

Please Consider.....

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of August 2000. The preacher is Phil Muehlman. His sermon is entitled Please Consider and is from Haggai chapter 2 verses 10 to 25.

Are we obedient to God? Do we seek to follow him and do his work?

Or do we ignore him? Do we ignore him and his words seeking to live for ourselves with whatever we can get to advance our own status in life? This book of Haggai as we have looked at it over the past few weeks as you may have realised is a series of prophecies from God through Haggai to his people calling them to rebuild the destroyed temple after they returned to Jerusalem.

Now last week we sort of looked at the notion that the people in Jerusalem had been exiled. Their place had been sacked and they'd been carted off in exile to Babylon in around about 586 BC. And then gradually they returned to Jerusalem. Jerusalem and when they get back to Jerusalem the temple there has been desecrated. The heart of their worship, of Israel's worship has been destroyed.

[1 : 30] And they come back in 537 BC or around about that time and they begin the process of rebuilding the temple. But they become discouraged and they stop.

Work ceases for 16 or so years. And in 520 BC God raises up the prophet Haggai to speak to the people, to call them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

And the prophecies begin, they take place around about the end of August in 520 BC. And the prophecies take place over a period of three months.

So the last prophecy occurs on December 520 BC. And the prophecy there is a call to rebuild the temple.

But it's not only a call to rebuild the temple. It is also a call to obedience by God's people to do the Lord's work. And from their obedience as they obey God, there will be blessing.

[2 : 33] And in the passage that has been read to us tonight, it begins here with the Lord telling Haggai to go to the priests and to ask the priests of the temple for a ruling.

Now the priests in Haggai's day had a very important role to fulfil. They were to look after and to know the Old Testament law as seen in what they call the Pentateuch.

Now that's a big word, but it's the first five books of the Old Testament. And they were to ensure that the law was fulfilled. Now if you were to flip over a few pages, don't do it, but go into the book of Malachi.

It says this about the priests of the temple. In chapter 2 verse 7 of the priests it says, For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth.

For he, that is the priest, is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. One of the priests' tasks was to apply the principles of God's precepts, especially pertaining to ritual and ceremonial purity and impurity.

[3 : 45] So Haggai goes and he asks the priests of the temple on behalf of the Lord for a ruling about the issue of holiness. Now if you look at verse 12, he asks them this bizarre question.

If one carries consecrated meat in the fold of one's garment and with the fold touches bread, presumably with the cloth that it's carried in, touches bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

Their answer, their reply is no. And then he goes on in verse 13 and he asks them another question. If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?

Their response is yes. Now in the book of Numbers, which is part of this Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, there we read that if anyone who touched a dead body became unclean for a week.

And anything that person touches also becomes unclean. So it's like this. I touch a dead body and then I go down and I shake your hands. And whoever I come into contact with, you become defiled because I become undefiled.

[5 : 03] And we become ceremonially, ritually unclean. Now the Lord then goes on, Haggai then goes on to apply this to the people.

Look at verse 14. He says, Haggai says, So it is with this people, referring to the people who are rebuilding the temple, so it is with this people and with this nation before me, says the Lord, and so with every work of their hands.

And what they offer there is unclean. What they offer there at the temple is unclean. What in effect is being said here is that these people are ritually unclean.

It's as if they have come into contact with a dead body, touched it, and as a result everything that they say and do is defiled. And it's contagious. It spreads wherever they go.

Why is everything defiled? One possibility could be that the temple where they take their sacrifices to offer to God, because the temple is the heart of their worship, where they go to take their sacrifices and offerings to God, that place has become like a dead body.

[6 : 19] And therefore every time they come into contact with it, they defile themselves. Now that's quite possible. It's even plausible. But I think the answer is seen in their attitude toward God.

And their attitude toward God here is one of indifference. There's little interest or concern about the cause of serving God. They just don't care.

Their indifference is seen in the way that they have been and still are inclined to their own interests, rather than to seek the kingdom of God and the rebuilding of the temple, which is what they have been called to do here.

