather food and clothing, to have drink and earn wages were being diminished because of their lack of focus. The people said the time to build God's house has not come, but God said differently. God called for a drought on the land because His people were going astray.

Churches are in great distress for the most part. It is true there are some that at least have the appearance of health. Only the Lord knows for sure, but even giving that, the overall state of many churches is tentative. Is it possible that we too are more concerned with our own houses and not the Lord's?

It seems to this writer that most of the efforts at church growth focus on numbers. Like salesmen make as many calls as possible because they know numbers translate into sales; church leaders often buy programs that focus on numbers of contacts. Many of these programs try to minimize the fear element of outreach by providing a canned presentation and the promise that it really works. Great effort is put into external motivation, and intrinsic motivation is ignored for the most part.

This happens because of a lack of faith. It is easier and faster to generate activity with external motivation. However, to change the heart, to create intrinsic motivation, takes heart work. Fallow ground must first be plowed! The plowman must have faith that his work is not in vain. Churches find a man willing to preach to the heart, to expose sin and lift up Christ, and then when the tares begin to grumble and flee they panic. Plowing turns the weeds under the earth and provides fertilizer for the soil. Churches are never to go after the tares because it is impossible to tell them from the real wheat. However, this writer has learned that it is much more difficult for a weed to grow in a healthy yard. Barren ground invites weeds; healthy turf repels them.

But let the reader take this one step further for you are the temple of God. What Haggai declares is true to every believer. Jesus said it this way, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me” (John 15:4 NKJV).

Are you striving after the world's offerings and neglecting your responsibility to grow in Christ? Yes, responsibility is the right world. Paul said, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, [which is] your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1 NKJV).

If we neglect the building of God's temple, then He will chasten us. You say, “I am not really building the temple in my life and things are not so bad.” Friend this is not the blessing of God for He chastens every son; rather this is likely the curse of God as He is taking His hand off of you. Notice the following passage in Romans if you think your waywardness is being overlooked.

“And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; [they are] whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” (Romans 1:28-32 NKJV)

Sin is not overlooked. It may be allowed to continue, but this is a sign of God’s judgment. God may have just let you go to judge you in the end deserving of death.

Oh friend if you are at peace in your sin flee to the cross today. Cry out for forgiveness with all your heart; cast off your worldly desires and find eternal life in Christ. If your way is hard, it might be the Lord seeking you, tugging on your heart to repent. Do not ignore the Lord’s calling for you may never hear it again. Today is the day of salvation!

The Scriptures say, “. . . The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."” (Romans 10:8-11 NKJV)

“Then He said to [them] all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His [own] glory, and [in His] Father’s, and of the holy angels.” (Luke 9:23-26 NKJV)

“. . . The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. "God [is] Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am [He]." (John 4:23-26 NKJV)