

Though the Fig Tree Should Not Blossom

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[0:00] We've had a couple of Sundays of looking at the little book of Habakkuk, so I'll give you a time to find it. If you're a veteran at finding it, you'll kind of know where to go.

If you haven't been here the past couple weeks, that's okay. Habakkuk's kind of right in the middle of your Bible, a little bit to the right of the middle. And it's one of the minor prophets, easy to miss, but I'm sure you can find it.

It's a powerful little book. It's punchy. If you haven't figured it out, it's kind of like the book of Job boiled down to three chapters. It's pretty great. Instead of 40 chapters, you have three. It's a lot nicer.

But Job is very powerful as well. Helping God's people deal with disappointment and sorrow and realizing that God is on his throne.

So, where have we been? Well, chapter 1 introduced us to Habakkuk. He's a questioning prophet. He's having a conversation with God.

[1:04] He's sending some text messages back and forth to God. He's saying, hey, God, why aren't you making things right? And God responds.

I'm going to make things right, but it's going to get worse before it gets better. And then Habakkuk comes back with, but why does it have to get worse before it gets better? How can you use worse things to accomplish better purposes?

How can you do that? But God doesn't give him a detailed answer, but he does give him a promise. He gives him a promise that as he trusts in him, as Habakkuk trusts in God, he will live through the bad things that are coming.

And not just live physically, but he will experience true life as he trusts in the living God. He'll outlive the judgment. He'll outlive the suffering.

He'll walk through it with life as he trusts in his God. And we know that for us as Christians, it's not about Babylonians breathing down our necks. It's about the reality of sin and death that faces us.

[2:09] And not just sin and death, but eternal judgment and hell. And we know that the beauty of the good news is that the same as Habakkuk's good news. As those who put their faith in God trust in him, God delivers them because he delivered up his son to have his judgment poured out on his son.

And so we who suffer in this life, we walk through life even as we suffer trusting in this good God who delivers us from every suffering, including eternal suffering through the one who suffered for us.

And then in chapter 2, Habakkuk got more details to how God was going to make things right. How God was going to use evil to accomplish his good purposes.

And he had an assurance that God is going to bring the woe of the wine of pride on those who drink it. And one day, God will make everything right.

He will soak the earth in his perfect glory, the knowledge of his glory. He will satisfy his perfect justice. One day, God is going to make all things right.

[3:21] The whole earth is going to stand before the sovereign one. And God will speak a word for good on those who trust in the one who was silent on their behalf.

Jesus, who went like a lamb to the slaughter, silent. He drank the wine of God's wrath. He drained it down for us.

And so we can have confidence, we can enjoy the wow of God's grace, knowing that we will one day have a full experience of the knowledge of his glory, even as we have an experience of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ in our hearts.

So that's what we've seen the past couple of weeks. It's been a very interesting journey. But now we come to chapter 3. And we're going to see how Habakkuk responds. God's been talking for a long time here.

Ever since chapter 2, verse 2, God has been speaking all the way up through the end of chapter 2. And now we're going to see how Habakkuk responds to this God who's sovereign, who brings judgment, who uses evil to accomplish his good purposes.

[4:35] God's doing all of this, and yet he's interacting with Habakkuk on this personal, gracious level. And so how is Habakkuk going to respond to this massive God, yet this personal and gracious God?

How is Habakkuk going to respond? How do we respond to this sovereign, yet personal God? We sing.

That's how Habakkuk responds. He sings. Chapter 3 is a song. Let me prove it to you. Look at verse 1 of chapter 3 and verse 19.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet according to the Shigianoth. And then verse 19, to the choir master with stringed instruments.

If you've read through the Psalms at all, those kind of terms will sound familiar. These kind of random musical terms, Shigianoth. This is a song written to the choir master to be performed on their version of a guitar.

[5:41] This is a song. It's a prayer. It's a song to be sung to the God who is both sovereign and very personal. The God who is beyond our understanding, using evil to accomplish his good purposes, yet intending good all the while and accomplishing that good all the while.

Chapter 3 is a song. Chapter 3 is a song that we can sing. A song of tremendous confidence in the joy-giving power of God's love.

It's a song of tremendous confidence in the joy-giving power of God's love. Now, I don't know about you, but when I think of being in pain and being disappointed and asking God big questions like Habakkuk is, worship is the last thing on my mind.

Singing is the last thing on my mind. My heart's not in it. And yet, that's where Habakkuk ends up. He ends up singing. And I think by the end of this chapter, I think we will too.

