

Losing the Anti-Midas Touch

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Date: 15 August 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, good afternoon and welcome to our lunchtime Bible talk. It's great to see you all here. We're continuing our series today on Haggai and we'll read chapter 2 verses 10 to 19 in just a few moments.

But first, let's pray together. Father, we do thank you that we can spend time now opening your word.

And listening to you speak. So help us to lay aside that which weighs on us, that which would distract us. And help us to focus now that we might respond to you with our whole hearts.

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Haggai, chapter 2, verses 10 to 19. If you're using one of the visitor's Bibles, that's on page 791.

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.

[1 : 15] 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?

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 priests answered and said, it does become unclean. Then Haggai answered and said, so is it 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. Now then, consider from this day onward, before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare?

When one came to a heap of 20 measures, there were but 10. But when one came to the wine vat to draw 50 measures, there were but 20.

[2 : 19] 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 24th 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?

Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on, I will bless you.

Amen. This is God's word. Do you keep that open? We can often find suspense a hard thing to deal with at times.

For those of us who are familiar with Netflix, you'll know the sweet relief of the next episode of the TV series you're watching, just looting straight away, playing one after each other. No more waiting week to week to find out what will happen after the cliffhanger ending.

Well, the Israelites in Haggai's day had to deal with a lot of suspense. There was the question of what the temple they were supposed to be rebuilding would end up like.

[3 : 34] Would it be anything like what had gone before? And after last week's prophecy, who knows at what point the greater glory of the latter temple will exceed the former?

When, if at all, will they see it? But there was another great deal of suspense to contend with. In chapter 1, it had been spilt out to Israel that their frustrations at harvest time were all at the hand of God.

Their labors produced little. That's what Haggai declared to the people. In the midst of their strife, he told them that it was God who brought it upon them. Chapter 1, verse 9.

You looked for much, and it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Chapter 1, verse 11. I, says God, have called for a drought on the land, on the hills, on the grain, and all the rest.

The cause of this was that the temple was lying in ruins. So they heard God's voice and responded. The rebuild was underway. And there was encouragement from God because of this.

[4 : 44] But what would happen at the next harvest? Israel were in suspense to know if the curses they were under would end. And as God's word comes to Haggai, this time on the 24th day of the ninth month, the suspense has only ended with the last phrase of this prophecy.

Before the reassurance of God's kindness, God wants his people to be clear about what ignoring him looks like. And that's what we have in the first point before finally a line is drawn under this whole ordeal in our second.

So first, verses 10 to 17. Heading our own way leads only to bleakness. And then verses 18 to 19. Heeding God's word leads to blessing.

So first, verses 10 to 17. Heading our own way leads only to bleakness. When we fail to listen to God, preferring instead to go our own way, and we prioritize what we want, then it corrupts and taints everything.

We see this with the returnees in the temple. Their refusal to prioritize it had brought them curses. The curses of the covenant had been poured out on them. But for us now, similarly, we mustn't neglect the building of God's church.

[6 : 06] Well, work had now begun on the temple. We see God's word come in verse 10. On the 24th day of the ninth month, two months have passed from the last word, and now they've reached the point of being able to lay the foundation of the temple.

Verse 18. The rubble's been cleared. The key turning point is underway. And this is a key time for the restoration community. And so God speaks to bring clarity to them.

God says to consider two things in this passage. Verse 15. He says, consider from this day onward. And then likewise, verse 18. Consider from this day onward.

And the first thing to consider is to look back at what has happened and to remember it. Consider from this day on what has gone horribly wrong.

Do not repeat the same mistakes. And so God speaks through Haggai to tell them what going their own way caused. He asks two questions of the priests.

[7 : 07] They seem a bit obscure to us. We don't really think about foods being unclean or clean in a spiritual sense. The first question, verse 12. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and then touches any other food with that garment, would the other food become holy?

In this day, when Haggai was prophesying they didn't have nice airtight Tupperware containers like we do or even sandwich bags, they wrapped their food up to carry it.

A bit like putting it in a pocket. So the question, does the holiness of the food pass from the garment and make other food holy? Now this specific scenario doesn't present itself in Leviticus 7 where these laws are talked about, but it's pretty straightforward for the priests to conclude from the law that the answer is no.

No, holiness is not transferable like that. So question two, verse 13. What about if someone has touched a dead body and so becomes unclean?

