

Haggai

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[0 : 00] 2. We're looking at the third message of Haggai this evening, in which there are four. This is the third. Haggai chapter 2, beginning at verse 10.

Now hear 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. 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 the bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy? The priest 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 priest answered and said, it does become unclean. Then Haggai answered and said, so is it with these 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 a stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare? When one came to 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. Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day of 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 tree have yielded nothing. For from this day on, I will bless you. Well, we need and we certainly ask for God's blessing upon his word, the third message of Haggai. We'll stand and sing a song which we've learned over the past couple of weeks now, and then we'll come back to God's word. With your Bibles, please look down again to chapter 2, verse 10, and we come to the third message of Haggai, which is very, very similar to the first.

So, if when I read it you thought, you know, this is similar to the first message, you'd be right. So, let me just indicate again what the first message was. So, the first message of Haggai was about the people of God having their priorities redirected back to God. This is always challenging, and it's always a cause for discomfort, because as believers, we naturally think that we put God first in most things. Reality is, is that we probably do put God first in a number of things, but not necessarily all things, or even the things that matter. So, Haggai's message is, you know, very straight to the heart, even to the Christian church, the redirecting of priorities, putting God first, seeking first the kingdom. The second message of Haggai was about redirecting the focus from purely looking at the past to looking to the future.

You know, none of us know when Christ is going to return, but we know the promises that God has made regarding what his life, death, and resurrection means, and also regarding what his return means for the world. So, number one, get your priorities straight. Number two, focus on the right things.

[4 : 41] Focus on the future. And now we come to a third message of Haggai, and the people are going to be hearing something very similar to what they heard in the first message. It wouldn't surprise me if you were there with them that they might be saying, we've heard this message before, we don't actually need to hear it again.

Yeah, there's good reason why the church needs to hear the same thing over and over again. One, because we don't always remember. Two, because we definitely don't always do. And so, there needs to be that constant reminder what to do in order for us to do it. So, here's the pattern of the Old Testament and reflected in the book of Haggai. Very, very simple. That blessings follow obedience, and no blessing follows disobedience. And in case you think that's an Old Testament sort of agreement between God and his people, think again. Because as we see in the New Testament, the same thing applies. That God blesses those who seek him first. That God blesses those who obey him and do what he wants.

And he withholds blessing from those who don't seek him first. Hence why there are multiple differences within churches and even within the lives of Christians themselves. It can actually come down to the type of devotion that each Christian lives before God. The question is here, is that despite the history, despite this being a very clear pattern throughout the whole of the Bible, God's people here still fail to make the connection between their obedience and devotion to God and God's blessing. They think that they can do what they want and still expect a blessing. And when blessing doesn't come, but indeed crop failure, they don't see that as anything to do with God, that that's just been a bad harvest. And God has to tell them, no, it's not been a bad harvest, or rather it has been, but here's the reason why, because I struck the harvest with ruin.

[6 : 49] So the implication for the Christian church and for believers is this, that whatever we're dealing with in life, we're always having to deal with God. You can never get away from that fact, never get away from the truth that whatever we deal with in life, we're always dealing with God.

Now the same is also true with people in the Old Testament, that whenever there was a good judge, the people were good. And whenever there was a bad judge, the people were bad. And so there's a definite calling for a certain type of judge. The judge has to be a good judge, and more importantly, the judge has to last forever. Because the reason why one judge replaces the previous judge is because the previous one has died. And if the previous one is good, and he's replaced by a bad one, and with bad judges you have bad people, what you need is a good and perfect judge who will last forever.

And of course, you don't get to that until you get to Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus is the good and perfect one who will continually obey God, and therefore we are continually blessed in Jesus. Because Jesus understands the pattern and the promise in the covenant of God, that God works to a very simple pattern. You obey me, I will bless you. And the reason why Christians are blessed is because they're in Christ, who always obeys the Father. That's why so much blessing comes to believers. Not necessarily because of your obedience, but because of the obedience of Christ Christ on your behalf. But your obedience matters, and we'll get to that in a moment.

