

The Evidence of Spiritual Awakening

Haggai 1:12-15

Slide 1

Jesus once told a parable about a farmer who went out to sow some seed in one of his fields. Although he sowed the whole field, there were places here and there where the quality of the soil differed.

Because of that, some of the seed he sowed fell on hard impenetrable soil, some fell into the rocky soil while others fell into the soil that was full of thorns and briars. Needless to say, those seeds didn't produce any crops.

However, the seed that fell into the good soil; soil that had been well ploughed and cleared of anything that would hinder germination and growth, that seed produced a harvest for the farmer.

In explaining that parable Jesus said that the seed was the Word of God and the soil was the human heart.

The main point of the parable was that only in those hearts, which have been properly prepared to receive the Word, will there be a positive response that will bring fruit to the glory of God.

Remember, Haggai was one of the few Old Testament prophets who had the joy of seeing his ministry actually bear fruit in the lives of those to whom he ministered.

The people had been in a state of spiritual apathy for many years and had become self-centered and worldly-minded in their outlook; so much so that the work of God, that is the rebuilding of the Temple, had been being completely neglected.

However, as a result of Haggai's preaching and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts and minds of the people, they heard and responded to the message.

They responded in the way that God desired that His people should respond. Their response resulted in a spiritual awakening, a spiritual revival among the people.

Last week we considered the causes of that spiritual awakening. Today I want us to consider the evidences of it as noted in verses 12-15 of this first chapter.

Haggai 1:12-15, *"Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: 'I am with you,' declares the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month."*

Slide 2

The first evidence that a spiritual awakening was taking place among the people is seen in the people's attitude towards God. We find that at the end of verse 12 where we read, *"the people FEARED the Lord."*

Prior to Haggai's preaching the unfinished temple spoke volumes concerning the people's attitude towards God.

The fact that for over 16 years they couldn't be bothered doing the work to which God had specifically called them, namely the rebuilding of the Temple.

That lack of interest showed that the people had little concern for God's glory and little reverence and regard for His person.

Had they loved God sincerely, had they held Him in reverence they wouldn't have been so quick to abandon the work on the temple in favor of their own domestic building projects.

But over the years their attitude towards God had changed. Instead of fearing God they began to adopt a more laid-back attitude towards Him. Their sense of the holiness, power, majesty and authority of God became increasingly dulled.

They weren't troubled by the fact that they were putting all their time and energy and resources into their own personal projects while God's house lay in ruins.

However, after Haggai delivered his first challenging message, we see a radical change in the people's attitude towards God. Now the people *"feared the Lord."*

They were brought to the point where they once again saw God for who He was – The Sovereign, Holy, Righteous, Just, Almighty God upon whom they were totally dependent and to whom they were subject and accountable for their conduct.

They became impressed with a sense of God's greatness on the one hand and their own nothingness on the other.

So, with a sense of God's holiness and their awful sinfulness, with a sense of God's goodness and their ungratefulness their attitude changed.

The laid-back, couldn't care less, disrespectful, irreverent attitude that had developed over the past 16 years was replaced by an attitude of reverence, respect and a healthy fear of God.

One of the main reasons they had been living the way they were living, one of the main reasons they had been sinning against God by enthusiastically pursuing their own selfish desires while neglecting the work of God was because they no longer feared the Lord.

If ever there was going to be a change in their conduct before God, there would first have to be a change in their attitude towards God.

As a result of Haggai's preaching and the work of the Holy Spirit, such a change in attitude came about: *"The people feared the Lord."*

Solomon tells us that *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* Wisdom in the Scriptures in general, and in the book of Proverbs in particular, is related to moral and ethical personal conduct.

In other words what Solomon is saying is there is an inseparable connection between a person's view of and attitude towards God and the way in which that person will live their life.

A proper view and a proper attitude towards God, in other words, fear of the Lord or reverence for God, are essential to and will produce godly living.

Nehemiah rebuked the rich in Jerusalem for taking advantage of the poor. He told them in Nehemiah 5:9a, *"What you are doing is not right, shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God."*

In other words, if you truly feared the Lord and considered what He has to say about how to treat the poor you would not behave the way you are behaving.

Later, Nehemiah bears testimony to the fact that even though previous governors of Jerusalem had placed heavy tax burdens on the people and lorded over them he, having been appointed to that position, didn't act like that. Why? Because he feared the Lord.

Nehemiah 5:15, *“But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.”*

Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:1 draws a direct connection between holy living and the fear of the Lord when he says that as believers we are to *“purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”*

Just as an attitude of reverential fear of God is essential to producing godly living, so too where a person does not have a fear of God, there you’ll inevitably find a life that’s characterized by sin.

Paul, in Romans 3, describes something of the awful, sinfully depraved state into which the human race has fallen, giving a number of examples of the sort of sin that’s common among mankind.

Romans 3:13-17, *“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.”*

Paul sums up and gives an explanation for their behavior with this statement taken from Psalm 36, *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

They were neither in awe of God’s Person nor afraid of His judgements. They acted as if there was no God.

