

A Tale of Two Houses

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[0 : 00] Well, as I say, tonight we are coming to the end of this short book of Haggai. And in lots of ways, this unfamiliar book maybe to us has proved to be a book of reversals.

First, God reversed their priorities. Once they put their own houses first, but now they are putting God's house first. Then God reversed their expectations.

Once they thought God's house would come to nothing, but now they are trusting that it would be everything that he promised it would be. But there's one final important twist at the end of this book, because the book ends with maybe the biggest reversal of all.

And it's this, that God reverses the curse. As long as God's people were not right with him, as long as they were out of step with his spirit, everything that they put their hands to was doomed to be unclean in his sight.

Not fit for God, his holy presence. So God says, as we just read, that he struck all the work of their hands. Their harvests didn't fill their barns.

[1 : 22] Their wine vats didn't fill their cellars. They were cursed as a result of their sin. But we see, from this day, says God, something is going to change.

See that there in verse 19, God says, from this day on, I will bless you. Bless you. The day that the foundation of God's new house was laid, well, the curse is lifted.

And instead, God blesses them. And this final twist of this short book is wonderful good news for them, God's people, for their work, their worship.

Most importantly, perhaps God's king. Now, if you've been with us through the book of Haggai, you'll know how wonderfully this book speaks to us, God's people, today.

We've seen how the story of God's house tells us about God with us in Jesus and about God in us by his Holy Spirit.

[2 : 31] We've seen how it speaks to us of God's house, his church, where God lives today. And, in fact, of the new creation where God will live with his people forever.

And, of course, it's spoken to us, hasn't it, about our weakness, our weariness, and our spiritual disinterest and self-interest at times.

But it's to people like us that God has said repeatedly in this book, I am with you. And now, he says, I will bless you. And if we are God's people today, well, this message is for us.

Sometimes God will still need, won't he, to challenge our priorities. Sometimes God will still need to stretch our expectations.

But the great news for us tonight, if our trust is in Jesus, to come to the end of the book of Haggai, is that the ultimate foundational change in our lives has already happened.

[3 : 39] Because God has already taken away our curse and instead has blessed us through the death and resurrection of our King Jesus. So that today, we in him, we live in his presence.

Our work is fit for his kingdom. And our day-to-day lives are worship. Holy worship of a holy God. So that's where we're going.

That's what we see in this final team talk that Haggai gives first to the priests in the temple and then to the governor, Zerubbabel.

And if Haggai's team talk that day had had a title, I imagine that it might have been a tale of two houses. And as Haggai does, we're going to start with our longer point and then move on to our more brief point at the end.

So house number one. Well, God calls us through Haggai firstly to consider the clean house.

Consider the clean house. So it's now been two months since Haggai's last team talk.

[4 : 49] It's been three months since God's people got back to work on his house. And so now things are happening in the city. I guess the dust and the noise of a building site are back.

We see the work of the prophets isn't finished yet because now God sends Haggai to the priests with one final word of encouragement to spur them on.

And it begins with a sort of legal riddle. Now these questions about what happens if you have a piece of meat hidden in your pocket or what happens if you've sort of come into contact with a dead body, these seem like strange questions to us, don't they?

But actually they're to do with something that we have become maybe a bit too familiar with in the last few years. And that is contagion. Contagion.

We know, don't we? Hopefully by now, how could we forget that if a person is unwell, if they have a virus, well, they can spread that virus by coughing or touching or breathing on someone.

[5 : 55] But okay, say somebody then gets vaccinated. And then they go around sort of coughing on people and touching them. Well, they don't spread health, do they?

They don't spread immunity. Okay, we know, don't we, that contagion is a one-way street. Things naturally get dirty. They don't naturally get clean.

And that was spiritually true in the religious laws of the Old Testament. So here's Haggai's riddle again, verse 12. If someone carries holy meat and they touch bread or stew or wine or oil or any food with it, well, do those things become holy?

And the priest answer, no. And then the follow-up question, verse 13. Well, then, if a person who's unclean by contact with a dead body touches one of those things, does it become unclean?

And the priest answer, yes, it becomes unclean. So the point of this little riddle is simply this. Holiness isn't contagious, but uncleanness was contagious.

[7 : 10] And that is a serious problem, isn't it? It means that however hard they try, things are only going to get spiritually filthier and filthier.

Serving God for them then would be like trying to clean up a muddy floor, but they've got mud all over their shoes, all over their hands. The mop is dirty.

The water is filthy. It doesn't matter how hard they mop and scrub. They're only going to be wiping the mud around, aren't they? And that's how it was in God's house.

Haggai is saying things are only getting less and less clean, because you and your work are unclean before God. It's like the opposite of the Greek myth, King Midas.

