

Habakkuk 3:16-19

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[0 : 00] I'm sure I share Dave's sentiments also when I say we are honored to serve you as pastors of this congregation. Let's pray, and then we'll get into the word.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your goodness to us. We bless you and we honor you. We pray, Lord, that as we wrap up our series today, that you will use this message as well as the other messages in the series to bring glory and honor to yourself, strength and faith and well-being to your people.

We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. We're at the end of what could be considered to be a relatively obscure book, a book that begins with the prophet's dialogue with God.

That dialogue is a conversation that is really studded with questions. It is with bold honesty that Habakkuk, earlier in the book, laid out his complaints before God.

He was a man who was observing the very dark side of human nature that was running rampant. Wickedness and injustice and violence prevailed.

[1 : 27] And from Habakkuk's perspective, the Lord was not doing anything about it. And thus we hear the prophet's complaint.

Chapter 1, it begins verses 2 through 4. Then, when the Lord's answer didn't bode well with Habakkuk, the prophet raised more questions.

That's how the book began. As today's text will show, the book that begins with questions ends on a significantly different note.

And in between the beginning of the book and the end of the book of this short prophecy, we've learned, we've really learned several lessons along the way.

Here's one of them. Questions for God are okay. It's okay for you. It's okay for me to ask God's questions.

[2 : 35] Such is the nature of lament. You see that in other places of Scripture where the worshiper, the believer, the person of faith comes with pain in heart and questions in mind and just sort of pours out their heart before God.

That includes questions. But here's the deal. If you have questions for God, make sure that you are prepared to listen to God's answers.

Sometimes, I don't know if we're just vent, but if you're legitimately and honestly asking God questions, be prepared to listen to what He has to say.

Those with questions for God must be good listeners to God. And those, and this is what we see in today's text.

Those who listen well end up worshiping well. Those who listen to God's answers well can end up worshiping before God's God well.

[3 : 52] Last week's text, and it was good to see we were refreshed with that even through our reading and that led into our preaching time today.

But what it did, it amounted to a refresher course on the way that God had worked for the salvation of His people in the past. Really, that's what we see in the earlier verses of Habakkuk chapter 3.

God had worked mercifully and mightily and powerfully subduing forces greater and mightier than His people.

Huh? Those in relationship with Him. God, in a sense, had flexed His muscle on behalf of His people of old. What a mighty God we serve.

Huh? What the Lord had done in the past provided a sneak preview of the judgment that He would execute on the Babylonians, but not before.

[5 : 00] In His sovereign wisdom, He would use the same Babylonians to bring discipline on His people. Huh? Remember, that was the complaint. God, your people are not doing right.

Okay, Habakkuk, I'm going to send these other people to take care of, to discipline my people. Wait a minute, Lord, you didn't hear me right.

That's the way that God was going to work. And you know what? That didn't change from the beginning of the book to the end of the book. So in verse 16 of our text, Habakkuk chapter 3, we see the impact of what was to come on the prophet Habakkuk.

Huh? It really, if you really look at this whole passage here, though Dave touched a little bit on verse 16 on last week, it probably can properly belong, though it is, it could be considered a hinge verse that goes both with the section before as well as what follows.

But we see here that Habakkuk, we see the impact of God's answer and what, on Habakkuk as far as what he had seen.

[6 : 15] Together, the four verses include the following things and you might want to take note of this. Verse 16, we see the prophets trembling. Huh?

In verse 17, we see the prospect of trials. Prophets trembling, verse 16, the prospect of trials in verse 17, a posture of trust in verse 18, and in verse 19, we see this picture of triumph.

What about the prophets trembling? A two-pronged judgment was on its way. Huh? And what Habakkuk had seen, it really left him absolutely stunned.

You see that in the text? I hear and my body trembles. My lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones.

My legs scumble beneath me. Huh? Wow. What an impact of this word of judgment on the prophet Habakkuk.

[7 : 36] The sentence had not changed. And the ungodly nation would be the instrument of discipline, but the nation Babylon itself would, in its own day, have its day of trouble.

Judgment coming on God's people, but also judgment coming on the instrument of discipline that God used to chastise his people. In verses 3 through 15 that Dave preached on last week, Habakkuk was lyrically and poetically reminded how the Lord had gone about to deliver his ancient people of old.

Again, you see those various images largely, it's of Exodus kind of imagery that we see there, but what the Lord was doing to his prophet, he was really giving him this refresher course on God's might and power.

The God of heaven, the Lord of hosts, had all the resources at his disposal and he would use them according to his wisdom and in his power for the deliverance of his own people, but also for the discipline and the destruction of his enemies.

