You’ve Got What It Takes – Part 3

# Obedient Hearts

# (Haggai 2:10-19)

Welcome, today we’re on part three of our message series, “You’ve Got What It Takes” and we’re continuing in the second chapter of the book of Haggai. It’s just a short book, only two chapters, written about 500 years before the birth of Christ. You may remember from previous weeks that King Solomon had built this magnificent temple for the worship of God. This Temple was one of the great wonders of the world and people from all over came to see its splendor. But after Solomon died, without his leadership, the people began to stray away from the one true God. They walked away from his hand a blessing, and so they begin to worship idols and do things on their own.

The Bible tells us that in 586 BC the Babylonian army invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took the people captive into a foreign land. After about 50 years, the king of Babylon determined to allow some of the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple of their God. You could just imagine their excitement. They started strong. They built the foundation. They built the altar. But when the Samaritans began to oppose them, they panicked, and the work came to a stop.

For 16 years the temple foundation lay unfinished, until God sent the prophet Haggai to encourage the people to continue the work. He told them, “You’ve got what it takes, don’t give up, but keep looking ahead!” His message was received with conviction and the people were stirred to get back to work. This was so important, because when God speaks to us, there’s only one acceptable response, and that’s obedience. God’s seeking those who believe, who trust him, and have obedient hearts just as David wrote in the Psalms,

“You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. (But) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart…” (Psalms 51:16-17).

And so, we don’t weigh the options, we don’t examine the alternatives, we don’t even negotiate the terms; we simply do what God tells us to do with obedient hearts, obeying in spite of the consequences. The leaders and all the people responded to the message given by Haggai, they were united in obeying God’s Word, having been motivated by a reverent fear of God.

However, this only lasted for 2 months, until the people began to compare their work, comparing what they’d accomplished with the glory of Solomon’s Temple. You see, the older men who remembered the size and the magnificence of the previous Temple began grumbling and complaining causing the people to become discouraged. They began wrestling with the same thoughts that we often struggle with when we’re trying to obey God and things aren’t going well. You know, when God says something to you so clearly, when he impresses something on you so strongly, and yet as you try to obey the Spirit’s leading you’re not making any progress. You’re trying to obey God and yet there’s obstacle after obstacle, your life is still a mess, and you begin to wonder if it’s even worth it.

Well that’s the context of our message today. The people of God were trying to build the temple, but it wasn’t going the way they thought it should, and so they began to wonder if it’s even worth the effort. They wanted to obey God, but it was getting awfully inconvenient. It was costing them so much, their neighbors were upset, and they weren’t seeing the results they expected to see. And so, their hearts weren’t into it, they began to pull back, because they’d lost interest, but God reminded them, “You’ve got what it takes.” And so, now it was about two months later and God spoke to Haggai again and gave him a tough message for the people.

Don’t you know that when God points out sin in your life it’s not always easy to accept?

Here in Haggai chapter 2, God had to point out their sin, he had to address the issue of their hearts, because he couldn’t overlook their transgression. He wanted to bless them, he wanted to bless his people, but they had defiled themselves, they were living in sin, and because of their sin the work they were doing was corrupted too. And so, number one, the prophet asked the people to look deep within.

## 1. Look Deep Within

Last week we looked at how the people of God had been distracted, they’d lost interest in the things of God, they weren’t pursuing the things of God, and so they put building their own houses ahead of God’s house. But they weren’t just building houses, they were making upgrades, additions, and various improvements. And so, God asks them to look at their motives, looking deep within, looking at their hearts.

First, he sends Haggai to the priests, to those who knew his Word, and he asked them two simple questions. We’ll read this at verse 10 and following,

“On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Ask the priests what the law says: If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated'" (Haggai 2:10-12)?

Now let me explain this for you. The priests, like those in some other churches, would wear special robes during the worship ceremony. And so, they’d wear these specially cleaned and prayed over robes when offering sacrifices of this consecrated, this holy meat to God over the fire. And so, what Haggai asked was, “If the robe you wore serving at the altar, that robe you wore offering sacrifices, if that robe having touched the holy meat, that consecrated meat, if that robe should touch something else, if your robe touches something that isn’t unholy, you know like maybe your #3 value meal at McDonald’s, or maybe a piece of pizza, he says, would the holiness rub off on it. Would whatever your robe touches become holy as well.” That’s what he’s asking. In verse 12,

“The priests answered, "No" (Haggai 2:12).

