

A King Affixed

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[0 : 0 0] Friends, it's been so good these last three weeks being with you and I will enjoy being with you next week as well. At the end I'll tell you what I'm going to do next week because we run out of Haggai this week.

So I've got to go somewhere, don't I? And so at the end I'll tell you where that is. But it has been a great joy and particularly to see old friends.

So I'm very grateful for the invitation and very good to see you. Anyway, let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for the prophet Haggai.

Thank you for his boldness. Thank you for his love of you and your word. And Father, we pray today that you'd help us understand that word and then understanding it, that you'd be at work in us by your spirit, that we might live it.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. One thing that's happened since I've left you is that I now wear glasses preaching.

[1 : 0 7] I avoided it for many, many years but my wife says I've got to do it. And she's right. So multiple years had passed. Since the small, ruddy-faced lad had been dragged away from his sheep.

Anointing oil had been poured on his head by aged prophets. Blaspheming giants had received their just desserts. Friends had died. Enemies had conspired.

Jerusalem had been conquered. The ark had been relocated to where it should be. And 2 Samuel 7 tells us that once shepherd boy is now king.

He settled in his palace. And the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him. That's where we are in the book of Samuel, which is a long way from Haggai.

But I want you to turn with me to that part of the Bible if you can. I want you to turn to 1 Samuel 7. Because I think this sets important groundwork for us.

[2 : 0 8] And I want you to turn to 1 Samuel 7, verse 2. David approaches Nathan the prophet and says to David, sorry, and says to him, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.

And then Nathan replies to David with typical courtly response. He says, go, do it all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you. Now, apparently Nathan is of the view that whatever David does is okay by God, doesn't need checking out too much.

But God is of another view. And he communicates with Nathan. And as you can see in 2 Samuel 7, it goes from verse 8 to verse 17, which is a lengthy response.

God is clear. David is not going to be the house builder. The temple builder. Oh, the house that David was talking about would eventually come, but it would be a descendant of his who would do it, not him.

Having said that, God then reverses the focus a little bit. Instead of God's house that is the temple, God talks about a different house that will be built. The house will be David's house.

- [3 : 22] In other words, the house will be a family, a dynasty and a throne forever. So David comes with his own agenda, but God has another agenda.
- He is committed to his agenda. And even if the sons that come fail and need discipline, God will not opt out of this relationship with David and his descendants.
- He will keep his promise. The house of David and the kingdom will endure forever before God. His throne will be established forever. But that promise will not only shape David's future.
- It will shape Israel's future as well. And it will even shape humanity's future. Friends, this is God's decree and promise.
- He has set his king on Mount Zion, his holy hill. And in Psalm 2, verses 7 to 9, he said to him at this point, You, David, are my son.
- [4 : 24] Today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession.
- You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. But let me tell you, grand as those things are, from the perspective of Haggai's day, they look distant.
- Those promises look very distant, if not empty, if not gone into the barrel of history. David's descendants have so disastrously failed.
- And God's hand has been seen in fierce judgment on his people. As Jeremiah said in chapter 22, God had torn the signet ring off his finger. Davidic kingship had been thrown into the dust, as it were.
- Or as Psalm 89 says, God has removed the scepter from David's hand. The Lord has hurled his throne down to the ground. He has covered it with shame.
- [5 : 29] David's glory is gone. His house is in disrepair. The Lord's glory and his honour is under threat. That, friends, is the reality.
- I want to give it to you clearly and really. That is the reality of the book of Haggai. It looks as though someone's ringing me and I haven't turned it off. So I will now pay attention to that.
- Sorry. Well. So with that background, friends, let's see what God's mouthpiece here in the day of exile is like.
- Let's see what he has to say. And let's begin by reviewing where we've been over the last few weeks. And then we'll come into this week's passage. The grand finale of this book.
- I bet as you heard it read, you didn't think that, did you? The grand finale. But that's what it is. So have your Bibles open and come with me as we review the story. Stick with me. You'll need to do that.
- [6 : 30] In my first week in Haggai, we looked at Haggai chapter 1, verses 1 to 11. And we saw that Israel had returned from the disaster of exile in 539 BC. Attempts at rebuilding the temple had begun.
- Back in the land. But by 520 BC, in the second year of Darius, the people had stopped. They returned to their ordinary daily pursuits.
- They were building panelled houses while God's house remained in disrepair. Haggai spoke boldly into that situation and he told the people that their crop failures, their lack of fruitfulness, was to become breach of covenant.
- Was because of their breach of covenant. They paid no attention to their relation with God and the responsibilities that that entailed. They have not paid attention to God's house.