The prophet's response to these things, he is absolutely stunned. The rehearsal that we see there of the deeds of the divine warrior shook Habakkuk to the core of his being.

[9 : 10] It was like a personal earthquake of sorts. That was his response. He was shaken and you see that all the way from his head to his toe, down from his lips, his body responding to what the Lord had said.

It was absolutely overwhelming. But there was a second reaction and we see that in the last part. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble.

Now, here's the deal. While he was personally stunned, his faith was actually strengthened. Listen to those words of faith and trust that we see.

I will quietly wait for what? The day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

His faith was actually strengthened in the midst of that. These are words of faith and trust. There would be an invasion by the enemy, but there also would be a day of trouble for the enemy, and justice would be served on both accounts as we go back to chapter one.

[10 : 23] Discipline for God's people, on it by an ungodly nation, but then God's discipline on that ungodly nation. What Habakkuk had seen and heard in chapter three, God's response to him, quicken his faith, awaken his faith in God.

While there had also, on the one hand, been a bodily reaction, there also was a faith reaction, a faith awakening in the prophet on the basis of God's rehearsal of his awesome and mighty deeds that he had done in ages past.

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

On the one hand, we see the prophets trembling in verse 16, but here in verse 17, we see the prospect of trials that are on their way.

But in the midst of that, do you hear? the resolve of the prophet. The coming of the enemy would have devastating consequences for the people of God.

[11 : 51] The forecast that we see here, friends, was not a fair weather forecast. Rough times were indeed on the way for God's people. And based on the warfare tactics of that day, Habakkuk could just about predict how the enemy was going to come in and what was going to happen even to the land in that day.

Notice the picture. It's a picture of devastation. A wrecked agrarian economy is what we see there. Did you notice the negatives in the text?

The thick tree would not bud. No fruit on the vine, olive oil, and grain would not yield their products.

no herd would be in the stall. Again, as the enemy would come into the land, would literally wreck and undo the economy of the nation in that day.

Figs and fruit, and fruit of the vine, and olives, and grain, and livestock. These were the very things that sustained the lives and the lifestyles of the people of that day.

[13 : 02] it's interesting, one writer notes that here we see an ascending order of things, from the least essential things like sugary figs, to the more basic things like cattle that were used for milk and plowing and food and wool from the sheep, an economic disaster was in view in the text that we're reading.

Tough times. trials. Trouble. Whether because of discipline or otherwise, are not new to people of faith.

Habakkuk and others before him and after him have wrestled through their doubts and questions, and in some way, they have come to confident resolution in spite of trials.

Notice the text. You see, though, back in verse 16, you see the yet that is there, and then the though and the yet that is going to follow.

In other words, in spite of the dark and dirty and dungy kinds of things that may happen, there's a confident resolution that is going to follow.

[14 : 27] if you're familiar with scripture, you know about some of the other tough situations in the Bible. One of the favorite ones, of course, is in Psalm 23.

As many of you can quote it. What is it? Though I, what, walk through the valley of the shadow of death. That's a very uncomfortable place in life.

Though I walk through that, I will not fear. Why? Because you're with me. Your rod and staff, they comfort me. The psalmist in Psalm 46 speaks about, speaks of several those.

Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

And then he falls as Selah. Though all of these earth-shaking kinds of things have a way of weaving and working their way into my life, we will not fear, we will trust in the Lord.

[15 : 40] I love Paul in 2 Corinthians. He said, so we do not lose heart. And here is one, as one who has crested the age of 60, we know we start to lose certain things, but this is the way Paul puts it, so we do not lose heart.

Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Though, those situations in life may not always work out or work the way that I think they should work or work the way that I plan that they should work.

Though, February celebrates African-American history in our country, and one of the areas of very significant African-American contribution has been in the songs of faith and trust.

One such confident resolve is a song by a person by the name of Douglas Miller. A very soulful kind of song.

[16 : 55] Dave, you talked a little bit about Bach and Beethoven. This is from the brothers. Yeah, though, the storm keeps on raging in my life.

Think about it. this may be where you are. And sometimes it's hard to tell my night from day. Still, the hope that lies within is reassured.

As I keep my eyes upon the distant shore, I know he'll lead me to the blessed place he has prepared.

there. But if the storms don't cease and just in case the winds keep on blowing in my life, my soul has been anchored in the Lord.

Oh, I realize sometimes in this life we're going to be tossed by the waves and the currents that seem so swift.

[18 : 12] But in the word of God I've got an anchor that keeps me steadfast and immovable despite the tide.

