

We're three weeks now into a series on the book of Haggai. It's a very short book. He's one of your minor prophets in the Old Testament. This series for the past couple of weeks has been like a fun kick in the face. Haggai doesn't pull any punches. He just comes right in to a nation who found itself at a very interesting point in time. In 586 B.C., the nation of Israel is taken into captivity. They were enslaved because of their idolatry. God gives them over to the Babylonians who take them 900 miles away, ransack the city of Jerusalem and just decimate the glorious temple Solomon built to a heap of rubble. The Israelites are 50 years in captivity before God allows the Persians to come in and knock off the Babylonians. Then through religious tolerance, they release the Jews and send them back to Jerusalem to go back and rebuild their city. So after 50 years of captivity, the nation of Israel returns. They have been commissioned by God to rebuild the city, rebuild the people and mainly rebuild the temple. They were to take the temple that was in ruins and build it back up so that the glory of God would once again dwell in the heart of the nation that would be a blessing to the nation. So people start on it, and soon thereafter persecution sets in. The nation then gets fearful of the work that they're doing, so they spend the next 15 years neglecting the temple. They go and begin to build their own houses, panel their own houses and build up their own name, their own kingdom and their own comforts, all while the house of God lies in ruins. So 15 years after that, in 520 B.C., God sends Haggai the prophet in. He would then send Zechariah in afterward. But Haggai comes in and speaks to the people and says, "God is not pleased with the fact that you've chosen to neglect what He redeemed and saved you from to go do and spend the next 15 years focused on your own self to the neglect of His kingdom and His name." So God stirs up the hearts of the people, brings them to a place of repentance where first their hearts are changed in reverence to God, and then their hands follow and they get back to work. They begin rebuilding the temple of God just as He had freed them to do.

But as we saw last week, just three weeks after the people began rebuilding, discouragement sets in. Because the older generation begins to see this foundation taking shape and all these images of Solomon's temple 70 years earlier start flashing in their head, and they're thinking to themselves, "There is no way. This thing looks like a shack. It's just a piece of rubble that's here. There is no way this thing is ever going to be as glorious as what we saw in Solomon's day. So I don't even know where the motivation is to continue in this thing." Meanwhile, there is a bunch of young folks who had never seen Solomon's temple. They don't know any different. All they know is God is in this thing and God wants them to build something again for His namesake. They're excited, but the older generation's discouragement bleeds in to the younger generation to the point that they stop working again. So God sends in Haggai again, and he comes and speaks a word of encouragement to them. He tells them to lift up their weary souls to this place. He tells them, "What's in front of you, though it might look like nothing compared to what you knew before, the reality is that God is doing something eternal that you can't even fathom. So be encouraged. God happens to be for this. He is with you. Get back to work so that He might be glorified. Know that you have the assurance not of what you see, but of what has been promised. And hang your hope not on perception, but hang your hope on the promises of God, that He will indeed do something beyond your wildest dreams in this work." So the people are encouraged, and they get back to work.

And now what we find in this third of four messages in this book is that they're back to work, they're excited, things are going well now, they're encouraged by what God is doing, but there's another problem that arises within the nation that not even the people themselves were aware was happening. As they began to work on this holy temple, some bad theology begins to creep in. Their theology proper (their understanding of the nature of God) and their anthropology (their understanding of the nature of man) get confused. Two things happen that we're going to see in this message. As

