

September 21, 2025

Return: A Blessing for a Defiled People

Haggai 2:10-19

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...

This morning we are going to look at Haggai 2:10-19, the third of four messages the Lord spoke through the prophet, Haggai. Speaking generally, in first message, Haggai spoke to the Israelites' priorities. They were focused on building their own houses but not the Lord's house in ch.1. In the second message found in 2:1-9, Haggai spoke to the Israelites' perspective. They were overwhelmed by the task at hand and discouraged by the lack of progress. So God gave encouragement through the words of Haggai that His blessing comes through obedience to his word.

And in this third message, Haggai speaks to Israelites' purity. Specifically, their history of doing religious activities with unclean hands and their need, moving forward, to walk in moral and spiritual cleanness of obedience. So we're going to work our way through this passage a little bit at a time and we'll talk about application at the end. So follow along, as I read the Word of God from the Book of Haggai, starting with vs. 10. [Read]

So, this prophetic message comes from Lord exactly three months after Israelites had returned to the work of rebuilding Temple in ch.1. And it comes roughly two months after the second message, which we looked at last week in the first part of ch.2.

And this third message begins with a conversation between the Lord and the priests through the words of Haggai. Now, the priests had several responsibilities under the Mosaic Law. And one of those responsibilities was to distinguish that which was morally and ceremonially unclean from that which was clean according to the Law. God had given numerous instructions by which the Israelites were to obtain and maintain moral and spiritual cleanness, so that they could remain in His holy presence and set apart as His holy people. The priests were the ones responsible for knowing, teaching, and then implementing, these Laws in Jewish society.

So, for this reason, the Lord addresses the priests with two questions about cleanness and uncleanness. Now, it's important to know the Lord is not asking these questions because He has a lack of clarity of His own laws. He's asking as a way to make His case and we see this play out in the following verses. [Read v. 11-12]

At the heart of this exchange is this question: Can holiness be transferred to a third level? This may seem like an odd question, but hang with me a second and let's see if we can make it make sense. To fully understand what is going on here, we need some background to this question and that is found in the description of the sin offering which is described for us in Leviticus 6:

"This is the law of the sin offering. In the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the Lord; it is most holy. The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tent of meeting. Whatever touches its

flesh shall be holy, and when any of its blood is splashed on a garment, you shall wash that on which it was splashed in a holy place.” (Lev. 6:25-27)

So, according to Leviticus 6, if the meat which was made holy by the priest as an offering touches a garment, then that garment becomes holy by virtue of its touching it. Holiness is transferred to a second level. But Haggai takes the scenario one step further and asks, “If that garment which is made holy then touches something else, does that third object become holy?”

And nowhere is that assertion made, either in Leviticus 6 or any other section of Law. And so, the priests rightly give their answer, “No, holiness cannot be transferred to a third level by virtue of association.” Having this question answered, Haggai moves to build his case by now asking a second question. [Read vs. 13]

Haggai essentially asks the same question but with a focus on uncleanness rather than cleanness. His question is essentially, “Can uncleanness be transferred to a third level?”

And the Mosaic Law is very clear on this matter. In Numbers 19:11 it says, “Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days.” And then in that same chapter in vs. 22 it says, “And whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean, and anyone who touches it shall be unclean until evening.”

So, unlike holiness, uncleanness can be transferred to the third level, and beyond. A person who touches something unclean becomes unclean, and then everything that person touches becomes unclean, and so on and so forth.

And uncleanness was no small matter for Jewish people. This was a matter of righteousness and holiness before God. People who became unclean had to separate themselves from the community of God's people and the Temple and go through a purification process, which sometimes took many days, to become clean again. If they didn't go through that process, they defiled everything they touched. And if they entered the Temple in a state of uncleanness, they were guilty of a terrible sin and were to be cut off from God and His people (Numbers 19:20)

The Law makes all of this very clear. So, in response to Haggai's question the priests, again, emphatically give a clear and correct answer, “Yes, it does become unclean.”

Now, this is where Lord drives His point home. He turns the priests' right answers about cleanness and uncleanness against people of Israel. [Read v. 14]

Now, what's interesting is that Haggai doesn't give us any detail about why, specifically, the people are unclean. Scholars have made many speculations, but the reason that seems most likely to me is that Israel had delayed rebuilding Temple because of their selfishness and lack of faith, as we saw in ch. 1.

The Book of Ezra, which describes these same events, tells us that, although they had quit rebuilding the Temple sixteen years prior, they had managed to get an altar built at the Temple site before they quit (Ezra 3:1-7). So, we presume that, in the sixteen-year gap before Haggai prophesied, the Israelites were offering sacrifices on the altar, but living in disobedience by leaving the Temple in ruins. So, in other words, they were going through the “religious” motions but, because of their disobedience, they were unclean before God.

And it was this uncleanness that was polluting their religious offerings so that they were not pleasing to God.

