

Haggai 2.10-19 / FBC / 11.15.20

Introduction

† **[1: Title]** Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

† How many of you have been on a cruise? Where was your favorite destination?

- I like to look at cruise brochures. If I were to take my sweet wife on a cruise, I could enjoy a week at sea, visiting exotic locales, with free activities on the boat all day, free meals and soft drinks, a room with a view of the ocean, plus Sofia would sail free. If I buy at the right time, I get not just free food, but free dining in numerous fancy restaurants on board; not just free activities on the boat, but on the shore of each stop also. To get all these benefits and more, all I have to do is pay the fare and get onboard. How many of these benefits do I get if I pay the fare, but then do not get on the ship? None, because I chose to walk away from them.
- A few years ago, I was mentoring four young men in my church. We met together weekly, and I met with them individually from time to time. The goal was for them to gain theological understanding, Bible study methods, ministry skill development, spiritual discipline and maturity, individual coaching about life issues or their spiritual issues, and all the blessings associated with biblical community, like encouragement, accountability, acceptance, and help. If one of those men stopped coming to the group, would he still be experiencing those benefits week to week? No, because he chose to walk away from them.
- We are going to see today that there is a similar dynamic at work in our relationship with God. We are studying Haggai 2.10-19, if you want to open your Bible and pull out the handout. Though Haggai lived under a different covenant with God than we do, we will find many ways we can learn from his prophecy, which God gave him for the people of his day.

† **[2: Timeline]** Before we consider the text, let's consider a timeline of events.

- The first exiles returned to the Jerusalem area in 538BC.
- On August 29, 520BC, Haggai gave his first prophecy about people's priorities being off, about the need to be devoted to God and dependent on God [1.1-12].
- On September 21, Haggai shared God's encouragement [1.13-15].
- On October 17, Haggai prophesied about the end times [2.1-9].
- In late November or early December, Zechariah began to prophesy to the same people.
- On December 18, Haggai gave two more prophecies, one of which we will consider today.
- In 457BC, a little over sixty years later, the second group of exiles would arrive, led by Ezra.
- That gives you the historical context for our passage today.

† **[3: 2.10-12]** **Haggai 2.10-12 NET: On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of [Persian King] Darius' second year, the LORD's message came to the prophet Haggai: "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies has said, 'Ask the priests about the law. If someone carries holy meat in a fold of his garment and that fold touches bread, a boiled dish, wine, olive oil, or any other food, will that item become holy?'" The priests answered, "It will not."**

- As he has done several times already, the prophet referred to God here as [יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת], which most English Bibles translate as “the LORD of hosts” or “the LORD Almighty.” The word [צְבָאָ] referred to military troops, for God it meant angelic armies.
 - The Bible uses [יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת] to emphasize Yahweh as the all-powerful God. The prophets sometimes refer to Yahweh in this way to frighten people into revering God, and sometimes to encourage people into trusting God. As we saw in Haggai 1, both were necessary at this time.
- † This all powerful God had Haggai ask the priests about “the law.” Which law was this?
- God was referring to the Mosaic Law, first given by God through Moses in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, then later augmented through other prophets. This is the Mosaic Covenant which God had with Israel, a set of promises and commands, with resulting blessings and curses depending on whether the people kept their part of the covenant and its law.
 - We need to be careful to interpret everything in the Old Testament after Genesis in light of the law. Along with the earlier Abrahamic Covenant and the later Davidic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant with its law was the guiding principle of the relationship between God and Israel as his representative people. Everything in the history books, wisdom books, and prophetic books relates in some way to this relationship, and therefore to this covenant and its law. Top line life, walking by faith and obedience, depended on the people’s response to that revelation.
- † **[4: clean]** What did the law say about this issue? Surprisingly little, almost nothing! In Leviticus [6.25-27], there is discussion about how specially consecrated meat [that is, meat prayerfully set aside for God] would itself be holy, and the garment that carried it either must be holy or would become holy [the Hebrew is fuzzy to our understanding], but either way there was nothing to say that the garment could then pass on that holiness to something else.
- So what is God’s point? Looking at the context of the whole book of Haggai and what Ezra tells us later, perhaps the people of Haggai’s day had deluded themselves into thinking they could gain holiness merely by association with holy things. Maybe they were thinking that just by being born into the people of God, with holy priests and holy sacrifices and soon to be a rebuilt holy temple, they themselves must be holy.
 - That’s not farfetched, because sometimes people today think the same way. You were born in the USA, God’s country! You were born into a Christian family and you were raised in the right kind of church. You attend church now, you are a part of the ministry, and you have the pastor over for supper, thus you must be holy. So you might think; but this is not so: you do not become holy or saved by any earthly association.
- † **[5: 2.13]** **Haggai 2.13 NET: Then Haggai asked, “If a person who is ritually unclean because of touching a dead body comes in contact with one of these items, will it become unclean?” The priests answered, “It will be unclean.”**
- God then asked whether those same food items would become unclean by touching someone who had himself become unclean from touching a corpse, and the priests answered yes. This is clear in the scriptures: **Numbers 19.22 NIV: Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening.**
 - Uncleaness was transmitted more easily than holiness, like a disease. The people of this community had failed to consider that association with unclean things would render them