Their God's house. As a result, they must get things back into focus. They must seek God's kingdom and his righteousness first. And for them, that was best expressed by rebuilding God's house.

[7 : 37] Then last week, we turned to the response of the people in chapter 1, verses 12 through to 15. And chapter 2, verse 12, tells us that they heard and that they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of his prophet Haggai.

They feared the Lord, verse 12. They began to rebuild and God responded with a promise of his presence. Look at verse 13. Through his prophet, he proclaimed, I am with you, declares the Lord.

And then verses 14 and 15 tell us that every level of society responds. Secular leaders, religious leaders, the remnant of the people, and they all begin working toward the house of the Lord of hosts.

Then we shifted into chapter 2. And it became obvious that God perceived what was going on in the minds of the people. He knows that they look at the product of their efforts and that it looks inglorious.

And you can see that in verse 3. Do you see it there? What they are rebuilding looks trifling in comparison to the previous glory of Solomon's temple. But God urges them not to be dismayed, verse 4.

[8 : 50] They are to take courage. They are to work for he is with them just as he promised that he would be. They should not fear, verse 5. For the days are coming when God will intervene in history. He will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land and the nations.

That is, he'll shake everything and his house will be filled with splendour, verses 6 to 7. So grand it will be that Solomon's temple will fade into a shadow beside it, verse 9.

And God will richly bless his land and his house with prosperity and grandeur, verse 9 again. This is the word of the Lord of hosts. It can be trusted.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, that's the story so far. That's where we've been. Now let's turn to the final section of this book. The final section falls into two neat parts, I think.

The first runs from verse 10 through to 19. It operates as a sort of theological reflection on the story we have just rehearsed. The focus is on the building of God's house by God's people again.

[9 : 55] The second runs from verse 20 to 23. And the focus of those verses is God's building project. So let's turn to 10 to 19 and have a look at it together.

In verse 10, we are told that another word comes from God to Haggai. And the word of the Lord, let me say, is a little strange here. It requests a ruling from the priests of the day about matters of ritual purity and uncleanness.

However, let me say that the message of these verses is when you examine it profound. Let's see if we can work it out. Look at verse 12. First question put to the priests. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

That makes sense, doesn't it? It's a question. The priest says, no. And the message is clear. Holiness doesn't happen by accident. It's not because it just sort of touches something that it becomes holy.

Accidentally bringing consecrated bread into contact with unconsecrated bread doesn't suddenly make it consecrated. No. Holiness happens when things are set apart for God.

[11 : 07] It's not accidental. That's the first principle. Now I want you to look at verse 13. Second question put to the priest by the priest to the priest by Haggai is actually the other way around.

If someone who is unclean by contact with the dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean? And the priest answers it. So there's the question by Haggai. It does become unclean.

That is, if something unclean touches, you know, something unclean which has come in contact with a dead body touches any of those sorts of things, do they become unclean?

Oh yes, it does become unclean. Here's the story in reverse. This time you have a person who's unclean because they've come in contact with a dead body probably, say they touch unconsecrated food.

What happens to it? Well, by the laws of uncleanness it becomes unclean. Principle here is clear. Can you see it? What is being said is that unclean things contaminate whatever they touch.

[12 : 11] Can you see the compare and contrast between the two? Okay? What is being said is unclean things contaminate whatever they touch. In this way uncleanness is like a contagious disease and we all know about that at the moment don't we?

It infects and affects everything that it touches. So there are the two questions. Now we need to ask what on earth is all this about? What's Haggai trying to say essentially?

Is he just having a discussion with some priests about esoteric parts of the law or is something else going on here? Well it's clear that something else is going on isn't it?

Haggai is trying to teach them something. He has a word of God for them. That's what this is. But what is it? Well let's see if we can work it out. And here's my understanding.

Look at verse 14. Verse 14 is the application of the two previous questions. Haggai says so it is with this 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.

[13 : 26] Let me explain. In the last couple of weeks we've seen Haggai often seem to echo parts of the story of Israel in the second half of Exodus. Well I think he's doing it here again.

You see in Exodus God often calls Israel what? My people. And in Exodus 19 he sets them apart from the whole of the earth.

He bears them on eagles wings and brings them to himself. And he promises if you obey my voice keep my covenant then you will be my treasured possession out of all the peoples of this earth.

You would be a priestly kingdom. a holy nation. You would be my people essentially related to me. But then in Exodus 32 to 34 Israel sins that great sin in the golden calf incident.

They break covenant from their side. And when they break covenant God's language about Israel suddenly changes. In his anger he calls them not my people but this people or even your people.