Before we get into why the message is repeated again, we have to understand what Haggai begins to say. And his accusation is either that they're not considering what he said in the first message, or that they've overlooked it or deliberately not paid attention. And the issue in hand is a common one. It's found in the book of Amos. It's found in the Christian church, and it's this, that the believers here are trying to divide something that cannot be divided. They're trying to separate something that cannot be separated. It's a bit like separating water from wetness. You just think you just can't do it. The water is wet, and something which is wet is normally perhaps water. You can't do it. But too often, Christians want to make a division where there is no division. And the division normally is between what a person does for God and what a person does for themselves. A bit like paying taxes.

[9 : 43] That we recognize that we have to pay taxes. We have to give the tax man what he deserves. He doesn't deserve it, but what the law requires. And we get to keep the rest. And because we have the rest, we're free to do with it whatever we choose. Now, that may be true when it comes to taxes.

It's most definitely not true when it comes to God. What God gives us cannot be paid back to him in a tithe, and then we do with whatever we like with the rest of it. That's not the way God works. The way God works is that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, and therefore everything matters. The people here are convinced that what they do personally is personal. And what they do for the Lord is for the Lord is for the Lord, and never the twain shall mix. And God is saying, well, never shall they be divided. Now, we saw this in the original mission study, that it's possible to be faithful with the church's finances. It's possible to be faithful with the church building. It's possible to be faithful with all the resources that the church has, and not be a good steward with what you consider your own. In other words, we're very keen to make sure, let's say, for instance, that the church's finances are right and just, and so we should be.

But we're quite willing to spend the money that we have on perhaps stuff that shouldn't be spent. The point here is that however much we try to ignore it, that even the Christian church wants to divide the different, the spiritual, from the personal. And God's saying that that kind of division cannot happen. And the moment you make that kind of division, that's why the problems arise.

Rather, God's ways must stretch all the way back into your private and personal life, not just back into the seats where you're sitting this evening within the church. That as long as I'm doing my bit in the church and I'm faithful before God, then everything's right between me and him.

[11 : 56] Well, not if the condition of your life before you get to church is an issue for him. And here in Haggai, that is the very issue. The issue this time is not that they're not taking care of the building of the temple, but rather the conditions of the life in which they do it. So these believers in the day of Haggai's are trying to make a division where no division exists. And the division is between what they do for themselves and what they do for God. And God's point is that actually that division can't happen. That what you do, period, must be holy. That what you do in totality must be righteous and just all the time. Here's an illustration that Haggai uses, and he uses the law to illustrate it.

He points that how can something holy become unclean? Verse 12 is someone carries holy meat, and holy meat is not something you can get from the supermarket, but holy meat is something that is dedicated to God for sacrifice. And then he carries it in the fold of his garment, and he carries it with lots of other food in there, like you do when you're trying to carry something. The question is simple. Does the other food that is surrounding this holy meat become holy? And the priests rightly answer, no. Just because the meat is holy, just because the meat is set apart for God, just because you put other stuff around it, the other stuff doesn't become holy. In other words, holiness is not transferable. You can't transfer that type of holiness in that way. Just look again at verse 12.

If someone carries the holy meat in the fold of his garments and touches it with the food, the bread, the stew, the oil, the kind of food, does it become holy? And the priest says, no. Of course, they're right. Holiness cannot be passed on in that kind of way. Okay, Haggai says. However, if someone has become unclean by touching a dead body, and then he touches the food, does the food become unclean? And the priest answered and say, it does. So, here's the point. Something which is holy cannot make something else holy, but something else which is unclean can make something else that it touches unclean.

Very simple. What's Haggai's point? Well, Haggai's point is this, that you are building a holy temple, but you yourself are unclean, which makes the temple unclean. What that means is this, that what you do in your private life, or what you consider to be your private life, and what you do in your personal life, what you consider to be personal, will have a dramatic effect on the service that you render in the church. Right down to me preaching, so if I'm out doing all the things that I shouldn't be, then this very preaching this evening is considered unclean before God. The same with the musicians, the same with the singers, the same with the people who are stewarding, the sound desk, whoever it may be, Sunday school leaders and teachers. What is done in the private sphere of life, or what is called private and personal, can have a dramatic effect over the service rendered to God as considered by God, because holiness cannot be transferred, but uncleanness, unrighteousness can be. That's really important. Really, really important. So Haggai, verse 14, calls the people to consider the work of their hands in building the temple, that they're undertaking the very work of God, but they're undertaking the very work of God in an unclean state of affairs. In other words, they haven't really changed. How have they become unclean? Well, Haggai chapter 1 tells us that they've become unclean because they're more concerned with their panelled houses than they are with the temple of God. You know, I've often wondered, why does the church always get the cast-offs?

