

Through the Bible - Zephaniah, Haggai

by Zac Poonen

Zephaniah's prophecy emphasizes the importance of humility, repentance, and standing for God's truth in the face of opposition, warning of judgment and destruction for those who fail to heed God's call.

Duration: 55:46

Scripture: Haggai 1:3-4, Haggai 1:8, Haggai 2:3, Haggai 2:9, Zechariah 8:16-17, John 3:16, Acts 20:35

Topics: "Through The Bible"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of leaders in the church who are seeking their own gain and focusing on money. He emphasizes that these leaders are not representing the true Jesus who taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The speaker also highlights the importance of leaders being obedient to God's commands and not being indifferent to sin. He encourages building a body ministry where everyone functions together, rather than having a one-man show. The sermon concludes with the reminder that to be a messenger of the Lord, one must first allow God to work in their own life.

Transcript

We turn now to the book of Zephaniah and chapter one. Zephaniah prophesied soon after Nahum, before the Babylonians became the great world power and just before Jeremiah's time. It's possible that Jeremiah was there towards the end of Zephaniah's time of prophecy.

He was the prophet just before Jeremiah. He also speaks about the destruction of Assyria and the rise of Babylon. But his main theme is the severity of God and the goodness of God.

There is a verse in Romans 11 which says, Behold the goodness and the severity of God. And we can see that verse demonstrated in the whole book of Zephaniah. First of all, he demonstrates the severity of God, his strictness against sin.

And then he demonstrates the goodness of God to that remnant. As you've been listening to these minor prophets, you've probably seen that there are certain themes that recur in all these prophets. Pride, exploiting poor people, love of money among the leaders and not being deceived by external manifestations of revival.

Chastening by God, God using heathen people to chasten his people. The need for faith to wait in patience, the answer does not come immediately. But God will definitely judge.

The anger of God against sin, the certainty of judgment and the remnant. All these prophets speak about a remnant. All these prophets speak about in a time of decline in the midst of God's people, there will be a few.

All these things are prophetic. These things are written for us, it says in 1 Corinthians 10. The entire Old Testament is written for us in our time, when there is a decline in Christianity, just like there was a decline in Israel.

And all the tribes declined. I told you how the northern kingdom was Israel and the southern kingdom was Judah. A picture of denominational Christians, which is the larger group, ten tribes, and separated groups, which is a smaller group, two tribes.

But both declined. And the separated groups did not learn from the failures of the denominations and made the same mistakes themselves. But ultimately from this, from the northern tribe and the southern tribe, God brings out a remnant.

And that is what God is doing today. He's got a remnant that is decline and declension everywhere. In all of Christianity, from one extreme to the other, from the most ritualistic to the most free groups.

But in the midst of it all, there is a remnant, a few people who have a heart for God, and you will not find them in any one denomination. They are here and there, who have a love for God, who are seeking Him, who are honoring Him, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and who are not involved in all the controversies, who are very careful with their tongues, very faithful with money, and God is gathering them together. That is the theme of these prophets, restoration.

And all that was for what? Ultimately, this remnant was to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. And when the Lord came, there was this remnant of Simeon in the temple, Anna who was fasting and praying, John the Baptist, the shepherds, and a few wise men too, from the east. So we see, it was all for this remnant was to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

And today also, there is a remnant in Christendom here and there, preparing the way for the coming of the Lord. So Zephaniah first speaks about the time of judgment. He speaks about the day of the Lord more than any other prophet.

There was a revival in King Josiah's time, just about four years before Nebuchadnezzar came and took them all captives. But Zephaniah was not fooled by that revival. A lot of Christian preachers are easily fooled when they hear about revival.

Zephaniah was not fooled. Jeremiah was not fooled. They could see through it.

But very few people, even in that time, could see through the hollowness and superficiality of what other people called revival. All the other masses thought, oh, this is revival. And today also you find so many movements in Christendom.

And a lot of people are fooled. Revival, revival. Oh, people are doing this and they are doing that.

And they are now singing and praising the Lord in those dead churches and we think it's all revival. It's not a revival to holiness. It's not a revival to humility.

It's not a revival to freedom from the love of money. It's not a revival to overcoming anger, overcoming the lust of the eyes. It's not a revival to poverty of spirit.

It's not a revival to forgiving others. If it's not a revival for all these things written in the Sermon on the Mount, what type of revival is it? Superficial. And prophets like Jeremiah and Zephaniah can see through it in a moment.

They don't need time. And I want to tell you, don't be deceived by a lot of things which are called revival today. They are not.

