

**Blessings and the King of Blessings
Haggai 2:10-23**

**What do you think of when I say the word 'pilgrim'?
What do you think of when I say the word 'tourist'?
How can we tell the difference between the two?**

Recently, Shelly and I were in Charleston, South Carolina to celebrate our 10th wedding anniversary and Charleston is a big tourist attraction with lots of historical value.

Many people that assume the tourist mindset want to descend upon the city and in a matter of a few days, catch all the highlights, get all the necessary pictures, t-shirts, and postcards, and then return to their home.

**They want Fort Sumter and all its significance and history to be boiled down to a ten minute talk by a tour guide and a trip to the gift shop.
Been there... done that... got the T-shirt.**

But then there are those who come to Charleston with a pilgrim's heart and mind, and they arrive at their destination with great excitement, much like the tourist, but they finish their tour of Fort Sumter with a deep sense that this is not all there is to it.

The pilgrim's heart tells him that there is so much more to their destination than can be captured by a few highlights, t-shirts, and photographs.

The pilgrim understands that the spirit of Charleston permeates everything from their Po Boy shrimp sandwich at lunch to the uniformed tour guide at Fort Sumter.

And it is the same way in our Christian American culture today, isn't it?

There are Christians who approach their walk with Christ like a tourist.

One Christian writer stated that those with the tourist mindset treat Christianity as simply a series of *sacred diversions or holy activities* which one engages in if adequate leisure time is available.

We go to retreats, conferences, read the latest spiritual book and even go to church on Sundays to get our God-fix and then we return to *real* life.

Been there... done that... got the T-shirt.

But then there are those who come to Christianity with a pilgrim's heart and mind, and they move through life with great excitement, much like the tourist, but *they* finish their day with a deep sense that this is not all there is to it.

The pilgrim's heart tells him that there is so much more to this life than can be captured by a few retreats, conferences, books, or trips to church on Sunday.

The pilgrim understands that the spirit of Christianity permeates everything from their supper on Monday night to the Lord's Supper on Sunday morning.

This morning we are going to open a window into seeing the grace of God as it permeates everything we do as we walk the pilgrim road from this ground to glory.

We are going to see that whether we are eating or drinking, preaching or praying, we need to turn in faith to Christ to receive His blessings.

Throughout the book of Haggai we find the people of God struggling with the tourist mindset.

They think that they bring the sacrifices that are required by the law of Moses then they are good to go.

Then they go back to their *real* job of farming or weaving or mothering, etc.

Another name for this tourist mind as it applies to spirituality has been called the distinction between *the secular and the sacred*.

- **Sacred things are things done by priests or ministers or the things we do when we are in church or praying or reading the Bible.**
- **Secular things are things that everybody does regardless of their religious convictions like go to work or eat meals or watch a movie, etc.**

And we can see from our passage this morning that God's people have the sacred things of life *here* and the secular things of life *here*.

And the LORD 1st uses the concept of the sacred or consecrated things to make His point.

**In verses 10-12 he is saying something like,
"If you take a clean hand and touch a dirty shirt, does it make the shirt clean?"
And the answer is obviously 'no'.**

**In the next two verses the LORD is saying something like,
"If you take a dirty hand and touch a clean shirt, does it make the shirt dirty?"
And the answer is 'yes'.**

**Then the LORD turns his in-depth theological discussion very personal and says,
"So it is with this people and this nation in my sight.
Everything you bring to me is filthy because your hands are not holy."**

You see when the LORD mentions specifically that a dead body defiles a person, he is making a connection to the state of the entire assembly of the Jews.

The LORD is saying that everyone one of you was once dead.

**You were at one time, dead in your exile in Babylon,
cut off from your promised land and defiled by those Gentiles among whom you lived.**

**And now that I have brought you back to this place,
brought you back out of exile,
you are still defiled because you were once dead.**

We can almost hear the thoughts of the Israelites in response to the LORD's reminders.

"What do you mean filthy? After all this hard work on rebuilding this

temple, you are telling me that my sweat and blood isn't good enough to regain access to your mercy?

**We are being obedient to what you have told us to do,
and our obedience still isn't enough?"**

Do you see what the LORD is doing here?

He is saying that you have to get rid of that sacred/secular distinction.

- **"You think that you can perform enough sacred duties that you don't need my blessing on them.**
- **You think because the activity has to do with the church or with Bible study that it gets automatic blessing from the LORD.**
- **You can't bring the "been there... done that... got the t-shirt" approach to spirituality in here and expect my favor to fall out just like a can of Coke from a Coke machine after putting in your money.**
 - **The grace of God is not like a vending machine.**
You don't simply do certain religious activities and out comes grace.

Grace is given unmerited and unearned to a person that comes to the LORD, who comes to Christ knowing that even his or her good works need to be washed and made clean.

And just in case that original group of Jews to whom Haggai was speaking didn't get it, the LORD comes at them from the secular angle, calling them to remember how well their crops and other jobs faired when they failed to start rebuilding the temple.

He reminds them they almost haven't made it.

**Their olive trees and grape vines haven't produced enough.
Their grain is too sparse and their kneading bowls are empty.**

**The people's problem was not that they weren't working hard on their farms...
... or that they didn't have the right technology...
... or that they had bought into a bad mortgage plan.**

They just figured, "What has religion got to do with whether I have enough food on the table?"

Their economic survival was floundering because they attended the creation while ignoring devotion to the Creator.

Here again, the LORD is flattening out this sacred/secular distinction.