Something's changed in the prophet. But this is the prophet who is asking hard questions of God, bold questions of God. God, where are you? Why aren't you making things right? How are you going to use this terrible stuff to accomplish your good purposes?

[7:01] Now he's singing. So aren't you curious to see what happened? I am. Let's jump in. There are three M's. Last year we had three W's.

Now we have three M's. Three M's that are going to help us move through this passage. One's in verse 2. The other is in verses 3 to 16. And the last is in 17 through 19.

So the first M. Let's look at it. The first M is a plea for God's mercy. A plea for God's mercy. Let's read verse 2.

Here we see Habakkuk's razor sharp logic in action.

He knows what's going to happen. He doesn't understand it fully, but he knows that there's going to be judgment coming through the Babylonians, and it's not going to be pleasant. He fears God's work of judgment.

[8:10] Just cast your eyes across the page to verse 16. We get a feeling of how he's handling this news. Habakkuk's knees are knocking together anticipating what's going to happen.

It is not going to be pretty. It's going to be the most terrifying thing that's ever happened to Israel as a nation. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and Habakkuk knows it.

This is what he also knows. He knows that God is committed to his promises that he has made to his people. Remember what Habakkuk said back in chapter 1?

Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. He knows that God's sovereign judgment must happen, and yet he also knows that God will not totally abandon those who are his.

God is sovereign, but he is also merciful. He's full of love for those who are called according to his purpose. So what's the right response?

[9:25] Freeze in terror? Shrug in apathy? No. Pray. Run. Run to the one who is both sovereign and merciful. Can you imagine if God was sovereign, but he was not merciful?

That would be terrifying. Can you imagine if he was merciful, but not sovereign? He'd be good, but he couldn't do anything. But our God is both.

Our God is both sovereign and merciful to bring about his good purposes through evil, through judgment, through wrath, through hard circumstances, and yet he's able to remember mercy. He is able to look upon those who call upon him for mercy and show it. But what's the basis? What's the foundation for this plea for mercy?

Do you see that little word in verse 2? And your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years, revive it, your work. In the midst of the years, make it your work.

[10:30] Make it known. That word work. God has been doing something. God has been up to something. All the way from the beginning.

Way back in the Garden of Eden, when the whole drama started. The evil, the spiral of sin that Satan and Adam and Eve had begun. God started working.

And Habakkuk knows that this plan involving the Babylonians is part of that work. It's part of God's plan, but it's not all of it, and it's not the end of it. He says, revive it.

Bring it back. Make it known. Keep doing your work, God, of redeeming all things for the glory of your name and for the good of your people. Don't destroy your work. Don't destroy your people. Keep your good work going. Make yourself known as a mighty and merciful God. He's asking God to remember mercy in the middle of the chaos.

[11:30] He's resting on the merciful character of God, and he knows he can go nowhere else. He knows it's a solid foundation to stand on when life is falling apart.

So that's the first M. Habakkuk makes a plea for mercy. Second M is God's majestic salvation. God's majestic salvation.

Now, the sun is not shining right now. However, when it is, and you're in this room, and you can look back to that stained glass window, you should.

Because it's beautiful. There are, I don't know how many colors and intricate pieces of glass that are framed in this patterned yet kind of mixed up, beautiful arrangement, mosaic of glass that when the sun hits that, oh man, it is majestic.

It is glorious. And sometimes you can't distinguish one piece from another very well, but you get the overall majestic effect.

[12:42] Well, that's what the next 12, 13 verses are. There is a lot that's going to hit us in the next 12 to 15 verses as I read them. However, as I read them, I want you to get the majestic effect, just like you're looking at that stained glass window when the sun's shining through it at full strength.

Okay? So, listen to verses 3 through 16. Let's catch a glimpse of this majestic God and see what he's up to. Verse 3.

God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light.

Rays flashed from his hand and there he veiled his power. Before him went pestilence and plague followed at his heels. He stood and measured the earth. He looked and shook the nations.

And then the eternal mountains were scattered. The everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. I saw the tents of Kushan in affliction. The tents of the land of Midian did tremble.

[13:54] Was your wrath against the rivers, oh 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. 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. You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters.

[14:56] What a God. You catch some pretty cool, brilliant glimpses of his majesty, his power, his glory, his authority, his fierceness, his warrior-like might.

