

# God's Project

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the importance of prioritizing God's project of building His spiritual temple through obedience and community action.*

**Duration:** 33:53

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Mark 16:15, Luke 10:2, 1 Corinthians 15:58, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8

**Topics:** "Peace"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that the church's focus should be on God and His work, rather than worldly matters like sports, entertainment, or politics. The message centers around the idea that God is building a temple made up of living stones, which are the people who have accepted Christ as their savior. The speaker encourages the congregation to stand firm and steady in their faith, to keep busy in their work for the Lord, and to not give up. The sermon concludes with a call for pastors to reconsecrate themselves and strive to do the work of the Lord better.

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## Transcript

God's Project. Some verses can be read simply, other verses need context or you don't get the understanding of it. And this is one of those places where a lot of you will not be familiar with the writings of Haggai from the Old Testament, a minor prophet, called one of the minor prophets because of the length of the book, not importance.

And he prophesied toward the end of all those prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, all of them, they preceded him for the most part. And Haggai only has two chapters and only has 38 verses. And we're only focused on one chapter.

So who was Haggai and what was he saying? And to understand that, you have to know the background. We know that Israel had settled the land under Joshua after Moses brought them out of Egypt. And they went into the land and starting from the time of Moses, there was always a tabernacle where God's presence dwelt.

That was his home, that was the center of worship. It was portable at first, then it was still tent material when they came in the land. But David's son, Solomon, built a temple 900-something BC.

It was a magnificent, one of the wonders of the world kind of structure. And that was the temple. But as the centuries went by, the people of God turned away from God.

They worshiped idols. They lived opposite of what God taught in his word. They were immoral.

They were cheaters. They gouged other people out of their money. They joined one land to another land and took advantage of people who didn't have much power.

And God sent prophets to them to warn them, don't do this, don't do this. I warned you back in Deuteronomy, if you sow that, you're gonna reap something bad. If you sow righteousness, if you try to live for me and trust me, you'll reap something much better, something beautiful.

I'll protect you, I'll do this, I'll do that. Well, God then decided to almost, as we say, turn his back on his people because they had turned their back on him. And he prophesied through men that an enemy would come and circle Jerusalem and Jerusalem would be laid waste.

And the temple which they took so much pride in, even though their hearts were far from God, would be destroyed. And sure enough, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar came, circled Jerusalem, laid siege to it, cut off food supplies. And then when they were weak enough, they came, breached the wall, came in, and not only destroyed and raped and pillaged, but they destroyed and burnt to the ground the temple.

Pulled it apart, stone by stone, and destroyed it. And Israel went into captivity, but God had foreseen that. And in his mercy and love, he said that after a certain amount of time, he was gonna bring a remnant of the people back to the land of Israel.

Now, most of the people were sent into captivity. Some people were left just to tend the ground a little bit so it wouldn't get totally crazy. But most of the great young leaders, like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, all those people were sent into captivity to Babylon.

The Persian Empire replaced the Babylonian Empire, and sure enough, God's word came true and the people came back. A remnant, not just a little short of 50,000 people, out of all those millions of Jews. Only 50,000 wanted to come back.

But it was hard sledding. They had been away for 70 years. Some people didn't even know the land, couldn't remember the land.

But God said, go back to the land, repopulate it, and rebuild the temple because I am gonna show my faithfulness to you. Under people like Ezra and Nehemiah, they came back to the land. Again, only about 50,000.

And they began to multiply and rebuild their houses and try to get things in order. The governor at that time was a man by the name of Zerubbabel. And the high priest was a man by the name of Joshua.

So they were the leaders of the people there. And a strange thing happened. They went back in the land, very negative situation, very discouraging, and they rebuild their houses and they started immediately to rebuild the temple.

Well, how do you start? You have to build a foundation. So they built the foundation of the temple. But you know what happened? All kinds of hellish things broke loose.

The Samaritans, the people to the north who existed right up until the time of Jesus and still exist today. I was in a Samaritan temple on my trip to Israel. The Samaritans attacked them, lied about them, caused political trouble for them.