the nation begins to stack one stone after the other on this temple, they begin to feel, because they were doing a holy work, that must mean that they themselves are holy. So they begin getting confused that, because they are engaged in external religious activity, God must be pleased with them simply because of the work of their hands. And secondly they felt that, because they have now turned their hearts in obedience to God, God must be obligated to bless them. So God then sends Haggai in again to correct this errant theology and to show them that no man is good enough on his own to earn both the holiness or the blessing of God. There's no work that you can do in and of itself that obligates God to then make you holy and bless your life. If anything, Haggai is going to argue that the only thing man is capable of earning is the judgment of God because of the sin that's in his life. So if any favor or any blessing comes your way, it's not because you were good enough to earn it, but it's because the grace of God has been poured out on you out of His own goodness. So we're going to see that the same message that was given to the nation 2,600 years ago is the same word that we need to hear today. It is not our religious activities that saves us and sustains us. It's not our religious activity that makes us holy before God. It's not our obedience to His work that obligates Him to do any sort of blessing in our life. In reality, we are in need, just as this nation was 2,600 years ago, of the grace and mercy of God to be poured out on us, not for anything we've done, but for everything that God has chosen to do in His love for us.

So let's look at this, starting in verse 10. "On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, . . ." This is December 18th, 520 B.C. It has been two months since the last message came to them, and it has been four months since the first message came to them. ". . .the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, . . ." In verse 11, Haggai is going to summon the priests together. Malachi 2:7 tells us that the very nature as well as all of the Torah about priests tell us that the priests were the spiritual leaders of the nation whose job was to read, discern and then teach the nation the nature of the Torah or the Law of God, what it is that God has demanded for His people as they move forward in obedience to Him. So the priests were the ones who understand this and interpret it for the people. So God commands Haggai to gather all the priests together, and essentially they're going to put the nation of Israel on trial because of this theology, this understanding, this misinterpretation that the nation had. They're going to now put that on trial before the priests and ask the priests for a ruling. They're going to ask them two different questions in verses 12-13 concerning the nature of God and the nature of man, the nature of holiness and the nature of unholiness. So he says in verse 11, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: . . ." And here's the first question that is asked. "If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy? The priests answered and said, "No." In other words, can an object that is dirty become clean simply because it rubbed up against something that is holy or pure? In Israel, when an individual family or the nation sinned, an offering was then demanded. This was the Levitical law that was set up by God for the people, that there would be intercession for the people so their sin might be atoned for before a holy God. What was demanded was an unblemished or perfect spotless lamb, goat or bull (depending on the offense that occurred) had to be slaughtered. The meat from that holy, unblemished animal would be taken and would be set upon the altar. Its blood would be shed over the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement that would cover the nation's sin. But that meat would then go up as an offering pleasing to God, recognizing that that offering was a perfect substitute to cover for their sin. As the priests would take the meat from the place it was slaughtered to the altar, they could not touch the meat. If anything touched that meat, it would become defiled and they could no longer use it as a sacrifice. They would have to go get another one. So the priests were very careful to take that meat and put it in the fold of their garment. They had a special fold in their robes that would carry the meat so that no human contact could occur. And they would carry that meat to the altar to protect it. So Haggai is asking, "If on the way the garment holding the meat accidentally touched something, was it possible for that something to be cleansed and holy?" The answer is no. It doesn't work that way. It didn't work that way in ceremonial law, and it doesn't work that way in life. I don't care how nice and new my Nike shoes are, if I go jump in a puddle of mud, it's not going to turn that mud into a nice pristine swoosh. It doesn't work that way. In the same way, you and I catch colds; we don't catch health. When you go into a doctor's office, they have the well child room and then they have the sick kid room. They don't bring the well kids into the sick room so that the sick children would just sit next

to them and all of a sudden be well. It doesn't work that way. They separate them because it's the cold that can spread to the healthy ones. So no, holiness doesn't transfer in that way. If I were to take this holy, pristine guitar of Bleecker's and allow my unholy hands to touch that guitar, I would not automatically know how to play that thing and lead you guys at the end of this service. In fact, it would be quite the opposite. My unholy hands would first break the strings, and as I began to play, I would then break your conscience as you listen. So it doesn't work that way. Holiness can't be transmitted. And rightly so, the priests agree that, "No, it can't."