They have begun the process of rebuilding the temple. We saw that two weeks ago. And then they've become discouraged. They've stopped. They've begun again.

And they've become discouraged. They've stopped. They're inconsistent. They don't really care.

They're defiled. Now there were rituals that dealt with the outward uncleanliness of the people to make them ceremonially clean.

[7 : 33] But there were none, no rituals that could fix this people's problem. And their problem was far greater than any kind of external uncleanliness.

Their problem was an inward attitude. The only hope for the people, it seems, lays in God's free acceptance of them.

And that free acceptance is implied and given in verse 19. It says at the end of verse 19, From this day on, I will bless you.

God is going to bless them. Now these people also need to respond to that acceptance in obedience and action, which will be demonstrated by them in the rebuilding the temple rather than with the current disobedience and the sinful negligence that they are displaying by not doing so. There's all sorts of issues going on in their life. They're probably whinging, complaining, and things are too difficult and so on. Well, the same applies to us who are Christians today.

[8 : 41] We need to respond to the grace of God with faithful obedience rather than in careless attitudes which aren't merely neutral but positively defiling and sinful.

Let me illustrate for you. If you were to put a nice clean baby, I won't ask Ebony to come forward here, but if you were to put a nice clean baby in a high chair along with a bowl of Heinz spaghetti in tomato sauce, very soon his or her face and hands, clothes and so on are going to be tainted and they will be stained because of the red sauce.

Won't they? Put a baby in a high chair, they're history. Our sin, our selfish attitudes, our carelessness and indifference towards God will produce the same results.

They will stain everything they touch. Even good deeds done for God can be tainted by our sinful attitudes. So the only remedy, it seems, is God's cleansing, God's work.

Well, Haggai seems to turn from the curses in verses 12 to 14 and in verses 15 to 19 he turns towards blessing and he seems to be addressing the whole people rather than just the priests back in 12 to 14.

[10 : 16] In verses 15 to 19 he turns and addresses the whole people and although these people have started the work of rebuilding the temple, there seems to be little progress with what's going on.

Perhaps the three months since Haggai's first prophecy have been spent in the preparation phase of the temple site and during that time the effects of the curses that we read about in Deuteronomy have still been amongst God's people.

Now, back in Deuteronomy in chapter 28 it describes the sorts of curses that will come upon God's people if they are disobedient to his commands.

And Haggai goes on here to describe the times through which they had lived and in verses 12 15 to 19 he goes on to describe the times they have been through and from an agricultural side of things the yield of their produce was only half of what they expected.

Look at verse 15 he says But now consider what will come to pass from this day on before a stone was placed upon a stone in the Lord's temple how did you fare?

[11 : 38] When one came to a heap of 20 measures there were but 10. When one came to the wine vat to draw 50 measures there were but 20. The yield of their produce was only half of what they expected.

Resources were not going as far as they needed and life it seemed was harder than they had wished for. But God here wants the people to consider all the terrible things that they have gone through.

He wants them to look at what's going on there. He doesn't want them to forget about them. He doesn't want them to forget about the past because now God is going to pour out blessing among them.

In the past God had struck their crops and they had failed. And they had failed because of three things that we see in verse 17. The first one is blight.

Now blight was the hot east wind which blew across the desert to Palestine causing the crops to shrivel. Much like the north wind that we get here in the hot summers. If you don't water your vegetables and the hot north wind comes along your veggies all shrivel up.

[12 : 47] So the first thing that has happened is they've been struck with blight. The second thing is mildew. Mildew had got into their grain causing a fungus and preventing it from ripening and yielding good crops and so on.

And the third thing that we see in verse 17 is that hail had come upon the people. Hail had no doubt caused damage to their crops and possibly injury to the people and to the animals that were in their care.

Now if you go back to Deuteronomy 28 verse 22 talks about blight and mildew as being one of the curses one of the afflictions that God's people will suffer if they continue to disobey him.

And at various times these things this blight this mildew this hail had occurred and verse 17 tells us God had caused it to happen.

