

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading
Sunday Worship Service
10:30AM 23 August 2026
Selina Chan leading & Jill Bird preaching
www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk
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THEME: The prophet Haggai, getting priorities straight

Good morning, dear brothers and sisters. During last Sunday Service, we've learnt from Habakkuk, the prophet who wrestled with God on behalf of the people. From the sermon of Simon and the testimonial of Denisa, we know we need to trust God and believe in His justice and sovereignty, even when His actions or silence seem incomprehensible.

Today Jill will help us understand God's message through the prophet Haggai - our spiritual priorities must come first and we should put God first at the centre of our lives, then everything else will fall into its proper place.

CALL TO WORSHIP

We fill our calendars and exhaust our strength,
yet our hearts remain restless.

God looks at our daily hustle and quietly asks:

What takes priority in your life?

**We confess how easily the demands of work, routines,
and personal comfort push God to the margins of our lives.**

God does not ask for what remains;

He calls for what is central.

Pause the rush, realign your focus, and
trust the presence that sustains you.

**Today, we reorder our lives and
place God at the centre of all we do. Amen.**

Hymn MP590

Seek ye first the kingdom of God

And His righteousness;

And all these things shall be added unto you.

Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Chorus

Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Man shall not live by bread alone,

But by every word

That proceeds out from the mouth of God.

Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and you shall find.
Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Karen Lafferty 1972

FAMILY TIME

*(*An offering will be taken during the following song, after which teenagers and children will leave for their groups)*

Hymn MP 1076

Jesus be the centre, be my source, be my light Jesus
Jesus be the centre, be my hope, be my song Jesus

Chorus

*Be the fire in my heart Be the wind in these sails
Be the reason that I live Jesus, Jesus*

Jesus be my vision, be my path, be my guide Jesus

Jesus be the centre, be my source, be my light Jesus
Jesus be the centre, be my hope, be my song Jesus

Jesus be my vision, be my path, be my guide Jesus

Michael Frye in 1999

PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
Forgive us for letting our daily ambitions push You to the margins.
We confess that we exhaust ourselves chasing things that never truly satisfy,
Offering You only what is leftover.

**Forgive our distracted hearts, Lord. Turn our eyes back to Jesus,
the ultimate fulfilment of Your presence and our only true hope.**

Through Christ, our strength is renewed and our lives are made whole.

We dedicate our time, work and worship back to You today,

Trusting the grace that sustains us.

**By the power of Jesus, we reorder our lives and
place You at the centre of all we do. Amen.**

BIBLE READING 1: Haggai 1. 1-11

BIBLE READING 2: Haggai 1. 12 – 2.5

BIBLE READING 3 Haggai 2. 6-9 and 20-23

HYMN MP 990:

I will offer up my life
In spirit and truth,
Pouring out the oil of love
As my worship to You.
In surrender I must give my every part;
Lord, receive the sacrifice
Of a broken heart.

Chorus *Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung,
As the praise of Your name, for the things You have done?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part,*

Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.

You deserve my every breath
For You've paid the great cost;
Giving up Your life to death,
Even death on a cross.
You took all my shame away,
There defeated my sin,
Opened up the gates of heaven,
And have beckoned me in.

MATT REDMAN © 1994 KINGSWAY'S THANKYOU MUSIC.

SERMON

The prophet Haggai, Getting priorities straight 520BC

Who can tell me the names of what we call the major prophets? Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. Then there are 12 what we call minor prophets – or short ones! Starting with Hosea and ending with Malachi. The first 9 spoke to the Jews before they were carried off into exile – Habakkuk who we heard from last week was one of these. The last three Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were after the return and mark the end of the Old Testament. There was no further word from God for 400 years until Jesus came. Interesting that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 400 years waiting with no word from God for salvation through Moses, and then the Jews had to wait and believe all the promises for Jesus to come.

Haggai spoke to the Jewish people after some of them had heard God's call and returned from exile and honoured God by starting to rebuild the temple and re-establishing it as a place of worship and the presence of God Almighty. The majority of Jews did not return – they preferred to stay in Babylon where they were doing well and had a good lifestyle. So those who returned initially had a good heart for the things of God – but let's see what happened to them.

Haggai as recorded, actually only speaks over a three month period, but there are 5 separate prophecies all recorded very carefully with the exact date he said them - interesting – God knows all the details of our lives!!

