

Habakuk's response

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Date: 30 June 2024

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[0:00] Thank you that you, the everlasting God who sits on your throne, thank you that you speak to us even today.

Thank you as we open these words from this ancient prophet. They are words which can help us as we follow you in life in this world today.

So Father, as we look again once more at the book of Habakkuk, these final words of this prophet, we pray please speak and please help us.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. How do you respond to bad news? Badly? That's fair enough.

I mean, maybe we respond with shock, tears, denial, anger, maybe in other ways as well.

[1:08] Maybe we have questions. Habakkuk certainly had questions of God in this book. We've seen him reacting to bad news, haven't we?

As he's seen the awful, evil behavior among God's own people, among the people of the land of Judah. He had questions to God.

God, why aren't you working? And then he had this, what felt like bad news, that God was sending the Babylonians as his judgment on his people.

And so Habakkuk had more questions of God. Maybe he had doubts about the Lord's work. Maybe he's shed tears. Maybe he's felt angry.

But still, in this book, we see he walks by faith in this world. He can't really see, he can't see and know the future, but he knows that God can and does.

[2:15] And last week, we looked at most of Habakkuk chapter 3. We've left 16 to 19 for the end.

And we saw in those verses before, as Habakkuk prayed, he was praying to the God who is full of majesty and might and power and splendor.

But also a God who, in wrath, remembers mercy. He remembers mercy for his people.

We saw that as Habakkuk looked to the Lord's deeds of the past. We saw that God works for the good of his people in this world. And so he pleads to the Lord in verse 2 to repeat his deeds.

Repeat them again in his day. Again in wrath, remember mercy, Lord. But as Habakkuk meditates on his God full of splendor and might, we also find him in verse 16 with his heart pounding, his lips quivering, and his knees knocking.

[3:40] As he looks to the future, as he knows the Babylonian army's invasion is imminent, he is trembling before his awesome God.

He trusts him, but he's also trembling. At the very beginning of the book, we read the prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received, which could also be the oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.

And we understood then that the word oracle, it's a weighty message. Habakkuk's received a weighty message from the Lord. And it hangs heavily upon him.

One or two of you maybe need to our evening meetings. Usually there's a chance just to break out and have a chat with the people around us.

And we're going to do that a couple of times this evening. First of all, I'd love you to have a look at verse 16 and just discuss for a few moments. What emotions do you think are going on there?

[4:54] Have a look. Chat amongst yourselves. And then we'll feed back a little bit as well. It will be.

Yeah, we thought fear. The whole idea of trembling, lips quivering. Yes. Just at the end, just before we stopped talking, we were quite intrigued by this whole matter of rottenness entering into my bones and wondered what emotion that could be about.

And it made me think of Psalm 31 where David says, where does he say it? And my bones waste away. Psalm 31 10.

Because of all my adversaries, I've become a reproach, etc. It's kind of similar. So, yeah. A sorrow maybe. Yeah. Fear.

Sorry. Excellent. Any other thoughts? I don't know where it's going. Maria. Great. We thought fear and what else?

[6:06] He felt small and weak. Yeah. Yet waited on the Lord. Yeah. I mean, he's just been meditating, hasn't he, on the sort of bigness of God.

Yeah. So, yeah. And he waited patiently. And we were saying it's a very hard thing to wait patiently in that situation.

Yeah. Or in any situation, actually. Thanks, Maria. Yeah. Brenda? Yeah.

We, carrying on from what Maria said, we commented on the contrast between what his body was doing.

Hmm. A sort of fight or flight, extreme reaction in his body. And his mind. Yeah.

[7:01] His mind is clearly waiting patiently and set on the Lord. Yeah. That's really helpful. Thank you. Did it, for one, see something as well?

Yeah. I suppose we might say my legs turn to jelly, mightn't we? Something like that. Hmm. Hmm. I was thinking about, I mean, you said that this is a response to the thought of the Babylonian invasion.

And that's definitely there at the end of the verse, isn't it? Hmm. The nation invading us. Yeah. I wonder to what extent it's also a response to the revelation of God, the theophany in the previous verses.