And this is the pattern we find throughout Israel's history. And, if we are being honest, we too often see it in our lives as well. They were doing the right thing by offering sacrifices, but their heart was far from God. The Lord wants them to see this pattern and change course. And so, He is going to instruct them about their past in the present. [Read v. 15a]

A quick note about the phrase, "from this day onward." The Hebrew in this phrase is a little tricky to translate. In your Bible, the word "onward" probably has a little footnote next to it. If you read footnote, you'll notice it says, "or 'backward'; see also verse 18"

You're thinking, wait, so this word could mean "forward" or the complete opposite, "backward"? Yes, welcome to Hebrew! But here in this instance, however you translate it, the main point of this passage does not change. This is what the Lord is doing. He is going to command Israel to "consider" their past, in the present, so as to live differently in future. [Read v. 15-17]

The Lord through Haggai commands the people to "consider" the past, not only today, but also moving forward into future. In other words, to "keep on considering." And what are they to consider? The emptiness of their life when they lived in uncleanness and disobedience, before they started rebuilding the Temple. They are to consider the time of fruitless toil, when the Lord tried to use their material lack to reveal their spiritual lack. Haggai commands them to "consider" these things, not just once, but three times. [Read v. 18-19a]

This time, the Lord commands them to consider the more recent past, the period of time since rebuilding began sixteen years ago and right up to present day. "Consider this," the Lord asks: "Has it gotten much better?" "Have things improved for you?" And the answer is, "no, you still have not seen God's blessing from your labors."

But, as the Lord commands them to "consider" the reality of the past He does not leave them without a promise of hope for the future at the very end of vs. 19: "But from this day on I will bless you."

God does not leave them to do it without hope. He gives them a promise. Because of their repentance, their faith, and their covenant obedience in heeding His voice and starting to rebuild the Temple in ch. 1, God promises that next year will not be like this one. Today may look bleak, but tomorrow will be bright and it will be a season of blessing. Why? Because God has promised and He always keeps His promises.

As we move to application, we need to think about these issues of cleanness/uncleanness and blessing/cursing and the difference between the Old and New Covenants. Under the Old Covenant, the Israelites, by God's design, were morally and spiritually clean or unclean before God based on their observation of the Mosaic Law.

Cleanness allowed them to live in fellowship with God and His people and to experience material fruitfulness of covenant blessing. Uncleanness distanced them from God and His people and, if it was not dealt with sufficiently, it led them to experience the covenantal cursing of God. Moving from uncleanness to cleanness involved the offering of animal sacrifices and ceremonial cleansing as an atonement for sin and wrongdoing.

But the New Covenant makes it clear that the whole system of the Mosaic Law is fulfilled in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that the Old Covenant and its system of cleanness, uncleanness, and sacrifice was temporary and incomplete. It was merely foreshadowing a more substantial, permanent, and complete covenant of Christ Jesus.

And, indeed, something more substantial, permanent, and complete was needed to remedy our human problem of sin, uncleanness, and unrighteousness. Scripture tells us that the destructive consequences of sin are universal, so that no one is righteous, not even one. (Rom. 3:10-12) Sin is inherent in our fallen world, so that we are sinful even from our mother's womb. (Psa. 51:5) And sin is pervasive. It touches every part of our existence, so that, as Isaiah says, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." (Isa. 64:6)

And the sin that makes us unclean before God, of which we are all guilty of, separates us from God and His good purposes for our lives. We are left with the just consequences of our sin, death and God's final judgment. There is no way we can work our way out of this hole because our uncleanness is transferred to everything we touch, so that even our most righteous deeds, the best and most virtuous acts we can muster, are stained like a polluted garment, unclean and unacceptable before a perfectly Holy God. And there is nothing we can do to change it.

But the good news of the Gospel is that God came to change it for us. Jesus, by nature of His Divine birth, was untouched by the universal, inherent, and pervasive nature of sin. He perfectly obeyed and fulfilled the Law. (Matt. 5:17-20) His life proved that He was perfectly clean, perfectly righteous, and perfectly free from the curse.

And as he died on the cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God, a great exchange happened. An exchange in which Jesus took our uncleanness and our curse upon Himself and shed His blood as an atoning sacrifice to fully and finally wipe them away, in a way the blood of animal never could.

And then, He rose from dead three days later, proving that sin and the curse of death had been defeated. And He now offers His perfect cleanness, His perfect righteousness, and His freedom from the curse as a free gift of grace to those who will receive it by faith with the result being that, by repentance and faith, we can stand before God fully and finally clean and righteous. Not simply with a cleanness of hands, but with a cleanness of heart. (Acts 15:9) Not by our own merit, but by the merit of Christ on our behalf.

But here's what we all have to remember. Simply showing up to church on Sunday cannot make you clean and righteous. Showing up to a midweek small group or Bible study cannot make you clean and righteous. Neither can reading your Bible or serving others, or... Although we, as followers of Jesus, should be doing all of these things, don't fall into trap of believing that doing enough "good" things makes us righteous before God. Jesus, alone, can make you clean and righteous before a holy God.

[Invitation]

If you have taken that step, know this today, you are clean and righteous before God. Not in anything that you have done, but in what Jesus has done for you. Again, the Book of Hebrews says in ch. 10, that we can "have confidence" to approach the throne of grace by the blood of Jesus. That we can "draw near" to Him with a "true heart in full assurance of

faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” And we can “ hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering...” because “he who promised is faithful.” (Heb. 10:19-25)

If you are in Christ, you have been declared clean and righteous, once and for all. Trust in His grace and forgiveness and love for you.

Consider these things today. And go on considering them in the days to come in the same way Haggai encouraged his fellow Israelites to do. Christ fulfills and transforms our understanding of cleanness. He is the New and Better Sin Offering, who touches us and makes us clean. His grace, love, and forgiveness compel us to obedience. And, when we obey Him, He promises us blessing saying, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 10:28) Let's pray.

Benediction: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” – Hebrews 13:20-21