You would ask God to open your eyes, read Jeremiah, Zephaniah and see. They lived in a time when people spoke about revival and they spoke the truth and they were said, you're negative people. You're always criticizing negative.

They were not negative. They were speaking the truth. And the result is four years later, Nebuchadnezzar came and took everybody captive.

Then they realized Jeremiah was right. Zephaniah was right. Those are the only fellows who could see through the hollowness and emptiness of what everybody else thought was revival.

And I believe one of these days, Christendom will realize that the few people who stood out and exposed all this hollowness, they will discover that they were right. The people they criticized as heretics were the prophets of the Lord. Same thing then, the same thing today.

We find that and we see the need for that today. All these results will not last. Now we turn to Zephaniah and chapter one.

Judgment in the day of the Lord is basically his theme and then finally how salvation comes also in the day of the Lord. Judgment on the earth, judgment on Judah, judgment on the nations that surround Judah. That's how in chapter one, Gaza, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria on Jerusalem and the whole earth.

There's judgment on all of them. You'll see in chapter two, verse four and all that. Now he says in verse two of chapter one, I'll sweep everything away from your land.

In verse four to six, we read how the Canaanites had dragged Israel down to their level. It says here in chapter one, verse seven, stand in silence for the day of the Lord is near. Now there is a double fulfillment of all these things in the Old Testament.

As I said, one was the Babylonians coming and Nebuchadnezzar or Assyria. Today it is the Antichrist coming, the forces against the church. In those days, it was the forces against Israel.

And then there was the remnant and there was the coming of the Lord. Today also, there's the double fulfillment. There is a remnant and the second coming of the Lord.

That day of the Lord, which is spoken of there was the day of God's judgment in their time with the Babylonians coming. For us today, the day of the Lord is the second coming of Christ. Now the Lord says here, not only the other nations, but I will crush Judah and Jerusalem with my fist.

This is Zephaniah one, four to destroy every last trace of their bail worship, because they go up to the roofs. They bow down to the sun, moon and stars. They claim they follow the Lord, but they worship more

like two.

I told you these verses describe how the Canaanites succeeded in dragging Israel down to their level. Israel went in to manifest the true God, but those people succeeded in dragging them down to their level. How does this apply to us today? It's like if you stand on a table and you have fellowship with the person who's standing on the ground, even if you're quite a person, tell me, is it easier for you to pull him up or for that person to pull you down? You know that if you get married to an unbeliever, it'll be like that.

Whether you're a man or woman, you're up here and that person's down there. Ultimately, both of you will be down there. So that's what happened to the Canaanites.

The Lord said, don't have any contact with them. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers, but they didn't listen. The result was the Canaanites dragged them down to their level and the Israelites started worshipping Baal and the sun and the moon and the stars.

Did the Canaanites start worshipping Jehovah? No. None of the Canaanites were interested in worshipping Jehovah. They dragged Israel down to their level.

And we see the same thing in a lot of Christian churches today that say, we are trying to Indianize our worship. And when they try to Indianize their worship, it becomes Hinduizing, actually. It's amazing how it goes.

In certain denominations of Christianity, it's happening. You know, I actually saw a Christian book published in India with the picture of Jesus in the cover and a seven-hooded snake over his head. And I saw it myself.

It was written, this is the seven-fold Holy Spirit of the book of Revelation. This is what I mean by Indianizing. It's happening.

I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. And the picture of the priest who wrote it is there at the back of the book. This is the age of deception in which we are living.

They are succeeding in dragging us down. We're not lifting them up. Stand true to the word of God.

You think there is a significance to these coconuts that are given at wedding times? I'm talking about Christian marriages. A lot of Hindu customs that creep in. Where did this dowry system come from? Is it in the Bible? Is it something that Jesus encouraged? Heathen customs.

The heathen have it, Christians have it. Show me one denomination in Christianity that doesn't have dowry. I'd like to see that in India.

You see how they've dragged us down. We say we are standing for the Lord. Which Lord are you standing for? They've dragged you down in every area.

You just take the name of Jesus, that's all. And if you stand against these things, you will be unpopular. You'll say, no, no, no, we have to.

These things are part of society. Society. God stands against this type of society which exploits poor helpless girls.

It's completely wrong. And these prophets stood against that and they hated them for exposing that because the sins of the leaders were exposed. That's what I mean here.

And verse 8, on that day of judgment says the Lord, Zephaniah 1, I will punish the leaders and the princes and those who participate in pagan worship ceremonies. But one thing true about all these people, they fill their homes with loot. They love money but they follow pagan customs and the Lord says, I will punish their leaders.