unclean. It would be like if we took two of our teenagers, and we covered one of them with mud and then had them wrestle around for a while. Would the clean of the one youth rub off on the other? Would the mud of the other youth rub off on the one?

- † **[6: clean or unclean]** We are not talking about mud, however, so we need to understand what it meant to be clean or unclean under the Mosaic Covenant.
- Out of everything in our fallen creation, God decreed certain things were clean or unclean in his sight. Only what was clean could then be consecrated [set apart for God alone] and thereby purified to be holy, and thus allowed into God's presence.
 - Sin would make a person unclean, but you could be unclean without sinning too. A menstruating woman was unclean because of the blood, but this did not mean she was sinful. So unclean does not necessarily mean sinful. Everything is tainted in this world and thus impure in God's sight. But what God declared to be clean could be consecrated to him and thus declared holy, while what was unclean could not.
 - When things or people went from clean to unclean because of some event, like touching a dead body or menstruating, there was a ceremony to become clean again. That is why this sometimes is referred to as ritual or ceremonial cleanness.
- † **[7: Samaritans]** To understand what was going on, we need to consider the cultural situation.
- You might recall from our discussion of Haggai 1 that Ezra tells us there was external pressure to not build the temple. This pressure, which discouraged the people from starting construction on the temple for almost two decades, came from other people living in the area, called the Samaritans. The Samaritans were part Hebrew and part Gentile, their ancestors being mixed from the Hebrews left behind after the exile and the various people groups exiled into the land when the Assyrians and Babylonians conquered other places.
 - At first, the Samaritans resented the returning Jews, who were given much of the prime land in the hills around Jerusalem. The two groups also did not get along because of racial bias that went both ways, and because the Samaritans had their own form of worshipping Yahweh, which did not entirely agree with the Jewish way. So race, religion, and economics caused friction between these two peoples.
 - As we discussed last week, the postexilic group of Jews, once they began working on the temple again, also were disheartened when they realized how hard it would be to rebuild the temple with anything like the glorious result of Solomon's original construction.
 - Into the context of those two frustrations – the challenge of building the temple and the hostility of the Samaritans toward that project – Ezra tells us that the Persian government issued an edict for the Samaritans to stop hindering the temple construction and start providing materials for it. This must have seemed welcome news to the frustrated Jews!
 - But God had a different perspective. Because the Samaritans did not worship God properly, in God's eyes they were ceremonially unclean, so it was impossible for them to contribute anything holy to the temple construction; and anything they did contribute would be unclean and thus make the temple unclean.
 - I have no doubt that God loved the Samaritans and wanted the Jews to minister to them and correct the errors in their worship. But being of mixed ancestry, they were not part of Israel, and thus they were not the chosen image bearers of God in that dispensation or time period.

God wanted his people, the Hebrews [the Jews] to construct the temple and worship him correctly. Then the Hebrews could bring Samaritans into proper worship as Gentile believers.

- I think this is an issue God is addressing in this prophecy.

† **[8: implications]** Let's summarize the implications of God's message so far.

- The Jews were not holy just by being associated with holy things, like temple building.
- The Samaritans were not holy just by being associated with holy things, like temple building.
- What the Samaritans wanted to contribute to the temple would not be holy just by being associated with the holy things of the temple.
- The Samaritans themselves were unclean because they were not God's chosen representative people and because of their false worship.
- Because the Samaritans were unclean, anything they contributed to the temple was unclean.
- If those materials were used in the temple, the temple itself would be unclean.
- And as we will see in a moment, the Jews themselves were now unclean because of their association with the Samaritans and because of their own sinful ways.

