

DEAD MEAT HAGG. 2:10-19

Many years ago there was a legend about a place which was a eutopia, heaven on earth, the perfect paradise. It was written by a monk named Brendon. As the legend goes, Brendon one morning invited his fellow monks to accompany him on a journey to find this earthly paradise. Where was this paradise of which Brendon spoke, they asked? Brendon answered with a silent jesture pointing outward across the ocean. So the adventure began to find this paradise according to the legend. The monks set out in a leather hulled boat. On their voyage they supposedly passed the fiery mouth of hell where demons hurled smoldering boulders at them. Later they watched in awe as a glorious temple of crystal rose up out of the sea. Still later, the monks boarded an island and lit a fire only to discover that they had boarded the back of a huge fish. Well, at last Brendon and his companions reached their destination, a sparkling paradise of fruit trees and rivers. There, according to the legend, an angel confronted them warning them to go no further. This, the angel said, was the gateway to the place where one day the

world would be judged. So Brendon, and his fellow monks obediently got back into their boat and sailed for home. That is Brendon's legend. How much of the legend is true, we really don't know.

We do know that there was a very powerful Irish monk named Brendon. He lived around 500 A.D. We do know that he did make some voyages in a leather hulled boat. These are historical fact. About a decade ago, a British historian named Kim Severen, set out to sea in a very similar craft trying to prove that Brendon could have actually made that voyage that he wrote about. Severen in his conclusions written after the voyage claimed that the mouth of hell was an icelandic volcano, the temple of crystal was an atlantic iceburg, and the huge fish probably a whale. We also know that later monks made voyages in search of solitude and some settled in the land we know today as Iceland. But whether or not there is any truth in Brendon's legend, it remains today an epic poem in Dutch literature, studied by Dutch students.

But there is one other note that we really should make, because whether or not Brendon ever sailed in hopes of finding Paradise is not really as important

as the impression that the legend that he wrote down made upon another individual. It is probable that Brendon never did make the voyage that he dreamed of making. But another person, a reader who became enraptured by Brendon's adventure, did end up making such a voyage. For when he was 41 years old, Christopher Columbus read the legend of Brendon, and that book changed his life, and our lives forever.

A single person who is dedicated to a belief can have a tremendous impact upon others and the flow of history. Even when that person does not live to see the fruition of his dream, still his influence can live on past his own lifetime.

So we have been seeing in the ministry of the prophet known by the name Haggai. A rather insignificant prophet in many ways. Probably older when he performed his ministry, at least in his 70's. His book is certainly not one of the longer or more significant works in literature in the Old Testament. No, Haggai's prophecy is the second shortest book in the Old Testament, second only to Obadiah. And Haggai never lived to see the full fruition of

his message. Certainly, we know that he had been buried long before the "desired of the nations", the messiah himself would come and fill this temple that by that time was being remodeled by Herod with the glory of God. But Haggai's influence was critical to the finishing of the work of rebuilding the temple, and for that he has a place in the history of Israel.

We have already seen 3 of Haggai's messages. The first (1:1-11) challenged the priorities of the people. They had focused their attentions on the building of their own homes to the neglect of the temple of God. The second (1:12-15) gave assurance of the presence of God as they were obedient to his word. The third (2:1-9) lead the people into a new perspective as they realized that even though the outward glory of the new temple could never match Solomon's, the inner glory of this new temple would be far greater for the Messiah would come and teach in it. Now we come to the 4th message found in 2:10-19 which addresses the importance of purity, and the promise of God to bless his people as they committed themselves to be pure before him.

READ Hagg. 2:10-19

HAG 2:10 On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: ¹¹ "This is what the LORD Almighty says: `Ask the priests what the law says: ¹² 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."

HAG 2:13 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."

HAG 2:14 Then Haggai said, " `So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,' declares the LORD. `Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.

HAG 2:15 " `Now give careful thought to this from this day on--consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple.

16 When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. 17 I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me,' declares the LORD.

18 'From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought:

19 Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.

