

GOD ENABLED REPENTANCE

Pastor Lucas Almeida—Central Baptist Church—September 18th, 2022

TEXT

Haggai 1

(ESV)

[1] In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: [2] “Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.” [3] Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, [4] “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? [5] Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. [6] You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

[7] “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. [8] Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD. [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. 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. [11] And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.”

[12] 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.” [14] And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. 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.

INTRODUCTION

The truth often hurts, doesn't it? Yet, the truth also often heals. But, how can we use and seek the truth for healing and not for hurting? Have you ever met people who make rude remarks and then justify themselves by saying, “At least I'm honest.” Is that how God wants us to speak truth?

John 1:17, *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*

Truth that heals is truth that comes infused with grace. It is truth that is spoken for the benefit of others. Today I want to consider from the book of the prophet Haggai how God enables his people to change, or to use a more biblical word, repent, as he confronts his people with truth and grace.

Now, you may be saying, "Pastor Lucas I've tried to change so much, I've tried to overcome my sin so many times, it's just not possible."

Friend, **the message of Haggai:** Repentance is possible when we seek it through the power that God supplies.

CONTEXT OF HAGGAI

Perhaps some of you have never heard a sermon on Haggai. Perhaps some of you have never read Haggai.

Haggai was a prophet, meaning he spoke from God to the people. Phrases like "*Declares the Lord,*" "*The word of the Lord,*" *Thus says the Lord*" appear 23 times in these two short chapters.

Haggai was a post-exilic prophet, which means his ministry took place after the Babylonian captivity. His book is outline by four prophetic oracles, and we actually have specific dates for them. All of Haggai's prophecies took place between August and December of 520 B.C.

Haggai was a contemporary of Zechariah and one of the 12 Minor Prophets. Outside of his book, very little is known about Haggai. His name means "festive," or "holiday." Ezra mentions Haggai in Ezra 5:1-2, which is actually the historical context for his prophecies.

But to understand the message of Haggai, first we need to understand it lies within the context of the entire Old Testament.

Before the people of Israel was given the land that they were promised by God, they were given a set of laws that God told them to obey. At the end of the book of Deuteronomy, in Deuteronomy 28 God promises to bless his people with peace in the land if they obey his laws, but he also promises to curse his people by removing them from the promise land if they disobey his laws.

It didn't take very long for the people to disobey God's law in very significant ways. After centuries of patience and longsuffering, God kept his promises. He sent the Northern Kingdom into exile in Assyria and the Southern Kingdom into exile in Babylon. The city of Jerusalem was destroyed and so was the temple.

By God's grace, after 70 years, under King Darius, the people of Judah were able to

return home from exile. But they come back to a city and to a temple that needs to be rebuilt. Under the leadership of Ezra, the foundations of the temple were built, and an altar is raised for sacrifices. But as opposition arose, the progress stalled, and about twenty years later Haggai the prophet calls the people to return to the Lord.

So, today we're going to consider from the first chapter of Haggai, three ways in which God imparts grace for the people of Israel—and also for us—to repent and change.

1) GRACE-FILLED REBUKE (1-6, 9-11)

Notice how the book starts with a very specific date: “the sixth month, on the first day of the month.” That’s August 29, 520 B.C. And a specific historical reference: King Darius. Friends, the Bible is not just a mere book of nice stories, it is the recorded history of God’s plan of salvation for his people. This is why when we hear “the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai” we listen very carefully, because God has spoken in history, and he continues speaking to us today.

In verse 1 we're introduced to some of the main figures in the book: Haggai, the prophet, Zerubbabel, the Governor (king?), Joshua, the priest.

In the second year of the Persian King, Darius, God spoke to the spiritual leader and the political leader of Israel. And what does he say? “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.’” The Lord is rebuking his people because they are ignoring his temple.

But why are they saying that it is not the time to rebuild the house of the Lord? Look at verse 4, *“Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?”* They are too busy making their own houses look nice; meanwhile God’s house is in ruins. They are saying, today is about me, tomorrow I’ll think of God.

But God doesn’t need men to build him anything, right? God made the whole universe; do you think it’d be too hard for him to rebuild a broken temple? As a matter of fact, King David wanted to build God a house and what did God say? No, you won’t build me a house. I will build you a house instead. The apostle Paul says, *“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man...”*

No, God doesn’t need for Israel to build him a house. The reality is that it is Israel who needs the temple to be built. The temple is where God promised to dwell among his people. It is Israel who needs God to be with them. The covenantal promise that God made to dwell among his people would be fulfilled in the temple.