They acted as if there was no one to whom they were accountable for their conduct. No one had the power and authority to bring them into judgement for their sinful way of life.

This lack of the *“fear of God”* is the very root of wickedness. John Calvin wrote, *“All wickedness flows from a disregard of God, since the fear of God is the bridle by which our wickedness is held in check, its removal frees us to indulge in every kind of sinful conduct.”*

Pharaoh is another classic example. Remember his response to Moses when Moses said that God had commanded Pharaoh to let the Children of Israel leave Egypt.

Exodus 5:2, *“Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord (that is I do not pay any attention to and will not submit to this God) and I will not let Israel go.”*

Pharaoh didn't fear the Lord. Even after the Egyptians had suffered through seven of the ten plagues, Moses said of Pharaoh in Exodus 9:30, *“But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God”*

The conduct of the people in Haggai's day, with respect to the work of the Lord, changed as a result of Haggai's preaching.

But that change in their conduct was the outworking of the change that had already been wrought in their hearts and minds in relation to their attitude to God. Now they *“feared the Lord.”*

This is something that's missing in many Christians today. A genuine healthy fear of God. God has been so modified, according to people's own ideas, that many people no longer stand in awe of him.

They have so concentrated upon His love, His goodness and His kindness that they no longer think too much, if at all, about His Holiness, His righteousness, His justice, His hatred of sin and His power.

They know nothing of the experience of Isaiah who, when he was confronted with the sight of the glory, majesty and holiness of God in the temple cried out: *“Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips”*

The lack of fear and reverence for God usually manifests itself in the way a person lives. Because they don't fear God, they're more inclined to indulge in sinful patterns of behavior.

They continue doing their own thing even though they have been challenged and rebuked about such sinful behavior by God through the preaching of His Word.

John Murray once wrote, *“It is the essence of impiety not to be afraid of God when there is reason to be afraid. The scripture throughout prescribes the necessity of this fear of God under all circumstances in which our sinful condition makes us liable to God's righteous judgements.”*

Many Christians need to recapture that attitude of being filled with a healthy, life transforming and life controlling fear of God.

Notice I said a “healthy” fear of God. A fear of God which, while it does not terrify, it does nevertheless have a positive impact upon the way a person thinks and behaves.

Where such a fear of God has been absent for some time and where, through the preaching of the Word, such an attitude is restored, you'll have the beginning of a renewed spiritual awakening in the life of that individual or that group of people.

So, if the first evidence of spiritual awakening is seen in the people's attitude towards God, the second evidence of such an awakening is seen in the people's attitude towards God's servant.

Slide 3

As I mentioned earlier, Haggai was the first prophet God raised to minister to the people since their return from Babylon.

After over 16 years of spiritual apathy, God determined to speak to His people with a view to challenging them about their spiritual condition and awakening them from their spiritual slumber.

God spoke to them by way of reproof in the realm of daily providence by causing their crops to fail through lack of rain and through the resulting economic instability and hardship that followed.

However, the people didn't seem to hear God's voice in these chastening events. They didn't draw a connection between their hard times and their sinful spiritual condition.

So, in order that the people would be in no doubt as to what God thought of their spiritual apathy and in order that they would be in no doubt as to what God required of them, He raised a man who would be His spokesman.

The message Haggai brought was straight, to the point and hard hitting. When proclaimed, no one was in any doubt as to what he was saying. Haggai didn't beat about the bush and leave people thinking *"Now what exactly did he mean when he said such and such?"*

So, how did the people react to the message this man brought to them? How did they view this preacher? Did they regard him as a sort of religious enthusiast, a religious extremist who was simply giving vent to his own personal opinions.

Did they do to him what their forefathers had done to other men who had the nerve to speak out publicly against them, point the finger at them and rebuke them?

Did they lay hold of him and throw him in prison. Did they stone him? Did they try to get rid of him and tell him to shut up?

No! They obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai because the Lord their God had sent him. He was the Lord's messenger.

It's clear from Scripture that the people acknowledged two things concerning Haggai.

First, they acknowledged that in speaking to them, he was doing so in his capacity as a divinely appointed prophet, a divinely appointed spokesman of God.

They recognized his divinely appointed office. He was *"The Lord's Messenger"* *"The Lord their God had sent him."*

Secondly, they recognized that in speaking to them, he was not expressing his own opinions and views on their spiritual state but rather he was merely the human means through whom God was speaking to them.

In other words, they recognized his message to be divinely inspired. The hard hitting, challenging message he brought to them was what God had to say about these things.

So, *"they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God."* They took what he had to say seriously because they knew that God was speaking to them through this man.

The fact that they recognized and respected the office to which this man had been called, a prophet of God; and acknowledged that, in the message he brought, God was speaking to them, is evidence that a spiritual awakening was occurring among them.