So as in a typical trial, let's bring in Exhibit B to the table. Haggai is going to get the priests to prove that it works quite the opposite when it comes to holiness and unholiness. Verse 13, "Then Haggai said, "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?"" In Leviticus 22, in the religious and ceremonial law for the nation of Israel, it was told that if an Israelite touched a dead body, whether at a burial or just happenstance, they would be ceremonial unclean because they touched it. They would not be permitted to go into the temple services because they have been defiled by that which was deemed unclean. So they would have to then go wash themselves in a ceremonial bath, and then they would have to remain outside of the camp until evening before they were deemed ceremonially clean to come back into the services. So Haggai asks, "If someone who has become unclean by contact with a dead body then touches any of these things, will those things become unclean if they're touched?" And the priests rightly answer here, "It does become unclean." So we know from verse 12 that it's impossible to commute or transmit holiness, but what about transmitting unholiness, uncleanliness? The answer is yes. If you take something that is unclean and rub it up against something that is dirty, the dirty thing is going to win. Again, it works that way in life. You can take a load of all whites and throw in that one red sock. I don't care how awesome your Tide color-safe guard is, that red sock is going to win every time. It's going to bleed and stain the white shirts. When a family has an unruly child who has made all kinds of mistakes, who is just rebellious and public school just isn't working out for him what does the parent do? Let's pull him out of public school and we'll go take him to private school. Because the thought is, "If we can get that boy in private school, all that great Christian influence there is going to rub off on him and make him well." I don't know about you, but I have spent a lot of time in private schools teaching, and I'm not sure those kids are any better than what's going on in public school. As that kid comes in though, what's the problem? Is it the school? No, it's what within the heart of that kid. You can change the influences all you want and for a season it may correct some sort of behavior, but if the issue is within the heart, I don't care what setting you put it in, that influence will not make that kid behave better. That kid will probably find a way to make the other ones behave worse. That's just how it works. And that's the ruling that was given here in ceremonial law. If you're unclean and touch something that's clean, that clean thing is not going to make you clean; you're going to make it unclean. Even Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 5 when he says that just a little bit of leaven leavens the whole lump. It doesn't take much for something unclean to spread. So the answer according to the Law here is that holiness cannot be transmitted by contact, but uncleanliness or unholiness can.

So why does he share this? Verse 14, "Then Haggai answered and said, "So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean." So in a sense, all that the nation had done for those fifteen years before God revamped their heart and they got back to work, all that they had done to rebuild the temple, God says is unclean. The nation, when they returned to Jerusalem, the first thing they did is set up altars for worship, they reinstated the feasts and festivals and even had started rebuilding the temple. And God essentially says, "Everything that you did was unclean. I don't care how great the religious activity was, your hearts were unclean. Therefore everything you touched didn't make you holy. What it did was desecrate the work that I had committed you to do." So God says all of that was for naught. Why? Because the hearts were unclean. These were narcissistic, self-absorbed, idol worshipers who gave the appearance of devotion but were secretly committed to their own pursuits. And now even though their hearts had changed, even though they had gotten back to work on the temple, although the outside appearance gave that look of devotion, in reality they still felt in their hearts that it was just

this work that would make them clean. So God says, "You don't get it. Just because you have gotten back to work and you're moving forward doesn't mean that all of a sudden you're holy nor am I obligated to just reverse all the agricultural curses that were on you for the last fifteen years. What I've been after is your hearts. It's not your hands that make you clean; it's your heart. It's a cleansed heart from within, not your external work.

