

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF THE LORD

The most basic teaching of the Bible is that there is a God who is not just a force but a personal God who creates us, cares for us and speaks to us. He speaks in creation and in circumstances, by his Spirit and especially in the Scriptures. Doesn't it make sense that if there is a God who made us and cares for us the only way to make sense of life, to stay on the right path, is to learn to hear his voice and listen to him. Listening is important in every aspect of life. In **Haggai 1:12**, when it says, *all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him.* In the Hebrew language, the word "obeyed" is the same as the word "listen" or "hear." They listened. They heard. Do we? Are we hearing? Are you? That's our focus today. ***To live your faith you have to listen to God. So listen up....***

I started thinking about this when I noticed the extraordinary emphasis on listening to the word of the LORD in Haggai. In the thirty-eight verses that make up Haggai we are told twenty-six times that the message of Haggai is the word of the LORD. I wanted to begin a series on the book of Haggai after Labor Day, but I saw that there were at least three messages on this foundational theme of the word of the LORD in Haggai we could cover in these closing weeks of August. The first week we looked at *The Gift of the Word of God*. It's inspiration and reliability. Then we looked at *The Gracious Authority of the Word of God*. It speaks with authority to guide and encourage us. This message builds on those two. Believing that we have been given the gift of God's inspired word and that it speaks to us with a gracious authority, *how do we listen to it?* In Haggai, and in all of Scripture, to listen to the voice or the word of the LORD means to obey but before we get to obedience notice this.

**I. TO TRULY LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF THE LORD
WE HAVE TO TRUST THE TRUTHS THAT HE REVEALS.**

When **verse 12** says they listened to or obeyed the voice of the LORD. What was it that the LORD had said? It was more than just a command to build the temple. The message of the Prophet was an explanation as to why things were going the way they were. Look at **verse 9**. *You looked for much, and behold, It came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts* There is a question that begs for an answer in **verse 9**. *Why?* This is the question we often ask when we face the frustration of working hard but not seeming to get ahead. There can be many reasons for frustration in any endeavor or area of life. Sometimes our faith is tested. Sometimes it is just the reality of a broken world. But sometimes, if we listen, we discover, in Scripture, a wisdom that imparts insight into why things are not working well for us. In this case the question is rhetorical. God provides the answer.

Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce.

A. The word of the LORD gives us insight into the way things work and sometimes, why they aren't working. *Trust that insight.*

We're not saying that whenever we experience frustration it's because God is withholding blessings to teach us some important life lesson. But surely sometimes that may be the case. When we are frustrated it is good to ask "why?" and look in Scripture for insight. Even secular psychologists do a form of this. Remember Dr. Phil's famous response to people handling things without wisdom? He'd ask, "*How's that working out for you?*" Scripture tell us *those whom the LORD loves he disciplines in love.*¹ He wants us to develop us into the men and women he created us to be. The grace we receive through faith in Jesus brings forgiveness for our sins but does not exempt us from reaping what we have sown. When you listen to Scripture, you aren't just getting commands to obey but a perspective to embrace, a worldview to adopt, a purpose to life, a set of priorities by which to live. So as we read and reflect and meditate on Scripture, we gain wisdom. To listen to the LORD is to trust his wisdom.

Along with wisdom there is something else we find in God's word.

B. The word of the LORD communicates gracious promises from God. *Trust in those promises.*

Verse 13 says, *Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD."* We cannot stress this too much. The commands we are called to obey are empowered by promises we can trust. Sometimes when the authority of the Word of the LORD is stressed, our first thought is about authority to command. That is important, but it's not only authority to command but also the authority to assure, to impart hope, and to encourage through promises.

This is a massive theme in the prophets, in Jesus, and the whole Bible. God makes and keeps great promises. To live life well we have to know God's promises and trust him to keep them. Listen to how **Psalms 119** speaks to us about the promises of God. **Verse 50**; *My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.* **Verse 76**; *May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.* **Verse 148**; *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.*

Someone said, If the Bible was a cup and the promises within it water, the cup would be overflowing. Someone said faith lives in the promises of God like a fish in the water. In J.I. Packer's classic book *Knowing God*, there is a powerful section about the promises of God in a chapter called "*Thy Word Is Truth.*" Packer writes: *In the days when the Bible was universally acknowledged in the churches as "God's word written," it was clearly understood that the promises of God recorded in Scripture were the proper, God-given basis for all of our life of faith and that the way to strengthen one's faith was to focus it upon particular promises that spoke to one's condition.*² Do you have some promises from God to rely on and find strength in?

The promise of God's presence is not just made in Haggai but all through Scripture. It's a promise for you and me. In **Hebrews 13:5**, God says, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

John Piper was once asked in a podcast about his personal go-to promise for finding joy in God. He said this was given to him by his

Father. **Isaiah 41:10**. Here is what it says: *Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* That is just an expanded explanation for the promise here in Haggai, which is repeated in Hebrews. When the Bible says, God will be with us. It doesn't mean he will be there as a passive spectator to our lives but as an active participant, guiding, providing, and delivering. Notice this in the Isaiah promise. It does not just say God is with you. It's God himself speaking, *Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* Piper said, when he recites this promise, he hears, by an act of faith, the living God speaking these words to him. Will you listen and hear God's Word, God's voice speaking this promise to you? Do you feel weak in any way? God says, *"I will strengthen you."* Do you need help of any kind? God says, *"I will help you."* Do you feel you've fallen down or been knocked down, beaten down? God says, *"I will uphold you."* Hold on to faith and hope by holding on to the promises of God. Preach and recite them to yourself. Find courage, strength, and joy in choosing to trust his promises.

