Habakkuk 3:1-19

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Date: 24 July 2022

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[0:00] We've come to the end of our sermon series this morning. We're in the book of Abacut. And if you will open your Bible to chapter 3,! It's on page 935 of your pew Bible.

By way of reminder, the first chapter of Abacut was its complaint to God over the rampant sin and wickedness of Judah, to which God promised to use the Babylonians, if you remember, these wicked people, as his agent of destruction.
But Abacut complained again to God that God will use such wicked people who had no fear of him as agents of judgment. God assured Abacut that he sees all sin and injustice, even the Babylonians, and he will judge.
He will judge it all. He is, after all, the God who sees all as he sits enthroned in his holy temple before whom all the earth is to keep silence.
So if, as the prophet said in chapter 2, verse 14, that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the water covers the seas, how is that exactly to happen if wickedness goes unpunished in the world?
[1:31] That's the wonder and the question of Abacut. That's our question as well. We know that this is God's promise, that the world will fill with the knowledge of the glory of God. But we see wickedness and sin run rampant.

So if God's law is trampled upon and sinful rebellion increases in our world, how is it to happen that this will occur then?
God's glory will reign supreme. I think the answer lies in the promise of God. His promise to act in judgment against all who oppose him by trusting in themselves.
Remember Abacut chapter 2, verse 4, those people are the ones who are popped up, the unrighteous, the ones who are not upright in themselves.
But even within that promise of judgment against all unrighteousness, against all who would think to come to God in their own righteousness, in their own merit, there is also the promise of life, the promise of salvation to the righteous, those who live by the faithfulness of Christ.
[2:41] The righteous shall live by faith. We're reminded that all who go to Jesus for refuge and trust in him are counted righteous before God and are given eternal life with God.

So this last chapter that Abacut comes to, chapter 3, is kind of a response to all that God has revealed to him. It is, this chapter is a prayer song, actually.
And you can see that. The man of faith, in response to God's promise to act in judgment and salvation in the world, responds in this prayer song to God.
Notice the word, Shigenoth. I can't even, I don't know if that's the right pronunciation. In the first verse, we don't really know what that word means. At least, I've read, no one really knows what it means.
But it's a technical term of instruction, telling the temple priest how to set music to the psalm. This is why we know this is a psalm.
[3:43] This is meant to be used in liturgical worship in the temple. So it's a technical term to give directions how to set music to this psalm that is written by the prophet.

We see other proofs that this is a psalm because as you read through it, in verse 3, verse 9, verse 13, you see the use of selah in it, which is often found in the psalms.
And at the end, there's actually an instruction, a further instruction to the temple priest about how to use this. So this is Abakut's response to God's promise of judgment and salvation.
And it's a prayer. But it's also a psalm. Abakut has already written the vision, as God told him in chapter 2. Write it on a tablet. Make it known as God instructed him.

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But now, in this liturgical psalm, he teaches the faithful, that is us, how to respond to God's revelation. Anytime God speaks, we are indeed, as the end of chapter 2 tells us, we are to be silent. [4:52] We are to be attentive to his voice. We listen as creatures before its creator. But we are also called to respond to the word of God.

Our primary response to God when he speaks is to believe and trust his word. God has spoken to us supremely in the pages of Holy Scripture.
And so we sit under the revelation of God's word, the Bible. Remember that. We sit under it, not alongside it. We don't carry our Bible and then carry our newspaper and decide.
We don't carry, or we do not sit over it. We don't judge God's word. We sit under in submission to God's revealed word. And so, as we sit under it, we humbly assent.
We submit to God's word by trusting the one who reveals himself to us. The one who supremely reveals himself to us and reveals God to us is Jesus Christ himself.
[6:05] The final word of God. This word of God is the one who gave his body up to death on the cross. Proving God to be true to his word.

