

## The Blessing of the Work - Haggai 2:10-23

*Speaker: Pastor Tim Nixon*

The story of Haggai begins when Nebuchadnezzar's forces attack the city of Jerusalem and destroy the temple. Nebuchadnezzar takes the priests hostage and many of them are executed. About 50 years later Cyrus sits on the throne. God stirs his heart and he sends the exiles back to their homeland to build a temple for their God just as Isaiah had prophesied beforehand.

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem laid the foundation of the temple. But progress soon ceased and the people turned inward. For 16 years, the temple had been in ruins until Haggai comes on the scene in 520 B.C.

His ministry only lasted 3 and a half months but in that time Haggai called the people to prepare themselves for the presence of God by completing the work on the temple.

- This was crucial because the temple was where the manifest presence of God resided.
- So, when God instructed the people to build, or prepare, the temple, He was in essence instructing them to prepare for the presence of God.

There were several things that needed to be addressed if they were to adequately prepare themselves and the temple, for the presence of God.

1. In the first message Haggai addressed the people's priorities.
2. In the second message he addressed their perseverance.
3. Now, this evening, we see him address their purity.

Before we move to tonight's finale look at Haggai, I want to focus for a few minutes on nailing down our last two weeks.

This first week we spoke of priorities and I showed you the popcorn and tennis ball jar as an example of putting the most important things first.

Last week we focused on perseverance.

In her book *A Practical Guide to Prayer*, Dorothy Haskins tells about a noted concert violinist who was asked the secret of her mastery of the instrument. The woman answered the question with two words: "Planned neglect." Then she explained. "There were many things that used to demand my time. When I went to my room after breakfast, I made my bed, straightened the room, dusted, and did whatever seemed necessary. When I finished my work, I turned to my violin practice. That system prevented me from accomplishing what I should on the violin. So I reversed things. **I deliberately planned to neglect everything else until my practice period was complete. And that program of planned neglect is the secret of my success.**"

The same is true for us if we will serve God well.

Tonight the theme of our text is purity.

## **A Call for Examination**

**Ch. 2:10-19**

Two months have passed since the last message from Haggai. It is December, now. The people are working hard. Now a startling question is being asked - Why have you gone to the work?

## **Challenges from the Law**

**(v.10-13)**

Two important questions structure this prophetic message. They are designed to get the people of Israel to examine their motives, to look at their hearts.

The first question asks, is holiness communicable? Does the holiness of sanctified meat for offering transfer to clothing, utensils, etc? The answer from the Scriptures is, no, it does not.

The second question asks, is sinfulness communicable? Does contamination and corruption of sin transfer to those in contact with it? The answer from the Scriptures is, yes, it does.

The lessons from the law are easily illustrated. How many of you have caught your good health from someone near you who has good health? None? However, how many of you have the vicious stomach flu going around from someone near you? Most? Health cannot be passed like that; but sickness can.

So, you cannot catch holiness from someone. It does not rub off. It does travel through handkerchiefs. Virtue is not communicable. But the contamination and corruption of sin is communicable. Bad company corrupts good morals – so says the wise man in Proverbs.

## **Contamination of the Work**

**(v.14)**

So, what is the point? The work is contaminated. Everything they touch and do is contaminated. They are corrupt sinners. Everything they touch, they contaminate. What they offer is unclean.

This is probably *not* talking about bringing unclean sacrifices, but being an unclean people who come to do work on the house of God and end up making it unclean. So here is a commanded ministry being done by corrupt people with the effect that they contaminate the work.

Why say this to them? God is challenging their motivations for doing the work. He asking, why have you gone to the work of rebuilding the Temple?

It appears that many had gone to the work expecting that being in the work and in the house of God gave them some sort of holiness. They expected that working on the house of God would transfer the holiness of the house of God to them. They had it terribly reversed. Instead of seeking to become holy by doing the work, they should have sought to be holy in order to do the work.

## **Considerations in the Work**

**(v.15-19)**

In the next bit, Haggai tells them to consider some things. This is not to be a casual look at what is going on. They are to look carefully at how God is working and think clearly about what it means. They were missing some obvious indications that something was wrong with their own lives.

### **Their Response to Blasting**

**(v.15-17)**

The Lord challenges them to think about what had happened before they began the work on the Temple. How had they done? Over and over again, God blasted their productivity and prosperity. But they seemed to not connect their difficulties with their disobediences. They would not return even though God was chastening them.

### **Their Reward in Blessing**

**(v.18-19)**

They also needed to think about what happened when they took up the work of building the Temple. When they laid the foundations the blessing began. God withdrew His chastening and dispensed His blessing.