† Before we go on, here's the big question: can we in the church, under the New Covenant, become unclean by association with sinful things? The answer is no... and yes!

- **[9: salvation cleansing]** When you accept salvation by God's grace gift, through your faith in the identity of Jesus Christ and his work to atone for you [that is, to make peace for you and reconcile you with God], then God justifies you, which means he declares you to be righteous in his sight forever.
- God justifies you by accounting to you the righteousness of Jesus Christ; we call that imputed righteousness, because it is imputed, or accounted, to you. This is God's choice, like he is declaring you to be clean in his sight.
- In that moment of salvation, as you are born again [regenerated] to have new spiritual life, because God has justified you [because he has declared to be righteous], you also are set apart for God's purposes, which we call positional sanctification.
- Now by definition, something holy is something pure that is set apart for God's purposes. Since you have both justification [a declaration of righteousness] and positional sanctification [being set apart for God], you are indeed holy in God's sight, and that can never be taken away by anything or anyone.
- So in that sense, you can never be made unclean in God's sight, not even by association with unclean or sinful people or things, because your cleanness, your holiness, is based on God allocating Christ's righteousness to you, not on your own actions. What a relief!

† **[10: confession cleansing]** On the other hand... you can experientially either walk with God or walk away from God; you can be in God's will, in his light, or you can turn away to walk in the shadows, pursuing sinful ways.

- When you sin, you are walking away from God, relationally separating yourself from him. You do not lose your salvation, you cannot lose it ever, but you do taint yourself and harm your intimacy with God. In this sense – experientially though not legally – you do become unclean.

- That is why God allows us to repentantly confess to him. When we are mired in sin, if we sense the conviction that we are wrong, we turn away from sin and back to God [that's repentance]; once we have turned back, we confess to God that we sinned, we apologize, we ask for his help to do better going forward, and we thank him for his forgiveness and cleansing through Christ.
- **1 John 1.9 NET: But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.** When we repentantly confess, God cleanses us from our sin, thus restoring our intimate relationship with him. This is a miraculous tool God has given us for keeping spiritually healthy. You should be using this tool every single day, anytime during the day when you realize you have sinned. Don't neglect this miracle in your life!

[11: 2.14] Let's return to our text. **Haggai 2.14 NET:** [After the priests had clarified the issue about cleanness and uncleanness] **Then Haggai responded, "The people of this nation are unclean in my sight,' decrees the LORD. 'And so is all their effort; everything they offer is also unclean.'"**

- In the weeks before this prophecy, Zechariah had prophesied to the same people about their sin. **Zechariah 1.3 NIV: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty."**
 - Because the post exilic community was sinful and associated with unclean things, they themselves were unclean in God's sight, and so was everything they offered, their sacrifices and their work on the temple.
- † It is hard for us to understand what a shock this must have been. Temple worship was essential to their religion. Without the temple, under the Mosaic Covenant the people had no access to God through the priests; and they could not completely satisfy God with their various sacrifices specified in the law for atoning reconciliation with God until the Messiah-savior would come.
- Now God, through Haggai, was saying in effect that nothing they offered – from their efforts at building the temple to their supposedly atoning sacrifices – was acceptable to God!
 - Suppose I said your baptism didn't count, your taking of communion was offensive to God, your money and ministry were worthless in God's sight. How would you feel? Even all that is nowhere near what Haggai was telling them.
 - Just being Jews – the chosen representative people – did not make them clean; just being back in the holy land did not make them clean; just working on the temple or making sacrifices did not make them clean. They needed to be obedient to the law in the Mosaic Covenant, they had to be walking with God by faith and obedience. Meanwhile their disobedience made them unclean as did their association with the Samaritans. And their own uncleanness rendered even their sacrificial worship unacceptable.
- † **[12: sacrifices]** Because of Jesus's sacrifice on our behalf, we do not need a temple or priests to have access to God; and we do not need to offer animal sacrifices anymore to have peace with God. Jesus has made permanent peace between us and God. So when we screw up in sin, we already are forgiven, and if we repentantly confess then we will be cleansed, healed, restored in relationship.
- Yet the New Testament does encourage us to sacrifice for God in other ways in our lives for other reasons. In response to God's salvation, in which he declares us holy, and in response to his transformation of our character, to experientially become more holy, God envisions us offering him sacrifices of praise [Hebrews 13.15], kindness and generosity toward others [Hebrews 13.16], even devoting our whole lives to him [Romans 12.1-2]!