[14 : 35] not my people. And I think that's what happening here. God is rehearsing what we've read about here in this book.

Do you remember the beginning of the book? Israel, God's covenant people, his set apart people, his holy priesthood are in covenant rebellion. They're breaking the covenant by not building the temple.

They're not acting as my people but as this people. As Joyce Baldwin, one of the commentators has said, the skeleton of the ruined temple was like a dead body decaying and making everything else contaminated.

They, the people, were defiled as well. And that meant everything they touched was defiled and everything that they touched became unclean. Everything that touched them became unclean.

And that in turn meant that any sacrifices they offered were also defiled because it had come through their hands. That is what I think verse 14 is saying. The covenant breaking people of God here in where they are at the moment back in the land are unclean.

[15 : 50] Every work of their hands is unclean for they are unclean. What they offer in the temple therefore is also unclean. And because they're in covenant breach the covenant curses were in operation.

That's what verses 16 and 17 make clear. Before they started rebuilding the temple their harvest even showed that to them. Blight and mildew and hail demonstrated it.

Smaller crops made it clear. Smaller returns on grapes and vine made it clear. And yet despite that despite these indications from God the Lord of all of creation they did not return.

By chapter one but chapter one then showed that they heard eventually God's word. They obeyed. They feared the Lord and they began to fulfill their charter with God from God by beginning to rebuild his house.

they sought him and his righteousness first. They obeyed him and feared him and God promised here that this day would go down in his calendar.

[17 : 05] It's a wonderful thought isn't it that God would open up his calendar and put the note in. From that day on he would bless them. No longer would there be covenant curses.

They would be replaced by covenant blessings. Fertility. Fruitfulness. Fulfillment of promises. Wrath replaced by mercy and grace.

And so look at verse 19. The Lord pronounces it from this day on. I will bless you. That's the first half.

So congratulations if you're hanging on in there because it's difficult stuff. But it brings us to our second section for today. Look at verses 20 to 23. God's focus on blessing finds a specific focus so it narrows down a little bit.

And if you've been observant as we've worked through the book you'll have noticed that every one of his prophecies except the last one were directed to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel the governor of Judah and to Joshua son of Jehozadak the high priest.

[18 : 17] Every now and then the remnant of the people are mentioned also but let me tell you a little bit about those two folk about Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel is the son of Shealtiel.

He's therefore the grandson of King Jehoiakim Ezra too. That means what? He's a descendant of David.

He's a descendant of Jeconiah whom Jeremiah called the signet ring on God's hand. He's therefore a descended of the discarded signet ring of God's hand.

With that in mind have a look at what is said in verse 21. Keep that in mind but have a look at what God says. God directs his word to Zerubbabel this discarded signet ring on his hand of his hand and he says to him I am about to shake the heavens and the earth to overthrow the throne of kingdoms.

I'm about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders and the horses and their riders shall go down everyone by the sword of his brother and on that day declares the Lord of hosts I will take you O Zerubbabel my servant son of Shealtiel declares the Lord and make you like a signet ring for I have chosen you declares the Lord of hosts.

[19 : 43] Friends can you see what's going on here? Zerubbabel is a descendant of David. He's there for the physical representation in the world of all the promises of God to David.

When people saw him they saw David. When God saw him he saw David. And he saw the promises he'd made to David.

He remembered the promises he'd made to David. God's people and God's king may rebuild God's physical house but God's focus is not on the physical house.

No. It's on another house. Whose house? David's house. God is the ruler of David's house.

In other words David and David's house is still God's grand building project. God's house. David will do what he promised. He will shake the heavens and the earth and overthrow all false kingdoms.

[20 : 47] Do you remember what Psalm 2 said? He will laugh at opposition to it. And he will overthrow it. He will take God's chosen king and make him like a signet ring on his finger again.

His promises to David cannot fail. Using the words of scripture he has chosen David. He's installed him on Zion his holy hill and he will make the ends of the earth his possession.

Friends please listen to this. Here in Haggai the focus may be on Zerubbabel. But you know the glass through which he's viewed is one that looks far far far far beyond him.

We see that in 2 Samuel 7. We see it again in Psalm 2 which we read earlier on. God's promises to David there are like a telescope through which you can view the future.

It's one through which he looks far beyond. And we who read the New Testament know where the focus of the telescope rests. Don't we?

[21 : 58] It rests on, is realised in, fulfilled in, Jesus, Jesus, the Son of God. Of course the Apostle Paul indicates he is God's resounding yes to the promises of God.

