

A BLESSING FOR THE UNCLEAN

Haggai 2:1-23

Key verses: 2:14b,19b, “And what they offer there is unclean...But from this day on I will bless you.”

Do you ever feel unclean? Do you wonder how God can bless sinners, who are unclean? Haggai the prophet received such a word from the LORD. This word is for us too. Let's hear Haggai's message in chapter 2 in three parts: (1) greater glory and peace to come (1-9); (2) blessing promised to an unclean people (10-19); and (3) God's chosen signet ring (20-23). May God help us to know his mercy and receive it humbly and thankfully.

First, greater glory and peace to come (1-9).

God's word through Haggai the prophet stirred the leaders and all the people to work on rebuilding the temple. Four weeks later, the word of the LORD came again by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people (3): “Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?”

The former temple that Solomon built was glorious. But it was destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C. Now, Zerubbabel's temple was looking pitiful in comparison. Ezra 3:12 says, “But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy...” The older people who had seen Solomon's temple compared it with Zerubbabel's temple and they wept. It was not impressive at all. It looked like nothing in their eyes.

But God had a very different perspective. See verses 4-5: “Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.”

The LORD their God urged them to be strong and to keep working on the temple, for the LORD was with them. God, who brought them out of slavery in Egypt and made a covenant with them declared, “My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.”

Now look at verses 6-8. “For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all

nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts.”

God brought his people out of Egypt with great plunder, moving the Egyptians to give to them. Once more God promised to shake heaven and earth and the nations. Then the treasures of all nations would come in, including silver and gold, for the temple in Jerusalem. Here the word “treasures” can also be translated “desire” of the nations. Some scholars think this could be a reference to the promised Messiah.

And the LORD of hosts promised in verse 9: “The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former. And in this place I will give peace.” God declared it. So it would happen. God’s people looked poor and weak, and the temple was nothing to boast about. But God was with them, so their temple would be even more glorious, and God would bring them peace, in that place.

The greater glory in the temple was seen in the person of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Apostle John wrote: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus brings true peace, for he is the Prince of Peace. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

Second, blessing promised to an unclean people (10-19).

Two months later, the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet, this time to the priests. Look at verses 12-14: “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.” Then Haggai said, “If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?” The priests answered and said, “It does become unclean.” 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.”

The priests understood that one can easily transfer uncleanness, but not holiness. Consider a practical example of this. If a person with muddy hands shakes hands with another person, do they transfer the mud to the person? Of course, they do. This is true of sin also. It is easy to transfer or influence others with sin and wickedness. But it is difficult to transfer righteousness to others. In fact, no one can pass on righteousness to another person, unless they are God.

Now look at verses 15-19. "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. 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. Consider from this day onward...Since the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider: Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you."

Before the people started work on the temple, how was the fruit of their labors? It was not good. It was like putting money into a bag with holes in it. Why? Because the LORD struck all the products of their toil with blight, mildew, and hail. God was hoping that they would get the message and turn to the LORD in repentance. But they did not. So he sent them Haggai the prophet to wake them up. Now that they began work on the temple, God promised: "from this day on I will bless you." Though they were unclean, God would bless them. Why would God bless an unclean people? Because he is full of mercy and faithfulness. This is God's grace. We cannot make ourselves clean or righteous. That comes only from God's grace and blessing. God wants to bless us and make us clean and holy.

Sinners can transfer sin to others. But sinners cannot transfer righteousness or holiness. Only a Holy and Righteous One can make sinners holy and righteous. In the time of Jesus, to touch a leper or a dead body would make a person unclean. Mark 1:40-42 says, "One day, a man with leprosy came to Jesus, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, 'If you will, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean." Jesus touched this man with leprosy. Yet Jesus did not become unclean. Rather, Jesus imparted cleanness to him.

On another occasion, Jesus saw a funeral procession. A widow's only son was being carried to the graveyard for burial. Luke 7:13-15 says: "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother." Jesus touched this dead man's coffin, and imparted life to him.

We may not have leprosy. We may not be dead, yet. But we are unclean sinners, and apart from Christ we are dead in our sins and transgressions (Eph 2:1-2). Listen to the good news from Apostle Paul:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:4-5,8-9).

Again Paul wrote, in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Christ] we might become the righteousness of God."

Apostle Peter also wrote: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God..." (1 Peter 3:18)

The blessings of forgiveness, righteousness and holiness come when we turn away from sin and turn to God with faith in Jesus Christ. Thank God for his mercy and grace.

Third, God's chosen signet ring (20-23).

The last word from the LORD given to Haggai came on that same day, this time to the governor Zerubbabel, saying (21-22): "I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother."

Here, God's word through Haggai recalled the overthrow of Pharaoh king of Egypt and his chariots, since he had hardened his heart, refusing to acknowledge the LORD as God over him. God will one day overthrow all powers and destroy all those who refused to acknowledge the LORD of hosts. The LORD says, "I am about to shake the heavens and the earth." This expression "I will shake the heavens and the earth" is quoted in Hebrews 12:26-28:

"At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe..."

Only God's kingdom cannot be shaken, for it remains forever. The author of Hebrews says, "So let us be grateful and receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."

The short book of Haggai ends with a great promise to Zerubbabel in verse 23: "On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of

Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts.”

God would make Zerubbabel like a signet ring. The signet ring of a king represented the king's authority and approval. If the king gave his signet ring to the prince, the prince would have all the rights and privileges and powers of the kingdom. God called Zerubbabel “my servant” and said, “for I have chosen you.”

This looked forward to God's servant, the Chosen One, the Messiah, for Zerubbabel was in the direct line of King David. Jesus is God's servant, the Chosen One, who fulfills all the promises of God. So we love and obey Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

We also, by the grace of God, are chosen children of God and servants of God, through Jesus Christ. Apostle Peter declared, writing to scattered Christians, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

So what have we learned from this chapter. We learned that God promised to make the temple more glorious than before and to give peace to his people. God wants to bless us, though we are unclean. He blessed his people when they obeyed the command and will of God to build the temple, giving God their first priority as the prophet Haggai urged them. God stirred their spirits to work together for building the LORD's temple. Finally, we learned that Zerubbabel kept the line of King David alive. All these promises were ultimately fulfilled in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He alone can make us holy and righteous. We receive this blessing, when we turn from sin and trust in Jesus to cleanse us of our sins, and make us his holy chosen servants. We have been chosen, not because we are worthy, for we are unclean sinners, but because of his grace in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God, the LORD of hosts, who is the Lord of glory and the Prince of Peace.