

Haggai Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

HAGGAI 1

Haggai 1:1-11

Give careful thought to your ways. - Haggai 1:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to the program AD 2000 and Beyond, there are about 260 people groups in the world that still need to hear the gospel. There are also 1,120 people groups that don't have a church of 100 or more members among them.

God's people still have plenty of work to do when it comes to obeying Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission. And we have been reminded this month that one of the reasons God wants us to work is to be able to support His work. Speaking through the prophet Haggai, God warned Israel not to forget His work as they went about their own tasks.

Today's devotional begins the fifth section of the study on work, a five-day series on precautions for workers. The Bible teaches us how to keep several clear priorities in mind as we work, and then how to use the income and other benefits work provides. These precautions are easy to forget or set aside when life gets busy, but each one is too important to neglect.

God's message to His people through Haggai is a good example of this. Haggai was the first prophet to speak to Israel after the people returned from exile in Babylon. Rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem was high on God's priority list. After a good start on the temple, however, the exiles became preoccupied with building their own houses. Work on the temple stopped for about fifteen years.

But this was not what God intended. The temple was central to Israel's worship, the place where God came to live among His people. By neglecting the temple the people were not only being disobedient. Their lack of concern reflected a deeper problem of spiritual apathy.

God had tried to get their attention in the most dramatic ways possible. He had withdrawn His blessing on their work in the fields and the vineyards, so that they got little return for their efforts. And even when they did earn a wage, God cut holes in the bottom of their pockets. ([Copyright Moody Bible Institute. Used by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Haggai - A Problem with Priorities

Steven Cole gives this **illustration** - I've shared before the story of the time management expert who was speaking to a group of business students. He pulled out a large, wide-mouth jar and filled it with fist-sized rocks. When he couldn't put any more in, he asked, "Is this jar full?"

The class responded, "Yes." He said, "Really?" Then he pulled out a bucket of gravel and poured it in, shaking it down through the cracks. Then he asked, "Is the jar full?"

The students were onto him, so they said, "No." "Good," he replied. He dumped in a bucket of sand. Once more he asked, "Is the jar full?" "No," they shouted. Again he said, "Good." He poured in a pitcher of water until the jar was full to the brim.

Then he asked, "What is the point of the illustration?" One student ventured, "No matter how full your schedule, if you try hard, you can always fit more in."

"No," the speaker replied, "that is not the point. The point is, if you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all." (*First Things First*, by Stephen Covey, Roger & Rebecca Merrill [Simon & Schuster], pp. 88-89.)

Editorial comment - What should our "big rocks" be? Jesus and His Word! Put them first in your life! If we put the pebbles, or sand, etc, in first, we won't find time for Jesus the King of kings and His living Word which endures forever!

Haggai 1:1-15

TODAY IN THE WORD

A beautiful building in Kiev, the capital city of Ukraine, has recently been reclaimed for its original purpose, and is now home to a

thriving Christian congregation. Like so many churches in the former Soviet Union, this church was confiscated by the government and used for other purposes during many of the seventy-four years of Communist rule. The building suffered from years of neglect, and still needs a lot of repair and restoration work.

Many centuries before the Communists formed the Soviet Union, a foreign conqueror swept through a nation and left a house of God in ruins. A little more than twenty years after the death of King Josiah, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar swept into Judah in a final conquest of the southern kingdom.

Most of God's people were sent off into exile in Babylon in fulfillment of God's judgment, and the magnificent temple of Solomon was leveled. But the godly line survived in Babylon, and when the seventy years of captivity God had decreed were finished, He kept His promise to restore Israel to her land.

The book of Ezra records the fulfillment of this promise of restoration, as the first exiles returned to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. A man named Zerubbabel was among this group (Ezra 2:2). He was a prince of Judah, the grandson of King Jehoiachin who had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:8-16). We're studying Zerubbabel today because he was one of the last descendants in the godly line mentioned in the Old Testament.

The prophet Haggai says that Zerubbabel was appointed governor of Jerusalem. The main task of the returned exiles was to rebuild the temple, a job they began with great enthusiasm. But after the temple's foundation was laid, opposition from the people living in Samaria caused Zerubbabel and the people to stop the work (Ezra 4:1-5, 24).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's study finishes our survey of some of the people in the Old Testament lineage of Jesus Christ. (Copyright Moody Bible Institute. Used by permission. All rights reserved)

Haggai 1:1-15

TODAY IN THE WORD

A beautiful building in Kiev, the capital city of Ukraine, has recently been reclaimed for its original purpose, and is now home to a thriving Christian congregation. Like so many churches in the former Soviet Union, this church was confiscated by the government and used for other purposes during many of the seventy-four years of Communist rule. The building suffered from years of neglect, and still needs a lot of repair and restoration work.

Many centuries before the Communists formed the Soviet Union, a foreign conqueror swept through a nation and left a house of God in ruins. A little more than twenty years after the death of King Josiah, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar swept into Judah in a final conquest of the southern kingdom.

Most of God's people were sent off into exile in Babylon in fulfillment of God's judgment, and the magnificent temple of Solomon was leveled. But the godly line survived in Babylon, and when the seventy years of captivity God had decreed were finished, He kept His promise to restore Israel to her land.

The book of Ezra records the fulfillment of this promise of restoration, as the first exiles returned to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. A man named Zerubbabel was among this group (Ezra 2:2). He was a prince of Judah, the grandson of King Jehoiachin who had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:8-16). We're studying Zerubbabel today because he was one of the last descendants in the godly line mentioned in the Old Testament.

The prophet Haggai says that Zerubbabel was appointed governor of Jerusalem. The main task of the returned exiles was to rebuild the temple, a job they began with great enthusiasm. But after the temple's foundation was laid, opposition from the people living in Samaria caused Zerubbabel and the people to stop the work (Ezra 4:1-5, 24).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's study finishes our survey of some of the people in the Old Testament lineage of Jesus Christ. [Copyright Moody Bible Institute. Used by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Haggai 1:1

The word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai. - Haggai 1:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

The teachings of the great Chinese philosopher Confucius have for centuries influenced culture, social morality, philosophy, and political theory throughout Asia and the world. He emphasized order and propriety in relationships, justice, and harmony. He believed strongly in the value of education as a key dimension of self-improvement, and he also promoted study of the classics as a highly virtuous pursuit. He is perhaps best known for his version of the Golden Rule, "Never impose on others what you would not choose for yourself," which he called the virtue of "reciprocity."

Did you know Confucius was a contemporary of the prophet Haggai? Considering Haggai's ministry in this final week of our month's study, we begin by noting his book is the second shortest (to Obadiah) in the Old Testament. Its two chapters contain four brief messages delivered during a four-month timespan: chapter 1, 2:1-9, 2:10-19, and 2:20-23. It was written in 520 B.C., in the second year of the reign of Darius. It is permeated by a strong sense of being a message from God, as more than two dozen times we are reminded that this is the "word of the LORD." Haggai is regarded as the first postexilic prophet, joined soon after by Zechariah. Nothing is known about his personal background, though it is speculated he was perhaps in his 70s. This is based on a possible inference (from 2:3) that Haggai was one of the people who had seen the original temple, which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The book's main purpose was to encourage the rebuilding of the temple. During the reign of Cyrus, 50,000 Jews returned home under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest. In the second year of their return, the foundation for a new temple was laid, but then construction halted due to Samaritan harassment, political shifts in the empire, and the people's own spiritual apathy. Sixteen years later, Haggai appeared on the scene. The ministry of Haggai and Zechariah would be successful: The people obeyed and finished building a new temple about 515 B.C.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The book of Ezra (especially 3:1-4:5) provides background for understanding Haggai. The return of the people from exile happened as God promised, but it wasn't easy. The people had to make a new life, including rebuilding homes and planting crops. Collectively, they faced the challenge of rebuilding the temple and reestablishing national worship. It must have seemed overwhelming! Fortunately for them and for us, "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Haggai 1:2 In His Time (play this old Maranatha classic chorus ["In His Time"](#))

READ: Haggai 1:1-15

This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." --Haggai 1:2

I know of a church that has desperately needed to expand for a number of years. Many of the members have had a desire to build for quite some time and are ready to press ahead with the project. There are others, however, who believe that because the church hasn't been able to raise the full amount necessary to pay for the project, the timing isn't right.

When doing God's work, the issue of His will and timing is a very important one. The Israelites in Haggai's day faced such an issue in the rebuilding of the temple. After years of captivity in Babylon, they returned to Jerusalem. With God's instructions, they began the project (about 15 years prior to Haggai's prophecy). But then, because of fear and intimidation, they quit (Ezra 4). As days and years went by, they excused their inaction by saying that the timing wasn't right (Haggai 1:2). Nonsense! The real problem was that they were too busy increasing their own comfort—building and living in their own "paneled houses" (1:4)—to give any time or effort to constructing the house of God.

How careful we must be to avoid becoming so absorbed in building our own "houses" (physical or financial) that we ignore the work of God. Let us always seek to do His work in His time and according to His instructions. —David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

Lord, I would always do Your will,
Your perfect plan I would fulfill;
Don't let me move too fast or slow,
For it's Your timing I would know.
—Fitzhugh

Now is the right time to do God's will.

Haggai 1:2-11 Today in the Word

A credit company based in Riga, Latvia, last year asked borrowers for their immortal souls as collateral. The company, which offers

short-term loans of up to \$1,000 at high interest rates, did not worry about credit rating or actual collateral. Instead, said their Web site: "There is just one condition, a borrower should pledge their soul." According to the terms of the loan, the soul remained the property of the company until the loan had been completely repaid. Was this a joke? A marketing ploy? Latvians weren't sure, but several Christian denominations there complained and asked the government to investigate.

Some people are willing to sign away their souls for a bit of money, and we are reminded how human priorities contrast with God's. In today's reading, the Israelites were invited and commanded to "give careful thought" to their ways and priorities (v. 7). Initially, Haggai addressed Zerubbabel and Joshua directly (v. 2). As the main political and religious leaders of the nation, they could not allow the people to continue making sinful excuses about why the temple project was being neglected.

Haggai then spoke to all the people, condemning their spiritual indifference and self-centeredness. "Paneled houses" suggests luxuriousness, meaning that they were putting their personal, materialistic desires ahead of the priority of worshiping the Lord (v. 4). How could they be claiming, "the time has not yet come" when the ruins of the temple were compared to their own beautiful homes? Did it make sense to pursue earthly priorities first? Their present circumstances revealed that God was not blessing such actions (v. 6): Harvests were small. There were shortages of food and clothing. They were unable to save money and inflation was a problem. They were living hand-to-mouth—it was as though their purses had holes in the bottom! They needed to put God first and gather building supplies for the new temple (v. 8). Once they straightened out their priorities, He would bless the work of their hands (vv. 9–11).

Apply the Word

We should give careful thought to our spiritual priorities in the stewardship of our physical and material resources. Do we take care of ourselves first and give God the leftovers? Perhaps it's difficult to offer God the "firstfruits" of our paychecks when it seems there's barely enough to cover the bills. When we have our priorities in order, though, God has a way of blessing us. And what are we worried about? He's already promised to meet all your needs (Phil. 4:19)!

Haggai 1:4 - "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?"

For the first time (except in the case of Daniel) a prophetic book is dated by Gentile dynasties. Israel's days are counted by reigns outside the Covenant. The remnant was restored to Jerusalem from captivity, but was still subject to Gentile powers. In these two chapters we have four messages, each carefully dated. They were all directed to one end, that namely of bringing these people to build the House of God, which, notwithstanding the fact that they had been restored over fifteen years, yet lay in incompleteness. In his work Haggai was helped by Zechariah; and they were successful, for the House of Jehovah was built. The first of Haggai's addresses is found in this chapter. Its positive note was a call to 'arise and build; its method was that of combating the mental attitude which had prevented the building. These particular words constituted the prophet's answer to that mental mood. The people were waiting for the right time, and saying that the right time was not yet come. The prophet revealed the falsity of the attitude by this question. They were not waiting for some special time, some psychic moment, for the building of their own houses. Into that, they were putting physical energy. The psychic condition needed for the building of the House of God was that of minds determined to employ physical energy enough to do it. How persistent is this folly of waiting for psychic moments to do Divine work, when the one thing needed is immediate action. The truth was, and is, in all such cases, that action is the outcome of desire. To desire the House of Jehovah is to build it. What we need is true apprehension of relative values. - G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Haggai 1:4

Paneled Houses

READ: Haggai 2:1-9

Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins? —Haggai 1:4

The prophecy of Haggai is often overlooked in Scripture, but it holds much for us. This brief book consists of four messages from God to the Jewish exiles who had returned from Babylon. Their mission was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

They started well, but then their enthusiasm waned and they turned to building houses for themselves. In his first message, Haggai asked, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" (Haggai 1:4).

In message two (Haggai 2:1-9), Haggai asked if anyone remembered the temple Solomon had built, and that King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed. A few elderly exiles could recall the former glory. By comparison, the abandoned work looked pitiful.

Let's think for a moment about our work of building the church. For us, the church is the body of Christ—the believers themselves (1

Corinthians 12:27). Our mission as followers of Jesus is to become a strong, dedicated, growing, witnessing church.

How is your local congregation doing? Is it busy doing the work of God? Are you personally involved? Or have you become distracted with the work of building your own "paneled houses"? —David C. Egner ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God gives us talents to be used for Him.

Should then His work for lack of zeal decline?

His kingdom first! Our light must not grow dim—

Through faithful servants may His glory shine! —Mollon

Commitment to Christ goes hand in hand with commitment to His church.

Haggai 1:6

F B Meyer

Our Daily Homily

He that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

In these words, spoken on their return from captivity, God remonstrates with his people for neglecting the rebuilding of his house, and indicates this as the reason for the failure of their crops, and the profitlessness of their labors. They seemed to put their hard-earned wages into a bag with holes.

How true a description of many in the present day! They work hard, but derive little comfort from their toils. Their homes are bare; their children unkempt; their circumstances meager. They are always in anxiety. Gambling, drinking, loose and evil company—are indeed bags with holes. But there are other analogies. We sometimes find our days slipping away without accomplishing anything worth mentioning. We have nothing to show for them—nothing accomplished, nothing done. Or we expend time and thought on plans that are apparently well and carefully devised, but they prove abortive and disappointing. All this is like a laborer putting his wages into a bag with holes, and when he reaches home he has nothing to show for his labor.

There is a reason for this loss and failure. What applied to the Jews on their return from captivity, applies still. We have not placed God first. We have run every man to his own house, while His house has lain waste. We have worked from the wrong base of operations. We have not made first things first. If we do not trust in the Lord with all our heart, but lean to our own understanding; if in all our ways we do not acknowledge Him; if our eyes are not single to his interests, we need not be surprised when He calls for a drought upon the land. Let us consider our ways, and amend them.

Haggai 1:6 Emptiness Without God

November 25, 2006 — by Herbert Vander Lugt

A little bit of doggerel goes as follows: "A cheerful old bear at the zoo could always find something to do. When it bored him, you know, to walk to and fro, he reversed it and walked fro and to!" The writer apparently thought people could learn a lesson from the bear, for these creatures seem to be quite happy as long as they have enough food to eat and a few of their own kind around them.

This is not true of humans, however. The Israelites who had returned from Babylon discovered that man cannot find happiness when he lives only for himself. They ignored the fact that God's temple had not been rebuilt, but gave themselves to the construction of fine houses and completely occupied themselves with materialistic things. Yet their harvests were poor, their clothing inadequate, and their wages did not keep pace with rising costs (Hag. 1:6). The prophet told them they were reaping a harvest of unhappiness because they were putting selfish pleasures first.