Always it's the leaders whom God hits out against. And I hope you have noticed that in all the prophets when they spoke. They spoke against the leaders and today if God sends a prophet anywhere, he'll be speaking against the pastors and the priests and the bishops.

And that won't make him popular because nobody likes to speak against the leaders. That's why you say every single prophet was persecuted. You remember what Stephen said in Acts chapter 7? He said, which of the prophets did you all not persecute? Tell me the name of one prophet, he said, which you did not persecute.

Every single one of them you persecuted. You know why? Because they hit out at the leaders. When Jesus came, did he hit out at the gamblers and the drunkards and the women caught in adultery and the decoits and the cheating tax collectors and the thieves? No.

He never said a word against them. He said, I came to save those people. He hit out against the leadership.

People who held their Bibles and stood in the churches and loved money and lived for themselves, never spoke against sin, never led people to godliness and they killed him. Is this the Jesus you are following? Or a mild Jesus who doesn't disturb any of the leaders, hobnobs with the leaders and goes for feasts with them? It is another Jesus that people are following today. These prophets spoke against the leaders.

He said, you fellas, you're just making money, filling your houses with loot and you're following all these pagan customs. And therefore the judgment will come. The judgment comes upon God's people because the leaders have failed.

In verse 12, God says, I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners to find and punish those who are contented in their sins, indifferent to the Lord, thinking he will do nothing. In the church today, there are people living in luxury, indifferent to the commands of the Lord, leaders who made money through serving God and indifferent to the seriousness of God's commands. They just want to retain their position as chairman, director, chief pastor of some situation or bishop or something like that, but they're not concerned about what God is saying.

And the Lord says, I'm going to search out every little sin that's lying in the church and I'm going to expose it all. You know, whenever a church or a nation declines spiritually, they move towards a life of luxury, ease, comfort and indifference, prayerlessness. And this is what happens.

Many of you young people today, you start with poverty, sacrifice, prayer, study of the word, wait for another 30 years and see what happens. If you are not faithful, if you don't fight against your flesh, if you don't stand against the corrupt Christianity you see around you and its corrupt leaders, I tell you, you will become like them. Prayerless, not knowing God's word, just a professional preacher getting up and dishing out your sermons every Sunday morning, accumulating more and more money, building houses,

living in luxury and with no anointing upon you, even though you started in great sincerity.

This has happened in the time of Zephaniah and it's happened today. Learn a lesson from that. And we see further in chapter 2, the Lord says through Zephaniah, beg the Lord to save you.

Verse 3, all of you who are humble, seek for more humility. What a word. Those of you who are humble, seek for more humility and perhaps the Lord will protect you in the day of his anger and destruction.

He will. God gives grace to the humble. Zephaniah understood that.

Here is the pride of Babylon and here is the humility of the remnant in Jerusalem. I told you right from the time of Cain and Abel, there's been these two streams, Babylon and Jerusalem. We see it running through here too, through the prophets.

That is Babylon, today a religious Babylon and that is Jerusalem, the church of God. And the remnant and the characteristic of that remnant is not miracles and great signs and arrogant speaking or high positions and titles and all that. It's humility.

And they never get tired of seeking for more and more humility. Walk humbly and do what is right. Seek for righteousness and seek for humility and the Lord will protect you.

See there's a great need especially in the remnant to be humble and I'll tell you why. What is the danger those who belong to this remnant face? Oh we are not like those dead people in the denominations and the other churches. That is exactly how the devil wants you to think because he knows that the moment you start thinking like that God will become your enemy too and you'll also become a part of them.

You see how quick it is that the remnant becomes part of Babylon in no time and I have seen that happen again and again and again in the last 25 years. People who came out understood God's ways and then became proud. Oh we are special and they became part of Babylon too.

Zephaniah said that pursue humility, keep your face in the dust, keep your face in the dust, keep your face in the dust. That's my exhortation to everyone who's a part of the remnant. Don't look up and compare yourself with other people.

That's none of your business. Compare yourself with Jesus. Full stop.

Period. That's all. Nobody else.

So that's a warning and the philistines cities verse 4 will be rooted out and left in desolation. How terrible it will be for them in that day. But a few survivors there again the remnant chapter 2 verse 7. Chapter 2 verse 8 we read about God's people who are part of this remnant being taunted and made fun of.

You see if you stand up for the Lord in the last days like Daniel and his three friends and like this remnant spoken of in all these prophets, you can be pretty sure that all the other Christians are going to make fun of you. And if you can't stand being made fun of, you will just finally give up and join them. They'll say oh brother what a fantastic ministry we expected you to have but you've gone and joined this godforsaken little group and you're wasting your life.