So do you see what's going on here with these first few verses here? You have a people who have been redeemed, who have been released to go work on the temple, their heart has been stirred up, there is much zeal for the work there, but along they way, they have gotten a misguided theology that tells them, "If I do this, this and this, then God will love me and deem me as holy. And if I do this, this and this for God, then He'll be obligated to bless me, because I'm doing this for Him." Now let me ask you something. Do we find this same misunderstanding in our culture today? Absolutely. It is rampant, not only all over the earth, but specifically in the Western church and Western mindset, we live on this stuff. The problem that's going on here is two fold. One is legalism. It's this feeling of, "I have to do, do, do in order to be acceptable to God." The other one that you see going on in the nation is the prosperity gospel that simply says, "Because I'm His, He owes me everything that's good." So legalism and the prosperity gospel are kissing cousins who reproduce illegitimate children. There are many in here who have been walking with Christ for a long time and are engaged in serving Him, but if we sat down and cornered you, you would still say that there is this pressure within you that feel like if you don't do enough, if you don't serve this much, if you don't attend this much, if you don't engage this much, then God's going to be disappointed in you. And you feel that if you do these things, then you'll be holy in His sight and He'll value and esteem your work for Him. We fall into that and feel like there's some prerequisite of morality before we can get to the point where we're ready for God's grace, which by the way is an oxymoron. When you study grace, the idea of grace is that it's unmerited favor. What makes grace unmerited favor is that it's unmerited, that there is nothing you can do, either before salvation or after salvation, that can make you, because of your own work, acceptable to God. That's now how God views it.

Turn over to Titus 2. I want to show you a snapshot of what morality looks like postsalvation. What does obedience and morality look like for a believer who has been saved by the grace of God? Titus 2, starting in verse 11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." You probably won't find too many clear passages reflecting the very nature of the gospel, past, present and future, than right there in that verse. Let me explain what this passage is saying here. Prior to faith in Jesus Christ, most people who believe in God, when asked, "How do you find favor in the sight of that God? How do you become acceptable in the sight of that God?," will go dig out a giant ladder and they'll simply start filling out their résumé. "This is how I become acceptable to God. I obey as many of the Ten Commandments as I can. And I try to limit the amount of crazy drunkenness that I used to have." And then we start comparing to other people. "Well I'm not as crazy lunatic as my neighbor. They're wild. I'm not that bad." So we just keep going and we climb that ladder until some point in time, somebody introduces us to the very nature of the gospel which simply says that man is not good enough to earn favor from God. Isaiah says even your best deeds are like filthy rags before a holy God. Because you can't earn it, God has provided it for you. In providing His Son Jesus Christ, verse 11 happens. "For the grace of God has appeared, . . ." It's now the law anymore. You don't have to climb up that ladder to earn salvation. Why? Because grace has come down that ladder and has offered a sacrifice on your behalf, but not just a piece of meat from a goat that you have to sacrifice more and more every day, but one sacrifice for all, God Himself. In Philippians 2, Paul says even Jesus the Son of God did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but He emptied Himself and took on the form of flesh, of a bondservant who eventually died a criminals death on our behalf and rose from the grave so that we might be cleansed and forgiven. So most of us, when we come to that point, we grab verse 11 and go, "I get it. It's not about me anymore. It's His grace. It's not about all these things I can do to earn

my salvation. It has been provided for me. And now all I have to do is believe and trust in Jesus Christ and follow Him." But what happens is we get to verses 12-14, this idea of renouncing ungodliness, worldly passions, living self-controlled, upright godly lives, being zealous for good works, and we go, "See? It was grace that saved me, but I've got some work to do now. And because of what God has done, I need to live a life that's pleasing to Him." So even though we get the grace of God in verse 11, when it comes to living for God on a daily basis, we go back into the garage of our soul and pull that ladder back out. Now instead of putting it up for our salvation, we put it up for our sanctification. We simply feel like we have to climb this ladder or God won't love us and will be disappointed in us. So we jump back on this treadmill again and just start running.

