

Finding Hope and Joy in Our Steadfast God

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Habakkuk chapter 3. Please follow along on the screen. A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigianoth.

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. 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. Though the fig trees 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.

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer's.

[1 : 09] He makes me tread on my high places. This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Jeremy and Judy.

And good morning, Watermark family. It is great to be with you in a surreal sense. It's so strange doing this online.

And you've got to know that on behalf of the elders, we love gathering together as a church family. We love the fact that every Sunday, diverse people from different backgrounds and cultures and languages and ethnicities come together to worship Christ our King, to encourage one another in the gospel.

And so this online thing feels like a very third-rate, distant experience for now. But we're grateful for God that we are able to do it, and we look forward to soon, hopefully very soon, being able to gather as a church family together.

Now, in this time of fear and confusion, this time of difficulty, there's so much going on in our world and in our city. As a church, we're going to be spending the next couple of weeks looking at a couple of passages of Scripture that lift our eyes and our gaze off of the circumstances around us and remind us of the bigness and the majesty of our God.

[2 : 37] We're going to look at some Scriptures that call us to live by faith in His faithfulness. At times like this, we don't just need words of good advice. We don't just need a pep talk or a little bit of inspiration.

We need to be reminded of the majesty and the sovereignty and the bigness of our God. And so over the next couple of weeks, we're going to be looking at passages of Scripture that help us to do that.

Now, today we're looking at this passage in Habakkuk chapter 3. If you remember as a church, we actually looked at this passage in about June last year. But the reason we're coming back to it is because God's Word isn't just there to give us some inspiration.

God's Word isn't just something we come to to learn something new or interesting. We come to God's Word to encounter the living God, to meet with Him, and to have our hearts lifted up and encouraged as we encounter Him in His Word.

God's Word is living. It's active. It means it's constantly fresh. It's constantly speaking to us. And as we come to God's Word, even passages that we may know very well, God's Word has the ability to shape us, to mold us, and to form us into the people that He wants us to be.

[3 : 54] And so this passage that we've looked at a year ago, we come back to it again today because it's one of those passages that challenges us but also is deeply encouraging. And so the context is this.

Habakkuk is a prophet in the nation of Israel around 600 B.C. But Habakkuk is not in a very good state. Things are not going well in Israel.

There is rampant injustice. There is rampant wickedness and corruption in the nation of Israel. The people of God that are meant to be following God and trusting Him don't care about God.

They don't care about their relationship with Him. They're not trusting Him or loving Him or obeying Him. And so things in Israel are not in a good place as well. And Habakkuk is crying out to God.

He's saying, God, where are you in all of this? Don't you see what's going on? God, have you fallen asleep? Are you blind and ignorant to what's going on amongst your people? But just when Habakkuk finishes complaining, things get worse.

[4 : 57] Because God comes to him and He speaks to him. And God says to him that things are going to get worse for Israel before they get better. God tells Habakkuk that he's about to bring disaster on the nation of Israel and on the people of Judah.

Because what's going to happen is the nation of Babylon, that ruthless and hasty nation from the north, are going to come down and attack Israel, bring God's judgment on them.

And the people of Israel are going to be taken as slaves into exile back into Babylon. Well, this just makes no sense to Habakkuk. He cannot fathom why God would allow this to happen to His coming people.

And so Habakkuk is faced or filled with all the questions that we are filled with in a time like this, in a time of difficulty. God, where are you? Why would you allow this to happen?

God, why don't you stop this? God, don't you care about what's going on in our nation? Friends, how many of us have asked questions like this over the last year as our city has faced difficulty after difficulty?

[6 : 06] But God doesn't stay silent. God answers Habakkuk a second time in chapter 2. And as He answers him, He does two things. The first thing He does is He gives Habakkuk a vision.

He speaks to him and tells him what's going to happen. And He says to Habakkuk, write down what you see because it's going to come to pass. It may take a little while. It may not happen in the timing that you want.

But the things that are planned, this is what's going to take place. God has spoken. But the second thing that God does is He calls Habakkuk to live by faith. In chapter 2, there's this incredible verse that the New Testament actually quotes three times to describe this life of faith.

He says, The ungodly is puffed up with pride and self-sufficiency, but the righteous will live by faith. And so God calls Habakkuk. He says, I know things are difficult.

