

Blessed: From This Day Onward.

Years ago, I heard a story a pastor told about how, when he was a young boy, he found a cigar one day and was intrigued by it. So he slipped away, I think it was in an alley, and started puffing away on the cigar. Well, he looked up and saw his father coming. So he very quickly hid the cigar behind his back. As his father neared, He tried to distract him by pointing to a billboard advertising a circus coming to town. He said, *“Dad! Look at that billboard! Could we go to the circus?”* The father looked at him and said, *“Son, never try to make a petition while at the same time hiding a smoldering disobedience.”*

The message of Haggai was a bit like that. The people were called by God to build his house but were neglecting obedience to God while still expecting blessing from God. God spoke through Haggai, challenging them to make his glory their priority. When they responded in renewed obedience, he promised his blessing from that day onward. One reason Haggai speaks so clearly to us is his theme is building the LORD's house for his glory and not just our own homes for ours. In the New Testament, the church is the LORD's house. We've talked about the need to give attention after our seasons of disruption to strengthening and building up the LORD's house - this holy temple made of living stones - the church of Jesus Christ. But another reason Haggai speaks to us is that, through him, God encourages us to trust and obey. One way he does this is by telling us that ***sometimes, before God can bless us, he has to correct us. If we want to enjoy God's blessing, we have to receive his correction.*** This is the final message in Haggai.

I. SOMETIMES GOD CHOOSES TO CORRECT US PRIOR TO BLESSING US.

Verses 15-17 *Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the LORD, ¹⁶how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. ¹⁷I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the LORD.* In **verse 17**, God says he himself was directly behind the difficult circumstances in their lives.

God's providence can work through our circumstances and...

A. God himself will correct us through the circumstances of life.

This does not mean that every hardship is discipline. The book of Job, all the wisdom literature in the Bible, and the story of Jesus especially tell us this is *not* always the reason for hard times. But the prophets and Jesus also tell us sometimes hard times come from God.

God works in our lives to correct us and draws us back to him. And...

B. God corrects us even though his grace saves us.

The troubles mentioned in **verse 17**, like *blight and mildew*, were actually specific punishments outlined in the covenant God made with Moses on Mount Sinai.¹ There were covenant blessings and curses based on obedience or disobedience. In this present age, through Jesus, God's people are in a new covenant relationship with God. God has forgiven our sins, sent his Spirit to give new life, and has written his laws on our hearts. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone.

In Christ, grace means our sins no longer separate us from God or keep us out of heaven. Grace does not mean our sins don't matter or have any consequences. Through grace, we become God's sons and daughters. He will never lose us or forsake us, but he will correct us.

C. God corrects us when we fail to correct ourselves.

In the story of Haggai, the people were trying to compensate for their disobedience while remaining disobedient instead of correcting their disobedience by simply doing what God said they should do.

As we saw last week, they were offering sacrifices at an altar they had built, but they were not building the house of the LORD. He said those sacrifices didn't compensate for their disobedience. Their disobedience contaminated their sacrifices. That principle that sin corrupts otherwise good things is not meant to discourage us from doing good things. The point is not to say, "Well then, nothing matters because I am sinful, so everything is worthless." No! It shows us why we all need salvation through grace alone. It shows us that we should be thankful for the new birth and its influences in our lives. And on a practical level, it calls us to directly address areas of disobedience in our lives with ruthless and humble honesty that faces the truth and comes clean with God.

1 John 1:8-9 is so helpful. It says, *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* We will struggle with sin all our lives. What we cannot do is take an area of sin or an issue of disobedience and sort of set it apart with the intention of neglecting to address it. To play off the imagery of Haggai, if there is something God wants built for him in your life, you have to be about building it. There may be opposition, setbacks, failures, and frustrations. But you cannot just say, *"I know this matters to God, but I have forgiveness, so I'm not going to work on that. I'm not going to work to build my purity, I'm not going to work to build my patience, I'm not going to work to build my prayer life, my marriage, deeper generosity, diligence, or honesty. I'm not going to work on building God's kingdom, reaching the lost, or building up the church, the LORD's house in this present day."* If that's our attitude, spoken or unspoken, we should know this: **sometimes, before God can bless us, he has to correct us.**