It was hard getting supplies. They laid the foundation and then they quit working and they stopped for 16 years. Living, businesses, building their houses, but the temple was nothing.

And God, at that moment, raises up Haggai. And now, given that background, you'll get the gist of what he's saying. Let's look.

During the second year that Darius was emperor of Persia on the first day of the sixth month, the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai. The message was for the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel, son of Sheetal, and for the high priest, Joshua, son of Jehozadak. The Lord Almighty said to Haggai, these people say that this is not the right time to rebuild the temple.

The Lord then gave this message to the people through the prophet Haggai. My people, why should you be living in well-built houses while my temple lies in ruins? Don't you see what is happening to you? You have planted much grain but have harvested very little. You have food to eat but not enough to make you full.

You have wine to drink but not enough to get drunk on. You have clothing but not enough to keep you warm. And workers cannot earn enough to live on.

Can't you see why this has happened? Now go up into the hills, get lumber, and rebuild the temple. Then I will be pleased and will be worshiped as I should be. You hoped for large harvests, but they turned out to be small.

And when you brought the harvest home, I blew it away. Why did I do that? Because my temple lies in ruins while every one of you is busy working on your own house. That is why there's no rain and nothing can grow.

I have brought drought on the land, on its hills, its grain fields, vineyards, and olive orchards, on every crop the ground produces, on people and on animals, on everything you try to grow. Then Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and all the people who had returned from the exile in Babylonia, did what the Lord their God told them to do. They were afraid and obeyed the prophet Haggai, the Lord's messenger.

Then Haggai gave the Lord's message to the people. I will be with you. That is my promise.

The Lord inspired, the Lord inspired, the Lord inspired everyone to work on the temple. Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, Joshua, the high priest, and all the people who had returned from the exile, they began working on the temple of the Lord Almighty, their God, on the 24th day of the sixth month of the second year that Darius was emperor. So you got the story, do you see it? God raises up Haggai, he's a prophet.

What's a prophet? A prophet is someone who delivers the word of the Lord to the people, and the message is an unusual one. It's not like other prophets. Other prophets talked about why are you worshipping Baal? Why are you living immorally? Why are you doing this? Why are you doing that? That's not this message.

Now we still have New Testament office of prophet, but whether it's a preacher, a speaker, a pastor, an evangelist, or whether it's a dream God gives you, or whether it's something that he just makes real to you through some reading of scripture, there are always ways that God uses to get our attention and to deliver a personal message, and that's what the prophet was. He was telling God's heart, not just predicting the future, but saying God's been watching everything you're doing, and this is what God has to say. Yeah, your posse approves of it, and your friends and your family think it's great what you're doing, but here's what I, the Lord, says to you, and that still goes on today.

God speaks to churches, to families, to individuals, to preachers, et cetera. So this message that Haggai gave was different because it wasn't, tear down those idols, what are you worshiping, Baal? Which was some of his predecessors' very same message. This was different.

God says through Haggai, there's all kinds of people there among you who say it's not time to rebuild the temple, but yo, 16 years has gone on. 16 years have passed. Nobody's building God's temple for 16 years.

He returned them from the land of captivity. He's the one who freed them and brought them back, but now that they're back, they're not thinking of God's project, they're thinking of their projects. So God says to them, is this right? My house lies in ruins.

Nobody's rebuilding it, but look at your houses. You got beautiful houses, you got beautiful apartments, but my house lies in ruins, so I don't get that. I'm the one who brought you back.

I'm the one who gives you life. I'm the one who chose your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Have I always not kept my covenant with you? And now, what'd you do, throw me under the bus? My temple lies in ruins.

Then God says something else. He says, don't you see what you're doing to yourself? By putting me second, don't you see what's happening? The blessing of God has been lessened. The blessing of God that would have been on you in a plenteous way and overabundance and overflow, it's not happening, is it, to you? Because I've held it back, why? Because look how you're treating me.

You don't think about my house, you're thinking about your life, your job. So now, instead of having abundance, you have just enough. I supply everything, but I've held it back.

But I've done more, God says, to get your attention. I've even sent some drought. I've held back the rains.