Oh, I don't need this anymore. Maybe the church would want it. Why? Why is it that way around? That's Haggai's point. He understands what people are like, that they take care of their own first, and they give second attention to the things of God. And so the things that they give attention to are now unclean. In other words, to go back into Numbers, I think it is, it becomes the iniquity of a thing. How can something holy be iniquitous? How can something holy be sinful? Well, Numbers would say, and so does the book of Haggai, because it's not that that in and of itself, which is unholy, but you have made it so because of what you are like as an individual, what you commit yourself to on the outside. Now, here's the reason that he gives. Haggai wants to make absolutely clear that the people make the connection which they have failed to make again. And the connection is this, that what you do personally will have an effect on what you do for the Lord.

[17 : 36] What you have in your private life will have an effect in the church. That what you do on your own, where nobody else sees, will actually come out before the Lord in the work that you do for Him.

That which is unclean can make something else which is holy unclean. Because God takes everything into consideration. So, the people are building the temple, but they haven't really changed. Their hearts are the same. They're not really changed in any way. They're probably still, there's still an indication here that they've got their houses, which is an asset to them now, rather than shelter. And, you know, they're just moving along quite happily, giving the Lord second best. Well, in the book of Amos, as an example, this comes down to the very act of worship itself. God, in the book of Amos, when the people are singing in church, when the people are praying, in the book of Amos, God puts His hands over His ears.

In other words, by the very act of God putting His hands over His ears, He's sort of indicating to the people praising and praying that He doesn't want to listen to it. And you've got to ask yourself the question, why doesn't God want to listen to praise and to prayer? And the answer is very simple, because God saw what the people were like throughout the week, before they got to church on Sunday.

You know, that's a powerful message, really powerful message, that our worship is determined long before we get to church on a Sunday. That the very blessing and benefit, and shall we say, depth of our worship is determined by our personal life long before we get to church on a Sunday. It cannot be put right by a few minutes of prayer in the prayer room. No, God has seen us throughout the week. So God has His hands over His ears, because He doesn't want to listen to His people.

[19:51] Why? Because that which is unholy makes that which is holy unholy. That which is unclean makes that which is clean unclean. There's a very clear pattern here. So He gets them to consider, verse 16, how did you fare? Think about it again, consider again. How did you fare? When you came to the heap of 20 measures, but there were only 10. When you came to the wine vat to draw 50 measures, but there was only 20. In other words, God is withholding blessing, and He's withholding it because you have dirty hands. I can remember used to coming in, you know, as a boy with my younger brothers. We used to go out playing in the mud and what have you, and we used to come in thinking that we could eat tea with dirty hands. We didn't see that was a problem for it. Wash your hands before you sit down at the table. Why? Because you're not going to come to the table with dirty hands.

Go and wash. Yeah, I thought it was a bit pernickety, but there you go. Well, it seems to be a very biblical way of doing things. Be clean before you come to be blessed with what I have to give you. A blessing follows obedience. And these people here are suffering in a multitude of ways, and they cannot make the connection that what they are doing personally still is actually affecting the type of blessing that God is giving them. They are failing to make that connection. God promises that blessing will come, but the people are going to have to wait a long time because it will take Jesus. Because the question that raises itself here is a very simple one, that if blessing comes to God's people on the basis that God's people obey, and yet God's people can't obey for long enough to get the blessing, how will they ever receive blessing? You see the problem? In other words, if blessing depends on my obedience and my obedience isn't good enough to get the blessing, how am I ever going to be blessed?

Christ? Well, the answer is very simple. Christ comes. And Christ obeys God perfectly. And we in Christ no longer reap what we sow in that kind of way, but we are blessed through Him. Now, here's a consideration or a few. Just in case you think that the obedience of Christ takes care of everything, which is often the case in the church, that, you know, my obedience really doesn't matter all that much because Jesus obeyed for me. That's true when it comes to salvation. It's not quite so true when it comes to areas within the Christian life. Let me give you a couple of indications. In the New Testament, people want to make the same kind of divisions between what they do personally and how the Lord blesses them. And they think that if this isn't happening, there must be good reason for it, rather than ask the question, am I actually obeying God or is God withholding blessing from the church, from my life? We see this in Revelation with the church at Sardis, that Jesus says, if you carry on one way, you'll end up in the way that you're going. But if you return to me, obedience, then you will be blessed by me. Christ handles the church not with a blanket response, but with more of a personal touch.

