

Haggai 2:10-19

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Thanks, TJ and the worship team for blessing us with that. Good morning. My name is Lucy Frerichs. I am the Women's Ministry Coordinator.

If you're visiting with us today, now is the time when our children, as you see them, three years old through second grade, are dismissed for our Kid City program. Teachers are standing at the back door, and kids can line up to be escorted to their classes.

Parents, please do pick up your children at their classrooms when the service ends. Our scripture reading today is from the book of Haggai, chapter 2, verses 10 to 19.

This can be found in the Blue Bibles on page 791. Again, the scripture text is Haggai 2, 10 through 19, on page 791 of the Blue Bibles.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. On the 24th day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.

[1 : 10] Thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priests about the law. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priests answered and said, no. Then Haggai said, if someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean? The priests answered and said, it does become unclean.

Then Haggai answered and said, so is it with this people and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands, and what they offer there is unclean.

Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten.

When one came to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord.

[2 : 21] Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider, is the seed yet in the barn?

Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive oil have yielded nothing. But from this day on, I will bless you.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

It's great to have you here today. I'm looking forward to our time in God's word together. You know, preachers are an odd bunch.

They work under this rather superficial illusion that the opening moments of their message must provide a hook to the emotional or psychological state of the listener, lest you depart never to return until the concluding psalm.

[3 : 38] Forgive me if that's the kind of church you normally go to. I have no interest this morning in opening with something that would let you into the text.

Rather, I just want to show you initially what hooked me. Yes, I'm going to talk about myself in this way to reveal to you that when I read the Bible, there are certain things that grab me, and as they are of interest to me, I assume they will be of interest to you.

As we look at our text today, these are the fundamental words, the first words, verse 10, which lit my heart to speak to you today.

Here they are. On the 24th day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.

Now that is a hook! Well, let me explain myself. We've seen this kind of refrain before.

[4 : 51] Twice, really, in this letter. Chapter 2, verse 1. In the seventh month, on the 21st day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet.

As well as in chapter 1 and verse 1, where we read, In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet.

When I saw chapter 2, verse 10, I felt as if I had walked into Haggai's study. The preacher now long dead.

And I glanced at his filing cabinets. For those of you who are under the age of 30, those are things that the rest of us had, and some of us still have, where we stored our paper.

The closest you'll get to it is the icon on your laptop. But in Haggai's day, he would have to store his sermon somewhere. Hard copy.

[6 : 03] No cloud. And in this book, I felt as if I had pulled open his drawer, stumbled across his green folder, pulled it out, and have seen now three, three manila folders.

Each one containing a sermon that he delivered those many, many years ago. And so, this period in our church life, we are going back through his sermons.

And we have a record of when he preached them. If you come to my office, you'll see the very thing. Manila folder, HTC, Haggai 2, 10-19, followed by the date and the year.

So that I will have a record of when I had that attractive opening illustration for you. Today then, we come to the third file in his folder that contains four messages that I believe changed the life and the course of a congregation.

These were sermons worth holding on to. And the one we have today was preached on the 24th day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius.

[7 : 34] Or if you want to be clear in regard to where we are, about two months after he preached that second message, not quite four months after he preached that first message.

And I began to wonder, does he have headers for these three messages? And it seems to me, as I've looked through his notes, he did. Sermon number one, which we looked at a bit ago, get your priorities in order.

He preached a message about putting God's house before your own. The message must have gone well because he didn't repeat that message.

He had in his second folder from chapter 2, verses 1 to 9, once they had gotten their priorities in order, he encouraged them to persevere in purposeful living.

They had taken up with the construction of the temple, long laid dormant, and they needed a word to persevere with that purpose.

[8 : 55] And he delivered it. Now we come to sermon number three. To put it differently, by way of question, once a church gets on about the right things, what do they need to remember along the way?

Having gotten their priority in order, having returned to purposeful living with God at the center, having put their hands on the plow, or in the case of their task, making mortar for brick, having begun the rebuilding, what do they need to remember along the way?