Yeah. About the greatness of God. And it just made me think that we're not always terribly good at that, are we? Mm-hmm. We're realising the greatness of God.

And I was thinking about things that impress us to the level that our bodies sort of respond to it.

[8:07] Hmm. Things like, I've been near horses when they're galloping. When you see horses galloping on the telly, it's just horses galloping. But when you're near them, the ground shakes.

And you sort of feel it through your legs and in your stomach. And I was just thinking that that must be the sort of impact that this theophany of God had on him.

To just feel overwhelmed as to how great God is. Yeah. That's my thought. Oh, I think you're right. I think it's probably both.

And that's really helpful for you to point out. And we saw last week God full of splendour and might. So, yeah. That there's an awesomeness about our God that we mustn't forget.

At the end of chapter 2, there were all these woes on the Babylonians particularly. And verse 20, we read, The Lord is in his holy temple.

[9:13] Let all the earth be silent before him. Tremble before him. Thank you.

Can I just come in on that one? Yeah, please do. Because I've been looking at the book of Revelation because it's something I've always had an interest in. There's one bit where at the end of the trumpets, I think it says, there was silence in heaven for half an hour.

And we've been a bit puzzled by that. But going back to what you were saying from Habakkuk in verse 20, that response to the Lord's greatness, just shh. Yeah.

Nothing more to be said. The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him. And that just seemed to link up for what it's worth. Great. It's good when it's linking up with other parts of scripture.

Let's move on. Well, not really move on, but let's continue. First point. I think we see fear.

[10:13] We see sorrow. We see all sorts of things going on. I've put it, nerves yet waiting. Nerves yet waiting. We see, in spite of all that he's feeling in his body, in verse 16, he is waiting patiently.

He finds confidence in the Lord's plans, which are being worked out in the world. As he's looked back on the Lord's deeds in the past, and I think that's what's giving him confidence here, to wait patiently for the Lord's continual work.

As he looks for the day of calamity, as he describes it, the nation of Babylon invading, the Babylonians invading Judah.

He knows he can wait. He knows that the Lord is at work. He knows his deeds are awesome. And so he can trust him. And you're only just chatting in groups, but we're going to do that again. Just to build up a bit of a theology of waiting. So there's various passages there. You don't have to look at all of them. There probably won't be time to look at all of them.

[11:36] But maybe choose a couple, two or three in your little groups, just to have a look at. And think, who is waiting, or what is being waited for? And what is the promise or the result of waiting?

Go. Go. A verse or two that they've been looking at and share.

Mike. Thanks. Give it a go. We're on, aren't we? Yeah. Go for it. It's on. It's on.

Thanks. In Psalm 40, we can see, we hear David waiting. He says. In where? Sorry, Psalm 40. Psalm 40. Okay, great.

You've gone. Yeah. Gone rogue. Jack and I were saying. In Psalm 40, we hear David waiting like this. He says, I waited patiently for the Lord.

[12:40] He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of a slimy pit. Out of the mud and mire. He set my foot upon a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. Now, the point I would like to emphasize is that in this case, David was waiting for the Lord and the Lord drew him up.

In the other version it says, out of a desolate pit. I heard Phil saying that some people were waiting for the Lord and their strength was renewed. Whether it be a church or the individual waiting upon the Lord, this is the thing that really struck me.

Not just this evening, but the most wonderful thing that results in our waiting patiently for the Lord, whatever our expectations might be.

And it's simply this. And it's slightly different in other versions. David says, I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. Now, in other versions, it's he inclined to me.

Now, if we're prepared to stick it out and wait patiently for the Lord, either as a body or as individuality, whatever the circumstances, whatever expectations might be, whatever the outcomes might be. The promise is that the Lord himself, if we wait patiently and he longs for this, will incline to us in whatever that situation might be.

[13:57] Will make himself present and known to us. And that is so worthwhile waiting for. Isn't that? Isn't that wonderful? David says, he turned to me and heard my cry.

