

How God's Blessings Come in the Present & Future

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[0 : 00] Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for the joy of time together. Thank you for fun this afternoon. Thank you now for time around your word. We ask for your spirit to help us so that we would be both hearers and then doers of your word.

And that that would be to your honour and glory. Amen. I don't know whether you've heard the story of the child who one day asked his mother, where is God?

And the mother said, well, God's everywhere. Is God in the kitchen? The child asked. The mother thought for a moment or two and said, yes, God's in the kitchen.

Is God on the kitchen table? Asked the child. The mother, scratching her head a little bit, wanted to be consistent, so said, yes, I suppose he is, yes.

Is God in this jam jar? Asked the child. And the mother, scratching her head a little bit more, said, yes, got him, cried the child as he put his hand over the jam jar.

[1 : 07] Got him. Domesticating God. Bringing God down to our sides. Or making ourselves think that we can get him to do what we want him to do.

That's really what the second half of Haggai chapter 2 is all about. And although we wouldn't be so crude as to think of got him theology, that we can get God to do what we think he ought to do.

Actually, the idea is that not that far from many of us. Let me give you three examples of it that I've come across in the last few months or so.

And they move from the least crass to the most crass. The least. I read in a magazine that someone had done some research over the last hundred years about where revivals had taken place in the world.

And he'd spotted some similarities. Often the church being prayerful and things like that. But the article so subtly was written in a way that suggested if we prayed like the people have prayed in these revivals, then revival would come to us.

[2 : 23] That if we just operated in the right way, God would do it. That is got him theology. Or a pastorally sensitive one.

We had a woman in our congregation whose husband died about three years ago. He died of cancer at the age of 42 with three young children. And about six months after he died, she stopped coming to church.

And I think others on the staff team were in touch with her from time to time. But I bumped into her in Tesco's. And I said, Rachel, we haven't seen you in church for a long time. She said, I've given up being a Christian.

I said, that's a dreadful thing. I said, what's made you give up as a Christian? She said, I prayed for years for my husband to be healed. And he wasn't. So I'm having nothing more to do with God.

Now the idea that she should pray for her husband to be healed. And that God must deliver on the prayer. He's actually got him theology. God must do what I think he should do.

[3 : 30] The most crass is a book I bought called How to Write Your Own Ticket with God. It's by a man called Kenneth Hagen.

He's dead now. But his book still seemed to sell well in the Christian bookshop in Preston.

Whenever I go into the Christian bookshop, I turn the spines round of the dodgy books so that people can't see the title.

Because I made the mistake of buying this book, How to Write Your Own Ticket with God, only to discover the next time I went into the Christian bookshop, they had restocked it and had two of them now. So buying the book did not actually prevent anyone else getting it, so I now just turn the

spines round.

That's what I'm going to give my retirement to. I'm going to have the ministry of spine turning of the dodgy books. Kenneth Hagen's book, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*, says this.

If anyone anywhere will follow these four spiritual practices, he will be able to write his own ticket with God. God will give him whatever he wants.

[4 : 38] God will have no other option. Now that's just crass, isn't it? That's got him theology.

Follow these four spiritual practices and God will have no option but to give you what you want.

The people in the 6th century BC needed to learn that got him theology would be very dangerous.

And so on the 24th day of the ninth month, you can see both 10 and verse 20.

Haggai speaks twice on the same day, probably because we're meant to read the two together.

We're now on the 18th of December, 520 BC. We're some 17 weeks on from where the book started, back in chapter 1.

The people are back at work. Work on the temple has restarted. But it's vital that these people working on the temple in Jerusalem, it's vital they come to learn how God blesses.

First, how God blesses blessings come in the present. How God's blessings come in the present.

Look with me at verse 11. As the word of the Lord came to the prophet Haggai.

[5 : 55] This is what the Lord Almighty says. Ask the priests what the law says. And here's case study number one. If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?