Here's what's crazy. There's something very interesting to notice about this passage. Because the expectation of a believer is verses 12-14, that we would live that kind of holy life before the Lord now. But how do we do that? The answer is in verse 12. It's the very first word in verse 12. It's the word "training." The word "training" there is the Greek word that we get our word "pedagogy" from, which is the idea of a parent teaching or instructing a child or a professor teaching or instructing a young student. But what is the subject in verse 11 that instructs us or trains us? Is it the law? Is it this pick yourself up by your bootstraps morality that says, "Once we've been saved by grace, now we have to work out the rest of our salvation to try to please God or else He'll be disappointed in us"? Is that the subject of verse 11? Grace is the subject. Don't miss this. This is huge in our theology. What Paul is saying here in verse 12 is that the same grace that saved you is the same grace that sustains you, that sanctifies you. There's no difference. There is no, "Take down the ladder for your salvation, but put it back up for your sanctification." No, it's grace on both ends. So as a believer in Jesus Christ, if you've gotten to the point where you feel like you have to perform in this religious activity in order for God to love you and be acceptable, you've missed it. You're back in law again. As law sets in for a believer, it typically manifests itself in one of two ways. It's either going to show itself in fear and insufficiency or pride and self-sufficiency. For the believer who is driven by fear and insufficiency, it produces deficit thinking in the believer, who continually feels like, "The tank will never be full enough of God's holiness, so I just have to keep pressing on. I've got to do more and more, and I've got to do all this stuff to win God's approval. Because if I don't, if I fail, then God is going to be disappointed in me."

I had a Catholic friend who would confess to me the guilt that he wrestled with about not attending his Catholic church. Not all Catholic churches believe this, but orthodox Roman Catholic doctrine will tell you that failure to regular church attendance is at the same level as murder. It's not a venial sin, but it's much worse. So he wrestled with this, "If I don't go to church consistently and regularly, then God is going to be displeased with me, and I won't be the Christian that He wants me to be." I just tell him, "Do you hear what you're saying? You're essentially saying that God's acceptance of you as a believer is based upon your performance. God's love for you, His acceptance of you isn't based on your performance. It's based on Jesus Christ. That's why Christ was provided. It's based on His work on the cross on your behalf. It's ludicrous to think that you have to obey these attendance patterns in order to be a Christian." Going to church makes you no more a Christian than going into McDonald's makes you a Big Mac. It doesn't work that way. We don't gain acceptance by osmosis. I assure you there is nothing in the fabric of the seat your sitting on that will actually bring you closer to God. It doesn't work that way. Essentially what happens here is people operate out of fear and insufficiency, thinking, "If I can only do this, this and this, God will find me holy in His sight. And if I don't, then I'll be a failure." If that's where you struggle as a believer, biblically speaking there is nothing you can do to make God love you any more. And there's nothing you can do to make God love you any less. Why? Because He doesn't love you based on your performance. He loves you based on His Son. That's the beauty of Christianity. That's the beauty of what our faith is in.

But let me be clear and say that grace doesn't then grant license to go do whatever you want. You don't have hell insurance so you can go and live like hell. If that's your understanding of grace, in encourage you to go bathe in Romans 6 and understand the same heresy the Roman church was falling into. They felt like, because of God's grace, they could

just have unbridled sin and go crazy. That's not what the gospel does. That's not what Jesus, in His grace, compels us to do. Grace compels you in the opposite way. Grace compels you to obey. Why? Because of what has been given to you, you now want to reflect the holiness and character of God, because that's what's in you. And it's grace that has freed you to that. Secondly, grace does not also motivate you to do nothing, to where you now just sit and lean on a shovel and pray for a hole in terms of morality. It doesn't work that way. Grace compels us to obey out of a right heart. What has changed is not the obedience. Obedience can happen by law or by grace. It's the motive that speaks to everything. Grace compels us, not in fear and inadequacy, but by grace of what He has given us that's confident in Jesus.