God has made us in His own image and for His glory. We can never find true joy until we obey Christ's admonition to seek "first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). Only then will we sow and reap abundantly, and eat and truly be filled.

O the emptiness of life without the Savior!

Nothing worldly here can truly satisfy;

We can only reap a harvest that's abundant,

Serving Jesus as to self we daily die. —Bosch

Selfish gratification will lead to spiritual stagnation.

Haggai 1:7 Careful Thought

READ: Haggai 1

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways!" —Haggai 1:7

Have you ever locked your keys inside your car? Mailed an envelope without putting the payment check inside? Baked a recipe without adding one of the main ingredients?

These are the kinds of things we all do when we don't give careful thought to what we are doing. Careless thinking means we either do something we shouldn't do or fail to do something we should. These wrong actions or irresponsible inactions can be minor inconveniences—or they can have serious lasting consequences.

You would think the people in Haggai's day wouldn't have committed thoughtless mistakes. Just 20 years before, they were living in exile in Babylon because they had disobeyed God. Now they were back in Jerusalem, but they were living as if that whole exile episode had never happened.

So through the prophet Haggai, God told them, "Consider your ways!" (Haggai 1:7). Then He told them their mistake: They were living selfish lives of luxury instead of completing God's temple. Careless thinking had led to wrong decisions and inaction.

God wants us to give careful thought to our actions, words, and relationships, and make decisions that bring glory to Him. Whatever you do today, give it careful thought.—Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Let us think about what's good—
What's right and pure and true;
May God's Word control our thoughts
In everything we do. —Fitzhugh

Keep your thoughts in line, or they'll lead you astray.

Haggai 1:7 Consider Your Ways

READ: Haggai 1:10-14

EVIL spreads like a contagious disease. Just as one person coughing in an airplane can infect all the passengers, evil infects all within its radius of influence.

Holiness, on the other hand, must be deliberately sought. We do not become holy by associating with godly people. Holiness comes as a result of seeking the Lord.

That is the point Haggai made centuries ago when he explained that meat set apart for sacrifice to God could not make other food holy by coming in contact with it (Hag 2:12). Ceremonial uncleanness, on the other hand, could be transmitted by a mere touch (Hag 2:13).

Haggai told the people of Israel, who assumed they were holy because of their godly heritage, that they had become defiled because of their disobedience (Hag 2:14). Having devout parents and associating with religious friends may help us see the value of a holy life, but neither can make us holy. To be holy, we must give ourselves to God and then live and walk in His ways.—H W Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Haggai 1:9 C H Spurgeon Morning and evening

"Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house." — Haggai 1:9

Churlish souls stint their contributions to the ministry and missionary operations, and call such saving good economy; little do they dream that they are thus impoverishing themselves. Their excuse is that they must care for their own families, and they forget that to neglect the house of God is the sure way to bring ruin upon their own houses. Our God has a method in providence by which he can succeed our endeavours beyond our expectation, or can defeat our plans to our confusion and dismay; by a turn of his hand he can steer our vessel in a profitable channel, or run it aground in poverty and bankruptcy. It is the teaching of Scripture that the Lord enriches the liberal and leaves the miserly to find out that withholding tendeth to poverty. In a very wide sphere of observation, I have noticed that the most generous Christians of my acquaintance have been always the most happy, and almost invariably the

most prosperous. I have seen the liberal giver rise to wealth of which he never dreamed; and I have as often seen the mean, ungenerous churl descend to poverty by the very parsimony by which he thought to rise. Men trust good stewards with larger and larger sums, and so it frequently is with the Lord; he gives by cartloads to those who give by bushels. Where wealth is not bestowed the Lord makes the little much by the contentment which the sanctified heart feels in a portion of which the tithe has been dedicated to the Lord. Selfishness looks first at home, but godliness seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, yet in the long run selfishness is loss, and godliness is great gain. It needs faith to act towards our God with an open hand, but surely he deserves it of us; and all that we can do is a very poor acknowledgment of our amazing indebtedness to his goodness.

Haggai 1:12-15 The people feared the LORD. - Haggai 1:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

The popular children's television program Reading Rainbow ended its 26-year run last summer. During this time, it won more than two dozen Emmy awards and was widely admired for inspiring children to fall in love with books and reading. Hosted by actor LeVar Burton, the show didn't address how to read but why to read, as reflected in the theme song: "Butterfly in the sky, I can go twice as high, Take a look, it's in a book." Children responded positively to the show's message.

In today's reading, the Jewish exiles who had returned to the Promised Land responded positively to God's message as brought by Haggai. This makes for a refreshing change in our month's study! Jonah eventually obeyed, but much of the time he acted like a stubborn donkey being pulled along a mountain path. The Ninevites responded to Jonah's message with humble repentance, but by Nahum's time their sins were so great that God judged them by totally destroying their city. Here at last in Haggai we find a group of people who, upon hearing the word of the Lord, simply got up and did it.

Thanks to Haggai's precise dating, we know that a mere 23 days passed between receiving the prophecy and restarting the temple building project. This short time tells us that Zerubbabel and Joshua were highly effective leaders and that the hearts of the people were spiritually receptive and responsive. They obeyed and feared the Lord, meaning they showed awe and reverence for Him (v. 12; cf. Deut. 31:12-13). For this reason, He renewed the covenant promise they most wanted to hear: "I am with you" (v. 13; cf. Matt. 28:19-20). What was the key to their obedience? From a human perspective, they got their hearts right with God and made the right choice to obey Him. From God's perspective, He "stirred up" their spirits or moved their hearts, a phrase suggesting both passion and action. In short, He spiritually transformed their self-centered hearts, enabling them to seek Him and choose to do the right thing (v. 14; cf. Ezra 1:5).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Now it's your turn to "give careful thought to your ways." Would an outsider looking at your decisions and way of life know that God was at its center? Worship and obedience are key, but we can't simply "will ourselves" to do them. We need God's help to seek Him and make right choices. We need Him to stir up our spirits and transform our hearts so that we can be better followers of Him. Let this be the cry of our souls today and every day!

HAGGAI 2

Haggai 2:1-5

My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear. - Haggai 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the most recent Super Bowl between the New Orleans Saints and the Indianapolis Colts, college football star Tim Tebow of the University of Florida played a starring role—not in the game, but in an advertisement aired during the game. The pro-life ad, sponsored by Focus on the Family, featured Tim and his mother, Pam. Pam discussed how she had almost aborted Tim, and viewers were directed to a Web site for more information. The ad sparked controversy before it even aired, but Tim Tebow and everyone involved stood their ground.

It takes courage to obey God's Word, as seen in today's reading. The date of this prophecy was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a harvest festival and the same holy day during which King Solomon had dedicated the original temple (v. 1). Again the prophecy was addressed specifically to the main political and religious leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, and then to the people in general (v. 2).

No doubt the older returnees from exile, possibly including Haggai himself, remembered the original glory of Solomon's temple.

Unquestionably the new temple was nowhere near as splendid as the old one (v. 3). God knew it, the people knew it, and the leaders knew it. The book of Ezra records that when the new temple was dedicated, shouts of joy were mixed with sounds of weeping (3:10-13). Feeling discouraged was a natural result of recalling the nation's and temple's former glory and why it had been lost—their sin and God's judgment of conquest and exile.

In the face of these very human emotions, God Himself encouraged the people to “be strong” or “take courage” (v. 4, NLT; cf. Josh. 1:6-7). The size and beauty of the temple wasn't the point. The point was that God was their God and He was with them once again—the same God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and shepherded them throughout their history (v. 5). Their responsibility was faithfully to do the work of rebuilding, not to mope around comparing their lives to the supposed “good old days.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you wonder where the “good old days” went? Do you think something you've done wrong has ruined everything? Be strong, take courage, your God is still with you. Be faithful to the work to which He has called you. Do not compare what you're doing now to the apparent “glory” of the past. Do not compare yourself to the next person about who is the “greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:1-4). Trust that God “will keep you strong to the end” (1 Cor. 1:8-9).

Haggai 2:4 Courage To Continue

READ: Haggai 2:1-9

"Be strong, all you people of the land," says the Lord, "and work; for I am with you." --Haggai 2:4

I enjoy my job, so usually I am eager to get out of bed and go to work. But one day I became discouraged when I thought about my family's financial security. Was I providing enough? Other people seemed to be doing so much better. I grew fearful as I thought about the future, and those fears sapped my zest for life.

It would have been helpful for me to recall what God had said through Haggai to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from exile. Even though they had started enthusiastically to rebuild the temple, they became discouraged. Memories of Solomon's glorious temple made their work seem insignificant by comparison.

They needed courage. So God told them, "Be strong, all you people of the land, ... and work; for I am with you" (Haggai 2:4).

How can we find courage? Some find it in a group. Some depend on their achievements. Some try to boost their self-confidence by raising their voice. But these do nothing more than camouflage their insecurity.

As God's people, our confidence comes from our relationship with Him. He is with us. We are His people. As we keep these truths in mind, we will find courage to continue working in a way that pleases Him and brings us joy. —Albert Lee ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God has said He will not leave us,
That He never will forsake;
We can trust His Word unchanging,
And new hope and courage take. —Anon.

We find courage to stand when we kneel before the Lord.

Haggai 2:4 Strengthened For The Work

July 14, 1996 — by David C. Egner

It was my privilege to spend time with a group of church leaders at a pastors conference. It soon became evident that the rugged demands of the pastorate and the idealistic expectations of some congregations were taking a toll on these faithful servants of the Lord. Some were burned out and emotionally exhausted. Others were asking hard questions about the primary responsibilities of a pastor and how to find time for everything.

Some were stressed by the “watchdog” members of their church—you know, the kind who watch every little move and let you know if you're even slightly out of step. Other pastors wondered how to know when it's time to leave.

In one meeting, the conference director brought an encouraging message from the book of Haggai. He reminded these faithful laborers in Christ's church of Haggai's words from the Lord to Zerubbabel, the leader of the project to rebuild the temple: “Be strong” (2:4), “I am with you” (v.4), “I will bless you” (v.19), and “I have chosen you” (v.23).

These words from the Lord should encourage all who are weary in the work of God. If you're stressed and exhausted, remember that God is with you and He will strengthen you for the work He's called you to do. ([Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God gives to His servants this promise:
"I never will leave you alone;
And when you grow weak in your struggle,
My strength will prevail—not your own." —Hess

God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

Haggai 2:5 Isaiah 63:7-14

I am with you ... [as] I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains with you. - Haggai 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

On July 9, 2005, a special birth occurred. Initial photos showed a tiny pink object, weighing about four ounces, clinging to its mother. Weeks later, when the baby's eyes began to open, new photos emerged, and the public fell in love with Tai Shan—Panda fever began!

Because baby panda bears are so helpless, the mother must hold the baby next to her for its first few weeks, constantly suckling and licking the tiny cub, which squeals often and loudly!

This care and devotion helps us to picture God's grace and mercy with His children. Exodus 12-18 records how God powerfully rescued His people from bondage in Egypt. Centuries later, the prophet Isaiah reflected back on the Exodus in light of God's coming judgment upon the sinful nation Judah. Isaiah helps us to understand the Spirit's constant presence during the Exodus.

Haggai 2:6-9

The desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory. - Haggai 2:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

To a previous generation, CBS newscaster Walter Cronkite was an authoritative voice. If he said it, it must be true. From 1962 to 1981, he stood for good journalism and "middle America." His reports on politics, the Kennedy assassination, the Vietnam War, the first moon landing, Watergate, and other national and world events were models of objectivity, compassion, and hard-nosed integrity. When he died last summer at the age of 92, his obituaries invariably cited his reputation as "the most trusted man in America."

If we can trust the words of a television anchorman as reliable, how much more can we trust the words of God as completely certain? The Lord continued to encourage the people in today's reading by giving them the big picture and looking ahead in time to a great day when the "desired of all nations" would come (vv. 6-7). The phrase "once more" reminded them of God's mighty power. No one can stand against it. When He decided to liberate slaves from Egypt, it was done. When He decided Assyria's time was up as a world superpower, it was done. When He decides to shake things up, it is done. History irresistibly follows His decrees!

The writer of Hebrews referenced these verses as applying to Christ's Second Coming, God's final judgment of the nations, and the consummation of all things (12:26-29). This Haggai passage is therefore both messianic and eschatological. In the past, God's glory had filled a literal tabernacle and temple, but in the future, it would be most clearly revealed in the coming of His Son.

The advent of Christ was, and is, the turning point and climax of God's plan for history. The Jewish returnees needed to hold fast to the truth of God's sovereignty, His ordering of all world events (vv. 8-9). If He decided to fill the new temple with silver and gold, it would be done (Ezra 6:8). If He decided global riches will come to Zion in the end times, it will happen (Isa. 60:1-5). He sent His Son to be the Prince of Peace, and when He establishes that peace we will inherit a "kingdom that cannot be shaken."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God was teaching the people a lesson in how He sees things, and as a consequence, how we should strive to see things. From a human perspective, "first" and "last" might be obvious, but God has a way of turning that upside down (Luke 13:30). From a worldly perspective, "strong" and "weak" seem clear, but the Lord has a way of reversing that, too (1 Cor. 1:25-29). We must see not through earthly eyes but through His eyes.

Haggai 2:8 IT'S GODS

Haggai 2:1-9

The silver is mine, and the gold is Mine," says the Lord of hosts. - Haggai 2:8

My friend Cindy subscribes to the Tightwad Gazette, a newsletter dedicated to "promoting thrift as a viable alternative lifestyle."

The monthly publication is filled with money-saving ideas such as vacuuming furnace filters and reusing them, and using shredded newspaper for cat litter. Cindy tells me that living by the Gazette's philosophy can save people a lot of money.

Now, I agree that a free-spending way of life can lead to serious trouble. So it's smart to shop wisely and follow principles of good stewardship. But for some people, being a tightwad takes on a deeper meaning. They become obsessed with saving every penny or hoarding things to protect themselves in the event of an economic collapse. They put their trust in their own resourcefulness instead of in God and His ability to meet their needs.

No matter how great the amount we save, however it cannot compare with the riches that God has. He owns everything! He owns all the silver and gold on earth (Hag. 2:8). The earth and everything in it are His (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-11).

Yes, the One who has promised to meet our needs has all the resources of the universe to back it up. And He gives without measure. -- David C. Egener ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God owns the riches of the earth
And all its hidden treasure,
And He provides for all His own -
It is the Father's pleasure.-Fasick

To be rich in God is better than to be rich in goods.

Haggai 2:8–9 F B Meyer Our Daily Homily

The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former. (r.v.)

The new Temple was deficient in the splendid adornment which Solomon had lavished on the first. Neither gold, nor silver, nor precious stones garnished its bare walls. But Haggai says that this lack was not due to any failure in the resources of Israel's God. The silver and the gold were his; and if He had chosen He could have poured them without stint into the lap of his people. But He purposely withheld them, that their attention might not be distracted from the spiritual glory which was to make the second Temple more famous than the lavished gold of Parvaim. The latter glory of this house, or the glory of this latter house, shall be greater, saith the Lord of Hosts; and then, as though to indicate that the glory was to be moral and spiritual, the Divine voice adds, "And in this place will I give peace."