The question is, is consecration catching? Now it wasn't uncommon for people to carry things in the kind of fold of a garment. Say you've been carrying something consecrated in the fold of your garment, and you take it out and you put something else in there.

Does that then become consecrated? Special? Holy? Does it catch through the kind of, the garment? Through the cloth?

Well, the religious leaders, the professionals, the lawyers, verse 12, are asked the question, and verse 12b, they answer it.

It's straightforward. The priest answered no. It's the correct answer. Consecration is not catching. Here's the second case study that comes in verse 30.

[7 : 09] Then Haggai said, if a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled? Is defilement catching?

And again, the legal hacks, they only need to have read Leviticus chapter 11, which describes all the food laws for Israel. One read of that chapter, and they would know the answer, and they do.

So verse 13b, yes, the priest replied, it does become defiled. Consecration isn't catching, but defilement is catching.

I was trying to think of a way of illustrating that, and when I was growing up, the garden that we had in our house, at the back of our house, had six apple trees in it.

It was a veritable orchard. What it meant was that my mother, in the early autumn, would pick apples, and she would wrap them in newspaper, and then put them in cardboard boxes, and box them into the garage, where they would then be, and we had a supply of apples that would last all through the whole year.

[8 : 19] My mother knew every apple recipe known to humanity. We had apples, as far as I remember, we had apples for every pudding, every day.

If you take one good apple and put it in a box of bad apples, do you think the one good apple will make the rest of the box of bad apples go good?

But if you take one bad apple and put it in a box of good apples, do you know what happens to the whole box?

They all go bad. As kids, we used to hope that would happen, so that we could have angel delight and be like normal children. One bad apple makes the whole box go bad, but one good apple can't make a box of bad apples go good.

Well, notice in verse 14 that Haggai then applies those two case studies. So notice verse 14, Then Haggai said, So it is with this people and this nation in my sight, declares the Lord, whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.

[9 : 39] Here's what they need to understand. They have previously been disobeying God. Now they're obeying God. Can their present obedience make up for their past disobedience?

No. When you're defiled, you're totally defiled. Unclean. When you sin, it spreads through all of us.

From the heart right the way through us. And the point that Haggai's making is a little bit of obedience can't undo disobedience.

So a little bit of obedience can't undo the sin that they previously had committed. You'll know non-Christian friends almost certainly who think that the way things get sorted out in terms of sin is a bit like a ledger.

You're two columns and you've got the things you do wrong in one column. And a lot of non-Christians think as long as you can balance that column up with a whole load of good stuff, that that will somehow undo the bad stuff, don't they?

[10:53] Kind of using an accounting kind of way. When we sin, that is when we rebel against God, which we've done since conception, when we rebel against God, it totally defiles us.

We're completely unclean. Now Haggai doesn't explain here how someone who is defiled can be made clean. You'd have to go back into the early chapters of Leviticus to see how it was done through sacrifices.

But those sacrifices actually in and of themselves didn't do it. It was what they were shadowing forward to, which ultimately is Jesus' death on the cross, that makes it possible for those who are defiled to be made clean.

For the consequences of our sin to be dealt with. How do the present blessings of God come?

Well, through mercy, not by works. Through mercy, that is by God doing something, that means our sin is not held against us.

[12:15] Well, of course, the good news is it's the death of Jesus. Learn from the law. But then secondly, notice with me, learn from the present.

Notice Haggai uses again one of his favourite little phrases. We had it twice in chapter 1, and it comes again twice here in our section now. So verse 15, now give careful thought to this.

The same idea comes again in verse 18. Give careful thought. Put your thinking caps on. Think carefully about it. Think carefully about how things are with regard to those material blessings that we saw in chapter 1 had been withdrawn as a result of the people's sin.

So look with me at verse 15. Now give careful thought to this from this day on. Consider how things were before one stain was laid on another in the Lord's temple. When you came to a heap of 20 measures, there were only 10.

