Sermon Series: Haggai: What's Your Focus?
Sermon Title: Unclean Hands
Date: 11/15/2026

Haggai 2:10-14

Big Idea: Run to Jesus for cleansing, and be careful what you stay close to.

Uncleanness Spreads

The Israelites returned to rebuild the temple, stalled for years, then restarted. Now they were obeying, yet the crops still weren't growing. So God sent Haggai to the priests, whose job was to tell holy from common and clean from unclean (Leviticus 10:10-11). Haggai knew the answers; he asked so they would stick.

First (Haggai 2:12): if someone carries consecrated meat - set apart for God - in a garment, and it touches other food, does that food become consecrated? No. Nothing is holy on its own, and holiness doesn't pass second-hand.

Second (Haggai 2:13): if someone made unclean by touching a dead body touches that food, does it become unclean? Yes. Touching a dead body was the most serious uncleanness, even with good motives like burying a family member. It wasn't necessarily sin, but it kept a person from approaching God, and it spread (Numbers 19:22). Death is the strongest picture of uncleanness because sin and death travel together (Romans 5:12).

Haggai applies it (Haggai 2:14): the people were like that unclean person, and even their offerings were defiled. Keep building, but working on a holy building couldn't make them holy. Their neglect had exposed a deeper problem with God.

God Does the Washing

How do you get clean? The law gave ceremonial cleansing, but the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). No one could work their way clean.

The first hint is Haggai 2:17-19. God says their poor harvests were His discipline for neglecting His house. Then He turns: from this day on He will bless them. Obedience wasn't a payment buying His favor; it was a response to His call. Zechariah, preaching at the same time, relayed God's invitation to return to Him (Zechariah 1:3), with a warning not to repeat their ancestors' refusal to listen (Zechariah 1:4). Then Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest in filthy clothes. Nobody told him to wash up - God took away his sin (Zechariah 3:4). God does the cleaning.

Centuries later, Jesus walked into Haggai's situation. Uncleanness spreads, but with Jesus, cleanness spreads. He touched a man with leprosy and the man was cleansed (Mark 1:41-42). A woman unclean for twelve years touched His cloak and was healed (Mark 5:34). He took a dead girl by the hand and raised her (Mark 5:41). The heifer's ashes made people outwardly clean (Hebrews 9:13), but Christ's blood cleanses our conscience so we can serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). We need Jesus.

Be Careful What You Stay Close To

If you're unsure where you stand with God, the first question is for you: holiness doesn't spread by being near it. Sitting in church or living with a follower of Jesus won't move holiness onto you. The washing comes from outside you, from Jesus alone (Titus 3:5).

If you follow Jesus, the second question is for you: uncleanness spreads easily. This isn't a rule about friends; it's about influence (1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Corinthians 5:6b). Picture two people with hands locked, one on a wall, one on the ground. Pulling down takes little effort; pulling up takes a lot. Staying up takes God's work in you and your choice of who you hold on to (Proverbs 13:20). This doesn't mean living in a Christian bubble. Jesus ate with sinners and wasn't pulled down, but we aren't Jesus, so we stay close to Him while we reach people.

Give careful thought to your ways. Who is influencing you? Do you walk away closer to God or further from Him? Maybe it's a friendship, a show, or a feed you scroll at night. Christ cleanses us so we can serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). Church, serving, and good people can't wash away your uncleanness. Only Jesus can, and nothing impure will enter heaven (Revelation 21:27). Run to Jesus for cleansing, and be careful what you stay close to.

Discussion Questions

1. **Why do you think God answered the people's frustration over their crops with a question about meat and a dead body?**

2. **Where might religious activity - attending, serving, giving - be mistaken for being clean before God?**

3. **In Zechariah 3:4 and Mark 1:41-42, who does the cleansing? How does that change how you approach God when you feel stained by sin?**

4. **Who or what influences you most right now? Do you walk away closer to God or further from Him?**

5. **How can we stay close to Jesus while still reaching people who don't know Him?**