That he is just. God is just in judging the wickedness of the world. But that he will also, that he is also the justifier that is savior of the ungodly who place their trust in him.
How does he do this? He did this by drinking the cup of God's wrath meant for you and I. In doing so, he saves all who trust in him for salvation.
You know, there are only two people in the world. The sinner and the sinner who has been forgiven in Christ. That's not original to me.
I stole that from someone this Wednesday night Bible study. So, thanks Brian. But that's important to know. There are only two people in the world.
[7:13] The sinner and the sinner who has been saved by coming to faith in Jesus Christ. So, in this last chapter, Abacut, as one who has been promised life by faith in the righteous one, respond and tries to resolve the problem of chapter one and two.

And he sets his resolution and his commitment to his God to music and for us. You know, truth said to music often lasts longer in our memory.
We all know this. This is true in the world as it is in the church. I'm sure there are nursery rhymes or famous songs that you sang growing up that upon hearing even the first line of the music, it all comes back springing to your memory.
I remember vividly still as I think of the idea that song and psalms and memory scriptures, those familiar ones are things that stick with us.
I remember Deanna Nett who passed away almost a year ago now, but I think about this time last year as I started ministry among you, I was visiting her and my last visit to her was the day she went to be with our Lord and she was unresponsive for when I started reading the 23rd Psalm, she perked up and she started reading along with me and I know that later that day Pat and Ruchenne were with her singing hymns with her and in those familiar words of hymns set to music, the words of God, the truth about Jesus, our Lord, set to music, she found comfort and rest.
[9:05] So I think it's true for us in our old age when even memory has escaped us, we remember the truth of God's word in these intimate ways when they're set to music and we remember it from our young age as well.

This is why it's important to soak our children in the word. And I think it's for this exact same reason that Abakak sets his response to God's word, to song, that we may commit them not only to our heads but also embed them in our souls.
So as the 96th Psalm encourages us, we are to declare in song God's glory and his marvelous deeds in judgment and in salvation. So the theme of this last chapter ultimately is an elaboration of God's word in Abakak 2.4 which we've talked about is the inch point of this whole book that even though God promises cataclysmic judgment on Judah, he will also come and save his righteous ones, those who have committed in faith to God's anointed one.
This prayer of Abakak is really then, this psalm of Abakak is really then a prayer but also a song of God's triumph in the face of wickedness.
And God's triumph over sin and wickedness is also our triumph. It's the triumph of all who have placed their trust and refuge in Jesus Christ.
[10:49] So, as we ask Abakak's question in our day, we ask these questions often. Why does a good God allow evil to prevail so much in the world?

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Why does he allow his church to be persecuted and marginalized? Why are we, who are Christians, denied so much in this Christian life?
Why is the Christian life often sometimes one of deprivation and loss? Why is it so hard to war against the flesh, even as we're commanded to live in the spirit?
Why does our life in the world often get harder after we've come to faith in Jesus Christ? As we ask all these questions along with Abakak, this psalm will help us to grasp the answers and commit them to our mind and to our heart and ultimately to our will as we walk in faith and obedience to the God who promises to save.
Let's look again closely at the example that God gives us. First in verse 2, Abakak starts off by saying, I have heard the report of you. I've heard the report of your work, O Lord, and I fear.
[12:07] Abakak's acknowledged he's heard God. But when the faithful hear God, it's not only hearing what I hear is alone, but it's a word of God that we also accept within our hearts and submit to in our will.

That is what it means to hear God. We're not only hear with the hearing of the hear, but we accept it in our hearts and we submit our will to it. And that's what Abakak has said that he's done here.
And his response to God's word is to pray then to God that God will indeed bring his promises to pass. The faithful person prays for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.
That's the prayer of the faithful. So Abakak prays, God accomplish your will as you promised to do, as you've decreed it. Oh God, make your awesome deeds known to the world.
But accompanying that prayer for God's will to be done, for God's purpose to be accomplished in the world, accompanying the prayer for God's will to be done is also a plea for mercy.
[13:18] That God will be compassionate even as it comes in judgment to judge the world. That in his ride he will remember mercy. This is the prayer of the faithful person who not only submits to God's word but has an abiding relationship with God.