So listening to the voice of the LORD means trusting the truths he reveals, embracing his wisdom and his promises. Then also...

II. TO TRULY LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF THE LORD WE HAVE TO DO THE THINGS HE CALLS US TO DO.

Verse 12 says, *all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God.* At the end of **verses 14-15**, it says, *And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God. ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius, the king.* They actually did what God told them to do.

There is great wisdom in that. Did you know, or do you remember, that Jesus said that? In **Matthew 7:24**, he said, *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* Twice in this passage, which comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of the importance of not only hearing but *doing* his words. Everyone who was present that day had heard his words. Jesus says the thing that would distinguish the

wise hearers from the foolish was whether, having heard His words, they did, or acted upon, what they had heard. In **Luke 11:28**, Jesus says, *Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*

The Bible is full of practical instruction on how to live our lives, treat people, act with honesty, integrity, and compassion, love and worship God and seek first his kingdom and righteousness. ***Because the Bible is the Word of God to disobey or disbelieve the Bible is to disobey or disbelieve God.*** This becomes a crucial especially in the areas where the Bible contradicts your desires, the culture in which we live, and even deeply felt feelings. The people in Haggai's day were busily wrapped up in building their own houses. They felt no need to stop and build the LORD's house. They needed to be told. They needed to embrace his perspective, trust his promises, change their priorities and obey his voice. Ask yourself this morning where might you be tempted to dismiss God's priorities, ignore his commands and go your own way? Please think about this. What if there is an issue of obedience to God that you are downplaying, minimizing, a disobedience you are excusing or justifying, and the sad truth is that resistance to the obedience of faith is hurting you and others while also dishonoring God?

In **John 8:31-32** Jesus said, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* What he says is that without obedience to God's word, we end up enslaved to worthless things that destroy life. Through submission to God's word, we are given true freedom.

There was a true story in *The Reader's Digest* years ago about a five-year-old boy who had a playmate who had pet kittens. So He started begging his mother for a pet because he loved the way these little kittens would frolic all over the rug. But the little boy had allergies, and that's why he didn't have pets. Then the mother came up with an idea. She bought him an aquarium with a couple of goldfish, and she put the aquarium in his room. Later that day, he came out, and she asked him how he liked his pets. He said: "Well, at first they played with each other great when I put them on the rug, but now, they just lay there." Why didn't those fish experience freedom when let loose from the limits of their aquarium? Surely they wanted to get out of the aquarium

and play on the rug. No, of course not. The little boy put them in an environment for which they were not made. As a result, they lost their freedom. Listen, the human heart and soul are made by God for relationship with God. When we try to cut loose from His direction, what we find is not freedom but a loss of freedom.

God does not say: *“Well, I'm the Lord, and you're the servant, so there's got to be rules. Let me just make some up.”* No God is saying, *“I built the human heart. I created your physiology and your psychology, and I made the world of human relationships. If you do not live according to the directions I have revealed to you, you are violating not only my laws of life but the very nature of your spiritual self and psychology. Trust me,”* he says. “My commands are trustworthy. They are like the water in which you thrive.”

Conclusion

We have good reason to trust God. Think of it: Almighty God, your creator, whose glory is daily proclaimed by the sun and the stars, entered our world and became one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived as God in human flesh and perfectly conformed his life to Scripture for us. Then he offered himself as a sacrifice and died on the cross to pay the penalty for all our sins. The payment he made for the sins of his people was a perfect payment that fulfilled his ancient promises. When you turn to him and trust in him, you receive forgiveness and eternal life and His presence in your life.

Remember this, one of the greatest of all promises in Scripture is the promise of salvation. It's made over one hundred and fifty times in the New Testament. One example is **John 6:40**, *For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”* Our salvation doesn't depend on promises we make and keep but on promises God makes and keeps and that we receive and believe.

The revelation of God is all the more appealing and should be all the more compelling because the God who reveals himself in his Word saves us by his grace in Christ. People who value the saving presence he promises us by his grace and who see that it shows us

how much God loves us and is for us, want to live a life that is led by God and pleasing to God. The best way, the only way really to begin to do that, is to learn to listen to the Voice of the LORD, to trust the truths he reveals, and to do the things he calls us to do.

Amen

1 Deuteronomy 8:5, Hebrews 12:6 & 10

2 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* p. 115

A Prayer Expressing Faith In Christ

Almighty God, You have beautifully revealed your love in Jesus whose body was broken, whose blood was shed for our salvation. I confess my sins and admit my need for your saving grace. I have gone my own way, disbelieving and disobeying your Word. I turn to Christ. I trust in him for my redemption. I believe he died on the cross to pay for my sins and rose again as Lord and Savior. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Grant me the eternal life promised in your Word to all who come to him in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, May I grow to increasingly embrace the truths you reveal, trust the promises you have made and do those things that you command. May your word be in practice, a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Help me to see the blessing and beauty of your word so that I treasure its truths and honor it's wisdom. May your Holy Spirit use Holy Scripture to enable and equip me to walk in the light of your presence. Amen