When God, the Holy Spirit, begins to work in a person's heart, when He begins that work of spiritual stirring, whereby He is going to bring a person into the way of repentance from sin and obedience, the first evidence of such a work is seen in that person's attitude to the minister of the Gospel and the message he proclaims.

They no longer see him as just some man who has taken up a job as minister of a congregation of which they're members, but rather as God's chosen and appointed spokesman in their midst.

They recognize that, as a man he is as human and as sinful and as fallible as anyone else, but they also recognize that God has sent him into their midst.

They recognize that he has a divine commission and that in his office as a minister of the Gospel he has been sent to bring to them the Word of God.

Thus, as they listen to him expound the scriptures, giving sense and meaning of the passage under consideration, and then making a practical application of the spiritual principles involved to relevant areas of personal character and personal conduct, they acknowledged that what they are hearing is not the voice of man but the voice of God speaking to them.

Remember what Paul wrote in his first letter to the Church at Thessalonica in chapter 2:13, *"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe."*

When Paul and his fellow missionaries came to Thessalonica, they preached the Gospel to them. He was just an ordinary man, but he had been chosen and set apart to preach the Gospel.

So, when he did preach, he knew that he wasn't communicating a mere human message but rather he was the human instrument through whom God was speaking to the men and women he addressed.

The people in Thessalonica who came to believe the gospel recognized that the Word he preached was not the word of man but the Word of God. That's what happens when God's Word is faithfully preached.

God's treasure is brought in earthen vessels, but the amazing thing about preaching is that in spite of the imperfections of the human instrument God chooses to speak to us through, they open up the scriptures to us.

So, when it comes to the reading and preaching of the Word each week, is your attitude that of Samuel who said, "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening.*"

The way in which a person responds to the preaching of the Word is a reliable indicator of that person's attitude towards both the messenger and the message.

As the people living in Jerusalem, in 520 BC, listened to what Haggai had to say, they recognized Haggai to be "*The messenger of the Lord*" and that being the case, they accepted what he had to say as "*the voice of the Lord their God.*"

So, not only do we see the evidence of a spiritual awakening taking place among the people in their attitude to God and to God's servant and the message he brought, we also see it in their attitude to God's Word.

Slide 4

Through Haggai, God not only challenged and reproved the people for their sin, He called them to turn from their sin and apply themselves once again to the work they had been neglecting for so long.

Haggai 1:8, *“Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the Lord.*”

God was calling for a change in their existing attitude, a change that would be seen in a corresponding tangible verifiable change in their conduct. So, how did the people react to this command to restart the building of the temple?

Haggai 1:12, *“Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the Lord their God had sent him. And the people feared the Lord.”*

Haggai 1:14b, *“They came and began work on the house of the Lord Almighty their God.”*

Having heard what God wanted them to do, they obeyed. They didn't just feel sorry and bemoan the fact that they had neglected God's work for so long, they did something about it.

They made the changes that were needed in both their attitude and conduct to bring them into line with God's revealed will.

Notice that the obedience was both universal and prompt. It was universal – everyone obeyed. We don't read of any exceptions. The leaders are mentioned specifically, probably because they led by example. Their obedience was prompt.

Twenty-three days after Haggai proclaimed the word of the Lord the work on the temple of the Lord began. No doubt those 23 days were spent preparing the site, getting timber, stone and so on.

When everything was ready they all began the work. It was prompt obedience. Here was clear evidence that God was working among this people.

Slide 5

Conclusion

A final evidence we see was their obedience to the Word of God. This is the most important evidence of all as to whether or not spiritual apathy is giving way to spiritual awakening.

The person concerned not only recognizes the voice of God speaking to them through the scriptures, but they also obey that voice. They do what God calls them to do.

They forsake their sin and they make those changes in their life that are necessary to bring their life into line with God's will for them.

God says to them, *"You should be more disciplined in your attendance at Church. You should be involved in some form of practical service for Me in the Church. You should be witnessing for Me. You should be reading your Bible each day. You should be giving more to the work of My kingdom."*

When God speaks as He does do, and as He has done to some of us in the past, our duty is to obey.

One commentator said, *"When God speaks, failure to act is nothing but practical atheism."* When God speaks to you through His Word and you don't obey him, you are behaving like an atheist.

You are saying, *“God says I should do such and such. So what, I don’t care. I am going to do my own thing.”* That’s practical atheism. Your conduct is a mockery of your professed belief in God.

The person in whose life the Holy Spirit is at work, the person who, perhaps for a period had fallen into a state of spiritual backsliding, when they hear the voice of the Lord their God will, under the gracious awakening influences of the Holy Spirit, obey that Word.

All of our hearts need such a stirring, some more than others. It’s my prayer that God would stir us up. That every one of us might truly fear the Lord.

That we would hear and recognize His voice speaking to us through the reading and preaching of His Word and, having heard God’s voice, that we would respond in obedience to it.

Isaiah 64:1, *“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!”*

Psalms 85:6, *“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”*

We need to stand in awe of God!