

A Holy People or a Holy Work
Haggai 2:10-17
September 15, 2017

A junior high student sits at his desk at school,
trying to sound out the new vocabulary work.

A – pa – thy

He can't look it up on his phone (not allowed at school)

So, he turns to his buddy,

What does a-pa-thy mean?"

His buddy shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Who cares?"

We've been studying through the book of Haggai since the beginnings of September,
As the book opens, the people are plagued with apathy.

Now, the people are quite ambitious about their own pursuits,
but when it came to the things of God – Apathy.

the problem was, though they were their ambitious in their own pursuits,
It was like they were bringing money and putting it in bags with holes.

Haggai opens with the message from the LORD,

Listen, I'm trying to get your attention.

Consider your ways!

Be ambitious about what's important to *me*, and I'll take care of you.

And the fear of The LORD jolted out of their apathy
and they rearranged their entire lives to make room for the LORD.

They got busy rebuilding the temple of the LORD
which had been destroyed by the Babylonians some 70 years earlier.

But, thanks to the reminders of the "good old boys"

Who had seen the first temple of Solomon,

Were quick to point out.

This temple was nothing like the good old days.

So what's the use?!

We'll never measure up to people's expectations.

We'll always be a disappointment.

We'll never be as good as

BUT they managed to escape the demoralizer of negative comparison;

And by faith they believe they are building more than they see.

Why, **the future glory of this temple would be greater than the first.**"

Why?

Just cause the Lord of Heaven's Armies said so.

And now, three months into the rebuilding project, the work is again at risk.

May we together hear what the Lord is saying to Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and to all the people,
And to what The LORD is saying to NB and to each one of us individually.

Word of God Speak (Worship Team)

4

Scripture -- Haggai 2:10-17 (Audio)

¹⁰ On December 18 of the second year of King Darius's reign,
the LORD sent this message to the prophet Haggai:

¹¹ "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says.

Ask the priests this question about the law:

¹² 'If one of you is carrying some meat from a holy sacrifice in his robes
and his robe happens to brush against some bread or stew, wine or olive oil, or any
other kind of food, will it also become holy?'"

The priests replied, "No."

¹³ Then Haggai asked,

"If someone becomes ceremonially unclean by touching a dead person
and then touches any of these foods, will the food be defiled?"

And the priests answered, "Yes."

¹⁴ Then Haggai responded,

"That is how it is with this people and this nation, says the LORD.

Everything they do and everything they offer is defiled by their sin.

The portion of Haggai's prophecy revolves around a point in their law.

About things that are clean and things that are unclean.

A little history will explain why this is so important to us at NB in 2017.

If we don't get this, we'll be spinning our wheels and getting nowhere.

In Leviticus, Moses goes into great detail about what's clean and what's unclean.
For example:

Clean: Animals that chew their cud and have a cleft in their foot (like cows).

Unclean, Animals don't chew the cud and have a cleft in their foot. (like pigs)

Clean: Fish with scales (like Salmon)

Unclean: Crustaceans – bottom feeders (like Lobster)

But unclean things also included:

Dead bodies

Skin diseases

Issues of blood

If a person became unclean by touching something that was unclean
they had to go through a purification process
before they could return to the camp/community.

For a nomadic people who lived in close proximity,
(Given what we know about bacteria and disease and trichinosis, etc.)
these distinctions and rules literally made the difference between life and death,
not that they understood why.

Now if the LORD were speaking to us *today*, he'd probably say:

If I am healthy and you are sick,
will my coughing in your face make you well?
We wish!

If you are sick and I am well, will your coughing in my face make me sick?
Good chance.

Health is not contagious; disease is.

When Haggai asks the priest to acknowledge this point of law,
isn't teaching the people any they didn't already know.
His question's strictly rhetorical to make a spiritual point.

**“That is how it is with this people and this nation, says the LORD.
Everything they do and everything they offer is defiled by their sin.**

OUCH!

Here are these people.
They've overcome their apathy.
They've overcome the demoralizer of negative comparison.
They gotten to work.
And now you're tell them that their work is unclean?

I don't remember reading that in Leadership 101!

Just what is Haggai insinuating here?
He's insinuating that the clean part is the work of building the temple of the LORD.
What could be more clean and holy than that!

And what's the unclean part?
Not the work, but the worker.
There's something about the worker that's contaminating the work.

He's saying the work is holy, but you're not!
Holy work won't make you holy people
BUT, unholy people will make even this good work unholy.

SELAH –pause and reflect.

What could be wrong that's making them so unholy?

