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Speaker 2 0:58

[Begin edited portion:]

Good day, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us on The Final Word. We continue with our study of the Prophet Haggai. Today we will wrap up our exposition with some applications of the message of the Prophet Haggai, some that we've mentioned along the way, some that we bypassed along the way but I think it is very important to pull those together.

Let me review the thrust of the Prophet Haggai. Haggai is a post-exilic prophet. We don't know much about him. But we do know that Haggai prophesied along with Zechariah, they were contemporaries, in the post-exile period. For those who don't know, the Jewish people who were living in Judea in 598 BC, and most especially in 586 BC, were conquered by the Babylonians. And as a result of a rebellion on the part of the last king of Judah, the Babylonians came in with a vengeance in 586 BC and destroyed the land and took the population (that they didn't destroy) en masse back to Babylon, and scattered them throughout their realm.

And that was a horror for the Jewish people, and it looked like all their hopes were dead. Well, the Babylonians were eventually conquered as the Lord had prophesied. Cyrus the Great was the conqueror and Cyrus, favorably impressed by some of the prophecies concerning him, issued a decree that allowed the Jewish people who want to do to return to their homeland, and encourage them to go back and to build the Temple, and he gave them some means with which to do it, mainly restoring to them some of the temporal properties that had been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

So they go back, they go back in 536 BC. They arrived there in the middle of December and set up shop. By setting up shop, we mean a very poor shop. First

thing they did was set up an altar on the ruins of the ancient temple. It was a pathetic sight, you can be sure, but they weren't worried about that at the time, and they offered sacrifice, which was appropriate. And they observed the first Feast, the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles, on the calendar.

And they set about very shortly to lay the foundations of the Temple once again and to rebuild it. But they didn't get very far at all before there was opposition. There was a new king on the throne by that time, and the opposition wanted to stop the building of the temple, and they sent their lawyers, so to speak, to get in the fray and to try to get the king to send a “stop work” order.

And they managed to do that; we won't go into the details. But for about 16 years, the people got invested and other things. They really pretty much had given up on the idea of rebuilding the temple. They used the excuse, “Well, it's not time to do that now.” You've heard it in our day, when there are things that people ought to do, especially when it involves money and work, they will find excuses to say, “Well, now's not the time.” Now sometimes there are good reasons and it is not the time. But in this case, it was simply an excuse. It was not a good reason.

The real problem was that the people had gotten invested in their own agendas, and they had put the worship of the Lord and proper service to Him on the back burner. The Lord was not concerned and He is not concerned now about bricks and mortar and all that kind of thing in themselves. The kingdom of God does not consist in more buildings. It does not consist in stained glass. It does not consist in bigger budgets. It does not consist in bigger crowds. Those things may or may not be germane.

But the point is, the fact that the temple lay there still in ruins was a message to Heaven that they worship of God, the proper service of the Lord was not a priority. Consequently, the Lord had been doing something to them, but they had no idea. They just had one crop failure after another, they had pockets with holes in them. We're all familiar with that phenomenon. Even when they had income, it just didn't go very far.

This mystified the people, and they felt like they were cursed, and they were; curse as the opposite of a blessing. So the Lord sends the prophet Haggai to them to warn them, that they needed to **consider their ways**. They have said, “Well, it's not time to do that the Lord says, is a time to build your sealed houses? Are you supposed to be out there in the suburbs, acquiring more and more for yourselves and building houses and finishing them and being proud of them and acquiring lands and doing

all this stuff while you let my temple stand there and ruins? No, no, no, “**consider your ways.**”

Well, the people got the message, and it was an obedient and a chastised response. The Lord was very pleased with this. And then the prophecy goes on to give them a lot of hope. And to tell them that things are going to be better from here on, and then the prophecy goes out into the future, about the wonderful things that God is going to do for the nation in the end.

Well, that is as much as we need to do; that’s giving it short shrift. But what we need to do now is just sum up some of the lessons that we can extract from this prophecy. In this book, we can learn these things, and I've got a good little list here.