If they touch the food, does the food become unclean? Answer? Yes, it does. Holiness doesn't necessarily spread by touch, but uncleanness does.

[8 : 24] So much so that if the holy and the unholy touch, it's the holy that becomes contaminated. Think about it as like a rotten apple in a bowl. It ruins the others, not the other way around.

Or in our staff offices, as someone comes down with a cold, as happens every winter and most springs and autumns and summers. We don't put them in a room with everyone else that's well in the hope that that will make them well again.

No, no, I'm as far away as possible. Anytime I shake their hand, I'm washing it. Because unholiness, sin, uncleanness is what's infectious, just like that bug.

Not the other way around. And with that established, Haggai then lands his punch, verse 14. So it is with this people, this nation before me.

Until this day, every work of their hands, all that they offer here at the temple, has been unclean. In mythology, King Midas was able to turn anything he touched into gold.

[9 : 29] And so we often talk about the Midas touch being when someone touches something, he brings success to it. But here God is saying to Israel, when you go your own way, when you ignore me, you've got the anti-Midas touch.

Everything you touch, everything you do with your hands, even making offerings, is tainted and stained. Or to put it another way, the temple that lay in ruins in their midst was like a corpse that was contaminating them.

As it lay there, it polluted the people so that everything they did was tainted. As the temple lay there untouched, unfinished, uncared for, it showed that Israel had put their fingers in their ears and were ignoring God.

It showed that their own interests mattered much, much more than the kingdom of God. Notice again in verse 14, they haven't stopped offering sacrifices, but the ones that they do offer are unclean.

And so verse 15, consider from this day onward that it's ignoring the temple that has done this. Think about the calamity of going your own way before stone was placed upon stone, before you've taken seriously what God has said.

[10:52] Verse 16, how did you fare when you were more interested in building your own houses? What was your experience? Just like we saw in chapter one, they faced frustration.

When it looked like the harvest might yield 20 measures, it was only 10. Or 50 measures, it was only 20. How did you fare? Their work ended in ruin.

All that they did was met with verse 17, toil, blight, mildew, and heal. Clear signs of judgment. Yet they didn't turn to God.

God is saying, remember this in the future. Think about how terrible things are when you go your own way and ignore me. Don't ignore my temple.

Don't ignore my kingdom. Don't ignore my words. And so Haggai is saying to us that we mustn't ignore God's church and playing our part in seeing his gospel spread to the world.

[11:57] If we're more interested in assembling things for our amusement, in building our bank balances, constructing a career, so that we neglect the necessary work that God has given to us, then these things might be like a corpse in the midst that stains everything we do.

If we've been content for many years to sit under God's word, but never respond, and are not prepared to sacrificially serve our church, then Haggai's message is, consider from this day forward how it went for Israel, and how it will go for you.

These curses are but a taste of what it will be like if we don't listen to God. So if you haven't ever responded to God, or if right now you're consciously hardening yourself to what he said, it might seem for a while that you're doing okay.

You might even seem to flourish in this life. But ultimately, if we go our own way, then we will face an unending future that experiences these curses much, much more than this.

As our failure to listen will be as much a corpse within us as the ruins temple was for Israel. And the anti-Midas touch will ruin our future forever.

[13:20] But God speaks because he doesn't want that to happen. Consider what has happened. That's what he's saying. Look at the calamity that comes from going your own way.

Learn from it. Don't go that way. And so the prophecy goes on to say, verses 18 to 19, Heeding God's word leads to blessing.

Haggai finishes by saying, when God's word is heard and responded to, then frustration turns to fruitfulness. There is restoration.

God is waiting to bless us. The end of the story doesn't have to be ruined. What was it that had changed? Verse 18. It was the day that the foundation of the temple was laid.

That's the turning point. Israel had knelt their colors to the mast. They'd responded to God's word and faith. The foundation of the temple signaled that they had listened.

[14:19] They were responding wholeheartedly to God. Verse 15. Consider before stone was placed upon stone, it was calamity, hardship, fruitlessness, ruin.

That was your way. But verse 18. Since the day that the corner stone, the foundation stone was laid, from that day on, verse 19, God says, I will bless you.

When we heed his word and respond to him, then we don't need to fear judgment or ruin. Consider from this day on, from this very day, the abundant blessing that God is waiting to pour out on those who respond to him.

Israel had a privileged heritage. At Sinai, God made a covenant with them that gave them status as his treasured possession. They, amongst all other nations, were his treasured possession.