Dear child of God, it has pleased thy Heavenly Father to withhold from thee both gold and silver. Thou hast just enough to live on, but that is all. With the apostle thou sayest, "Silver and gold have I none." God could have done otherwise for thee; for the silver and gold are his. But He purposely abstained lest thy head should be lifted up; lest thy attention should be so absorbed by these things as to neglect the sure riches; lest the radiance of thy faith, which is more precious than gold tried in the fire, or the beauty of thy meek and quiet spirit, should be obscured by the tawdry sheen of earth's metals.

But peace, and righteousness, and meek humility, are of everlasting work. Cultivate these; let thy life be a Temple whose glory is the indwelling of God; expect that the Desire of all nations should make thee his home, and shine through thee to others.

Haggai 2:9 - The latter glory of this House shall be greater than the former.

In this chapter there are three messages, all of which were called forth by moods of the people which threatened to prevent their accomplishment of the great work. The first message aroused them, and under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, they started well. After about seven weeks came the feast of Tabernacles with its necessary cessation of work. During that period they were assailed by the lamentations of those who bemoaned the poverty of the House they were building, in comparison with the glorious House which had been destroyed. Such lamentation tended to dishearten them, and to correct this the prophet made this great declaration. Here again is a persistent peril. Men are constantly tempted to think meanly of the work they are doing as they compare it with the glories of past achievements. It is an utterly false and unwarranted thing to do. To that House, lacking in some material splendour which had characterized the former one, there was to come the Desire of all nations, and so a spiritual glory which the former House never knew. Let us lay the lesson to heart. We may be working better and

greater things than we know. It is always futile to judge the value of God-appointed tasks by the appearance of the hour in which they are done. If they are indeed appointed by Him, that is enough for us to know; and more, that is the assurance that they are better than the past, for God is ever moving towards the higher, the grander, the nobler; and will do so, until He has wrought out the final perfection of His will.- G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications

Haggai 2:10-14

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. - Psalm 51:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Pacific and Atlantic Oceans contain large areas called “garbage patches.” These are massive offshore regions in which trash is accumulating, with plastic waste especially threatening the health of fish and other marine animals. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which is the size of the state of Texas, is well-known, but its Atlantic cousin has only recently been identified. The width of the Atlantic version is currently unknown but its length is roughly the distance from Cuba to Virginia. Plastic waste can be found as deep as 65 feet down, and trash density in these patches can be as high as 1.9 million bits of plastic per square mile.

Such pollution is a violation of God’s mandate to care for His creation. It is also a reminder of the consequences of impurity in both the physical and spiritual realms. In today’s reading, Haggai reminds the people of the importance of purity in obeying the word of the Lord. Two months had passed since his previous message, during which time Zechariah had begun his prophetic ministry (v. 10).

This message is delivered in the form of legal questions; the apparent purpose of these questions is to get official rulings on issues of ceremonial purity according to the Law. This implies a public or formal occasion and heightens the significance of the message. The first question asked, Can holiness be passed on by contact (vv. 11-12)? The answer came: No, purity cannot be transmitted in that way. The second question asked, Can unholiness be passed on in that way (v. 13)? The answer to this question was Yes (cf. Lev. 22:4-7).

Through these questions, God was highlighting the contrast between purity and impurity, obedience and disobedience. The issue was not whether the people had been offering sacrifices, but the state of their hearts (v. 14). They had been told to “give careful thought to your ways”—and now God was giving them His evaluation of their previous ways. Their worship had been rendered meaningless by their disobedience. God’s response to their corrupt worship is the subject of tomorrow’s devotional.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do we go to church as a matter of habit only? Are our minds elsewhere when Scripture is being preached? Instead of worship and praise, do we focus on what people are wearing? Do we think God meant that message for our neighbor? Do we act as though mere attendance has a purifying effect on our lives? True worship comes from the heart, the Word is supposed to change us, and fellowship is to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24-25).

Haggai 2:15-19

From this day on I will bless you. - Haggai 2:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Ingathering, was established in the Mosaic Law as an occasion of gratitude to the Lord for the harvest (Lev. 23:33-43; Deut. 16:13-17). It typically took place in the seventh month on the Jewish calendar, or in September or October by our calendar. The people lived in booths in order to commemorate the Exodus and the long journey from Egypt to Canaan. Their thankfulness was not just for a specific year’s harvest but also for the general fruitfulness of the Promised Land.

In today’s reading, Haggai called upon the Israelites to consider their ways in light of the poor harvests they had experienced since returning from exile (vv. 15-17; cf. Amos 4:9). Prior to resuming work of building a new temple, they had seen only poor harvests and empty barns. This was true of all crops, including staples such as grapes and olives and more exotic items such as figs and pomegranates. In case they hadn’t noticed, their hollow spiritual condition correlated with their meager return for their physical labor. All they did turned out poorly, because God made it turn out poorly, yet they hadn’t seemed to understand why. The day they responded in faith to Haggai’s ministry was the turning point (vv. 18-19). Assuming they continued to obey and rebuild the temple, God promised to bless the harvests to come.

God had responded to their empty worship and neglect of His house by continuing to pursue them with His love. He sent a prophet,

Haggai. He gave warnings by making their farming unsuccessful—a significant judgment in an agricultural society. Once they had heard and obeyed and gotten back to building the temple, He promised to provide for and bless them in ways that contrasted with their recent failures. This “before and after” snapshot sent a clear message that He was pleased with their heartfelt response to His exhortations. God had shepherded the people from being oblivious, defiled, and disobedient to being obedient, responsive, and pleasing to Him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In studying the book of Jonah, we learned that our God is a God of second (and more!) chances. This is true not only for individuals like Jonah but also for groups of people and even entire nations such as the Jews in today’s reading. Neither Jonah nor they were “worthy” of God’s patience and all the effort He made to show them His love and call them back to Himself. The fact is that none of us are “worthy” of God’s love ... a fact which brings Him more glory!

Haggai 2:17 Why Am I Not Blessed?

READ: Haggai 2:10-19

I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me. --Haggai 2:17

When my friends from the United States came to visit me in Singapore, I was surprised that they walked into my home without removing their shoes. Because of our cultural differences, I thought their lack of concern about tracking in dirt was strange.

As you read Haggai 2, you may think all the talk about holy meat and dead bodies is peculiar (vv.12-15). But the Lord wasn't just concerned about physical cleanliness. He used those object lessons to help the people of Judah to remember what had happened to them after they returned from exile in Babylon.

The sinful attitudes of a few had spread and defiled the whole community. Instead of rebuilding the temple, they had focused on constructing their own homes (Hag 1:4). And because of their sin, they lost God's blessing. Then the Lord, like a father who longs for a close relationship with His child, disciplined them to encourage them to return to Him (Hag 2:17).

When Haggai came along, they renewed their commitment to God. So the prophet challenged them to remain faithful, and he said the Lord would bless them abundantly (v.19).

Are you enjoying the blessings of a close relationship with God? Or do you need to turn from sin and renew your commitment to Him? —Albert Lee ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Our sinful ways can sap our joy
And isolate us from the Lord;
Confession and repentance, though,
Provide the way to be restored. —Sper

God sometimes takes us into troubled waters—not to drown us but to cleanse us.

Haggai 2:17 C H Spurgeon Morning and evening

“I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands.” — Haggai 2:17

How destructive is the hail to the standing crops, beating out the precious grain upon the ground! How grateful ought we to be when the corn is spared so terrible a ruin! Let us offer unto the Lord thanksgiving. Even more to be dreaded are those mysterious destroyers—smut, bunt, rust, and mildew. These turn the ear into a mass of soot, or render it putrid, or dry up the grain, and all in a manner so beyond all human control that the farmer is compelled to cry, “This is the finger of God.” Innumerable minute fungi cause the mischief, and were it not for the goodness of God, the rider on the black horse would soon scatter famine over the land. Infinite mercy spares the food of men, but in view of the active agents which are ready to destroy the harvest, right wisely are we taught to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” The curse is abroad; we have constant need of the blessing. When blight and mildew come they are chastisements from heaven, and men must learn to hear the rod, and him that hath appointed it.

Spiritually, mildew is no uncommon evil. When our work is most promising this blight appears. We hoped for many conversions, and lo! a general apathy, an abounding worldliness, or a cruel hardness of heart! There may be no open sin in those for whom we are labouring, but there is a deficiency of sincerity and decision sadly disappointing our desires. We learn from this our dependence upon the Lord, and the need of prayer that no blight may fall upon our work. Spiritual pride or sloth will soon bring upon us the dreadful evil, and only the Lord of the harvest can remove it. Mildew may even attack our own hearts, and shrivel our prayers and religious exercises. May it please the great Husbandman to avert so serious a calamity. Shine, blessed Sun of Righteousness, and

drive the blights away.

Haggai 2:19 Holiness

Read: Haggai 2:10-19

From this day I will bless you. --Haggai 2:19

Holiness is hard work. That's one of the messages Haggai the prophet gave to the exiles returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Haggai gave the example of an Israelite who carried in his garment meat that had been set apart for use in the temple. The garment was considered holy because of what it carried, but that holiness could not be transferred to another object (Hag 2:12). In contrast, ceremonial uncleanness would pollute whatever it touched (Hag 2:13).

That tells us something about how carefully we must live in this world. We are easily soiled by the filth that sweeps around us each day. It's a bit like what happens with little boys. They always come home dirtier than when they left. Dirt, grass, and bicycle grease all seem to attach themselves to active boys. The only way to keep them clean is to keep them away from the grime.

When children get dirty, they can be cleaned up. But the people of Haggai's day had been defiled by disobedience and selfishness. The prophet said their cleanup would begin when they responded to his message and put God first. Then, as verse 19 explains, God's favor would return. Holiness would lead to blessing.

Obedience to God is difficult--but it's worth it. --J D Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

More purity give me, more strength to o'ercome,
More freedom from earth-stains, more longings for home;
More fit for the kingdom, more used would I be,
More blessed and holy--more, Savior, like Thee. --Bliss

A small step of obedience is a giant step toward blessing.

Haggai 2:19 C H Spurgeon Faith's Checkbook

From Obedience to Blessing

"From this day will I bless you."—Haggai 2:19

FUTURE things are hidden from us. Yet here is a glass in which we may see the unborn years. The Lord says, "From this day will I bless you."

It is worthwhile to note the day which is referred to in this promise. There had been failure of crops, blasting, and mildew, and all because of the people's sin. Now, the Lord saw these chastened ones commencing to obey His word and build His temple, and therefore He says, "From the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider. From this day will I bless you." If we have lived in any sin, and the Spirit leads us to purge ourselves of it, we may reckon upon the blessing of the Lord. His smile, His Spirit, His grace, His fuller revelation of His truth will all prove to us an enlarged blessing. We may fall into greater opposition from man because of our faithfulness, but we shall rise to closer dealings with the Lord our God and a clearer sight of our acceptance in Him.

Lord, I am resolved to be more true to thee and more exact in my following of thy doctrine and thy precept; and I pray thee, therefore, by Christ Jesus, to increase the blessedness of my daily life henceforth and forever.

Haggai 2:21 Earthquake Power

READ: Hebrews 12:25-29

I will shake heaven and earth. --Haggai 2:21

Have you ever been through an earthquake? Several years ago a mild quake awoke me with the swaying and trembling of the house. It was not severe and did not greatly disturb me. I am told that a really severe earthquake is a fearful experience. Much of the fear, however, may depend on the view one takes of the phenomenon.

During an earthquake that occurred many years ago, the inhabitants of a village were extremely alarmed. Yet they were also surprised at the calmness exhibited by an old woman whom they all knew. Eventually one of them asked the woman, "Aren't you afraid?" "No," she answered. "I rejoice to know that I have a God who can shake the world!" She had no fear because of her confidence in her God, who could rattle the world in His hand.

There is a future "shaking," a final universal earthquake coming. In Hebrews 12 we read, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (v.26). So great will this cataclysm be that Isaiah tells us "the earth will move out of her place" (Isa. 13:13). In that day we'll be safe with our Lord, and we'll be glad that He who shakes the universe is our God and our Savior. —M. R. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Great God of wonders! All Thy ways
Are matchless, Godlike, and divine;
But the fair glories of Thy grace
More Godlike and unrivaled shine. --Davies

Nothing can shake those who are secure in God's hands

Haggai 2:20-23

I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you. - Haggai 2:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book *Turning Points*, historian Mark Noll has identified a dozen "decisive moments in the history of Christianity." They range from the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to the Council of Nicaea in 325 to the conversion of the Wesleys in 1738 to the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910. In each of these pivotal events, the church stood at a crossroads involving and interweaving history, doctrine, and sociopolitical and cultural forces and trends. The decisions and actions of key leaders at these times, under God's sovereignty, shaped the future of the church for years to come.

As we can now see, the book of Haggai is the story of a turning point in the spiritual life of God's people. They had gone from neglecting the new temple and the spiritual state of their own hearts to obediently rebuilding the temple and joyfully participating in genuine worship. They had moved from self-centered to God-centered, and as a result were poised to experience His blessing on their harvests and community.

Today's final message is addressed to Zerubbabel, and it parallels the messianic passage earlier in the chapter (vv. 6-9). The first part reaffirms that God is sovereign and has a plan for the nations (vv. 21-22). The second part portrays Zerubbabel as a "signet ring" on God's hand (v. 23). One meaning of this image was that God would bless Zerubbabel as a leader, as opposed to King Jehoiachin, who as a "signet ring" had been discarded (Jer. 22:24-25).

A second meaning of this picture was that Zerubbabel was a type or foreshadowing of Christ (cf. Zech. 3:8). Generally, a king's signet ring carries the authority of the king, just as Christ the Son is equivalent in authority to God the Father (John 17:2). From our vantage point in history, we know that Zerubbabel was in the line of David and an ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:12). Zerubbabel, then, was chosen by God to lead in a special task, rebuilding the temple, at a key time in history, and both who he was and what he did had spiritual significance beyond that time, just as God had planned.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We know that Messiah has come, and He will come again. We can have hope and confidence! "While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ," we are "to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives" so as to become "a people that are [Christ's] very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14). Christ says, "'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

Haggai 2:23 Signet Ring

Haggai 2:20-23

I will take you... and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you. —Haggai 2:23

In some ancient kingdoms, a king who wanted to mark or secure a document with his seal used his signet ring. He pressed it into softened wax and allowed it to harden into an unbroken seal that bore the mark of his ring. The signet ring represented the honor, authority, and personal guarantee of the king, so it was highly valued.

In Haggai 2:23, we read that God said He would make Zerubbabel "like a signet ring." This was an incredible statement, because the Lord had pronounced judgment on his grandfather Coniah (Jehoiachin) and his family line (Jeremiah 22:24-30). God had said that even if Coniah were a signet ring, He would still pull him off.

Years later, though, Zerubbabel led a group of Jews back to Jerusalem after their exile in Babylon. Because of his obedience to God and his efforts to rebuild the temple, the Lord referred to Zerubbabel as a valued signet ring (Haggai 2:23).

We know that God is just and that sin carries its consequences. But we must not forget that God is also merciful and blesses those who do what He asks them to do.

When we are obedient to the Lord, we too can experience the joy of being like God's signet ring—pleasing to Him and useful for His purposes.—Albert Lee ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O what can I give to the Master,
The One who from sin set me free?
I'll give Him a lifetime of service
To thank Him for dying for me.
—K. De Haan

The way of obedience is the way of blessing

Exposition of Haggai

by C H Spurgeon

Haggai 1:1, 2. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying. This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

God keeps an almanack, and the date on which he speaks is always important. There is a set time for each of his messages to come to men, and God would have them give heed to every message as soon as it is delivered to them. If they do not, he keeps count of the days of their delay; and therefore he is particular in causing his servants to record the exact date when his message was delivered: "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest." Oh that God would make this very day notable in our history by speaking to the hearts of many here!