- **Romans 12.1-2 NIV: Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**
 - Yet without Jesus, even these sacrifices would be useless, unacceptable to God! Only Jesus cleanses us and consecrates us for God, setting us apart for his purposes so that God declares us to be righteous and holy in his sight. So we should beware of depending on religious ritual [such as the Lord’s Table] to cleanse us or falling into the habit of religious ritual without really feeling devoted and dependent on Christ.
- † **[13: 2.15-17] Haggai 2.15-17 NET: [God further spoke through Haggai] “Now therefore reflect carefully on the recent past, before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple. From that time when one came expecting a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty measures from it, there were only twenty. I struck all the products of your labor with blight, disease, and hail, and yet you brought nothing to me,’ says the LORD.”**
- This goes back to when the people first returned from exile. Those first to return no doubt thought they were the prophesied “faithful remnant” who were about to experience all the prophecies of God’s deliverance. But instead of blessing them greatly in the harvest, God had been chastening them this whole time until Haggai spoke.
 - The curses in the law, however, had not effectively called the people into repentance; to do that, it took Haggai’s warning to give up their materialism and make God’s work their priority.
- † **[14: 2.18-19] Haggai 2.18-19 NET: [God continued] “Think carefully about the past: from today, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, to the day work on the temple of the LORD was resumed, think about it. The seed is still in the storehouse, isn’t it? And the vine, fig tree, pomegranate, and olive tree have not produced. Nevertheless, from today on I will bless you.”**
- Now they were to look back over the past few months, since they resumed work on the temple. Their hope of blessing had not occurred yet, even though they began building the temple as commanded.
 - Part of the problem was that the harvest was over, so they would have to struggle through the rest of the year, hoping for better in the next harvest.
 - But also, though they had repented of their materialism and focused again on God’s priority of rebuilding the temple, they had tainted themselves with unclean associations.
 - Despite all that, now God promised to bless them, no doubt knowing they again would respond to Haggai’s prophecy with repentance, in this case by refusing the offer of Samaritan help and doing what was necessary to become ceremonially clean for God themselves.
- † **[15: I am with you]** In the previous prophecy at the start of Haggai 2, God had given the people hope of eschatological [end times] blessing. Now God was bringing hope for blessing in their present and near future, that he would bless them because they were operating in his will.

- They would continue to suffer for a little while because of the weak harvest that resulted from disobedience, but they should take hope that now things would improve. Material blessings were proof of the restored relationship with God under the Mosaic Covenant.
- Almost a century later, Malachi would speak again of economic suffering, because the people were once more disobedient. But at least for now, Haggai's community was about to experience God's blessing because they were in his will.

† **[16: sin effects for us]** We are under a different covenant, the New Covenant, which replaced the Mosaic Covenant. But there are some similarities we might note.

- God does sometimes discipline his people today, to try to call them back to him. Quoting a proverb is **Hebrews 12.5-6 NET: For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts.**
- Scripture tells us there are other negative side effects of our sins, including earthly human consequences [such as jail for legal crimes], deception of the mind and hardening of the heart [Hebrews 3.13], spiritual bondage to sin [John 8.34; Romans 6.16-18], physical illness [John 5.14], a loss of heavenly treasure [2 Corinthians 5.10; 1 Timothy 6.18-19], and negative effects on other people.
- Also, as we said earlier, when you sin, you damage your relational intimacy with God. So you in effect walk away from him, and – though your salvation is not threatened – you in effect walk away from other blessings that are inherent to God's way of life and a tight relationship with God. Thus you no longer can expect God's empowerment to endure your trials, his transformation to spiritual maturity, strengthened faith, growing manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, the ability to inspire others to faithfulness, spiritual enlightenment.
- So the choice each day is ours. We cannot earn God's love or his salvation, but if we want to experience all of the blessings promised in scripture, we have to choose each day to walk with God, on the "top line," living by faith and obedience to his revelation. And if we screw up, which happens all the time, then we need to repentantly confess this to God and thank him for his forgiveness and cleansing.

† So two themes you can take with you today...

- First, we need to be clean and consecrated for God, and that happens in the legal sense only through faith in Jesus Christ, only by accepting his righteousness as a gift.
- Second, we need to be clean and consecrated for God, and that happens experientially only when we walk with God, in his light, responding to his revelation with faith and obedience.
- Let's pray . . .