Folks, bad priorities in that day and in this day have their bad consequences. They not only do in life in general, but especially that is true in the spiritual realm. God does not want to play second fiddle in your life. He wants first place. He is our Creator, He is our Sustainer, He is our Redeemer. It's not about us, it's about Him. And He wants us to honor Him. That is not legalism, that is a proper response to the grace, to the mercy of our God. We have no right to our own agenda. None.

@7:25, 1) God doesn't want simply more of your life, more of your time, more of your energy, more of your money. My friends, God wants to be first, period. And if we expect to be blessed by God in the ways that God is willing to bless us, then we've got to get our priorities in order. And a lot of people don't seem to understand that.

As I've said, a number of times in these studies, if you've listened to them, some people have the idea that God is our cosmic valet, that God exists in Heaven to serve us. There's a circle about our lives and say, “What is it that you need? Master, You tell me, and I'll be honored to supply these things. So you will thank me.” That is a very cockeyed notion. That is not what it is about.

@8:13, 2) A second lesson that we can learn from these words of Haggai is this. That all the religiosity, all of the ceremony, all the ritual, all the outward service of God in the world is of no account in God's eyes if we are defiled on the inside. For us, this life is not about God giving us happiness, it is about us gaining, by the grace of God through the work of His Spirit, holiness. What God wants of you and me is to be a holy people. The road to happiness, in the biblical sense of the idea, runs straight through holiness. That is God's first priority. I do not

mean that God does not care that you're happy. Of course he does. He wants you to be happy. But I'm telling you happiness runs through holiness.

And the first project in your life, as far as God is concerned, is to make you a holy man or woman, pure in His sight. And there, we find true happiness. And outside of it, we can't find anything other than those shallow things that the world calls happiness, which never, never last. Some people, a lot of people, in fact, just have a tendency to reduce our relationship to God to external things, and many to ceremony and symbol and all of that. And that's what I mean by religiosity. I mean, people just going through the motions of things externally, and they're quite happy with that.

@9:53, You know, they like communion, and what's not to like about it? They like baptism, what's not to like about it? They like going to church, what's not to like about that? Although some people find a lot not to like about that. They do the outward things. They read their Bible, they may pray the Lord's Prayer and such things; you can think of all the kinds of things that I've got in mind, which I'm encompassing under religiosity, and they are not bad in themselves. In the Old Testament, there was nothing bad about sacrifices, there was nothing bad about those rituals, there was nothing bad about those festivals. God had commanded them.

@10:25, *But when the outward things are not accompanied by the spirit that is supposed to attend them, they're abominations in God's sight.* God really wants at the end of the day, obedience, heart obedience, and not just the outward performance of religious rituals.

Well, we see this in Haggai, that God wants holiness. And if we're defiled on the inside, everything that we touch is defiled: all of our ceremonies, all of our rituals, all of our so-called sacrifices. If they're not attended by a Holy Spirit, then they're trashed.

@11:05, **3)That brings me to a third point.** And we see this in chapter two of Haggai, where Haggai asks the priests for a ruling concerning ritual law and then makes an application of it. *And that is this: pollution is much easier to spread than holiness.* Thomas V Moore, in his little book on the Minor Prophets, has made this very trenchant comment, **“One drop of filth will defile a vase of water; many drops of water will not purify a vase of filth.” Let's remember that. Pollution is much easier to spread than holiness.**

@11:51, 4) **This brings me to a fourth application** of the things that we see in Haggai, the Prophet: **No amount of religious ceremonies or rituals, no matter how appropriate in themselves** (I'm thinking in modern terms, baptism as appropriate, observing communion is appropriate, attending church is appropriate; "Neglect, not the assembling of yourselves together and so much the more, don't neglect it, as you see the day the day of the Lord approaching, were taught, and Hebrews chapter 10, verse 25." All of these things are appropriate in and of themselves.)