I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight mildew and hail. But even though all this happened even though all this happened they still did not return to him.

[14 : 01] They were not repentant. They did not come back to their God. Here the coldness of the human heart is seen unable to come back to God.

And here we also see the promises of God being fulfilled as he pours out his curse on his disobedient people. But just as they have been reminded of the past they are a second time asked to consider from this day what is about to follow.

This day this 24th day in the ninth month is a special day. It's a very special day. It's December now in December 520.

It will be a day to remember the curses that you've read about that we've read about here in Deuteronomy 28 they are going to turn into blessing.

Why? Why is that going to happen? Because God wills it. And the commitment to rebuild the temple by the people marked by their laying of a symbolic foundation stone will be a sign of their obedience and taking God at his word that there will be blessing.

[15 : 19] And further evidence of this will be seen in the crops that have recently been planted yielding a bumper crop in the years ahead rather than the dismal crops in the years that have gone by.

And why does this happen? It happens because God is pouring out his blessing amongst his people. When personal devotion to God was absent nothing went right in their worship or in their general daily living.

But when devotion to God was renewed when by their action in temple building they declare that it matters to them to have God in their midst when they return to a God centred lifestyle God responds and he responds by blessing them.

Now friends God is eager to bless us and he calls us to be obedient to him as well. Now it's hard I know I'm a human being like all of us here.

It is hard I know to take those first few steps that will lead to obedience such as regular Bible study such as regular prayer such as regularly coming to church meeting with other Christians telling other people about the love that God has poured out upon us in Jesus Christ.

[16:39] I know it's hard but as we seek to be obedient to God's leading hold on to the promises of blessing that he has in store for you. Now that blessing is chiefly in store for Christians in heaven but we also have smidgens of it here in many and varied ways.

Now I don't think that blessing comes around in the form of financial prosperity like some popular strands of Christianity might like to stress. If you think like that then I think that that leads to greed and it leads to other sorts of things and I don't think it's a correct reading of the Bible.

The blessing comes around in the form of a deepening faith and trust in God. It comes around in the form of the way we see people and the way that we look at the world.

We see the depravity of the world but we also see the good within the world. The blessing comes about in the way that we work together as Christians and so on. It changes our perspective on things and that's the sort of blessing that we can expect.

A real joy, a real privilege in serving the Lord in whatever circumstances that we may be faced with. And as we are blessed by God we will also be a blessing to others as well.

[18:06] Well God's people here have been rebuked by the prophet Haggai and they have just received as well a promise of blessing by God. And further blessing comes upon his people as a promise is made through Haggai about the governor of Judah or Jerusalem.

And that is a guy whose name is Zerubbabel. If you are thinking of having children there is a good name for you, Zerubbabel. And the promise that is made here is about the restoration of the kingship of Israel.

At this time, in the time of Haggai's prophecy and so on, there is no king in Israel. There is no king for them. And it further adds to Israel's sense of hopelessness.

They are under Persian rule. Zerubbabel, their leader, is only a governor and possibly only a governor in an honorary capacity. It is an insignificant role in a sense.

And the days of kingship, it seems for Israel, are a thing of the past. And if you had no king back then, you were considered an insignificant people.

[19:20] And this nation of Israel had felt insignificant for some time. All the promises that God had made to his people in the past seem to have disappeared forever.

But just as God has chosen to bless the people, he now reminds them of his promises in the past that are relevant for them now as well as into the future.

You see, God is a God who keeps his promises unlike us who can't be trusted to keep ours. In verses 21 and 22, once again God says he is about to shake the heavens and the earth.

There will be a final judgment and restoration of God's kingdom. And whereas the shaking of heaven and earth in verses 6 and 7 of this chapter seems to be referring to a literal earth shaking where natural things are brought to bear, the emphasis on the shaking here seems to be on a political level.

It's referring to the defeat of armies, the defeat of civil strife and chaos throughout the world. But in both instances though, it is referring to God's decisive victory over his enemies and his sovereign and divine rule.