Notice, too, that God also takes care to direct his messages to those for whom they are intended. The word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel and to Joshua. God knows to whom his message is specially addressed to-day, and he will not let it miss its mark. Oh, that someone here would cry unto him, and say, "Lord, speak to me, as thou didst to Zerubbabel; and not to me only, but to such-and-such another, as thou didst to Joshua."

"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say."

So that the Lord notes what people say, and in due time he reminds them of what they have said. Sometimes, he makes men eat their own words; but, if not, he at least recalls them to their remembrance: "This people say, The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built." Delay has always been one of the strongest of Satan's temptations even with God's own people, who far too often say, even concerning his work which they know ought to be done, "The time is not come." How much more would be done for God if we would all do at once what ought to be done! We could then go on to something else, and make our lives still more useful and fruitful. But we delay so long the carrying out of one good purpose that there remains no opportunity for another. If any of you Christian people are tempted to put off some service for God which lies upon your heart, I pray you to remember your Lord's words, and to imitate his prompt action, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

Haggai 1:3, 4. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

“There seems to be time enough for you to enjoy the luxuries of life, but not time for you to rebuild the temple of the Lord;-time enough for you to get rich, but not time for you to serve God;-time enough for you to spend your labor upon anything for yourself, but not upon the house of your God!” What a rebuke was this to those who professed to be the Lord’s people!

Haggai 1:5. Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; consider your ways.

“Just look back a little, and see what have already been the consequences of looking to yourselves, and not to your God; have you gained anything by so acting?”

Haggai 1:6. Ye have sown much, and bring in little;

“You have sown much to yourselves, but little to God; what has your sowing brought in to you?”

Haggai 1:6. Ye eat, but ye have not enough;

“Those of you who do seem to prosper are not content with what you have. Peace of mind does not come with it; you are not happy.”

Haggai 1:6. Ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink;

“You are as thirsty as ever after all your drinking from the earthly cistern, yet you still crave for more of that drink which can never quench your soul’s thirst.”

Haggai 1:6. Ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put into a bag with holes.

How often does this happen! Yet what folly it is for a man to work hard, and earn wages, and then put the money into a bag with holes, and so lose it all!

Haggai 1:7-9. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

Again I beg you to note what a stern rebuke this was, yet how richly was it deserved! God had done great things for his people; he had brought them back from Babylon to Jerusalem, and their first concern should have been to rebuild the temple which had been destroyed. But every man was more concerned for his own house than for the house of the Lord, and, therefore, no good could come of whatever they did, or whatever they had. “I did blow upon it,” said the Lord; and when God blows upon whatever a man has, or upon whatever a man does, he soon blows it away, as the marginal reading says.

Haggai 1:10, 11. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.

We are dependent upon God for everything, and sometimes he makes use of the ordinary laws of nature to be a chastisement to those who forget him. If we will not be reminded of him by his mercies, we shall be reminded by his judgments; and if, as stewards, we do not make a proper use of that which he entrusts to us, he can easily take it all away.

Haggai 1:12. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the word of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.

What a blessing it is when faithful testimony is thus received! Sometimes it happens that people get angry, and hate the preacher who too plainly rebukes them for their sins; but when the Spirit of God works within them, they take heed to what is said, and receive the preacher’s message as from God himself.

Haggai 1:13. Then spake Haggai the LORD’S messenger in the LORD’S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.

Haggai was the Lord’s messenger, so he did not utter his own words; but he “spoke in the Lord’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith Jehovah.” He was with them, so they were with him; and it is the same with us if we are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he says to us, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;” and if we have the presence of God, we have all that we need.

Haggai 1:14, 15. And the LORD stirred up the Spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the Spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

God takes note of the time when his people work for him; he records, in his almanack, the day, the month, the year, for he loves to see his people actively engaged in his service.

Haggai 2:1. In the eleventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying,

God's people need to be spoken to very often; and every time God speaks to them, he takes account of it. Let us do the same: let us not think it is such an unimportant matter for us to hear a gospel sermon that we need not take note when we hear it. Oh, that the Word of the Lord were more precious to us in these days! Let us praise God for it, and not reckon it to be so common a thing that we take no more notice of it than we do of eating our breakfast or sitting down to our supper.

Haggai 2:2, 3. Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?

There could not have been many persons left who had seen Solomon's temple. If any such were still living at that time, they must have been extremely aged persons; yet there were many there whose fathers had seen it, and who had heard from their fathers, when they sat upon their knees as children, what a glorious place the house of God had been in Solomon's day.

Haggai 2:4. Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:

This is the second time that Haggai was sent with this message. It was so rich, so full, so divinely encouraging, that the Lord might well repeat it: "I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts."

Haggai 2:5-7. According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of host.

So it happened that, to the second temple, the Babe of Bethlehem was brought, that glorious "Desire of all nations" whom we worship; and thus it came to pass that the glory of the second house was, after all, far greater than the glory of the first.

Haggai 2:8. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.

The released captives had not much of it with which to build the second temple, but God had all that was needed, and he was willing to supply them with enough for all the needs of the great work which they had undertaken in his name.

Haggai 2:9. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

The Prince of peace gave peace to many in that second temple.

Haggai 2:10. In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,

Here is another message from the Lord, and the date of its delivery is as carefully noted as the dates of those that had preceded it.

Haggai 2:11-14. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; And now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD, and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.

That which is ceremonially holy cannot communicate its holiness to that which is unclean; but that which is

unclean, in the eyes of the law, can communicate its uncleanness to anything that touches it. These people, being themselves defiled with sin, could not bring to God either acceptable service or acceptable offerings.

Haggai 2:15-17. And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labors of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD.

How often, in these two chapters, the word "Consider" occurs! And this subject of the Lord's chastisement was well worthy of his people's earnest and solemn consideration, yet they were not brought to repentance by all that they suffered.

Haggai 2:18, 19. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.

That was indeed a memorable day in their history; I trust that many of us can also remember such a notable day in our life, when the Lord said to us, "From this day will I bless you."

Haggai 2:13-14

C H SPURGEON

SERMON NOTES

Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. (14) Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean. — Haggai 2:13-14

HE prophet makes the priests witness against themselves and the people. This was a powerful means of forcing home the truth.

It is clear from verse 12 that the mere bearing of a holy thing did not enable the bearer to communicate consecration.

But the priests owned that the touch of an unclean person did communicate uncleanness.

What a picture! An unclean person making everything unclean wherever he laid his hand! He could not move without spreading defilement on all sides.

Such were the erring people of Haggai's day in the judgment of their God, and he never judges too severely.

Such are sinful men at this day.

I. THE TERRIBLE UNCLEANNESS. Here we keep to our text.

For a New Testament exposition, read Titus 1:15.

1. Common things are polluted by men of unclean nature.

Nothing is common or unclean naturally; for every creature of God is good (1 Tim. 4:4). But in diverse ways the things of ordinary life are made to be unclean—

By making gods of them, saying, "What shall we eat?" etc.

By excess in the use of them. By gluttony, drunkenness, etc.

By excess in the keeping of them. A miser's goods are accursed.

By ingratitude concerning them. Then they remain unblessed.

2. Holy things are polluted by men of unclean nature.

They use the gospel as an excuse for sin.

They offer prayer in solemn mockery.

They make praise into a musical performance.

They turn the sacraments into hypocrisy or worse.

There is nothing so holy but that sin can defile it.

3. Good works are polluted when they come from evil men: "so is every work of their hands."

They can be charitable for ostentation.

They can be religious to be seen of men.

They can be sternly righteous in order to be revenged.

They can be humble to gain their ends.

4. Sacrifices are polluted when offered by unclean men: "and that which they offer there is unclean."

Their public thanksgivings are a falsehood.

Their solemn fasts are a mere comedy.

What a wretched condition is he in who even in his holiest acts is defiling everything! He may well pause and humble himself before God, for the more he does in his present state the more does he defile.

Sin has cast a serpent's trail over the whole universe, making the creation itself subject to vanity. What does man touch which he does not degrade and pollute? Here is a wide field for thought, and abundant cause for humiliation.

II. THE ALL-SUFFICIENT REMEDY. Here we go beyond our text.

In Numbers 19, we have the type of the great remedy, and a fuller account of the uncleanness which it removed.

In the rites used for purifying the unclean—

1. There was a sacrifice (Num. 19:2-4):

"A red heifer without spot:" This must be slain. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Heb. 9:22).

2. There was a burning (verses 5 and 6).

Sin is hateful, and we must see it to be such; it must be burned without the camp.

3. There was a water of separation.

Having been purged with blood of sacrifice, we must be sprinkled with water of sanctification.

4. There was an application with hyssop.

Faith must receive the cleansing. "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean."

5. This must cleanse our whole nature (see verse 19).

There was a washing of the whole man and his garments.

All that this type intended may be found—

In the water and the blood which flowed from the side of our Lord; manifesting the doubly cleansing power of his sacrifice: and

In the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit.

See, O sinner, your need of cleansing before you attempt anything. Before this, nothing you are, or have, or do, is dear before God. After this, all things shall be holy to you.

See to this cleansing at once, and all else will follow in due course.

Vivacities

"My friends say everywhere that I am not a Christian. I have just given them the lie direct by performing my Easter devotions (mes paques) publicly, thus proving to all my lively desire to terminate my long career in the religion in which I was born, and I have fulfilled this important act after a dozen attacks of consecutive fever, which made me fear I should die before I could assure you of my respect and my devotion." — **Voltaire, to**

Madame Du Barri (What a specimen of polluted holy things!)

Those whose devotions are plausible, but whose conversation is wicked, will find their devotions unable to sanctify their enjoyments, but their wickedness prevailing to pollute them.

When we are employed in any good work, we should be jealous over ourselves, lest we render it unclean by our corruptions and mismanagement. — **Matthew Henry**

Diogenes, standing beside a foul bath, was heard to exclaim, "Where shall those be washed who wash here?" When even the religious duties of men are defiled, what hope can they have of making themselves clean? Those who turn prayer into a mockery, and sacraments into a show, have turned medicine into poison; and how shall they be healed?

A child has taken an infectious disease. He comes to fondle you, and you push him away. He moves the furniture, and you command him to take his hands off. He must be shut up, and kept from contact with the household. Suppose he persists in leaving his room, and joining with the rest of the family. No matter how kind his motive, he is doing wrong, and acting mischievously. The more industriously he works about the house, and runs to and fro, the more does he spread the disorder. The household work which he does would be well enough if he were but in health: as it is, his every movement is a danger, and his best endeavors are perilous. The child must be healed before he can do real good in the family: while he is infected he pollutes all that he touches, and injures all whom he approaches. Oh, that unconverted men were wise enough to see that what they need, at first, is not so much work to do, as cleansing from pollution, in order that they may be able to do good works.

At one of the Ragged-schools in Ireland, a clergyman asked the question, "What is holiness?" After some pause, a poor Irish convert, in dirty, tattered rags, jumped up, and said, "Praise your Riverence, it's to be clane inside." — **G. S. Bowes**

From C H Spurgeon's Book...

Power for You

Chapter 6: The Abiding of the Spirit

Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.—Haggai 2:4–5

Satan is always doing his utmost to obstruct the work of God. He hindered these Jews from building the temple, and today he endeavors to hinder the people of God from spreading the Gospel. A spiritual temple is to be built for the Most High, and if by any means the evil one can delay its uprising, he will stop at nothing. If he can take us away from working with faith and courage for the glory of God, he will be sure to do it. He is very cunning and knows how to change his argument and yet keep to his design. He cares little how he works so long as he can hurt the cause of God.

In the case of the Jewish people on their return from captivity, he sought to prevent the building of the temple by making them selfish and worldly so that every man was eager to build his own house and cared nothing for the house of the Lord. Each family pleaded its own urgent needs. In returning to a long-deserted and neglected land, much had to be done to make up for lost time; to provide suitably for itself, every family needed all its exertions. They carried this thrift and self-providing to a great extreme and secured for themselves luxuries while the foundations of the temple that had been laid years before remained as they were or became still more thickly covered up with rubbish. The people could not be made to bestir themselves to build a house of God, for they answered to every exhortation,

"The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built" (Haggai 1:2).

A more convenient season was always looming in the future, but it never came. Just now it was too hot; further on it was too cold. At one time, the wet season was just setting in, and it was of no use to begin. Soon after, the fair weather required that they should be in their own fields. Like some in our day, they saw to themselves first, and God's turn was very long in coming. Hence, the prophet cried,

"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:4)

By the mouth of His servant, Haggai, stern rebukes were uttered, and the whole people were aroused. We read,

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. (Haggai 1:12)

All hands were put to the work, course after course of stone began to rise, and then another stumbling-block was thrown in the way of the workers. The older folks remarked that this was a very small affair compared with the temple of Solomon of which their fathers had told them. In fact, their rising building was nothing at all and not worthy to be called a temple.

The prophet describes the feeling in the verse which precedes our text.

“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” (Haggai 2:3).

Feeling that their work would be very poor and insignificant, the people had little heart to go on. Being discouraged by the humiliating contrast, they began to be slack. As they were quite willing to accept any excuse, and here was an excuse ready-made for them, they would soon have been at a standstill had not the prophet met the wiles of the archenemy with another word from the Lord.

Nothing so confounds the evil one as the voice of the Eternal. Our Lord himself defeated Satan by the Word of the Lord, and the prophet Haggai did the same. Twice the voice was heard:

“I am with you, saith the LORD” (Haggai 1:13; 2:4).

They were also assured that what they built was accepted and that the Lord meant to fill the new house with glory; yes, He meant to light it up with a glory greater than that which honored the temple of Solomon. They were not spending their strength for naught but were laboring with divine help and favor. Thus, they were encouraged to put their shoulders to the work. The walls rose in due order, and God was glorified in the building up of His Zion.

The present times are, in many respects, similar to those of Haggai. History certainly repeats itself within the church of God as well as outside of it, and therefore the messages of God need to be repeated also. The words of some almost-forgotten prophet may be redelivered by the watchman of the Lord in these present days and be a timely word for the present emergency. We are not free from the worldliness which puts self first and God nowhere, or else our various enterprises would be more abundantly supplied with the silver and the gold that are the Lord's but that even professing Christians reserve for themselves. When this selfish greed is conquered, then comes in a timorous depression. Among those who have escaped from worldliness, there is apt to be too much despondency, and men labor feebly as if working for a cause which is doomed to failure. This last evil must be cured. I pray that our text may flame from the Lord's own mouth with all the fire which once blazed about it. May faint hearts be encouraged and drowsy spirits be aroused as we hear the Lord say,

“My spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not” (Haggai 2:5)

I will enter fully upon the subject, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, by calling your attention to discouragement forbidden. Then I will discuss encouragement imparted. Having done so, I will linger with this blessed text which overflows with comfort and will speak, in the third place, of encouragement further applied. Oh, that our Lord, who knows “how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isa. 50:4), may cheer the hearts of seekers by what will be addressed under this last point of discourse!

Discouragement Forbidden

Discouragement comes readily enough to poor mortals like us who are occupied in the work of God, seeing that it is a work of faith, a work of difficulty, a work above our capacity, and a work much opposed. Discouragement is very natural; it is a native of the soil of manhood. To believe is supernatural; faith is the work of the Spirit of God. To doubt is natural to fallen men, for we have within us an evil heart of unbelief. It is abominably wicked, I grant you, but still it is natural because of the downward tendency of our depraved hearts.

