

## TCC Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2013 – Haggai 2v10-23

### **Title: “A ring in the nose or a ring on the finger?”**

#### **Purpose:**

To get people this week to move on from looking at their actions to looking at their assumptions.

Assumption #1 – that sin doesn't matter too much

Assumption #2 - that the future has little bearing on the present

#### **Introduction**

As we are in October now – you know what that means don't you – well simply that we are now officially in the 3 month countdown to Christmas.

And that means that some of us have to ask that yearly question: Q. What do you buy for the man or woman that has everything?

Now the reality is that for most if not all of us this is not a question that really is going to tax us for very long – BUT if I were a multi-millionaire perhaps seeking to gain the land of a young lady perhaps I would want to find the most expensive ring out on the market.

#### The Chopard Blue Diamond Ring

The Chopard Blue Diamond Ring is the ring that makes any other diamond ring look bad. Set with an enormous, oval-shaped blue diamond, the ring has diamond shoulders and an 18 carat white gold band literally paved with diamonds.

This ring – currently the world's most expensive - is valued at a mere 10 million pounds!!

This morning our passage will touch down upon an even more precious ring and we will consider the appropriate manner that this ring should be worn.

#### Short recap

But before we get into our passage - I want to take a few moments to provide a short recap for those that weren't here last Sunday morning, so that they can get up to speed and also for the rest of us it will help us to keep in mind what God has been saying up to this point.

- In Haggai we have 5 messages – 3 are encouragements and 2 are exhortations
- These messages are Words of the LORD through Haggai and they all come over a short 4 month period in the year 520BC which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the reign of the Persian king Darius
- Haggai is a great book because it is very direct in its teaching – we don't have to do too much reading between the lines
- It is a great book also because the authoritative word of God, God speaking, gets a mention pretty well in every other verse – so it is very God-centred, very Word-centred
- It is great book also because here we see a successful prophet, he speaks and the people respond to him
- Last time we saw that God had a couple of things that he needed to bring to the attention of the people, things that we described last week as DESPICABLE (so they were serious things):

1. Was that they were CHEATING on the One that they were meant to love – they were building their own houses whilst God's went to rack and ruin – and God tells them to GO BACK TO WORKING ON HIS HOUSE AGAIN

2. Also they were COWARDLY – they were in their hearts, given over to DEFEAT or DEFEATISM – and God tells them that they are to BE STRONG

OK that was last time – and we covered from chapter 1v1 through to chapter 2v9 today we taking the remaining section.

So we come through to Haggai chapter 2 and verse 10 and what I want to call:

## 1. “A ring in the nose” (Chapter 2v10-19)

### Read the passage

Let me read this section of 10 verses, if you’re using the church bibles this is page 949

\*READ\* Haggai 2v10-19 \*READ\*

### 5 Messages

As you may recall there are 5 messages in this short book of Haggai and 3 of them are encouragements, which is great – as someone said “Encouragement is like oxygen to the soul” and so it is.

The other 2 messages are **exhortations, corrections** where God is needing to “**prick their consciences**” and to deal with an issue.

### Our prevailing issues

This can be the case that because of some prevailing issue in our lives, God says, in effect: “I cannot move on with you until this is recognized, looked at and resolved.”

Q. I wonder whether you are in that place this morning?

Q. I wonder if God has “unfinished business” in your life and maybe **right now** God is going to confront it?

### Do you believe in the RIGHT NOW?

Can I ask you: Q. Do you have any sense of the RIGHT NOW?

I was having my quiet time on Thursday and was reading a familiar passage in Matthew 4 about Jesus and the different elements that essentially made up his ministry: teaching, preaching, healing diseases, casting out demons and it additionally mentioned those in severe pain.

I had never noticed that little bit before. Well an hour later I was in conversation with a minister friend and he mentioned that I might pray for his wife who was just about to see a consultant about having a cortisone injection for pain she has been suffering in her foot for many months. Well I passed on the verse and he too, though a very experienced minister said that he too had never noticed that little aspect.

The word of God is living and active and can be very precise.

Q. Do you remember the last item of the armour of God?

Yes – the sword of the Spirit which, it goes on, is the Word of God. It is worth noticing that the particular sword Paul mentions there in Ephesians chapter 6 is the short sword and it reinforces this notion that the Word of God is very often a precisely shaped word for a particular occasion and it goes into us to achieve a very specific purpose.

The Word of God is not really much like a long sword which perhaps was better accustomed to slashing back and forth in a more general way.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> bone to pick

This second bone that God want to pick with his people comes to them just a few months after God kick-started the people off – it is now the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month.

God asks a two part question of the priests:

**Verse 12-13** "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?" "The priests answered, "No." Then Haggai said, "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?" "Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled."