So Abakak prays according to his knowledge of God's character. This is a man who knows his God. He knows that God is indeed a righteous judge and a consuming fire but he is also a merciful and gracious God, abounding in steadfast love, not wishing that any should perish.
So Abakak's prayer is in accordance with God's word and in accordance with God's character. And as he copes with the reality of judgment around him and the reality of judgment on his nation, he turns to God in prayer.
I think we must learn, like Abakak, to come to God with our questions, with our uncertainties, with our fear of the unknown and the known.
In this case, Abakak now knows and has submitted to the judgment of God. God says, I will judge Judah, I will judge Babylon. Although Abakak is petrified and perplexed by it, he submitted himself to God's purpose and judgment.
[14:45] He even knows that the calamity that is about to befall Judah will not spare him. Yet he prays, knowing that the judgment of God is the means by which God will also bring his salvation.

He submits to God's rule and reign as a faithful subject. And we see that as he continues in verse 3 to 15, the prophet sees God coming in all his glory to save, even in the midst of judgment.
And the imagery that's painted for us in verse 3 to 15 is of God as a warrior, the one who fights and strips the wicked bare, while at the same time saving and delivering his people.
So even in the midst of judgment, he is able to see, that is, Abbaqaq is able to see with the eyes of faith, and he's able to hold on to God's promise that the righteous will live.
He trusts God that God will preserve his own in the midst of the cataclysms that he's about to visit on the world. How do we know this?
[15:52] We see that in the illusions that Abbaqaq gives in these verses. Abbaqaq is in some ways, he's actually remembering God's faithfulness in the past. He remembers God's saving acts towards his covenant people in the past.

All the illusions here are illusions of how God has delivered his people in the exodus from Egypt, from slavery in Egypt, in delivering them and bringing them to the promised land.
And conquering all their enemies. And I think this should be an example for us as well. As we await God's final coming in judgment and salvation, we take confidence in the history of God's redemption in the past.
This is the basis for our faith, at least for Abbaqaq's faith, and it should be the basis for our faith as well. That the God who was spoken in the past, the God who has accomplished its purposes

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without fail in the past, is the same God that has promised to come and will come in the future to judge and to save.
So Abbaqaq remembers God's saving act in Exodus. He remembers the redemption of Israel from centuries of slavery in Egypt, and deliverance by his mighty end to the promised land.
[17:15] God. And as he looks back to God's great deliverances from Egypt and from the Canaanites, he also looks forward and places his trust in the God that is mighty to save.

What do we look back to in our day? What great act of deliverance do we look back to? I think oftentimes when we are faced with the kind of perplexity that befalls Abbaqaq.
When we are faced with the questions of our age, where is God in the face of death and destruction and sin and wickedness, we ought to look back at God's great act of deliverance.
We look back at the cross. It is there that the full judgment for your sins and my sins was poured out. Judgment was poured out of the cross, on Jesus Christ, it is there that your salvation and mine was secured.
And it's there that a far greater redemption than the one in Exodus was wrought. Because, you know, sin and death are the great implacable, insurmountable enemies of man after all.
[18:34] But God in Christ defeated them there at the cross. God, that is the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, He is the chosen servant of God.

And He's the one spoken of in Isaiah 42 as meek and gentle. This is the one who comes to die for us on the cross. He's the one that's spoken for that He will not bruise, a broken reed He will not break, a smoldering wick He will not quench.
That is the nature and gentleness and tenderness of our God. But in that same chapter, they describe Him as that. In verse 13 of that same chapter, He's described as the warrior God who advances, who roars aloud like a lion and prevails over His enemies.
So this same God, who is gentle and lowly with us, is also the God who fights to save and deliver His chosen ones. Here is a picture of a God who is a judge and a savior.
This is the picture of a sovereign servant, the Messiah, in whose life, death, resurrection, and ascension, we have access to God as Father.
[19:54] So as we talk of God as warrior, as we talk of Him, as we think of Him as the one who goes before to battle and judge all the wickedness of the world, I don't want us to forget that this same God longs to show mercy.