Everything he touched turned to gold. Well, we could say everything that they touched turned to mold. Now, we have to be a little bit careful here with what we do with this, because in the Old Testament, uncleanness doesn't equal sin.

[8 : 21] Okay, so you could become unclean for lots of non-sinful reasons, like touching a dead body, like Haggai says. And as Jesus says later, clean and unclean are only really dealing with things that are outside of us, not in the heart.

But even though these ceremonial laws were only a kind of temporary teaching tool, well, they teach us a permanent truth, a truth that is still true, that God is holy.

Holy, holy, holy. He cannot be corrupted or twisted or smudged even a little bit by sin.

John writes in his first letter, God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. And so the law says that only things that are holy can be in the presence of the holy God.

And so do you see the problem? The priests are right, at which they are right. Well, then with the spread of uncleanness around God's house, well, soon no one or nothing would be fit for God to live with them.

[9 : 45] That's exactly what had been happening in God's new house. See that verse 14? Haggai said, So it is with this people and this nation in my sight, declares the Lord. Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.

And so the uncleanness of his people was undoing the whole point of the return from the exile, the rebuilding of his house, for God to be with them again. He's like a surgeon operating on a dying patient, but all his tools are dirty and rusty.

Whatever he does is only going to make it worse. Unclean people cannot build a holy house for God to live in. Now, where does that leave us, God's people, today?

Are we unclean like God's people back then? Well, no, we're not. Remember, Jesus changed this for us, didn't he?

Remember, he declared all things clean. He says this in Mark chapter 7. There's nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him.

[11 : 01] So touching dead animals, okay, that's probably a bad idea. You wouldn't recommend it. But it's not going to threaten your relationship with God. Wonderful good news.

However, however, even without those laws, our situation isn't really better. Because Jesus goes on to say, well, it's not what goes into you, but it's what comes out of a person that defiles him. Because from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within. And they defile a person, says Jesus. In other words, he's saying what separates us from God, it's not out there, but it is in here.

So those ceremonial laws are designed to teach us in ways we can see and feel how the sin in here that we can't see and we can't feel kind of spreads, contaminates us, our church, our communities.

[12 : 23] Jesus is saying like a polluted well that only gives dirty water. So whatever is drawn out of our hearts is muddied by sin. Now that is a huge problem, isn't it?

If whatever comes out of us, our work, our words, even our worship, it is not fit for a holy God. How can God be with us?

Some would say that this is the question of the whole Bible, the question that the whole Bible is crying out for an answer for. Well, the great good news that Haggai comes is that God has done something about the uncleanness, the curse of our sins so that he can live with us.

Did you notice that? Look with me at verses 18 and 19. He says, From this day on, from this 24th day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid.

Give careful thought. Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, pomegranate and olive tree haven't borne fruit. From this day on, I will bless you, he says.

[13 : 41] Think about this day, says God. Which day is that? It's the day that finished the new foundation for his house. He's saying, remember this foundational day.

From this day on, he says. I will turn that curse around. The curses we read about in the book of Deuteronomy. Drought. Lack.

Instead, he would bless them. And notice, that's not happening when they put the kind of finishing touches on the house. Okay? When they go around doing the snagging. It's from when they have laid the foundation of it.

From the very start. He's saying, he has done his work in their hearts. And they have responded in faith. And so now he will bless the work of their hands.

See, God is coming to them. To clean them up. That is how he will live with them. And brothers and sisters, that is how he comes to live with us, is it not?

[14 : 46] He must come to clean us up. Is that not what we see time and time again in the gospels? That when Jesus comes and touches unclean people, it is not to push them away.

It is to wash them clean. How willingly he did that. Earlier in Mark's gospel, there's a man who comes to Jesus with leprosy.

And he says, if ye are willing, Lord, you can make me clean. How does Jesus answer? I am willing. I am willing.

Be clean. And so he was. He is willing. And only he can do that, friends. If you have not come to Jesus, know this. You need to be washed clean by him.

Tonight, you can't wash yourself clean. And I can't wash you clean. The Lord Jesus washes sinners clean. And on the day you come to him, God will take away the curse of your sin.

[15 : 54] And he will bless you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Let that day be today. If it has not been already. Remember those covenant curses.

God says he called for a drought on the land, on its fruits, on all their work. They came, the people, under God's curse for ignoring him, for rebelling against him. But here God says, well, keep an eye on the fields.

And keep an eye on the trees. Because from this day on, that's going to change. Consider it done. He says, you'll have food on the table again. You'll have things to offer in worship.

Your service will be fit for me. I will bless you. Now, again, friends, where does that leave us? As Christians, with our sin.