If he had a title for this one, I think he'll like mine. what is the source of your power?

That's what every church needs to know when they've recommitted themselves to putting God first. What's the source of your power?

While your back is now reengaged in the labor, what actually brings about the change? Notice, he doesn't just throw the answer out there.

[10 : 30] God! Would have been a short sermon and not very interesting to follow. What's not, what the biblical preachers do is they don't just give you a big idea, repeat it 18 times, and tell you to go home.

The biblical preachers make an argument so that by the time they're done, it is not only in your mind but is embedded in your heart and therefore will carry forward in your way.

And so Haggai makes an argument concerning the source of their power after they had changed their priorities and begun purposefully living.

Notice what he does, verses 11 through 14 really. He opens his message, rhetorically, with two questions that are put to the priests.

The first question is there in verse 12. You'll see the question mark listed. The second question is there in verse 13.

[11 : 42] Two questions that the people are to ask the priests concerning the Word of God.
Question number one.

If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

To which the priests responded, no. That's a rather brief call and responsive reading that Sunday morning in Haggai's church.

No. You see, he's referring to the book of Leviticus. It even calls here the Torah or the law. And in the book of Leviticus, a priest would, in a sense, take a sacrifice and put it in the fold of his garment. And when he did so, his garment became holy. But the question is, now, if his garment touches something else, does that become holy by way of transference?

[12 : 53] The priests knew their Bible well and I'm sure the people did too. And they said, well, of course not. The non-transferable nature of things holy.

Just because the priests picked up holy things did not mean that the things that touched him became holy.

They would have needed to have touched holy things. Now, this is a wake-up call for the congregation here to remember that while they had begun purposefully living for God and put his priorities first, it didn't mean that they had the Midas touch.

It didn't mean that whatever they touched turned to gold. There was a distinction between the things that were holy and themselves. Let me put it differently.

People who are unholy by nature have no power in and of themselves regardless of the good things they've given their life to to produce holy change.

[14 : 28] well, that's the first line of his thinking as he's moving toward his big idea.

He follows though with a second question, verse 13, then Haggai said, if someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?

unclean. To which the responsive reading that day added a few words. They recited, it does become unclean.

In other words, there is a transferable nature, unlike holy things, with unclean things.

Let me put it this way. He wanted the Israelites to know that while they had rolled up their sleeves, and they said, you know, we got to get our hands dirty. We got to have a little street credibility in our neighborhood.

[15 : 31] We need to get about the house of God. And so they rolled up their sleeves, and they got their hands dirty, and the reading that day said, and don't remember, when you get your hands dirty, you get things dirty.

that's the point. Jean-Paul Sartre, dirty hands, taking up in one character the desire to live cleanly, to effectuate political change in the narrative of his novel in such a way that he would remain unstained from the world.

and by the end of the novel, with all that great intention, he had dirty hands.

For more ancient literature buffs, take Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. The inability, regardless of how much she wanted to rid her hands of the stain which spoke of the complicity of her own heart in the anger and murder to another, damn this spot!

She recognized, I can't get it out! That's the point. Israel was to know that just because you're getting on with God after 15 years of walking away.

[17 : 16] Don't confuse that with your ability to make anything good. And just because you're purposefully now engaged, rolling up your sleeves, remember this, those dirty hands make things dirty.

They have not the power to make anything clean. I'm sure it was instructive for Israel, it's got to be instructive for the church who is today largely convinced that if I'm about good things, good things are going to happen because they come in contact with me.

Or, if I can demonstrate through my work that I'm here to clean things up, they'll really get clean.

No.

No, in this Sunday morning, way back in Haggai's day, file folder number three, he had two questions that had them look at the word, which then dealt with a matter of interpretation, and he drove it to the heart of the biblical text, and now watch how he applies it to the people.

verse 14, then Haggai answered and said, so it is with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands, and what they offer there is unclean.

[18 : 49] Two questions to the priests with a stinging application for the people. And this is a good people. This is a people that have just recently been revived.

