

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 11th February 2024 am

TITLE: "Though... yet will I rejoice." TEXT: Habakkuk 3 verses 1-19

Series: Lament and Faith in the Sovereign God part 4

Scripture references from the ESV

Habakkuk Ch 3 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

² O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear.

In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.

³ God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*

His splendour covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

⁴ His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power.

⁵ Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels.^[a]

⁶ He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations;

then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways.

⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

⁸ Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD? Was your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea,

when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation?

⁹ You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows.^[b] *Selah* You split the earth with rivers.

¹⁰ The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice;

it lifted its hands on high.

¹¹ The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear.

¹² You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger.

¹³ You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck.^[c] *Selah*

¹⁴ You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter me,

rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.

¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters.

¹⁶ I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones;

my legs tremble beneath me.

Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,

¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.

To the choirmaster with stringed instruments.

Every mountain top experience starts in a valley. It requires energy and effort to get to the top, as you navigate the path. It is all worth it, however, for the joy of gazing at the glory that is seen from the top.

Habakkuk is not literally climbing a mountain, but it is a spiritual and emotional climb as he wrestles with the question:

How can a good God allow and use evil in a world that he governs?

- He takes seriously the holiness of God, and the problem of evil that results in suffering and sin.
- He is grieved that God, who is holy, has allowed his own people to continue to sin

When he hears how God is raising up the ruthless Babylonians to judge the nation of Israel,

- he is even more grieved that God, who is holy, is using evil to deal with evil.

Habakkuk is neither a stoic nor a fatalist with regard to suffering and sin. He does not brush the problem off, putting on a brave face, nor does he just accept that there is nothing that can be done. Rather:

Habakkuk is a believer in God

He takes what God says in his word seriously

He wrestles with the questions that result from taking seriously the holiness of God and the problem of evil. In this way:

Habakkuk comes into an experience of God that results in reverent faith

He waits on God, rejoices in God and rises up to greater heights with God

In the 21st century, so often we do not encounter God in any depth because:

- We are apathetic when it comes to these deep questions of suffering, sin and a Holy God
- We are easily distracted from such wrestling by the trivial entertainment that is so easily available to us
- We are leaning into our stoic upbringing, and shrug it off as unimportant
- We are resting in fatalism and think we must just put up with it because there is nothing that can be done

The people who go higher up with God are those who tread the hard path of faith from the valley.

Emotionally, Habakkuk started this oracle in the darkest valley: **O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save?**

³Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?

Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. (1:2-3). He asks two questions that are common to every lament: Lord, how long and why do I have to look at evil? Yet he ends his journey of faith on the mountain top of faith in the Lord (vv17-19 above).

His physical situation has not changed. The Babylonians will still brutally attack the nation of Israel. Those who are not killed or taken captive will still face the possibility of starvation and poverty (v17). It fills him with dread (v16). Despite this, Habakkuk can still say (vv18-19):

I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places

Like a deer that is sure footed on the top of a mountain, he is standing firm on the high place with joy in his heart because God is his strength and his joy.

- Would you not like to be that kind of person, displaying such deep joy in the Lord that enables you to stand sure-footed in the midst of trials and to face sorrow and pain with courage?

You get to that place by taking God’s word and working it out in your life. Rather than arrogantly dismissing the sufferings of life, we are to exercise our faith in the Lord (2:4)

**Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith**

- When we rightly trust God, it will result in true joy even in the midst of the worst trials.

How do we come to trust God? We do as Habakkuk did: We pray, meditate and choose.

1. **We pray.** Habakkuk speaks to God in **v2**, though the whole chapter is a prayer. He begins with God, as all prayer should, and ends with a request. He reminds himself of who God is and what God has done in the past. Then he asks God to do that same work again in the present.

God's work is to show mercy, while pouring out wrath in judgement.

- The climb from the valley of lament begins with prayer that focusses on God and his work, and confidently asks God to do again what he has done in the past.
2. **We meditate (vv3-15).** Here, in an attitude of prayer, Habakkuk is meditating on God and his works. It is a meditation intended for public worship which is why it is bookended by the musical term **Shigionoth (v1)** and the instruction for this to be added to Israel's corporate worship in **v19**.

God's people are invited, in song, to think through who God is and what God has done. They are to reflect on his work in redeeming Israel from Egypt, entering into a covenant relationship with them at Mount Sinai, leading them through the desert and into the Promised Land, where God defeated the inhabitants of Canaan so that Israel could live there under

God's rule. It is a meditation that displays God's glory - the glory of his power, justice and victories throughout history.