But with that, Israel were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They had great privilege, but that meant that they had to listen to God. They'd been happy to build, and build they did, but, chapter 1, verse 4, it was their own lovely paneled houses they were building.

[15:41] But now they'd heard God's word, they'd responded to him, and the 24th day of the ninth month, as they laid that foundation, they committed again to building God's kingdom first, which has its temple at its heart.

Now, the date is significant here, not just because it was the day that the foundation was laid, but this was also the point of the year when all the seeds would already have been planted. Verse 19, is the seed yet in the barn?

The answer to that would have been no. Their experience of curses has meant that previously the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree, the four most fruitful trees that there were, have yielded nothing.

Here's the suspense that Israel face. The seed is no longer in the barn, it's been cast for another year, but what would happen? More hail? More blight?

More mildew? No, none of that. From this day on, I will bless you. From this very day, say goodbye to the empty Midas touch.

[16:52] From any human perspective, it was far too early to tell what would happen with this crop. Even the most experienced farmer couldn't predict what the harvest would be like this far out. But the word of the Lord has come, and as sure as the curses came for ignoring him, so sure will be the blessing for responding to him.

Israel had experienced the curses of the covenant from just Deuteronomy 28. That's what we see Haggai spell out in chapter 1. That's what's happened to them when they'd gone their own way, verse 16.

But now, God says he'll bless them from this very day, and so they can anticipate again the blessings of the covenant from that same chapter in Deuteronomy, where we're told, blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.

Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds, and the young of your flock. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed you shall be when you go out.

The Lord will command the blessing on you in your barns, and in all that you undertake. He will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, and on and on.

[18:12] From this day, I will bless you. And just as the curses that Israel faced were a fortieth of the greater curse that is yet to come for those who harden their hearts to God, so too is this blessing, a foretaste, a shadow of the greater blessing that is to come.

Israel could at this point with confidence anticipate a fruitful harvest. They could with confidence wait for prosperity. And we too, through Jesus, our true temple, can anticipate with more certainty a greater prosperity than even Israel had at their high point.

At their high point, Israel had taken Cain in the promised land. They had David's greater son Solomon. They had his temple. They knew real, material flourishing.

But all of that, too, was a fortieth, a shadow of the ultimate blessing and fulfillment of God's covenant. We have a greater temple in Jesus. In Jesus, we have the greatest son of King David. And we look forward to the kingdom that will never fear or spoil, that will never be shaken, where all that is in it will only be fruitful forever.

[19:37] God says, I will bless you. That's the blessing that awaits in the future for those who have God's word at work in them. But even now in the present, we are now joined to Jesus and we share all the benefits of that.

He deals with the corruption within us that taints everything. When we respond to God's word, we are made a new creation. The old has gone.

The new has come. And whilst we went our own way, all of our works were like filthy rags. Even the best things that we could do were tainted.

But now, however, through God's blessing, we have become God's workmanship with good works to do for him that he's prepared for us.

And so we must hear God's word and keep responding to him and not hardening our hearts. We must heed God's word that calls us to be builders, building his church.

[20 : 43] And what that simply means is participating in the ways that we can in the ministry of the church that we're in. We don't need to erect a pulpit somewhere for us to preach in.

We don't all need to go to theological college and train. We don't need to hold a position or a title in church even. No, we just give our time, our money, our energy to support and encourage ministries that are opening the Bible and pointing people to Jesus and his way that they might know this blessing.

We do it by offering ourselves to do whatever it is that might help more people hear God's word. We do whatever we can to encourage others to take God's word to their neighbors and their colleagues and their friends.

Maybe you haven't ever responded to God before. Now is the time because he says from this day you can know his blessing. And as we do listen to him, as we do serve him in his church, each sacrifice we make, whether it costs us our career, whether it costs us our comfortable retirement, or the lifestyle of the lovely panelled house that we've always dreamt of, each of these sacrifices are part of us kneeling our colours to the mast.

They're evidence of responding to God's word. And so what does God say to us? He says from this day on I will bless you.

[22 : 29] No suspense, no wondering. From this very day I will bless you. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that as we come to you, no matter if we failed, no matter if we ignored you before, you're waiting to pour out your blessing on us, to make us new.

you. So we pray that you would reassure us of your grace and give us all we need to serve you faithfully in building your church, that we might long for the ultimate blessings that you've promised. For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.