

**Blessings**  
Haggai 2:10-19  
Bethany Assembly of God  
5/21/2023

**Central Proposition: If you want to be blessed, you have to be holy.**

**Introduction**

Everybody wants to be blessed. Some of you grew up in the Catholic tradition and so, you're familiar with a variety of blessings or prayers that might be offered to ask for favor. Maybe you went to confession and began, "Bless me father, for I have sinned." There was a period in American Evangelical culture—if I remember correctly, it was in the late 90s and early 2000s—when there were many sermons and studies on blessing. Preachers and curriculums talked about keys to a blessed life. Altar calls and conference promotions included appeals to come and receive your blessing. Some thought that if a particular preacher prayed over them, they would be blessed.

At some point, a transition occurred where blessing is now more associated with being thankful and a sort of middle class aesthetic; it's kind of a humble-brag used to let everyone know that you're well off and God loves you more than He loves them.

Everyone wants to be blessed; to have a good life, to be happy, live comfortably, and have your needs met. But there are many very different ideas about what it means to be blessed or how to be blessed. Usually, people in the broader culture associate blessing with external possessions, health, and happiness and often attribute blessing to some mixture of luck, hard work, and maybe a vague higher power. Religious people, whether they're people who are Christian in name or people who practice other religions, often attribute blessing to ritual: did you do what you were supposed to, to get God to give you what you want? That could be attendance, or giving, or some other worship ritual that's done out of a manipulative obligation rather than faithful obedience and love for God.

We're in our fourth message from the book of Haggai and we've seen that the remnant of God's people that returned from exile in Babylon failed to rebuild the Temple. They started, but the work quickly came to a halt because of threats from enemies, political intrigue, and fear, until God sent Haggai to speak a message of challenge and encouragement to the leaders and the people, telling them to lay aside their fears and excuses, to reorder their misplaced priorities and put God first, and resume the work on God's house. And they did.

However, they quickly became discouraged. The work was slow and it didn't appear to be as grand as the Temple that was there before. They needed the reassurance of God's presence and to refocus on His provision. But there was another problem and another discouragement: their personal needs. We learned from **Haggai 1:6** that though they worked hard, they didn't have much to show for it.

But they had started working again. They were being obedient. They were giving up time, energy, and resources to work on the Temple which meant that they weren't working in the

fields, planting their own crops, repairing their own tools, or fixing their own houses. Could they expect God to meet their needs while they served His house?

This is a question that Christians have to answer regarding blessing and how we are blessed. Does God's blessing come because we are Christian in name, because we attend church once in a while and think that we are moral people, but we basically keep putting ourselves first with a side of God to improve our odds? Or does blessing come when we set our lives apart for God, put Him first, sacrifice for His Kingdom, and trust Him to meet our needs?

In order to understand how our passage this morning answers that question, we need to go back in time from Haggai, back somewhere about 900 years before, to the time of the Exodus when God was bringing Israel into the Promised Land. God made a covenant with Israel. They were to put Him first in all things, and He would provide for them. See **Deuteronomy 11:10-17**.

The very land God was giving to His people was designed to be a reminder that they relied on the Lord for their very existence and that they should be set apart for Him. It wasn't like the flood plains of the Nile. There were mountains and valleys and there wasn't a large river running through the middle that could be used for irrigation. They would have to depend on rain. This may seem like a foreign concept to our modern, scientific ears, but God promised to make the rains regular for them if they were consecrated to Him.

God hasn't made this kind of covenant with us. He hasn't moved us into a land without irrigation and promised to send rain so we can grow crops if we keep His commandments. So, we shouldn't try to make a one to one application of the promises we read today. We're not Israel and God's covenant with us is different, but the principles we learn about holiness also apply to the covenant God has made with us through His Son Jesus. Haggai's third message to the people could be summarized and applied to us like this: **if you want to be blessed, you have to be holy**. This is not the world's recipe for blessing. God's recipe is being totally set apart, all for Him. The Lord's message through Haggai reveals several lessons about holiness that we can apply to our lives as well.

### **1. You can't catch holiness; it's a gift.**

Some people think of holiness and the blessings that it brings like catching a cold, a good kind of cold. They think that if they come to church once in a while and expose themselves to it, if they carry out the rituals, maybe get baptized, pray now and then, and use some Christian words, maybe they'll catch holiness.

Read **Haggai 2:10-12**

- The law made clear that the meat was holy and that whatever it touched became holy as well. But that's where the transfer stopped.
- You can't just go around spreading holiness from one thing to another as if holiness is just a ritualistic idea and has nothing to do with actual devotion to the Lord. And yet, that's how the people were treating it.
- Holiness is total devotion; it means that you're given over to the Lord. It means that nothing is withheld. It means a total dependence on Him. They wanted a

holiness that could be caught by going through the motions instead of a holiness that came from total devotion. But that's not how holiness works.

