

TEXT: 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." 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." 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. 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.'"

Dear Friends in Christ,

If our heart is not right with God, He will not bless us in our life. On the other hand, when we do what God wants us to do with the right heart, God will bless us. Mr. Ikeda found that out in his life...

God blesses his repentant people. That was also the message the remnant received from God through the prophet Haggai. A quick review of where we have been before today...

When the Jews first returned from the Captivity in 538 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel, they made a good start at rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. But soon they were discouraged in their building project, and the work stopped completely (see Ezra 4:4-5, 24). Then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah began to stir up and encourage the people with their preaching (see Ezra 5:1-2).

Haggai began his preaching in 520 B.C., the second year of King Darius' reign (see Haggai 1:1). In his book with its two chapters, Haggai brings four messages or sermons to the people of Judah. His messages contain both correction and encouragement, that is, both Law and Gospel. The people first needed correction because their priorities were wrong. They were not putting spiritual things first. God and His temple were pushed aside while the people were selfishly thinking only of their own material comforts. Because they were not putting spiritual things first, God was even keeping from them the things they wanted so much: food, good clothes, savings, good crops, oil, etc. Haggai preached to the conscience of the people and asked: **"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house (the temple) remains a ruin?"** (1:4).

The people listened and the building project started again. As they built, Haggai encouraged and comforted them. He promised that God was with them as they built. When some were discouraged because the new temple was not as beautiful as Solomon's former temple, Haggai comforted them again with a promise of the Messianic Kingdom. Through Christ and his messianic kingdom God would grant peace to the world at the place of the new temple. God promised, **"The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house ... And in this place I will grant peace"** (2:9). [Read 2:6-9 for the whole Messianic promise.]

Through the prophets' preaching the people repented (Haggai 1:12-15) and were moved to start the temple-building project again. [In 516 B.C. the restored temple was completed (see Ezra 6:14-15). It had been 70 years since the first temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. (Since the Bible sometimes dates these events and the prophets' lives according to the rule of King Darius, it is helpful to remember that Darius ruled from 521-486 B.C.)]

But it seems that even this marvelous promise (2:6-9) had failed to stir the people to wholehearted energy and enthusiasm. God had sent another prophet, Zechariah, a few weeks later. His first word (Zech. 1:2-6) had been a stern warning against misbelief and stubborn refusal to do the Lord's will. Yet a month later, God found it necessary once more to warn his people against the same sin through his spokesman Haggai. He does this in a very impressive manner. Since the people did not respond properly to Haggai's Gospel promise (Haggai 2:6-9), they are to hear from the divinely appointed teachers of the Law, the priests (Lev. 10:8ff., Deut. 17:8ff., 33:8ff., Malachi 2:7), what the God of unwavering holiness thought of people who refused to obey His will joyfully. Haggai was to propose two questions to the priests and apply their answers to the people.

"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."** (*though the garment itself was sanctified by such consecrated food, it could not impart holiness to one who, by neglecting the will of the Lord, had become unholy [Kretzmann]*) **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."** (Haggai 2: vs. 12 & 13) The priests were correctly reminding the people of the Levitical ceremonial laws recorded in Lev. 6:20,27 and Lev. 22:4, Numbers 5:2,9,10.

Haggai now applies these laws as correctly taught by the priests. **"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. 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."** The children of Israel were in disgrace because of their neglect to finish the house of the Lord, and though their land was holy land, consecrated to the Lord, yet its fruits (their offerings) found no favor in His eyes and could not serve to make the people clean by a mere outward service, as long as their hearts were not in the right relation to Him, so that they were constrained to give them the worship which He desired.

the Lord reminds us through his prophet that it isn't just what we do, but also the attitude that we have in our heart when we do works for God that determines whether our works are good and pleasing to him or not. Works done without the proper attitude will not be blessed by him. Works done in humble repentance and faith are blessed by our loving God as he wills.

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The prophet tried to explain to the nation that just as a clean thing would become polluted by touching the unclean, so the former attitude of the people towards the Lord and His house polluted their own labor and as a result the blessing of the Lord was withheld. **However, from this time on, the Lord will indeed bless his repentant people.**

"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.'"

Before the construction of the temple was resumed a stack of sheaves which promised a yield of twenty bushels or pecks **"there were only ten."** **"When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures** (thinking that the harvest should have brought that much), **there were only twenty."** Why? **"I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me,' declares the LORD."** God was through these chastisements trying to lead his impenitent people to repentance. But all these punishments did not have their desired effect.

But now things had changed. The Holy Spirit had worked true repentance in their hearts and God had pronounced his absolution on them. **"I am with you."** (Haggai 1:13) Even though they were still suffering the results of their former

impenitent condition, the consequence of the shortages of food, etc., times would now change, since they were showing evidence of the change which had come over their hearts. If men turn to the Lord in true repentance, **“He is faithful and just to forgive them...”** (1 John 1:9) and, if it is his will, turn to them in mercy and give them blessings in this life in rich measure.

That’s what Mr. Ikeda experienced in his life when he learned about his sin, repented, trusted in Jesus, his Savior, for forgiveness and then lived a life of faith in that Savior. He experienced what Jesus promised in his Sermon on the Mount when talking about the necessities for this life. **“Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and all these things will be added to you”** (Mt. 6:33). There is a very positive correlation between putting God first in life and experiencing divine blessings! But even when we enjoy those blessings from the Lord let us always humbly acknowledge our unworthiness of God’s temporal blessings to us as Jacob did. He said, **“I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant...”** (Genesis 32:10) It is the Lord who sent his Son, Jesus, to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is the Lord who through the Holy Spirit called us out of darkness in his wonderful light, the light of faith, by revealing our sin and need for a Savior through the Law and then calling us to faith through the Gospel, the good news that Jesus is that Savior, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. It is the Lord who credits faith in the Savior to be righteousness, and then motivates us to do works of righteousness in thanksgiving and praise of the Lord. We haven’t done a single thing to deserve his blessings, yet he blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others as the psalmist wrote in Psalm 67:6,7, **“The land yields its harvest; God, our God blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all of the ends of the earth will fear him.”**