[23:31] So let me go to the home, the husband. You know, in 1 Peter 3, he's talking about marriages and the type of marriages that husbands should have with their wives and wives should have with their husbands. But then he goes on to say this, that husbands should treat their wives according to God's will. If they don't, okay, if they don't, God will not listen to their prayers.

You think about that for a moment. How many men who are married are failing in their praying life simply because, not because they're not praying, but actually because they're not treating their wife properly? Which is the very thing that 1 Peter 3 says. That if a husband is struggling in his praying life and failed to have his prayers answered, it's actually due to the fact that he's not treating his wife the way that he should. That God will pay no attention, take no heed of his praying life. He can say all the right words. He can pray for even a very long time. But if he is not treating his wife according to God's will, then God's going to pay no attention to his prayers. Blessing follows obedience. What about in James, where a person in the church is ill and God says there will be no healing unless there is first the confession of sin and prayers. And when there is the confession of sin and when there is prayers, then there is, following that, blessing for his people. In other words, in Peter, in James, and in other areas of the New Testament, Christians are to learn over and over again that what we do in one area does affect the other, even if we think there is a division between the two. Haggai or the people in Haggai's day failed to see that connection. And Christians often fail to see the same kind of connection. What about children? Well, the New Testament church, as in the Old Testament, always assumes that whenever people, God's people, come together to worship him, the children are there. They are never routinely sent out of a worship service. They are routinely in a worship service. Hence why Paul says, children obey your parents. He's assuming that the children are in the congregation to hear that. Children are to be taught to obey their parents as it's pleasing to the Lord.

But here's the thing. That very commandment comes with a promise. Here it is. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land. Ephesians 6, verses 1 to 3. What's he teaching? This is what he's teaching. Children are not to grow up being deceived. And that commandment is there so that children don't grow up to be deceived. Why? God is not mocked. God is not mocked. What a person sows, that will he also reap.

In other words, you're not going to be able to get away with it with God. God is not mocked. So, children are to take hold that they are to understand, that they are to obey their parents because it's pleasing to the Lord. It comes with a promise, and that commandment is there because God is not mocked. God will not be made a fool of by anybody. That's deeply challenging.

[27 : 34] But notice the blessing following obedience. So, as in the Old Covenant, Old Testament, as in the New Covenant, the New Testament, there is no division where people try to make a division between the personal and the spiritual. All of life is connected. All of life is connected.

So, here's the exhortation. God wants us to understand that he is involved in everything that we do. Everything. So, everything that we do must take God into consideration. Think about it. Meaning that the people of Haggai's day had to understand that what they did personally would affect what they did directly for God, and God would take what they did personally into consideration.

And the same is true in the New Testament church, that what we do personally in our own private life affects what will happen as we serve God. It could go well. It could go wrong. It could be blessed. It could be removed from us.

I know enough ministers now, sadly, that have had to have been removed from the church.

[28 : 51] Not because they weren't good ministers. Not because they couldn't preach God's Word properly and truly. And not even because they didn't serve in the church really well.

But actually because they failed in their private life. Why? Because they failed to understand that there is no private life. There is no, there isn't that division.

And the moment you make that division, you fail to realize that what you do in one area, God will actually cause it to affect the other area. So here's a final consideration.

That everything is under the sovereign control of God. Everything was created through Jesus. Everything is created for Jesus. And so everything in the world is going to change so that it is consistent with Jesus.

A final consideration would be this. That the Word of God is to direct your life. That the Word of God is to regulate your life and your doctrine.

[30 : 01] As believers, you need to be careful of only paying a casual reflection to God's Word. Dipping into it, a bit like a map when you're lost.

Don't do that. It's not good for you spiritually. It's not good for your devotional life. It's just not good. Rather, spend time with God in His Word.

We need to keep close to God. And the only way to keep close to God is to keep close to the ways of God. And the only way to know the ways of God is to keep close to the Word of God. No more casual reflection. No more looking at it only when you're lost like a map. Rather, look at it daily. So that your walk with God would be both close and clean.
Amen.