A lot of people told me that 25 years ago. I'm thankful that I didn't listen to them. I said Lord I don't care whether I'm with two people or three people.

I want to be where you are. I want to move with you. I want to obey your word and I don't care for the opinions of backslidden Christianity or their leaders.

If you're going to be like that, you'll face a lot of opposition but you'll finish your course with joy. You'll be a triumphant warrior 40 years from now if the Lord tarries and you will not give up. Keep your eyes on the Lord.

Others will taunt you. The Lord says don't worry. I'll deal with them in my own time.

And chapter 2 speaks about the destruction of Assyria. Verse 13 which is going to be destroyed. Assyria was declining after Nehum had prophesied but it hadn't yet been destroyed fully.

And then finally chapter 3 speaks about the condition of the so-called Jerusalem of that time. A picture of a lot of Christendom today. Again the leaders.

Notice the emphasis on leaders, leaders, leaders all the time. Chapter 3 verse 3. Its leaders are like roaring lions hunting for their victims. They are out for everything they can get.

You know Jesus told his disciples freely you have received, freely give. He told his disciples it is more blessed to give than to receive. And the apostle Paul said in Acts 20, I have demonstrated to you Ephesians for three years the truth of this word that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

But do you think today's Christian leaders and pastors are demonstrating the truth of that verse that it is more blessed to give than to receive? No. They are all eager to get like it says in this verse. Their leaders are out for everything they can get from anybody.

Their judges and other type of rulers are like ravenous wolves trying to get something from the sheep. Go here, get something from the sheep here. Go to another church, get something from the sheep there.

Go there to another church, get something from the sheep there. This is how it is in Christendom. This is how it was then.

Ravenous wolves eager to get and trying to speak about a Jesus who said it is more blessed to give than to receive. If you cannot demonstrate by your life like Paul that it is more blessed to give than to receive, how can you represent a Christ who lived on earth to show that it is more blessed to give than to receive? How can you demonstrate a Christ who showed the love of God, who so loved the world that he gave his son? You see this is a very important thing and again another group of, there are four groups of leaders mentioned here in verse three and four. Leaders, judges, prophets, priests.

They are all telling lies, seeking their own gain. Verse four, what do the leaders seek? Their own profit. It's all money, money, money, money, money, money.

When people ask me why do you speak so much against money, money, money, money, money? I say it's here in the Bible. That's why we speak against it. It's not receiving.

The Lord has ordained those who preach the gospel can receive money. It's coveting, loving, longing for it, trying to grab it wherever you go. That's different, totally different.

The Lord himself had ordained that the Levites should receive money from the others, but he didn't ordain this type of looking for it, looking for it everywhere and trying to get, get, get, get, get. That is completely an

abuse of the Lord's teaching and that's what's happening today. It's priests defile the temple by disobeying God's laws, but the Lord does no wrong and he watches everything and he takes notice.

So he says, I wiped out many nations before and the Lord is going to do the same thing now. He says, be patient. The time is coming soon when he will judge, verse eight.

And when I pull out a remnant from all this, see what happens to this remnant. On that day, verse nine, this is a description of the remnant now to the end of the chapter. I will purify the lips of my people.

See the emphasis again on lips, speech. If you have heard me minister, you've heard me often speak about speech and about money because the prophet spoke about that often in the Old Testament. The way you speak, be careful if you want to be the mouthpiece of God.

The way you handle money, be careful if you want to be the mouthpiece of God. Just take care of these two areas in your life and I believe you can protect yourself from a lot of harm. I will purify the lips of my people and they will worship the Lord together.

They will stand together, as it goes on to say in one translation, shoulder to shoulder. They'll be united and they serve the Lord. And I will remove, verse 11, all the proud, arrogant people.

Notice the emphasis again on proud people. Always the prophets speak against proud people, proud people, proud people. You should preach in such a way that people ask you, why are you always preaching against proud, pride, pride, pride, pride? Why are you always speaking about humility, humility, humility? That's what the prophet spoke about.

I will remove the proud, arrogant people and there'll be no more pride on my holy mountain. And those who are remnant will be a lowly, humble people and they will have faith in the Lord. They will trust in the Lord and they will not wrong each other anymore like they did in the past.

They will not have these leaders who are wronging each other. Verse 13, they will not tell lies to each other. They will not deceive each other and they will live in peace and in safety and they will have no fear.

A beautiful description of what a church should be like. Verse 9 onwards. It's a beautiful description.

Meditate on that when you have time. I wish I could spend a whole session on it. And in that church, this remnant that's really learned to love one another, very few, there's a shout of praise in the midst of this church.