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

D. God corrects us because of his love for us.

There is a verse in the Bible that is very famous with some people. It's **Revelation 3:20**, in which Jesus says, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* There is a famous picture that goes with this verse. The artist Holman Hunt painted this picture in which Jesus, looking a little bit like a lady with a beard, is knocking on the door of someone's life. It all seems so gentle and sweet. Jesus is wearing what looks like a silk evening gown which he has accessorized with a jewel-encrusted lantern. Jesus is just gently knocking with the back of his half-opened hand as if to say, *"Come on, please, let me in ."* What occurred to me this week is that the preceding verse doesn't get the same attention. If it did, it would give us a stronger image of Jesus. **Revelation 3:19** says: *Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.* Then comes **verse 20** *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice*

and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The invitation to open the door of your life to him comes in the context of *both* an expression of love *and* a warning about correction or discipline. He's saying, *"Because I love you, I'm not going to leave you alone! I'm going to show up at your front door and rebuke you and discipline you. But what I want you to do is repent, be zealous and repent and open your life to me so that we can get past correction and into communion."*

Down by the beach, once where the cars drive, I saw a little boy take off through the traffic lanes headed for the water. His dad was chasing him, yelling, "stop, stop!" It was scary because of the cars but funny because the child thinks he's going to beat the old man. But the child is three and the old man is twenty-five. It's funny because you know this is a race the child will lose even if he hasn't figured that out.

Sometimes like that child, we foolishly run from God. It starts early in the Bible. Adam and Eve hide from God in the Garden of Eden. It's interesting; sin makes us foolish. In the book of Genesis, Adam thinks he can hide behind a tree, and the creator of heaven and earth won't be able to find him. Or there's king Saul saying, *"I have obeyed,"* while Samuel is asking, *"What's that bleating of the lambs I'm hearing?"* To have an issue of disobedience to God unaddressed in your life and to expect God doesn't care and it doesn't matter is foolish.

Sometimes God corrects us through his Word and his Spirit. If we listen, he blesses us as we trust and obey. Sometimes we are stubborn, and so he uses people and circumstances to correct us. When God brings correction into our lives....

II. IF WE WANT TO ENJOY GOD'S BLESSING, WE HAVE TO RECEIVE HIS CORRECTION.

Verse 19 ends with the words, *But from this day on, I will bless you."* Throughout the Bible, God's people are called to receive or *obtain* his blessing. He wants to bless us.

A. The promise of blessing doesn't wait for the work to be done.

They hadn't completed anything but God looks at the heart, sees their change of heart and commitment to obey, and says, *"from this day onward, I will bless you."* This is how God responds to obedience all throughout the Bible. Much of the time, but not always, God's blessing comes in obvious ways. In Haggai, it meant, as **verse 19** suggests, *the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree*, which had

not born fruit, *will bear fruit!* The things they had lost would be restored. The things they needed would be provided.

B. God's promised blessings are certain in spite of present appearances or circumstances.

That's part of the point of **verse 19**. *Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing.* These are the circumstances. It was after the harvest season, and they hadn't planted for the next year's crop, so they would have to be encouraged by the promise of blessing that would begin right then but not be fully seen for some time.

Sometimes it takes time. I've known people who've fought through difficult times, but they have said: *"You know what? God has blessed us in all of this."* Sometimes we have to come through to the other side before we see what God is doing. Faith is trusting and obeying.

That truth is embedded in the the gospel and the story of Jesus. Early in the life of Jesus, God the Father said, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* Throughout his life, Jesus lived with the blessing of grace and strength and God's presence but without a home of his own or money in the bank. Jesus was under the declared blessing of God when Judas slipped off to betray him! He was blessed in the garden when he prayed, and they came with clubs to arrest him. When the crowd yelled, crucify him. God, the father, was still saying, *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased."* He was blessed on the cross when he said, "it is finished." That was the reason he came into our world, and his sufferings were the labor pains that gave birth to our redemption. And the resurrection of Jesus? That's not God *finally* blessing him. That's God revealing the reality of the blessing that rested on every part and every turn of His life and story.

