

Bible Study Of Haggai 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 January 1988

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Trouble is, anything I might want to do at the last minute, I can't, because Joe has me on a leash here, so I can't go anywhere. But anyway, we'll start, and we're looking at the book of Haggai, and Haggai in the red book is on page 762, and in the blue book it's on, can anybody, what? 832, so it's 762 in the red, and 832 in the blue.

And I just thought of a great way of remembering how to find Haggai, and that is there are three Zs, because before Haggai is Zephaniah, and after Haggai is Zechariah, and in Haggai is Zerubbabel. So if you can just remember Zephaniah, Zerubbabel, and Zechariah, you're right on. All you need to know to remember it all.

So it's between the two Zs comes the book of Haggai. Okay. This day, I think you know in England perhaps, and here as well, there's a request that we should be remembering Terry Waite, who's been a hostage for a whole year today.

This is the anniversary of his having been taken a hostage in Lebanon. And I'm anxious that all of you should be remembering in your prayers, in your thoughts, and your travels, the mission at the University of British Columbia next week.

[1 : 53] I don't know how many of you know a book called Basic Christianity by John R. W. Stott. That was based originally on a mission to the University of British Columbia.

Even though it's now in many languages and spread all over the world, that's where it began. So that was an important occasion. There was another, there's been some very interesting debates between various people that have taken place at the University of British Columbia.

This great province of British Columbia was founded at a time when science had completely taken over from religion.

So it's a, it's a great university that has no sort of Christian foundation whatever. You know, like when you go to Cambridge and you have Christ College and St. John's College and on and on it goes, isn't it?

I mean, there's, there's a place in, in Cambridge they call Christ's Pieces. That's a field. And you're always, you can always see the evidence of the Christian foundation.

[3 : 08] Charles Simeon, when he went to Cambridge in 1840s, found that he wasn't allowed to be a student at Cambridge unless he was confirmed.

And you know that you weren't allowed to teach unless you were a baptized and confirmed member of the Christian church.

You weren't allowed to teach in a university. Well, in the University of British Columbia, we have a quite different situation in which humanism is very much stronger.

And the idea of a Christian foundation just isn't there. And that, that may be an advantage for all we know. But it does tend to mean that, that when somebody comes and tries to present the Christian faith at a university, like the University of British Columbia, there's bound to be some kind of confrontation because people feel threatened by it.

And I want you to pray for a happy and fulfilling confrontation between the University of British Columbia and those who are seeking to, in that context, articulate what is the focus and reality of the Christian faith.

[4 : 32] And that's going to be going on at many different levels next week. And I think we should be praying earnestly that God will use that and will sustain those who, who go up against considerable opposition.

I did a mission once at Lakehead University and that was back in the sixties. And every, every noon hour for the week, we met in the, in the halls or the sort of, it, the way it's designed is that there's a whole lot of free space.

And we had sort of open sessions there at noon hour just to pick up the passersby. And Lakehead University at that time was, was, it was full of Maoists, you know, people who'd, who were reading the books of Chairman Mao and that was the way ahead.

And would you rather be a peasant in China or, uh, in the ghettos of Chicago, you know, and, uh, obviously it was infinitely better to be a peasant in China than in the ghettos of Chicago.

So, uh, though, that was, uh, you know, it was, uh, made it a very exciting mission because they came out and asked all the questions. And, uh, it, I think that you find yourself in a position of probably better defining the Christian faith when you come up against somebody who is, uh, opposed to it, articulately opposed to it.

[6 : 03] You understand why the Christian faith fits together a whole lot better than when you're trying to persuade somebody who generally thinks it's a good idea, but isn't quite sure what it is.

You, the, the, the, the having to present it to somebody who, who, uh, says, how can you possibly claim this? Well, then you have to examine, well, how can you possibly claim this?

And, uh, that helps you to get more to the roots of what it's all about. So those are things about which, uh, I would like you to be praying and to be concerned. And, uh, so that just as we begin, maybe we could bow our heads.

Our Father, we thank you for the, the, the, the, the, the, the having to present it to somebody who, who, uh, says, how can you possibly claim this? Our Father, we thank you for Terry Waite, for his life, for his witness, uh, for his Christian convictions.

Um, and we ask that wherever he is and under whatever circumstances he finds himself this day, that you will, by your Spirit, be with him and strengthen and sustain him.

[7 : 13] And according to your will, bring him to, uh, a place where he can be released and rejoined with his family and his work.

Pray that, uh, you'll be with Michael Green and all those working with him in the University of British Columbia. And ask that they may be given great wisdom and sensitivity and that they may clearly articulate the reality of the Christian hope in a world that is pretty much resigned to despair.

And, uh, we ask that, uh, that you will do this to the honor and glory of your own holy name. Amen. Thank you. And, uh, it reminded me, as I was praying, that the, the title of the mission at, at, uh, at UBC is, A Reason for Hope.

