

The Coming of the King

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[0:00] 10 to the end of the chapter on page 948, 949. Heavenly Father, as we turn again to your word, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, our Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

Amen. For those who are a bit warm, the doors have been opened at the back, so hopefully the air currents will start to flow soon. I don't know if you know the story of Elizabeth Elliot. She was the wife of the missionary Jim Elliot, and she was told the story of her brother, who was Thomas Howard. Their mother used to let him play with paper bags that she collected as long as he put them away afterwards.

And one day the mother walks into the kitchen, and the paper bags are littered all over the floor. So she goes in search of young Thomas, and she finds him at the piano singing hymns while his father was playing.

And when confronted, he said, But mum, I'm singing God's praises. I can't go and tidy up all those paper bags. And his father stopped playing and said, Young man, it's no good singing God's praise if you're going to be disobedient.

[1:24] It's no good singing God's praise if you're going to be disobedient. And this little story reminds us that it's no good obeying the Lord in one area if we are willfully disobeying him in another.

God, of course, tells us that we are to sing his praises. Many of the Psalms command us to sing unto the Lord. But he also tells us to honour our father and our mother.

And little Tom hadn't quite got that one correct. He'd forgotten that. Well, Haggai's third sermon, which dovetails with his fourth, seems to carry this same theme.

The people by this point had started their work on the rebuilding of the temple. But the danger always is with something like that, that they start neglecting God's law in some other way.

And we'll discover that as we go along, what the danger was for them. God speaks through the prophet Haggai to remind them that while they are building this temple in obedience to him, the temple is not where their confidence is to be placed.

[2:28] But their confidence is to be placed in a relationship with God himself, which is marked by their obedience to his laws. And just before we dig into that theme, let's remind ourselves of what Haggai has been teaching us.

We've been learning that it fits into the time period of the book of Ezra. God's people had been carried off into exile in Babylon because they had disobeyed God's word.

In that sense, they were under God's curse. But God promised them that they would return through prophets such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. You will return to the land.

They did return to the land and they were commanded to rebuild the temple. But 15 years had passed and only the foundation stone had been laid. They got a bit apathetic.

Apathy set in and the Lord sends Haggai to return the people to the work. Haggai preaches four sermons. We've looked at sermons one and two. And tonight we're going to look at sermons three and four in the one sermon.

[3:34] If you know what I mean. Put them together. You know the little phrase that starts the sermons? It begins in a particular read in the reign of Darius. On this day and this month, the word of the Lord came to Haggai.

And tonight we see that in verse chapter 2, verse 10. And chapter 2, verse 20, which is sermons three and four. And the first of these sermons tonight from verse 10 to verse 19.

The message of that really is to remember God's law. Remember God's law. And then second in verses 20 to 23. God's chosen king is coming.

God's chosen king is coming. So first then, we have Haggai's third sermon, remembering God's law. As we have said, the people were in danger of while obeying God and the rebuilding of the temple, disobeying him in other ways.

And the Lord through Haggai speaks to his people and challenges them on this very matter. We read in verses 10 and 11. On the 24th day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai.

[4:48] This is what the Lord Almighty says. Ask the priests what the law says. Now, of course, the priests were God's servants. And their job was to teach God's law to the people and answer any questions that people might have about the interpretation of that law.

And God comes to the priests. Remember, he's already used Haggai the prophet. He's going to use Zerubbabel, the governor or the king. But in this particular section, he uses the priests because he's going to challenge his people on holiness and sin.

Holiness and sin. And he asks the priests two questions, which might sound a bit strange to our hearing, but they do teach us quite a lot. The first question is in verse 12.

If a person carries consecrated meat, that's holy meat, meat that has been set apart for God's use, in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?

Does it become holy? And the priests answer in verse 12, no. No. Now, Haggai doesn't tell them if they got the answer correct or not.

[6:00] But from reading the Old Testament law, we know that the priests gave the correct answer. Absolutely correct. It does not become consecrated. The idea was that a priest who was consecrated, his robes were also set apart for use.

And this item that he had inside his robes, if that touched something else, holiness doesn't transfer.

The holiness can't transfer to a third object of some description, no matter what that object is.

The second question is almost the opposite of that. And it comes in verse 13. If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these objects, these things, does it become defiled?

