

Haggai 2:10-19
"Tis the Season"

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1. I want you to use your sanctified imagination. Imagine that we have the capabilities to travel back in time, and that just for a few moments, we are going to take a sort-of time travel field-trip together.
2. Our destination is the ancient city of Jerusalem. It is the once-glorious capitol where great kings like David and Solomon ruled.
3. The year is 520 BC, and Jerusalem, like much of the world, is presently within the realm of the vast Persian Empire, which only recently replaced the Babylonians as the world's super power.
4. The city itself has certainly seen better days. There are piles of rubble where the walls once stood. Neighborhoods that were once prized real estate are now broken down and empty, vacated in the fallout of war.
5. *Our* calendar says it is late November, but for the small community of Jews who have returned to the city, *their* calendar says it is the ninth month, called Kislev.
6. As we walk around the city, we hear no talk of turkey or Black Friday, and there are no Christmas decorations to be found anywhere.
7. A crowd has gathered near the spot where the great Temple used to stand. As we draw near them, we recognize that somebody is preaching to the people.
8. His name is Haggai, and his message is about what God wants to do for His people at this time in their history.
9. We are not ancient Jews, and this time of year means very different things to us than it did to the people of God long ago.
10. Nevertheless, I want us to consider the message that the Prophet Haggai delivered about this same time of the year, some 2,500 years ago.

11. While his message applied specifically to that day and to those people, the truth behind what he said is timeless, and applies to us as well.

12. Regardless of what time of the year it may be, it is always the right time to apply the Word of God to our lives. Therefore, consider what the old prophet can say to us in this season. First of all, he speaks to us and says, 'tis the season:

I. TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD

1. In Haggai 2:10, we are given a date reference for our text. It says, *"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."*

2. Again, that date corresponds very closely to this same time of the year. For us it would be late November or early December.

3. So about this same time of the year, God spoke to the Prophet Haggai. His instructions are recorded in verse 11. He said, *"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law..."*

4. Haggai was told to pose a couple of questions to the priests regarding the Levitical Law; that is, the religious law regulating the worship in the Temple.

5. As we examine these questions that God sent Haggai to ask, we are reminded that God did not need the answers. No, He had given the Law, and He knew right well what it said.

6. His questions served to make a point to His people in that day. Look down at verse 14. God says to Haggai, *"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."*

7. The people were not right with God, and He spoke to them through Haggai about their condition. As we look at what God said to His people, we are challenged to think about our own relationship to God, and where we currently stand with Him.

8. From these questions, and their answers, we are reminded of what must happen in order for us to insure that we are right with God. First of all, we must:

A. See the contamination of sin

1. In verses 11 and 12 we find the two questions that Haggai was told to pose to the priests. Look at them with me.

2. First of all, verse 11 asks, *"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?"*

3. In other words, if a priest were carrying a piece of sacrificial meat that had been set apart for the Lord, and that meat were to contact some other item of food, would that meat transfer its holiness? In verse 11, the priest answered, "No".

4. Now look at verse 12. The second question is this, *"If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?"*

5. In other words, if someone who is ceremonially unclean, because of contacting a dead body, should then touch something else, would they cause that object to be unclean? The priest's answer was, "Yes."

6. Here is the point the Lord was making through Haggai and his questions. Just because you handle holy things, does not mean that you are holy.

7. In fact, if you are unholy, and you handle holy things, you will in turn make those holy things unholy.

8. Preaching on this text over a hundred years ago, Charles Spurgeon described sin as being so contagious that, "...he who is affected by it spreads it wherever he goes." He went on to say, "We cannot [transfer] holiness, but we can [transfer] unholiness."ⁱ

9. Dear friend, you may come to church and sing the songs and sit through the sermons, but all those holy things do not make you holy.

10. In fact, if you are not genuinely right with the Lord, all you are doing is contaminating your religion with your sin. You must understand the seriousness of your sin if you are to get right and be right with the Lord Jesus.

11. Notice something else that must happen in order for us to be right with God. We must not only see the contamination of sin, but we must also:

B. Seek the cleansing from sin

1. Look again at verse 14, and the explanation for the questions posed to the priests. It says, *"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."*

2. The people were going through the motions of religion, but their hearts were not right, and their sin was defiling everything they did; even their worship.