Reflecting on the message of Haggai. Does God promise us the modern equivalent of grapes, figs, pomegranates, and olives?

Well, those were the essential crops in that day, and God does promise to meet all our needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.² But, the idea of blessing in the Bible is that we are blessed by God when we have a healthy relationship with God, our needs are provided by God, and he empowers us to be fruitful in this world.

There is a false teaching at work in the world today, often called the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel reduces the fullness of God's

blessing to material wealth and physical health at the expense of other biblical truths and blessings. It hypes those material blessings up in an exaggerated and unbiblical fashion. Let's distance ourselves from that but hold on to the authentic Biblical promises of blessing!

A great New Testament passage on the blessings of obedience is found in **1 Peter 3:9**. In this passage, Peter quotes an Old Testament passage about blessing, Psalm 34. Still, he applies its principles directly to us. **1 Peter 3:9** says, *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.* **Verse 10-11** says, *"Whoever desires to love life and see good days. Let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.* Don't you want to love life and see good days? God, first through David in **Psalm 34**, then through Peter in **1 Peter 3**, celebrates that desire and tells you what to do!

God's promised blessings are certain, and there is also this...

C. The blessing isn't limited to the here and now.

Look at **verses 20-22**. *The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, ²¹ "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth,²² and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother.* In these final verses, it talks about the day when God will shake the heavens and the earth and bring in the final judgment and the Kingdom of God.

Look at the final words in **verse 23**: *On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts."* At the end of Haggai, the message seems to focus on one man showing us how personal the blessings of God can be. Yet there is more to it than that. In the first book of the Bible, God promised to bless the man named Abraham and bless the whole world through his offspring. In time God said the promised blessing would come through the particular family line of David's descendants, the family of King David. To David, especially the title *"my servant"* was given by God.

One of David's descendants, Jehoiachin, also called Coniah, was king when God's judgment fell on the Israelites, and they went into exile. He was a disobedient, wicked king, and, through the prophet Jeremiah, God said, *though you were a signet ring on my right hand, I will tear you off*. He also said none of his immediate children would ever rule in Israel. *Zerubbabel* was his grandson. In the promise to *Zerubbabel*, God says I will renew and continue my redemptive promise and purpose. In the first chapter of the gospel of Matthew, we find the name of *Zerubbabel* in the genealogy of Jesus. So *Zerubbabel* becomes a part of the larger story of Jesus and redemption. You and I are also invited into that story and promise. Ultimately Haggai and *Zerubbabel* are part of the larger story that leads us to Jesus, and in Jesus, God shows us the richness of his blessing and the depth of His love.

CONCLUSION

Think about that. Think about the words *"from this day onwards."* Any day can be a new beginning. Maybe for some of you, it is coming to faith in Christ or at least taking your first serious step toward understanding why and how you become a true Christian. Pour your heart out to God in honesty and humility. You don't begin with promises to do better but with dependence that relies entirely on his grace. Come to him and receive the correction that draws you into dependence and brings the blessing of Salvation.

But think about the words, *"from this day onwards, I will bless you."* Does God have to correct you before he can bless you? Is there some issue that you know you need to address? Don't put it off. The more our stubborn self-will is broken in childlike acceptance of God's goodness and bends to his will, the more fully we can experience and enjoy his blessing.

Amen.

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Almighty God, open my eyes to see Christ as my Savior and Lord. His dying on the cross in my place is the foundation of my redemption. His rising again is the vindication of his Lordship and victory over sin and death. I need and want the salvation he offers. Grant me forgiveness and new life as I turn to and trust in him. Amen

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

LORD of hosts, Open my eyes to see the importance of your house in this age in history. Cultivate in me a love for your church and a commitment to use my gifts to build up the body, in love.

Deepen and strengthen my understanding of your church as a holy temple, made of living stones fit together by your grace and indwelt by your Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

¹ See Deuteronomy 28:22 for an example.

² Philippians 4:18-20