Verse 14, they're singing, they're shouting aloud, they are glad, they rejoice because the Lord has removed his hand of judgment and the Lord himself is living among them and their troubles are over. And in that day, the announcement in Jerusalem will be, cheer up Zion. Don't be afraid.

The Lord has arrived to live among you. He's a mighty savior. He will rejoice over you with great gladness.

God does not rejoice over all his people. Don't think so. Do you think God can find any joy over people who are living in sin? Can a father find joy in a child who is full of sickness, who's got sores and eczema and asthma and leprosy and tuberculosis? Can a father find joy in that? Neither can God find people who live in sin and don't want to be healed.

But God finds joy in this remnant. With great gladness, he shouts over them. He sings a happy song.

This is one place in scripture where it says God looks at his people and sings a song. There are many places where we sing a song to God. Here's God singing a song when he sees such people.

What a challenge that we should be people like that. And the Lord says, I'll gather you who mourn. You see, this remnant are people who weep before God.

I'll deal severely with those who have oppressed you and I'll save the weak and the helpless ones. This remnant is a group of weak and helpless ones and I will give them glory on that day. I'll give you a good name, a name of distinction and the people who criticized you, they will praise you when I stand and restore your fortunes in that day.

Don't be worried about what people say about you today. So that's how the book of Zephaniah ends and now we move to the book of Haggai. Haggai is a small little book with two chapters and Haggai was one of those prophets along with Zechariah who was younger to him, who was sent by God to encourage the believers who had gone back to build the temple.

And we read here that for 16 years after they came back, no temple was built. They just lived like that. There are a number of messages here in the book of Haggai, actually four messages.

First in the first chapter and three messages in the second chapter. And the first one is a call to rebuild the temple. And what you see here is first of all the selfishness of God's people.

The Lord says, this people are saying, verse two, the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house. You see, if you go back to the book of Ezra, what the king forbade was, you should not build that city. He never said anything about not building the temple, Ezra 4:21.

But these people took that as an excuse. And so I said, no, it's not your time because circumstances are not right. The king is against us.

And he says, you fellows, verse three, you have plenty of time to build your own luxurious houses. And my house lies in ruins. Just like Solomon, who spent 13 years building his palace, but at least he spent seven years building the temple.

But here are these people. They just built their grand houses and were not concerned about the Lord's house. Do you find people like that today who are concerned about building up their own family and not the Lord's family, concerned about building their own house, not the Lord's house, concerned if some of their own property is encroached upon by a neighbor, but not concerned when the Lord's property is encroached upon by Satan.

This is exactly the condition of a lot of God's people today. They are concerned about their property. Oh, my children are sick.

What about God's children? My house. What about God's house? When Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and the other things will be added to you, it is the exact opposite of this. What he's saying is put God's house first.

I'll take care of your house. Put God's name first. Don't worry about your name.

Take care of God's children. I'll take care of your children. It's true.

And you must be a living demonstration to an unbelieving world that if you honor God, he will honor you, that if you take care of God's children, he'll take care of your children, that if you take care of God's house, he'll take care of your house. Is your life a testimony to that? That's a very good question to ask ourselves. And here we see in verse five and six, the Lord says, consider how things are going for you.

Is there spiritual fruitfulness in your life? You have planted much, but you harvested little. That means you go to so many thousands of meetings. You read so many books.

You listen to so many tapes. But what is the spiritual condition of your home? Is there godliness in your home? Is there peace between you and your wife? Have you overcome even a simple thing like shouting at your wife? What's the use of going to thousands of meetings? You sow much, but you harvest so little. You got such a lot of food to eat.

So many tapes, so many books, so many meetings. But you're still not healthy. What a sad thing.

Something is wrong. You have planted much, but harvested little. Your thirst is not satisfied.

You have clothing to wear, but you don't feel warm. You earn such a lot of money, but there are holes in your pocket. Verse six, and it all goes away.

You ask God to fill you with the spirit, but you leak. And so it all goes out. What's the use of pouring water into a vessel that's got holes in it? I believe many, many believers are coming to God with a vessel full of holes, saying, Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit.

And God says, fix the holes first. That's exactly the reason. It's not that God doesn't want to fill you with the Holy Spirit.

There are things in your life that have got to be patched up, set right. There are holes in your pocket. What's the use of putting whole lot of coins in your pocket? Lord, fill my pocket with coins.

And God says, no, there are too many holes there. I can't waste all those coins. Many people who are asking God to fill them with the Holy Spirit, that's it.

There are things in their life they have not set right. They have not gone and apologized to somebody. They have not returned some money they've taken wrongfully.

