

Waiting with Joy

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. It is always a joy and privilege to be able to preach. As Jen said, Sean is out at our Sister Church Crossway preaching for them this morning.
- And some of you may know I've been taking a class on preaching, and I had to preach various sermons and turn them in for homework. And Sean thought it would be a good idea to take the last sermon, which I've already done, and use it and update it for this week as Sean is out.
- So because of the nature of the class, I had to pick different parts of the Bible to preach from, and eventually it came to the prophets. So we're not going to be in Revelation today. We're actually going to be in the minor prophet Habakkuk.
- So if you can open your Bibles to the book of Habakkuk, that would be great. If you do not have a Bible, please raise your hand, and someone will kindly give you one. Habakkuk is one of the minor prophets. It might be a little hard to find.
- He is after Nahum and before Zephaniah, and if that doesn't help you, then you'll probably need your index to help you. It's the fifth from the last book in the Old Testament. And I specifically chose this passage because I love it.
- [1 : 0 6] However, I wanted to study it more. To give some context, Habakkuk was a prophet during the time of ancient Israel, and he likely preached around the time from 640 to 615 BC.
- So this is decades before the Babylonian Empire invades and destroys the city of Jerusalem. While there are no other records of Habakkuk in the Old Testament, we do know that he was likely around that time because of the way he's talking about the Babylonians, what makes Habakkuk particularly stand out among the various prophets and the books of the prophets is that this is actually a dialogue between God.
- Normally, the prophets are just like a one-way communication between God and his people through the prophet, but here Habakkuk is speaking, and God is responding back and forth, and that's what makes it particularly special.
- While our passage today is going to be just the last three verses, Habakkuk 3, 16-19, I do want to give us some context and talk about the whole book.
- It's only three chapters long, so if you're there, I want you to first look at Habakkuk 1, 2-3. This is how the conversation begins. Habakkuk 1, 2 says, Habakkuk 1, 2 says, That's how Habakkuk begins.
- [3 : 0 2] God responds to him, and he says, He is doing a work that he would not believe. In verse 6, it says, He is raising up the Chaldeans, this nation, the Babylonians, and they're going to come in, and they're going to destroy and judge the people of Israel.
- However, Habakkuk is somewhat taken aback. He can't believe it. How are you, God, going to use this terrible, bloodthirsty nation to do something like that?
- In chapter 2, God responds again, and he says, I myself will also judge the Chaldeans. And that brings us to chapter 3, where Habakkuk, having heard God's final response, offers a prayer to the Lord.

So, if you're willing and able, please stand for the reading and preaching of God's word. I'm going to go through all of Habakkuk 3, even though we're doing the last few verses, just for context. Habakkuk 3, a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to the Shigionoth.

He said, He looked and shook the mountains.

[4 : 32] Then the everlasting mountains were scattered. The everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. I saw the tents of Kushan in affliction. The curtains of the land in Midian did tremble.

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, you stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows.

You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and writhed. The raging waters swept on. The deep gave forth its voice. It lifted its hands on high.

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. You marched through the earth in fury. You threshed the nations in anger.

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. Selah. 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.

[5 : 35] You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters. Verse 16. I hear, and my body trembles.

My lips quiver at the sound. God, rottenness enters into my bones and my legs tremble beneath me. Yet, I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon those who invade us.

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 will 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. He makes me tread on my high places.

To the choir master, with string instruments. This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. Many of you in high school might have read the book Night by a man named Elie Wiesel.

[6 : 40] He was a survivor of the Holocaust. He was one of the 5% of the 1.3 million people who went through Auschwitz and survived.

Of his many experiences there, one particular one stuck out with him. It was a strange trial.

He says, In the kingdom of night, I witnessed a strange trial. Three rabbis, all erudite and pious men, decided one winter evening to indict God for allowing his children to be massacred.

I remember I was there. I felt like crying. But nobody cried. This is an introduction to the play The Trial of God. That night, evidence was gathered and witnesses were cross-examined.

And God was put on trial. Now, the idea of God on trial might be strange to some. I know we've had, just by coincidence, some fairly high-profile trials in the news.

[7 : 47] So it's very easy to imagine politicians or tech CEOs or celebrities on trial. But it's not too strange to think about God on trial. If you have thought about the sufferings of the world.

Or if you yourself have faced deep trials. You have been probably tempted to take up the gavel and persecute God. To prosecute God. To say, God, where are you?

Where are you doing? Why do you idly stand by? This is Habakkuk's question.