Discouragement may come and does come to us, as it did to these people, from a consideration of the great things which God deserves at our hands and the small things which we are able to render. When in Haggai's days the people thought of Jehovah and of a temple for Him and then looked upon the narrow space which had been enclosed and the common stones which had been laid for foundations, they were ashamed. Where were those hewn stones and costly stones which, of old, Solomon brought from afar? They said within themselves, “This house is unworthy of Jehovah: what are we doing by laboring thus?” Have you not felt the depressing weight of what is so surely true? Fellow believers, all that we do is little for our God, far too little for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. For Him that poured out His soul unto death on our behalf, the most splendid service, the most heroic self-denial, are all too little, and we feel it is so. Alabaster boxes of precious ointment are too poor a gift. When we have done our utmost

in declaring the glory of Jesus, we have felt that words are too poor and coarse to set before our adorable Lord.

When we have prayed for His kingdom, we have been disgusted with our own prayers, and all the efforts we have put forth in connection with any part of His service have seemed too few, too feeble for us to hope for acceptance. Thus have we been discouraged. The enemy has worked upon us by this means, yet he has made us argue very wrongly. Because we could not do much, we have half resolved to do nothing! Because what we did was so poor, we were inclined to quit the work altogether! This is evidently absurd and wicked. The enemy can use humility for his purpose as well as pride. Whether he makes us think too much or too little of our work, it is all the same so long as he can get us away from it.

It is significant that the man with one talent went and hid his Lord's money in the earth. He knew that it was but one, and for that reason he was the less afraid to bury it. Perhaps he argued that the interest on one talent could never come to much and would never be noticed side by side with the result of five or ten talents, and he might as well bring nothing at all to his Lord as bring so little. Perhaps he might not have wrapped it up if it had not been so small that a napkin could cover it. The smallness of our gifts may be a temptation to us. We are consciously so weak and so insignificant, compared with the great God and His great cause, that we are discouraged and think it vain to attempt anything.

Moreover, the enemy contrasts our work with that of others and with that of those who have gone before us. We are doing so little as compared to other people; therefore, let us give up. We cannot build like Solomon; therefore, let us not build at all. Yet, fellow believers, there is a falsehood in all this, for, in truth, nothing is worthy of God. The great works of others and even the amazing productions of Solomon all fell short of His glory. What house could man build for God? What are cedar and marble and gold as compared with the glory of the Most High? Though the house was exceedingly magnificent, "of fame and of glory throughout all countries" (1 Chron. 22:5), the Lord God has of old dwelt within curtains, and never was His worship more glorious than within the tent of badgers' skins. Indeed, as soon as the great house was built, true religion declined. What of all human work can be worthy of the Lord? Our little labors do but share the insignificance of greater things, and therefore we ought not to withhold them. Yet, here is the temptation from which we must pray to be delivered.

The tendency to depreciate the present because of the glories of the past is also injurious. The old people looked back to the days of the former temple, even as we are apt to look upon the times of the great preachers of the past. What work was done in those past days! What Sabbaths were enjoyed then! What converts were added to the church! What days of refreshing were then bestowed! Everything has declined, decreased, degenerated!

But, fellow believers, we must not allow this sense of littleness to hamper us, for God can bless our littleness and use it for His glory. I notice that the great men of the past thought of themselves even as we think of ourselves. Certainly they were not more self-confident than we are. Let us throw our hearts and souls into the work of the Lord and yet do something more nearly in accordance with our highest ideal of what our God deserves of us. Let us excel our ancestors. Let us aspire to be even more godly, more conscientious, and more sound in the faith than they were, for the Spirit of God remains with us.

Wherever discouragement comes in, it is dreadfully weakening. I am sure it is weakening because the prophet was bidden to say three times:

"Be strong" (Haggai 2:4)

to the governor, high priest, and people. This proves that they had become weak. Being discouraged, their hands hung down, and their knees were feeble. Faith girds us with omnipotence, but unbelief makes everything hang loose and limp about us. Distrust, and you will fail in everything; believe, and "according to your faith be it unto you" (Matt. 9:29). To lend a discouraged people to the Holy War is as difficult as for Xerxes' commanders to conduct the Persian troops to battle against the Greeks. The vassals of the great king were driven to the conflicts by whips and sticks, for they were afraid to fight. Do you wonder that they were defeated? A church that needs constant exhorting and compelling accomplishes nothing. The Greeks had no need of blows and threats, for each man was a lion and courted the encounter, however great the odds against him. Each Spartan fought *con amore* (with love, devotion); he was never more at home than when contending for the altars and the hearths of his country.

We want Christian men of this same sort, who have faith in their principles, faith in the doctrines of grace, and faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We want men who therefore contend earnestly for the faith in these days when piety is mocked from the pulpit and the Gospel is sneered at by professional preachers. We need men who love the truth, to whom it is dear as their lives, men into whose hearts the old doctrine is burned by the hand of God's Spirit through a deep experience of its necessity and of its power. We need no more of those who will parrot what they are taught, but we want men who will speak what they know. Oh, for a troop of men like John Knox, heroes of the martyr and covenanter stock! Then would Jehovah of hosts have a people who would "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10) to serve Him.

Discouragement not only weakens men, but it takes them away from the service of God. It is significant that the prophet said to them,

“Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work” (Haggai 2:4).

They had ceased to build; they had begun to talk and argue, but they had laid down the trowel. They were extremely wise in their observations and criticisms and prophecies, but the walls did not rise. It is always so when we are discouraged; we cease from the work of the Lord and waste time in talk and nonsensical refinements. May the Lord take away discouragement from any of you who now suffer from it. I suppose some of you feel it, for at times it creeps over my heart and makes me go with heaviness to my work.

I believe that God's truth will come to the front yet, but it has many adversaries today. All sorts of unbeliefs are being hatched out from under the wings of “modern thought.” The Gospel seems to be regarded as a nose of wax, to be altered and shaped by every man who wishes to show his superior skill. Nor is it in doctrine alone, but in practice also, that the times are out of joint. Separateness from the world and holy living have given way to gaiety and theatergoing. To follow Christ fully has gone out of fashion with many of those from whom we once hoped better things. Yet are there some who waver not, some who are willing to be in the right with two or three. Blessed is the man who will be able to stand fast by his God in these evil days. Let us not in any way be discouraged.

“Be strong... be strong ... be strong” (Haggai 2:4)

sounds as a threefold voice from the triune God.

“Fear ye not” (Haggai 2:5)

comes as a sweet cordial to the faint; therefore, let no man's heart fail him.

The Encouragement Imparted

“According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not” (Haggai 2:5).

God remembers His covenant and stands on His ancient promises. When the people came out of Egypt, the Lord was with them by His Spirit; hence, He spoke to them by Moses, and through Moses, He guided and judged and taught them. He was with them also by His Spirit in inspiring Bezaleel and Aholiab as to the works of art which adorned the tabernacle. God always finds workmen for His work and by His Spirit fits them for it. The Spirit of God rested upon the elders who were ordained to relieve Moses of his great burden.

The Lord was also with His people in the fiery cloudy pillar which was conspicuous in the midst of the camp. His presence was their glory and their defense. This is a type of the presence of the Spirit with the church. At the present time, if we hold to the truth of God, if we live in obedience to His holy commands, if we are spiritually minded, if we cry unto God in believing prayer, and if we have faith in His covenant and in His Son, the Holy Spirit abides among us. The Holy Spirit descended upon the church at Pentecost, and He has never gone back again. There is no record of the Spirit's return to heaven. He will abide with the true church evermore. This is our hope for the present struggle. The Spirit of God remains with us.

To what end, my brothers and sisters, is this Spirit with us? Let us think of this, that we may be encouraged at this time. The Spirit of God remains among you to aid and assist the ministry which He has already given. Oh, that the prayers of God's people would always go up for God's ministers, that they may speak with a divine power and influence which none will be able to contradict! We look too much for clever men; we seek out fluent and flowery speakers; we sigh for men cultured and trained in all the knowledge of the heathen. However, if we sought more for unction, for divine authority, and for that power which does hedge about the man of God, how much wiser should we be! Oh, that all of us who profess to preach the Gospel would learn to speak in entire dependence upon the direction of the Holy Spirit, not daring to utter our own words but even trembling lest we should do so. Oh, that we would commit ourselves to that secret influence without which nothing will be powerful upon the conscience or converting to the heart.

Do you not know the difference between the power that comes from human oratory and that which comes by the divine energy which speaks so to the heart that men cannot resist it? We have forgotten this too much. It is better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Spirit than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit. He who rested on those who have gone to their reward in heaven can rest this day upon our ministers and bless our evangelists if we will but seek it of Him. Let us cease to grieve the Spirit of God and look to Him for help for the faithful ministers who are yet spared to us.

This same Spirit who of old gave to His church eminent teachers can raise up other and more useful men. The other day, a brother from Wales told me of the great men he remembered. He said that he had never heard such a one as Christmas Evans who surpassed all men when he was in the hwyl. I asked him if he knew another Welsh minister who preached like Christmas Evans. “No,” he said, “we have no such man in Wales in our days.” So also in England, we have neither Wesley nor Whitefield nor any of their order, yet as God is the residue of the Spirit, He can fetch out from some chimney-corner another Christmas Evans or find in

our Sunday school another George Whitefield who will declare the Gospel with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.

Let us never fear for the future or despair for the present since the Spirit of God remains with us. What if the growing error of the age should have silenced the last tongue that speaks out the old Gospel? Let not faith be weakened. I hear the tramp of legions of soldiers of the Cross. I hear the clarion voices of hosts of preachers.

“The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it” (Ps. 68:11).

Have faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ! When He ascended on high, “He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph. 4:8). He then “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11), and He can do the like again. Let us fall back upon the eternal God and never be discouraged for an instant.

Nor is this all. The Holy Spirit being with us, He can move the whole church to exercise its varied ministries. This is one of the things we want very much, that every member of the church should recognize that he is ordained to service. Everyone in Christ, man or woman, has some testimony to bear, some warning to give, some deed to do, in the name of the holy child Jesus; and if the Spirit of God is poured out upon our young men and women, each one will be aroused to energetic service. Both small and great will be in earnest, and the result upon the slumbering masses of our population will surprise us all.

Sometimes we lament that the churches are so dull. There is an old proverb which says of So-and-so that he was

“as sound asleep as a church.”

I suppose there is nothing that can sleep so soundly as a church. Yet, the Spirit of God still remains, and therefore churches can be awakened. I mean that not only in part but as a whole a church may be quickened. The dullest professor, the most slovenly believer, or the most critical and useless member of a church may yet be turned to good account. I see them like a bundle of sticks, piled up, dead, and dry. Oh, for the fire! We will have a blaze out of them yet.

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, brood over the dark, disordered church as once You did over chaos; order will come out of confusion, and the darkness will fly before the light.

Only let the Spirit be with us, and we have all that is wanted for victory. Give us His presence, and everything else will come in its due season for the profitable service of the entire church.

If the Spirit is with us, there will come abundant conversions. We cannot get at “the lapsed masses,” as they are pedantically called. We cannot stir the crass infidelity of the present age. No, we cannot, but He can. “With God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). If you walk down to our bridges at a certain hour of the day, you will see barges and vessels lying in the mud, and nothing can stir them. Wait until the tide comes in, and they will walk the water like things of life. The living flood accomplishes at once what no mortals can do.

And so today our churches cannot stir. What will we do? Oh, that the Holy Spirit would come with a flood tide of His benign influence, as He will if we will but believe in Him, as He must if we will but cry unto Him, and as He will if we will cease to grieve Him. Everything will be even as the saints desire when the Lord of Saints is with us. The hope of the continuance and increase of the church lies in the Spirit remaining with us. The hope of the salvation of London or any other city lies in the wonder-working Spirit. Let us bow our heads and worship the omnipotent Spirit who deigns to work in us, by us, and with us.

Then, fellow believers, if this should happen—and I do not see why it should not—then we may expect to see the church put on her beautiful garments. Then will she begin to clear herself of the errors which now defile her; then will she press to her bosom the truths which she now begins to forget; then will she go back to the pure fount of inspiration and drink from the Scriptures of truth; and then out of the midst of her will flow no turbid streams but “rivers of living water” (John 7:38). If the Holy Spirit will work among us, we will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the name of our God.

When once the Spirit of God puts forth His might, all things else will be in accord with Him. Notice that in the rest of the chapter—not relating to that temple at all but to the church of God—there is great comfort given to us. If the Holy Spirit is given once, then we may expect Providence to cooperate with the church of God.

“Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations” (Haggai 2:6–7)

Great commotions will cooperate with the Holy Spirit. We may expect that God will work for His people in an extraordinary fashion if they will but be faithful to Him. Empires will collapse and times will change for the truth’s sake. Expect the unexpected; reckon upon that which is unlikely, if it is necessary for the growth of the kingdom. Of old the earth helped the woman when the dragon opened his mouth to drown her with the floods that he cast forth (see Revelation 12:16); unexpected help will come to us when affairs are at their worst.

And next, the Lord in this chapter promises His people that they will have all the supplies they need for His work. They feared that they could not build His house because of their poverty, but, says the Lord of Hosts,

“The silver is mine, and the gold is mine” (Haggai 2:8).

When the church of God believes in God and goes forward bravely, she need not trouble as to supplies. Her God will provide for her. He that gives the Holy Spirit will give gold and silver accordingly as they are needed; therefore, let us be of good courage. If God is with us, why need we fear?

One of our English kings once threatened the great city of London that if its councilors talked so independently, he would—yes, he would, indeed he would—take his court away from the city. The Lord Mayor on that occasion replied that if His Majesty would graciously leave the river Thames behind him, the citizens would try to get on without his court. If any say, “If you hold to these old-fashioned doctrines, you will lose the educated, the wealthy, the influential,” we will answer, “But if we do not lose the godly and the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are not in the least alarmed.” If the Holy Spirit remains with us,

“there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God” (Ps. 46:4)

Fellow believers, my heart leaps within me as I cry,

“The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Ps. 46:7, 11).

“Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (Ps. 46:2).

The best comfort of all remained:

“The desire of all nations shall come” (Haggai 2:7).

This was in a measure fulfilled when Jesus came into that latter house and caused all holy hearts to sing for gladness, but it was not wholly fulfilled in that way, for if you notice in Haggai 2:9 it is written,

“The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former... and in this place will I give peace,”

which the Lord did not fully do to the second temple since that was destroyed by the Romans.

However, there is another advent, when “the desire of all nations shall come” (Haggai 2:7) in power and glory, and this is our highest hope. Though truth may be driven back and error may prevail, Jesus comes, and He is the great Lord and Patron of Truth.

“With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity” (Ps. 98:9).

Here is our last resource; here are God’s reserves. He whom we serve lives and reigns forever and ever, and He says

“Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Encouragement Further Applied

I would be done if it had not been that this text seemed to me to overflow so much that it might not only refresh God’s people but give drink to thirsty sinners who are seeking the Lord. It is at the beginning of every gracious purpose that men have most fear, even as these people had who had newly begun to build. When first the Holy Spirit begins to strive with a man and to lead him to Jesus, he is apt to say, “I cannot; I dare not; it is impossible. How can I believe and live?” Now I want to speak to some of you who are willing to find Christ and to encourage you by the truth that the Spirit lives to help you. I would even like to speak to those who are not anxious to be saved.