This is a church in the midst of revival. This is what great churches who have taken up with God's priorities need to remember along the way.

The conclusion from the law of Moses through the two questions asked of the priest serve as an illustration of the moral condition of the congregation.

Well, I don't know how Haggai opened his sermon, but I bet he had their attention by now.

Fortunately, though, he moves on.

Interestingly, in the text, he wants them to know more than merely that there's a blight that comes forth from them.

[20 : 05] He moves, notice, from two questions to the priest that ended with a stinging application for the people to now two questions for the people. Now he's preaching right to the congregation and wait till you see the surprising implication that comes from God.

Look at the two questions for the people. The first one opens in verse 15, the second one in 18. Do you see it there? He leads in with this phrase, now then, consider from this day onward.

Verse 15. Also verse 18. Consider from this day onward. Followed each time by a question.

The first question, though, he asked them to consider what life was like before they resumed work on God's house.

Do you see the phrase there? Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? In other words, before I preached my opening message, before I told you there was a need for a change in priority, before you had gone about purposefully living again with God at the center, in the day in which, from that time backwards, when you were 15 years doing your thing, while my house laid in ruins, how did you fare?

[21 : 41] Well, the answer, he goes on. When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord. In other words, he moves from the first half of the sermon, where he's looking at matters of biblical interpretation, to now the second half of the sermon, he is speaking to the people by way of introspection.

He preaches to their head on the authority of the scriptures 11 and 12. He now asks them to consider their heart.

Let me drive those truths home to your personal experience. I'm not doing exegesis anymore, says Haggai. I'm doing experiential applicationary preaching.

Before you repented and got on with God, tell me, how did it go for you? Lots of toil, all failure.

[22 : 58] Lots of work, little return. The story of our life. In other words, he's saying, you know I'm right.

right. It's not just right because the Bible tells me so. It's right when you look back. You were a mess because you weren't holy.

Nothing you touched turned holy. You had dirty hands and all you touched had dirty hands. In other words, he's just driving his point home.

By this point, I'm sure that when they were preparing now for that second question, verse 18, they felt wow.

I mean, the hammer fell with question number one. The hammer fell with question number two. The hammer falls with question number three.

[23 : 59] The expectation on that Sunday morning is, man, that was a downer of a message. I mean, all he did all morning long was hammer us.

But oh, Haggai's a good preacher. He didn't hook him in the opening, but he's going to hook him in the end. He opens his question, consider from this day onward, that is from the 24th day of the ninth month.

That's the day he's preaching. So there's a distinction between what he's asking them to reflect on in 15 and what he's asking them to reflect on in 18.

Temporally, in 15, look to the past and tell me if the Bible doesn't, in your own experience, prove itself to be true. But this one, it's, and look to the future.

From the time I give the benediction in my message today, he asks, from this day forward, and look at the question, is the seed in the barn?

[25 : 11] Now the implication of the answer is no. Let me tell you why. According to the timetable of this message, it would have fallen at the time of planting.

just as last week's message fell when they were living in booths, this week's message falls after the season of planting.

There's no seed in the barn. Notice he didn't say harvest in the sense of all of that. They've gone out. They've put their stuff in the ground. And even when they put their stuff in the ground, before there was a vine or a fig tree or a pomegranate or an olive tree, and although it all is yielding nothing, at that very moment when you expect the implication of the introspection portion of his message to lay the people low, yeah, and there won't be any.

You have that final little phrase, but from this day on, I will bless you. I mean, the whole sermon is moving to that moment.

It caught everyone by surprise. The two questions to the priest brought a stinging application upon the lives of the people, but the two questions for the people, the last one in particular, reversed their fortune with a surprising implication from God.

[26 : 51] Even though you are unholy, unclean, guess what, guess what, guess what, from this day forward, from the moment of the benediction, when you walk out the doors, God declares, I will bless you.

And at that moment, they were all glad they had come to church on Sunday. Sunday. Your moral condition will not be overcome or will be overcome by the mercy of God.