I know you do not understand what's going on. Trust me. Will you trust me? God promises Habakkuk that he's at work in the world, that he knows what he's doing, that he hasn't abandoned his people.

[7 : 10] And He promises that he's working all things for his glory, but also for the good of his people. But He also tells Habakkuk, it won't happen in the form or the manner in which you expect it, and it also won't happen in the timing which you want.

And yet still, will you trust me? Will you trust me? How should Habakkuk respond? Friends, how should we respond?

When God comes and says, trust me, how should we respond? Well, Habakkuk chapter 3, which is the passage we're looking at today, records Habakkuk's response.

And the way that Habakkuk responds is he turns to God in prayer. Habakkuk chapter 3 really is the record of his prayer. But it's an unusual prayer.

It's a very different prayer to the kind of prayers that we normally pray, especially in difficulties, because Habakkuk gives us an amazing picture of what prayer looks like and where it ought to lead us.

[8 : 13] Rather than coming out with a list of things that he wants or a bunch of things that he desires God to do, almost nowhere in this prayer does he ask for anything.

Rather than this prayer, we see a mixture of Habakkuk, on the one hand, calling out to God, but also preaching the gospel to his own heart. He is both crying out to God, but he's doing more than that.

He's reminding himself in this prayer of God's incredible faithfulness to his people throughout the ages. And that, friend, actually is what the power and the significance of prayer is.

Prayer, on the one hand, is the means by which God accomplishes his purposes in the world. That's true. But it's also his means by which he aligns our own hearts to him.

Prayer does move God. That's true. But prayer most powerfully actually changes us. Prayer is not just telling God what we need. He's sovereign.

[9 : 09] He's our Father. He knows what we need. Prayer is actually the means by which we get a heavenly perspective on the world, by which we see what's going on in the world from heaven's perspective.

And, friends, that's why in times like this, when things are so uncertain, when the world all around us is going in a direction we don't understand, when the stock market is falling and the economy is under difficulty, when jobs are on the line and there's this worldwide health crisis, friends, one of the most important things we can do is to come before our Father in prayer.

And so that's what Habakkuk does in chapter 3. Friends, maybe I can ask us, what's your prayer life like recently? Look at where this prayer ends.

Habakkuk knows the situation in Israel is not good. God is sending the Babylonians to bring his judgment on his covenant people. Israel is going to be taken as captives, exiles, back to Babylon. And that may mean that some loved ones are going to pass away. It may mean that some, in the heat of battle, lose their lives. It will almost certainly mean that hunger and famine is going to come to Jerusalem as the Babylonians lay siege to the city of Jerusalem.

[10 : 27] It means for most people, their security, their financial savings are going to be eaten away. For everyone, it means the future is uncertain and things are unknown.

And yet, having wrestled with God in prayer, Habakkuk gets to the place where he ends off his prayer with these incredible verses.

And so look at verse 17 with me. He says, It says, What an incredible prayer.

Maybe a modernized version would be something like, Though the food stalls and shelves are empty, Though the cash flow of our business runs out, Though the economy should falter and the stock market should crash, Though my job is on the line and I'm not sure how I'm going to pay next month's rent, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Now, when Habakkuk says that he will rejoice in God or take joy in who the Lord is, He's not just talking about a frivolous kind of a happy-go-lucky joy.

[12 : 10] He's not talking about a light-heartedness, As if, you know, the circumstances around us don't really matter. Let's just trust Jesus and carry on. Keep calm and carry on because we're Christians, right?

That's not what he's talking about. In the Psalms, whenever the psalmist talks about rejoicing in God or taking joy in who God is, In the same breath, he talks about trusting God.

He talks about putting his hope and his confidence. He talks about a deep-seated contentment in who God is despite the circumstances around him. 150 years ago, there was a pastor in England who wrote a prayer for his own heart, As well as for his congregation.

And he writes this. He says, Remember, O my soul, that he who is the ground of your faith is also the substance of your joy.

Therefore be happy in him, O my heart, and in nothing else. Rejoice in the giver and in his goodness. For whatever a man hopes in and trusts in, from that too he expects his happiness.

[13 : 21] And that's what Habakkuk is doing. He's praying, but he's also preaching to himself. He's reminding himself that his circumstances are limited in their ability to provide contentment, deep-rooted joy, to maintain the peace and the security that he longs for.

