

# Habakkuk 3:17-19

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Preacher: Jim White

[ 0 : 00 ] Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can come here today and gather around your word to worship you and praise you, that we can come here to encourage each other in fellowship and love, that we can sing your praises together, and most of all, that we can open your word to know you better and to find out what you have for us today.

We ask that you be with me today specifically, speak through me. May your Holy Spirit work in this room. May your Holy Spirit work in the people and the individuals here that hear your word, so that you may give understanding and that you may be glorified. In Jesus Christ's name, amen.

Picture David emerging from a dark, damp desert cave. His eyes are momentarily blinded as he's adjusting to the unforgiving desert sun. He's used to moving from cave to cave, being on the run, keeping one step ahead of King Saul, who is out to kill him. King Saul has already made two attempts on his life at this point, and he comes out to the desert when he hears of David's new hiding places.

As his eyes adjusted to the desert sun and the rough-hewn warriors come into focus, the guys that guarded the caves at night, those are the ones who swore legions to him.

In 1 Samuel, they call the warriors men on the run, men in distress, men in debt, men that are bitter in soul. These are the warriors that have sworn allegiance to David.

[ 1 : 30 ] At his lowest point, David found himself hiding in Philistine territory. This is a nation of unclean pagans who are at war with the Israelites at this time.

Standing at the mouth of the cave, in the desert sand as far as the eye can reach, his rough-hewn warriors guarding his cave, hunted by King Saul, David's situation must have appeared dark, bleak, and hopeless.

Yet the reality of his surroundings did not match the reality of his faith. David placed his faith in the God of his salvation, no matter how desperate his situation appeared to be.

David rested in the knowledge that God already anointed him king and that he would unfold his plan in his time. As David stood at the entry of the desert cave, living on the run, David placed his faith in the God of his salvation.

Our text captures the same sense of steadfast faith in the midst of desperate situations. If you take a look at it with me, verse 17, so chapter 3, verse 17, we read, 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.

[ 2 : 43 ] The flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. This is a picture of a desperate situation. Habakkuk uses a number of agricultural images to give us these images of devastation over and over again.

Again, we can understand most of these images, but there are a couple of them that, within the context of the original hearers, they might be a little bit different than we would understand them. So I'd like to point two of them out for you here.

The fig tree and the vine are generally symbols of wealth and prosperity during times of peace, during Habakkuk's time. Deuteronomy 6, verses 10 through 12, I'll just read that for you.

You don't have to turn there. Basically, the context of that text is Moses is talking to his people. They are getting ready to move into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua, and Moses is kind of reminding them of all that he's been teaching them throughout the years in the desert.

But he also sends them off with a warning, and that brings us to the text that I'd like to read. And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you with great and good cities that you did not build and houses full of all good things that you did not fill and cisterns that you did not dig and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant.

[ 4 : 08 ] And when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord. God gave them these things of luxury. They basically moved into the promised land, picked a house and moved in.

Everything was there. The fully grown fig trees were there to give them shade, and the vines were, you know, they enjoyed the fruits of the vine. We flash forward a few hundred years during the reign of King Solomon.

In 1 Kings 4.25 we read, And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon.

So again, we have these images of luxury during times of peace. In our modern day context, we could say it's the American dream. Every family has their dream house with a two-car garage and cars to park in it.

In Habakkuk, we have the lack of these things. So basically we have trees no longer bear fruit, the luxuries are gone, the times of peace are gone, these are images of desolation.

[ 5 : 12 ] God basically took away from the Israelites what he gave them when they entered the promised land. It's the equivalent of the American dream coming to an end. You have a foreclosure sign in your front yard.

Our second image is the image of the olive itself. In our text it says, The protus of the olive fails. They used the oil, it was a staple in the lifetime, in the Middle East back then, during Habakkuk's time.

They used the olive oils for anointing their new kings. They used the oil to purify themselves for worship. They used it on a daily basis to cook with.

And even at nighttime, they would probably use it even to light their lamps. So when the protus of the olive fails, there is far-reaching devastation. The rest of these images, even us city people can figure out, the fields yield no food.

Basically, if there's no food, you can't feed your family. If there's no food, you can't feed the livestock. So if the livestock is dying off, the flock is cut off from the field. Basically means they're gone, they're absent.