- People still do the same thing they did. They come to church thinking that perhaps holiness will rub off on them, or at least that God will be satisfied because they were here. They think that maybe they will catch holiness by being around holy people or being in a holy place. They don't want to actually be holy, but they do want to be blessed, and since they think that God will bless them for being here or for praying or for some other religious stuff, they do it, half-heartedly.
- You can't catch holiness; it's a gift. God makes us holy through Jesus by faith, see **Colossians 1:21–23**.
- God has a free gift of salvation through Jesus and when you receive that gift, God makes you right with Him and sets you apart for himself; you surrender yourself to Him. That's holiness.
- And Christian, you can't offer part of yourself to the Lord. You cannot serve the Lord and something else. His demands are total, but with that total demand comes the total liberty of Christ, the fullness of the Spirit, the joy of salvation, and the hope of God's promises. See **Romans 12:1**.

A living sacrifice—that doesn't sound partial, does it? That is being set apart to the Lord in every aspect. That's standing in awe of the merciful God and giving Him all because He gave His Son for you.

Stop trying to catch holiness. You can't. Receive it as a gift and offer your all to the Lord. Give Him everything.

## 2. You can catch wickedness.

Read **Haggai 2:13–14**

- Uncleaness refers to a state of being unfit to enter God's presence or to be in a holy place, a place dedicated to the Lord.
- Anyone and anything that someone who had touched a dead body came into contact with also became unclean. The uncleaness spread like a disease. This part of the law was designed to teach God's people something about the nature of sin, and Haggai used it to illustrate the state of God's people. They weren't ritually unclean; they were morally unclean, and everything they touched, every work, every act of worship became unclean because they hadn't obeyed the Lord.
- Sometimes we think we can separate our religious lives from our everyday lives. No such separation is possible. God said that because they were unclean, everything they offered was unclean. When we come to the Lord and offer Him less than all, nothing we offer is clean to Him.

The fact that wickedness spreads so easily should cause us to consider what we allow in our lives. We have so many inputs because of our constant attachment to media through our televisions, radios, and phones. We may be tempted to think that these little devices and the entertainment we receive through it is no big deal, but we should not forget that uncleanness spreads.

Perhaps we should consider the influential people in our lives. There may be people who are not influencing you toward holiness but spreading wickedness in your life. You have to discern your maturity and whether you are influencing them toward holiness, which doesn't spread easily, or if they are influencing you. You can't catch holiness, but you can catch wickedness.

### **3. You can practice holiness by putting God first.**

Read **Haggai 2:15–19**

- The people had experienced all kinds of hardships. Their harvests were not as large as they expected. They were consistently frustrated by not having enough.
- The turning point came when they started working on the Temple, when the foundation was laid. When they went beyond words, intentions, and rituals, and they put God first. Holiness can't be caught, but it can be practiced. Practicing holiness doesn't earn us holiness. God makes us holy through Jesus.
- Obedience is better than sacrifice. God wants you to obey; He doesn't want you to observe rituals.

Are you practicing holiness? Does God have first place in your life?

### **4. You can move toward holiness by paying attention to discipline.**

Our series is called, "Consider Your Ways" and Haggai refers to that phrase three times in these verses. In verse 15, he tells the people to consider if they were blessed before they obeyed God. In verse 18, he tells them to consider if their situation improves after they put God first, and again at the end of verse 18, he calls on them to pay attention to how God blesses them once they put Him first.

This is where we have to be careful that we don't make one to one applications because we don't have the same kind of covenant with God that they did. God promised to bless their agriculture if they put Him first and God has not made this same covenant with our nation, so while it's tempting to say that if we're righteous God will bless us, we need to be careful.

- Not every hardship we endure is judgment from God. There are times when God disciplines us, and we should pay attention to that. See **Hebrews 12:5-6**.
- God may get our attention through the consequences of sin, the correction of a parent or a trusted friend, or the conviction of the Holy Spirit through the Word.

- We should pay attention to the discipline and the blessing of the Lord. When we live without reflection, we may miss the conviction and direction of the Lord.
- Imagine the discipline and conviction of the Lord like the symptoms of a disease. If you don't pay attention to the symptoms, the disease gets worse. Similarly, the discipline of the Lord is designed to get your attention, stir you to repentance, and move you toward holiness.

Is God disciplining you right now? Are you experiencing the conviction of the Holy Spirit - that work He does to convince you that something is wrong in your life? Are you going through some hardship or frustration as a result of not putting God first? Consider your ways. Don't ignore the warning signs. Pay attention to what brings discipline and what brings blessing.

### **Conclusion**

These lessons will help you set your life apart for the Lord and bring His blessing. But what is that blessing? It's not rain for your crops, because, as we've already noted, God's covenant with us is different than with Israel. Could we take what God said about their crops and apply it to money and resources? God certainly can and does bless people financially, but I don't think that's a guarantee for holiness. Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." **(Luke 6:20)**

So, we can't say that holiness is guaranteed to result in riches or ease. Perhaps it's best to put it directly in the words of Jesus as we've done in previous weeks, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." **(Matthew 6:33)**

Put God first and live for Him and He will take care of you. Now there's a blessing! It's the blessing of salvation. It's the blessing of resting in the knowledge that God has me, both now and in the future. It's the blessing of simplicity: put Him first and let Him take care of the rest.