

"The Gracious Authority of God's Inspired Word"

This is our second week looking at *The Word of the LORD, the doctrine of Scripture in the book of Haggai*. The message today is about the gracious authority of God's inspired word. I'm not using the word "gracious" in the sense of soft-spoken and charming but in the sense that it is a grace, an undeserved gift for God to reveal to us what is true, how we are to live in order to flourish and what we are to believe to be wise. The search for truth is not just a philosophical quest. It is a very practical need. Every day we face situations that confront us with challenges and require us to make choices. In all of this, it makes all the difference in the world to clearly understand the truth about the purpose of life, the priorities of life, and the differences between good, bad, and best. We are constantly making decisions based on what we believe to be true. Even people who say that there is no such thing as truth, just perceptions, perspectives, and preferences, are saying that claim is the truth! You can't really get away from the need for truth. What the Christian faith claims is that God has revealed the truth we need and it is found in the Bible.

I. WHAT WE HAVE IN OUR BIBLES IS THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

Haggai 1:12 says, *Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with 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. And the people feared the LORD.* Zerubbabel is the political authority figure. Joshua is the religious authority figure, but they obey the voice of the Lord, and all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God. **God's word speaks with an authority that calls for the obedience of faith.** That's the point of **verse 12**. We saw last week that in the book of Haggai, there are six phrases used to reveal and even emphasize the truth that God was speaking through Haggai, the prophet who served as his messenger. One of the characteristics of

Haggai is that he uses *all* these phrases to express very clearly that he is the mouthpiece of the LORD. He not only introduces his statements with the familiar phrase, "*thus says the LORD*," he often concludes with some variation of that. So in **verse 13**, he says, *Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD.*

There are some 3,800 places in the Bible that tell us in similar ways what we read in the Bible is not just a collection of ancient myths and wise sayings. It is the revealed word of God, inspired and preserved by God to speak and preserve his wisdom and truth with his authority.

A. The implications of inspiration are sometimes misunderstood.

Inspiration doesn't mean every statement recorded in Scripture is the truth. For example, **Haggai 1:2** records the people saying, *The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.* What they were saying was not true, but it was true that they were saying it! That distinction becomes essential in some parts of the Bible. Some of the reasonings of Job's friends were misguided. Some of Ecclesiastes represents a limited human perspective, but the record of these statements is part of the inspired Scripture, and we can learn from them we just have to interpret them correctly.

Inspiration doesn't mean everything in Scripture should be interpreted with a strict literalism. At the end of **verse 6**, we read, *he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.* That is a figure of speech. It doesn't mean *all* the wage earners were literally putting their money into bags with holes. Or in **verse 10** when it says, *Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce.* He is not teaching that the heavens and the earth have consciousness and the capacity to choose to withhold blessing. That is a poetic description of what God was doing.

Psalm 104:5 says *God has set the earth on its foundations, so that it should not be moved.* There was a time when many Christians read that literally and thought that the sun could not be the center of the solar system with the earth in orbit around it. Eventually, the

understanding that the earth is a sphere in orbit around the sun was proven correct. Christians came to understand that the point of the psalmist was not to instruct us in astronomy, but to assure us of God's sovereignty. Sometimes in our concern to uphold the Bible's authority, we make overly quick and confident literal interpretations and miss the point God is making. At least some objections to Scripture by modern skeptics are a failure to understand what inspiration means.

Inspiration does not mean the Bible was mechanically dictated by God. At least three times in Haggai, you find the phrase, *the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet*. This is the translation of a Hebrew expression that basically means “*through the instrumentality of.*” So it highlights the interaction of the divine and human in the inspiration of the message. **2 Peter 1:21** says, *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*. While there are some places where messages are dictated by God, most often, you find God works through people as people, not as machines. That’s why the styles of the human authors come through their writings even though they were under the extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit.

To use Peter’s words, inspiration means “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” Our church’s statement of faith says this about the Bible.

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

B. What Jesus and the rest of the Bible tell us is that what we clearly see in Haggai is true of the whole Bible.

1. Some things Jesus says about the Bible are astounding. In

Matthew 5:18, He says, *"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."* Jesus is saying the whole Bible, down to its littlest parts, is true and will come true. A phone book can be true. But Jesus is saying more than that. He says every bit of the Bible *will be accomplished*. He is saying its promises will come true, its wisdom and warnings will be upheld, its story will be completed, and its commands will prove right and wise

2. The attitude of Jesus to the Bible shines through his words and his life everywhere once you look for it. For instance, one day, Jesus was talking about marriage. It's in **Matthew 19:4-5**, He says, *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?"* The part of the Bible he is referring to is Genesis 2, which was written by Moses. So Jesus is saying Moses wrote it but who said it? The creator, God, said it. Moses wrote it, but God said it.

3. The followers of Jesus in the Bible have the same view that he had about the Bible. In **Acts 4:25**, the apostle Peter is praying, and he says to God, *You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:* Then he quotes **Psalms 2**, *"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?"* The view that Jesus lived taught and all his followers embraced is if the Bible says it, God says it. What Moses and David wrote was what God said. It is God's word.

I read a story where a man told how his wife lost her voice on a vacation. For one entire day, she could barely speak above a whisper. He said imagine that. Whatever I said, she couldn't contradict me. Whatever came up, I was all but guaranteed the last word. Basically, all she could do was smile and nod. But he said what he actually realized was how terrible it would be if he lost her voice forever. He said the thought that he would never hear her laugh, encourage, express love, even disagree, and make up after arguing. It was bearable for one day, even funny at first. But for life, it would be tragic. Wherever there is love, there are words. That's why God's people love the Scriptures. In the Scriptures, we have the word, the voice of God.