What is the point here?

Q. So what is the point here?

Well in the first part of this 2 part question, he is getting the priests to verify the spiritual reality that HOLINESS cannot be easily passed on. Consecrated meat may make the garment holy but the garment cannot simply then pass on this HOLINESS and this SACRED CONSECRATION onto some 3<sup>rd</sup> party.

Now by way of contrast, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the question, we see that UNHOLINESS or POLLUTION is much much easier to pass on.

I guess we could illustrate this a little by thinking of HEALTH instead of HOLINESS:

Q. Which is easier to pass on HEALTHINESS or ILLNESS? Well, I think we all know that ILLNESS, DISEASE is pretty easy to pass on, but the reverse is simply NOT THE CASE.

Where is the issue exactly?

Q. What is the issue then that God is getting at?

God is saying to them in effect:

"Don't be too hasty in thinking that now you are working away again at the Temple of the Lord – all is therefore rosy in the garden."

Notice how God does the very same thing he did in **chapter 1** where he spoke to them about the way they were CHEATING on Him, having transferred their AFFECTION and LOVE in another direction – busy building and centering on their own houses (whilst His was a ruin).

Give careful thought

He tells them to "**Give careful thought...**" and this was a repeated phrase, a refrain which sandwiched a summary of all their troubles – the fact that even though they planted much, they weren't reaping much, that God was essentially EMPTYING THEM OUT.

And we looked at that last week and maybe you remember me asking you:

Q. Have you ever been aware of God emptying you out – do this to get your attention?

And God here is saying to them that their REPENTANCE, their RETURN TO OBEDIENCE (and at this point of course they have returned to rebuilding the house of the Lord) needs to be a TRUE, an AUTHENTIC repentance.

Wasn't renewed obedience enough?

And maybe you might say:

Q. Wasn't renewed obedience enough?

And God is saying to them:

"To have Working Hands is one thing  
- to have Washed Hands/Washed Hearts - is entirely another."

Q. Do you see the difference?

God is not being picky here – He just knows that we can be surface people – our repentance can be

exterior repentance. Yes – new things are being done, but WE are the same people, UNCHANGED on the inside.

### An assumption, not an excuse

Deep down here, the problem that comes to the surface in chapter 2 is not so much of the people making EXCUSES but rather the people making ASSUMPTIONS.

They are no longer making excuses about this not being the right time to be building the house of the Lord, that is ancient history now BUT

Instead they are ASSUMING, that nothing needs to go on deep down inside them.

Another way to say this is that they had a very low view of HOLINESS.

Can I put it this way: - They did not really see that SIN in the Heart  
still trumps OBEDIENCE with the Hands!!

Remember the question that comes up in:

Psalm 24v3-5 “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive the blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour.”

Or again, the true focus that emerges in another psalm regarding SACRIFICE:

Psalm 51v16-17 “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”

### Hanging around Church doesn't make you a Christian

Let me express it this way:

- If you hang onto practices that are godless,
- if you hang around people that are godless,
- if you grant **them** privileged position in your circle of intimate acquaintances  
then you will find that you become affected, they will blunt your edge, they will pass onto you contamination – if you doubt the reality of this – note that it is BOTH CERTAIN yet SUBTLE – if you want ample illustration of this you do not need to look any further than the people of God in the OT.

Equally too – just because you hang around a CHURCH or CHURCH PEOPLE – does \*NOT\* mean that you will become HOLY!!

Hanging around a CHURCH – DOESN'T MAKE YOU A CHRISTIAN.

### Give careful thought – MODIFIED (from this day on)

Once again from verses 15-19, we see what is almost like a THEME PHRASE for Haggai, coming to the fore. “Give careful thought...” – HOWEVER – what we do well to notice is that this time around IT IS MODIFIED.

It is modified essentially in a couple of ways:

1. FIRST – that we have the phrase being given to us three times and not just twice – and from that I think we gain perhaps some added emphasis AND ALSO I think it HINTS at the fact that we have some change, some movement involved from the last time. So God is telling them NOT MERELY that they need to do what they did before and have a bit more “SOUL SEARCHING”.
2. I think the SECOND change comes in this – allied to this key phrase (“Give careful thought...”) is another one (“From this day on...”). This phrase is now added to the other one and also comes 3 times.

Q. So what is God’s meaning here? -

At a minimum it is a very strong encouragement.

God is letting them know His declared intention: v19 “From this day on I will bless you..”

### Make hay while the sun shines

We have in English that saying “Make hay while the sun shines” and God is to them you have the perfect opportunity and the ideal timing to really capitalize on things.