But no amount of religious ceremony or rituals, no matter how appropriate in themselves, can make one right who is polluted by willful disobedience to God's commands. People delude themselves in that way. We can go to church, we can pray up a storm. But if we're lifting up defiled hands, unholy hands, the careful observance of these rituals does not make us right. It cannot compensate for that.

[Illustration:] I remember years ago seems like another lifetime when I was in my first church out of seminary. I had a man on that church who was a deacon, it was a Baptist church, what are called elders and most other churches were called deacons in that church. He was a major pain in the differential, you know what I mean?

But like many of his type, he was a man whose hands were defiled. He was not really a good man, and he was unfit for his office. But the deacons were deacons for life, so he had tenure, so to speak, and there was no getting rid of him and I had to deal with him and some others of his own ilk.

But boy, was he rigorous about the Lord's Supper. He was not rigorous about personal holiness, but people like that sometimes will compensate. And they make their reputation as a person of piety by being very tight and rigorous on matters of ritual. Boy, you've got to baptize by immersion. And I believe in baptism by immersion.

But you would think that heaven was going to riot if you're baptized any other way. When it came to communion, if you offered communion, as I did one Sunday, to a man who had, this was unbelievable, who had just received Christ, but he hadn't become a member of our church yet. Oh, did that rattle his cage, and he accosted me outside the church after the service, "How come you offered that man communion when he wasn't even a member of the church?" And I said, "Brother, I do believe if the Lord Jesus Christ were there, he wouldn't have been the least bit concerned about whether the man was a member of our church or not, is only

concerned about whether he was a member of the kingdom of God. And when that man came to Christ today and confess Christ before this people and sat down on the front row, I asked you to serve him because now he has a brother in the Lord. Well, that seems obvious, I'm sure to virtually everybody out there who hears what I'm saying.

But some people don't get it. They do not understand that no amount of religious ceremony or rituals can make one right. That's what this man didn't understand about himself, a man polluted by willful disobedience to God's command, but he tried to compensate by being very legalistic about all of these details of church ritual and church membership. A lot of nonsense.

5) Now, I'll make a fifth point of application of Haggai. When things go wrong or haywire in our lives, folks, the first thing we ought to do, and very often, the last thing that many do, is what Haggai says twice in his first message, “Consider our ways.” “Consider your ways,” the Lord said. We need to consider our ways, consider the possibility that the Lord may be firing a shot across our bow, chastening, we call it, to draw our attention to unfinished business that needs our prompt attention. That's a good thing.

Very often, what we're going through is just testing. The Lord tests His people, we see it all through the scriptures. We say Jesus testing his disciples. He tests the church, that is good. Because in the end, it strengthens our faith.

But lots of times, there's something going on in our lives. There's an uncleanness, there's a defilement, there's disobedience. It may be disobedience by way of commission; it may be disobedience by the way of omission. But whatever it is, it's something that we may be ignoring. It's something that we may not be fully conscious of. And the Lord is shaking us up and rattling our cage a little bit.

And I don't know about you, but in my case, I think, I can't remember all cases, but it has been rather a habit with me when things go wrong, and I think it's a good habit, is to first of all, say, “Lord, is there something I'm doing? Is there something that is displeasing to You? Am I out of line, out of alignment with Your will in some way? And is this or that or whatever it is, is this a message that You're sending me so that I will be alerted, and I will wake up and see things in a different light?”

Sometimes they're just outright scandal in our lives and things start breaking apart. And the Lord is sending a message, saying, "This is not right. This is reprehensible. This is an abomination in My sight."

"What Lord?"

And does He say, "Consider your ways. What about this? What about that?"

Folks, we need to go there, a lot of people never do. They're just not properly introspective spiritually. And they don't have a Haggai standing right there speaking with the voice of God, but we do have the Word of God. And if we're in the Word of God, and we do have the Spirit of God inside us, and the Spirit of God works through the Word to make us alert to these things, when we have eyes to see and ears to hear when we want to please God but may not be doing so.