[ 6 : 18 ] And if you don't have any flock, then you can't bring them home at night and put them in the stalls. So the herd in the stall, no herd in the stalls, basically means you have no animals left. So you have this downward spiral of devastation over and over in this verse here.

In a modern-day context, we could see it in our own history, sort of this modern-day example of downward spiraling, the Great Gatsby's roaring 20s came to an abrupt halt. In Black Thursday, October 24, 1929, it's considered to be the beginning of the Great Depression.

The housing boom, the stock boom, the exploding expansion of the nation all gave way to the downward spiraling devastation in the 1930s. The stock market price bubble burst.

Families often lost every cent of their savings in the crash. Banks failed. Businesses went under. Factories closed. Jobs became scarce. Crops prices plummeted. Farms were impacted.

Economic uncertainty, coupled with drought, and poor agricultural practices led to the Great Dust Bowl and Black Blizzards. One thing led to another in this downward spiral.

[ 7 : 26 ] So that's a modern-day example of kind of what we see here in verse 17. The luxuries are gone, and the downward spiral of devastation begins. So the question is, Habakkuk spends his time to give us this image over and over, what is the cause of this devastation?

So we're at a disadvantage. We just come into Habakkuk in the last three verses. So we need to go back through Habakkuk to kind of get an understanding of what's going on here. If you can turn back a couple pages to Habakkuk 1, verse 1.

And we'll just take a look at that. While you're doing that, Habakkuk was a minor prophet. He was around 640, 615 B.C. And he also, well, we basically know that he was there.

He's a pre-exilic prophet at this point. So in verse 1, chapter 1, verse 1, we read, The oracle that Habakkuk, the prophet, saw. Oracle is basically a prophecy that was shown in the form of a vision, so therefore he saw it.

Verse 2 through 4, We find Habakkuk approached God boldly in prayer. We find him crying out to God in honest, direct approach. So take a look at that with me. Verse 2, As my youngest would say, Habakkuk is all up in God's grill here.

[ 9 : 08 ] He approaches him boldly. He complains about the unfairness, the righteous being stomped on by the wicked. He doesn't make any distinction here necessarily between the wicked of the nations and the wicked within God's people.

So we're watching this, and we see that the God's people are doing these things as well. And again, if you look at the words specifically, violence, destruction, strife, contention, perverted justice, these are things that God's people are doing to each other in the nation.

God's people turn their back on God, and they live their lives the way they wanted to. Yet they continue to call themselves God's people. In Habakkuk chapter 1, we learn that God will raise up the Babylonians to destroy Judah.

And the Babylonians, when they are done pilfering and destroying, the buildings turn to rubble, the landers ravage, and the last beams smolder in what once was the temple, we come to the images of Habakkuk in verse 17.

The luxuries and dates and wine are gone. The daily staples of olives and their oil, gone. Food to feed the family and the livestock, gone. Livestock itself, gone.

[ 10 : 24 ] God's people, gone. God unleashed his wrath and judgment on his people because they turned their backs on him.

They lived their lives the way they wanted to. Today we call ourselves God's people, and how do we measure up? How is Holy Trinity Church doing today? Are we examples of gospel living, or do our actions condemn us and deserve God's wrath?

I could quote a bunch of statistics from the Barna Group right now, like many pastors like to do, but I'm going to do something a little bit different. I'm going to quote some lyrics from a Christian hip-hop artist called Catalyst.

Most of you know him as Kareem Emanuel. He makes some really good observations in his lyrics. He sees the church, and he sees the lax morals of the Christians in the church, and he sees the poor teaching of the people in the church.

So let me give you some quotes here. We buy the newest toy, although we can't afford it, keep it to ourselves. Our shelves are like storage. Chase our desires, even if we've got to sneak and creep through the streets.

[ 11 : 28 ] We just hope no one is recording it. And these are the professing Christians. They try to say they love God, while their actions deny him. We've got divorce in the world, divorce in the body.

Supposed to look like God, we mirror the ungodly. Look at the sin we enjoy, supposed to be saints, but the Holy Spirit looks unemployed. And on the poor teaching in the churches today, he says, Everywhere I look, I see crooks.

And what's amazing is, they are holding the holy book. But the Lord, they are replacing him with doctrine of elevation. And now salvation has fallen to the bottom of all their conversations, and sin isn't a problem.