Put off your half-heartedness, your superficial devotion to God – as though God does not notice these things – give Him both HARD WORKING HANDS and also CLEAN HANDS too.

And then – I can almost hear God saying what he said through another contemporary prophet Malachi in regard to another subject:

(Malachi 3v10) “Test me in this,” ... “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

### Q. Isn’t this God’s SIGNATURE?

This is so much God’s TRADEMARK – His invariable KEY SIGNATURE – Micah, an earlier prophet sums it up will in:

Micah 7v18-19 “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”

I want to move onto the second aspect which comes in our last 4 verses of this short book to move on from SIGNATURE, if you like, to SIGNET:

## 2. “A ring on the finger” (Chapter 2v20-23)

Let me read the verses \*READ\* Haggai 2v20-23 \*READ\*

### Words spoken to Zerubbabel

It is very fitting I think that the last words are directed to Zerubbabel. Those that lead are up on the front line where the attack can be the fiercest. They, perhaps more than others really need to hear the voice of God and to know His special encouragement.

It would not be hard for Zerubbabel to look at everything around him and be very downbeat. Materially they were not in the best of times and there was so much to do – endless rebuilding and even then, the wall of the city was destroyed and burned (and in reality there was going to be another 70 years before Nehemiah would come on the scene and rectify that one).

So God gives him something to hang on to.

Another thing he says is there in verse 23 is “I have chosen you”. It is a vital aspect of the life of a leader of God’s people that they know the calling of God in their lives. It is this that they may return to whenever they think the going is just too hard for them.

### The significance of Zerubbabel

Zerubbabel was the governor of Jerusalem – I guess if you wanted to consider how God has lead his people through the pages of the OT you would say:

- It began with **PATRIARCHS**
- Went on with what you might call **PRESIDENTS** or **GENERALS** (people such as **Moses** and **Joshua**)
- Then God gave **JUDGES** or **DELIVERERS**
- Then for hundreds of years there were **KINGS**
- And now, finally, we are in a period of **GOVERNORS** (of which **Zerubbabel** and **Nehemiah**)

However, Zerubbabel wasn’t just anyone – he was the grandson of the Davidic King – Jehoiachin, also known as Jeconiah or simply Coniah and his name features in the line of Jesus in both Matthew and Luke.

And this connection helps us to appreciate that whilst the Lord is making promises to bless Zerubbabel, these promises have a greater fulfilment in the Messiah, Jesus to come.

Zerubbabel here is what we would call a “TYPE” – which simply means that in him we are to see a pattern of someone else.

One of the clues to this is the designation – is in verse 23 “I will take you, my servant...” – the promised Messiah, that one which people like Isaiah speak about, has this same label.

### The significance of the signet ring

Well we’ve seen the significance of Zerubbabel – let’s go on to look at the significance of the signet ring.

Q. What is a signet ring?

Well “signet” comes from medieval French and is a diminutive form of the noun “signe” which means a sign – and so it is literally a little sign and hence a signet ring is one which carries, usually engraved on a stone mounted in the ring, some initials or perhaps a symbol, which acts as a signature for the bearer or keeper of the ring.

In the OT we see them being used around this time in the book of Esther where the king would seal an edict or decree with his signet ring – probably by pressing it into some soft wax attached to the document that it authorized.

A signet was:

- A thing of BEAUTY – and God had the power to attach a beauty and magnificence to his chosen leader
- But more than this – it was a thing of AUTHORITY, of SECURITY and of CERTAINTY

You can't help but notice that throughout Haggai we hear a consistent note of God's Sovereign Authority.

14 times we get this designation of "The LORD Almighty" – and again and again we have clear statements of what God will do \*READ\* Verses 21-23

## CONCLUSION

Let me draw the threads of this book together as we conclude:

Haggai is a tremendously exciting letter – partly because it directly diagnoses the problems of the people of Israel and that diagnosis is surprisingly still very much on the mark today.

It is also very exciting because God reminds us powerfully here of how much He is willing and wanting to bless us as we repent and respond. There is a turning point in view and this is a wide open door for us to go through.

And for us here at Thatcham Community Church – we come to what feels like another new chapter – I believe God would have us to:

1. Live lives of OBEDIENCE serving the Lord and NOT living self-serving lives
2. Also to live CLEAN lives so that what we are doing on the outside is matched by what is going on internally

God takes no delight in mere formalism or externalism

If that is what our service to God consists of God would prefer we don't do things at all!!

So I wonder this morning whether we are a people to whom God has given the most precious of rings and yet we are a people who insist on wearing it through our snouts because our lives are ones of filth in God's sight – lives more fitting to pigs in a pigsty than God's chosen people.

Let's pray