Now, that would have been an experiential, visceral, heart, definite, definite thing. David would have really sat up and said, my word, the Lord himself has turned to me. You know, he was in a definite place, but he waited and waited and waited and waited.

What a wonderful outcome. What a sure is the Lord Jesus himself will really incline himself to us in whatever that. Thanks for encouraging us with that.

Someone put their hand up and take it from me. Anyone want to share some of the verses they were looking at? Phil? Yeah, I don't think I've got..

Well, the Romans one, the Romans... Great. ...is a long-term waiting, isn't it? Yes. There seems to be a difference between a short-term waiting and a long-term.

[15:00] So the Romans is waiting for our adoption as sons. That is to say, the redemption of our bodies. So that's really the end of the world.

That's on the last day. So I suppose that says we're permanently in an attitude of waiting for that. It says we groan inwardly.

So I think there's a non-stop dissatisfaction built into the Christian that we're not where we want to be. We're not resurrected. We have indwelling sin.

So there's a groaning. And also it says we wait eagerly. So there's a sort of positive motivation about it. So that's a long-term waiting. But the one that Michael mentioned, I waited patient for the Lord.

No, I'm getting mixed up now. One of them, it says, I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, which is a sort of shorter term, isn't it? That I prayed. And before too long, in God's good time, I see an answer now before the last day.

[16:04] Thank you. Yeah. Two different types of waiting. But we can, in both instances, we're waiting with confidence.

We have certain hope that the Lord will do as he promised. Yeah. Anyone else want to share? We should move on in a moment. But anyone else want to share? I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I wonder. Go for it. Just imagine this matter of waiting is so important to the Lord Jesus, as he will come soon. And I was just saying, take an example in the last World War, when your loved one would be sent away to fight. You don't know when they were going to come back. You don't know whether they'd come back alive or in a box.

But if that loved one did come back and you had no knowledge, if they were to find you waiting for them, what would that mean to them? And the Lord Jesus often said, what will I find when I come back?

[17:05] Will I find a church really, really? I mean, what kind of waiting? I mean, if you're waiting for your loved one to return from a flight from a foreign land where there's been difficulties or upsets and you're in dread, you know what you're going to look like.

You're going to be biting your nails there. No, I don't want a tea. I don't want a coffee. I'm just so worried about her. I mean, how will the Lord find us when he comes if we're really waiting? That's going to be so much for him, I guess. Yeah, thank you.

I guess the difference in those two is when we're waiting for the Lord, we're confident that Jesus is going to return. Whereas in the waiting for human beings, the outcome's uncertain.

Yeah. We must move on.

Thank you for sharing. Thank you. It's helpful to see in the Bible that God works through our waiting.

[18:14] And those verses that we've looked at, hopefully they've helped us to see that a little bit more. And I guess our own Christian experience may help us to see that.

Maybe we've waited for months or years before an answer to prayer comes. And yet we've kept waiting. And we've seen the answer.

Or maybe we're still waiting for the Lord to answer a prayer. But I think in some of those verses, we can still see that the Lord is good to us, even in the waiting.

As we wait patiently. He cares for us just as much in the waiting as with the outcome. He's growing us. He's growing us and our faith in him. I think he's doing that with Habakkuk. We've seen his faith in the Lord grow through these verses.

For Habakkuk, he can say with confidence, I know that there is an end to the violence I see in the land. I know that there is an end to the Lord's judgment upon his people.

[19:17] I know it will come. I know there is an end to it. And this little verse, verse 16, should be a little encouragement to us. That though we may wait for the Lord in faith, it doesn't mean the waiting is going to be easy.

Maybe physically. There will be different reactions that we have in different situations. But yet in our hearts, we can wait patiently for the Lord. We can wait patiently for what he's going to do.

Our hearts may still be pounding. Our knees may still be knocking. But we know he will work. He is working. We know we can trust in him.

We know we can wait on him in faith. We can say, I do not know when or how it may come, but I know that it will. When we hear bad news, when we feel like the earth is shaking around us, as it felt for Habakkuk, we can wait.

We can trust that the Lord is working. His purposes are being worked out. And the earth will be filled with his glory as the waters cover the sea. It's an encouragement that Habakkuk heard from the Lord.