They started with enthusiasm but after just 2 years they stopped because of opposition from surrounding peoples and because their hearts were not that committed to putting the things of God first. Nothing further was done to the temple for 14 years. We can read the history of these times in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah where we also find Haggai's name mentioned as he lives right there with the returned Jews. They wanted to build up their own lives – and used the excuse in verse 2 ch1 **The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built** – I'm too busy sorting out my own life!

Let's read it in chapter 1. 1-11

God's response was the famous verse ch1. 4 **Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in panelled houses while the house of God remains a ruin.** A panelled house was a very posh one – the walls inside lined with expensive wood panelling – what would be the equivalent in Reading!!

God says through Haggai – is your life actually that blessed? – **give careful thought to your ways** – what direction is your life heading – what are you living for? Have your crops given good harvests? Do you easily have enough to eat, drink and wear? Do you earn enough to be free from worry? **Or are you earning wages to put it into a bag with holes!** Could it be because you are not putting me first and serving in my house and caring for my people?? If we have the wrong priorities, nothing will really satisfy us. Have you ever had that experience? You live for something – finally getting your own home, finally getting a job, having a baby! But when it happens it leaves us just hungry for something else.

What does God say? Put me first – start building my house again – it gives me so much pleasure when you honour me v8

Haggai's prophecy is interesting because we get the exact day that things happened – his first prophecy we have looked at already was on the first day of the 6th month – then it was 23 days later the 24th day of that month when the people started to obey. Were they thinking hard, giving this careful thought to their ways. For we then get this statement.

Ch1. 12 and **the people feared the Lord** I wonder what that looked like. If the fear of the Lord came on us here in Abbey today would we go out different people? Does the fear of God prompt obedience?

Do we need a pause – a time of considering and not just charging ahead with our hopes, plans and ambitions? Where is God in all my thinking – or are we thinking as the people were then – I'll think about God when all my plans are in place- it's not yet time.

I have put paper and pens out on your seats – let's have a time of honest thinking this over for yourself. What are your priorities – have they changed from say 5 or 10 years ago? Have they changed since you have come to the UK?

As we come back together who can share some thoughts? Could we ask for the fear of the LORD to come on us to help us in this?

BUT seems to be a second big message in Haggai as to what pleases the Lord – putting him first in terms of our lifestyle and how we spend our time but also from ch 2. 10 -19 our desire for holiness and hating sinful thoughts, attitudes and actions. Remember Jesus' words – **Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and you will be blessed with all that you need.** The prophecy says several times 'Give careful thought, give careful thought. God talks about coming to the temple 'defiled' – not worthy to come into his presence because of our sin.

Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would come and convict us of sin – we invite that Holy presence again to do his gentle work – Cleanse us from our sin Lord – make us clean within Lord

READING 2 Haggai 1.12 – 2.5

As a result God says loud and clear through Haggai - I am with you and my Spirit will come on not just your leaders but all the people. The end of chapter 1 – they came together and began work on the house of the Lord. And more promises of God's help in chapter 2 – often when we are obedient and start putting the things of God as our priority

Be strong and work for I am with you – this is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt – my Spirit will remain with you – do not fear.

So what is the challenge here for us individually but also as a church?

But there is another thread of prophecy in Haggai. Three further words on the 21st day of the seventh month and then two separate words on the 24th day of the ninth month. Why so accurately recorded? Every word from the Lord is so important! There was about to be the 400 years of silence and they would need to know these prophetic words of the coming of Jesus, to stir and maintain hope. In those years they would again come under the cruel domination of an invading superpower – this time the Romans.

So here comes the promise of Jesus' coming and also of the final victory of God at the day of Judgement and Jesus' return

Bible reading 3 Haggai 2. 6-9 and 20-22

This rebuilding of the temple was never half as beautiful as that built by Solomon – huge and covered in gold. In fact in Ezra it says that many of the returnees who could remember that glory wept when they realised how small and poor the new temple would be. But God promises the day of Jesus – the desired of all nations will come and will fill this house with glory- much greater glory than any of the former temples. Jesus himself dwelling in his people – do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit we read in 1 Corinthians. Zerubbabel their leader, is a direct descendent of David through whom the line right down to Jesus will follow. The signet ring represents the power and authority that will rest on Jesus.