I've held back the things that you need to really prosper. Why? How can I bless you when you don't even think about me? My temple for 16 years has been rotting there with that foundation. So God tells him, now get up.

Go to the mountains and get the lumber and rebuild my temple. Don't worry about how small it is. Don't worry about if it doesn't look like Solomon's temple.

Don't despise the day of small beginnings. It is what it is. Don't be comparing things with what used to be.

It is what it is. You just do what I want you to do, rebuild the temple, because the secret is not the building, it's my presence, it's my blessing. So the people got afraid and they listened.

You know, a lot of times we listen and we say amen, then we don't do anything different. I don't want that to happen in this sermon. I prayed very fervently last night and today that that wouldn't happen, whatever the application is to our lives.

The people listened and they went to work. And the minute God saw that they were gonna go and do what's right, listen to what God said. Haggai, tell the people, now that I see what you're doing, I will be with you.

Now, when God says I will be with you, what does that mean? He's with everyone all the time because he's omnipresent. How many understand that? Say amen. In other words, there's no place in the universe where God is not.

So when God says I am with you, what does that mean? Well, no, when God says I am with you, that means I'm gonna bless you. I'm gonna give you strength. Wait till you see what I'm gonna do for you now.

Oh, you're rebuilding my temple? You're putting my kingdom first? You're thinking about my project? I got your back, and then some. I will bless you in abundance. I will protect you.

Yeah, there'll be difficulties because whenever you do something for God, the devil attacks. Yeah, the Samaritans will attack, it's the same old, same old, but I will be with you. I will fight for you.

I will supply for you. Your children will have blessings now they wouldn't have had, why? Because you rebuilt my house. And that's the end of my sermon.

No, I'm serious. The question is, that happened 500 years before Christ. All I'm talking to you about, Haggai prophesied about 520 years before Christ was born.

And we're not building a physical temple, and I didn't preach this to take an offering. You already saw, I took the offering. So what's the application? We know now, and whenever you read Scripture, the first question you ask is, what did it mean to the people who read it? Because remember, Haggai didn't speak to us.

Haggai spoke to them. But since it's the word of God, after you find out the context and what it meant to them, which I think we all understand now what it meant to them, and how they reacted, now you step back and say, what are the abiding lessons for us? Well, look at this verse, found in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 58, one of my favorite verses from the Good News Bible. So then, my dear friends, stand firm and steady.

Keep busy always in your work for the Lord, since you don't know that nothing you do in the Lord's service is ever useless. Listen again. So then, my dear friends, stand firm and steady.

Keep busy always in your work for the Lord. Who's that written to, the pastors of the church? No, the church. This is to the Corinthian church, not the pastor, not some evangelist.

It's not written to Billy Graham, or some member of the clergy. This is written to the congregation. So then, dear friends, stand firm and steady.

In other words, don't quit, don't give up. Keep busy always. Not just keep busy, keep busy always, because the tendency is to get energized, and then quit, and go in a mood, a funk.

Keep busy always in your work for the Lord. Not for Macy's, not for the Board of Ed, not for Amex, not your job. That's your job, that's how you get money.

God gave you that job. Do it the best you can, and be a light, and shine. But that's not your service for the Lord.

That's something else. Keep busy always in your work for the Lord, since you know that nothing you do in the Lord's service, not your job, in the Lord's service, is ever useless or in vain. We're not building a physical temple, but we're supposed to be building a temple.

It's an invisible temple. God right now is not interested in any physical building in the universe, because he doesn't dwell in anything made by human beings. He dwelt in Christ when Christ came, the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him, and when Jesus went back, he sent the Holy Spirit, and now the Bible says, don't you know, you, plural, don't you know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit? God is building a temple.

Well, that's news for some of you, it seems. God's got a project. He's not interested in the UN.

He's not interested in the White House and who's president so much, or what's happening over there in the European market. He's building a temple. It's made up of living stones that are being put together and cemented together with love.

Who are these living stones? Those are people who receive Christ as their savior. They hear the gospel, and now they become part of the temple that you and I are part of. It's called the kingdom of God.

It's called the church. In another place, it's called the body of Christ, and he is the head. That's his project.