And

II. GOD'S WORD WARRANTS A RESPONSE OF REVERENCE.

Notice how this comes through in **Haggai 1:12-13**. *Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with 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. And the people feared the LORD.* ¹³ *Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD."*

Let's notice two pivotal truths...

A. Because the word of the LORD is the word of the LORD, to obey the LORD, we must obey his word.

Verse 12 says. To obey the prophet's words is to obey the voice of the LORD. That obedience goes hand in hand with the fear of the LORD, which is a reverence that does not take him or his commands lightly.

We are a church that talks a lot about the compassion and grace of God. Does that mean that obedience doesn't matter all that much? No! We stress the love of God because it is the love of God that calls forth a response of love from us and assures us of God's wisdom for us, but Jesus was as clear about the obedience of his followers as he was about the compassion of his father. Listen to how Jesus puts it in **John 14:15**, in The Upper Room. *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. In **Luke 6:46**, Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"* The grace that assures us of God's love and acceptance in Christ does not wash away God's standards for how we relate to him, obey his word, and love others. Grace frees us from the condemnation of God's judgment, but it doesn't exempt us from our need for his wisdom revealed in his word.

There are people who say things like, *"I have a good relationship with God, but there are parts of the Bible I don't go along with."* Well, You can't follow Jesus and not follow what he followed. **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 Bible is filled with page after page of clear instructions for day-to-day life. It addresses your work, relationship, how you handle difficulties, money, sex, and security, relational conflicts and emotional struggles. If you only follow God's word when it makes appeals to you or conforms to your desires, you are really just following yourself and not following Him at all!

Because the word of the LORD is the word of the LORD, to obey the LORD, we must obey his word.

B. Because the word of the LORD is the word of the LORD, to believe the LORD, we must believe his word.

Look at **Haggai 1:13**. *Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD."* There are all kinds of things in the Bible you might not want to obey because they are hard to do. But there are also things in the Bible that are hard to believe because they seem too good to be true. Here also, the Bible speaks with authority.

Haggai is part of a larger story at the center of that story is the gospel. The gospel tells us that God's love is beyond comprehension. Although we have sinned against God repeatedly, God in love came into our world to save us. Jesus went to the cross to suffer in our place and to pay for our sins. He rose again because God is as powerful as he is gracious. No matter who you are, how you have failed, when you turn to Christ and trust him, He saves you. He reconciles you to himself and makes you his own child. Have you trusted him? If so let Scripture speak with authority and give you peace and assurance. Even when your own heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart, and he covers your sins and sees you as his beloved child, righteous in his eyes for Christ's sake and he tells you so in his word, the Bible.

The Bible, if we accept its authority, can lift us up out of the most discouraging emotions. It can create calm in the storm, peace in

uncertainty, a quiet confidence in God's presence and in his promises. Our spiritual battles have been compared to hand-to-hand combat. One writer says.

In any hand-to-hand combat, there's a constant back-and-forth of blows, dodges, blocks, counterattacks, and so forth. That's exactly what is going on in the unseen around us. Only it takes place, initially, at the level of our thoughts. When we are under attack, we've got to hang on to the truth. Dodge the blow, block it with a stubborn refusal, slash back with what is true. This is how Christ answered Satan-- he didn't get into an argument with him, try to reason his way out. He simply stood on the truth. He answered with Scripture, and we've got to do the same.¹

If you haven't accepted the Bible's authority to speak the things that you don't want to obey because they are hard to do, you may find it hard to trust the Bible when it declares things you wish you could believe, that seem too good to be true. If you do not come under the Bible's authority to correct you, you may struggle to come under the Bible's power to comfort you

CONCLUSION

In **John 10:27-28**, Jesus says: *My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* Hear in the Bible the voice of your Savior and shepherd. He came into our world and died and rose again to be our Savior. He offers you salvation right now as a free gift of his grace. You don't earn it. You just receive it. You turn to him as your God and Lord, and you trust in him as your Savior, and he gives you salvation immediately and forever. His love and grace for you is the atmosphere in which you respond with the obedience of faith. The same Jesus who taught the multitudes in the Bible speaks to you through the Bible. Trust him as your savior, treasure his word.

Amen.

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

God of truth in whom no falsehood dwells, thank you for the forgiveness of sin you offer me in Christ. I admit I have often been indifferent to your word, deaf to your voice, disobedient regarding your commands and disbelieving your promises. In my darkened condition I could never have earned your love or satisfied your perfect righteousness through my own works or efforts. Thank you that, in my Lord and Savior Jesus you provided that perfect satisfaction for me. I receive and rest on Christ alone as my Lord and Savior. I praise you in his name, Amen

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, May I grow to increasingly realize and reverence your word. May I *surrender arrogance and embrace dependence*. I confess that I am always deeply in need of the truth you reveal and guidance you give in the Bible. May I learn to be attentive, receptive, and submissive to your voice in Holy Scripture. May your word truly be for me in practice a light to my path and a lamp for my feet. Grant me an ever-deepening knowledge of and conformity to your word so that I might more closely follow my Savior and glorify you. Amen

1 Brent Ethredge, *Wild At Heart*, pp 163-164.