I remember that Dr. Payson, an exceedingly earnest and useful man of God, once did a singular thing. He had been holding inquiry meetings with all sorts of people, and great numbers had been saved. At last, one Sunday, he publicized that he should have a meeting on Monday night for those people who did not desire to be saved. Strange to say, some twenty people came who did not wish to repent or believe. He spoke to them and said, “I am sure that if a little film, thin as the web of the gossamer, were let down by God from heaven to each one of you, you would not push it away from you. Although it were almost invisible, you would value even the slightest connection between you and heaven. Now, your coming to meet me tonight is a little link with God. I want it to increase in strength until you are joined to the Lord forever.” He spoke to them most tenderly, and God blessed those people who did not desire to be saved so that, before the meeting was over, they were of another mind. The film had become a thicker thread, and it

grew and grew until the Lord Christ held them by it forever.

Dear friends, the fact of your reading this discussion is like that filmy thread; do not put it away. Here is your comfort: the Holy Spirit still works with the preaching of the Word. Do I hear you say, "I cannot feel my need of Christ as I want to feel it?" The Spirit remains among us. He can make you feel more deeply the guilt of sin and your need of pardon. "But I have heard so much about conviction and repentance; I do not seem to have either of them." Yet the Spirit remains with us, and that Spirit is able to work in you the deepest conviction and the truest repentance. "Oh, sir, I do not feel as if I could do anything." But, the Spirit remains with us, and all things that are needed for godliness He can give. He can work "in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). "But I want to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Who made you want to do that? Who but the Holy Spirit? Therefore, He is still at work with you, and though as yet you do not understand what believing is—or else I am persuaded you would believe at once—the Spirit of God can instruct you in it. You are blind, but He can give you sight. You are paralyzed, but He can give you strength. The Spirit of God remains.

"Oh, but that doctrine of regeneration staggers me; you know, we must be born again." Yes, we are born again of the Spirit, and the Spirit remains still with us. He is still mighty to work that wondrous change and to bring you out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. The Spirit remains with us, blessed be His name! "Ah, dear sir," says one, "I want to conquer sin!" Who made you desire to conquer sin? Who, but the Spirit that remains with us? He will give you the sword of the Spirit and teach you how to use it, and He will give you both the will and the power to use it successfully. Through the Spirit's might you can overcome every sin, even that which has dragged you down and disgraced you. The Spirit of God is still waiting to help you.

When I think of the power of the Spirit of God, I look hopefully upon every sinner I see. I bless His name that He can work in you all that is pleasing in His sight. Some of you may be very careless, but He can make you thoughtful. I hope you may yourselves become an exhibition of divine grace. You think not about things, but He can make you feel at this moment a sweet softness stealing over you until you long to be alone and to get in the old armchair and there seek the Lord. You can thus be led to salvation.

Wherever you come from, I want you now to seek the Lord. He has brought you to this point, and He means to bless you. Yield yourselves to Him while His sweet Spirit pleads with you. While the heavenly wind softly blows upon you, open wide every window. You have not felt that you wanted it, but that is the sure proof that you need it, for he that does not know his need of Christ is most in need. Open wide your heart that the Spirit may teach you your need. Above all, breathe the prayer that He would help you right now to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, for there is life in a look at the Crucified One; there is life at this moment for you.

"Oh," you say, "if I were to begin, I should not keep on." No, if you began, perhaps you would not, but if He begins with you, He will keep on. The final perseverance of saints is the result of the final perseverance of the Holy Spirit. He perseveres to bless, and we persevere in receiving the blessing. If He begins, you have begun with a divine power that "fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa. 40:28). I wish it might so happen that not the prophet Haggai but I, God's servant, may have written to you such a word as you will never forget. And, may the Lord add to the word by the witness of the Holy Spirit,

"From this day will I bless you" (Hag. 2:19).

Go with that promise resting upon you. I would like to give a shake of the hand to every stranger reading this and say, "Brother, in the name of the Lord, I wish you from this day a blessing." Amen and amen.

Haggai 2:13

DEFILED AND DEFILING

by C H Spurgeon

NO. 2495 A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 1896, DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 19TH, 1885.

"Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, so is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean." — Haggai 2:13, 14.

THE prophet Haggai very wisely drew out from the priests a definite answer to certain questions which he put to them. Then, upon their authority, he could say to the people, "This is what your own priests say; and this is what you yourselves believe." This was taking them by a kind of sacred guile, and it was a powerful means of forcing home the truth to their heart and conscience.

According to the twelfth verse, Haggai first put to the priests this question, "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with

his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered, and said, No.” Here is a man who is holy — I mean, ceremonially holy, — and he is carrying in his skirts part of a holy sacrifice. Now, if he touches anything, will he make it holy by that touch? The priests said, “No,” they could not say otherwise. So, if a man be himself holy, however holy he may be, can he make another man holy simply by touching him? If he speaks of good things, or does good actions, will it be certain that he will thereby affect others by his good words and good works? Oh, no! There does not seem to be that spreading power in holy things that there is in unholy things; at any rate, not in those that are merely ceremonially holy. Here, then, is a man who is, in a legal sense, clean before God, and he is carrying a holy thing in his skirts, but he does not therefore make that which he touches to be clean or holy.

Then the Spirit of God, having by the mouth of the prophet put the truth in that way, suggested to him to ask this priests another question. “Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.” There is such a terrible contagion about uncleanness that he who is affected by it spreads it wherever he goes. Whatever he puts his foot upon, or touches with his hand, becomes thereby defiled. We cannot communicate holiness, but we can communicate unholiness. It will cause us labor and agony and anguish of spirit to impart to another even one right idea, and then when it is imparted it is not fully fixed in the hearer’s heart till the Spirit of God comes and works a miracle of grace; but it is easy enough to communicate evil. A lewd song may have but one auditor, and yet never be forgotten. A wrong action may never be chronicled by the public press, yet some little eye that saw it shall have learned from the ill example something that shall never be unlearned. The horribly contagious and infectious power of sin, wherever it is displayed, is terrible.

But the thing to which I want specially to call your attention is this. See what a picture is before us. Here is an unclean man; he has touched a dead body, and so become unclean, therefore whatever he touches also becomes unclean. There is a loaf of bread; he has cut a slice off it, and all that loaf has become unclean. Here is a mess of pottage on the table; he has taken a portion from it, and so made it all unclean. There is a cup of wine; he has sipped it, or he may have only touched the vessel that contains it, but the whole of the wine is unclean. Here is oil, which one would think would be medicinally useful without being at all harmful; but this unclean person has put his finger to it, and it is unclean. Here is meat, or vegetable food of any kind; he has touched it, so it is all unclean. I should not like to be that man; — to make unclean even a chair that I might touch, to pollute the very house in which I dwelt, to be unable to shake hands with a friend without making him defiled through contact with me because I was myself unclean. I say again, that is a dreadful picture; and you must bear with me when I tell you my fear that it is not only the portrait of the erring people in Haggai’s day, but also a life-like representation of some who are now present, and of multitudes who pass for very good people in these our days. It can still be said with utmost truthfulness, “So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.”

I. So this is my subject. First, The Terrible Uncleanness. And here I will keep to my text.

If you want fully to understand the text, or to have it put into New Testament language, you must look at Paul’s Epistle to his son Titus; for there, in the fifteenth verse of the first chapter, you get this same picture in other colors: “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.” They are themselves so impure that everything becomes impure to them. Every man whose heart is not renewed by grace is in this sad and terrible condition.

Here note, first, that common things are polluted by men of unclean nature. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, says, “I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself.” Nothing that God has made, and that sin has not marred, is common or unclean of itself, “for every creature of God is good.” From that day when Peter, at Joppa, saw the great sheet let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air, he was taught a lesson that he needed to learn, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” In and of itself, there is nothing that God has made which ought to be described as common. To the pure heart, everything is pure, but unclean men may make unclean every common or everyday thing of life. They can not only make wine to be unclean, as, alas! is all but universally the case; but even bread, pottage, oil, meat, or anything that is in itself harmless, can be rendered impure when it comes to be touched by impure men, and used wrongfully.

Perhaps someone asks, “How can that be?” Well, common things can be rendered unclean when you make gods of them. If the most important questions of your life are, “What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?” — if you seek first of all in this life merely these things, though they are not in themselves evil, they will become idols, and so will be unclean, for every idol is a defiling thing to those who bow down before it. Anything which takes your attention away from your God, is an idol; it is another god, a rival god, and so it is the most unclean thing possible. I mean just this, that, although your ordinary pursuits may be in themselves perfectly innocent, and may be commendable if they are followed out to the glory of God, yet if your first object in life be yourself and what you can get out of the common things of this life, you defile them by putting them into the place which belongs alone to God.

Next, common things may be defiled by an excess in the use of them. This may be done by gluttony. What a defilement it is of bread, the staff of life, and of those comforts which God gives to us for food, when a man makes his own belly into a god, whose temple is his kitchen. I know not that the worst of the heathen can possibly degrade themselves more than epicures and drunkards do when they make those things, which in themselves are not evil, to become their Gods, and indulge in them until, by their excess, they sink below the level of the beasts that perish. You can go to this excess with all kinds of things. The commonest and most apparent case is that of the man who indulges in strong drink; but all other common things are capable of being polluted in the same way, and they are continually being so polluted.

Others pollute common things by excess in the keeping of them. The miser's gold is cankered by his avarice. He who must ever be getting more land, even if he has to banish everybody from the range of his windows, defiles his possessions. He who in trade is exacting towards those who labor for him, demanding more and giving less than is their due, defiles his trade; he makes a dunghill of his shop, and turns his traffic into treason against God. I need not go into particulars, because the thing is apparent to all men, and you can see how a defiled man, coming into a business which in itself is perfectly right, nevertheless defiles it by excess in the keeping of the goods which God has entrusted to him as a steward to use for the good of others.

I am sure that we can also defile the common mercies of this life by ingratitude in the enjoyment of them. Are there not many, who eat and drink, yet never bless God for what they have; or who abound in riches, and yet out of all their wealth there never comes from their hearts any thanksgiving to God? They are, as good old Rowland Hill used to say, like the hogs under the oak, which eat the acorns that fall on the ground, but never lift up their thoughts to the tree from which the acorns come. These ungrateful people are willing to receive all the good things which God may give them, and they are greedy to get more; but the Lord never receives from them even the peppercorn rent of a word of thanksgiving. Their hearts are set upon the gifts of God, and they care nothing for the gracious Giver. O sirs, when you sit down without thanksgiving to your meats and to your drinks, your tables are defiled, your platters and your cups are defiled, and every mouthful that goes down your throats is defiled, because you do not eat and drink to the glory of God!

See, then, in how many ways common things may be polluted by men of unclean nature.

But, even worse than that, holy things are polluted by men of unclean nature. It is a very sad thing to see how the most sacred things can be spoiled by the touch of unholy hands. You have all heard of Voltaire, and you know something of the character of the man. I should think that nobody ever excelled Voltaire in a clever kind of blasphemy; yet I find him writing to a lady, — a lady of whose character the less said the better, — "My friends say everywhere that I am not a Christian. I have just given them the lie direct by performing my Easter devotions (*mes paques*) publicly, thus proving to all my lively desire to terminate my long career in the religion in which I was born." Only fancy a man like Voltaire, after blasphemously saying of Christ that he would "crush the wretch," then going to eat "the sacrament," as some call it; and I am afraid that, every Easter, there are many people of that sort, who have no respect for the Lord's day, but because their "priests" choose to call the day "Good Friday," they have great respect for that day, and they will come then to the communion table, though all the year long they have never had a thought concerning him whose death they profess to celebrate. It is a terrible thing that the innermost mysteries of the Church of Christ are often polluted by a godless, thoughtless man, who, nevertheless, for some hypocritical or formalistic reason, will come even to the table of the Lord, not hesitating to break through that guard of fire, "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

Brethren, it is not merely the Lord's table that an unclean man defiles, but he pollutes the gospel by using it as an excuse for sin. Listen to him. He says, "the preacher proclaimed the mercy of God, so I am going to live in sin." Brute beast art thou to talk like that! Another says, "the minister told us that salvation is all of grace, and that a great sinner glorifies God when he is converted; so why should not I be a great sinner?" O horrible wretch, art not thou accursed indeed, when thou canst turn the very grace of God into an excuse for thy wantonness and sin? Oh, but!" says a third, "you say that salvation is all of the sovereignty of God; therefore I cannot do anything in the matter." I know you, sir; you are in your own heart so defiled that you use the blessed gospel itself as the instrument of your rebellion against God. Such people are, alas! all too common; they touch with defiled hands the holiest thing, and so pollute it.

But what happens if these defiled people pray? Oh, how many prayers there are which only insult the Most High God! If you sit, down, or stand up, or kneel, and yourself "a miserable sinner," when you neither believe that you are a sinner, nor suffer any misery because of your sin, what are you doing but provoking the Lord to anger by virtually lying in his presence? Is not much so-called praying just of that sort? It is an awful thing to repeat a form of prayer when your heart does not mean it. What is it but a direct insult to the Lord? Yet how can men who are defiled pray such a prayer as God will accept? They must be themselves cleansed first before their prayers can be accepted. There is nothing so holy, in earth or in heaven, but a man of defiled heart and conscience will pollute it if he can but lay his hand upon it.

Further, even good works are polluted when they come from evil men. See what it says in the text: "So is this people, and so is this

nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands.” Here is a charitable man, he has been giving away a great deal of money; yet see how he has defiled his liberality. He sounded a trumpet before him, he was ostentatious, he desired to be thought very generous; and thus, every penny that he has given to the poor has been defiled. “Take heed,” says our Lord, “that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.” There is no reward reserved for them at the resurrection of the just, for they have had their reward already.

Here is another man, and though he is not renewed and regenerate, he is in his way a very religious man. But why is he religious? Partly, out of fear; still more, from custom; possibly, just to please his friends, or to stand well with his neighbors. Is not all that simply defiling religion?

I have also known some men appear very humble just to gain their own ends; and when an unrenewed man puts on humility merely as a cloak, I was going to say that he is devilish, for the very humble man who aims at making some gain by it — the Uriah Heep of the novelist, — is one of the most despicable of all people beneath the sky. When even that precious grace of humility is touched by his hand, class he not defile it till it appears loathsome in the eyes of men?

I have seen that same man become sternly righteous in order to be revenged upon his enemy “I must do the right thing,” he says; and he speaks as if it was most painful to him to have to do it; but all the while there is somebody whom he hates, and he is determined to crush him. He will have his pound of flesh, or the uttermost farthing of his debt, and he tries to excuse his malice by saying, “You know, we must sometimes make an example of wrongdoers.” Yes, other people have been very foolishly charitable, and have passed by wrongs done to them; but he is going to be a defender of everything that is upright, yet he does it merely to gratify his desire for vengeance. Is he not defiling holy things and good works by touching them? Yet is not this often the case with bad men? They defile to the last degree even things that appear to be good.

And, dear friends, the text adds that even sacrifices are polluted when offered by unclean men: “that which they offer there is unclean.” Their lamb, their bullock, their fine flour, their oil that they pour out at the foot of God’s altar, — all becomes defiled. There is what professes to be a public thanksgiving to God; and it is turned into a show to the glory of men. Whenever the unregenerate world brings anything to God as a sacrifice, what a wretched mess it makes of it! It becomes only another occasion for sinning against the Most High. Supposing a heathen should come in, on Christmas night, when professedly Christian people are supposed to be celebrating the birth of Christ, and all their cups are full of wine, they can scarcely stand for staggering, what would he think the Christ must be whose birthday they are celebrating? An unrenewed man cannot touch anything without spoiling it; wherever he goes, he is a spoiler. The sea has often been strewn with wrecks which have been occasioned by the cupidity of merchants, and the world is full of the tombs of men who have been hurried to their graves by other men. Truly did the poet sing, —

“Every prospect pleases, And only man is vile.”