That's where his interest is right now. That's what the angels are staring down and watching, watching me preach right now. Who knows if they're not in this room while I preach? That's what they're interested in.

Who wins the NBA title? Who wins the World Cup in soccer or football? They don't talk about those things. What's happening with the market? What's happening with the economy? They're not talking about those things. Who won American Idol? What's the hottest TV show? What's the biggest grossing movie? That's an irrelevancy to them.

They have their mind only on one thing. God sent his son into the world to die and shed his blood on the cross. And he shed his blood on the cross, so this message of love and forgiveness of sin and mercy and pardon, this is amazing, Grace.

This is amazing, love. That message, he has entrusted to us so that the kingdom can expand. It won't be a little temple.

It'll be a bigger and bigger and bigger temple in China, in Africa, in Brooklyn, everywhere where the gospel can go out. God's building a church. He's building a church.

That's why the last thing he said to the apostles was go into all the world and preach the gospel. Baptize everyone who believes and then disciple them, train them. But this is hard work.

You think rebuilding a temple is hard in 500 BC? That's a piece of cake. You just go up in the mountain and get some wood and haul it down even though there were no tools and machines that we're used to. No, building this temple, it means being in a prayer meeting, crying out to God, being filled with the Holy

Spirit, being filled with the word of God, being bold enough to share Christ even though you might be mocked and you'll lose some friends and your family will turn on you.

But if you're crazy for Jesus, that's what you have to do. He's building his temple. Come on, let's say amen to that.

He's building his temple. Then after they find the Lord, who's gonna counsel them? They come with all kinds of baggage. Some of them are learning disabled.

They can't read. Who's gonna teach them the Bible? They grew up in homes where it's total chaos. So now they have to get their mind renewed and learn how to live and honor Christ by their living.

They have problems. They get discouraged. Some are used to snorting cocaine.

Others just smoked weed every time they felt discouraged. Now God has to break those chains. They have to be loved.

They have to be encouraged. They have to be prayed with. Some take three steps forward but then they go back one step.

It's just the way it is. It's always been that way. So someone has to work, pray, give, go, visit, take missionary trips, go pick them up with your car, tell them to meet me at church, meet me at the bus stop, I'll bring you there.

But you gotta hear the gospel. You gotta hear about Jesus. I don't know how long I can work and build.

We all gotta be thinking. Now there will always be people, like in the days of Haggai, there will always be people who say, it's not time to build the temple. There will always be that, including pastors.

They get enough people to pay their bills and they're done. I know that like the back of my hand. I meet too many of them.

They got 150 people, 200, but they're not gonna rock the boat because they got enough to pay the bills or the mortgage or the building is paid for and they got a salary and that's the way it is. They don't care. There's no urgency, there's no passion.

There's always people in every church who will say, it's not time to build. I just, look, my daughter's two years old. You know, you only go around one time.

You gotta smell the roses. That's everywhere in America. Not so much an underground church in China.

I've been there too. They think totally different than we do. They're willing to risk their life to build the temple.

They're willing to go to jail. Imagine me, I preach in front of hundreds of them with my friend Ravi Zacharias and half of them had been in prison for Christ and here we're battling with people. Can we drag them away from the NFL game or from TV and whatever, movies or texting the universe and Facebook and staying connected with the universe? So there will always be people, like there are here today and there are everywhere.

There will always be people who say, it's not time to build the temple. We gotta get to it, but it's not time yet. That's what they were saying in Haggai's day.

But I believe Jesus is saying to us, after all I've done for you, gave my life, so what's my position in your life? Forget about going to church on Sunday. Anybody can go to church on Sunday. People who are not even born again go to church on Sunday.

Am I right or wrong? Who's gonna build my temple? Who's gonna make themselves available? This is why so many Christians don't have overflowing joy, just like they didn't have overflowing crops. How in the world would God give us overflowing joy and overflowing peace when we're not even building the thing he wants us to build? Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. First Corinthians 15, 58 from the NIV.

Knowing that your labor for the Lord is not in vain. That visit, that call, that prayer, that day of fasting. You know what? I just met someone who got saved.