Any storms raging in your life? do you have confident resolve in spite of the nature of the winds and the kinds of winds and storms that you may be facing?

Huh? Oh, there are so many storms of life. There are things that you and I can fill the blanks with. Sickness and disease and unemployment, you name it.

though your faith and mine will be challenged by the absence of certain things and also by the presence of certain things in our lives.

But what's your resolve? Try this one out. Though earth-shaking events invade my life, my faith in God will not be shaken.

[19 : 26] Is that your kind of resolve? In a sense, that was the prophet's resolve in the text. The prophet's trembling, verse 16.

The prospect of trials, verse 17. But look at verse 18. For it is there that we see this particular posture of trust.

Though all of these things happen in verse 17, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

This particular verse has been called one of the strongest affirmations of faith in all of Scripture. Specifically, this is what it says, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

You hear the prophet's resolve? He's going to rejoice. His commitment, in spite of the prospect of the eventual presence of trials, was in fact, to indeed be joyful.

[20 : 33] Joy here, it's not based on circumstances. It was based on the one who was in control. His was a resolve to rejoice regardless. And you've got to understand these words here.

These are not just casual kind of words. These are very strong words. Rejoice and take joy. The meanings were to jump for joy and to spin around with overflowing emotion respectively.

That's what we're talking about in this particular situation. The object of the prophet's joy was none other than the Lord Yahweh himself, who was designated in chapter 1 verse 12 as the Holy One and the Rock.

In chapter 2 verse 13, his title there is Yahweh Sabaoth. That means that he is in charge of all of the forces of the universe. He is the one who has worked well on behalf of his people, chapter 3 verse 2, and for the salvation of his people, chapter 3 verses 8 and 13.

That was the object of the prophet's faith, the Lord himself. Even when stripped of all earthly possessions, the person whose faith is in the right person can indeed be joyful.

[21 : 59] The right man, Luther put it well, didn't he? We're not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. You ask who that might be? Christ Jesus!

It is he, Lord, Sabaoth is named from age to age the same, and he must win the battle. Has your faith found a resting place?

Should it be in anything or anyone less than the one who has provided and gone on for the salvation of his people? A person's trust is only as good as the reliability of that object of faith.

And if your faith here today is in a thriving economy, when the economy fails, your joy is gone too. If your joy is people-based, when the person is gone, your joy is gone, but the person in verse 18 is eternal and he is eternally good.

He's unchanging, and thus placing one's faith and trust in him is the best you and I could ever do. With these things, no wonder the prophet Habakkuk could rejoice.

[23 : 18] Take joy in the God of his salvation. But note finally, and this is a long finally, okay, the picture of triumph that we see in verse 19.

Look at the verse with me. God, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like the deers.

He makes me tread on my high places, and let's not forget to the choir master with string instruments that's tagged on there. What's the picture that actually comes into focus in verse 19?

It is that of the sure-footed speed and agility of a gazelle. And it is said that gazelles are so fast, they're so swift that a greyhound is in danger of dropping from exertion, chasing after a gazelle.

That is pretty fast. A deer can move swiftly and agilely through a dark forest. So with the strength of the Lord, the prophet would be able to navigate, and God's people able to navigate difficult situations.

[24 : 46] Furthermore, the strength that the Lord provides is pictured by the treading on high places. And there the picture is one of victorious possession and government of the land.

It's a picture of triumph over one's enemies, of ultimate triumph of God's people. Huh? But here's the deal. The triumph of God's people needs the trust of God's people.

And I really want you to see something here in this particular passage in all of chapter 3. From what we see in verse 19, and in other places in this chapter, it appears that Habakkuk's praise was likely influenced, it definitely was influenced by other places in the Old Testament, but specifically it seems like Psalm 18 could have been particularly in view.

So the question that I would ask, and I'll take you to a couple of passages there, is was he in fact meditating on Psalm 18 in the process of his communion with God?

Was he praying Psalm 18 as he cried out to God? Was David of old's experience, did that inspire his praise?

[26 : 13] Did Habakkuk's coming before the Lord in desperation include coming before the Lord with scripture that may have informed his prayers as well as his praises?

Could likely have been the case. So turn to Psalm 18 in your Bibles. I just want to show you a few of the connections there with this ancient psalm and Habakkuk's prayer and praise that we see in chapter 3.

Notice in Psalm 18 and 33 the reference to the deer's feet in verse 33.

He says, matter of fact, let me just start at verse 31. For who is God but the Lord and who is a rock except our God?

The God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.