Exodus 25:8—*And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.*

The Lord is telling the people, “My presence among you is the greatest blessing you

could have! So, stop being selfish with your own kingdom and come serve my kingdom!”

Friends, there is a direct correlation here between God’s blessing and God’s presence. But there is also a direct correlation between the neglect of God’s presence and the absence of God’s blessing. This is not the prosperity gospel; this is the prophet Haggai.

Listen to the consequences of the people’s neglect in verse 6: *“You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.”*

We all know the harms of inflation, right? At the end of the month, there’s always more month than money. And we see here that Israel was going through something similar. This was exactly what Israel was experiencing.

What was happening to Israel was 100% caused by God. Look at verse 9, *“You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away.”*

Again, look at verse 11, *“I have called for a drought on the land and the hills.”*

Friend, the if God bringing about hardship might be foreign to you, but God is in control of every adversity we face. He always brings it about with a purpose. When all around us goes well we tend to forget God. When we are able to panel our houses, pay our bills, care for our health, love and be loved we tend to forget our deep need for God.

Psalm 119:71—It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

It is impossible to learn the ways of God and not be afflicted by God. We learn most when we suffer, and God knows that. It is better to suffer and know the Lord than to prosper and forget him.

Now, I don’t think we are called today to worry about building a temple in Palestine. I don’t think that’s the application for us today. I don’t think either that Haggai is calling us to rebuild this place here in 2503 Country Club Rd, although we are called to be good stewards of the facilities God’ has given us.

Ultimately, the promise of God being present with us was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. *“The word became flesh and **tabernacle** among us.”* This is why, when Jesus walked into the temple he was able to say, “Something greater than the temple is here.”

God dwelt in the temple, but in Jesus all of the fullness of God dwelt. It was in the temple that sacrifices were presented day after day, but Jesus once for all presented a sacrifice in his own body, and no more sacrifices are required. The temple was the place where God’s people would at times gather, but in Jesus we become the stones

upon which God builds his own temple.

We don't have a physical temple today because we have something better. We have Jesus...always available, always accessible! If this building were destroyed tomorrow, Central Baptist Church would not be, because Jesus is our temple!

God, in love, rebukes his people. You are neglecting my presence, you are neglecting my worship, you are neglecting me. God wants his people to say with the Psalmist,

Psalm 73:25—*Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*

We are not very different from the people of God at the times of Haggai, are we? Our generation is known for binge-watching TV shows while Bible literacy grown rampant. I think social media reveals the dissatisfaction of our hearts with the Lord in such a clear way. A service cannot run longer than an hour and a half, but two hours of aimlessly scrolling through social media is totally acceptable.

Friends, we live our lives before the presence of God, and today, God is rebuking us, "You have neglected my presence!" But he does it because he loves us! It is the job of the Spirit to reveal sin to us. Just as it is loving of a doctor to reveal a hard diagnosis to a patient, it is loving of God to reveal to us our sin so we may put it to death in us.

Friend, you may be among us today think of sin only as things like murder, adultery, stealing, major things like that. But the Lord reminds us through Haggai that we can live an apparent upright life and yet neglect to delight ourselves in the presence of God. And friends, in this area we are all guilty. When God reveals our sin to us he doesn't simply tell us, "Stop doing it." He reveals to us that we can't in and of ourselves forsake our sins. We don't just sin, we are born with a nature that is corrupted by sin. God's law calls us to love him with our entire heart, but we don't, we love things, we love comfort, we love ourselves.

But God is able to work in us at a heart level. God, because of the power of Jesus's death and resurrection is able to transform not only our actions, but the inner person, the desires, our volition, our proclivities, our inclinations.

[GOSPEL]

2) GOD'S GRACE-FILLED INSTRUCTION (7-8)

For the second time now, God calls Israel to consider their ways. The Christian faith includes a constant call for us to consider our ways. The Christian faith includes a constant call to redirect our thoughts and actions from self to God.

Following this charge, God goes on to instruct the people on how to be obedient. Look at **verse 8**, "Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take

pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.”

God initially rebukes the people of Israel, but now he instructs them on how to walk rightly. He first indicts them for walking in folly, but then he teaches them to pursue wisdom. God doesn't leave us to wonder what he expects of us. Friends, we have been given God's very own words.