[20:39] And secondly, Habakkuk is empty, yet he is rejoicing. Or rather, the land is empty.

And Habakkuk is probably feeling empty a little bit as well. Yet he rejoices. Verse 17. Why are these things mentioned?

I don't think they're random. If you turn to Deuteronomy chapter 28, we see that they really aren't random at all.

If we read Deuteronomy 28, verse 15, first of all. Which says, However, if you do not obey the Lord your God, and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you.

And so, these are curses, these are punishments for the Lord's people if they're not obeying him as they really weren't in Habakkuk's day. So, verse 31 says, Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will eat none of it.

[22:16] Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned. Your sheep will be given to you, to your enemies even, and no one will rescue them.

Habakkuk said, There's no sheep in the sheepfold, and there is no cattle in the stores. This is not a random event.

This is part of the Lord's judgment upon his people. And then verse 38 to 40 as well. Verse 38, You will sow much seed in the field, but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it.

You will plant vineyards and cultivate them, but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. You will have olive trees throughout your country, but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off.

Habakkuk says, There's no grapes on the vine. Habakkuk says, The Lord says, You will plant vineyards and cultivate them, but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes. Habakkuk says, The olive crops fail.

[23:31] The Lord says, You will have olive trees throughout your country, but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off. This is not random things. This is the Lord's judgment upon his people for disobeying him, for turning their backs upon him.

All aspects of farming go. The nation is dependent upon the farming for their food and for people's livelihoods, but it's all failing.

Fig trees and vines are often mentioned in the Bible, aren't they? And are seen as some of the most important of crops, but they have failed. The land is barren.

There is no food. There is no life. There are no blessings. It's under a curse. For us, maybe we can imagine it, if we go back to those days of the beginnings of the COVID lockdown, where there was no toilet rolls on the shelves and no pasture in the cupboards.

Maybe we can imagine a little bit of what it was like for these people. We wondered, Will we ever get toilet roll? And we thought the world was ending because there was none.

[24:51] Maybe the same was true for Habakkuk. Habakkuk's people in Habakkuk's time. They thought the world was ending. In many ways, their world was ending. They were being crushed.

They had nothing. It's complete economic and social devastation. So Habakkuk could despair and wallow in his tears.

It's all over, he could think. But that's not what he does. The land is empty, yet he rejoices.

Verse 18. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior. And here's an up-to-date version of what Habakkuk's written from a pastor in the USA who wrote this.

Though our investments go down, or our furnaces blow up, or our dream job is now a nightmare, or our holiday gets cancelled, we will rejoice in you.

[26:02] Though the house contract fails, or our insurance doesn't pay up, we will rejoice in you. Though it rains on our daughter's wedding, or our son gets kicked out of college, we will rejoice in you.

Father, you are at work in all things, all the time, no exceptions for your glory, and for our good.

That takes faith to say that.

Is it faith for Habakkuk to say that? How can we say such things? Remember what Habakkuk said in verse 13.

You, God, came out to deliver your people to save your anointed one. The Lord has worked to deliver his people in the past.

And he is still working to do that for Habakkuk. Habakkuk, in the Lord, knows a deliverer, knows a saviour.

[27:07] That's what he rejoices in. Verse 18, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my saviour. And so, because the Lord has

come to deliver his people, Habakkuk can rejoice, even though everything is empty and devastated.

The joy is not found in looking around him, it's found in looking up at his God, who is the source of unending and inexhaustible joy. In times of blessing, verse 18 may make absolute sense to us. But in times like Habakkuk's going through, the gloomy, dark days, it may not. But I think we need to be clear on what joy is.

Because joy is not the same as happiness. John Piper, pastor in America, says of joy, Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world.

It's an inner joy, an inner happiness. It's not happiness, but it's a feeling similar. Deep within, even if everything around us is awful, deep within we know joy, we know peace.

[28:41] Because of God's work in us. Because of God, who is the unending source of inexhaustible joy. It's found in God himself.