He seeks to save all who cry out to Him. But that's just it. That's just it. You must cry out to Him. There is no salvation in self-dependency.
There is no escape from His judgment for those who are puffed up in themselves, those who are self-righteous. Grace is given only to those who come to an end of themselves, who truly know that the ark of salvation against the flood of God's judgment is Jesus Christ alone.
And to all who run to this ark of salvation, that is Jesus Christ, to all, there's a promise of salvation. So if you're here this morning, now is the hour. Run to Him. He is merciful and gracious to save. He will wash you clean in His blood and cover you with His righteousness.
[21:10] Run to Him. And there's a word for those of us who have already come to Him in salvation. Those who have come to, who have received the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

What more can we learn in this psalm of Abacut? We know that wickedness reigns in our world as it does, as it did in Abacut's world. It will seem that supremely, except for God's promise of intervention, there is just rampant, ongoing sin and wickedness in the world.
The world, in hatred of God's judgment and in hatred of God's righteous one, that is Jesus Christ, gnash their teeth in derision and in anger against God.
You know that phrase, gnashing of teeth, is often used in the Proverbs, in the parables of Jesus to describe those who have been cast into hellfire, into utter darkness. But the root of that word is actually not just, a gnashing of teeth does not only occur in hell out of despair and pain and anguish.
Gnashing of teeth also occurs when people are angry at God, are angry at God's word, or deriding God's word and God's law.
[22:35] So for example, in Psalm 37 verse 12, the wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him. Or even in Acts 7, when Stephen was preaching and proclaiming Jesus, the Bible said that the crowd was enraged and they gnashed their teeth at him.

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In their anger, they rushed upon him and stoned him to death. So in the same way, many after Stephen were not spared from the danger, from the anger of the wicked.
It has always been that the righteous are always oppressed and persecuted by the wicked in the world because they persecuted and killed the righteous one of God.
We should not expect that they would treat those who follow Jesus any less. So as Abba looks to the future and sings of God's triumph over his enemies, he recognized that he lives in a world where because he is a follower, faithful follower of this God, this righteous and faithful one, he is exposed to the wickedness of his world.
He remembers though, that God will judge. he is always remembering that. He rightly fears the impending wrath of God.
[24:05] Now, notice that Abba's fear of God is not because in verse 16 here, verse 16 to 19 at the end of this psalm, it is not because he is doubting God, it is not because he is doubting God's promise even in verse 16 to save the righteous.

It is actually he fears because he trusts God. He knows that God will accomplish what he said he will do. So in verse 16 to 19, we see a three-fold reaction of Abba's and Robertson's commentary was helpful for me to see this.
There is three reactions in this verse 16 to 19. In verse 16, we see a response of stunned awe from Abba's and then in verse 17, we see a recognition of the coming loss that will befall his nation and befall even the righteous in the land.
And then in verse 18 and 19, we see a committed resolution by the man of faith of joyful and trusting himself to God's word and God's purposes.
So Abba's was aware that judgment is coming. But you can imagine the fearful anticipation because this hasn't actually occurred yet. God has promised I will judge Judah.
[25:28] I will raise up Babylon. This is a prophecy of what is to come. I will raise up this wicked nation to judge Judah and then later I will judge Babylon themselves. So from the pronunciation of God's promise and impending judgment, Abba lives in fearful anticipation of God's impending judgment on his nation.

He knows it is inevitable since nothing can stop God's word from coming to pass. What God speaks comes to pass. But his response is that he is speechless.
He has an healthy fear of the Lord. He is gripped by this healthy fear. He knows that even though the righteous shall be saved, they will also endure the calamity that the Babylonians are about to bring upon Judah.
He knows that the righteous will be exiled from the land of promise even as the look and hope to the future restoration of God's people to that land.
But he knows that God is faithful. So even at the end of verse 16 there, even as he says I am shaken in fear, I am gripped by fear, he still says yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who will invade us.
[26:46] I will quietly wait. Now this isn't weakness on Abacus' part. It's not even passivity on his part. But it's a commitment of complete trust in God's word.