They don't even think about it, because think about it, they ain't really hearing the gospel. They're hearing deception, receiving no correction. Church has been infected with pastors who preach in blessings, so we're less effective.

A ship with no direction. But real believers in Jesus need a witness protection. God's people rejecting God, living their lives the way they want to, diluting the truth, perverting God's word.

[ 12 : 32 ] This is not gospel living. This is not gospel truth. As we move on to verse 18, verse 18 is surprising in this context, because he says, I will rejoice.

Take a look at it with me. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Now how on earth does Habakkuk come on this response after giving us image after image of devastation?

We need to go back into Habakkuk again to take a closer look and find out what's going on. So in Habakkuk chapter 1, verses 5 through 11, basically, God says, you know, the wicked will feel God's wrath at the hands of the Babylonians.

In verse 12, we see Habakkuk basically getting ready to respond again to what God just said. And you can almost hear a huge, yes, but you're going to punish your people at the hands of the pagan nation, the Babylonians.

And he continues on with a series of those types of questions. And in verse 12, I'm sorry, in verse 2, chapter 2, verse 1, it's important to note how he then lands in his response to God.

[ 13 : 44 ] Take a look at that as well. I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

I love this. Habakkuk is basically approaching God with boldness. He's up in his grill initially, and he's asking the tough questions, but then he backs down. And here we see him basically saying, I will humble myself.

I will anticipate that God will answer. I will wait in faith to hear what God has to say. And I'm not going to form my opinions until I hear what he has to say, and then I will respond.

With that, God then goes through in chapter 2, actually responds to Habakkuk. And in there, there's really two points of interest that I want to point out, is God responds with a series of five woes expressing the wrath that's coming to those who exploit the righteous.

The wicked will experience God's wrath. But at the same time, if you look at chapter 2, verse 4, there we read, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

[ 14 : 58 ] We see among the wicked, there are still those who are faithful to God. So that's encouraging news there. We just read chapter 3, so hopefully you kind of heard what was going on.

But I'll give you kind of a highlight recap of what was said in chapter 3. In chapter 3, God reveals his sovereignty, so that's important, in those images that Habakkuk saw.

There's image upon image of God's uncompromising wrath. We can't get around that. The wicked will experience God's wrath. We saw the divine warrior who will execute that judgment.

And in light of that judgment that's coming, Habakkuk asks God that he will show mercy in his justice. And again, there's this glimmer of hope that God will save his anointed, his righteous.

And again, we see how Habakkuk reacts in two different ways here at the end. In chapter 3, verse 16, I hear and my body trembles.

[ 15 : 58 ] My lips quiver in the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones. My legs tremble beneath me. This is a grown man who reacts in fear as he sees the images of God's wrath coming.

But then again, with that full understanding of God's judgment and God's grace and salvation, we see that he steps back at the end of that verse and he says, Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

He puts his faith in God. He knows that God will act out his plan in his time. In faith, Habakkuk accepts that God is at work.

He accepts that God is sovereign and he accepts that God offers salvation in the midst of this judgment. Habakkuk puts his faith in God. God is his focus.

Habakkuk looks at God as his Lord who has proven himself to be trustworthy, caring, merciful, and just. That is how Habakkuk landed on verse 18 with this response.

[ 17 : 04 ] Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Gospel living is joyful living, rejoicing in the God who is sovereign.

Gospel living is joyful living because we find salvation in Christ. So the question is, where does this idea of salvation come from? Again, we have to go back into Habakkuk.

3, verse 13, and we have a hint there. 13 we say, it says, you went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed.

So there is salvation. Habakkuk knows the scriptures. He knows that God has proven to be a God of salvation. Throughout the years, God has cared for his people.

He brought the Israelites up out of Egypt, freed them from slavery. When they were in the desert, he provided for them and cared for them. He gave them the promised land and gave them victory over their enemies in the territories surrounding them.

[ 18 : 05 ] God gave them a king who is powerful and gave them wealth and peace. God has proven that he is a God of salvation. If there is salvation, then we need to know what there is salvation, what we need salvation from.

And again, chapter 3 gives us that answer. Verses 9 through 11. I'll read that again for you. 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.

The flash of your glittering spear. The warrior is a divine warrior who came to unleash God's wrath. The divine warrior also comes to save his anointed.

So again, we ask the question, who is this divine warrior? We just completed a series in Revelation, so most of you should recognize the imagery here. If you don't, we point out in Revelation 19, we saw the rider on the white horse.