3. The people were unclean, and until they became truly clean, they could do nothing that would please the Lord and make their worship acceptable.
4. There is here a great lesson for us who live, not in ancient Israel, but in modern, religious America. The truth is that all our church-going and all our Bible-belt rituals will do nothing to cleanse us of our sins.
5. We can sing “Amazing Grace”, pass the plate, and say, “Amen”, but unless our hearts have been truly cleansed, we have done nothing but pollute the presence of God with our foul, filthy sin-sickness.
6. You say, “But preacher, how do we get clean – truly clean?” I’m glad you asked. The only answer is Jesus!

Are you clean – truly clean from the inside out?

*Are you washed in the blood?
In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb,
Are your garments spotless?
Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

7. Until Christ makes us truly clean, nothing we do will ever please God. We cannot be right with God apart from the righteousness of Jesus!
8. Haggai reminds us that this season is as good as any to make sure we are right with God. *'Tis the season to be right with God.* Notice also secondly, however, the prophet reminds us that this season is also the season:

II. TO BE RESPONDING TO GOD

1. Some 2,500 years ago, about this same time of the year, the prophet Haggai preached to the remnant of God’s people who had returned to the city of Jerusalem.
2. Upon their return to the city, they had been commanded to rebuild the Temple. For various reasons, that work had been neglected and the people had disobeyed God.
3. Their disobedience had caused them problems, and yet, in spite of those problems, the close of verse 17 says, “...yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD.”
4. These people were guilty of not turning to the Lord and responding to Him when He tried to get their attention.

5. All these years later, I fear that many of us as God's people today are guilty of the same thing. Our lives are filled with situations and circumstances that are intended to turn us to the Lord.
6. Yet, we are often clueless as to the Lord's work in our lives. Like the Jewish people long ago, we have not turned to God when we should.
7. Haggai's message reminds us that we should see the events of our lives as motivation to respond to the Lord our God. Consider this with me. We should be responding to God:

A. When difficulties challenge us

1. In the books of Kings and Chronicles we read about the wealth and glory of the kingdom under Solomon. It was the golden age of the Israelite monarchy.
2. When we come to the book of Haggai, those days are long gone. Things in Jerusalem were hard, and making a living was a struggle for those who had returned from the exile.
3. In our text, Haggai reminds them of the difficulties they had faced prior to their obedience in starting the work of the Temple.
4. He says in verse 16, *"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."*
5. The idea is that when these people came to a heap of grain, they thought it would amount to twenty measures, but it turned out to be only ten measures.
6. Likewise, their grapes were small and dry, and when pressed, would fill only twenty vessels, as opposed to the normal fifty.
7. Remember, this was an agricultural society. What their land produced was essentially their paycheck. It is equivalent to you getting paid half of what you used earn, or making only a percentage of what you once made.
8. All those difficulties should have turned the people to their God, and caused them to seek His face. Apparently though, it did not have that effect.
9. What about you? When things are hard, and life is a burden, do you turn to God? Do you draw closer to Jesus when the days are difficult?

10. Too many want a sunny-day Savior, who provides us with comfort, rather than a cross. Too many follow Jesus for the loaves and the fish He can provide, but want nothing to do with all His talk of denying yourself and forsaking all for His kingdom.

11. When difficulties challenge us, it should cause us to respond to God with a humble and submissive heart. We should be responding to Him, not only when difficulties challenge us, but also:

B. When discipline chastens us

1. The lives of these people had been hard. Their crops had struggled and all their labor seemed to be for little gain.

2. In verse 17, the prophet Haggai explained the reason behind all their struggles. The Lord spoke through Him and said, *"I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD."*

3. God was the reason their lives had been so hard. He was chastening them for the purpose of disciplining them and bringing them to repentance.

4. I wonder; could it be that right now there is a painful situation in your life that God is using to try to chasten and discipline you?

5. Hebrews 12 has a very instructive passage on the discipline and chastening of the Lord.

6. Beginning in verses 5 and 6, the writer of Hebrews says, *"...My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."*

7. Later on in that same chapter, verse 11 says, *"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."*

8. It is never pleasant when God begins to discipline us with the rod of chastening. However, when He does, it is for our good, and for the purpose of turning us towards Him as our Lord and loving Father.

9. The old preacher, Vance Havner talked about his upbringing, and about how his dad was the authority in the home. He said of his dad, "[He] was in favor of the posterior application of superior force when necessary."ⁱⁱ

10. When our Heavenly Father applies His superior force to the chastening of us as His children, it should turn us to Him, and cause us to respond to Him as the Lord of our lives.