And God knows. This is the world he created. He knows that we are tempted in this way. To accuse him and doubt him. So we have this book of Habakkuk today.

If we are to be Christians who live by faith, we must be able to answer these accusations. Answer these doubts when they arise. And therefore, we have this book.

[8 : 50] So I want us today to learn from Habakkuk. What it means to, instead of listening to the accusations and letting the doubts sink in. Instead to live a life of faith. And a life of faith that rejoices first in the Lord.

By waiting quietly. By waiting quietly. Because he brings trouble on his enemies. And rejoicing triumphantly. Because he will rescue you from the day of trouble. So the first lesson from Habakkuk today.

That we get from verse 16. Is that we should wait quietly. In faith. For trouble will come upon his enemies. Look back into chapter 3 verse 16.

Habakkuk is describing his body trembling. Rottenness entering into his bones. He can't stand in the face of the frightening news that he has gotten. This prophecy of doom that the Lord has given Habakkuk would be fulfilled.

The Babylonians would come. And their war would be terrifying. It would be disastrous. The book of Lamentations describes the siege of Jerusalem. If you were, back in those days, if you wanted to destroy a city.

[9 : 56] You would encamp around it. Cut off its food. Starve the people. And when they were weak, you would enter the city and defeat them. The famine from the siege was so terrible.

That Lamentations 2, 11 through 12 says. That infants were fainting in the streets. Dying in their mothers' bosoms. The young and old. Woman and men.

Were laying dead. Killed by the sword in the streets. Woman. Even boiled their own children. Ate them to survive.

Princes. And the royalty were hung in the streets. Turns your legs into jelly. Just thinking about it. But it doesn't just make you weak in the legs.

Something else comes up. Something else arises in your heart. That voice that says, God, what are you doing? How could you idly stand by? Why? However, Habakkuk, knowing what war is like, knowing what war is like, knowing that these things would come, he can say, I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come up on people who await us, invade us.

[11 : 13] What we see here is that quietly waiting first involves putting down the gavel.

Chapter 3, we read it all. It sounds nothing like the beginning of chapter 1. Gone is the accusatory voice. Gone is the voice ascribing to God iniquity. Perversion of justice.

So, when evil comes our ways, when people wrong us, yes, it's right to raise our voice, to use whatever legal means it is, or within our grasp.

But when we are tempted to prosecute God, we should quietly wait and put down the gavel. And Habakkuk can do that because his quiet waiting faith is a waiting faith in God's justice.

He believes that God will repay that. Whatever this day of trouble that comes upon these invaders will make things right. Specifically, God tells the Babylonians in chapter 2, verse 17, the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you.

[12 : 21] So, they would come in, and they would destroy Lebanon, but that violence would return under their head. Habakkuk has an expectation that accounts will be settled. Now, the thing is, this kind of quiet waiting faith first has to be a waiting faith, because things happen in God's time.

God's timing is not ours. It would take 50 years after the fall of Babylon, so probably a century after this prophecy, for the Babylonians themselves to be defeated by Persia, which is another bloodthirsty and war-hungry nation.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that is not so patient. If I see that my prime order is coming in three days and not one, I get to complain.

If my flight is delayed five or six hours, that's the worst thing ever, right? Used to be regular. Can you wait a century for God's justice? This quiet waiting faith also must be quiet, because God's judgment is terrifying.

There is something worse than death by the sword, death by an invading empire. It is judgment in the hands of an almighty God. Habakkuk starts his prayer in chapter 3 by speaking of the report of the Lord's work.

[13 : 43] O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. That is the real source of his fear. Throughout chapter 3, there are allusions to God's work in creation, and in judging various nations, you can see references to various battles, such as in Joshua 10, where he stops the sun and moon in their place, and that corresponds to verse 3, 11 here.

God shows his power, and Habakkuk has faith that because God has already shown his power, he will be able to enact that power in justice. You see, faith is not believing something in spite of everything that says otherwise.

That is a Dawkins atheist definition of faith. That is just not what the Bible says. It's a sad description. Faith is, it's kind of like a chameleon.

You know how chameleons have two eyes, and they can move independently? Well, faith has one eye looking at the past. It is looking at God's work, and trusting that whatever it's looking to in the future will come to pass.

God knows that, or we know, that whatever will happen in the future can happen because of what has already happened. That is a true picture of faith.

[15 : 02] You see, when people wrong you, and we people bring trouble to you, you can also respond with that same faith.

You see, we, every single person, from the kingdom of Israel, Babylonians, us here, we are all made in the image of God. God is infinitely worthy, infinitely beautiful, infinitely good and righteous.

