

Text: Haggai (entire book)

God is Dishonored When We Place Our Needs and Wants Above His

In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 2"Thus says the LORD of hosts, "This people says, "The time has not come, even the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt." 3Then the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" 5Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! 6"You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes." 7Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways! 8"Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the LORD. 9"You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away Why?" declares the LORD of hosts, "Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. 10"Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. 11"I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands." (Haggai 1:1-11)

You may recall from our previous study in the Book of Ezra the account of the rebuilding of the Temple. Cyrus the king of the Persians had issued a decree that the Jews be allowed to return to Jerusalem and reconstruct both the city and the Temple of the Lord. They succeeded in building an altar and in reinstating at least some sort of sacrificial system, but then they were derailed in their efforts by enemies that managed to get an order from King Artaxerxes to stop the rebuilding work. Rather than trusting in God to preserve and help them, they ceased the rebuilding work, and became absorbed in building their own houses, properties, and livelihoods. This was an affront to God in several respects:

2"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3"You shall have no other gods before Me. (Exodus 20:2-3)

37And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38"This is the great and foremost commandment. 39"The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' (Matthew 22:37-39)

Remember, the placing of *anything* above or even near to God among one's priorities constitutes idolatry. By ignoring the decree to rebuild the temple first out of fear and then out of selfishness the Israelites essentially made idols out of these two attitudes.

**5Trust in the LORD with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
6In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)**

**1Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain.
2It is vain for you to rise up early,
To retire late,
To eat the bread of painful labors;
For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep. (Psalm 127:1-2)**

Furthermore, the people trusted in their own knowledge and understanding rather than in God. They feared the king, and they saw the necessity of providing food, clothing, and shelter for themselves, but did not consider that God is the one that supplies our safety and provision.

**9Honor the LORD from your wealth
And from the first of all your produce;
10So your barns will be filled with plenty
And your vats will overflow with new wine. (Proverbs 3:9-10)**

8"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. 9"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! 10"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. 11"Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:8-11)

22And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. 23"For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24"Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! 25"And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? 26"If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? 27"Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 28"But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith! 29"And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. 30"For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. 31"But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:22-31)

God specifically promised before, during, and after this period that if His people will seek Him first, all of their needs will be met. As the Israelites' experience in this case illustrates, when we set our minds first and foremost upon providing these needs for ourselves, God is dishonored and our efforts will fail. When the people sought their own needs above God, He struck the land and people with drought and famine. Likewise, if we invest our efforts first and foremost in providing for our temporal needs, these efforts will fail, because God will not bless them with success. We are all utterly and constantly dependent upon Him both for temporal provision and for eternal salvation.

When People Turn to God, God Turns to Them

12Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him And the people showed reverence for the LORD. 13Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, "I am with you," declares the LORD." 14So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, 15on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king. (Haggai 1:12-15)

1On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by 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 is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? 4'But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the LORD of hosts. 5'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!' 6"For thus says the LORD 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'I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 8'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts. 9'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts." (Haggai 2:1-9)

The people responded to the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah by resuming the work of building the Temple. God promised to honor this work by enabling the work to be completed, providing for the physical needs of the people, and even by allowing the glory of the Temple to exceed that which it formerly had. This can be observed as a picture of how God responds to repentant individuals in all situations.

9If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

This first promise is made to Christians. Remember, although as believers we have been given a new spiritual nature and have the hope of eternal life, the sinful nature still remains and wars against that which would serve God. When we sin, God promises to forgive and cleanse us if we will confess those sins.

9that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12For there is no

distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." (Romans 10:9-13)

A similar promise exists for the non-believer. All that one must do in order to be saved is to confess Christ as Savior and Lord, repent of our sins and seek His forgiveness and redemption. No matter how much we have done, anyone who turns from their sin and submits to Him will be embraced by Him and saved from sin and Hell.

28"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'
29"And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30"The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. 31"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first."
Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32"For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him. (Matthew 21:28-32)

5Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

God values actions, not empty words. The son that initially refused his father's command, but then repented and obeyed pleased his father. The one that said the right thing but didn't do it did not please his father. The Israelites initially refused to rebuild the temple, but repented at the preaching of Haggai and resumed the work. Therefore, God blessed them. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers (those Jesus addressed in this passage) refused to believe and were therefore condemned, while the "sinners" believed, repented, and were accepted by God. Those that become Christians, accepted and adopted by God Himself, are those that not only say the right words—the Pharisees, etc. were good at that—but those whose lives demonstrate the work of the Holy Spirit, which results in repentance, belief, salvation, and perseverance.

Attitude is Important!

10On the twenty-fourth of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying, 11"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling: 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." 13Then 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." 14Then Haggai said, "'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean. 15'But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the LORD, 16from that time when one came to a grain heap of twenty measures, there would be only ten; and when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be only twenty. 17'I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you did not come back to Me,' declares the LORD. 18'Do consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month; from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded, 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.'" 20Then the word of the LORD 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 power 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 the LORD of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,'" declares the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:10-23)

The attitude with which we approach God's work is of utmost importance. When the prophet speaks of clean and unclean, he notes that touching a common article with a holy one will not make the common holy, but touching any article with something unclean will make that thing unclean. Likewise, because the people had approached their works with an attitude not righteous before God, He regarded their works and their worship as unclean. Only when they repented and placed God first were their works accepted.

51"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52"Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it." (Acts 7:51-53)

In this passage, Stephen, who became the first martyr immediately after speaking these words, notes that the Jewish religious leaders followed the letter of the ceremonial law (including circumcision), yet were "uncircumcised in heart and ears." Their religion was not accepted before God because their hearts were not right.

21" You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22" But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23" Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matthew 5:21-24)

Likewise here, even though one might be observing the letter of the law in presenting sacrifices, if he has an unrighteous attitude the offering will not be accepted. Jesus commands that we be reconciled to our fellow believers before approaching Him in worship.

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. (1 Corinthians 11:26-29)

For Christians, the observance of the Lord's Supper is perhaps our most solemn ordinance. We must be careful to observe this in a humble and reverent manner, examining ourselves both for the fruits of true salvation and for any unconfessed sin that should not be brought to the Lord's table. Our worship will not be accepted by God if it is offered by a heart not purified by and submitted to Him.

9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

An admonition to those that think they are "doing God a favor" by attending worship services, praying, studying the Bible, etc.—and this includes ALL of us at times, if we are honest with ourselves. The outwardly religious, prideful Pharisee was not accepted; the humble, supplicant tax collector was. God is *God* and we are not. We are to approach Him in a manner that reflects this dichotomy. Even though we have the promise of God's Word that He adopts Christians as "sons," He is still God, and we should never approach Him in a manner that is arrogant, presumptuous, or that assumes equal footing. We should at all times approach Him with humility and reverence if we expect to be heard and accepted by Him.

37 And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' (Matthew 22:37-39)

29 "And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. 30 "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. 31 "But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you. (Luke 12:29-31)

Finally, two positive reminders. First, we are to love God with all of our being. This is a necessary result of the saving work of the Holy Spirit, and a prerequisite to receiving His temporal and eternal blessings. Second, just as the Israelites of Haggai's day were blessed spiritually and physically when they made serving Him their first priority, we likewise can expect the same treatment. Love Him, serve Him, seek Him, submit to Him, and trust that He will provide. He has both promised to do so and demonstrated repeatedly that He makes good on that promise!