But there is that further sure promise of the day when God will shake the whole earth and all the nations AND all those who think they have all the power. His judgement will come and the new kingdom of his son Jesus will be here.

So where are we like the people of the Old Testament? They had to get their priorities right and put God and the holy things of God first. Then they had to wait a further 400 years for Jesus to come and stay trusting and believing for that day – remember the wonderful faith of Simeon and Anna waiting to meet the baby Jesus before they died.

What about us? are we living with God as number 1? Are our eyes fixed on the day when Jesus will return and bring in a world with no more pain or suffering? As it says so often in the book of Hebrews - Let us encourage one another to remain faithful with eyes fixed on Jesus and the wonderful future we all have when he returns. AMEN

HYMN MP 37

As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship You.
You alone are my Strength, my Shield. To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire And I long to worship You.

You're my Friend and You are my Brother, even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other, So much more than anything.
You alone are my Strength, my Shield. To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire And I long to worship You.

I want You more than gold or silver, only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver and the apple of my eye.
You alone are my Strength, my Shield. To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship You.

Intercession — Lam & Selina

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the service and the message we received today — a reminder that our lives only find true direction when You are at the centre.

Merciful Lord, this summer our land is aching. The UK faces severe drought, and unbearable heat burdens many parts of the world. Birds no longer sing, the grass has turned brown, farmers feel helpless, houses are destroyed by wildfires, and people everywhere are struggling. **We cry out to You: send Your wind, Your rain, Your gentle weather. Breathe life back into Your creations. Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

Gracious Father, Our world feels heavy with conflict. Russia and Ukraine continue in war. The Middle East grows more troubled as more nations are drawn in. Gaza and Palestine remain in deep suffering. So many have lost homes, families, and any sense of safety. And as inflation rises, hardship spreads even further. **Lord, we ask You to break through the darkness. Bring peace where peace seems impossible. Amen.**

Loving God, Our nation is entering a new chapter with a new Prime Minister. Homelessness, immigration challenges, strained hospitals, and rising crime weigh on our hearts. We do not know how the new government will respond — but we trust that You are still sovereign. **Grant wisdom, compassion, and courage to Andy Burnham and his cabinet. Lord, fill this country with hope again. Amen.**

Almighty God, Thank You for Your love for Abbey Baptist Church. You have grown our congregation over the past five years, bringing brothers and sisters from many cultures and nations. You have protected our seniors and strengthened them to support the younger ones. **Lord, stir our hearts. Help more of us say, "Here I am — I'm willing to serve." Pour out Your grace on our church. Amen.**

Faithful Lord, We lift up the missions we support — ReInspired, CIRDIC, CCA, Mustard Tree, Bowers family, and Ray Lam and his family. Strengthen them with Your love. Provide every resource they need. **Give them resilience, perseverance, and joy as they continue their work in Your great name. Lord, surround them with Your love. Amen.**

HYMN BP&W 352

O Jesus, I have promised, to serve You to the end;
Be now forever near me, my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway if You will be my Guide.

O let me feel You near me; the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
But, Jesus, draw still nearer, and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear You speaking in accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will;

O speak to reassure me, to hasten, or control;
O speak, and make me listen, Your guardian of my soul.

O let me see your footmarks, and in them plant mine own;
My hope to follow duly, is in Your strength alone:
O guide me, call me, draw me, uphold me to the end;
And then in Heaven receive me, My Saviour and my Friend.
J. E. BODE (1816-74)

BENEDICTION

Go into your week with clear priorities and steadfast faith.
Put God first in all things, trust His provision,
and walk in obedience – knowing that
when you seek His Kingdom above all else,
everything you truly need will be added to you. Amen.

THE GRACE

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, Amen.

Events to highlight next week

Tuesday 25th	8pm Zoom prayer meeting
Wednesday 26th	10.30 Renew Wellbeing 12.00 Bible Study
Thursday 27th	10.30 Bible Study 10.30 Toddlers
Saturday 29th	Training for evangelism ALIVE mission Earley Christian Fellowship 153 Wokingham RD RG6 1LW
Sunday 30th	Newcomers lunch after church
Sunday Sept 13th	AGM and ordinary church meeting after the service



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