Does it become unclean, unholy? And the priests answer, yes, it does become defiled or unholy, unclean. And again, the priests get the right answer.

The Old Testament law was very clear that if a person touched a dead body, they were declared to be unclean. They couldn't enter worship of God. They couldn't come into the temple precincts. They had to be set aside, even from other people.

[7:07] Because they could pass on the uncleanness to other people.

Numbers 19 tells us that. Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days.

He must purify himself with water on the third day and on the seventh day. Then he'll be clean. You see, as opposed to holiness, which doesn't transfer, sin does.

Sin does. Sin does. Unholiness, uncleanness does rub off onto other things. And that's the lesson that the Lord was wanting his people to know.

He's teaching them a very important lesson. You see, holiness and right living before the Lord doesn't just rub off to other people as much as we might want it to. There was a danger that because the people were rebuilding the temple, the people perhaps would start to think that the temple was some kind of magic charm.

It was a talisman. The temple would somehow bring them holiness. It would bring them blessing from God. Remember, the people had made this mistake with the first temple.

[8:14] That's exactly what they had done. The prophet Jeremiah addressed the stupidity of the people in that. He says in Jeremiah 7, Hear the word of the Lord. All you people of Judah who come through the gates to worship the Lord, that's to go into his temple.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. Reform your ways and your actions and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.

That was their badge of honour. The temple of the Lord just had been the tabernacle before it and just had been the Ark of the Covenant as well. You know, holiness doesn't just rub off no matter how holy the other object is.

But sin, on the other hand, does. It's corruptive. It passes through things. Think for a little minute. You have a young child. You have a white t-shirt.

You have a bowl of spaghetti bolognese. Put those three things together. And you get the point what Haggai is trying to make here. Can you picture it? Very soon the spaghetti will be all over the child's mouth, his hands, his face, his white t-shirt.

[9:26] The cleanness of the white t-shirt doesn't rub off on the bowl of spaghetti. But the spaghetti rubs off, of course, on the white t-shirt. Sin spreads so easily and corrupts everything in its path.

But holiness doesn't just rub off. And God is reminding his people of that and he applies it in verse 14. So it is with this people and this nation in my sight.

Whatever they do and whatever they offer, that's offered to God, it's defiled. It's corrupted. It's unclean. You see, simply returning to the land didn't make God's people holy and right before him. Just as entering the land in the first place didn't make them right or holy before him. If it did, then God wouldn't be sending Haggai to sort them out again. Or sending other prophets to do the same. Similarly, rebuilding the temple, while that was obeying God, what he had asked them to do, that didn't make them holy. That didn't make them right before the Lord.

[10:28] The temple itself couldn't transfer holiness. You know, there's some ancient Greek mythologies and it's to do with the god Apollo. Apollo is the Greek god of light, truth, music, poetry, science and healing and all these things.

And by being a god of healing, people thought that if you went to the temple of Apollo and stood at the temple of Apollo, healing automatically just came upon you and you'd be healed of everything. Well, holiness doesn't work like that.

You don't just come to church or come to some kind of consecrated holy place and you automatically have become holy. It doesn't work like that at all. And the Lord is reminding his people.

What they needed to be made clean and was to be washed from sin was a right relationship with God. Yes, they could go to God in the temple as they'd met with God in the tabernacle, but their confidence is not in that thing.

It's in the Lord himself. You see, it's so easy to place our confidence and trust even in the things of God, the good things of God, rather than in the Lord God himself.

[11:36] And this always leads to disaster. Even the good things of God, it leads to disaster. I remember visiting a lady. Now, this lady is not from this congregation.

She wouldn't be from any congregation that you know. As a student minister, she didn't come to church. She hadn't been to church for many a long year. And I, as a young student, said to her, Why don't you come to church?

And she said, Well, I don't come to church, but I always pay my tithe. My envelope's always in. I make sure my envelope's in every single week. And so she did. I'm sure the treasurer could look up the list and find that she had submitted every week.

Her tithe, as regular as anything. But she wasn't saved. She wasn't saved. Her confidence was being in, keeping up.

Keeping up that tithe. Keeping herself in there. In the hope that she would be okay. But she wasn't saved. She was placing her hope in giving money to the Lord, which we are commanded to do, rather than giving her life to the Lord.