It is a mercy that unrenewed men cannot enter heaven; if they could, heaven would not last as heaven for even five minutes. There would be another hell created if unrenewed men could walk among the palms and harps of the glorified. You may do what you like with a man, but as long as he is unclean he communicated his defilement wherever he may lay his hand.

That is a picture of every man who has not been born again; it is not a pretty picture, is it? Did you come here expecting me to say pretty things to you? I have not learnt the art of doing that; but in the name of God I assure you that this is true, and I pray his Spirit to convince every unregenerate person that it is true. In your present condition you cannot do any good works, you cannot serve God; what have you to do to declare his statutes? You cannot do anything but what will displease him until you are born again. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God;” — he cannot even see it; — and further, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” He will have to stand shivering outside its walls, but of that kingdom he cannot be a subject until he has passed from death unto life, and has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus, and so has been cleansed from his sinful defilement.

II. Thus I have kept to my text; but now I am going to run right away from it, to speak upon The All-Sufficient Remedy.

Where can we find a better type and figure of that remedy than in the chapter which I read to you just now from the Book of Numbers? In Numbers 19 we have a type of the great remedy, and a striking account of the uncleanness which it removed. I shall not attempt a full exposition of the rites used for purifying the unclean; but I would have you notice that, first of all, in order to the removal of uncleanness, there was a sacrifice. There was a red heifer, without spot, which had to be slain. There could be no sort of purification except through death; and there can be no cleansing of thy defilement, my brother, except through the sacrifice of the Son of God. The red heifer and the lambs and the bulls under the old covenant died to teach people that the punishment of sin was the forfeiture of life, and these creatures died in the stead of the offender, that he might live. They were all types pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God who, in the fullness of time, came and took upon himself his people’s sin, and stood in his

people's place, that he might die "the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God." There is no hope of your ever being made clean except through the blood of him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin. Kick not at this doctrine, I pray you; for why should Jesus die at all, if you could be saved without his death? And if there be not everything in that death that is necessary for your cleansing, what do you propose to add to it? It seems to me to be sheer blasphemy to think that anything you can feel, or do, or give, can be worthy to be added to the great sacrifice of Christ. I wish you would say, "If this be the way of salvation, by a sacrifice offered in my stead to be accepted by me, I will gladly and joyfully accept it." This is the great truth: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." There is no other cleansing, and there is no need of any other; just listen to this text, and believe what it says: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Is not that enough for you?

Turning again to this Book of Numbers, you will notice that there was a burning; for this heifer, after being killed, was burned outside the camp. This burning signified that sin was very hateful to God, that he could not bear to have it where his people lived. Sin must be put outside the camp, and then as a dead thing it must be burned with fire; and the heifer which was supposed to bear that sin must suffer that doom. Jesus also, when he took our sin, suffered without the gate. I want you, dear friends, to feel that sin is a hateful thing; you can never be purged from it while you love it. Shut it out from your heart; as much as possible, shut it out from your thoughts. Since it put Christ without the camp, you must put it without the camp. There is no cleansing a man from sin while he lives in sin; and there is no possibility of forgiveness while sin is indulged in and delighted in. You must quit it; it must be burnt as offal, over the wall there among the filth and refuse of the city, and be put away altogether from you; in type of which you see your Lord thus slain upon a cross, as if he, too, had been a felon, "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

Looking again at the type, you will see that there was a water of separation. The ashes of this red heifer were to be put into running water; — not stagnant, but lively, running water; and a mixture being made therewith, it was to be sprinkled upon the people as a water of separation, or purification. And, dear friends, you and I must have the Holy Spirit pouring in upon us the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ to make us clean. There is no purification for you, my friend, except by the Holy Ghost. There must be the water as well as the blood; they must both come to purge the conscience from dead works that we may be clean, like the priests of old, and go into the holy place, to present acceptable sacrifices unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. You must have the blood to take away the guilt of sin; and you must also have the water to wash you from the pollution of sin, that you may be sanctified and set apart unto the living God.

You will notice, too, that there was an application of all this with hyssop. Hence David says, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. "Faith is, as it were, that little bunch of hyssop. Hyssop was a small plant, as I suppose, insignificant enough in itself, and of no use except for use in sprinkling. It was dipped into the blood, and then the guilty one was sprinkled; or into the water with the ashes, and with it the unclean one was sprinkled, and made clean. You must have this faith if you would be saved. The blood of the paschal lamb would not have saved the Israelites in Egypt if it had not been smeared on the lintel and the two side posts. The scarlet line would not have saved Rahab if she had not fastened it in the window, to be the mark that her house, with its inmates, was to be spared. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is all thou hast to do, and this he enables thee to do. Just simply believe that Christ is able to save thee, and repose thyself on that dear heart which was pierced for thee. Put thyself into those blessed hands that were fastened to the cross, and thou art saved. The moment thou believes in Jesus, thy sins are gone, — all of them, for there is no halving sin. There is a solidarity in sin, it is one great mass; so that, the moment a sinner believes in Christ, all his sins, past, present, and to come, are gone, and gone for ever. "To come," say you, "how can that be before they are committed?" Did not Christ die, not only before we committed any sin, but before we had any existence, and yet even then, in his death, he put away the sin of his people. If thou believes, thy transgression is forgiven; thou art "accepted in the Beloved;" and, as surely as thou livest, thou shalt one day stand before you burning throne, "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," and thou shalt have no fear.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day, For who aught to my charge shall lay? While through thy blood absolved I am From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

See, beloved, how simple is this deliverance from impurity. If the impurity was terrible, yet the remedy is go perfect, so complete, so available, that my heart dances while I talk of it to you.

Finally, this remedy must be applied to our whole nature. Remember that nineteenth verse that we read: "And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even." If thou, dear friend, wouldst be clean in God's sight, thou must be washed from head to foot; not merely with the washing of water, but with the washing of the Holy Spirit. "What is holiness?" said a clergyman to a poor Irish boy. "Please, your reverence," he said, "it is having a clean inside." And so it is, and you have to be washed that way, — washed inside, washed in your very nature. The fountain of your being has to be cleansed, the source of all the pollution is to be made white; and how can this be done by any man for himself? This great purification can only be wrought by a

wonderful work of grace, by the power of the Holy Ghost; but then the Holy Ghost is pledged to do this to everyone who believes in Jesus. It is a part of the covenant: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."

"Oh!" says one, "that would be delightful; but I am afraid that I should fall away, after all." That you shall not, for here is another covenant promise: "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." O glorious promise! That crowns it all. I want you, dear friends, to have a faith that can believe God, and say, "I have given myself over to Christ to save me to the end, and he will do it; and I commit to him my soul, not for this next year only, but for all years and all times; and I give myself up never to have any claim to myself again, to be his for ever and ever." What does he say to that? He answers, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." You see the double picture; Christ has his people in his hand, and then his Father comes, and puts his hand over the top of Christ's; and all who believe in Christ are in that double hand of the Son and of the Father, and who shall pluck them thence? We defy earth, and heaven, and hell, ever to tear away any soul that is once in the grip of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who would not have such a glorious salvation as this?

O ye defiled ones, come ye to him who alone can cleanse you! And when he has once cleansed you, remember that you will have need daily to wash your feet, and you shall find him waiting to wash them; but you shall never need such a complete cleansing as he gave you at the first. There shall never be a repetition of that, for "he that is bathed, needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." May the Lord give you that cleansing if you have not had it; and, if you have had it, rejoice in it with all your hearts. Amen and Amen.

HOW DOES IT LOOK TO YOU NOW?

Haggai

Robert Morgan

Over the years, I've read a great number of missionary stories, and one of favorites is the autobiography of Lillian Dickson, a missionary who worked among the mountain peoples of Formosa (modern Taiwan). In her book, Lillian tells of working in a particular village where they needed a meeting place for their church. Most of the other villages built their church buildings out of bamboo or wood, but after a few years of typhoons and heavy weather, these buildings would blow down. So Lillian proposed a different idea and made a unique appeal. She suggested they build a stone structure—a church made out of river rock. And she asked every Christian family in that village to make a commitment to carry up a certain number of stones each day from the river. And that's what happened. Every family sacrificed the time and effort to hike down to the river, select appropriate stones, and carry these heavy rocks back up to the building site. And as every person did his or her part, the church building was built and presumably is there to this day.

In a sense, this is the pattern that was established in the Bible and that it has been in operation since Old Testament times. As God's work grows, it needs tools and facilities to fulfill its purpose and mission; and so everyone sacrifices, everyone pitches in, everyone gives as they can, and together the work moves ahead.

In the Bible, there are five major stewardship campaigns. The first was to raise the money for the Tabernacle. The second was to raise the money for the Temple. The third was for the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem during the days of Nehemiah. (I'm not planning to devote a message to that just because of time). Today I'd like to deal with the fourth major stewardship and building campaign in the Bible, which was for the building of the Second Temple, and this story is given to us in the book of the prophet Haggai. That's where I'd like for us to turn today for our Scripture reading.

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

This verse gives us the historical setting for the book of Haggai, and it's impossible to understand this story if we don't know something of the background. Last week, I talked about how King David raised the funds for the building of the First Temple. His son, Solomon, was in charge of building that Temple; and that magnificent building sat atop Temple Mount in Jerusalem for hundreds of years. But in the year 586 B.C., it was destroyed by the Babylonians, the city of Jerusalem was burned to the ground, and the Jewish people were exiled from their land.

Seventy years passed; and just as the prophet Jeremiah had predicted, in the timing and in the providence of God the Persian Emperor passed an edict allowing a remnant of the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem to reestablish the city and to rebuild their Temple. The book of Ezra describes how a delegation of thousands of Jews packed their bags, said goodbye to their friends in the Diaspora, and returned to Jerusalem. Their hearts were broken as they arrived in the city of their fathers and saw that the site of the once-great Temple of Solomon was nothing but an overgrown field of charred ruins, the home of foxes, snakes, and jackals. The people started to work, cleared the site, erected an altar, and laid the foundation; but the work was hard, their resources were meager, and they faced mounting opposition from the Palestinians. Finally, this remnant just stopped working on the project altogether. They settled down into their own homes instead and built houses for themselves and began enhancing their own lifestyles. And the work on the House of God lay dormant for eighteen years.

Then the Lord raised up two preachers—Zechariah and Haggai. Last year, I preached a series of sermons from Zechariah, and I'll not revisit him today; but I'd like to focus on what Haggai had to say. He preached several sermons on this subject, and I want to show you two of them. The first sermon is in chapter one, and the second sermon is in chapter two.

God Will Build It (Haggai 1:2-15)

Haggai's first sermon could be titled, "God is Going To Build It Through Us." Let's continue reading with verse 2:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'" Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

In other words, you are always struggling financially, and there is never enough to make ends meet. Why is this? Well, read on:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the Lord. "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the Lord Almighty. "Because of My house which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."

That passage does not require much commentary. The people had been dragging their feet with the Lord's work, they had evidently been withholding their tithes and fund offerings, and they were using their money for their own purposes, to put nice paneling in their own houses and to build up their own portfolios. But in the process, they had lost the blessings of God on their finances. Haggai was very bold to tell them this, but his message touched a cord. Look at what happened.

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

So the people made some significant changes in their lives. They gave of their means and they re-allocated their time, and they went to work with their hands; and the Lord was with them, and the building project resumed after eighteen years of inactivity.

As I have studied these various passages, I've become increasingly convinced of the main thesis I'm presenting in these series of messages. There are two ways of financing God's work. The first involves the day-by-day expenses of kingdom work, which is to be funded by the faithful tithes and offerings of God's people. But, secondly, there are occasional moments of special opportunity when we can go above and beyond our regular gifts, committing ourselves to make a series of sacrificial gifts that will help the kingdom work advance in a quantum way. These are occasions when we can do something for the Lord that will set the stage for future generations to minister. As we are obedient to the heavenly mandate, the Lord opens up the windows of heaven and blesses us in needed and unexpected ways.

I want to give you an example. Last Sunday night, instead of meeting here for our regular Sunday night service, we divided into Home Fellowships, based on our Sunday School Life Groups. Each of these Home Fellowships viewed a video about our Loving God, Loving People building program, and prayer was made to the Lord in each of these sessions. I've been so very gratified by reports from these Home Fellowships. Everyone who has talked with me about their own particular one has been moved; and the only complaint I've heard is that some of the groups wanted more time. Isn't that wonderful? The Home Fellowship I attended was packed, and there were tears in our eyes as we thought of what the Lord is doing here among us.

Well, this week my mind traveled back ten years ago, to another set of very similar Home Fellowships. It seems hard to believe, but it was in the fall of 1996 when we had a similar set of meetings throughout our church as we prepared to build this CelebrationCenter. Our theme was Faith That Builds, and we produced a video much like the one we showed last Sunday night. Shortly after those Home Fellowships, I received a letter from one of our members. It's dated October 3, 1996, and I want to read a little of it to you.

Dear Rob,

Committed faithful tithing has always been a problem for me—not in believing that tithing is biblically based or commanded by God—but, rather, by personal commitment and personal surrender by faith to God's promises.

This has been a special personal problem in the last year during a time of financial struggling.... Due to financial struggles and excessive work times, I have been diligently searching for another job for over a year. I have sent over 150 resumes to prospective employers and received enough "no thanks" letters to discourage anyone. In the last year, I have been interviewed about 10 times. Still no luck....

Yet, in all this, I remained faithful to prayer and the Bible. But not fully faithful. No tithing. On the rare occasion that a tithing check was written, it would often be held for weeks until I was sure we would not need the money. Obviously, there was no faith in God's promise of provision. That was until the Home Fellowship of September 22. After viewing the Faith That Builds video and discussing the topic afterwards, I made a personal, silent commitment to begin tithing on a regular basis.

Guess what happened in my life based upon this commitment. Here is a chronology of events...

And my friend went on to describe how, within the course of one week, things begin to come together regarding a new job opportunity, and literally moments after writing the tithe check, he received a phone call from a potential employer, scheduling a second interview. The next week, he was offered a job resulting in a 30 percent increase in his income and tremendous opportunities for advancement and pay increases.

He ended his letter saying:

As I look at his chronology, I am convinced that it is the blessings directly from the hand of God in response to a sincere promise made in silence and put into motion by faith at the next opportunity. Now I am "afraid" not to tithe... God is faithful to His promises and abundantly more faithful to His children. I look forward to having the opportunity to make sacrificial gifts over the next three years to our expansion program.

Isn't that a wonderful testimony? And it's typical of what the Lord does in our lives. As we give of our money and means, the Lord takes our funds, large and small, and uses them as He builds His work through us.

You say, well, how much should I pledge in this stewardship effort? Let me say several things about that.

1. On Palm Sunday, we're going to ask everyone to make a three-year commitment to this building program. Some of our leaders will have made their commitments in advance, but we're asking everyone in the church to make a three-year commitment on that day. You can do this with confidentiality, because it's between you and the Lord. Unless you tell me personally, I will never know what you have or have not committed. We'll receive those on Palm Sunday, and on Easter Sunday, we'll have the First Fruits offering, in which we ask everyone to make the first gift toward this project based on their commitment.