This short book suggests they're in DANGER of two things making them unholy–
two things that represent HUGE danger for New Beginnings
and for you and me personally when you set out to do the LORD's work

Danger #1:
Holy Busyness

The danger of exchange one form of busyness for another,
and still neglecting the LORD.

Yes, they had rearranged their entire lives to make room for the LORD's work.

Ezra 3:3 tells us just how serious they were about it all:

In addition to rebuilding the temple . . .

They set the altar upon their bases;

and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, morning and evening.

They kept also the feast of tabernacles,

and offered the daily burnt offerings by number,

and willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

They are again busy, busy, busy.

And the LORD is still saying, “Where are you?”

The Lord God through the prophet Hosea said, (**Hosea 6:6**)

“I don’t want your sacrifices—

I want your love;

I don’t want your offerings—

I want you to know me.

Holy work is no substitute for a holy heart that loves the LORD.

**The LORD doesn’t bless holy work;
he blesses holy people.**

Let me bring it home.

If I’m so busy being your pastor that I have no time to spend with the LORD,

I am contaminating everything that we do.

And we’ll end up just spinning our wheels.

That’s for me a . . .

SELAH – pause and reflect

It’s so easy to switch the goal posts,

Get more people in the seats;

get more money in the coffers

Renovate the building.

Champion community projects

All good things!

Our primary goal can *never* be to build New Beginnings.

It is always to know and love the LORD.

The LORD will not bless a holy cause,
no matter how great,
unless the people are holy.
That's you and me.

Frankly, the LORD doesn't *need* New Beginnings
any more than he *needed* a temple.

Listen to what God said through **Isaiah 66:1-2**

This is what the LORD says:

“Heaven is my throne,

and the earth is my footstool.

Could you build me a temple as good as that?

Could you build me such a resting place?

My hands have made both heaven and earth;

they and everything in them are mine.

I, the LORD, have spoken!

“I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts,

who tremble at my word.

Steven, in the New Testament, quoted this verse from Isaiah
to the very religious people of his day –

the people who performed all the right religious rituals,

who gave their tithes to the temple

and who would be loath to violate the sabbath.

It was the last thing he said – before they stoned him to death.

Here's something you don't usually hear a pastor say:

The Lord doesn't need your talent, your money or your time.

As if giving those things would cause your stock with the LORD to go up.

He wants your heart.

If he has your heart,

these other things will follow in their appropriate places and ways.

Don't fall prey to danger #1

But there's another danger.

Danger #2

Logical Fallacy

(I gave it a big word in hopes that it'll stick.)

We are meaning-making creatures.

We want our world to make sense.

So, when something happens, we want to know why.

If we see an effect, we want to assign a cause.

Absence of information is absolutely no problem for us.

We'll just supply that missing information from our own imagination.

We are quite adept at writing stories in our minds

that perfectly explain *everything!*

I mean, hear me out.

Who could question my logic?

Now, if you're brutally honest with yourself,

You'll notice that your cause and effect stories

preserve your good estimation of yourself.

If I have success it's because I did A, B, and C.

If I have failure it's because they did X, Y and Z.

We masterfully create our own version of reality.

That why two people living in the same house or working in the same office

Can have two radically different versions of reality.

And here comes the LORD through Haggai challenging their logical fallacies.

When the story opened, and the people just couldn't get a good return on their labor.

Failure certainly be because *I*

I'm sure in the story they wrote,
The economy was to blame.
Perhaps the leadership was to blame.
Perhaps the greed of the rich and powerful were to blame.
or the ignorance of the poor and disgruntled were to blame.
The Democrats were to blame
The Republicans were to blame.
Whatever their story, they weren't to blame.

Don't be hard on them.
It's what we all instinctively do.
And unless the LORD breaks into our story making brains
We'll stay stuck our own logical fallacies.

The Lord in his grace, interrupted their story saying,
Consider your ways!

And they *did*.
They woke up,
And got to work.
Now they get to write a new and improved version of the story
The LORD says he going to bless us – success
And it's because I (We) did A, B, C!
Since we are doing this holy work, the LORD is going to be happy with us and bless us.

But the Lord of Heaven's Armies, in his grace, interrupts their story making, saying,
Consider your logical fallacy!

The blessing will not come because you are doing holy *work*,
It will come because you are holy *people*.

**If the LORD grants us a larger measure of visible success than we already have,
It will not be because we have worked harder.
It will be because we have learned to love him more.**

BENEDICTION

May we be the holy people
through whom The Lord God Almighty
can do his holy work