It's the economic difficulties of chapter 1 and verse 6 being repeated. When anyone came to a wine vat to draw 50 measures, there were only 20. Why was that?

[13:29] Again, we're told, I struck all the work of your hands with blight, with mildew, hail. Yet you didn't turn to me, declares the Lord. Well, from this day on, from the 24th day of the ninth month, 17 weeks after Haggai first spoke and 13 and a half weeks since they've been back at work, give careful thought think about it today.

Is there yet any seed left in the barn? The answer's no. Until now, today, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranates and the olive tree have not borne fruit.

I wonder whether you can see the significance of what's happened. You see, God has withdrawn the material blessings of good crops and things from the people. It was meant to wake them up, we saw this morning.

But it didn't. Haggai has come along and called on them to be back at work, which they now are. And they have been for 12 and a half weeks.

What do you think they might have thought would happen the moment they got back to work? Do you not think they might have thought, well, all the economic difficulties that we've been experiencing, they'll all go away.

[15:03] But God does not give them the material blessings they expected. He doesn't give it to them straight away. Oh, they are going to get it.

Notice the end of verse 19. From this day on, I will bless you. In the context, that blessing must mean the material good crops. From this day on. But the Lord God delays restoring their material blessings for 12 and a half weeks.

Why? Why doesn't he restore it the day they started back at work? Almost certainly, it's so that the people learn grace.

That is that they don't earn God's blessing. That obedience doesn't earn God's blessing. So that they learn that the blessings God gives is entirely under his sovereign hand.

God's blessing. You see, what would have happened if God had not decided from this day on, what would have happened if he said, well, I'm still not going to give you the economic blessings that you think you should have.

[16:20] Do you think they could get them? No. It's entirely under the sovereign hand of God, isn't it? God will bless them from this day on.

God will bless them, but not because they've earned it. Not because they deserve it. Not because they merit it. So the blessings that they're going to experience from that day, the 24th day of the ninth month, the blessings they're going to experience are entirely the goodness of God to them. He doesn't give them what they do deserve and he does give them what they don't deserve. It's mercy and grace. And it's entirely under the sovereign hand of God.

There's no got him theology going on here. You see, Hagen's not right, is he? You can't turn the tap of blessing on by just doing a few tweeky kind of spiritual things.

But I know in my own heart that deep down got him theology is not that far away. You see, deep down in my sinfulness, I actually think God's jolly lucky to have me around.

[17:45] I think that he's very fortunate to have me on his team. I contribute so much. I wouldn't be as crass as to say that publicly to you, but it does go on in my heart.

Or I think things ought to go well for me because I do so much at church.

I help on that rotor and I go to the monthly prayer meeting and if I'm not preaching away, I go to church twice on Sundays and we've got a standing order with the bank.

He's jolly lucky to have me, isn't he? And I think that things ought to go therefore relatively well for me. That is crass Kenneth Hagen like theology that thinks that somehow God is in my debt because of what I do.

That somehow God is obligated because of what I do. It's crass. the present blessings of God come entirely because of the sovereign goodness of God.

[19:17] It's not a bad idea from time to time to think about some of the blessings that we have. Psalm 103 tells us not to forget all his benefits.

It's a good thing to rehearse the kindness of God to us, isn't it? And to think of the blessings we have and then it's an equally good thing to remember that we haven't earned them.

How the blessings of God come in the present, what do you think the implications of that as we learn that lesson might be? Let me suggest a couple.

Well, three actually. let me suggest three. First, it keeps us humble. It stops me becoming proud. Secondly, it keeps me dependent. And thirdly, it means I never start to think that I am somehow better than you or you're worse than me.

[20:29] Because if the blessings I've got and the blessings that you have, if they have come as a result of God's sovereign goodness, his mercy and grace, if they have come by that root, it means that I'm not better than you and you're not worse than me.