" 'From this day on I will bless you.' "

1. We saw last week that the 3rd message that Haggai delivered to the people came about a month after his initial challenge to start the building process again. Now this message comes 3 months to the day after that initial challenge to build on the barren foundations, about 2 months after the message which we studied last week. This message was delivered during the

time of the winter planting season. In Palestine, the fall rains had now come—the drought was ended at last. And so it was time for the people to plant their seed for the new crop season. Now Haggai speaks to them concerning the necessity of their purity before the Lord, for God would only continue to bless them as they remained pure before him.

In this message, we have Haggai consulting the priests who were the legal experts on the law to make an important point before the people concerning purity. The questions posed by Haggai have to do with the transmission of both holiness and uncleanness. And the point that Haggai is obviously making is that it is much easier to become defiled than it is to live a holy and pure life before the Lord. Holiness is contrary to our sinful natures and it is foreign to the world's system in which we live. So the follower of God will not just become holy naturally. Rather he will naturally become defiled by the world. No, the follower of God must consciously pursue purity if he is to stand clean before God.

Haggai presents 2 hypothetical situations that were very much in keeping

with the culture of his time to the priests. In the first one a person is carrying some consecrated meat. Now consecrated meat was that which was part of a sacrifice offered to the Lord. The animal had been presented to the Lord, had been killed to make atonement for sin, and now the meat was consecrated-given to the Lord. This person was carrying the meat in the fold of his garment, with cloth wrapped around it for the meat's protection. This is important to note, because the law said that anyone who came directly in contact with consecrated meat was then consecrated himself (Lev. 6:27). So then, only the priests who had been consecrated to the Lord were to actually handle or eat of the consecrated meat, and they used this meat, of course, for their daily supplement of food. Now the garment wrapped around this meat touches some other food- does this normal regular food now become suddenly consecrated? Of course not. It has not been offered to the Lord, it remains common food.

In the next hypothetical situation we have a person who has been involved with a dead body presented. Perhaps the person has been caring for an

individual when they died, or has been involved in burying a recently deceased person. Whatever the individual case, this person having touched the dead body is now unclean for the required time limit under the Old Testament law. Numbers 19:11-12 gives some stringent requirements. "Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for 7 days. He must purify himself with the water on the 3rd day and on the 7th day; then he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the 3rd and 7th days, he will not be clean." Now under the law, if a person who was unclean came into contact with another person, or some utensils or clothing or anything else, what he contacted was also unclean for the same period of time that he was, and needed to be cleansed thoroughly with water so that it might no longer be unclean.

Now we realize today that these stringent requirements were for health reasons, to stop the spread of germs and plagues among the Israelites. And God had promised to the Israelites that if they obeyed his commands, none of the diseases of the nations surrounding them would spread among them.

But Haggai brings out these illustrations to prove a point about purity and holiness before God. And it is a point that is very well taken, and one which we all should realize.

The power of defilement is far easier to transmit than holiness. To use a modern day illustration we might speak in terms of apples. We have a saying, "One rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel." Now that is amazing when you think of it. Here you have a hundred red, rosy, crisp apples, and one lousy rotten apple. You would think that the good apples would influence the rotten apple to become like them. After all, they outnumber the rotten apple 100-1. But it doesn't work that way, does it? The bad apple contaminates the good ones and if left to themselves, the whole barrel becomes rotten.

And so it is with this matter of defilement and holiness. You can catch a cold if someone sneezes near you, but you never catch health from anyone. So it is in the spiritual realm, and that is one of the the reasons for the difficulty of living pure lives before God here on this earth. We are

continuously surrounded by defiling influences. Unless we consciously opposed them and hunger and thirst after righteousness, we will naturally drift right down the stream that is flowing away from the character of God.

These people needed to hear these words from Haggai. They had come back into the land some time before and had laid the foundations for the temple. Then after 16 or so years of idleness, they had begun again the work.

And now they were becoming very pleased with their progress, and very happy with their obedience to God. And they should have felt great satisfaction. But Haggai needed to remind them that there was not only the obvious opposition of the Canaanites, but there were also subtle temptations that would come their way. Their forefathers had stormed into the land and defeated the enemy militarily, but then they had fallen to the subtleties of the pagan worship and had strayed from God. So Haggai wanted to warn these people against following in their footsteps.