[ 19 : 15 ] At the end of that text, we learned that that rider on the white horse was called the king of kings and the lord of lords. So the divine warrior is none other than Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ himself will execute God's righteous judgment on those who have rejected him. He will crush the head of Satan, destroying him forever. The divine warrior judged the Israelites because they rejected God.

The divine warrior judged the nation of the Babylonians because they lorded it over God's people. The divine warrior will execute final judgment in the future.

The divine warrior will judge all of those who turn their backs on God and reject him and live their lives the way they wish to, even if they call themselves Christians.

The divine warrior will judge, but he will also show mercy to those who submit to Jesus Christ as their lord and savior. Jesus, our savior, did not come on the white horse.

[ 20 : 18 ] He came on a donkey. Christ descended from the throne in heaven, became a lowly person. He was despised, rejected, humiliated for our sake.

He paid the ultimate price, giving up his life on the cross so that those who believe and follow him as their lord may find salvation in him. The divine warrior is Jesus Christ, our lord and savior, who is sent by God the father to judge and to destroy the wicked nations, but also to gather up his people and his anointed.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Gospel living is joyful living because of the salvation we have in Christ. We move on to verse 19, find out what's going on there.

God the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer's. He makes me tread in my high places. Have you ever noticed when you take a look at a portrait photograph of an individual, the person is in sharp focus and the background is all kind of blurry.

You can't really tell what it is. Let's say the background is green. It could be the ivy on some building of an esteemed university or it could be one of those hideous backdrops in the portrait studio itself.

[ 21 : 37 ] The point is it doesn't really matter. We don't really need to know what the background is because we're looking at the subject in the photo. In a sense, that's what Habakkuk is doing here in these three verses.

In verse 17, he's got his lens focused on the background, the devastation that's sort of the backdrop. But he shifts his lens a little bit and focuses on God in verse 18.

And then when he gets to verse 19, we have a complete balanced photo of the glory of God, the sovereignty of God and life in faith in God. So let's take a look at this full, complete, balanced picture in verse 19.

We'll go ahead and take a look at the, there's like three segments here that we can look at, I guess. God the Lord is my strength. In Habakkuk, Greece refers to God as his rock in chapter 1, verse 12.

God is called a rock because he's unchanging. In Psalm 18, David also calls God his rock because he is his refuge.

[ 22 : 41 ] He is his shield. He is his salvation. Habakkuk places his faith in an unchanging, all-powerful God. In the next section, we read that he makes my feet like the deer's.

This is an interesting image. Usually it's imagery used to indicate sure-footedness or swiftness in battle against the enemy and there are no missteps here. Habakkuk clings to God's promises because he knows that God will keep him on the path of righteousness.

God makes him quick afoot to avoid, to outrun, to outmaneuver any wicked that pursue him. He makes me tread on my high places.

High places are places where God meets, where the people meet God. High places are where we want to be when we're in battle. We want to take that hill. We want to be able to take that position of advantage where we can see the enemy coming.

We can tell what his strategy is. We can anticipate his next move and victory will be ours when we're in the high places. The high places are where God meets his people.

[ 23 : 50 ] He came down to Mount Sinai to speak to Moses, to speak to Elijah. But in reality, there is no high place like the highest of high places when we're at the feet of Christ, at the throne of heaven, where God's anointed from every nation, every tribe, and every tongue will gather to worship and sing his praises forever and ever.

This is where we want to be, in the high places with God, sure-footed in faith in the God of our salvation as we maneuver the temptations of this world.

Kevin reminded us last week that gospel living includes sharing the gospel. Habakkuk shuddered in the light of God's coming judgment.

Do we understand fully the coming judgment? Do we take it seriously? We should. Again, we just finished a series in Revelation and those images should be fresh in our mind of God's wrath coming.

Do we realize that there's hundreds of thousands of people here in this city who have either rejected God or haven't even heard the gospel? Do we care enough to pray and to reach out to them and share God's gospel with them?

[ 25 : 04 ] We're talking about the 312 program. This is a good time to remind you again. If you haven't put the names on those cards, keep praying, identify three individuals that do not know Christ and commit to praying for them.

Gospel living is being Christ-like, living holy and pure lives. Habakkuk was one of God's anointed. He was righteous. He lived a life that was holy and pure.