Now that you've gotten about God's house, God's going to get about looking after your fields. That's the point. So let's spend some time trying to figure out how this would have been hitting them before he stuck it back in his file for us.

Blessing is what the people of God could expect from God after orienting their heart to his priority. Let me put it this way.

They could expect material blessing. I don't want to spiritualize this thing away here, this phrase. It's talking about seed and figs and pomegranates and olive oil.

[28 : 15] It's talking about life provision. God is saying, when you could give a rip about me, I pulled the rug out from everything under you materially.

but now that you have given yourself to me, at least next spring or next harvest season, at least for one year, you're going to have a good crop.

It's material. Don't shy away from that. The promises to that congregation on that day were that they could expect a good crop next year.

And in general, I would say this, in general, that principle holds. That is a biblical principle. It's proverbial wisdom.

You follow God, the righteous don't go hungry. Now, in our day, in this country, people run what I've just said to some far edge of lunacy and declare Christianity.

[29 : 30] I have no interest in standing with them. Because we need to not be naive. The Bible is not some handbook that you can reduce to some little wand that you wave obligates God toward you.

No, we don't obligate God in any way. The Bible does not claim that follow God and you'll get wealthy. No, in fact, we're pretty sure that often it says, sell everything you got and start following me.

The Bible does not claim that you're going to get that paneled house if you just get your priorities straight or your jet, jet, you preacher boy.

No, it does claim that even the Son of Man had no place to lay his head. The Bible does not claim that take up with God and your afflictions go away.

The Scriptures do claim that many are the afflictions of the righteous, but God delivers them out of them all. The Bible does not claim that even in Haggai's day, they all would have had a bumper crop.

[31 : 04] But it does claim that not one would have necessarily been in need. That's what happens in the New Testament.

It doesn't claim that you start early church following Jesus and everyone gets wealthy. No, what it does claim is that the people that are blessed materially have a heart like God that makes sure that everyone in the family is still getting along.

It doesn't even the playing field in the sense of writing a check for the same amount for every individual. The Bible doesn't do that. It does claim that every individual who goes by the name of Christ, I'll put it particularly here, and is a member of this congregation should and will be cared for. That's blessing. It is material. It's also spiritual. But for that you have to come back next week. Or in Haggai's day, just take a look, just a quick aside, look at verse 20, one of these hooks again. The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the 24th day of the month.

[32 : 21] Now in other words, there are actually four sermons in his file, and the fourth one is the same day as the third one. In other words, they must have had a morning service and an evening service.

So they came in the morning service and heard this one, and they got all jacked about, God is actually going to help me in the coming year. And he said, well, come on back tonight, because I've got another sermon tonight, and I want to actually talk not just about what he's doing for you and your pomegranate, but I'm going to talk about what he's going to do for you by making provision through the line of your people to bring blessing to all the families of the earth.

It is going to be a spiritual component. For them, they would have come back Sunday at 6. For you, you'll have to return next week at 1030. But there is spiritual effect.

Think of the New Testament. Think of what you can rightly expect today because of Jesus. Mark 1, 14, he sees a leprous person, says, you know, I'd like to be clean.

Jesus says, well, okay, you want to get clean? He goes, I'd love to be clean. Jesus touches him and he's clean. We touch unclean to unclean.

[33 : 45] Jesus touches the unclean and he's clean. Think of the woman, 12 years, bleeding, says to herself, if I can just, if I can just lay hold of the fold of this garment, I don't even have to touch him.

See how Jesus like all of a sudden supersedes all the things that are happening in the Mosaic Law? In the Mosaic Law, you would have had to get a hold of the holy meat to be holy. But in Jesus' day, all she had to do in faith was get a hold of that garment and she knew if I have my faith in what he's on about, blessing will come.

And it came as an indication that he was reversing the destructive force that happens in the world through our unholiness and our uncleanness. One of the wonderful things I think about in regard to how we should be thinking about this text differently than that congregation are the final words in Luke 24 that Jesus pronounces over his followers after the resurrection.