However, he has put his image into us, so we bear a slice of that infinite beauty, and God will defend it. And he will defend it with his zealous wrath.

So when people sin against you, know that whatever petty vengeance you have is nothing but petty. If we even knew for a bit what his judgment would actually look like in the final day, we would also be quiet.

We get a picture of that today with people who witness executions. Ted Bundy recently had a show or two produced about him.

[16 : 06] He was a serial killer who operated in 40 years or so. He was sentenced to death by electric chair for the murder and sexual abuse of over 36 women, though he claims to have murdered even more.

Throughout his trial, he displayed unbelievable arrogance, smiling and laughing as he confessed to the murder of these women. He turned down a public defendant and decided to defend himself in court and, of course, lost.

After a lengthy appeals process, which he himself used every method to complicate, he was finally sentenced to death on January 24, 1989. He was led to the electric chair.

On that day, the self-assured Bundy, normally cocky and ready to speak, was ashen. He didn't even eat any of the food in his last meal. In front of him were 42 witnesses, many of them relatives of his victims.

He was tied to a chair. The latch, the lever was flipped. 2,000 volts went through his body. His body stiffened, went limp, and he was dead.

[17 : 16] As the witnesses filed outside of the compound, they were shocked. The LA Times says they were shocked because apparently outside, hundreds of people had lined the streets and they were playing music and celebrating the death of Ted Bundy.

Outside, they had signs like, Happy Friday! because, to them, it was something worth celebrating. But to the eyewitnesses of the execution, who the LA Times called the somber bunch, they couldn't imagine other reaction than grim silence.

If you knew what God has in store for those who do evil to you, I think it would be silence. Hebrews 10, 31 says, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The Lord will repay. Vengeance is his. So when someone wrongs you in any way, know that God will repay. It can be something even as small as an insult.

Jesus says that if anyone is angry with his brother, he is liable to judgment. If anyone says, you fool, they will be liable to the fires of hell. Now that judgment may not come in this life, but it will come one day.

[18 : 31] Hebrews 9, 27, it says it is important for man to die once and after that comes judgment. There will be a day when we are brought not into a human court but God's court and books will be opened and judgment will be passed for every evil deed and thought and I tell you there will be silence in heaven.

And we know he can do that because he created the world. Every tree, every atom, every plant, every galaxy and universe was made by him. He can, he has the power to judge. So if someone wrongs you and they're not in the church, it's your first reaction to feel deep, deep sorrow for them.

You know, it seems outdated but there is a prayer that says, may the Lord have mercy on your soul. And it's actually often spoken in death sentences when judges hand down death sentences, they often end them by saying, may the Lord have mercy on your soul.

people need that mercy. Now if it's someone in the church, it's a different situation. Someone sins against you and they're in the church, you know, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

However, God does discipline and his disciplines are painful. So instead of the imagery of a courthouse, instead we have imagery of perhaps two kids fighting. And one of them says, if you don't make up, daddy's gonna come.

[19 : 52] So, in that situation, there's still a response of faith to trust that God as a heavenly father will come. So that's our first lesson from verse 16 so that we, like Habakkuk, can respond in faith by waiting quietly for the day of trouble whenever evil comes our way.

The second lesson we can learn about living a life of faith is that it rejoices triumphantly in verses 17 through 19. for he will rescue us from that day of trouble. Verse 17 is a beautiful, poetic, and haunting description of devastation and loss.

Each of these things, the fig trees, the vines, the grapes, the olives, and the fields, they're all hallmarks of a flourishing agricultural society. Same thing with the flock, the sheep, and the herd in the stalls like the oxen.

If you had these things in abundance, you were doing well. But if you had them, you were lost. Imagine how devastating it would be to not have a harvest of any grape.

You don't even have seeds to plant for next year's crop. It would be like being fired from your job. Your bank account being empty. You can't even afford the internet to look up other job interviews.

[21 : 09] You can't afford the transportation fees to get your next interview. Now, the loss of these things could have been literally because invading forces as Joel describes, waste the vine and the fig tree.

It could also just be a symbolic description of Israel's particular judgment because Israel is described as a nation that is God's fig tree. It is his olive garden. So for it to be destroyed, it would be a picture you could use the similar language.

However you interpret it, it is clear. In the face of absolute ruin, terrible devastation, complete loss, Habakkuk is able to say, I will rejoice in the Lord.

Yet, I will take joy in the God of my salvation. And he's able to do it because the God is his God of salvation.