But there's a lot going on here, so let's ask a few questions. First, what's God doing here? Did you notice all the movement verbs in this passage?

Let's look at verse 3. God came. Okay, next. Verse 6. He stands to survey his enemy. Verse 8. He rides on a chariot. Verse 12. He marches through the earth. Verse 13. He goes out. Verse 15. He tramples the sea. I don't know if you noticed, but God's on the move.

God's coming. He's doing something, and he's moving somewhere. And you better not stand in his way. Pestilence and plague are before him. All he does is look at the nations, and they shake in their boots.

[16:05] That's what God's doing. He's coming. He's on the move. Second, why is he coming? Why? What's the purpose for him coming? Well, there's one word.

I wonder if you noticed it. It pops up two times in verse 13. Once in verse 8. Your chariot of salvation. Verse 13. You went out for the salvation of your people.

For the salvation of your anointed. God is coming to save. That's why he's coming. He's coming to save his people. He's committed to his people, and he's coming to save them.

You can read this passage, and you can be kind of freaked out, because God seems really scary. But the really cool thing is, when you read that word salvation, you know why he's sounding pretty scary.

It's not because he's angry at his people. It's because he's coming to deliver his people. The whole passage is a picture of God's intense, saving love for God's people.

[17:08] He's coming, and he's going to make things right, and he's going to deliver his people and pour out his holy fury on all those who are opposed to him and to his own.

But I don't know. There's some kind of confusion of, is this something that Habakkuk is talking about? God's coming to save his people in the past?

Is it in the future? Or is it in the future, or is it in the present? What's going on here? Well, there are a couple of clues that help us see at least that it's pointing to the past in some ways.

So let's look at those clues. Look at verse 3 and verse 7. God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran. There's some interesting names there.

Teman and Paran. Why is that important? Well, if you were an Israelite living in Habakkuk's time and you heard those two words, it would be kind of like for an American hearing the word July 4th.

[18:08] Words. July 4th. Immediately, we think independence. We think deliverance. We think freedom. Well, that's exactly what the Israelites thought when they heard those terms.

These were references to the exodus from Egypt. Deliverance from slavery. Let's look at verse 7. A couple of other names pop up. I saw the tents of Cushon and affliction.

The curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Cushon and Midian. These were enemies of Israel that were God used to oppress Israel during the time of the judges.

And that God delivered his people from them through different judges and deliverers that were raised up by God as Israel repented of their sin and came back to God.

So all of these names are pointing back to God's past deliverance, his past salvation. But why is Habakkuk remembering this stuff?

[19:07] He's not writing a history textbook here. He's naming these names for a purpose. And it's this. It's to remind God's people as they sing in the present.

All those who are going to be singing this song that Habakkuk has written, seeing it as a congregation gathered in the temple, seeking God's presence, seeking to be with their God, they're singing this psalm and they're remembering how God has delivered them from their enemies in the past in powerful, unmistakable, miraculous ways.

He has come to save them in the past. And for those who continue to trust him, he will come again to save them in the future. And he helps them to endure hardship in the present.

They know that he is committed to them in love. He will remember his mercy in the middle of chaos. And he will display his majestic salvation for them as they continue to trust in him.

But it was in the future. But he did come again, didn't he? Habakkuk's people were singing this in A.D. 600.

[20:21] Sorry, B.C. 600. 600 years before the coming of Jesus. Almost 3,000 years ago. But there was a time when God interrupted history.

God invaded history. God invaded time and space. But he didn't do it in a way like this. Instead, he veiled his majesty. He clothed and cloaked and hid his splendor.

He set aside his spear and his arrows. He came to deliver his people from their worst enemies. Sin, death, and the devil.

And Jesus, through his glorious suffering, he reigned over the ultimate enemy, death itself. He delivered his people. He set his sights on his own.

And he rescued them. He was the shepherd who laid his life down for the sheep. And he took it up again in majestic salvation. And by the way, he's coming again. He's coming again, but this time his majesty is not going to be cloaked.

[21:27] His glory is not going to be veiled. He's coming. And we're going to get the full show. It's going to be a lot like this. This has something to say to us as Christians.

To look forward to God's glorious deliverance one day. As we continue to put our trust in him. Even in the midst of sorrow and disappointment and hard circumstances now.

Because God has come for his people. And God will come again for his people. So, if you go and see superhero movies, I mean, they're cool.

They come and they save the day. But they have nothing on this God. He's the God who came to save his people. Okay, so he's just sung about the God who's coming to save his people.