One commentator put it this way,

"The heart of their problem was that they acted as if life could be run without reference to God and as if grace would be theirs even though they neglected the means of grace."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, isn't this still our problem today?

- **We act as if life could be run without reference to God.**
- **We act as if our finances could be run without reference to God.**

- **We act as if our job performance,
our marriage relationship,
and our parenting
and a host of other things can be done
without reference to God and His Word.**

We sometimes also act as if grace would be ours even if we neglect the means of grace.

- **We act as if the church will grow if we don't pray for it to grow.**
- **We act as if the grace of being in the body of Christ will be ours even when we are not engaged with being in the body of Christ.**

Please understand that I am not preaching at anyone and that so many of these convictions come to rest on me.

I act as if grace will be mine even when I neglect the means of grace.

I act as if my ability to lead my family into greater faithfulness is just going to happen even though I don't pray for it.

How about the fact that next week I will be ordained as a ruling elder here at CPC,

and I act, given how much I have prayed about it, as if when the ministers in our presbytery lay their hands on me and pray that I will just "POOF!" be transubstantiated into an elder, complete with all the wisdom, long-suffering, and graciousness that is required.

And what about the ache in my soul left from the death of our infant son, Noah?

Will those wounds heal themselves or...

... do they need the Great Physician to come and spread His balm on my heart and make me whole again?

If that is what needs to happen, then why don't I ask for it?

But praise be to the Father who does not leave us with only reminders that we have defiled hands and that we have neglected his grace in the past.

He gives a word of encouragement at the very end of verse 19.

"From this day on I will bless you."

Be assured that this is not an "everybody gets a Cadillac and a diamond ring" type of blessing.

The blessing of which the LORD speaks is the assurance of God's presence in the midst of faithful work and devotion.

The LORD is saying to the Israelites,

"You have begun a faithful work in rebuilding the temple.

***Because you have turned in dependence to me for mercy,
then your hard work will no longer return void."***

And even today the LORD's word is the same for us,

"From this day on I will bless you."

He is always just a prayer away when we turn to him in faith.

**Just like it didn't matter that the people of God in Haggai's day had neglected the temple for 20 years,
so today it doesn't matter if you have neglected loving the body of Christ for a long time.**

**The Father does not lord our past sins over us,
but like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, He sees us and comes running.**

The Father in His love for us through Jesus Christ loves to lavish His grace upon us and to bind up our wounds and to freely give us all good things.

The Father, in His promise of blessing, is encouraging our church community to lead holy lives, to worship, and to service.

**And if the last line of this oracle in verse 19 isn't enough,
on the very same day the LORD gives more encouragement by announcing who would be the divinely endorsed new leader of God's people.**

**If you remember back in Haggai chapter 1 and 2, the LORD sends his prophetic word to both Zerubbabel, Judah's governor, and to Joshua the High Priest. Well chapter 2:10-19 was encouragement addressed to the people through the priests,
but verses 20-23 was addressed to the people through Zerubbabel.**

And the most significant thing about Zerubbabel in this context was that he was from the line of King David.

If you look in the genealogies at the beginning of 1st Chronicles, Zerubbabel's name appears in the list of David's royal descendants.

Think how exciting a time this must have been for the people of God.

- **The temple was getting rebuilt.**
- **The people received the promise of the LORD's blessing.**
- **Then there is this oracle talking about shaking heaven and earth, overturning thrones, and confusing their enemies...**
- **... and then they hear that their new leader,
who was a Son of David, was going to be like God's own signature.**

**Now while Zerubbabel didn't lead the people into a golden age of the kingdom of God, there would be another Son of David who,
fulfilling God's promise to King David in 2 Samuel 7,
would come and leave the perfect impression of the Father on humanity.**

This Son of David was none other than Jesus Christ.

Haggai 2:23 tells us that Zerubbabel was declared to be the LORD's signet ring, whereas Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus, the Son of David and the Son of God "is the radiance of God's glory and the *exact representation* of his being."

**Where Zerubbabel was God's signature on His people,
Jesus was God himself dwelling among His people.**

Where Zerubbabel was to lead the returned exiles in holy living, worship and service,

so Jesus is the Great Davidic King who has made a way for all people to return from the exile where sin keeps us from true worship, from holy living, and from service.

Where the LORD promised blessings for renewed work on rebuilding the temple,

so the body of Christ has been blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus.

**What the people of God under Zerubbabel's leadership received,
under Christ's lordship we receive infinitely more.**

And so Jesus, the King of Blessings, most definitively and finally cancelled out the distinction between the sacred and the secular.

**Our jobs, marriages, children, hobbies, education,
everything we set our minds and hands to
has been injected with sacred value if done in the belief that
Christ has prepared all our good works beforehand so that we
might walk in them.**

**Brothers and sisters in Christ,
are we laboring with the mindset that we have the temple to rebuild over here
and our farms to attend over here
and there is no relationship between the two?**

**Are we desiring to live holier lives or be healed or...
... to break an addiction
or see a loved one repent and believe for the first time
or see the church grow both in maturity and in numbers...**

are we desiring all these things but not availing ourselves of the means of grace like communion and prayer?

**Do we desire the blessings but do not bend the knee to the King of Blessings,
Jesus Christ?**

**If this is our struggle,
then forgetting what is behind and
straining toward that prize set before us in Christ Jesus,**

**let us hear the words of the LORD afresh this morning,
"From this day on I will bless you."**