11. There is a third truth we find from Haggai's message in this season. It is the season *to be right with God, to be responding to God*, and lastly, 'tis the season:

III. TO BE RELIANT ON GOD

1. After having pointed the people back to the days of leanness and struggle, prior to the laying the foundation of the Temple, in verse 18, Haggai points them forward.

2. Verse 18 says, *"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."*

3. The last part of this particular prophecy of Haggai ends on a hopeful and optimistic note. Look at the last phrase of verse 19. The Lord says through His servant, *"...from this day will I bless you."*

4. Haggai called the people to look forward now in faith to what God was going to do for them. In the previous verses, Haggai called the people to repentance. Now, he is calling them to dependence.

5. Haggai's prophecy reminds us that in this season, we need more than ever before to be reliant upon our God, and upon His word to us.

6. Consider this reliance in light of Haggai's prophecy. First of all, consider:

A. The foundation on which we trust in God

1. In verse 19, we are pointed to a particular day. It was, *"...the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid."*

2. Before that day, things had been tough, and God was chastening His disobedient people. After that day, however, Haggai proclaimed that things would be different. God was going to bless them.

3. The laying of the foundation of the Temple was an act of obedience on the part of the people. It signified their compliance with the word and the will of God.

4. For us today, our blessings from God are not dependent upon some work or act that we might do for God. No, the foundation for our faith in the Lord is none other than Jesus Christ.

5. In light of our text in Haggai, I am mindful of what Paul said in I Corinthians 3:11. *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

6. Today, we anticipate the goodness and the blessings of the Lord, not because of anything we have done for Him, but because of what He has done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We rely upon God, saying with the songwriter:

*My hope is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus blood and righteousness,
I dare not trust a sweeter frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name*

*On Christ the Solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand"*

7. In this season, we trust the guidance and goodness of the Lord because we have trusted in Christ, in Whom we are blessed with all spiritual blessings!

8. 'Tis the season to be reliant on God! Consider not only the foundation on which we trust in God, but consider also:

B. The faith with which we trust in God

1. Look very closely at what the Lord says through Haggai in verse 19. He asks His people, *"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."*

2. In other words, God asks his people, "Is your seed still in your barn?" The seed *would* still have been in the barn, since the time for planting had not yet come.

3. He went on and said, "Also, the vine is still bare, the fruit trees, and the olive trees have yet to produce anything."

"Yet," said the Lord, "...from this day forward, I am going to bless you."

4. Do you see what God was saying to His people? He was telling them, "In spite of how bad things have been, and though there is no sign yet that they are going to be any different, you are going to have to trust Me. I am going to bless you."

5. There are times when our lives seem so barren. Nothing good has happened in a while, and it looks like nothing good is going to happen for a while either.

6. Yet, when things have been bad, and seem to be bad still, we know the Word of God has promised us that all things are working together for the good of them that love God, and them who are called according to His purpose.

7. We must rely on God in this season, and in every season, that He loves us and is working even now for Christ's sake to produce something good in our lives.

8. British poet and hymn writer, William Cowper, struggled with mental illness that led him into deep, dark valleys of depression and despair.

9. Even in the midst of those struggles, Cowper penned, what is in my estimation, one of the most insightful Christian writings outside of Scripture.

He wrote:

*"God moves in mysterious ways,
His wonders to perform,
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm,*

*Deep in unfathomable mines,
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will,*

*Judge not the Lord from feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace,
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face,*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy, and will break,
With blessings on your head."*

10. The Lord's message, proclaimed through His servant Haggai challenges us to trust and rely on God now, with a faith that looks beyond how things have been, and how they may even appear to be still, and onto what God says they *will* be.

1. Were we to use our hypothetical time-travel powers to transport the prophet Haggai from his day to ours, he would be totally unfamiliar with all our holiday traditions and celebrations this time of year.
2. I imagine though, he would tell us something very similar to what he preached to God's people some 2,500 years ago, around this same time of the year.
3. Haggai's prophecy reaches across two and a half millenniums, and two different cultures, and reminds us that this season is a season to be right with God, to be responding to God, and to be reliant on God.
4. While much is different in our world from that of Haggai's, one thing that has never changed is the Lord our God.
5. He is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. We need Him today just as badly as His people have always needed Him. May we hear from Him today as they did long ago!

ⁱ Spurgeon, Charles, The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Vol. 42, (1896), sermon "Defiled and Defiling", p. 589

ⁱⁱ Hester, Dennis J., The Vance Havner Quote Book, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986), p. 69