He says, the Lord God is my strength. He makes my feet like the deers. He makes me tread on my high places. This description of having feet like the deers, the Lord being his strength is almost a direct quote from Psalm 18.

[22 : 11] Psalm 18 is described by its subtitle as a psalm in which David celebrates God rescuing him from the hand of all his enemies in the hands of Saul. There's another story of God saving people from disaster.

If you have feet like a deer, you can bound up a mountain. You go faster than any human. If you are treading on the high places, you have at least a military advantage because you can see farther.

Your projectiles have the help of gravity. The high places also have a spiritual connotation because the higher you are, the closer you are to God, which is why by that time, the word high places referred to places of idols, places where they were enemies of God and God was expected to trample down those enemies, tread them underfoot.

So this picture of flight, the flight of the deer who treads upon the high places is a picture of the Lord giving safety and victory. And this is what Habakkuk believes in.

He believes that he can live. Habakkuk 2, 4 specifically says, the righteous shall live by his faith.

[23 : 21] The Lord tells Habakkuk, the righteous shall live by his faith. And we see that literally throughout the Old Testament. We don't know what happens to Habakkuk, but we do know what happens to Daniel and a lot of the people who are captured by the Babylonians and exiled.

Daniel, there are many stories of this in Daniel, but one of them is that of Daniel in the lion's den, a very common Sunday school story. Daniel faces a law that says, if you pray to any other God but him, you'll be thrown to the lions.

But he keeps faith in God, prays to God. And when he is thrown to the lions, God sends an angel and shuts the lion's mouth and he comes out alive. He lives by his faith. Now, Hebrews 11 tells us these stories these saints of great faith are examples for us today of what it means to live by faith.

And we are going to need that faith because a day of trouble is coming. And this day of trouble is not just for great criminals, invading empires, but it is a day of trouble for you and me.

You see, all have fallen short of the glory of God. Now, I spoke about Jesus saying that anyone who is angry with his brother is liable to hellfire. I imagine that that would include all of us.

[24 : 45] We all need to live. How can we do that? 600 to 700 years later, the apostle Paul would write in Romans 1, 16, that he is not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. That is a direct quotation from Habakkuk 2, 4. This salvation that Habakkuk wrote about is fulfilled in the gospel.

In the gospel, Christ reveals himself as Lord and Savior. And if we believe in him, we take him as our God, then we will be saved. His righteousness, his perfect righteousness from that life of purity that he lived will be granted to us and our sins will be placed on him.

And in that divine trade, we will have the righteousness of Christ and by that, we will survive that day of judgment. The books will be opened and our names will be written there and instead of a long list of every evil we've done, it'll just be Jesus' name.

Righteous. So that is something worth taking joy in. And this joy is not a happy-go-lucky type of joy. It's not that fleeting high that people chase in this world through, among other things, sex, money, and drugs.

[26 : 13] But it's a deep, deep abiding joy. And that joy starts with thankfulness. John Piper says that thankfulness is a species of joy, and I love that.

Christ has risen from the dead. Let us rejoice in that. He has not only risen from the dead, but he promises new life to all those who believe in him. Death, that final enemy, is defeated. And not just death, but the power of death, which is sin.

Sin is the source. It is the actual source of the suffering in this world, not God. And while sin reigns in this world for a moment, there will be that day after that judgment where there will be no more sin.

And we can look forward to that day by the Spirit, the same Spirit who allow Jesus to overcome the temptations in the wilderness. We too can overcome the lies of the devil. We can take his word, the sword, and have victory, the same victory that Christ has.

And we can do that with our eyes fixed on that final day. And that is something worth rejoicing over. Now, that doesn't mean in this life that we'll be free from troubles and free from trials and tribulations.

[27 : 25] Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians gives a long list of his various trials. One of the most faithful apostles was faced with imprisonments, countless beatings, being shipwrecked, toil and hardship, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, and cold and exposure.

Indeed, Jesus says, in this world, you will have tribulation. But in John 16, 33, he also says, take heart. Take heart. I have overcome the world. Jesus, our Lord of salvation, has overcome the world so we can take heart by faith in him.

So we should ask ourselves, what does it look like to live by that faith that Jesus is our salvation? You know, we may not be like Paul. We may not have been shipwrecked or facing beatings, but we will also face toils and hardship in this world.

And we await his salvation and his vindication that on that final day, when the books are opened, he will make all things new. Everything will make sense.

And we will be able to say, as we've seen in Revelation, that we will call God's justice and judgment true and holy. And we can do that by faith. And again, the faith that does that is not this blind faith that just has no bearing on reality.