I said, how'd you get saved? Well, the truth is somebody turned over their plate and said, I won't rest until my friend becomes a Christian. And they got ahold of heaven, got ahold of God, and then you say, oh, that's just by accident. Well, according to your faith, so be it unto you.

I don't believe that's by accident. I believe God hears and answers prayer. And I think some of you are here because somebody was doing the work of the Lord.

Someone got emergency mode for you and me. There's a lack of joy and peace. Oh, let me come and get prayed for.

We can pray for you until Jesus comes. If you're not interested in his project and his priority, how would you have an abundance of peace and joy? Just explain that to me. He's under the bus, you're building your houses.

No, your apartments are fine, aren't they? And your money, you got 11 pairs of sneakers. You got shoes to match every outfit. And Jesus is saying, but how about my temple? I blessed you, I want you to be happy.

I love you, you're my children. But I mean, how about what I'm interested in? The last promise was this. Oh, now that I see you're doing that, now I will be with you.

You thought I blessed you before? You don't even know what blessing is. Now I'm gonna be with you. I'm gonna strengthen you, I'm gonna protect you.

Let me say a couple things to you parents. You want your kids to grow up straight and true? You want them to be Christians? Throw yourself into the work of the Lord. Have quality time, yeah, read to them, go to Bayamon, have a vacation, whatever you wanna do.

But the best example you can give your child is that you're all out for Jesus. My wife and her parents had all kinds of faults like my parents had faults. All her siblings are serving the Lord.

She's serving the Lord because they couldn't get away from the fact my mom and dad are all out for Jesus. Not church on Sunday, they're like crazy for Jesus. You're worrying about your kids going to church too much? Will they get their homework done? You put God first and then tell me how God blesses your

children.

He will bless your children. He'll bless you, he'll help you. There will be battles.

Let me say one more thing. I thought of it while I was teaching on church history this week. Francis Asbury was sent by John Wesley when the Methodist movement gained steam in England and was rocking England.

Most historians say that England was preserved from the ravages of something like the French Revolution which hit across the Channel in France because of the Methodist revival. The gospel started to be preached. The spirit was poured out.

Wesley would preach to 10, first, 20, 30,000 people with no microphones and they could all hear him in a field. The meetings were 55 minutes long but people were dropping on the dirt and the mud. Sang a hymn, he preached, sang a hymn at the end and God was just doing great things.

Methodist movement began. He sent a guy named Francis Asbury to America. There's a school named after him in Kentucky, I believe.

America was unsettled. It wasn't a nation yet. It was before 1776.

Colonies, drunkenness, carousing, immorality. People said you couldn't walk down any street in colonial America and not blush from what was going on and stuff you heard. But God had sent a revival and now Francis Asbury came on top of that to found the Methodist church.

And he said something in reading his biography. I wrote it in my Bible, Flyleaf, years and years and years ago. Brothers and sisters, if you have any trust in me or you value anything that I've learned, let me just suggest this to you.

Asbury spoke to the leaders of the Methodist, fledgling Methodist movement there in America and he said this. Brethren, let's say there's a couple hundred of them that came together for a convention. Brethren, though the devil will attack you in a thousand ways and though there is trouble on every hand, mark this, you will never be happier than when you're doing the work of the Lord.

Though the devil attack you in a thousand ways and though there's trouble on every hand, you will never be happier, there will never be more peace or joy in your life than when you're doing the work of the Lord. Sharing, talking, praying, giving, going, beseeching, training, discipling, visiting, you'll never be happier than when you're doing that. When he attacks, you just resist him, he'll flee from you.

But there'll be a blessing of God on you and what is he saying? It's exactly what Haggai said. Now the Lord says, I will be with you. I just wanna go on record here today with my pastor friends.

Pastors, come and stand with me. We have some away, others will be here at 12. Others are preaching.

They're preaching at churches that have no pastor that are going through hellish attacks. We are reconsecrating ourselves. I wanna do the work of the Lord better.

I wanna be a better pastor. I wanna preach better. I wanna pray more.

I wanna see God do greater things. I wanna see the most wonderful prayer meetings. We had a beautiful one this last Tuesday.