- God came from Mount Paran to meet his people (**v3**)
- God used plagues both as judgement on Egypt and to show his great power to the Egyptians (**v5**)
- God defeated Israel's enemies. His power is so great that the earth shook and kingdoms trembled. (**v6**)
- God showed his power to part the Red Sea and the River Jordan so that Israel could escape Egypt and enter the Promised Land. (**v8**)

- God enabled Joshua to conquer the land of Canaan, using his power over creation to make the sun stand still so that Joshua's army would have enough daylight hours to finish the battle (**vv9-13**)

Interspersed through this song is the word **Selah**, which probably means pause and think. The musicians could possibly have played musical bridges between the verses to give the people time to think about what they had sung. God's people were to stop and think about:

- God's love to choose them and deliver them
- God's power to set them free from slavery
- God's faithfulness to defeat their enemies and bring them into the land he promised to give them
- God's justice to deal with his enemies who had rebelled against him
- God's grace to look after them even though they too had rebelled against him

**Habakkuk was fixing his mind and heart on the glory of God,
the glory of his wrath against his enemies and his mercy to his people.**

What do we have to sing about, to meditate on and to pause over?

We have an even greater salvation.

It is the salvation from sin, Satan and death through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

When you cannot make sense of what God is doing, when it seems as if your very existence is threatened and you are faced with utter devastation, and when it seems that God has turned on you and his wrath will overwhelm you, only one thing will sustain you. It is the assurance that the God who:

- gave his own Son to save you will never abandon you because he has committed himself to you in love
- has power over the elements and over nations will use it to deliver you from all evil, including your sin
- judges all things justly will forgive you because he justly judged Christ for your sin in your place
- kept his people alive in the desert will give you all you need while you live out your life on earth

Prayerful meditating on God and his work in this way will lead us to faith.

Habakkuk comes to believe that God will do what he says because he has seen and meditated on what God has done in the past. Though the thought of the invasion by the Babylonians fills him with dread, he is able to see past it and say **Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us (v16)**.

Prayerful meditating on God and his work, especially his work of salvation, is the means by which you will grow in faith as you:

- Take scripture and chew it over in your mind, thinking through what God has said, how it applies to you and what it teaches about God
- Sing songs that speak truth in public worship and on your own, using the musical bridges to think about what you've just sung

It is hard work and requires the disciplined use of our time. We all need to get over the intellectual laziness that our use of media entertainment has created, and we need to stop singing our songs on autopilot and instead really engage with the truths in them.

The hard work is worth it because it results in seeing the glory of God.

3. We choose (v18). Habakkuk is choosing to rejoice in God. Meditation has brought him to a place where faith is at work in his life

He now fears God more than he fears the loss of material necessities that sustain life

Seeing the glory of God means he can say 'even though... yet will I rejoice'

What does faith look like in the life of a believer?

When we come to see the glory of God, like Habakkuk, our faith will mean

- we are set free to wait for God to act (v16)
- we are set free to choose to rejoice even though we face devastation (vv17-18)
- we will have a sure-footedness that enables us to skip in high places with God (v19)

The life of faith in a believer who prays, meditates and chooses to rejoice, is a life of waiting on God, rejoicing in God and rising to God

- Take this meditation (vv3-15) and think through what it says about God, how it relates to us and what difference it would make to our current suffering and sin if the God of these verses acted as he had in the past.

Doing that in an attitude of prayer will give you a view of God's glory that would leave you:

Choosing to rejoice in your suffering

Waiting for God to deliver you in his time

Able to go higher up with God

What Habakkuk teaches us is that God will not allow us to live in this world, dismissing him, and get away with it. God's judgement is going to come on sin and all sinners. The Bible teaches us that judgement is coming. This might push you to think you had better clean your act up, but the Bible is clear that you can never do enough to make yourself righteous before a holy God.

- Jesus Christ alone is righteous, and it is only through faith in him that we are declared righteous in the sight of God.

If you are not a believer, then take time to meditate upon this passage and to see that where there is the wrath of God, there is also mercy. Even now, God is showing mercy and giving you the opportunity to turn away from a life that dismisses him and denies that judgement will come. Take time to accept Jesus and to pray that his righteousness will be yours and acknowledge that he has taken your sin and dealt with it at the cross.

- Then that joy that Habakkuk knew will be yours and you will stand before the judgement seat and hear 'Well done, good and faithful servant'.