

“Building Our Houses”

Sermon Outline | Rev. Steven P. Gunther | 30 August 2026

Our first reading this morning came from the first chapter of the prophet Haggai

- Give background/context
 - Babylonian captivity, 70 years, returned home, began building the temple, work fell off, they focused on building their own houses, years go by and their houses are built, farms are going, but the temple is still in ruins
 - How does that work for them?
 - Sow much – take in little
 - Eat mush – never satisfied
 - Clothe yourselves – never warm
 - Earn wages – bad full of holes
 - The Lord chastises them for building their houses and focusing on that while the temple is in ruins
- We often find ourselves doing the same thing: We get caught up in our worldly goals/motivations “I need to save up for this house, I have to build my retirement, I need to save for this vacation, I need to give my children a comfortable lifestyle, I need to get this promotion so I can have this title, etc.” and without even realizing it, that has become our focus.
 - We go to work and pursue our career, but the point of our daily lives becomes to work toward our goals and visions for the kind of life we want, and following the Lord and focusing on what He calls us to care about gets moved to the back burner
- And so the Lord calls us to change our ways, the same way He called the Israelites to change theirs

- ...But is having these goals bad? Is it bad to seek out a promotion? Is it bad to save for retirement? Is it bad to want to be financially comfortable and make decisions based on that?
- This brings us to Zacchaeus...

Zacchaeus

- Re-tell the story: He was a chief tax collector, and *he was rich*. He did well for himself, but no one liked him because he was a tax collector and everyone assumed he was dishonest and a thief, Jesus comes to His house, he explains he gives half away to the poor, and if he ever takes anything he restores it fourfold. Jesus says “Today salvation has come to this house.”
- Zacchaeus was successful and he was wealthy. He had a powerful title that he most likely had to work for. It’s safe to assume he was a man who had goals and knew how to pursue them and accomplish them
 - To borrow imagery from Haggai 1, Zacchaeus was someone who had spent a good amount of time building his house.
 - But was he wrong for doing so? Many around him seemed to think so—people grumbled about Jesus visiting a “sinner”
 - But on the contrary, Jesus says that salvation has come to him. Why was that?
 - He demonstrated a willingness to use his position to help others (giving half away) and that he prioritized honesty in his work (restoring fourfold if he ever took something he shouldn't have).
 - Punchline: Zacchaeus’s worldly success was good *because the worldly success itself wasn’t the goal*. Instead, his goal was doing his work **honestly, justly, and faithfully**

TCR

- Our reading from TCR explains that charity itself (not just one aspect of charity, but charity *itself*) is doing the work of your occupation honestly and faithfully.
 - Whatever our job is, when we make our goal to do it honestly, justly, and faithfully, then suddenly our daily work isn't just about our own worldly goals, but it becomes about the use we are providing to the people around us.
- Notice in Haggai that the Lord says "You shouldn't build your houses!" No, His point was that we shouldn't focus on our houses *at the exclusion of the temple*.
 - And He doesn't say "stop everything until the temple is built," but instead just tells them to go the mountains, get some wood, and start building

Big takeaway:

- It's good for us to have goals and motivations that inspire us to work hard at whatever our career is, but we need to be careful to not allow those worldly goals to become the end-in-view (we don't want to build our houses and ignore the temple that's in ruins right down the street).
- Instead, we should focus on doing the work of our occupation honestly, justly, and faithfully. That's not separate from our work, but it actually infills our work so that we can serve the Lord and our neighbor in our daily doings.