[12:43] I would have much rather that she'd kept her money, fell at the feet of Jesus, and pleaded his mercy and his forgiveness. You see, it's so easy to trust in even seemingly good things, spiritual things.

The people did it with the previous temple, as we've just said. Remember the story of Eli's sons? Eli was a priest of Israel. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were also priests.

And they did the same thing with the Ark of the Covenant. You remember that story back in 1 Samuel? God told the people not to go into battle. They hadn't to do it, unless he commanded them to.

God hadn't given them the marching orders. But Hophni and Phinehas say, we will take the Ark of the Covenant. We will lead the people into battle. And because God's Ark is going ahead of us, we will win.

See what they were doing there? They placed their confidence in a thing of God, rather than the Lord God himself. And what happens? The nation of Israel loses tens of thousands of soldiers.

[13:46] Hophni and Phinehas lay dead. And God's Ark is captured by the Philistines and taken away for a long period of time before the Philistines send it back because of everything the Lord does in their midst because he's holy.

And that's the lesson he was teaching his people. We need to place our confidence in God himself. It's so subtle. I know the distinction is subtle, but it's a very, very important one.

Very important one. Holiness doesn't just rub off. Sin does. And it's so corruptive and destructive. I've heard parents say things like, my parents come to church.

I'm okay. No, you're not. I pray to God, but you're never in his house with his people. You will not be okay. I come to church.

Is that enough? No, it's not enough. I volunteer regularly. Is that enough? No, it's not enough. My name is on the communion roll. Is that enough? No, it's not enough.

[14:49] I came forward. I made a decision for Christ. Is that enough? No. I'm genuinely a good person. I will be fine. No, you won't. Holiness doesn't just rub off and sin is so corruptive and destructive.

You won't be okay. You will stand before this holy God on the day of judgment and he will declare you to be unclean. We are not wearing a beautiful white spiritual t-shirt.

It's not even off-white. It's more like black. It's stained. And God demands holiness in his presence. What we need is a renewed heart.

A renewed heart that comes from being born again of God's Holy Spirit. We need a new heart to praise our God. We need to fall on our knees before the living God and ask for his mercy, pleading the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Only then, only then, will we be holy, able to serve the Lord forever. It's a personal relationship with him that matters and always has done.

[15:53] We place our trust in nothing, but nothing other than faith in Jesus Christ. The temple could not pass along holiness to the people, just as none of these other things can either.

The hymn writer said it so well, on Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

There's many a name on a communion roll that's current destination isn't heaven.

That's not where we place our confidence. It's in Christ alone. It's always been a matter of the heart. And this is what God's word, his law was teaching his people.

He's saying to them here of the importance of personal holiness and sin. And to be saved from the sin, the law points to the sacrifices, which points, of course, to Christ.

That's what the law was teaching. That's what he's teaching here about holiness and sin. Sin is so corruptive. Holiness doesn't just rub off, except that you believe in Jesus Christ.

[16:57] God was asking his people to remember his law. Foul we to the fountain fly, says the hymn writer. Wash us, Savior, or we die.

That's where our confidence lies. Just as a side point, it's not really in the text, but I think it's an important one. You know, that's where our lack of assurance comes. We take our eyes away from the Savior, and we start to focus either on ourselves or on the things of God.

And that's where assurance becomes lacking in us, because we've taken our eyes off Jesus and started to place it on how much prayer we do, how much Bible reading we do, how much things we get involved in.

And all these things are important, but our confidence is in Christ and in him alone. And then in verses 15 to 19, God takes them on a survey of their past and reminds them of this.

He looks back at their immediate past and says, your crops were not bearing fruit. You weren't prospering. You only had half measures. The plants were not yielding what they should have yielded.

[18:02] And why does God say that? Because you didn't turn to me. That's the important thing. A personal relationship with God, to turn to him. And the thing is, as we learned in the last sermon that Haggai preached, the people committed to serving the Lord.

And from that moment on, God says, I will bless you. They hadn't started work again, but now their hearts had turned and God said from this day on, I will bless you.

That's a wonder. That's such an encouragement. That's how sometimes God works. He blesses us in the first few steps of obedience so that we'll keep on going on.

