

A Call to Build the House of the LORD

† Consequences for apathy (vv.1-11)

† Promise for faithful fear (vv.12-15)

In the name of Jesus, our Immanuel, dear children of the heavenly Father:

Once a member of our Board for Lay Ministry told the rest of us we were crazy. He was right. We were about to sign an easement on a major chunk of our property. If we had, that whole lower area of the ball diamond, about three of our seven acres, would now be under water behind a fence. Our local drainage authority wanted to make it a holding pond with special soil to filter runoff into the water table. We just needed a permit to move the garage in order to make room for the Education Wing. Walk out the north side and you'll see the old slab. God used our member to save the possibility of a school that would require a playground. We did not need to give away land in order to obtain our permit.

God's people back from Exile in Babylon were not so fortunate. Their government was far away in Persia. Their neighbors hated them. Coming back to the Promised Land with Zerubbabel sixteen years earlier had been hard. About that time the LORD told Daniel in a vision that Jerusalem would be *“rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.”* (Daniel 9:25 NIV) Due to complaints by local Samaritans, the government shut them down. No permit, no temple. That's how it goes sometimes.

† Consequences for apathy (vv.1-11)

By the time of our text things had changed. New king, new administration, new possibilities. But God's people were not ready. Life was hard! They had mortgages to pay. Their own homes needed lots of work. The economy was a mess. The media was against them. How could they possibly start clearing rubble to rebuild the temple? Besides, don't you know? You can worship God anywhere. They sounded a lot like modern Americans: *“The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.”*

We know the one true God, the God of the Bible, is very practical. He has no use for wasteful extravagance. Just watch Jesus when He fed the 5,000 men plus women and children with the little boy's lunch. After such a miracle with five loaves of bread and two small fish, Jesus told His disciples, *“Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.”* (John 6:12 NIV) Yet the same LORD God was pleased a thousand years before Christ when Solomon overlaid the temple walls with gold. How do you reconcile such a huge disparity? Saving scraps versus gold plated walls?

Our problem is these eyes connected to this heart. We want to judge by sight and dollar signs. God looks deep inside at our heart. He has no use for **apathy**. In fact, we see through this window into history a very important lesson for us at New Life today. God has **Consequences for apathy**.

Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.” (Haggai 1:3–6 NIV84)

We've been so richly blessed at New Life. This 1990 building plus the 2004 Education Wing function extremely well. The mortgage is manageable on an attractive building in a visible spot. God has blessed us with dedicated volunteers and Church Family group leaders who keep things fresh and clean. But time has taken its toll. A visitor after one funeral told me the sanctuary cracks are quite distracting. This is God's house. How can we shake off any **apathy** and come together wisely with our resources?

First, I thank God for His warning. **Consequences for apathy** are also spoken in the last New Testament book of Revelation. To the pastor and people of the church in Laodicea our Lord Jesus says, *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth....Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.”* (Revelation 3:15f,19 NIV84) He said something similar to Ephesus: *“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”* (Revelation 2:4–5 NIV84)

Unlike the ancient Israelites, we will not need to physically *“go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house....”* But as we make our plans for our 25th Anniversaries “Beautifying God’s House,” as we set our goals and gather our offerings to repair, remodel and update, we want to keep one thing foremost on our minds and hearts: the glory of God. *“So that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD.* Isn’t that the heart of it all? Paraphrasing an old-time Missouri Synod Pastor Drews, “You don’t have to build the best, but build the best you can.” **Consequences for apathy** can be a great blessing. Maybe this explains why our credit cards seem to have running shoes. Why our bills build mountains and the gas tank sticks on empty. The Lord chastens those He loves. Couldn’t these all be **Consequences for apathy** among us? *“Give careful thought to your ways,”* the Lord says at least five times in these two chapters of Haggai. Literally, “Set to your heart upon your ways.” It’s what the Lord told us in last week’s sermon from Romans 12: *“Think of yourself with sober judgment.”* (12:3) God wants to blow His blessings on us, not have to blow His blessings away.

† **Promise for faithful fear (vv.12-15)**

Did you notice who was moved by this? It happened in two stages. First came the **fear**: *“Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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.”* That’s what happens when God’s people listen to His Word and take it to heart. We just have to come and hear it preached. All of us ought to have a **faithful fear** about missing church. God commands: *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (Hebrews 10:25 NIV84) Just seeing you here is always encouraging.

And can you see how this **fear** is not the “run and hide” kind like Adam in the Garden? No, this is **faithful fear** that God causes to bloom and grow in the second stage of His message. This is so simple, yet so sweet. Only two words in Hebrew: אֲנִי אִתְּךָ. It takes four words in English: *“I am with you.”* That’s all we need, isn’t it? Little kids afraid at night only need to hear Mom or Dad softly say, “I’m here.” Grown children of God working hard only need to hear Him say, *“I am with you.”*

He says it with a smile because according to God’s **Promise**, Jesus washed away all our sins with His holy precious blood. Even our **apathy** couldn’t hold up under the Word-powered water of Baptism. He sends His Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament, so that His holy fire burns in our hearts all because *“I am with you.”* *“I am with you”* in your family as you live for me. *“I am with you”* in church as you focus your resources on the Great Commission. Remember I promised, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore while going, disciple all ethnic groups, by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to guard and treasure all things as many as I have commanded you. Look! I am with you all the days until the gathered goal of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18–20 TPA) His Name is still Immanuel, *God With Us.*

We’ll hear more in coming weeks from our Decorating Committee as we set our goals together. But always more important than *what* we do is *why* we do – in response to God’s love. May God stir up our spirits too – leaders, pastor and people. Let us work this anniversary in honor of our God. Amen.