And, uh, that's the theme of it. Uh, Terry Waite came to Vancouver and even to St. John's not very many years ago, um, because he was the sort of aide-de-compte to the Archbishop of Canterbury and had to make arrangements for the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit here.

[8 : 36] And, uh, I would like you to know that I am, uh, over 200 pounds and six foot five. And I stepped onto the sidewalk and met Terry Waite, who made me feel like a dwarf.

He's, uh, he's six foot seven or eight. And, uh, I would say over 300 pounds. He's a very big man. And, uh, I felt like a small boy by comparison, try.

So, uh, that's what makes me worry about him. How, wherever they got him, he fits in, you know.

Okay, now we're looking at the last of the three statements in, uh, Haggai.

And it begins with chapter two and verse 10. And, uh, it probably would be good to read it just to give your mind, uh, a grasp of what I'm talking about.

I find it when I, when I start studying it, I get so wound up in particular details that I lose the sweep of it. And, uh, so I want you to have the, the, the sweep of Haggai and that last section beginning at chapter two, verse 10, where it begins, Verse 10, on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to, came by Haggai, the prophet.

[10 : 12] Thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priests to decide this question. If one carries holy flesh in the skirt of his garment and touches with it, with his skirt, bread or pottage or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priests answered, no. The priests answered, no. Then said Haggai, if one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, and by these he means the bread, the pottage, the wine, the oil or any kind of food, does it become unclean?

The priests answered, yes, it does become unclean. Then Haggai said, so is it 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. Pray now, consider what will come to pass from this day onward.

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

[11 : 47] When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I smote you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and the hail, yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.

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? Do the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree still yield nothing?

From this day on, I will bless you. The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month. Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms.

I am about to destroy the kingdom of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his fellow.

On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts.

[13 : 26] So, that's the passage. And you look and you see, again, these wonderful references to remind us that Christian faith is always dated in history, you know.

God doesn't act in some ethereal way at some imaginary time in some fantasy world, but that God acts in time and history.

So, that if you begin in chapter 1, verse 1, in the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month. If you look at chapter 2, chapter 1, verse 15, you will see again, the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.

Chapter 2, verse 1, chapter 2, verse 1, in the second year of the king Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month. So, you've gone from the sixth month to the seventh month of the second year of king Darius.

And then if you move along to chapter 2, verse 10, you're now on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. And then if you go along to the final reference in chapter 2 and verse 21, it says, the twenty-fourth day of the month. So, there were two prophecies came on one day.

[14 : 51] You can have fun, and it gives you a little bit of background for Haggai if you just note that the whole thing took place somewhere between about August and November.

And then, it was the second year of the second year of Darius the king. And he was...we'll come to that later. So, you have that dating thing. It's always tying things down. And wonderful to me that that happens.

And it goes on from there to talk about what he's doing in this situation. And the priests are to decide on a question. He has a theological question which the Lord tells Haggai to put to the priests, because the priests are the official interpreters of the law. And so, when he goes to them, he says, he gives them this conundrum or this riddle. If the priests are the official interpreters of the law. And so, when he goes to them, he gives them this conundrum or this riddle.

The priest's country was a prophet, of the Jews, which look like they're called to the saints. So, when the priests move to them together and wants to talk about these gods and we all believe this about the saints is ultimately damn complacentest with everything of this parishion and death. answered, no it doesn't. Then in contrast, Haggai said, if one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean? The priest answered, it does become unclean. Now, what the Lord is getting at there is to tell people something that you all know, that if you take a lovely pitcher of pure, clear, mountain spring water, and you take an eyedropper of filth, and put one drop in that pure, clear, fresh spring water, you contaminate it. If you then come along with an eyedropper full of pure, clean, fresh spring water and drop it into the same jug, it's still dirty. You haven't changed anything. And that's what he wants them to see. He wants them to understand that evil contaminates. It contaminates everything it touches. And if they, by a religious ritual, which is by doing one thing right, like going to church on Sunday or offering a sacrifice according to the law, think that they're going to change their character, they're quite mistaken.

[17 : 54] It's not going to happen. And they need to know this, that they're being very abstemious about their religious rituals, but their religious rituals are not going to make holy or make clean what has already been defiled. And it just isn't going to happen. Religious ritual is not meant to make clean. It's to represent the reality of cleanness. And if that reality isn't there, then it's not brought there by religious ritual. And that by going on with their religious ceremonies and their religious

rituals, they think they're changing anything. They're mistaken. And Haggai, the Lord points this out to them through Haggai by telling Haggai to ask the priest whether this is so or not. He says, you don't have to listen to me. Ask your priest what happens when somebody with a flesh that has been consecrated for sacrifice. And it's, it's met all the standards of the book of Numbers and the books of Leviticus and all the things that have to be done to make a proper sacrifice. If someone is carrying that holy flesh, as he calls it, for sacrifice, and he touches something, does that become clean? He says, no, it doesn't.