2. I know that many people in our church can give more than they are thinking about giving. This isn't about what you can give right now. This is about what the Lord can enable us to give over the next three years. To be honest, I'm stretching my commitment over four years in order to give a little bit more and take advantage of the tax deductions. But it is a faith-gift, and many people really and truly can take the amount they are considering right now, add a zero to it, and trust God to provide that amount by faith. By

God's grace, we can give more than we think we can.

3. Third, there are no small gifts. The commitments will all come in varying amounts, but there is no such thing as a small gift. All the gifts are large in the Lord's eyes and in our eyes. In my files is a clipping of a little girl who, many years ago, developed a burden to share the message of Christ with those who have never heard. She had very little, and these were in the days when money was hard to come by; but she managed to save one penny, and she sent it to a missionary in Burma. The small coin was all she had, but she gave it with her heart. The worker on the foreign field was deeply touched by the child's earnestness, and he decided he would do the most he could with that money. After careful thought, he purchased a Gospel tract and personally gave it to a young Chieftain. The tribal leader was unable to read, but as the young man looked at the tract, he grew intensely curious, and he finally left home and traveled 250 miles to find someone who could translate and read it to him. After hearing the Gospel message, he came to faith in Christ. Returning to his own people, he told them what the Lord had done for him, and he invited missionaries to come and to preach to his entire village. Many tribesmen were converted and a church was planted—all because of one little girl whose gift appeared very small by human standards, but it was very large in the sight of God.

Little is much if God is in it; so here in chapter 1, Haggai's first message was: God is Going to Build It Through Us.

God Will Bless It (Haggai 2:1-9)

Now, in chapter 2, Haggai preached another sermon, and we can title this one: "God is Going to Bless It For Us." Let's read this portion:

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it now seem to you like nothing?'"

I love this passage. What happened, of course, is this. As the work resumed on the Temple, the old timers who remembered the great and glorious Temple of Solomon grew discouraged and disappointed, because there was no way that this new building could match the splendor of the previous one, which they remembered. Solomon's Temple had been the most expensive and extravagant structure on the face of the entire earth. It was a wonder of the world. There was no way this tattered remnant could replicate the ornate splendor of the Temple of Solomon. They were building a functional building, but it wasn't gilded in gold or lined with marble. And the present reality, when compared to their prior memories, cast a pall of discouragement over them. But look at what the Lord is going to say:

But now, be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord, and work. For I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty. This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.

In other words, you may not be able to build a palace, but you will be able to enjoy a Presence. It may not be overlaid with gold, but it can be filled with God. It may not be dazzling with silver, but it can be filled with His Spirit. But there's more. The next verse brings to us one of the great Messianic promises of the Old Testament.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In a little while, I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty. And in this place I will grant peace, declares the Lord Almighty.

Here's what the Lord was saying: You are rebuilding this temple, but you think that it will never match the glory that belonged to the Temple of Solomon. But you're wrong about that. Because the time will come in days ahead when I will shake the nations, and a person—a Messiah—will appear on the stage of history, and He is the Desired of All Nations. And this Temple that you are building right now is the very building in which He will be taken to as an infant to be dedicated to Jehovah. He will come back here and confound the rabbis as a twelve-year-old boy. He will come here and teach the nations as an adult. And this Temple will become His place of ministry. You are building this building, not for yourselves, but for Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Desire of all Nation. And even Solomon's Temple in all its glory cannot compare with that.

Do you remember that stanza from Charles Wesley's Christmas Carol on this theme? It says:

Come, Desire of Nations, come;
Fix in us Thy humble home....

That's what they were doing; and with all my heart, that's what I think we are trying to do here. I want our building and classrooms here on this property to be a place where Jesus Christ ministers and where He does a great work. I want Him to tend the babies in our nursery and create a heavenly atmosphere which will penetrate their tiny hearts. I want Him to teach our children in our new children's ministry center. How well do I remember Marge Bailey and Jean Campbell, those dedicated godly women who taught me, when I was a little boy in primary and junior Sunday School, and who helped me memorize my first Bible verses. I want the Lord Jesus to head up our Youth Ministry, grabbing the heart of our students and turning them into a generation of world-changers for Him. I want the Lord Jesus to encourage our singles and to build up our homes and to win men and women and boys and girls to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Haggai said: God is Going to Build It Through Us, and He is Going to Bless It For Us. It is all of Him, from first to last. The glory of this present house will be greater than we could ever imagine; God will use us in marvelous ways; Jesus will be here among us—reaching, teaching, winning, and sending; and in this place He will grant peace.

I NEED HELP WITH MY TITHING

Haggai 2: Robert Morgan

We've begun a series of messages of the subject: "I Need Help ASAP!" Today's installment is entitled, "I Need Help with My Tithing."

What is tithing? Tithing is the habitual practice of giving to the Lord at least ten percent of our income. In the Bible, Abraham was the first to practice this habit in Genesis 14. The concept of tithing is seen from that point throughout the Old Testament; and the New Testament affirmed it, not as a law to be obeyed, but as a pattern to be followed and as a starting point for our giving to the Lord's work.

This is perhaps the most important subject facing Christians in the United States today, because God only designed one system for financing His work on earth—the generous, open-hearted, open-handed gifts of His people.

This is absolutely amazing to me. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven at the end of the Gospel era, He set in motion the greatest mission and the greatest enterprise the world would ever know. He established a channel through which all the world would eventually hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He established a company of believers that is larger and greater than any other company or corporation in history.

How is such an enterprise to be funded and financed?

The Bible only has one plan. God wants to give His people a regular income so that we might give a portion of that income back to Him for the financing of His global work. That is the only system He has ever devised for supporting His great enterprise on this earth.

The Bible encourages us to give at least ten percent of our income to the Lord's church; but the average Christian in America has seen fit to give only 2.6 percent. Out of every dollar God sends into our pockets, the average Christian in America gives just over two pennies back to Him.

Sometime when I look at those numbers, I feel a little like the great British preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. There's a new little biography of Spurgeon that has just been published by Clive Anderson. I ordered a copy from England and thoroughly enjoyed reading it. In this biography, Clive Anderson tells of a time when Spurgeon spoke to a group of people and he was trying to raise money for the ministries with which he was involved. At the end of his talk, he took his hat and passed it around for the offering. No one put anything into the hat, and when it came back to Spurgeon it was empty. The people there wondered what Spurgeon would do next. He prayed, saying: "I thank You, O Lord, that at least these old skinflints have given me my hat back."

Well, today, I'd like to show you two sides of the coin when it comes to the giving of our tithes and offerings. Heads and tails. Let's begin with tails—tightfisted people forfeit God's blessings.

Tightfisted People Forfeit God's Blessings

I'd like to give you a great example of this in the Old Testament. In the entire troubled history of the Jewish People, there has never been a more tragic day than the one that occurred in 587 B.C. for King Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of the Babylonian Empire. Look at the last paragraph in the book of 2 Chronicles:

And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young men or virgins, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon.

Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants of him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah....

For seventy years the city of Jerusalem lay barren, the temple in ruins, and the Jewish people exiled. And then, just as Jeremiah had predicted, after seventy years a remnant of Jewish people were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Look at verses 22-23:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!

And thus ends the book of 2 Chronicles. There follows immediately the book of Ezra, and this is the book that tells of the exciting journey of the remnant of the Jews, how they found their city of Jerusalem in ruins, how they cleared away the rubble from the ruins of the temple, and how they began to rebuild the house of God. This is the work that God had ordained and commanded for that generation, and they set to it with all their hearts. But there were problems and many discouragements. Most of all, there was opposition from the Palestinians, and there came to be governmental interference.

And look at what happened at the end of Ezra 4: Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

In between chapters 4 and 5, eighteen years pass. Eighteen years in which the Jewish people were living in Jerusalem, going about their lives, building up their homes, establishing their careers—and utterly neglecting the work on the house of the Lord.

Added to that was the fact that these proved to be lean years, hard years. They remnant sowed their crops, but the harvest was meager. They suffered from drought and famine. They earned money, but they it seemed they had holes in their pockets. They had clothing, but they couldn't stay warm. They had food, but they couldn't seem to get full.

But then God sent two men to them, to preachers, two prophets. Look at Ezra 5: Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them.

So Zerubbabel (the governor) the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua (the high priest—the religious leader) the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

And by the next chapter, the temple had been finished and dedicated to the Lord—and it was in this rebuilt temple—the Second Temple—though it was later renovated by Herod that Great, that Jesus Christ was dedicated as an infant. It was here that He worshipped and preached and performed His miracles and proclaimed His truth.

What message could so inspire the people of God? What sermon could have moved them to jumpstart their work? What could Haggai and Zechariah have said that brought such a revival to the Jewish remnant? Haggai began his preaching ministry among them by preaching on the theme of stewardship. Stewardship!

Turn with me to his book—it's near the end of the Old Testament—and look at how he begins. Let me read this to you in the new

paraphrase by Eugene Peterson called the Message:

The people procrastinate. They say this isn't the right time to rebuild my Temple, the Temple of GOD.... How is it that it's the 'right time' for you to live in your fine new homes while the Home, GOD's Temple, is in ruins...? Take a good, hard look at your life. Think it over.

You have spent a lot of money, but you haven't much to show for it. You keep filling your plates, but you never get filled up. You keep drinking and drinking and drinking, but you're always thirsty. You put on layer after layer of clothes, but you can't get warm.

And the people who work for you, what are they getting out of it? Not much—a leaky, rusted-out bucket, that's what. That's why GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies said: "Take a good, hard look at your life. Think it over."

Then GOD said: "Here's what I want you to do: Climb into the hills and cut some timber. Bring it down and rebuild the Temple. Do it just for me. Honor me. You've had great ambitions for yourselves, but nothing has come of it. The little you have brought to my Temple I've blown away—there was nothing to it.

"And why...? Because while you've run around, caught up with taking care of your own houses, my Home is in ruins... Because of your stinginess. And so I've given you a dry summer and a skimpy crop. I've matched your tight-fisted stinginess by decreeing a season of drought, drying up fields and hills, withering gardens and orchards, stunting vegetables and fruit. Nothing—not man or woman, not animal or crop—is going to thrive."

The people of the remnant weren't devoting their resources to the work of God or to the House of the Lord; they were spending everything on themselves. And as a result, the blessing of God had been withheld from their lives. Tightfisted people forfeit God's blessings.

Openhanded People Experience God's Blessing

The flip side of the coin, however, is that openhanded people experience God's blessing. Do you realize that virtually every commandment in the Bible related to giving and stewardship has a corresponding promise? Let me give you five quick examples.

- Proverbs 3:9-10: Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase. In other words, we are to honor—to worship—God. How do we do it? We honor and worship Him in many ways, but one way is certainly with our money and with the first part of our income. The promise: So shall your barns be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.
- Proverbs 11:24-25. This passage shows us the two sides of the stewardship coin as clearly as any passage in the Bible. It is comparing tithing and giving with the sowing of seed by a farmer. There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. What does that mean? Let me read it in the New International Version: "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed."

Two of my best years as a young man were spent in Graduate School at Wheaton College outside of Chicago. One of the trustees at Wheaton and one of its principal backers for many years was a man named Robert Nicholas. He was a very successful business owner in the Chicago area, and a highly respected community leader. He was a man who believed in tithing and in giving far beyond the tithe, and the reason he believed that went back to this verse in the book of Proverbs.

Robert Nicholas had grown up in Ontario, and as a young man he had migrated to Chicago. Robert was hardworking and industrious, and soon he was earning far more than he had ever dreamed about. He wrote to his parents, telling them of his good fortune.

His father wrote back in a lengthy letter, warning him of the dangers of money. Be cautious and wise, he said. Give to the Lord. Some people are financially blessed so as to be generous in the Lord's work. And don't forget Proverbs 11:24, a verse Mr. Nicholas prominently quoted in his letter to Robert: "There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty."

The verse had its intended effect. Robert began giving his tithes and offerings to the Lord. Joining a nearby Methodist church, he worked in the Sunday School and witnessed to friends. Within five years, he purchased his own hardware store in nearby Oak Park and soon built it into one of the strongest businesses in Illinois. His leadership in Oak Park brought in department stores, banks, and

schools. He advised and aided nearby Christian colleges, and helped finance many projects for the Kingdom. Many missionaries and mission boards, churches, and students received aid from him, the gifts often coming anonymously. His life overflowed because he never forgot his father's counsel from this verse in the book of Proverbs. Scattering leads to increasing more, but withholding brings poverty.

- Malachi 3:10-12: Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessings that there will not be room enough to receive it.
- Luke 6:38: Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-8: But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance of every good work.

I could quote other verses to you to show you the preponderance of this promise in the Bible, but I had to cut out other quotations due to time. Perhaps these will suffice to make the point: Tightfisted people forfeit blessings, but generous people claim and receive them. Tithing is one of the greatest secrets and most wonderful habits of the Christian life.

Perhaps you're saying, "Well, how do I begin? I'm in such a terrible financial shape now, how can I possibly begin? I can't pay my bills right now!"

Well, there's two ways to begin. There's the little faith way and the great faith way. Little faith says, "I don't have a whole lot faith in God's ability to keep His promises about finances, but I know I need to begin proving Him, so I'm going to begin with three percent, then to five percent, then move to seven percent, and then move to the tithe. It might take a year or so to get there, but I'm going to start right now as best I can."

Well, that's better than nothing.

But great faith says, "God has told me to test Him and to prove Him in this, and so I am. I'm going to start tithing from my next paycheck, and then I'm going to see how He begins to bless me and meets my needs."

In my preparation for this sermon, I came across the name of a man who has done much to promote tithing in the United States. His name was Thomas Kane. Many years ago, he began to tithe of his income, and after five years of trying it, he noticed that his business and his finances had undergone a decided change for the better. He began asking others if they had a similar testimony, and he collected story after story that was similar to his own. So he wrote a little pamphlet, a tract, and sent it across the United States to churches and to pastors. In it he said, "My belief is that God blesses in temporal as well as spiritual things the man who honors Him by setting apart a stated portion of his income. I have never known an exception. Have you?"

Millions and millions of copies of this little tract spread around the world. Years later, he wrote a book entitled "The Biography of a Tither," in which he said that he received thousands of replies to that little tract, but not one person ever wrote telling him that tithing didn't work for them. "The negatives," he said, "are nonexistent."

I can also tell you by personal testimony that this is true. Katrina and I just celebrated our twenty-eighth wedding anniversary. When we were first married, we didn't have a great deal. We both worked in department stores. She worked in a discount store selling cloth and fabric, and I worked at J. C. Penney's in the women's shoe section. We lived in a Presbyterian Manse in exchange for my preaching for them. But from the very beginning, to the best of my knowledge, we have tithed from every paycheck we have ever received. And today we are committed to give beyond the tithe on an ongoing basis. I can't wait to get to heaven and to see how the Lord has used the money we've been able to invest through the years in His Kingdom. But I have a feeling that when I do, I'll wish I had done so much more.

And let me say that ninety-five percent of what we give to the Lord, we do so through this church. Why? Because I believe in its ministries. I believe in its mission. I believe in its missionaries. I believe in the multitudes the Lord is going to reach through us. And I believe we can do so much more as a church if only we had more funding. I've given the best years of my life to the ministry

of this church in the will of God, and I believe the Lord has great things in store for us in the future. He wants to use us to change the world, and I'm so thankful to be able to invest in God's kingdom through the ministry of here and around the world.