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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

The Backstory: Seventy years earlier, the Babylonians overran Judah, destroyed Jerusalem, burned Solomon's glorious temple to the ground, and carried the inhabitants into exile. Now a rag-tag remnant of Jews return to their homeland and begin rebuilding the Temple. But when opposition arose from the neighboring peoples, construction stalled for sixteen years! So God raised up the prophet Haggai to deliver a message of judgment and of hope to them—and to us!

- Read Haggai 2:1-9 to learn **three actions which can help us learn how to trust God:**
In v. 3 God draws their attention to how puny the current temple is compared to Solomon's glorious temple (cf. Ezra 3:12–13). Why do you think God would want them to [1] **take a reality check?**

In light of this discouraging reality, why is it important to [2] **remember God's past faithfulness** (v. 4-5)?

How does [3] **taking hold of God's promises for the future** (v. 6-9) help in the midst of discouragement?

But here's a problem: a lot of the promises in the Bible were made to Israel, not to the church, or to specific individuals, not to you in particular, and "claiming a promise" that God made **to someone else** does not obligate him to fulfill it for you! So, how can we tell which promises are for us today?

- **OK**, now it's time for something **really obscure**—yet **extremely important**. Read Haggai 2:10-13. We're all familiar with the fact that Israel had some really confusing dietary rules (see Leviticus 11). "Clean" means "able to come into God's presence", so God told Haggai to ask the priests for a ruling:
Question #1: Do clean things have the power to purify unclean things? **Answer:** No.
Question #2: Do unclean things have the power to defile clean things? **Answer:** Yes.
So, the principle is: *"Uncleanness ruins everything, making one unable to come into God's presence—and some token virtuous activity cannot erase defilement, allowing that person to worship God."*

Got it? Now read Haggai 2:14-19 to see God's lavish grace in action!

According to v. 14, because the Jews had put their own interests before God's (1:2-4), everything they did was defiled and "unclean"—and they weren't in any condition to worship their holy God.

God himself opposed them, cursing their labors (1:9). End of story? No hope? Not so fast! Verse 15 opens with a startling contrast. What is it?

God said, "Yes, they're unclean—*but from this day onward*" (v. 15, 18 & 19) I'm going to bless them!" In v. 15, "this day" was "_____ one stone was placed on another in the temple of the Lord".

In v. 18, "this day" was when the foundation was completed. The Jews repented, obeyed, and God said, "That's all it takes—our relationship is restored! From this day onward I will bless you!" (v. 19)

Jesus once told a story that illustrates these principles. Read Luke 15:11-24. Discuss the similarities.

Have you "come to your senses" (v. 17) and "returned to your Father" (v. 18)? Tell us about it.

Sermon Summary (Key Text: Haggai 2)

Many times in my life I put myself over God. Then God speaks to me either by His Word, other believers, or through convicting my heart. My prayer is that I respond the way the people responded in the book of Haggai! The Lord called them out and showed them their problems were His discipline and they responded. They didn't respond like many believers do, but they responded like all believers should: they obeyed! God's people heard His voice and repented of their sin and began to restore their fellowship with Him. The reason they obeyed is because they feared the Lord (1:12). As a Christian, if we do not fear God then we will never obey Him! There are two phrases in this text that help the people keep moving forward in the midst of these tough circumstances. First, because of their obedience God says, "I am with you," and as a result of that, "the Lord stirred up their spirit." When life gets the best of us or when we get stuck in sin, if we will repent and obey the Lord, He promises to be with us and work in our lives. This is our motivation as believers. If we obey God's Word we have fellowship with Him and He works through us.

About a month after the Lord stirred up the people to obey they become discouraged. This happens in our lives too. We get on fire for the Lord and follow Him and then it gets hard or the things we desire are not happening and then we get reluctant and want to quit. The people became reluctant because the temple was not coming along quickly enough and did not seem near as good as Solomon's temple. The beautiful truth in this story should encourage our hearts. God commands His people to "Be strong" and "Work! For I am with you!" When times are tough and we cannot see the end, this is our hope. We keep pushing forward in life because God is with us! In the middle of their reluctance God teaches them that the results are His doing. In verse 9 God says, "The final glory in this house will be greater than the first." The burden is not on us. Our job is to obey God, and His job is to bring the results. If God's people will be obedient, He will handle the results!