It's a commitment of trust and resting in God's purposes and plan. So oftentimes we think that trusting God's word, we think our activeness in the face of the wickedness around us is a sign of faith.
But oftentimes I think when the church in fear and in doubt of God's word tries to take matters into its own hand, tries to prevent God's purposes from coming to pass, or maybe even try to help God's purposes to come into pass by taking matters into their own hand, they're showing that they are actually doubting or fearing God's purposes.
But here we see the opposite. The man of faith waits upon God's word. He trusts God's purposes.
And then we see in verse 17, there's a recognition of the coming loss.
This is not sort of this Apollyannic vision that Abacut has. He says, though the fig tree should not blossom, though there will be no fruit on the vines, though the produce of the olive fail, that's famine and deprivation, though the fields yield no food, though the flock be cut up from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls.
[28:25] That's exactly what happened when Babylon came through. They annihilated and destroyed all that was in their path. Not only cities, but livestock, animals, people.

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But here is Abacut's commitment, even as he recognized the coming loss. Here's what one commentator says about Abacut's statement of faith.
He says that in sharp contrast with the spirit of complaint and unbelief that is manifested in Israel in the desert, Abacut here stands in sharp contrast to Israel's grumbling.
Because he openly recognizes the coming loss. He openly recognizes the deprivation of all the luxuries of life and life necessities that's about to befall the faithful.
But he believes nonetheless. The promised mercies of God to his people extend well beyond all material losses. Abacut's faith is not what have you done for me lately.
[29:32] Kind of faith. He's not a what have you done for me lately. Kind of Christian. You know those who follow Jesus for the loaves of bread and fishes he can provide. There are many who followed Jesus when he was on earth for those reasons.

There are still many who follow Jesus today for what he can provide for them. These people are described in the Bible as fair weather friends.
They're the ones that Jesus was saved to at the end of the age. Depart from me. I do not know you. You're workers of iniquity because they have no relationship with God.
Theirs is a shallow superficial discipleship of following. But the faithful like Abacut who have come to trust and love the giver of the gifts.
Not just the gifts in themselves. Those who have come to place their whole self in his keeping. Those are the ones who are promised salvation from sin, salvation from death, and a promised eternity in heaven.
[30:38] So we are called even in this age to take up our cross, to follow God because we know there's a promise of future glorification. But more so than that, Abacut finishes in this last verses.

He says, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Here God, he says, God the Lord. Look what he's saying. God the Lord is my strength.
He makes my feet like the deers. He makes me tread on my high places. He confesses that God is his joy and his strength. Oh that we may make the same confession.
That is the confession of the faithful in the midst of impending doom. This is not an empty confession. Abacut is not being naive here.
He's not a look on the bright side of life kind of guy. Abacut knows what's coming. He is travailed with God over it. He's placed his faith and future in God's hand.
[31:44] And he's not, neither is his commitment of faith sort of a fatalism masquerading as happiness. This is faith in the God who saves.

This is what it looks like. Brothers and sisters, we have before us a greater salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ. Abacut looks back at God's saving of Israel in Exodus.
We can look back at even a greater salvation at the cross. There, God conquered our greatest enemy. He poured out his life so that we might have freedom.
And as we look back at this great salvation, we are called to continue to trust and wait in the coming saving of God that will come at the end of the age.
We are called to put our faith in the God who comes. He is promised that he is coming at the end of history to judge the living and the dead.
[32:52] He is promised that he will come to call his home into his everlasting joy and rest. So we are called to trust his promise and trust your whole self to this God who saves.

Let us pray. Therefore, since you have been raised with Christ, strive for the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
Thank you, Jesus, that this is our hope, this is our confidence, that our life is hidden with Christ in God. Nothing in this world, no circumstance, not even death, can touch our life because it is hidden with Christ in God.
I promise, the promise of eternity with you is secured and is assured. Help us, Lord, to continue to trust your word, to trust your promises. Help us to stand firm in faith as your people.
[34:14] Help us to do so in the power of your Holy Spirit. No, we cannot do it in the arms of flesh. We pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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