[20:46] Now in the past, some of God's greatest victories over his enemies are seen in the way he destroyed the horse and the riders. If you look at verse 22, he talks about the horse and the riders.

And that seems, I think, referring back to the Exodus in Egypt where they go to the Red Sea where the Hebrews are taken out by Moses. They are led out of Egypt and they get to the Red Sea and the chariots or the horse and the riders are coming chasing them.

God divides the Red Sea. They go across it and as they go across it, the horse and riders, they go into the sea and what happens? They get swamped.

God's decisive victory is seen there. And you can be sure that just as he swallowed up that victory back in Egypt against his enemies, he will destroy his enemies on that final day with whatever arsenal of weapons people may seek to have.

Whatever weapons, whatever military, whatever arsenal we may have, they are nothing, nothing in the face of God. The manner in which God is to do this, the manner in which God is to have this victory is through a king.

[22 : 07] A king who is a descendant of King David, Israel's greatest king up to this point. And that connection starts again with Zerubbabel, himself a descendant of King David.

God says to his people that Zerubbabel here will be his signet ring. Now a signet ring is a ring that's worn on the finger or around the neck of its owner.

It's attached to him and it bore on it the owner's name or mark. It's much like a wedding ring for a husband or a wife. It says that I'm married and Barbara is my wife.

Well it doesn't say that but you know what I mean. Zerubbabel is God's signet ring and therefore is a reminder here to the people of God's promises of the past and of the future that he is talking about here in verses 21 to 23.

Well who is this king then that will bring about God's victory for his people? Who is the king? Jesus is, isn't he? He is the one who will bring about God's decisive and glorious victory on the final day.

[23 : 23] Now in the Gospel of Matthew we see there an account of the descendants of King David. And in verse 12 of chapter 1 that name Zerubbabel is mentioned as in the line of those descendants.

And if you go down a little bit further in chapter 1 down to verse 16 you see there the birth of Jesus is mentioned. And alongside that it says Jesus who is the Messiah, the one chosen by God.

Jesus is the greatest king ever. Although he was mocked, although he was taunted on the cross as the chosen one of God, he wasn't really treated as king, should be.

Although all those things happen to Jesus, he is in all truth the true temple of God. In John chapter 2 Jesus talks to the people there and he says, talking about the temple, tear down this temple and in three days I will raise it up.

The disciples when they first heard that they didn't know what he was talking about. But there is an editorial comment in John 2 which says they didn't realise this until he had risen from the dead.

When Jesus was risen they realised he was the true temple of God.

[24 : 47] Jesus is the true temple of God. He is the one who we come before with our sin. And he is the only one who can cleanse us as white as snow so that we can enter into God's presence undefiled.

He is the only one, the only way to enter into God's presence. Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promises made to his people back in Haggai's day and to us in this modern day and age who live this side of the cross.

Today Jesus still calls us into faith and obedience by following him, by serving him with our lives.

And for those who do there is a great reward which we are sharing now that we will experience in its entirety when he returns.

Now if God were to prophesy to us today as he did through Haggai, what would he say to us as individuals?

And what would he say to us collectively as his gathered people? Would he have a word of promise? Or would he have a word of rebuke? Or would he have both?

[26 : 01] I want to challenge each of us to search our own heart and to discern what God's Holy Spirit is saying to each one of us right now. And I want to challenge each one of us to act on it in some way in the week ahead.

I'm just going to take a moment to have a moment of silence for us to think, to be asking God areas in which we should be becoming more obedient towards him. And then I'll pray for us as we close.

Amen. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for your sovereign rule. We thank you that your word instructs and guides us. Lord, I pray that you would help each one of us to be more obedient to it.

We pray, Lord God, that we would live lives which reflect you. Father, your spirit speaks to us and challenges each of us to be more like you.

[27 : 35] I pray that your spirit would search us and convict us in areas of our lives where we fail to obey you.

And Lord, I pray that we would be willing to do something about that so that we may draw closer to you. Father, we pray that we may be a blessing to others.

We pray most of all, Lord God, that all that we seek to do would bring honour and glory to you. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 37] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.