It's the same thing that the psalmist says in Psalm 42. He says, Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why such turmoil within you? Hope in God. Trust in the risen Lord.

Habakkuk is not being stoic. He's not being unrealistic. He's not just closing his eyes and grimacing at the facts. He's facing the facts. He's aware that very soon difficulty is coming his way.

Economic hardship. Food shortages. That the future is desperately uncertain. And yet he's reminding himself where his hope lies. Habakkuk doesn't deny the reality of the circumstances.

But he is denying the circumstances have the final say over his hope and his joy. And so he looks to God. He looks to the sovereign God.

[14 : 27] Now, friends, the question is, where does Habakkuk find this kind of faith? When you start off the book of Habakkuk, he doesn't start there.

In chapter 1, he's deeply unsettled. But how does he get to this place? What happens between chapter 1 and chapter 3 that Habakkuk finds the deep-seated confidence in who God is? In this book, we find three things. Three brief things I'd love to leave us with. The first one is this. Habakkuk has come to know God personally. Last week, Chris spoke to us about the importance of great theology.

As we looked at Jeremiah 32, Jeremiah has this great theology. He says, Our Lord God, you who have made the heavens and the earth by your outstretched hand, nothing is too difficult for you. And A.W. Tozer said, The most important thing about a person is what he believes about God. But the important thing is not just what we believe intellectually. It's not just what we would write on a theology exam.

[15:30] It's what we actually believe in our hearts. It's what we actually know about God. Not just in our heads, but existentially in our hearts. Look at what Habakkuk says here in verse 18.

He says, I will rejoice in the Lord. The word Lord there is the covenant name. It's the personal name for God. It's the name that God gave to himself when Moses said, Who should I say you're sending me?

Which God is sending me? And he says, Tell them this God, Yahweh the Lord, my personal covenant name. Habakkuk calls upon the name of the Lord. And then he says this, I will rejoice in Yahweh, my God.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Not just the God of my people. Not just the God of watermark or Israel. My salvation. My God.

For God the Lord, he is my strength. In the nation of Israel in the ancient times, to worship any other God was a capital offense. It wasn't very good news.

[16:31] And so everyone in Israel followed God. Everyone would go to the temple and worship. Everyone would sing the songs and look at the scriptures in their family home.

And yet in ancient Israel, much like in modern culture, there were many people that would go through the motions. And yet they didn't know God personally. And so when difficult times came, when trouble came their way, their superficial faith couldn't withstand the crisis of the day.

But for Habakkuk, there's something different. Because his faith isn't just in God in general. It's not just the God up there. It's personal. God literally is his strength.

His comfort in time of need. Look what he says here. He says, Yahweh, you are my strength. You're not just the God that I bring offerings to. You're not just the God that I sing to on a Sunday morning. You are my strength throughout the day. You're the one I look to for direction. You, when I'm overwhelmed, you're my first port of call. God, you are my strength. And friends, great men and women of faith that have persevered in the face of difficulty, that have overcome opposition and persecution and difficulty, were those who weren't just religious.

[17:45] They were those who knew their Bible, but they didn't just know their Bible. They knew the God of their Bible. They had a deep-seated faith in who God is. They were those that didn't just know good theology.

They knew the God of their theology. And that's what we see with Habakkuk. Okay, he knows God. He knows his theology, but his theology has brought him to a place of deep-seated strength in who God is.

And friends, in times like this, we need good theology. That's true. But we need to know the God of our theology. We need to be able to cry out to him, to lean on him, to say, God, you are my strength in this time.

Habakkuk says, you are the God of my salvation. Friends, it's good that we know God is our savior. Do you know that he's the God of your salvation? Friends, do you know that Jesus didn't just die for the sins of the world?

He died for your sins. It was your judgment that you were under that led God to send Christ the Son to the cross. Friends, do you notice because God loved you that Jesus went to the cross?

[18:44] It wasn't just for God to love the world. That's true. But he loved you. It's his great love for you that led him to die on the cross and to hang there, to carry our sin and our shame upon the cross.

Psalms 9 says this, the Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name put their trust in you.