Blesses us in the first few steps so that we keep pressing on. From this day on, I will bless you. And this would also have been a very encouraging thing for God to say to his people, because according to the 24th day of the ninth month, that places them at harvest time, not harvest time, before the seeds were planted.

Seed planting time, in which they were looking forward to a harvest reaped many months in the future. They had many a long year of no yields or poor yields. Now God promises them a bumper harvest.

[19:12] Why? Because they were now obeying. Now obeying him. Yes, the people would know blessing in the land as they'd not done before. But what was the ultimate blessing that God had for his people?

And that's where the second point of Haggai's final sermon comes in, in verses 20 to 23. And it's God's chosen king is coming. And this is the ultimate blessing that really highlights, puts in bold and underlines for us what Haggai has just said in this sermon.

That subtle distinction between the blessings of God and God himself. He highlights it here. The people are now set to the work of rebuilding God's temple in obedience to him.

God warns them that even this temple won't save them. He was who they needed. And this is the ultimate blessing that God gives his people. It's himself. He is the ultimate blessing.

And this is what the closing verses of Haggai tell us. They speak of Zerubbabel. So you're immediately saying to me, well, Alan, have you lost it a little bit? Because how could they be speaking of Zerubbabel and also speaking of the Lord God himself?

[20:20] We're going to go on to find out exactly why that speaks of the Lord God himself. Verses 20 and 21 say, the word of the Lord came to Haggai a second time.

This is much later in the day. It comes a second time on the same day. Two sermons in one day. Tell Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, that I will shake the heavens and the earth.

Now, who was Zerubbabel? Well, he's the governor of Judah. It was his role to rule this area of land for King Darius. But he's more than that, though. We learned last time that he is the grandson of King Jehoiakim, who was the last true king of Judah before the Babylonians came and took them off into exile.

This was God's man. This was the line that descended from the great King David. This man, Zerubbabel, could trace his ancestry back to David.

God had cursed Jehoiakim because of disobedience. The prophet Jeremiah had said, in Jeremiah 22, as surely as I live, declares the Lord, even if you Jehoiakim, son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, were a signet ring on my hand, I would tear you off.

[21:37] I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear, to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and to the Babylonians. I will hurl you and the mother that gave you birth into another country in which neither of you were born, and there you will both die.

You will never come again to the land in which you were born. Is this man Jehoiakim, not despised? Is he not a broken pot, an object no one wants?

Why will he be cast out? This is what the Lord says. Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper.

None of them will sit on the throne of David or rule any more for Judah. That was God's curse on the Davidic line because of disobedience, and they're stark words, they're sobering words.

That's sin. The Lord judges sin, and what he demanded from the kingship was holiness. The signet ring referred to there, of course, was often used by kings and queens of old.

[22:38] It was the symbol and stamp of their authority. Wax was melted on important documents when it was nearly dry. The ring was brought down to bear, and it bore the impression, the imprint.

It showed the readers that this document bore the authority of the sovereign. God removed the signet ring from the Davidic kingship. He removed the signet ring from Jehoiakim.

But now God promises to restore that blessing through Zerubbabel, his grandson. You see, despite the sin and disobedience, God had made another promise.

He had made a promise to King David that one would forever sit on his throne, even despite what they had come to do in disobeying him. And God here, in this chapter, overturns that curse on this line.

He says in verse 22, 22, I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers. Horses and riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

[23:45] Now this is poetic language. And back in chapter 2, remember the Lord says, this is what I did when I, this is what I covenanted, verse 5, with you when you came out of Egypt.

My spirit remains among you. Do not fear. Do not fear. This would have reminded them, the shaking, the ten plagues of Egypt, how God had led them out, led them out in great style from Egypt, as he led them with a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud.

Egypt was shaken. Their chariots were hurled in to the sea. God defeated that mighty nation and he would do it again. Can you imagine if you're Judah? You lost everything in the exile.

Babylon has now tumbled. It's given way to the Persian Empire. God defeated Babylon. He raised them up. He brought them down. God has raised up Persia. He will bring Persia down. God replaces that with the Greek Empire.

The Greek Empire gets brought down. He raises up the Roman Empire. That falls. Every empire sins. He raises up the British Empire. The British Empire collapsed as well because God is sovereign over all.