It's all by God's sovereign grace. learn to rehearse the blessings of God to you and then recognise how they've come.

How God's blessings come in the present, that's verses 10 through to 19. But then, how God's blessings come in the future. Now, I don't know whether on the Cornhill course that Andy teaches up here in the north, but one of the things I do to get our students who are learning how to handle a Bible to do is to look in a passage for repeated words or repeated phrases.

And it's often a way of seeing what some of the themes are in a passage. Well, it's like in chapter 2 and verses 6 to 9, so in verses 20 to 23, there's one phrase that's repeated at least seven times, I will.

That alerts you to a number of things, doesn't it? As Haggai is going to spell out what God is going to give to his people, it first tells you they're in the future, doesn't it?

[21:54] I will. In other words, the blessings that they're going to experience from today are not all the blessings God has for them. There are future blessings that he will give them.

Second, notice that these blessings are not dependent again on anything the people of God in the Old Testament do. I will.

Notice there's no deal going on here. It's not an I will if you dot dot dot. It's not conditional. I will. He's just going to do it.

Whatever you and I do. I will. Notice it's I will. It's God who's going to do it. What is he going to do?

Three things to notice in verses 20 to 23. First, the new covenant will come. It's very similar language to what we saw back in chapter 2 and verse 6 and 7.

[22 : 59] So, tells Erubel, governor of Judah, that I will shake the heavens and the earth. That is the universal people of God. The covenant that God had made with Abraham will be fulfilled.

All the nations of the earth will be blessed. The shaking, as we saw this morning, the shaking begins with Jesus' death on the cross, with the earthquake as Jesus dies.

And as the nations gather in Jerusalem at Pentecost, so the gospel starts to go to all the nations, to the ends of the earth.

It is going to happen. God is going to achieve it. I will. So, look forward to the time when Jesus returns.

And there are people from every nation, tribe, and tongue gathered around the throne. What a wonderful day that's going to be. The new covenant will come.

[24 : 10] This international people will be established. Second notice, the nations will be judged. So, verse 22, I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms.

I will overthrow chariots and their drivers, horses, and their riders will fall each by the sword of his brother. It's using Old Testament military language to describe the overthrow of peoples, the overthrow of kingdoms.

It's using language that they would have understood, speaking in the military hardware of the day. But what it's signifying is that those who are in opposition to God and his people will be overthrown. And of course, it's got to happen if what we saw this morning is going to happen. You see, if God is going to grant peace, chapter 2, verse 9, if God's people are going to enjoy shalom, if they're going to enjoy peace forever and ever and ever, it must mean that those who are the enemies of God and his people must be dealt with.

And so Jesus describes how he will enter into judgment with all the nations gathered before. That's the people from all the nations who are rebelling against God and his people.

[25 : 43] And they'll be done with. I don't think because we've lived in relative security and relative comfort for hundreds of years now, I don't think that we see the force of what good news this is.

Next year I'm going to be going to North Korea. I don't know whether I'll come back. It's a fairly scary place, certainly for Christians who are publicly Christian in North Korea.

Do you not think that Christians in North Korea are looking forward to the time when Kim Jong, what's his name, is overthrown and his arrogant opposition to God and his people will finally be dealt with.

And then God's people in that land will enjoy shalom forever and ever and ever. For there to be international peace for the people of God the nations must be judged and one day it will happen. And on that day the third thing that will happen is the exile will end. On that day declares the Lord Almighty I will take you my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel declares the Lord and I will make you like my signet ring for I have chosen you declares the Lord Almighty.

[27 : 14] When Nebuchadnezzar came and beat up Jerusalem Jeremiah described it as the king was no longer ruling on the throne in Jerusalem.

He described it as if the signet ring had been removed from Israel. The signet ring was a bit like I suppose we might say the mayor's chain of office or the queen's crown.

The signet ring was a sign that God had his king on the throne. When they returned from exile it was nothing like what they were hoping for.