My Bible reads this way, then he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven and they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

What a change of things. In Haggai's day, they're trying to get the temple up in anticipation of God's blessing. In Jesus' day, he places his hands over the whole congregation and says, I bless you and I'm going to do it from the throne at the right hand of the Father and they go back to the temple blessing God.

[35 : 40] In Jesus, you can expect to be blessed. Given the caveats I've laid out, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are the poor. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Imagine this morning, imaginatively, the Lord Jesus Christ presently at the right hand of the Father, interceding for his church, who is working up to elbows deep to get his glory going in Hyde Park and beyond.

And he stands and intercedes. You can expect him to bless. But what's the source of it all? Not my holiness.

Not my cleanness. All his power. This is the way Paul uses it. 1 Corinthians 3. He says, I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth.

And then he actually inverts all these images of Haggai. And he says, and by the way, you know you are God's house, and you are God's field, so don't mess with the field.

[36 : 59] Don't mess with yourself. Keep walking a holy life, because he'll destroy things if we destroy him. But you're the field, you're the house, and God's going to cause it to grow.

That's what we can rightly expect through the distinctions of this text and what the gospel gives us. The promises in the Old Testament then, this is interesting, the promises of Haggai 2 are that you can be forgiven and you can have God's blessing.

Whereas the implications of the New Testament are this, he put a king in the world, you better submit to him. Now we get that all inverted. We read the Old Testament and think, oh God is the big heavy hammer.

He's all about judgment in Haggai. No, you haven't heard the sermon well. In Haggai, you have a promise of forgiveness and blessing. In the New Testament, now that he's on the throne, you better get in line, because only judgment is coming.

But we can rightly expect here in Hyde Park, in your marriage, in your home, on your block, that when you sow, it won't just come back blight.

[38 : 14] That when you roll up your sleeves, something really will get done. That when you give yourself to the priority of the kingdom and the glory of God, something really, really, really will rise.

I don't think any of us would spend our time coming back if that wasn't the God as the scriptures revealed himself to us. so sow your seed.

God will cause the growth. Our Heavenly Father, as we look to the surprising implication of Haggai's message, it is that while we expected death, mourning, judgment, we were surprised with forgiveness and mercy and blessing.

Our Heavenly Father, we praise you that you can alter our condition that brings us into your presence with great joy, even dancing.

In Jesus' name, amen. On your feet and bless the name of our God. Thank you.

[40 : 06] I can't stay silent. I must sing for your joy has come. He's turned my morning into death's day again.

He's lifted my sorrow. I can't stay silent. I must sing for your joy has come. Where there once was only hurt, he gave his healing hand.

Where there once was only pain, he got covered like a friend. I feel the sweetness of his love.

Your secret's all I can. I see the bright and morning sun. As it ushers in his joyful gladness.

You've turned my morning into dancing again. You've lifted my sorrow. I can't stay silent.

[41 : 25] I must sing for your joy has come. I must sing for your joy has come. I must sing for your joy has come.

Where there once was only hurt, you gave your healing hand. Where there once was only pain, you were covered like a friend.

I feel your sweetness of your love. Here's secret darkness. I see the bright and morning sun.

As it ushers in your joyful gladness. You've turned my morning into dancing again.

You've lifted my sorrow. I can't stay silent. I must sing for your joy has come. You've lifted my last for a moment in time.

[42 : 39] But your favor is here. And will be on me for all my lifetime. You've turned my morning into dancing again.

You've lifted my sorrow. You've lifted my sorrow. I can't stay silent. I must sing for your joy has come. You've turned my morning into dancing again.

You've lifted my sorrow. You've lifted my sorrow. You've lifted my sorrow. You've lifted my sorrow. I can't stay silent. I must sing for your joy has come. Please come.

Please come. I'm going to give you a benediction from Psalm 90.

If you want to go back later today and put it into your heart, make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us and for as many years as we have seen evil.

[44 : 04] Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands upon us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. Amen? Amen. You may be seated. Amen. Amen.