As we continue in Haggai the tone changes. In v. 10-14 Haggai asks two questions with the hope of drawing application to the hearts of the people. The first question is a set-up question. They deal with the idea of making something clean or unclean. The first question was intended to show that ceremonial cleanness cannot be transferred (v.12), while the second question showed that ceremonial uncleanness can be transferred (v. 13). Haggai then applies the lesson. (v.14) Even though the people had been offering up sacrifices while they neglected the rebuilding of the temple, their offerings were unacceptable! Their sin had caused their offerings to become contaminated and unclean. And their good works, their offerings, could not transmit cleanness. Haggai is trying to teach them sin is contagious; righteousness is not.

In v. 15 Haggai tells them to reflect back before one stone was laid and examine what state they were in as a people. The Lord struck the people because of their sin. God destroyed the work of their hands with hopes of drawing His people back to Him. We see God's fatherly love here. When we have to discipline our children, it is not done out of hate, but love for their well-being. We want our children to make right decisions and when they don't, we discipline and correct them. This correction often times hurts, but it is for their good! As the story continues, the Lord's striking down of all the work of His people was for their good and ultimately for their salvation! After God disciplined His people and raised up the prophet Haggai, the people responded in obedience and this led to the Lord's blessing. God says, "Consider it carefully from this day forward." He is saying remember this day because from now on, because of your obedience, I will bless you! When God's people obey Him, they are blessed. The question is "what is this blessing?" We see all the way back to Genesis 2 and all the way forward to Revelation 21 that the greatest blessing of all is a right relationship with God. Revelation 21 says it like this, "Look! God's dwelling is with man, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God." What a promise! Sin will no longer separate us from our God and we will forever live with Him as His people. This is the greatest blessing one could ever receive!

As the chapter wraps up in verses 20-23, I want you to see one unique thing. God tells Zerubbabel He will make him His signet ring. A signet ring is the thing nearest to the king and it shows His final approval before any decisions are made. This is showing the restoration of the Messianic promise through a relationship with the Davidic line. Zerubbabel would carry on the Davidic line all the way to the birth of the Messiah. God is keeping His covenant with His people to provide salvation. The result of the obedience of God's people, through the work of the Spirit, ultimately leads to the blessing of Jesus the Messiah!

Questions to consider:

- Are you obeying God in every aspect of your life?
- How will you respond knowing your job is to obey and not worry about the results?
- Is there unrepentant sin in your life hindering your fellowship with God?
- Have you received the blessing of salvation by placing your faith in Jesus?
- Will you make God first in your life and obey Him in whatever He calls you to do?

Haggai Chapter Two

- 1 On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of Yahweh came by the hand of Haggai the prophet saying,
- 2 “Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying,
- 3 ‘Who among you remains who saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem like nothing in your eyes?’
- 4 But now, be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares Yahweh, ‘be strong also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land, be strong,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares Yahweh of hosts.
- 5 ‘As for the promise which I cut with you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is standing in your midst; do not fear!’
- 6 For thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘Once more—in a little while—I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.
- 7 And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the desirable things of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says Yahweh of hosts.
- 8 ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ declares Yahweh of hosts.
- 9 ‘The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘and in this place I will give peace,’ declares Yahweh of hosts.”
- 10 On the twenty-fourth of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Haggai the prophet, saying,
- 11 “Thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘Ask now the priests about the law:
- 12 If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches bread with this fold or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?’” And the priests answered, “No.”
- 13 Then Haggai said, “If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?” And the priests answered, “It will become unclean.”
- 14 Then Haggai answered and said, “‘So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and so is every work of their hands; and what they bring near to Me there is unclean.
- 15 But now, oh set your heart to consider from this day onward: from before one stone was set on another in the temple of Yahweh,
- 16 from when it was that one came to a grain heap of twenty measures, then there would be only ten; and from when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty troughs full, then there would be only twenty.
- 17 I struck you and every work of your hands with scorching wind, mildew, and hail; yet you did not come back to Me,’ declares Yahweh.
- 18 ‘Oh set your heart to consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month; from the day when the temple of Yahweh was founded, set your heart to consider:
- 19 Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree, it has not borne fruit. Yet from this day on I will bless you.”
- 20 Then the word of Yahweh came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying,
- 21 “Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, ‘I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.
- 22 I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.’
- 23 ‘On that day,’ declares Yahweh of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares Yahweh, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’” declares Yahweh of hosts.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

*Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "to obey is better than sacrifice"
It's more remarkable than you may realize—it was said at a time when sacrifices were obligatory!
Let's see what we can learn from this earth-shaking pronouncement...*

Monday— Read 1 Samuel 15:1-9. You're probably going to disagree with what God commanded King Saul to do...

- What **exactly** did God command King Saul to do (v. 1-3)?
- Want to know **why** God commanded that the Amalekites be utterly destroyed? Because as God was delivering poor, vulnerable, oppressed slaves, the Amalekites attacked the faint and weary stragglers—the weakest of the weak. (See Deuteronomy 25:17-19.) God, out of love and justice for the vulnerable, wanted to avenge that wickedness.
- **Did** Saul do **exactly** what God commanded (v. 7-9)?
- For whom do you feel greater sympathy—the Amalekites or the women and children slaves they slaughtered?

Tuesday— Read 1 Samuel 15:10-15.

- **What** did Saul **claim** (v. 13)? Was his claim true or false (remember v. 3, 8-9)? What was God's evaluation (v. 11)?
- Is **partial selective** obedience, in fact "obedience"? Why or why not?

Wednesday— Read 1 Samuel 15:16-21.

- What **exactly** did God command King Saul to do (v. 18)? And what was Samuel the Prophet's question (v. 19a)?
- Did Saul repent and confess, or did he double-down on his rationalizations and excuses (v. 20)?
- Whom did Saul throw under the bus (v. 21a)? (And notice in v. 21b whom Saul **ultimately** blamed! How wicked is that?!)

Thursday— Read 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

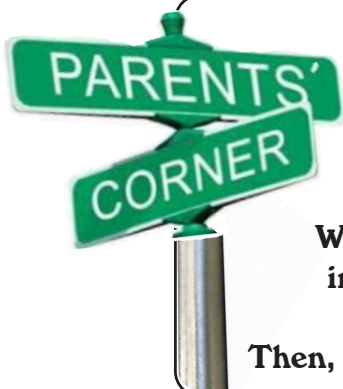
- Consider now that famous declaration in v. 22, remembering that burnt sacrifices were an established part of worship. How does v. 22 reveal the supremacy of our heart attitude in religious activities?
- How seriously does God take our hypocrisy (v. 23a)? What consequence did Saul receive for his disobedience (v. 23b)?

Friday— Read 1 Samuel 15:24-29.

- What was Saul's reaction when he heard what his disobedience would cost him (v. 24a)? What did he request (v. 25)?
- What was Samuel's (ie, God's) answer (v. 26-29)? Let this sink in and sober you; God **requires** obedience!

Saturday— Read 1 Samuel 15:30-35.

- When Saul realized that God had rejected him, whose approval did he still crave (v. 30; cf. v. 24b)? (Saul got his pathetic wish—see v. 31. But rejected, disgraced Saul was put on the shelf—see v. 34-35. How sad.)
- Who **did** obey the command God had given to Saul (v. 32-33)?
- Are **you** obeying God fully, from the heart, or are you substituting partial, selective religious activities of your own choosing?



The Jews in Haggai's day were disobedient and selfish (1:2-4)—and so God "spanked them" (1:9)! It worked, and they repented. God immediately blessed them—he didn't sulk or make them grovel. God blessed them "from this day onward" (2:15, 18, 19). How about you?

When your kids disobey, do you discipline them (as God did) or are you inconsistent, letting them get away with it (because you're too tired)?

Then, when they do repent and obey, do warmth and receptivity return immediately?