Have you ever thought about the fact that God did not have to give us the Bible? Or God didn't have to give us pastors and teachers to explain the Bible to us? God's instructions to us are an evidence of his grace for us. It is only by God's initiating grace that we come to know what is expected of us. You see...no one will ever be able to boast by saying, "I knew the Lord before the Lord revealed himself to me." It never happens that way. God, by his grace, is always the initiator.

So, do you want to change? Do you want to grow? Do you want victory in this life and in the life to come? Listen to God's instruction.

Look at verse 8 again. God tells the people, "*Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house*" Go...bring...and build. That's all. And what would be the result of this obedience? God's pleasure and God's glory. The result of Christian obedience is God's pleasure and God's glory. In other words, obedience is worship and obedience is proclamation. Through obedience we demonstrate our devotion to God, and through obedience, we proclaim his glory to the world. Look, the world is watching us, and they are dying to call us hypocrites, because they hate our God. But as we obey, the world will see our good deeds and will glorify our God.

So, friends, what greater motivation should we have to obey than to know that in obedience we are honoring God and proclaiming his greatness? Can I ask you to consider your ways today? Are you embracing God's instructions? Do you love God's law? Do you desire for God to be pleased? Do you care that God is glorified? Do questions such as these inform the way you live your life? God's pleasure and God's glory should inform all things in our lives.

If you are in college here today, or starting a career, are you making decisions that will ultimately bring glory to God in your life? If you are dating someone, are you pursuing a relationship that glorify God? Are the friends who surround you people who are concerned with God's glory?

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones was a young Welsh doctor. By the age of 23 he had already become the chief assistant clinician to the doctor to the King of England. Dr. Lloyd-Jones was on the fast-track to fame and success. Yet, when he sensed the call to pastoral ministry, he quit his prestigious career in order to be a preacher to coalminers. What could possibly motivate such an improbable change of careers? Only a deep desire to glorify God. Is God calling you to make decisions today that the world would call "foolish," in order for his name to be glorified? God's glory and pleasure must be the greatest factor in every decision we make.

3) ISRAEL'S GRACE-ENABLED REPENTANCE (12-15)

One of the most astonishing aspects in this whole chapter happens in this section. The people actually obeyed the Lord. Look at the end of verse 12; it says, "The people feared the Lord." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. They feared the Lord, they honored him, and they obeyed.

I want you to notice in these verses that the people repented, and the people obeyed. Repentance and obedience are two sides of the same coin. Repentance is a change of mind, and obedience is the outward evidence of this change. So, if you want to know whether or not you are truly repentant of your sins, one good evidence of that would be that you are going from disobedience to obedience.

Now, I think it's also important to mention that obedience often looks more like a wrestling match than ballet dancing. But are you fighting to obey, or do you just indulge in sin? Do you plan ways to escape your sin or do you plan ways to pursue it. Friends, let us not play around with sin, but instead pursue obedience.

And how does the Lord respond this repentance? Look at the end of verse 13, God says, "I am with you." This is covenantal language. God promised Israel in the very beginning, "I will be your God, and you will be my people." And the obedience of Israel here caused God to reaffirm his covenant with his people. It's like God is saying, "Though you have been unfaithful, I'm still the same."

Now, what is the catalyst for this obedience? Look at verse 14, "*And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel...of Joshua...and of all the remnant of the people.*" Do you see it? The Lord did it! The Lord moved in them and stirred up their spirits. This is what grace-enabled repentance is. God gives us grace to obey.

I love talking about God's work of grace in forgiveness. God can forgive any sinner that comes to him in faith. God's grace is greater than our sin. Where sin has abounded, grace has abounded even more. YES! YES! YES! God, in his grace forgives sins! But friends, Jesus didn't just die to forgive us our sin. He died to enable us to have victory over sin. It is by grace that we are enabled to obey God.

So, how does God do this? How does God give grace for us to obey? Do we become like puppets and God simply acts in our place? How does God give the grace for us to repent Well...he's doing that right now. Through the preaching of his word. God is using this very sermon today to call you to repentance and obedience. The word of the Lord came to Haggai. The people heard and obeyed. Look half way through **verse 14**: "*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.*"

Now, the Word of the Lord has come to you today. Will you too repent and obey him.