And so, Haggai said, well let’s look at it another way, verse 13,

"If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, (you know, something that’s unholy, your bread, stew, double cheeseburger or whatever) does it become defiled?"

"Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled" (Haggai 2:13).

And so, the priests acknowledged that sin corrupts, sin defiles, sin stains like when a young child eats spaghetti. How many of you know what I’m talking about? It doesn’t take long before everything that once was clean, everything that that child comes in contact with is stained with spaghetti sauce. And so, that spaghetti sauce is like sin, it defiles everything it comes in contact with, it makes the pure impure, the holy unholy, and the clean unclean. Pretty soon that child has spaghetti sauce not only on his or her face, but on their hands, clothes, table and floor.

Here’s what God was trying to impress upon them. Even good things done for God can be stained and corrupted by sinful attitudes. Holiness doesn’t rub off, but sin does. The Bible says it this way,

"Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

That’s what the prophet was getting at, the temple workers must be separate from sin, separate from those fruitless deeds of darkness, because they’re corrupting God’s temple. Haggai responds to the priests in verse 14,

“So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,' declares the Lord. 'Whatever they do and whatever they offer there (in the temple) is defiled” (Haggai 2:14).

You see, their grumbling and complaining, their hearts had drifted away, they’re chasing after idols, and they’d lost interest in the things of God. And therefore, God said, “Everything they touch, the work that they’re doing, the sacrifices that they offer, everything is defiled by their sin.” And in the same way, when your heart isn’t right with God everything you do will be wrong also.

Jesus said look deep within and in Matthew chapter 25 he said,

"If you’re offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23-24).

He said look deep within, get your heart right, get your relationships right, and then come back and worship at the altar. Because if your heart isn’t right, it doesn’t matter what you do. If your heart isn’t right, whatever you do is wrong. And here, the people in Haggai’s time were defiling the temple because of their sin. Their hearts weren’t in the right place, they’re discouraged, they’re disappointed, and they’re making idols of their own homes. And so, God wanted to impress upon them the importance of doing his work from hearts that were pure and devoted to God. Haggai tells the people to look deep within, because he wants them to get to the heart of the issue. And then number two he says, “Consider how things were before one stone was laid.”

## 2. Before One Stone Was Laid

In other words, God’s trying to get his people to consider, to give some thought to their ways, and so he’s trying to remind them, trying to get them to look back and consider how things were. You may remember from chapter 1 he said, “You’ve planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but you’re not warm…” (Haggai 1:6). And so, before one stone was laid, you were doing everything you could, but you were still lacking. You were seeking to find meaning in life, but it was all in vain, everything was empty and pointless; you were working, but you still felt like there was so much more.

And so, God says to consider in verse 16,

“When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail…” (Haggai 2:16-17).

Now, I know some of you are going to wrestle with this, because how could a good God do that? It’s hard to understand when you’re doing everything you can, you can’t get ahead, and then God says, “Oh by the way, the reason you can’t get ahead is because I didn’t let you.” You know, why would God do that? Well, the answer is right there at the end of verse 17, here’s the reason, God said,

“I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me” (Haggai 2:17).

You didn’t turn to me. In other words, God was simply trying to get their attention, trying to get them to pray and seek him. He wasn’t trying to punish them. He was trying to restore them, he was trying to change their hearts; and so, he simply withheld his blessing, he pulled back, and he watched like in the story of the prodigal son. Jesus said, “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him…” (Luke 15:20). His father representing God was watching and waiting; “Yet you did not turn to me,” declares the Lord”.

Now, I want you to understand, and especially those of you that are going through a tough time right now, that sometimes when bad things happen they’re simply the result of our spiritual enemy lashing out at us. He’s simply trying to steal, kill, and destroy our witness and effectiveness in the kingdom of God. Another large percentage of the time, those negative circumstances are simply due to the fact that we live in a sinful and fallen world and there are a lot of bad things that happen. But here in Haggai, we see that there may be times when our hearts have turned away from God and that he may allow something bad to happen simply to get our attention and to draw our hearts back to himself. The psalmist said it this way,

“If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart” (Psalms 44:20-21)?

And so, you’ve got to understand that he’s not the cause of evil, he’s not the culprit, he’s not to blame, but here he simply pulled back his protection, he stopped blessing them, and he’s watching and waiting for them to turn to him.