Oh my goodness, the Lord came. I wanna see him come again and again and again. I wanna see people get saved so that there's so many to get baptized, we have to stop and empty the water and change it because it's getting funky in that water because we're baptizing so many people.

How many are with me? Say I. I. That's what I wanna see. And why not? Well, look at me. Why not? Why can't God use you more? Why can't God use me more? Is God tired? Has he run out of power? Is he not interested? Does he have no project? Why can't he use the men behind me and me? Why can't he use us more? Why can't he use this church greater than ever before? Why not? Is there some verse that says no, you have to stand still? Is there some mandate from heaven, now you gotta decline? No.

The best is always yet to come in your life. You will experience things from the Holy Spirit, power, the gifts of the Spirit, unction, faith. All kinds of things happen when you're doing the work of the Lord.

But I grew up around, at times, not always in my life, but I grew up around a teaching about the Holy Spirit in a Pentecostal culture, where it was get more of God, get more of God. But nobody went out and did the work. Everybody wanted to just feel the goosebumps, get the chills.

Oh, God, send the power. And God is saying, for what? I'll give you the power, but por que? For what? What are you gonna do? Are you consecrated to my project? Then I'll give you everything you need, and then beyond that. But if you just wanted to feel good, to go back to the way you live, no.

I didn't send the Holy Spirit to make you feel good. I sent the Holy Spirit to give you power, so you could be my witnesses, so you could build a church of Christ. And I've seen that in my own life, when I get covetous, just, oh, God, I need more of you.

I want more of you. Oh, that was good. Now, let me wait till next Sunday.

I want more of you then. I need more of you for what? Let's close our eyes. Holy Spirit, lead us.

I invite you to visit your people now. We need you. We can't do what I just was preaching about.

We can't do it without your power. We can't even consecrate ourselves without your power. We don't even know how to surrender.

We're all so selfish, so preoccupied with what is, we can't see what can be. The material world just snuffs out everything. We don't see the invisible world, souls, eternity, the church of Christ.

You're not building a physical building. That would be easy. Just some money and a construction team.

You're building the church of Christ. You're dealing with human beings. Satan has them.

He got them locked up. Possesses some of them. Blinds others.

Discourages, makes others cynical. You said that if we would go out and speak and pray and love and visit and give, that you would be with us in marvelous ways. That's what we're praying for.

If you're here and you have felt a call on your life to do something that you're not doing now. I was like that. I was a businessman at one time.

But I got a growing sense in me. No, no, no. I got something else for you to do.

It could be just a short-term mission trip. It could be a longer assignment. It could be to step into something that you've never done before.

Not even leave your job, but step out and just come on. That thing that God showed you once. That thing that God once quickened you about.

And you're not doing it yet. And you know God has to open the door, but you wanna show yourself a volunteer. You're ready to do his project, work on his church.

Be spent for him. If you feel that, come out of your seat quickly. Stand here.

From the balcony, from downstairs, stand there at the altar. Those of us who are asleep, I ask in Jesus' name that you will awaken us. Those of us who have grown hard and cynical and traditional, and we know because we've been going to church for so long, we know, we worship doctrinal positions, but we know little of your life and your power, your compassion.

I pray, God, starting today, you will do a 180 degree turn for all of us, Lord. Starting with the speaker. We give ourselves.

Everyone just lift your hands up as a sign of surrender. Come on, everyone in the building who feels it, who's a believer. We hold up our hands as a sign of surrender.

We will not just work on our houses and leave your house abandoned. As you enable us, we will give, we will go, we will talk, we will pray. God, give us new priorities by your spirit.

Save us from the same old, same old. Send a revival. Open up the heavens and come down upon us.

We have no hope without you. The Brooklyn Tabernacle is hopeless without you. We are hopeless.

I declare publicly, we are hopeless without you. But you said that if we would do your work, you would be with us in amazing ways. So we surrender to you and your purpose for our lives.

Work it out, we pray. In Jesus' name. How many believe God is gonna help us? Say amen.

Amen. And all the people said one more time. Turn around and give a bunch of people a hug or a handshake.

God be with you.

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