Doesn't make anything clean. However, if you have been in touch with a dead body, and you go and touch any of these things, you make them unclean. And that's, you know, that's part of the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. That after you'd been in touch with someone sick or someone, somebody who's died, that's right, then you are ceremonially unclean and you have to be made clean before you can go on and do anything. And that's, you know, that cuts really right to the heart of so much of our religious observance. We can't change anything by ritual observance. If there isn't the reality and that that doesn't represent a substantial reality, then we're not going to change it. And that's what Haggai points out to the people in Jerusalem. Well, from having done that, they then go on and

Haggai makes the application of that problem when he says to them, and this is in verse 14, then Haggai said, so it is with this people and with this nation before me, says the Lord.

And so with every work of their hands, what they offer there is unclean. Now, I tell you this, there is, there is in the prayer book, article 14. And article 14 deals with works of supererogation. And you can look it up in your prayer book any Sunday when the sermon gets a little long and boring, and there you will see an article on works of supererogation. And what it in fact says is that there is no way that you can do anything by and of yourself which is pleasing to God.

You can't do it. So that whatever you do is marked by pride, greed, arrogance, selfishness, guilt, all those things tend to motivate you for doing things. And in doing them, you don't, uh, you don't form, you don't, you don't do anything essentially good.

[22 : 08] Now, the reason that this article, I mean, you, you may, this is one of the, one of the big problems of our society is this, is this thing. But, um, Tama, would you get me a prayer book? Because I'd like to read this to people so you, you, they can find it. And I, uh, I don't know where you'll get one, maybe in the next room, but I can't go because I'm tied here. Um, the reason for this is that the basis of our being made whole or healthy or holy, whatever you want to use, is something that God has done for us in Christ. And we can't do anything to add to that which he has done for us. We can do good works in a response of love because of what God has done for us in Christ. But we can't by ourselves build up any kind of balance in which we can, by which we can claim, uh, recognition or acknowledgement by God. We can't do it. The goodness has to do with what God has done for us in Christ. Christ has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And he did this by his obedience to the Father, his perfect obedience to the Father. He has done what, what we couldn't do. The, the, thanks, Tam. The article that, that, uh, reads like this, and I'll, I'll read it to you just so you...

Voluntary works besides over and above God's commandments, which they call works of supererogation, not be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but they do more for his sake than if bounden duty is required.

For as Christ saith plainly, when you have done all that are commanded to you, say, we are unprofitable servants. In other words, we never do more than obey God's commandments.

We never do more than obey God's commandments. We never do more than is justly required of us. We never get to the point where we by ourselves can do anything which, uh, which is more than God's legitimate request of us. You know how easily Christian communities get all messed up on this, and how we ourselves start thinking, well, this person has done so much more than could be required of them. And this person has gone so much out of their way. And this person has exceeded anything that could ever be expected of them. And what a wonderful person this is for all that they've done.

Well, the new, the, the, the scriptures say to us very plainly, when you've done all that it's possible for you to do, you haven't done any more than God had a right to expect of you.

[25 : 37] You haven't done one iota more. And he, and the, the article quotes Christ as saying, when you have done it all, and you know how, how prideful it makes us anyway, and, and how so

many of the good things we do, we destroy by being proud about it. But, uh, this says you can't do it. You can do everything that it's possible for you to do, and yet at the end of that, you haven't done any more than God has a just right to expect you to do. And that's what's, that's what these people are in trouble over. Because they think that by their religious ritual, they're doing something extra, and that, somehow they're doing more than God could expect of them. And that they're making everything right by doing that. They're making up for all the little faults that are around by doing a little extra for

God here and there, and having a little extra service here, or a little extra prayer there, or a little extra something off. And that we're, we're doing something really worthwhile. And of course, and Haggai tells them, it doesn't work that way. It doesn't happen. All you are doing is what you're commanded to do. And if you're doing all that it's possible to do, you're only doing what you're commanded to do. And, uh, that's, and what God has a right to expect that you will do. And that's what they really found hard to understand. Well, as a result of that misunderstanding, then Haggai goes on to explain to them the trouble they've got themselves into. This people and this nation, in other words, have a great deal of destruction. And they have a great deal of destruction. And they have a great deal of destruction. In other words, what they do, though it may seem wonderful to you, is nevertheless unclean. And the motive behind it may be greed, or guilt, or pride, or arrogance, or something like that. So that what they're doing really is spreading an infection of uncleanness among the people of God, rather than doing what they think they're doing, and that is making everything accountable, and making themselves, giving themselves a standing before God. Well, Haggai goes on and hammers them a little harder. In chapter 2, verse 15, he says, Pray now, consider what will come to pass from this day onward. Before a stone was placed upon a 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 the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

I smote you and all the products of your toil, with blight and mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me, says the Lord. You knew something was wrong. You knew.

[28 : 51] For the remainder of this study, please turn this tape over.