Friends, do you know his name? Do you know his ways? Do you know this God deeply and personally? In difficult times and circumstances, Habakkuk comes to call upon the God that he's known and encountered.

Do we know him by name? And that leads us to the second thing, which is that Habakkuk encounters the living God in his word. We said earlier, in chapter one, Habakkuk is all over the place.

Things are not going well, and he's crying out to God, where are you God? Don't you care? Why is this happening? And Habakkuk's not in a very good place. At the end of chapter one, he says, I will take my stand.

[19 : 51] I'll stand on the watch post and I'll see what God has to say to me. I'll see how God is going to answer my complaint. But by the end of chapter three, he's a different man.

Something has happened between chapter one, where he stands, seeing what God's going to answer him, and chapter three, where he says, even though chaos abounds, yet I will rejoice in this God.

What's happened between chapter one and chapter three? In Habakkuk chapter two, he encounters the living God in his living word. In the beginning of chapter two, God comes to him and he says, Habakkuk says, the Lord answered me.

And he says, write down the vision that I give you. And then God speaks to him and he gives him a revelation of what God is going to do. Now, up until this point, God's dealing with the world doesn't make much sense to Habakkuk.

It's left him confused and uncertain, scared and a little shaken. Until, until such time as God speaks to him and gives him his word.

[20 : 58] God's word to Habakkuk is challenging, sometimes uncomfortable, but God's word is living and active and it gives him hope. Friends, in these days, we have more access to God's word on our phones, on our iPads, on our computers than in any other generation in the history of the world.

We've got more versions, we've got more translations, we've got more commentaries than any generation before us and yet we are the most illiterate generation when it comes to knowing God's word.

Friends, more than anything else, in times like this, in times of global crisis, the temptation is to run to our phones and to spend time seeing what's happening with the global crisis.

The temptation is to run to the news and to read up the latest report. The temptation is to go to the stock market and see what's happening with the stock price. And yet, friends, the temptation is to go to bed at night and the last thing we've seen is to read the report on the virus or to check the stock price and to wake up in the morning and the first thing we do is to grab our phones and see what's happened while we've been asleep.

And yet, friends, the most important thing we can do, the most rock-solid thing we can do is to come to God's word and to anchor our hearts and our souls in this. Habakkuk is shaken like a reed in the wind.

[22 : 18] He doesn't know which way to go and by the end, he's rock-solid. Why? Because he's encountered God in his word. In the Psalms, Psalm 19 says, your word is true and righteous altogether.

Friends, Psalm 19 says, your word has the ability to revive my soul. Friends, building our life on the news reports, on the stock market price, on WhatsApp messages is like building our lives on a sandbank, building our lives on the beach.

But there is a rock-solid foundation upon which we can bank our hope in times of crisis and difficulty. Friends, come to God's word. Watermark, are we reading websites more than we're reading God's word?

Are we spending time on our phones more than on our knees? Is Netflix occupying our time while we're at home at the moment? Or are we drinking deep from the fountain of God's word?

The psalmist said, my soul melts away for sorrow. Oh, strengthen me, Lord, according to your word. You give great peace to those who love your word.

[23 : 33] Nothing can make them stumble. Friends, maybe the very best thing that we can do in times like this is to put away our phones each day, to wake up in the morning and to not look at our phones before we spend time in God's word, until we've come to him and heard him speak to us, until his living word has given us strength for the day.

Habakkuk starts off incredibly unsettled by the circumstances he sees around him, and yet by the end of the book, the reality of those circumstances are still there, but they've lost their grip on his heart because he's encountered the living God in his living word.

Thirdly and finally, Habakkuk remembers the God of his salvation. Now, as we mentioned earlier, chapter three is a prayer, and it's a remarkable prayer because hardly anywhere does Habakkuk ask for a single thing, but rather what he does do is he remembers God's faithfulness to his people and he remembers the various times that God miraculously delivered his people when their backs were against the wall and it felt like they had no hope.

In verse three, he remembers the way that God called Abraham and made a covenant of grace with him. In verse four, he remembers God's covenant with his people at Sinai, how he came down with fire and power and he gave them the ten commandments.

He said, I will be your God, you will be my people. In verse seven, he remembers the way that God delivered his people from the Midianites. In verse 11, he remembers the way that God fought on behalf of the Israelites as they went into the promised land.