[28 : 46] Habakkuk looked back to God's work to inspire his faith and we can look to God's greatest work, the death of his son on the cross to inspire our faith that whatever may come, God is working.

If God can take the death of his son and make it out to be something as great as the salvation of the world, then he can make good come out of whatever troubles come your way.

Romans 8.32 says, He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? God can make good come from the death of his son.

He can make something good come from your troubles. Now, I can't tell you exactly what that looks like in the same way that I can't tell you exactly what God's judgment will be like. We can't fully imagine it, but I can tell you it will be right.

It will be rich and it will be worth enduring with patience the troubles of this world. So when your fig tree does not blossom, when there's no fruit on your vine and when your olive tree has no produce and your field yield no food, how will you live?

[30 : 02] What will your heart say when instead of prosperity and abundance, we have desolation, utter loss? Will you rejoice in the Lord of your salvation?

One great way we can express that joy is through song. If you noticed in Habakkuk 3, there's various, it's not just a prayer, it's actually a song.

It says in Habakkuk 3, 1, that it's according to the Shigiona, that's a musical direction, saying it's kind of like how the song All Glory Be to Christ is according to Agil Sing, which is that New Year's song.

Throughout it, it's punctuated with the word Selah, another common refrain during Psalms, and it ends to the choir master with string instruments. You see, on that dark night in Auschwitz, these three rabbis convened, and they set God in trial, and they came down with a sentence.

Their sentence, depending on the interview with Elie Wiesel, was either guilty or recompense needed. But Habakkuk's verdict was not a verdict, but a verse.

[31 : 09] It was not a sentence, but a song, and we can learn from him. And we should learn that we should be people to sing in the face of our trials. We should be people of song, and not just on Sundays, because trials come every day of the week.

I highly recommend if singing is not a part of your regular devotional daily practice, I recommend you to make it a part of it. So, for example, every morning, I try to, with Nora, my two-year-old daughter, I try to read a little bit from the Bible.

She doesn't understand much. That's okay. I try to sing a little, and then I just do the Lord's Prayer together. If you're not singing every day, I think you're missing out. And don't just sing.

I would highly recommend you to also consider writing your own psalms. Write your own psalms. They don't have to be good. You don't have to perform them. They're not going to be stuck in a Bible for literally billions of people to read.

They can be stolen and copied from other people, just like Habakkuk probably copied from David. All they have to be is dreadfully honest to God. Every trouble of your life, from the worst to the least, bring before Him.

[32 : 20] Recount your current struggles, your fears for the future, and recount His good works. I don't know what your psalm would sound like, but I've thrown something together.

Maybe it would sound something like this. Though the traffic in Boston suck, and though the guy in front of me at the stoplight won't look up from his phone, and now I'm late from work, I will rejoice in the Lord.

Though I can't find a date, and my romantic hopes and dreams are shattered, I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Though the price of groceries skyrockets, money is tight, and the job market is hopeless, you, God, are my strength.

Though political turmoil, war, and rumors of war are on the horizon, you, Lord, make my feet like the deer's. Though I lose everything I have because of my faith.

Though I may even be diagnosed with cancer, have but months to live. Though maybe my wife, child, my loved ones pass away before me. Though all my friends be miserable comforters, and I have nothing left but you.

[33 : 36] Though you give, and you take away, and you take away, you still make me tread on my high places. I will rejoice in you, Lord. You are the God of my salvation. Let us be a people who rejoice in song as we recognize that he saved us from that day of trouble.

So I want to end by clarifying that I'm not being hard on these rabbis in Auschwitz. They, of course, they had reason to be asking the questions they did. In fact, Elie Wiesel ends his account with something in incredible detail.

that after the rabbis had convened and delivered their verdict, God being guilty, they concluded by saying, it's time for evening prayers.

Who are they praying to? There's something commendable in that type of faith. We, on the other hand, have the full, the true revelation of Jesus Christ.

we, by faith, believe that he has died and he has risen and he will come again and he will come to judge the living and the dead and on that day he will make all things new.

[34 : 50] It will be a day of trouble for those who do evil who have not believed in him. The trouble for his enemy but it will be salvation for the one who loves him. So in the meantime, while we are on this earth, while trials and tribulations come our way, let us be people of faith.

Let us wait quietly in that faith and rejoice triumphantly. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we trust you that though the evils of this world are countless, you have let the evil of the death of your son be used for good we don't know exactly what that good is in its fullness but we trust one day we will see it face to face.

Let us live rightly and well before you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.