Israel had been taught by the Scriptures to measure the blessing of God by the bounty of God. So as they moved into the ministry work God required, He rewarded them. In this way, the Lord encourages and motivates His people.

It doesn't always work that way, however, don't give expecting to get, this is not a quid-pro-quo arrangement. God's blessings are not based on nor obtained by our obedience. God is not obligated to bless because we obey. God will sovereignly bless at the time of His choosing in the way that is best. This call to consider our lives we can all heed as well. We often simply keep going on doing what we do without careful examination of what God is showing us.

At the center of what God is doing is your holiness and your faithfulness. Will you please Him in everything and will you do the ministry work you ought to be doing.

Some of you have not found your niche. Some of you have stopped doing ministry you are gifted and able to do. Some of you are in a good transition into this community where you need to do ministry work. Are you seeing God working in your life so that you will do what He wants you to do?

### **A Cause for Expectation**

**Ch. 2:20-23**

The final word from the Lord comes also in December. It is spoken to the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel. He points this leader of God's people to the future glory of the work.

Now, we must remember that Zerubbabel is a governor. There is no king in Israel.

The Temple is being rebuilt in a way intended to point them to a future temple, the Lord Jesus Christ and the spiritual temple of His church. So, the empty throne is also intended to point them to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, their future King who would die and rise again. In His resurrection and ascension He sits on David's Throne to rule and reign. Here in this final prophetic word is real cause for a grand expectation.

### **The Impending Ruin**

**(v.20-22)**

We have heard this language before in Haggai 2:6-8. "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill his house with glory...'"

So a mighty cataclysm is soon to happen. It will be a day when the glory will fill the Temple. It will be a day when the Lord will shake and shatter the earth and gain the victory in the midst of awful destruction.

The inauguration of the fulfillment of this prophetic word began with life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' death and resurrection began the shaking of heavens and earth that will end on the final day of His return in glory. Then, through the gospel the kingdom will begin. It will extend down through history until the end of days. In the end of days, Jesus Christ will return from heaven to complete what was begun in His first coming. Then, He will bring His redeemed people with Him from all the ages in a mighty train, in a glorious crowd from every tribe, tongue and people. He will destroy the armies of the nations. He will bring all His enemies to heel. He will set up His throne and judge. It will be a triumphant day of glory for Christ and a terrible day of calamity for all those who have refused His Word rejected His Son.

## **The Inaugurated Reign**

**(v.23)**

In a marvelous reversal of God's judgment, Zerubbabel is identified to continue the Davidic line. His grandfather, Jehoiachin, had been rejected and his reign ended. But now, God affirms him. He is identified as God's servant. In Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah, he is marked as a spiritual man who obeyed God immediately. When sin was pointed out, he repented quickly. He led God's people courage and conviction. He is God's servant. But he also points through the language of Isaiah to God's greater Servant. The Lord Jesus would come as a servant and shepherd king. He would serve His Father's purposes, even to dying a cross kind of death.

The signet ring referred to here was used to make the mark of its owner on a document or clay tablet. It reflected his authority and was to be guarded, preserved and passed on to the heirs. God promised that Zerubbabel would be his signet, or representative authority to the people. Here is the close and the cause – "I have chosen you, declares the Lord of Hosts." What God has done for Zerubbabel and for all God's people is to show the greatness and glory of God. God has chosen Zerubbabel; He has chosen His people so that no one of us may boast in His presence. Pride and place and position are all removed when it is all of God and all of God alone. There is also honor and love and delight flowing from being chosen. We are humbled and we are honored. That God chosen us of His own will and in His own great love makes much of God. Making much of God then floods the heart with all that is grand about being loved by God.

As we close, allow these truths to settle deep in your soul in a life transforming way.

Evaluate your life carefully to see God at work.

- What is He doing?
- Where is He chastening?
- How is He blessing?
- Over what in your life is He frowning?
- Over what does He smile happily?

Do your work of ministry. At the end of the day, this is what Haggai calls us to.

Know that what we do here may always be small and incomplete. We are doing a great and good and glorious work, this building up of God's people. But we will never finish it ourselves. It will never be as perfect as we hope and plan. But it is God's good work for us.

Set your expectation on what God promises in the future. Look forward to final consummation of this age and the coming the fullness of His kingdom. Be willing to work hard for what will only be complete on the day of glory. Set your hope and expectation on that in such a way that you are moved and motivated to do ministry work now.

God will bring about victory and to show His glory in us. Let us, then, get to the work.