Well, once again, we need to see, as we have done throughout this book, that God's house is not preaching to us about bricks and stones, but about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[16 : 58] We read in Peter's first letter, chapter T. Peter writes, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Peter calls him the cornerstone, the foundation stone. And he speaks of us who trust in him as a holy temple. You are like stones, he says, being built up together on a living foundation that God has laid.

And that foundation is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, remember which day, as Haggai says, God would reverse that curse.

The day the house is finished, or the day the foundation was laid? Well, it is that day, isn't it? The day the foundation went down. And so to bring that kind of up to date for us, what day is that? What day do we consider as God's people today is the day on which God began to rain his blessing upon his people, while not some future day when Christ returns in glory, but on the great historic day when God raised his son Jesus from the dead to be the foundation on which his church would be built.

[18 : 37] Friends, it is from that great historic day onwards that those who have trusted in him have been free from the curse of sin. Sins forgiven, guilt covered, debt paid, done.

So that we, me and you, friends, as we are, still sinning as we do, we are standing by faith on the death and resurrection of Jesus, while we are clean, fit for God's service, richly blessed now and forever, because on the cross, as we read earlier from Galatians, well, Christ took the curse so that we would receive the blessing.

And friends, Haggai says to us, doesn't he, he preaches to us tonight, consider that day, consider that day, oh, happy day when Jesus washed my sins away, because from that day onwards, he says, I've blessed you.

He no longer are works like filthy rags in God's sight. Yes, who we are, yes, what we do is still stained by sin. And yet in God's sight, it is worthy and acceptable because of Jesus.

You think lots of us as Christians live with the sense, maybe that you nothing ID for God is ever good enough. that God looks at us here today and thinks, hmm, not sure.

[20 : 14] Let's be clear, what we do for God can't put us right with him. But once God has put us right with himself through Jesus, he says our whole new life, all our work, our service, our worship, well, it is acceptable to him.

He accepts it. Peter says, you brothers and sisters, you have spiritual sacrifices to offer, which our holy God accepts and delights in because of Jesus' finished work.

So what spiritual sacrifices, what counts, what do we do that God delights in? Well, what about our prayers? Long, rambling prayers and prayers that we just don't know what to pray.

We struggle to find the words. Acceptable, says the Lord. What about our time in the Bible? That snatched kind of 10 minutes at the beginning of the day and the hour or two we spend listening to his word being preached on a Sunday?

Acceptable, says God. What about our serving as a church? The teams and the rotas that we have going every Sunday? And the meals we cook?

[21 : 34] The calls we make? The lifts we give? Acceptable, says God. The visible public service up the front and the acts of love and one anothering that go on that nobody sees.

Acceptable, he says. We could go on and on, couldn't we? There's all sorts of areas of spiritual life and service. God accepts. Family worship. David touched on this this morning.

Be it blissful or chaotic. Acceptable, says God. Or at work. The great gospel conversation with your colleague. All the just short prayer at your desk.

Acceptable, says God. All spiritual sacrifices that God loves and delights in when we offer them to him. Because however they are offered, they are being offered in and through the Lord Jesus.

And he is acceptable. And that is a wonderful thing, isn't it? For us to consider. Consider. When we feel that nothing we do is ever good enough.

[22 : 43] If you feel today that you're falling short as a Christian, you're not going to be alone. Obviously, I'm not going to ask you, but if we asked for a show of hands, I suspect that it would be most of us, if not all of us, would feel that way.

And we have room, don't we, to grow as Christians. But no, brothers and sisters, however weak or struggling your Christian life feels today, well, God does not look at you in the chaos and the

busyness of life and think, not good enough.

If our trust is in Christ, he delights in us, he blesses us, he accepts us because, why? He has laid his foundation and we are standing on it.

And so he has taken away our curse through the death and resurrection of his son. Consider that, says that guy. Consider that. You know what great encouragement that is for us to press on in God's work, to build up his house, his church, to worship him.

Perhaps you don't have a specific day that you look back on. It's the day that you first trusted in Jesus. But we all have a day, don't we, that we can look back on and consider when life changed. [24 : 03] The day when he became a curse for us. The day when he was raised from the dead in glory. You consider that day, says Haggai.

And praise God when you wake up tomorrow for another day to offer him spiritual sacrifices, clean, holy, that he accepts and delights in.

Friends, consider the clean house. But secondly, and more briefly, Haggai brings us then to the second house, the king's house.

And God's final call to us through Haggai is to hope in the king's house. Haggai's been to see the priests in the temple. Now, verse 20, he's sent the same day to the final member of the dream team, the governor, Zerubbabel.