[25 : 05] But throughout this chapter, the one thing that keeps coming through is the way God saved and delivered his people from Egypt through the Exodus by the blood of the Lamb.

And so throughout chapter three, he constantly references God's great salvation of his people from slavery and bondage into freedom by the blood of the Lamb.

Look at what he says in verse 13. He says, you went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed ones. As Habakkuk looks at the horrifying situation around him, he considers the circumstances and he faces the fact of what's going on.

That's true, but he does more than that. He also lifts his eyes above the circumstances around him and he remembers the faithfulness of his God towards his people.

And particularly, he remembers his great salvation. He remembers that when Israel were slaves in Egypt, God saved them by the blood of the Lamb. He remembers that when Israel was without hope, no way of saving themselves, God came and did for them what they could not do on their own.

[26 : 13] He remembers how God defied the forces of nature, rescuing and redeeming his people, parting the Red Seas so that they could be delivered and brought in to the new land. Now, what does that mean for you and I today?

What is God's word to us today? Friends, if you're a Christian this morning, we find ourselves in a very similar situation to Habakkuk. Things are difficult, circumstances around us aren't looking good, the world is full of difficulty.

The news feed and the news cycles are either filled with wishful optimism or dire pessimism. We face the facts, we consider the circumstances, but this morning, God invites us to do more than that.

He invites us to lift our eyes off of the circumstances around us and to remember the God of our salvation. He invites us to remember that when we were dead in our sins and had no way of saving ourselves, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves by saving us from eternal death by the blood of the Lamb.

Friends, when we were enemies of God and under His just judgment because of our sin, God was the one who went before us and rescued us and redeemed us and brought us into His family.

[27 : 28] In Habakkuk chapter 3 in verse 14, it says, you take the arrows of the warrior and you destroyed our enemies with his own weapons. Friends, remember how Jesus went to the cross and He took death and He overcame death by dying Himself.

Jesus died the death that we deserve so that we can have life. Friends, when Habakkuk prays this remarkable prayer at the end of chapter 3, it's not because he's a super believer.

It's not because he's got everything worked out and he knows how to persevere. This faith comes from a man that has wrestled with God. A man who's wrestled in prayer.

A man who's come to God's word. But it comes to a man who has remembered the great acts of salvation and the faithfulness of his God. And that faithfulness that he looks back upon God's unprecedented faithfulness causes him to look forward full of faith in God's faithfulness to his people.

Habakkuk comes to the end of this wrestle with God in uncertain times. And he says, though the fig tree should not blossom, though there be no fruit on the vines, though the produce of the olive tree fail, though the fields yield no food, even if there are no flock in the fold and there are no more

animals in the stores, yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

[28 : 58] I will rejoice in the Lord. Let's pray together.

O sovereign God, you who made the heavens and the earth by your outstretched hand, is anything too difficult for you? O Lord God, we come to you this morning, God, and we are deeply challenged by Habakkuk.

deeply challenged by this man who, like us, God, starts off so uncertain, scared, afraid of the circumstances around him, not knowing where you are and what you're doing in the world, and yet, God, when your word comes to him and when he considers your faithfulness, God, it's like you breathed steel into his bones and you fortified his faith.

God, we come to you in the same position. We come to you weak, God. We come to you afraid. We come to you uncertain, God. And yet, God, we ask you to do to us watermark and in Hong Kong what you did with Habakkuk.

God, open our eyes to see you, we pray. Give us faith, Lord. Father, give us faith this morning. God, this week as we go back to work, some of us from home, as we homeschool our kids, as we maybe stay at home in isolation and we are all on our own, God, we pray that you will draw near to us.

[30 : 41] We pray that you will draw us near to yourself. We pray, Holy Spirit, that you will come and fill our hearts, God. Open the eyes of our hearts to see you and to trust you.

Father, right now in our homes we bring to you our fears and our frustrations. We bring to you our anxieties. Christ, come and minister to us.

Come and have your way. Come and help us to trust you, Lord. God, we pray that along with Habakkuk from two and a half thousand years ago, we too will be able to rejoice in you.

We too will be able to find a deep-seated contentment, a peace, resting in who you are, knowing that you are our strength, you are the God of our salvation, you are the faithful God that has led us, God, and you will lead us going forward.

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Thank you.