He’s a good God and so he didn’t allow anything devastating to happen, but he simply cut off their supply. You see, his intention was that they would turn back to him, that they’d remember that he was there provider, that he’s the one who controls the seasons and that they needed him. The Bible says it this way in the New Testament,

“You’ve forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Hebrews 12:5-6).

And so, for those of you who are parents, you may be able to relate, because when you’re disciplining your own children you probably do exactly the same thing. You know, maybe you tell them your grounded, you’re not going anywhere. Or you restrict them from playing with a certain toy, going to their friend’s house, borrowing the car or whatever; because when they’re rebellious, when they’re abusing your favor, when they’re misrepresenting your values, you simply pull back your blessing, you pull back your supply until their hearts come back to you.

You see, God’s desire was that they’d turn to him, that they’d consider how things were before even one stone was laid. He wants more than anything else for them to return to him, because he remembers that day when they would seek him with all their hearts, when they loved him more than anything else, even their own houses. And so, number three, he invites them to return to him so that from this day forward he may shower them with blessings.

## 3. From This Day Forward

The problem was that God couldn’t bless the people the way he wanted to because they were defiled. They weren’t keeping the terms of the covenant, and they were contaminated by their sin. And so, it was because of their disobedience that God couldn’t bless them. Their economy fell apart, and so God sent Haggai issuing a call to repentance and with that call came the assurance of his blessing. In verse 18, the word of God tells us,

“From this day on, from this twenty-fourth 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, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. "'From this day on I will bless you'" (Haggai 2:18-19).

Now, had the people been devoted to the Lord when the foundation of the temple was laid God’s blessing would have immediately followed. But the people were sinful at heart, and their sin grieved the Lord and corrupted their work. And so, God was reminding them of the blessings of obedience and the promise that he’d given Solomon after the dedication of the Temple.

"If My people, who are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

God’s desire was that they would turn to him so that he could forgive their sin and heal their land. He simply wanted to be their God, he wanted to be first in everything, and he wanted their hearts. Jesus explained it this way saying,

“Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

God’s desire is simply that you would seek him, that you would enjoy him, that you would delight in him, so that he could give you the desires of your heart. God tells us in Jeremiah chapter 29, when you seek him with all of your heart, when you call on him, when you, and pray to him, he will listen to you…

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you…” (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

God desires the hearts of his people and if your heart isn’t right with God, then everything you do is wrong, but when your heart is right with God you’ll know the blessings of obedience. It’s all about your heart, seeking after him with all your heart, that’s what God said about David, “He was a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14).

You see, God didn’t care about his people having nice houses, but he didn’t want them to put their house ahead of his house. And so, they’re struggling with the work, they’re laying the foundation, the neighbors begin mocking them, things get really difficult, and they begin to wonder if it was worth it after all. And it was in that place of discouragement that God reached out to them and said, “I want your heart.”

Meanwhile, God’s people were grumbling and complaining, “This isn’t going right, this isn’t what I was expecting, but God you promised…” And so, they didn’t understand the blessings of obedience. God said this of the people in Isaiah chapter 29,

“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Isaiah 29:13).

You see, we don’t obey God so that he will bless us. We obey God because we love him, he has our heart, and in turn he blesses us.

The wonderful thing about this little book of Haggai, these two powerful chapters, is that the people repented and turned back to God. Not only did they get back to rebuilding the Temple, but they were obeying with all of their hearts, and they were experiencing the blessings of obedience. God had their hearts once again, worship was restored, and even though they hadn’t finished the Temple, even though they hadn’t finished the work, God said,

'From this day on I will bless you'" (Haggai 2:19).

There are those of you here today whom God is calling you to give him your heart. You may be obeying outwardly, but inside your rebellious and discontent, and so I want you to give careful thought to the day when the foundation was laid. You see, if you’ve only been giving him lip service, if you’re not walking in obedience, God can’t bless you the way he wants to bless you. And so, if you’re hearing this today and you recognize that there’s no seed in the barn and the vine and trees have not yielded their produce; I want to encourage you to check the condition of your heart and make sure it’s completely devoted to God. You see, he wants your heart and there are those of you today who love God and you’re turning to him with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And so, as we close let’s take a moment to pray and reflect on the word of God.

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