The second manifestation of living by the law is pride and self-sufficiency. The problem with behavioralism is that some people can actually accomplish it, at least compared to other people. The problem with performance-based legalism is that, when we actually start accomplishing it, we start sizing everybody else up to our own standard. After a while, we begin to feel like we've gotten away with it and that we find favor with God because of our performance. Both scenarios, whether living out of fear and insufficiency or living out of pride and self-sufficiency, only leave you as a slave to the law and you miss the whole point of it all. The danger of those two is they become like mirages, convincing us of a reality that's not really there. They convince you, "Somehow if I can just accomplish these external acts of religion, God will bless the works of my hands and I'll become more holy in His sight." But if the heart is still uncleansed, if the heart has not been changed from within, not only is my work not holy and pleasing before God, but everything that I touch will be desecrated in my efforts for Him. So God is saying here and the Law confirms it, "Just because God has consecrated this temple as holy and set apart as clean, just because you grab a stone and help throw it on top with some mortar, it doesn't make you holy and it doesn't make your offering to God sincere. It's just religious activity if the heart is not right."

The other thing is in verses 15-19, and that is the belief that all this external work by the nation should have instantly reversed their agricultural conditions and God should have just dumped out blessings on the people immediately. God says, "It's by grace there too." Verse 15, "Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the LORD, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty." He's saying, "Back when you spent all this exhaustive amount of energy pouring out in our own life and throwing God a bone through religious, ceremonial activity, how did that pan out for you? You were barren. There was famine in the land. You couldn't even bring home more than a 40-50% return on your investment." So in verse 17 is the reason for that. "I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the LORD." All those were curses under the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 28. When they turned to idols, God would withhold and afflict their crops. And God is saying, "Prior to that, I poured out My love to you, and you didn't repent to Me. Then I disciplined you and tried to bring you back into relationship with Me, and you didn't repent. All this effort that you poured into yourself produced nothing, and you still wouldn't turn to me. But now you have and your heart has been changed." So here's the promise of God. "Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider: Is the seed yet in the barn?" And the answer is no. In order to get seed to store up in the barn, you have to have a crop before that that gave you that seed from the fruit. They had been barren for fifteen years. Nothing had happened. "Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing." So God is saying, "Even though you turned back to work, there has been nothing. There has been no fruit for the last several months. You haven't seen anything. Just because you got back to work doesn't mean that automatically all the storehouses of blessing are going to happen, because it was on you. No, what makes it happen is because of My grace." So He says in a great promise in verse 19 to a discouraged heart, "But from this day on I will bless you." Because what God is not after is religious activity of our hands. What He's after is a heart that has been cleansed by His overwhelming amount of grace. In that time, He loves to pour out His blessing on that.

So what do we take away from this? If you have come into this place and you have made a mess of your life, if you come in here thinking that just because you came and attended a service at a church, that somehow is going to fix everything, we don't have anything to offer for you here for that. What I can point you to is a Savior who has been offered on your behalf and who has shed His blood to make a way for you to God that is not dependent on your own work. And you can rest in that grace. And if you're a believer in here who is finding yourself struggling with the treadmill of behavioral performance, be reminded and encouraged that the same grace that saved you is the same grace that sustains you. Rest in that and allow grace to be what compels you to move forward as a holy vessel under the Lord.

Would you pray with me to that end? "Father, we thank You for the promise of Your goodness, that You love us and have not left us nor forsaken us. Father, wherever those ladders are that we erect in our hearts, help us take them down. Because they don't accomplish anything. It's not our ceremonial activity, our religious activity, our morality and performance that can make us holy before You and obligate You to bless us. Lord, it is simply the grace the You have offered. I'm reminded of David in Psalm 51 after messing up with Bathsheba and having her husband killed. When he finally got broken, he stood before You and recognized that, if all You wanted was just a burnt offering and some sort of sacrifice, he would have brought it to You. But Father, he confessed that what God is after is a broken and contrite heart. Those are the sacrifices that You will not refuse. So Father, we lift our hearts before You now. We want to sing and we want to praise You, not because of anything that we've done, but because of the amazing grace that You have poured out in Jesus Christ on our behalf. For that, we love You and thank You in Jesus' name. Amen."

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