Indeed there is no king on the throne in the book of Haggai. They're ruled by this man Zerubbabel but notice he's not called a king he's called the governor verse 21 because actually Jerusalem is still ruled by the Persian empire.

It's the king of Persia who's on the throne. The king mentioned in the book of Haggai back in chapter 1 verse 1 is king Darius. He's the king.

[28 : 32] Judah has no king other than Darius. They're ruled by a governor. That's the best they've got. But they've been told when they came back from exile that they would be ruled by a son of David who would rule them with justice.

I don't know whether you have a carol service here at St. I don't know whether you do the lots of readings bit kind of carol service but if you do almost certainly you'll have Isaiah 9 as one of the carol service readings.

Unto us a boy is born unto us a son is given of the increase of his reign and peace there will be no end. It's looking forward to a time when a son will be born who will rule over a kingdom that will last forever.

And Zerubbabel well it hadn't happened at this point but I will. Now it's not actually the physical Zerubbabel who is going to be the signet ring.

It'll be a descendant of Zerubbabel. And so when you come to the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's gospel that traces Jesus back you'll find Zerubbabel's name there.

[29 : 49] Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel because it will be a descendant of Zerubbabel who will be born. Isaiah 9 unto us a boy is born.

We have it at the carol service because that is Jesus. And Jesus will be king over his people. And he will rule over them forever and ever and ever.

And it will be only good. And it will be only good all the time. Deep down that is what we ache for. To be ruled well. I don't know whether you followed the American elections last week. We've got four of our ministry trainees in the northwest are Americans.

And we were teasing them for weeks up to the election. I said to them the day after the election, how do you feel? And they said, it feels like we've entered into the big unknown.

[30 : 59] Because we've got no real concept of how Donald Trump will rule our country, how he will lead. One or two of them are even more negative than that.

But that was their uncertainty. They're entering a national unknown. We're not. Not when we come under the rule of King Jesus forever and ever and ever.

it'll be good. And it will be the moment when all the promises that the Old Testament have all been looking forward to climax in fulfillment.

But notice, it's God who will do it. And of course that ultimately gives you great confidence that it will happen, won't it? Because notice it's not dependent on the people again.

the present blessings they have are not earned by them and the future blessings that will come for all eternity are not earned by them. So you can be confident that they will be delivered.

[32 : 06] Because if present blessing or future blessing ultimately rested on me, will it be a bit like living in America under Donald Trump?

Answer. Well, I'd just make a muck up of it, wouldn't I? So you're probably glad that I'm not the king who's going to rule over a new creation forever and ever and ever.

But you ought to be thrilled it's Jesus because he'll do it very well indeed. This little book of Haggai, it's made for a day like today, three sessions.

It's encouraging us to be at work, to be at work in temple building, to be passionate about it, to be flat out for it.

There's no greater priority. There's nothing more that brings God pleasure and honour than people coming under the rule of King Jesus through the gospel.

[33 : 14] We ought to be passionate about it. We ought to be flat out for it. Be at work. But as we're at work for him, we must remember that every blessing we have and every blessing we will have whilst we work has not been earned.

It's all the gift of God's sovereign goodness. I'm done. Shall I pray?

Why don't we pray? Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that this ancient book so clearly speaks to us of what you do.

Forgive us for the times when we have slipped into the got him theology, when we think that somehow we can manipulate you to do what we think you ought to do. Forgive us for the times we think that you ought to act in rewarding us.

Heavenly Father, we humbly come dependently before you and acknowledge that every blessing that we enjoy is of your goodness. And everything that you are still doing and will do until the day Jesus comes, when all these promises will find their complete fulfillment, fulfillment, are entirely because of your sovereign goodness.

[34 : 51] Thank you for the confidence that gives us to be your people today. So keep us at work, we pray, for you, so that you may be honoured and be given pleasure.

And we ask it for your name's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.