He is God's clanging declaration that this is the word of the Lord of hosts and it can be trusted. So friends, when you first look at Haggai it looks dark at the end but I want to tell you it's glorious in its light and it looks forward to the descendant of Zerubbabel and all that he will do.

So with that said, I wonder if we can step back a little and see what we've learnt from all of this. You see on the surface of this book, the issue is that of physical buildings of God's house, God's temple and we don't really understand much of that.

But if you think that's all it's about, you've missed the point. I've tried to show you that the focus of this book is actually on God. On God's purpose for his people in history.

God's future and God is telling us that God has a promise. He is committed to the future painted here. In other words, he's committed to his word and his promise.

[23 : 23] And he's telling his people in these dark times when they're just looking at buildings that that ain't the end. He's committed to the future painted here.

To his word and promise. And friends, let me tell you, in these dark and disappointing days of his people, he's urging them to trust him.

He's on about his purpose still. Though they are in such a miserable state. And he wants them to line up with it. Now, in their context, how's that expressed?

It's expressed in covenant obedience. How's it shown? By getting on with building the temple, which is a sort of earthly representation of what God is about. Their obedience to that direction is tangible evidence that their interests are subordinated to God's will and God's purpose.

Friends, isn't that what obedience is about? Obedience is simply lining up with God and his purpose in your actions. It's saying my will is subordinated to your will.

[24 : 32] My will is secondary to your will. My desires are secondary to your desires. I wonder if you could ponder this with me for a moment as we close this study on this great book.

book. You see, this book has made clear, I think, that blessing flows when God is honoured. And God is honoured when his people obey.

And that's what we see here. You see, building God's house is not so much about sacrifices and ceremony and bricks. It's not as though God wanted a place where people could come and slaughter animals.

No, it's about lining up with God and his purposes in the end. God is not after sacrifices. He's after hearts broken and contrite.

He's after obedience. Samuel made that clear to Saul in 1 Samuel 15. David makes it clear in Psalm 51. And Haggai confirms it.

[25 : 38] Brothers and sisters in Christ, I've come to the conviction over quite some time, not only from observing others but observing self, that good old-fashioned obedience is a dying art.

In the contemporary world, obedience reeks of authoritarianism for us, doesn't it? And particularly, if I might say, Aussies. It reeks of someone else determining your destiny.

And we think that cannot possibly be good for us. Surely it cannot be good to make someone else the master of our destiny.

But what Scripture tells us is that this someone else is God, the creator of all the earth. And this God is good. He is just.

He is righteous. He has our best interests in mind. And those interests are caught up in his purposes. The Lord Jesus himself knew it. So what did he do?

[26 : 45] He submitted to the Father. He was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. As the New Testament puts it, that is it. In Philippians 2, he was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And he knew that fullness of life was found in obedience to God's will. The psalmist knew it. Read through Psalm 119 if you don't believe it.

Listen to him rejoice in God's will and purpose displayed in his word. It's not a burden for him. It's a joy. Sisters and brothers, observe these ancient saints in Haggai.

These ancient saints stood in hard and dark days. Yet, they wondrously heard God's word.

They obeyed God's word. They feared the Lord. So observe them. Observe the psalmist. Observe our Lord Jesus the Christ.

[27 : 49] And be like them. Subordinate your imperfect, lesser, self-centred goals and absorb and take on God's greater good for you.

Choose to be obedient to his word and his will. For let me tell you, there is no better place to be. For it is the place of blessing and richness.

But let me put a finer point to it for us. You see, I'm sure that among us today are people entranced by disobedience. Or people caught in disobedience.

If that's you here tonight, then God's word through Haggai is clear. What is it? Return. Return to the Lord. Bow before him. And as you do observe that wonderful moment in this book, do you remember it?

Do you remember the day on which Israel repented? And the day God acted? And he marked the day in his calendar. He marked the day in his calendar.

[28 : 53] This day of repentance, devotion and obedience would be the day that blessing begins. And of course, that blessing must not be construed in wrong terms. The blessing underneath any material blessings here is one that matters.

And the blessing is the forgiveness and the presence of the living God in the midst of a renewed life. That's what counts. A renewed life that will never end.

That blessing is made possible through his Messiah, our Lord, Jesus the Christ. So trust in him. Walk with him.

Obey him. Turn back from any sin in your lives. For let me tell you, in him all the promises of God have their yes and their amen.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this, at times, rather enigmatic book.

[29 : 55] But this book full of you. As well as being full of your people, it is full of you. And Father, please help us. Thank you for this book being fulfilled through our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please help us to trust in him. Walk with him. Obey him. Knowing that all your promises have their yes and their amen in him. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.