[27 : 25] Now, of course, this is not the only reference in scripture as far as the sure-footed deer, but it's here. But you combine this with what we see elsewhere. Look at verse 6 and following because there we hear echoes of the language of Habakkuk chapter 3 verses 3 through 15.

Look at verse 6. In my distress I called upon the Lord. To my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice and my cry to him reached his ears.

Notice, the earth reeled and rocked. The foundations of the mountains trembled and quaked because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth.

Glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens and came down. Thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew. He came swiftly on the wings of the wind.

He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him. Thick clouds, dark with water. Out of the brightness before him, hailstones and coals of fire broke through the clouds.

[28 : 37] Several places in the psalm we see references to God and being the source of salvation. Particularly, note, Psalm 18, verse 50.

Notice what he says. Great salvation he brings to his king and shows steadfast love to his anointed.

Now, compare that back to Habakkuk. Compare that with Habakkuk 3 and 13. You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation, there it is, of your anointed.

You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. It seems like, for Habakkuk, coming before the face of God in prayer, included engagement with God's word.

The question I would ask, should it be the same for you and me when faced with life's perplexities and challenges? And in your questioning, in your lamentation before God, may it be informed with what thus saith the word of God.

[29 : 56] The lens through which we must view and see and understand the Lord who is indeed at work in this world, in spite of what you and I may be able to see, the lens through which he needs to be approached is through his word.

So when you and I are faced with the ugliness and the messiness and the confusion of life, come before the Lord with prayer as well as with scripture.

Could this have been the point, the actual point of adjustment and refocus for Habakkuk in this book? Through prayer and the word he was brought before the fair face of God in whose presence is the fullness of joy and at whose right hand there are pleasures every more.

So what does that say to you and me? Take it and read it and pray through it and take it, God's word, and read it and trust in the one who is featured in the word from Genesis through Revelation, even the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised seed of the woman who at Calvary crushed the head of the serpent.

Take it. Read it. One more thing.

[31 : 43] There's final directions, aren't there? Who needs to get the song? And what kind of accompaniment is needed? Imagine with me the following scene.

A music minister looks through his files and comes across this particular song from Habakkuk 3. This song could be entitled and owed for tough times.

It could be any day, any area, because tough times have a way of showing up unannounced. The song that we've been looking at is just right for seasons of distress and grief.

It's a song to sing when times are tough, yet it's not the blues, because it points to a sure solution, the very God of salvation.

So the prophet who came on the scene with mourning leaves the pages of scripture with a song, a song to be delivered to the music minister, a song that's been passed on to us.

[32 : 56] Yes, the kind of song that belongs in the repertoire of church music. It's an ode, but it's an ode for tough times, times like the one that many of us find ourselves in now.

How was it that the prophet with questions at the beginning of the book landed as he did at the end of the book? How did the prophet come to this resolve? And listen, he didn't come to it by being passive.

His perplexity led him to the prayer closet, the place of speaking and talking and listening to God, and also from what we see rather clearly in chapter 3, his perplexity led him also to the pages of scripture and made challenges that you and I face in our day, do nothing less, may it do it today and tomorrow in the days and months and years to come.

The triumph of God's people need the trust of God's people. And one of the ways that we do that is by rehearsing the very deeds of God, both in biblical history as well as in your life and in my life.

The book for us lays out the pathway to the prophet's faith and trust. This exercise of coming before the face of God was therapeutic for Habakkuk and it can be the same thing for you and me.

[34 : 21] In the process, the Lord, who seemed so small and so distant at the beginning of the book, loomed larger than the messy situation that confronted him in his world.

And may you find him nothing less than that today. Here, once again, basic Christianity, we're reminded of the power of prayer and scripture.

Strip those things away from the people of God. And what do you have? Prayer and scripture and song and has a way of revitalizing the faith of God's people.

Why is it? Because the righteous live by faith. that. And may your questions, friend, lead you to God.

May your questions lead you to God in prayer. And may your praying be informed by scripture. And may your faith be strengthened in the one who himself is our savior, even Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[35 : 29] That's my prayer for you. that's my prayer for myself. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we give thanks unto you for Habakkuk comes on the pages with prayers.

He leaves the pages with praises because his faith has been strengthened in you. Lord, may our faith be strengthened in the midst of challenging times, times that we can't iron all the wrinkles out.

Oh, God, may our faith in you be unshaken. May there be strengthened resolve, Lord, to trust you.

May the faith of your people be strengthened. And Lord, though we may not get the answers we want, may we find the God that we need. That's our prayer.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.