So I say again, when things go wrong or haywire in our lives, the first thing we ought to do, but very often, the last thing many do, is to consider our ways and to ask ourselves the question, if the Lord just may be firing a shot across our bell, to draw attention to unfinished business that needs our prompt attention, and eventually when and you ask, the Lord will show it to you.

And if it's not there, you examine your conscience, you examine your ways before the Lord, the Lord will communicate that to you also. He'll do it through his Word, He will do it through His Spirit, or He will do it through both. Or he will do it through righteous, pious friends or others, who the Spirit of God will use to assure you that the things that you might be too hard on yourselves about are not, in fact, the issue at all.

But that's a good process for all of us. It keeps us squaring the books at the end of the day, so to speak.

6) Now another point of application, nNumber six, if God has left us a clear and unequivocal promise, and I do emphasize clear and unequivocal promise, we ought to run boldly with it against all contradictions, providing we are certain we have met the stipulations. Here's an example. God has given us a promise; in fact, our Lord Jesus gave it to us at the end of Matthew chapter six. He said, speaking to His disciples, warning them against getting all caught up in all of the worry traps that so many people get embedded in, worrying about money, worrying about food, worrying about house payments, worried about car payments, and we can understand easily how people go there, especially if a man or woman is out of a job or both, why that wouldn't be an anxiety.

20:22, But our Lord tried to calm our fears, and He told us, *“That's what the Gentiles, that's where the pagans go with these things. My advice to you,”* the Lord Jesus said, *“is do this, Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven. That is, Seek first the rule of God in your life. You make that ‘Job One.’ You make that your priority, and all of these things that you need, and I emphasize **need**, and all these things that people tend to worry about instead of seeking first the kingdom of God, these things that you need will be added unto you. That's a promise. Do not fear,”* the Lord says, *“I am with you, My Spirit is with you.”*

So you will encounter obstacles, and you will hit blind spots where you don't know what's coming, and you don't know where the Lord is, and where the Lord doesn't seem to be with you. ‘Seem’ is the operative word, where it seems on the surface that the Lord has violated His promise, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’

But when God has left us such a clear and unequivocal promise as that, then what we need to do is just to run boldly with it against all seeming contradictions, providing I say, we are certain that we've met the stipulations. And what is the stipulation? **Seek first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness.** Put that ahead of everything else. Just move that to the front of the line and say, “Look, I don't know what's happening. I don't understand everything. Sometimes God's ways are a mystery to me. But this is clear, and this is unequivocal. The Lord Jesus said, ‘Seek first, make that your priority of life, the rule of God in your life, the kingdom of God, make that the first thing, ‘Job One,’ and all these things will be added unto you. ‘All these things’--He didn't mean everything you want, but He meant everything that you need. Now, we just have to take that to the bank and run with it.

7) Which brings up a seven point: In difficult circumstances, all we really need to know to get through it is this: “I am with you,” says the Lord, My Spirit is abiding in your midst.” And in our case, His spirit is not only in the midst of us as a church, but His Spirit is abiding in us. “Therefore, do not fear. Do not crumble like a cookie; walk through the obstacles, continuously putting one foot in front of the other in the blind spots.” It's okay to say Lord, “I don't know what's going on. It's okay to say, “Lord, I trust you that you are with me, even though *it doesn't seem like you're with me.* I trust You to take care of me even though at the moment, it's not apparent that You are. The Lord is good with that. Just trust Him. “I am with you.” And that ought to be enough to light our fires and to carry us through.

I close with this: **God is never pleased with us, my friends when we allow his rightful place, which is first place in our lives, to be usurped by our own selfish agenda. When we do that, when we drift into that territory, we can expect the Lord to challenge our priorities in one way or another. And that'll usually involve some complicating of our lives, and probably some pain, probably involved that until we get on the right page.** It was with these folk, and the Lord has not changed. So let's remember these things and benefit by them.

Well, thank you, friends for joining us on The Final Word. God bless you and have a wonderful day.

[end of edited portion]

Speaker 1 24:10

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Unknown Speaker 24:55

just gets in the way

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