And the message he brings sounds a lot like the message God sent a couple of months earlier, doesn't it? I'm going to shake the heavens and the earth. But where is the point before of God shaking the universe was to build his house?

[25 : 12] Well, the point here seems to be to break down the kingdoms of the world, that he'll overturn royal thrones, shatter the power of foreign kingdoms. Suddenly we're plunged from the religious world of sacrifices into the political world of wars and kings and thrones.

It's a reminder for us God's plan in this book isn't just for a small house in the back of beyond, but for the world, for the nations. But we'll miss the point, I think, of the whole book if we don't see that this too is a promise about a house.

Not to raise up another special building, but to resurrect a royal house, a royal family. Verse 23, on that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I'll take you, my servant Zerubbabel, and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord Almighty.

This is an incredible moment, not just for this one man, but for the history of the world. See, nearly a hundred years earlier, after generations of sin, God had told his rebellious king, though you were the signet ring on my right hand, I would tear you off.

It's a terrifying thought, a terrifying image that God would disown his king. Still more terrifying that God was threatening to walk away from his covenant, his promise to David.

[26 : 50] God promised David a king from his house would always sit on the throne of God's kingdom. Those kings had broken God's covenant so many times in so many ways that finally he threatened to go back on his promise.

The royal ring would be torn off his hand. So see now what he's saying through the prophet Haggai. He says to Zerubbabel, I've chosen you, and I will take you to be, verse 23, the signet ring on my finger.

What's he saying? God is taking his king back. And what is more, this would-be king Zerubbabel is from the house and line of David.

David's son would sit on the throne again. And God is saying that he would move heaven and earth to see it done. What a powerful reminder, friends, at the end of this book that God never, ever breaks his promises.

That verse is one of the most powerful reminders in the whole Bible of God's faithfulness. Through centuries of rebellion, through decades of exile, he still had not forgotten his promise to David.

[28 : 09] He threatened to turn his back, but he never did. And a hundred years on, he was coming to put his king back where he belonged, on the throne of his kingdom.

Just as the signet ring had been torn off his hand, so he was putting it back on his finger. And just as the queen house would be rebuilt with greater glory, also the king's house would be rebuilt with greater power.

For the Lord says, on that day, there would be only one king, one kingdom left standing. And it is a kingdom that cannot be shaken. If you've never heard of Zerubbabel, don't worry.

There's a reason. And that is because he would only ever be the would-be king. He was never crowned, he never ruled. But through him, God raised up a king greater than any other to rule over his people.

You don't need to now, but later, if you were to turn over to the family tree of Jesus, in Matthew chapter 1, just 20 or so pages on, you will find Zerubbabel's name there.

[29 : 24] And a few generations later, Jesus, who is called Christ. See, this renewal and restoration and return, God promised through Haggai, did not come in his day.

But God's promise of a faithful king and an everlasting kingdom of glory and peace, it came with the coming of King Jesus. Ever since that day, God has been turning the world upside down, hasn't he? Your rulers and nations and kingdoms have come and gone, but Jesus is still on the throne. Your nations have risen to power and fallen to dust, but God's kingdom has only grown across the world. And at the close of this short but powerful book, Haggai calls us today, God's people, to hope in his kingdom. To see again the hugeness of God's work in this world.

To put our trust in what he is doing, not in the goings-on around us. Ultimately, to put our hope in the king, Jesus himself. And as we live in this world, to wait to him, to follow him, to invest our lives fully in his work here and now.

[30 : 44] And what is his work? I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So then, brothers and sisters, let us live and work and worship, thankful for a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

And let us pour out our lives to see his church on earth built. Let's pray for that together. Let's pray. God, our Father, how we thank you that you looked upon us in our sin far from you and you sent your Son.

How we thank you that you are ever true to your promises, that just as through the long ages you had promised rescue, rescue from sin, that you sent it in Christ.

through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. How we thank you that from that day you have been building your church, you have been blessing your people.

We thank you, Father, that we who trust in Christ are among them. And so tonight you bless us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Lord, help us never, ever to lose sight of that wonderful privilege and benefit and blessing we have in Christ.

[32 : 08] Lord, help us, we pray, when our eyes and our hearts are downcast and downturned. Lord, when our sin gets the better of us.

Lord, when the cares and the troubles of this life overcome us. Help us, we pray, to see Christ and to take heart and to press on in him, knowing that our work is acceptable to you through him.

Father, we pray that you would help us to be a shining witness, Lord, in this world. That each of us this week, that our church in the coming weeks, Lord, that through us you would draw many to yourself and so build up your church.

Draw living stones, we pray, to be built on the living stone of Christ. And this we ask in his wonderful name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.