But verse 16 reminds us that he's still facing something. I hear and my body trembles.

[22:27] My lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones. My legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

His situation hasn't changed. He knows stuff is still on the horizon. So how is Abacca going to respond? Well, the third M is this.

The first M, he pleads for God's mercy. The second M, God displays his majestic salvation. But the third M is this. And this hits us right where we're at.

The miracle of joy in the midst of sorrow. The miracle of joy in the midst of sorrow. Let's read verses 17 through 19.

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit beyond the vines. The produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food.

[23:26] The flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

God the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer's. He makes me to tread on my high places. This is such a crazy set of verses.

Let me just put this situation that Abacca just gave us. Let me put it in the modern day language for us. Even though my family is falling apart. I have no friends who care about me.

Even though I had to eat saltines last night for dinner. Because there's nothing in the refrigerator. And nothing in the bank account. And I got diagnosed with cancer last week.

I will still rejoice in the Lord. That's crazy. That is nuts. Abacca is painting a dark picture for his readers.

[24:30] He's preparing them for the sober reality that they are going to face in not a lot of time. Back then and up to about really the

industrial revolution 150 years ago.

Prosperity was based solely on that year's harvest. If the fig tree didn't blossom. If there was no grape harvest. No olive harvest. If the wheat or the barley fields didn't yield anything. If there's no cattle in the folds. No sheep in the stalls. Then you are facing total poverty and death. Famine. Total economic disaster. Everything falls apart.

We tasted that as a nation not too long ago. It was just a tiny little taste. We faced some unemployment. And it was hard. But nothing compared to this. Abacca is basically saying. If there is absolutely nothing good in my life. Nothing whatsoever. Then I will still rejoice in God. And he says. The crazy thing is. He says rejoice. Not trust in. Nor have faith in.

[25:24] Or even be content in. Or hope in. But rejoice. Have joy. He has joy in God. When there's absolutely nothing good. And everything bad in his life circumstances. That's nuts. It's nothing short of a miracle.

What would possess him to say something like that? Either he's nuts. Or. There's something so solid underneath him.

That not even death and poverty itself. Could rob his joy. What is it? Verse 18. I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

Does that ring a bell? What have we just been hearing about? God is the one who's coming to save his people. But it's not just the salvation. It's not just being rescued from hard circumstances. It's the fact that God himself is coming.

Habakkuk has just finished singing about this God. Coming to save his people. That's committed himself to their good. No matter what. And that is the source of his joy.

[26:30] When his whole world falls apart. He knows. That his God will not abandon his people. He will not forsake those who trust in him.

Even though he has nothing. He has God. And that is everything. Habakkuk knows that he is going to experience really bad circumstances.

It's going to be nasty. He's going to experience pain in every form. But he knows that this isn't the end. He knows that God is still for his people.

He knows that God is coming for his people. He knows that God has made promises that he will keep. He knows that even if it's beyond this life. God will preserve the righteous that trust in him. He knows that it's impossible for God to cease to be merciful. Even when God is flexing his muscles of justice. He knows that he will still have God.

[27:28] And he knows that if he has God, he has strength. He knows that God will be his strength. Verse 19. God the Lord is my strength.

He makes my feet like the deer's. He makes me tread on the high places. Jesus. I love nature documentaries. My wife will tell you that I really enjoy watching Planet Earth by the BBC. And there's this one part of this nature documentary where it shows these mountain sheep. These massive horns somewhere in the Himalayas. And they're fighting. These two male sheep are fighting over some female.

And they're basically hugging little slivers of rock on a sheer cliff as they fight, butting heads with each other. They're sure-footed.

They're able to tread on the high places. So much so that they're fighting. With confidence. If God is your strength, he makes your feet like the deer's.

[28:34] Swift. Sure. Graceful. As you walk through pain. If God is your strength, he makes you able to tread on those tight spots where you barely feel like you seem like you have a foothold.

He is your strength. He's the one keeping your foot on that tight spot. You might feel like you're tumbling off a cliff, but he is your strength. He enables you to walk with confidence.

Not in yourself. Heavens no. But in the one who remembers mercy. And the one who comes with majestic salvation. And the one who causes you to sing with joy when life is falling apart around you.

So all through the paths of this little book, we've seen how our God can handle our hard questions. And not only that, he can turn our hard questions into song.