2. Now having given them these 2 hypothetical situations illustrating purity and the difficulty of attaining it, he reminds them once again of what

God thinks of impurity and the consequences of it.

READ Hagg. 2:15-17.

HAG 2:15 " `Now give careful thought to this from this day on--consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple.

¹⁶ When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. ¹⁷ I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me,' declares the LORD.

Remember, Haggai says. Remember what the Lord's hand of disfavor felt like. Before you returned in obedience to the Lord, you expected 20 seahs of grain (about 10 bushels) but you only got 10- a 50% loss. Before you returned in obedience to the Lord, you did even worse with your grape harvest, experiencing a 60% loss.

So remember those days and learn the lessons from them, Haggai says.

3. But now here come the words of blessing. From this day on, from the time of your recommittment to the Lord on, you can expect the blessing of

the Lord as you follow him in obedience, Haggai says. READ Hagg. 2:18-19.

¹⁸ `From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought: ¹⁹ Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.

" `From this day on I will bless you.' "

Now here we have a tremendous principle that Haggai gives which I believe we can apply to our lives even today.

Now I am not speaking about a prosperity theology here. We have many today who are preaching a theology which says that if you follow God, you can expect to never have any adversities in your life ever again. God will make you rich, famous, healthy - without any problems whatsoever.

We know from the Scriptures that this is not true. All people are called to a measure of suffering and affliction. Adversity builds character in our lives. Jesus Christ the perfect example of one who lived totally in the will of the

Father suffered greatly. And basically prosperity theology reveals a very shallow view of what real blessings are all about. Physical, material blessings are exalted and inner character blessings that money cannot buy are ignored. So we are not promoting this shallow approach to the Scriptures that so many try to preach today.

But we must not ignore Haggai's clear message here either. Obey God and he will bless your life. From this day on God will bless you if you continue to obey him. And I believe that we can see the truth of this principle from the Scriptures. Yes, it is much easier to live a life of sin than it is to live a life of purity and holiness. Sin comes naturally to the flesh. But the rewards of living a pure life before God are so great that they make the sacrifices seem almost inconsequential. When one lives in obedience to the Lord, God often rewards that person financially. But God always gives much richer treasures that money cannot begin to buy. Peace of heart, joy of spirit, fulfillment of purpose, discipline and other character traits, wisdom and knowledge. Jesus Christ did not have much financially, but he was the most

joyful and peaceful and self-satisfied person on the earth when he lived. And God commits his blessing to those who will live their lives in obedience to Him.

It was during the great depression, when he was over 100,000 dollars in debt with no hope of ever seeing light at the end of the tunnel that a young man named R.G. LeTourneau turned his entire life over the Lord. And things began to change in his life. God gave him wisdom- by the end of his life, LeTourneau had over 200 patents for heavy machinery including a monster earth moving machine that weighed over 200,000 pounds which could cut a 35 foot wide strip through the dense Amazon jungle, chewing up trees 5 foot in diameter. God gave him financial prosperity- by the end of his life, LeTourneau's foundation was worth over 40 million dollars and had already given many times that amount to Christian and humanitarian works throughout the world. God had given him fame and reputation- LeTourneau had served as president of the Christian Businessmen's Committee and Gideon's International. He had built a college which continues to bear his

name in memory. All of these things happening after he had wholly dedicated his life to the service of the Lord.

But it is interesting when LeTourneau was interviewed shortly before his death in 1969 by Forbes Magazine. He didn't mention his wisdom, or his wealth or his reputation. He said these words. "I like to do 2 things. One is to design machines, turn on the power and see them work. The other is to turn on the power of the gospel and see it work in people's lives."

R.G. LeTourneau had delighted himself in the will of God, and God had blessed him by giving him all the desires of his heart.

Haggai said that God would do the same for his people. As they committed themselves wholly to the Lord, God's blessing would rest upon them in every way. They would have to take the narrow road of purity of life, but the sacrifices would certainly be worth it.