

*"I have an ache in the pit of my stomach because of all the people that lost their homes and had damage. I'm worried where I'm going to live and how I'm going to clean up."* That was one of the reactions to Hurricane Dorian as it cuts through the Caribbean Islands and heads toward Florida. Families have had a similar reaction when their home gets flooded or damaged by a tornado. Have you ever experienced that feeling in your life? It leaves one feeling overwhelmed, helpless and without any security.

The Israelites who lived 2,500 years ago felt overwhelmed, helpless and insecure. The 50,000 that returned from their Babylonian exile saw a demolished Jerusalem. There was so much to do to make their homes and their city a livable place again, not to mention rebuilding the rubble of the Temple, the place they worshiped the Lord.

Because the task seemed so overwhelming many of them adopted a "me-first" mentality. They started on God's house, but stopped to focus their time and money on taking care of their own fields and rebuilding their own homes.

If St. Paul's church or school had been damaged by flooding or a tornado, would we have insisted that we fix the church or school first, and then try to find time and money to fix our own homes after?

God expected his OT people to take care of his house first. He was very upset when they didn't. So, he sent his prophet Haggai to help them re-prioritize their lives and encourage them to rebuild his temple. Through Haggai the Lord assured his people that he wasn't asking them to do something by themselves. Through Haggai: **The God of Angel Armies says: "I am with you."** They didn't need to feel overwhelmed, helpless, or insecure; but they did need **to take his work and his word seriously.** That's also God's encouragement for this congregation. Let's find out how these words apply to us.

**The God of Angel Armies.** You may have never heard that name used for God before. It is both a wonderful and biblical name for God. We're more familiar with translations like: *"Lord God Almighty"* from the NIV, or *"Lord of Hosts"* from the King James, or even when we sang: *"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of*

*Sabaoth"* from the old Lutheran Hymnal. The Hebrew word *"Sabaoth,"* (not to be confused with *Sabbath* - the day of worship) can be translated: armies or hosts. The one who controls armies of the heavenly hosts – angels – is almighty. Not only does the God in whom we trust protect us and go with us, but he even brings his angel armies along with him.

That's why we want to take the work of our God so seriously that it becomes our top priority. Something the people of Haggai's time didn't do. There were consequences because they didn't. God said to the people in the verses before today's lesson: **"You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it. You expected much, but it turned out to be little. Why?" declares the Lord God Almighty (or, God of Angel Armies). "Because of my house, which remains in ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house."**

To us it seems logical that the harder you work, the more blessings you'll receive. But that's not a guaranteed recipe for success. The verses I just read, along with Solomon's verses from Ecclesiastes in last week's lesson remind us that unless God is involved in what we do, it won't amount to much, no matter how much time or how much effort, or money we sink into it.

One reason we may seem short on time or cash, or both is because we haven't taken the Lord's work seriously and made him our priority. There's no excuse for that, as our lesson explains; The God of Angel Armies says: **"I am with you."**

The Lord assures us that he's not asking us to do something by ourselves. He's with us. And if he's with us, we can put his work first and not worry about how we'll make ends meet. Our powerful and loving Lord knows what we need and has promised to provide it. His exact words were: **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."**

For the Israelites in our lesson that meant they could get back to rebuilding the temple and trust that God would still bless their families, their harvests, their

flocks, their lives. For us it means that we don't have to say: *"Once things slow down for me, or when I retire, then I'll serve the Lord with my time."* or *"Once I get caught up on some bills, or get a full-time job, then I'll start giving a regular offering."* You can start those acts of service and sacrifice today because the God of Angel Armies is with you.

That's doesn't mean helping with a building project, like God's OT people did, is the only way to serve him. And, doing the Lord's work isn't limited to helping out at church or school. It's an important part of it, but it's not the only way.

- You serve him when you take care of and provide for your family.
- You serve him when you do your job as well as you can.
- You serve him when you give your best effort in the classroom.
- You serve him when you walk the Christian walk each day.

Be careful though, that you don't use the excuses: *"I have to take care of my family and our expenses. My job takes so much time. I'm not making that much at my job."* for why you can't help here or elsewhere. Those were the excuses the people tried on God at the time of Haggai.

Sure enough, God exposed them: *"You aren't taking care of my house, because you're too busy taking care of yourself first."* God will put up with a lot of things, but second place in your life is not one of them! Take the Lord's work seriously and make it a priority.

Our sinful natures don't want anyone telling us what to do. That is so true, but keep this in mind, while these words are spoken by me, they come from the God of Angel Armies. He wants you to take his word seriously, just like the people in Haggai's day: **"Then Zerubbabel, the governor, Joshua, the high priest and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD."**

There was no miraculous display of power. No fire from heaven to convince the Israelites to repent of their sin and get on with the Lord's work. Haggai simply preached the law, pointing out their mixed-up

priorities. Then he shared the gospel, assuring them that the God of Angel Armies was with them and would bless their work. It's good for Haggai to remind us that God chooses to motivate his people through his quiet Word delivered by ordinary people.

Do we take God's word seriously? You may listen as the Bible is read in church, or as you read it on your own at home. But is that the same as taking God's word seriously?

Notice the groups of people - Zerubbabel, the governor; Joshua, the high priest; and the rest of the people who realized: *"This isn't Haggai speaking. This is God talking. We had better take his word seriously."*

They did: **They came and began to work on the house of the Lord.** This was everybody's business and responsibility and privilege. The book of Haggai began on the 1st day of the 6th month when he brought the message from the **God of Angel Armies**, and now in just a little over 3 weeks, the 24th day of the 6th month, the people made God and rebuilding his temple their priority.

I'm not going to apologize for encouraging you to participate in the work of our church and school. I'm not going to apologize for asking if your priorities are in the right place. I care about the health of your soul and your eternal future. If your priorities remain misplaced. If you continue to tell God you're too busy for him, he'll say the same thing to you on Judgment Day. But that time hasn't come yet. So take to heart and take seriously God's word of forgiveness when our priorities have been out-of-place.

When I say that the God of Angel Armies is with you, I really mean he's with you.

- He became one of us in the person of Jesus.
- He served the sentence of hell for your sins so that you will one day see heaven.
- He physically ascended back to heaven, but the one who controls armies of angels is not only with you, he even brings his angel armies along with him to protect you.
- He promises to keep you strong as you keep him your top priority.
- The God of Angel Armies is by your side and on your side!