There are big, big holes. And they're saying, Lord, fill me, fill me, fill me. You can have all night prayer meetings to fill you.

Nothing will happen. Spend the night fixing those holes, and you'll get the answer very quickly. There are holes in your pocket, the Lord says.

Consider how things are going for you. It's a very good question. In fact, it's one of those questions, Haggai's theme is, consider how things are going for you and be strong and do the Lord's work.

First of all, consider. That's his message here. And I want you to notice here in verse seven and eight, he's not talking about laying the foundation.

He's talking about building the house. Rebuild my house, he says. The foundation was already laid.

Jesus spoke about a man who laid the foundation, Luke 14, and did not complete the building. You know that parable? And everybody laughed at him. Have you ever considered where that parable comes? It comes in Luke 14, in the middle of a section on how to be a disciple.

Jesus was giving three conditions of discipleship in Luke 14, and in the middle of that, he said, I'll give you a parable. When you preach evangelism without discipleship, it's like laying a foundation and not building the house. Is a foundation necessary? Is evangelism necessary? Absolutely necessary.

But if you build the foundation and don't build the house, it's useless in a sense. That's the comparison Jesus made between evangelism and discipleship. You read that in Hebrews chapter six, verse one to three also.

Let us not lay again the foundation of repentance, faith, baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, resurrection, eternal judgment. That's all foundation. Good.

Let's now press on to perfection. That's the house. Let's make people disciples who are following Jesus and pressing on to perfection.

What is Haggai talking about? He's not talking about the foundation. He's talking about perfection. He's talking about building the house, completing the house, building the church, building the body of Christ, not collecting bricks.

You know the difference between a congregation and a body of Christ? If you put all the 50,000 bricks or stones that this building had, let's say, piled up here. Okay, all 50,000 stones are there. That's evangelism.

They were cut from the quarry and brought here. They're born again now. But that's not a house.

You have to now take those people who are cut from the quarry. They were unbelievers there, cut, born again, brought here. Now you've got to build them together.

That's the difficult part, to build them and make it into a house so that it is the body of Christ and the church, not just a one-man show watching over all these bricks. You know, I believe a lot of churches are like this. One man, like a watchman, stands there, makes sure that nobody steals my stones.

And they say, brother, you're trying to steal my sheep. You're trying to steal my pile of stones. Why is it we don't have to watch all the stones in this building at night, whether somebody may come and steal one of these? Why is that? You must build a church like this, where you don't have to be worried about somebody stealing your stones.

They are there. They are built. They are cemented.

There's a stone on top of them, a stone underneath them, a stone on the left, and a stone on the right. You can't take it out. It's these people who don't build, who are always complaining, somebody snatched somebody from my church.

I have never, we have a church in Bangalore for 25 years. I've never said that anybody stole anybody from our church. We are building a building.

Build a church. Haggai says, build a house. Don't just be satisfied with the foundation.

And verse 9 to 11, you see a strong rebuke here. The Lord gives, and I believe there's a great need in our churches for a word of rebuke. That's what's often lacking.

There's a lot of teaching, but not enough rebuke and correction. And when God brings failure into our life, when he brings sickness into our life, we need to sit and listen. Consider, why is this happening? Consider your ways.

Why is God blowing away my harvest, verse 9, when I thought I'd have a rich harvest? Why is this house lying in ruins? Why is the heavens, verse 10, withheld its dew and the earth withheld its crops? Why is there a drought, verse 11? Why is there a dryness in my ministry, barrenness? Why is there a drought, verse 11, so that people are starving? Why is it? Because you're concerned about your own house, your own family, your own money, your own bank account. You're not concerned about the Lord's work. And then Zerubbabel, when he heard this prophecy and Joshua, the high priest, they obeyed the message.

They responded to the message of this prophet. And they said, okay, we're going to do this. We're going to build a house now.

We're not just going to be satisfied with evangelism. We're going to make disciples. We're going to build a house.

We're not just going to be satisfied with a pile of stones that were cut from the quarry. We're going to build them together. We're going to have a body ministry, not just a one-man show, like a watchman watching over 50,000 stones.

We're going to build them together and make a house. We're going to build a body functioning together, not a pile of body parts, like in an anatomy laboratory. You have a hand and a leg and a stomach and an eye and all that lying over there, but they can't function together.

A lot of churches are like that, to build them together. Joshua and Zerubbabel said, we're going to build. Wonderful.

And verse 13, then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave the people the Lord's message. That's a good expression. Not just Haggai gave the Lord's message.

The Lord's messenger gave the Lord's message. Now, anybody can give the Lord's message. You just listen to it on a tape and repeat it.