For Habakkuk, everything around him is terrible. Joy doesn't make sense unless God is his savior. And so for us, in our times of anxiety and stress and depression and illness and tragedy, even in those times, we can know joy.

We might not be going around with a smile on our face. We may be very far away from that. But we can know a sense of joy deep within as we know God as our savior.

Unless we have a God who we know has come to deliver us and know, know, remember that he's not come to deliver us from all the badness and sadness in the world we saw this morning.

[29:57] Christians will suffer. But he has delivered us from our slavery to sin. He has raised up his anointed one, his Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

For Habakkuk, he was the one who was to come.

For us, we can look back with certainty at the one who has come and who will come. to the one who has taken all our sin away, who has given us new and living hope.

And so we stand with Habakkuk and we know that by faith in Christ we are righteous. And so we live. And that can fill us with joy.

So we may have sadness. We may have disappointments. We may even end up in poverty and anxieties. But we are rich in Christ.

Strip everything away and we are still the most richest and most blessed people if we have Christ. Words of a song recently written.

[31:07] What joy to know that Christ is mine who holds me ever in his love. He's the sure foundation of my life whose grace will always be enough.

Though all I have is stripped away still I rejoice for Christ remains. And when he comes he'll lift me high for all of Christ is all of mine.

So Habakkuk has nerves and yet he waits patiently with confidence in his Lord. Habakkuk sees the emptiness of the land around him and yet he rejoices and finally he is weak and yet he is strong.

We saw his weakness in verse 16. We're reminded that he's a human being just like us. We are weak and so where do we find strength?

Especially where do we find strength in the face of bad news bad situations? Where do we find strength in the calamities of life? Verse 19 The sovereign Lord is my strength he makes my feet like the feet of a deer he enables me to tread on the heights.

[32:26] Apparently the word used for strength here is not only physical strength but also speaks of wealth and that word is translated that in some other places.

though there may be economic weakness and poverty in the land the Lord provides riches he provides his people with strength.

Psalms 18 says It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure he makes my feet like the feet of a deer he causes me to stand on the heights so similar to these words of Habakkuk.

And so the picture there is of deer standing on the heights strong another animal picture that I've been thinking of seeing it on mountains in the Lake District sheep just standing in the most horrible places like how do they do that how have they not how do they not fall down likewise for us how do we stand firm when we're going through life struggles how can Habakkuk stand upright in such devastation calamity he can't do it by himself he needs the law to strengthen him he needs the law

to keep him fast to hold him fast though the situation may seem like he and the people of the Judah are in the depths God raises him to the heights a bit like those words from Psalm 40 that Mike shared for us and

I know that in this room even now there's people who are going through painful times sorrowful times and who have been through them as well and yet the Lord has kept us we are still here by his grace he has kept us he has strengthened us to face the trials we've been through or are going through and the ones will yet go through and though we may at times feel in the depths of despair God has in Christ raised us up to be seated with Christ in the heavenly realms and so yes we absolutely can stand strong and tread on the heights because we're in Christ he strengthens us so as we sang Psalm 23 earlier David he speaks through in that psalm about us going through dark valleys valleys the Lord our shepherd he is leading us through those dark valleys and he's leading us through there will be an end to them we may not know when the end will come but he leads us through the book of Habakkuk as a whole shows us that the greedy the arrogant the violent cannot stand before the

[35:40] Lord who opposes evil but life is given to the righteous and we are righteous by faith by looking to God in faith by looking to the Lord Jesus we stand in his righteousness and we can add to that in Christ we know joy we can know joy beyond all measure from the God who is the source of unending and inexhaustible joy that brings us to the end of this little book of Habakkuk we're going to sing this is a hymn written by William Cooper I mentioned William Cooper last week in the sermon and the last verse of this hymn is a very fine hymn piece of poetry really the last verse is from the verses we've looked at the vine nor fig tree neither their looked for fruit shall bear the wall the field should wither nor flocks nor herds be there yet

God the same abiding his praise shall tune my voice for while in him confiding I cannot but rejoice
let's stand let's sing to the tree ending ending!
ending! ending! ending! ending! ending