[24:51] He's the ruler of nations and this would have encouraged his people. And he says, on that day Zerubbabel, I will take you, my chosen one. Remember, he's the true king.

And I will take you and make you like my signet ring. Now, these verses, the time frame is uncertain and you don't have to read very far in the Old Testament.

There's only two more books left. Zerubbabel doesn't appear again. He appears, yes, in Zechariah, the contemporary of Haggai, but he doesn't appear again because he's not Messiah.

It's through Zerubbabel's line that God will bring Messiah. And that's where you have to turn over to Matthew chapter one to get where God is going. Remember, we read all those names.

Where do those names come to? They go down to verse 12. After the exile to Babylon, Jeconiah, who's Jehoiakim, the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel, the father of Zerubbabel, skipped generations, and from Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, who was born Jesus.

[25:55] And he is Messiah. He is God's chosen king. He is the one who fulfilled all the promises perfectly to David. He is God's king of kings and lord of lords.

He is God's signet ring. He is the exact representation of God's being. He carries the imprint of God. He bears God's authority. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.

He is the one God promised would sit on David's throne forever. And these words teach of him.

These words teach of him. And Jesus is who we get in the gospel.

We often talk about, what do you get in the gospel? Well, I get forgiveness of sins. I get eternal life. I get a heavenly address. Yes, of course you do. But what's the most important thing you get in the gospel? Christ.

Christ himself. That's who we get in the gospel. Isaiah said of him, of the increase of his government and peace, there'll be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

[27:06] God was going to bless his people by giving them his son. And that's what Haggai is promising here through Zerubbabel's line. God said

to Abraham that he was his shield and very great reward.

The Psalms say, who do I have in but you? And the earth is nothing I desire beside you. My flesh and heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

God is who we get in the gospel. He gives them himself and all the blessings come through that relationship. That is what is central. Jesus is who we get in the gospel.

The forgiveness of sins, eternal address, a new heart, prayer answered, peace beyond all knowing, absolutely, but because of Christ and in relationship to him.

Paul had his theology spot on when he said in Ephesians chapter one, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing.

[28:11] He doesn't stop there. He's got two more words. With every spiritual blessing in Christ. In Christ. Those two last words are significant.

We have the blessings only by being in a relationship with Christ. And when we forget that, we get into such a mess. That's when we start to lack assurance.

That's when sin starts to creep in and Satan has a field day by giving as much confusion. And Satan will want you to focus on the things of God rather than on God himself.

But that's what our focus needs to be, to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Not on all the blessings. We count them up one by one and then we thank God for what he's done. But the focus is on him, on him alone. God gives us the most precious gift that he possibly could to save us so that we can treasure him forever.

[29:09] The heavens and the earth will be shaken again when Jesus comes back as Haggai prophesies here. And all his followers will be taken to be with him forever.

The seal of his signet ring of his authority which will be seen by all on that day when the book of life is opened. And he will say to his followers, well done, good and faithful servants.

Come you who are blessed by my father. Take your inheritance. The kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. That's what awaits you as a Christian because of what Jesus has done.

When he shakes the heavens and the earth again, they will be shaken again. Do not place your trust in things. Even spiritual things.

Your trust is to be in Christ on that day. That's the only thing God wants to see. You'll come to him and say, well Lord, I did a lot of prayer. I did a lot of Bible reading.

[30:10] I can recite massive patches of scripture. I can do all this. But my son, what do you make of him? What do you make of him? Trust in Jesus who is God's chosen king.

He is God's signet ring of authority. It's in Christ that God says to you, if you're in him from this day on, I will bless you. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for this reminder of where our hope and our confidence is to lie.

It's on the foundation that's laid by Jesus Christ. Not in a temple, not in a church building, not in ourselves, not in each other. Our confidence is to be in Christ and him alone.

Father, forgive us when our eyes can be taken away. Perhaps we even do much work for the Lord and Lord, that's a great thing. But we want our hope to be in you. We want to work for you, to serve you, to be in a deeper relationship with you because we know that it's only in Christ that we have all of these wondrous blessings.

[31:20] Lord, we submit ourselves to you. We pray for forgiveness for our many sins. In Jesus' name. Amen.