But you have to first become the Lord's messenger. And to become the Lord's messenger, you have to allow God to do a work in your life first, like he did in Hosea's life. And Haggai doesn't tell us how God drilled him and crushed him in his younger days and broke him and took him through deep trials.

He doesn't tell us all that. A lot of servants of God will never tell us. But I'm absolutely sure, Hosea told us a little bit, Paul has told us a little bit, but I'm absolutely sure every single prophet, every single servant of God whom God has used in the history of this world has had a private history of God's dealings with him, breaking him, crushing him, humbling him, making him lose things which the world appreciates, his money, his reputation.

And through all that, he becomes the Lord's messenger. And there's a difference when the Lord's messenger gives a message and another person who hears that on a tape or reads it in a book goes

somewhere and preaches the same message. There's an anointing here and there's no anointing there.

Why? The message is absolutely the same. A man can give the same message that he heard an anointed man preach, but the anointing is not there because this man is not the Lord's messenger. See, the anointing is not on a message, the anointing is on a person.

The Holy Spirit does not come on books and tapes. No, no, no, no. I know there are people who lay hands on books and tapes and say, Lord anointed, but whatever they pray, that doesn't happen.

God anoints people. He doesn't anoint buildings. He anoints people.

The Lord's messenger must give the Lord's message. Please remember this very important principle. And it says in verse 14 and 15, the Spirit stirred these people through the word to action.

And then, you know, there's been an anointing. People have been stirred. And I want to tell you, those of you who preach the word, don't ever be satisfied in your life till your preaching stirs people to do something about it.

Not just shake your hand outside of the door and say, brother, that was a good message. I'm not interested in that. Does it stir them to action? Does it stir them to get rid of their sin? Does it stir them to go and make restitution? Does it stir them to make disciples out of the converts they made in their local church? That's what happened.

It stirred them to action. And within 23 days, the first was in the second year of King Darius. It says here in the 29th of August and here in the 21st of September, verse 15, things began to work, which did not happen for 16 years.

You see the result of one prophet, the difference he can make. Things are silent. Nothing's happening for 16 years.

All these professional preachers are getting up and saying something. And one prophet comes along and shakes everybody up and things begin to happen. Be a man like that.

Become the Lord's messenger. We come to chapter 2 and it says here, verse 3, is there anyone who can remember this house as it was before in comparison with that old house, Solomon's temple? How does it look now? It seems almost like nothing, right? But the Lord says, take courage, take courage, Zerubbabel. Take courage, Joshua.

Take courage, all you people. Take courage and work four times for I am with you. My spirit remains among you.

And just as I promised in the time you were saved first, when you came out of Egypt, don't be afraid for this is what the Lord Almighty says. I'm going to shake heaven and earth and I will bring the treasures of these nations to this temple. And here's the promise, verse 9, the glory of this latter house is going to be far greater than the glory of the former.

That's like saying anything you saw under the old covenant is nothing compared to this new covenant church. Solomon's temple had gold and bronze and so much of money was there, silver and so many things. But the new covenant church doesn't have gold and silver and bronze, but it's got something of eternal value.

And the glory, Jesus says, the Lord says, of this latter house, this new covenant church, is going to be far superior to anything they ever had in the old covenant. Anything that you read in the entire Old Testament is far surpassed in what happened after the day of Pentecost. Are you hard up for money? The Lord says, money is no problem.

Verse 8, the silver is mine, the gold is mine. Do we need money for God's work? We certainly do. Jesus needed money to live.

He not only had to take care of his expenses, he had to take care of 12 disciples. And God is not unrealistic. It says a lot of rich women supported Jesus and Jesus received their gifts.

But he didn't go begging or asking anybody. He trusted God to provide his need and he got and he received. Because he knew this verse, God says, the silver is mine, the gold is mine.

Everything that you need for your life and to take care of your family, I can provide you if you trust me. Everything that you need for your work, you need money for your work. I realize that.

You need money to travel from one place to another. You need money to buy food. You need money to rent a house.

You need money for clothes. You need money to educate your children. You need money for your activities in the ministry.

The Lord says, I know it. God is not unrealistic. But trust him for it.

Don't become a beggar. Trust God. Because he says, the silver is mine, the gold is mine.

So there we have people seeking to build a church and being concerned about money and the Lord says, that's no problem. And verse 10 to 12, there's an interesting parable here. It says here in verses 10 to 12, ask the priest this question.

This is another message that came here. It's a third message. The first was about completing the temple.

The second was chapter 2, verse 1 to 9, the glory of the temple. And the third message is about holiness and sin. You notice always, whenever the prophet spoke about building the house, the very next thing they speak is about holiness.