But all the way through, I've been wondering if you're asking this question. Why does God bring all this about anyway? Okay, God can make me have sure footing on the tight spots of my life.

[29:47] That's good. He's my strength. That's good. But why does he bring it? Why does he cause suffering to happen to those whom he loves? To those who love him and those who trust in him? Why doesn't he just take us home?

Why for those who trust in Christ and we're already his, why doesn't he just spare us the hard stuff of this life? And just, once we get saved, we're out of here. Why does he bring this hard stuff? Well, the full answer to that question, I'm not even going to attempt to give. But I think Habakkuk 3 is a partial answer to that question. Remember, Habakkuk 3 is a song. It's worship. It's a joyful expression of profound personal confidence in a profoundly personal God. The God who delivers his own even and perhaps especially in the middle of pain. The God who allows them to sing even and perhaps especially in the middle of pain. Well, God brings hard things into our lives for many reasons.

[30:50] But I think it's the beauty of music arising out of chaos. Of joy coming out of sadness. Of light coming out of darkness. I think it's that that brings him our maximum joy in him and his maximum glory.

As we walk through the pain. But then we see in the middle of the pain that God is sufficient for our pain. We start singing.

He causes us to sing. And that brings him great honor and glory. And that brings us great joy. To know that our God is not only the God who is worthy of praise when things are going really well. And worthy of praise at the end of all things when all things are well. But even when things are not well. He is so worthy and sufficient of our praise. So let me conclude by offering us three ways to pursue that.

Three ways to pursue that joy. And they're based right off our three M's. So first. How do we pursue that joy that comes out of sadness? First, cast yourself on the mercy of God.

[31:57] Cast yourself on his steady mercy. There's an endless supply. God is a God who is loving and compassionate and tender toward his own.

And as soon as his own begin to call for mercy, he listens. So cast yourself on the mercy of God. Second, remember his majestic salvation in the past, in the present, and the future.

God has come for you. Jesus Christ has come for you. To set you free from darkness. To open your eyes and your blindness. To introduce you into your greatest good.

Fellowship with the living God himself. Jesus Christ has come for you. Remember that. But he's also with you in the present. His salvation is with you, available to you right now.

Through Jesus. As you trust in him. That song we sang, he is our good, good father. That's true for you right now. To deliver you right now because of Jesus. And he will come to deliver you in the future.

[33:06] One day, all will be well. He's making all things new. He's going to come. So he'll make all things right. Remember his majestic salvation. Get your eyes on that stained glass window of his majestic salvation.

And three, simple. Sing in faith. Sing in faith. Whether it's you're washing dishes. Whether it's you're washing dishes. In your house.

Vacuuming the floor. You're at work. You're driving in the car. You're with your screaming kids. Or you're here at church. And you don't really feel like singing.

Sing in faith. He enables you to sing in the midst of sorrow. Let me read a brief excerpt to close.

Written by a guy named Theodore Keiler. It's a beautiful little paragraph called God's Light on Dark Clouds. Just enjoy this. When God leaves a Christian without any trials.

[34:12] He really leaves him to a terrible danger. In the black forest of Germany. A baron built a castle with two lofty towers. From one tower to the other.

He stretched several wires. Which in calm weather were motionless and silent. When the wind began to blow. However. The wires began to play.

Like an eolian harp in the window. And as the wind rose to a fierce gale. The old baron sat in the castle. And heard his mighty hurricane harp.

Playing grandly over the battlements. So while the weather is calm. And the skies are clear. A great many of the emotions of a Christian's heart are silent.

But as soon as the wind of adversity. And difficulty. Smites the chords. The heart begins to play.
And when God sends a terrible hurricane.

[35:12] Pain of terrible trial. You will hear the strains of humble submission. And joyful faith. And even happy confidence.

And holy exaltation. Which could never have been heard. In the calm hours of prosperity. Brothers and sisters. May this be true of us.

May the strong winds of sorrow. And disappointment. Create beautiful music in our hearts. Music that expresses our dependence upon God's mercy. Confidence in his majestic salvation.

Past, present, and future. And the strength to rejoice in him. And sing. All because of Jesus. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you, Father. Thank you for your good answers. Thank you, Father. Thank you for your good answers.

God, thank you for your good answers. Thank you for your promise that you will sustain those who trust in you. thank you for your promise that you will be our strength as we walk on the high places thank you God for causing us to sing when our hearts are sad Father you know every person in this room you know their situation do that God for your namesake and for our good in Jesus name
Amen