How are we doing as a church? Are we living lives that are holy and pure? Do you realize, and this is something that I learned from Dave Kamara, our friend, who helped me understand this a couple years ago, that there really are no private sins.

Any sin that you commit in private, behind closed doors, in secret, have a direct impact on the fellowship of this church, on the church in general? Do we see ourselves in the observations of Catalyst's lyrics?

Do we do like the Israelites, bring in the pagan practices little by little, turning our backs on God, rejecting him as we bring in more and more pagan practices into our daily lives?

[ 26 : 12 ] They experience the wrath of God, and how are we going to measure up to that? Kevin also reminded us that prayer and God's word are key aspects of God's gospel living.

Habakkuk was a man of prayer, as we could see over and over, today even, and even he knew the scriptures. That becomes evidence as we read Habakkuk more and more. He approached God.

He wrestled with him in prayer. He knew the promises of God, and he knew that when he was looking at these images in verse 17, that that was not the fulfillment of what God has promised yet.

Just like David kept his faith in God when he was standing in those desert caves, even though he was anointed king of Israel. Are you a man or a woman of prayer?

Do you know the scriptures? Do you wrestle with God, or do you just mindlessly recite blessings at the dinner table? Do you look at your surroundings and circumstances and try to filter them through God's word?

[ 27 : 13 ] What does God's word have to say about this downward economic turn that we're experiencing right now? What does it say about the classism, the racism in the cities? Do you know that God is sovereign?

He has kept his promises throughout history. As we read God's word, that really becomes real to us. Let's meet with God in prayer. Let's spend time with him in his word.

Let's listen to what he has to tell us as we read God's word. We need to refocus our lens on God. Habakkuk kept his eyes on the Lord.

He was at the watchtower waiting for God to act. He was looking for God. He was actively looking to see what God would say to him. He knew about God's acts of salvation because he knew the scriptures.

He knew God's promises and put his faith in those promises. He kept his eyes on the Lord. Habakkuk tells us that gospel living is joyful living no matter how desperate our circumstances appear to be.

[ 28 : 15 ] How do your circumstances influence your response to God? When they pound that foreclosure sign in the front yard, all your belongings are in the dumpster in the driveway, do you stand up and say, yet I will rejoice?

I know it's not easy. When you get that pink slip, and I've been there, I've experienced that, and I don't know that I was strong enough to stand up and say, yet I will rejoice. But our circumstances shouldn't matter.

Yeah, if we've experienced salvation in Christ, they just don't come close to what we've experienced there. Our circumstances shouldn't matter.

How could they in the light of salvation in Jesus Christ? How can they in the light of the wrath of the divine warrior when he comes to destroy the nations who oppose him?

If you've experienced salvation through Jesus Christ, then rejoice in your salvation. If we deserve the full force of God's judgment, yet we barely escape with life because God sacrificed his son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf so that we may have salvation.

[ 29 : 21 ] Too often, we turn our focus on the background and our circumstances become overwhelming. We need to, our God is out of focus, God is fuzzy, we need to put God back into focus.

If your faith is weak, your joy is gone, your surroundings appear bleak and hopeless, then go back and meet with God face to face. Adjust your lens, put your focus back on God.

Wrestle with him in prayer. Ask him the tough questions with directness and humility, with anticipation that he will answer. Meet with him as he reveals himself through his word.

Stand firm in faith in God of your salvation, no matter how desperate or how good your situations appear to be. Gospel living is joyful living.

Rejoice in the God of your salvation, for he is truly good. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we rejoice in the salvation that you offer us through your Son, Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 26 ] We are by nature sinful and live our lives in selfishness. It is only by your grace that you have reached out to us and offered us salvation. May we not take this salvation for granted.

Instead, let us rely on your strength to live lives that are holy, pure, and righteous. Lives that are fitting for your anointed. May the joy of your salvation overflow from our hearts that non-believers can help but notice the difference that you make in our lives.

May our common, sinful nature give us compassion on those who have not heard your gospel message. May we rely on your strength so that we can be courageous in reaching out to the lost, offering them your salvation so that they will not experience the full force of your wrath.

May we guard our lives so that we remain holy and pure, so that your church remains holy and pure. May we know the scriptures so that only your truth goes out of this church from the individuals and from the pulpit.

We pray these things as we rejoice in our Lord, our Savior. Amen.