You cannot build the house, if you're not going to emphasize holiness. Okay? And ask the priest this question. Supposing one of you, verse 12, is carrying a holy sacrifice in his robes and he happens to brush against some bread or some stew or some wine or oil or any other kind of food.

Will that food also become holy? And the priest said, no. See, they had certain things which are holy in the Old Testament and perhaps we don't understand this. The Jews understood it immediately.

Then Haggai said, let me ask you another question. Supposing something has become unclean by touching a dead body or something like that and that touches one of these other bits of holy bread. Will that holy bread become unholy? Yes.

So what is the message there? Let me use another illustration which you will understand even better. You know, if you go to an operating theater in a hospital, the doctors scrub their hands for many minutes, at

least they are supposed to, in a good hospital. They sterilize all the equipment.

They keep it in what's called an autoclave, where they boil it with steam. All the equipment, the knives, the pincers and scissors and the cloth and everything is sterilized. Now, if you take that sterile thing which is completely free from germs and rub it on my shirt which is full of germs, will all the germs go from my shirt? Yes or no? No.

So that means purity cannot be communicated like that. Now the other way around. Supposing I take my dirty shirt full of germs and rub it on that sterile equipment in the surgery theater.

Will that become dirty? Yes. That's the message here. Sin can be communicated much more quickly than holiness.

You understood the message? It's easy for somebody to make you a sinner. It's difficult to make a person holy. It takes a lot of effort to make all that equipment in a hospital sterile.

But how long does it take to pollute it? Just a moment. Sin is communicated very easily. Please remember that.

God says that whatever you offer, He says here in verse 14, is defiled. Everything that this person is offering is defiled because even though that thing is a holy thing, the hands that are offering it are filthy. Supposing the equipment in an operating theater has all been sterile and the surgeon comes in with dirty hands.

What happens? All that equipment, as soon as he touches it, it becomes dirty. That's what the Lord is saying. You fellows are offering to God.

But there's sin in your life. That's what the Lord is saying to the church today. This prayer that you prayed on Sunday morning, boy, that was such a fantastic prayer.

Everybody said amen and hallelujah to it. But there's sin in your life. You came to the meeting after fighting with your wife.

What's the use of praying that fantastic prayer? All the people said amen and hallelujah. But none of the angels in heaven said amen or hallelujah because they saw how you behaved at home before you came to the meeting. That's what I mean.

It's very down to earth and practical. Sin can be easily communicated. In other words, the Lord is saying with your unholy life, you communicated sin to that prayer.

And the prayer that came up before God, people only listened to the beautiful words, but they did not know the heart from which it came. They thought it was a holy prayer, but God who was watching everything said the heart has communicated sin to those words. There's iniquity in the holy things.

That's what we considered when we studied Exodus. There's iniquity in the holy things. Finally, the last message is for Zerubbabel.

There's one word in verse 19. Before that, the Lord says, don't be discouraged from this day. I'll bless you.

And the last word is to Zerubbabel. The last message tells Zerubbabel, I will shake heaven and earth and I will overthrow the royal thrones. I will destroy the power of Satan.

That's the meaning. And I will honor you, Zerubbabel, because you responded to the word of God. I will treat you like a ring on my finger.

A ring on a finger is always a picture of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. When the prodigal son came back, the father put a ring on his finger, a picture of anointed with the Holy Spirit. I will anoint you because I've specially chosen you.

I just want to say one thing in closing. Haggai was a real prophet. He exalted Zerubbabel and withdrew himself.

He said, Zerubbabel, you're going to be the leader. You're going to be the leader of these people in building the church. The ring is going to be on your hand.

My ministry was just to encourage these people and disappear. You know, a true prophet never got honor. The kings like David got honor.

Zerubbabel got honor. But the prophets, they fulfilled a ministry and they disappeared. Their honor will come when Christ comes again.

Be a prophet of God. Be a servant of God who proclaims his word, seeking no honor from Christendom, no honor from anyone on this earth. Encourage other people.

Push them forward. Let them be the leaders. Let them be the elders.

Let them take the ministry. Let them be the chairman. Let them be the directors.

And you pull back. Say, I'm just a humble servant of the Lord. I have no title.

I have nothing. I'm here to proclaim God's word and disappear. Let other people have the honor.

This is the mark of a true servant of God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we bow before you, we thank you for the tremendous example of these godly men who are an example to us, who have so much more than they had.

We have the Holy Spirit. We have the word. We have the light of Calvary.

Help us to emulate these men, to follow in their footsteps and be worthy servants of yours in our day, in our generation. We pray in Jesus name.

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