

I will Wait and Rejoice

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[0 : 00] Well, in life, there are various things we rejoice in, isn't there? Last weekend, my son won his first game of basketball this season, and it was great rejoicing.

In fact, after losing so many games, I'm not sure who was rejoicing more, the children or the parents. It won't say anything about the fact that he actually had to drop a division before they won a game, but they won a game, which is very exciting.

But there are other things that we rejoice in in life, aren't there? We may not use the word rejoice, but it's what we do. When our football team wins, or when the kids sleep through the night, or when there's a good report from the doctor, or when we hear good news in the family.

In fact, when it comes to spring, I will be rejoicing. When it comes to my holidays in a couple of weeks' time, I'll be rejoicing. There are various things in life that we rejoice in, but what do we do when things are not good?

When there seems to be no good news? What do we do when life goes pear-shaped and it's full of suffering? How can we possibly rejoice then?

[1 : 09] Well, today we come to our third and final word from Habakkuk. And just to recap the story so far, you might remember there was injustice in Judah. And so on the next slide, Habakkuk chapter 1, we see his first protest where he cries out, How long, O Lord, until you judge the wicked in Judah and save your people, the righteous ones?

And God's first answer was a surprising one, you might remember. He was going to use the evil Babylonians to bring justice and to save the righteous amongst his people.

And so Habakkuk learnt the lesson that God is sovereign, even over evil, and will use it to bring good. But this surprising answer prompted a second protest or complaint on the next slide.

And so we saw from chapter 1 and 2 that Habakkuk cries out now, Well, how long will a holy God tolerate an evil people like the Babylonians?

How long until you bring justice, not just to Judah, but to the world? And God's second answer we saw last week was that there isn't a point of time when he will judge all evil and bring justice to the world.

[2 : 22] A time when God will put all things right, when everyone will know his glory, his rule. A time when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God's glory as the waters cover the sea.

And so until that time, though, we had to live by faith. And so the lesson for Habakkuk was to live by faith in our holy God who will put things right.

And now we come to chapter 3 today and Habakkuk's response to all this. And it seems like he's learnt those lessons that we just looked at. Because he gives no third protest or complaint.

Instead, he now moves from protest to prayer. Which brings us to point 1 and verse 1. Here we read that we have a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet.

And then it has this term on Shigunoth, which seems to be a musical term. Perhaps it's the name of a tune that went with these words of the prayer.

[3 : 23] In fact, we know this prayer is meant to be sung because it ends in chapter 3. Right at the end, it says, For the director of music on my stringed instruments. And so technically, this chapter is meant to be sung.

And so, Andre, do you want to come back up and sing it for us? No? Okay. All right. But I think it's a song for two reasons. First, it fits with the idea of rejoicing, which is where Habakkuk ends.

But second, songs actually help us to remember words, don't they? Have you ever had words stick in your mind because they are part of a song? The rhyme, the melody, the rhythm helps us to remember the words.

And Judah is going to need to remember these words. And Judah is going to need to remember who God is and Habakkuk's resolve. Because Babylon is about to invade them.

And life is going to go very pear-shaped. And so they're going to need to remember these words in chapter 3. And that's why I think it's a song. But the prayer itself actually starts in verse 2.

[4 : 29] Verse 2 says, He, Habakkuk, begins by recalling God's deeds, which made God famous.

And he stands in awe of these deeds in history. And then he asks, halfway through verse 2, which is technically the prayer, Repeat them, these deeds, in our day.

In our time, make these deeds known. In wrath, remember mercy. Habakkuk is praying that what God has done in the past, he will do again in the future.

When my children were younger, I used to kind of throw them up in the air and then catch them. I would catch them when they came back down. But that was when they were younger and lighter, and I was younger and stronger.

But when I would do that, they would say, do it again, do it again. Have you ever heard children say that? Well, in a much more serious way, that's what Habakkuk's prayer is.

[5 : 36] For God to do it again. To do these deeds in the past again. You see, Babylon is about to attack Judah as part of God's judgment on Judah. And so Habakkuk prays that God will remember mercy in that judgment.

That God would not forget his people. In fact, the word remember in Hebrew doesn't mean that he'll forget. The word remember means to act. Act as you have done in history. Act again like you used to save your people.

Well, do it again. Save your people in judgment or through judgment. Show mercy in wrath. And verse 2 says in our Bibles that Habakkuk wants God to do this in our day and in our time.

But the words in verse 2 there, in our day or in our time, are literally, it's on your outline, in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years, make them known, is what he literally says.

And that statement is much more general, isn't it? And I think it shows a much more contented Habakkuk who trusts in God's timing. As he will say in verse 16, he will wait patiently for the day of judgment to come on Babylon who's about to invade them.

[6 : 49] You see, he now has a patience and a contentment in God's timing. And so I think those words, those literal words, are much more helpful because Habakkuk's prayer is not necessarily that God will repeat these deeds in his day straight away, but in the midst of the years in God's timing.

What are these deeds? Well, Habakkuk remembers some of them now, which brings us a point to in verse 3. Verses 3 to 15 are a list of deeds remembered in somewhat poetic language.

So have a look at verse 3. He says, God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran, I say Mount Paran, but I think I'm influenced by Melbourne. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.

His splendor was like the sunrise, rays flashed from his hand where his power was hidden. Plague went before him, pestilence followed his steps. He stood and shook the earth.

He looked and made the nations tremble. And so it goes. Now here Habakkuk remembers various deeds of the Lord in history.

[7 : 58] But it's not particularly clear which deeds he has in mind. Though I think we can have a reasonable guess. And I suspect verses 3 to 6 or perhaps even 3 to 10 are referring to the Exodus where God saved his people from Egypt.

I mean, straight away in verse 5, you've got the mention of plague and pestilence, which reminds you of the plagues in Egypt, doesn't it? Even in verse 3, the mention of Teman and Mount Paran reminds us of places where God came from, is said to have come from, to deliver his people.

So let me show you, because this is less familiar. On the next slide is a map. And you might see there the red dot, which is Teman, and that's in the area or the region of Seir.

The yellow dot is Mount Paran, and the blue dot is Mount Sinai down the bottom. And so they're all kind of southeast of Egypt, if you like. God would come up from the southeast into Egypt.

And that's what Moses said God did in the time of the Exodus. So on the next slide, we read in Deuteronomy chapter 33, Moses said, The Lord came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir, the location of Teman.

[9 : 16] He shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones from the south or southeast, from his mountain slopes. Sure, it is you who love the people.

And Moses is talking about when God came to Egypt to rescue his people. And so on the next slide, what it's really saying is it came like a, you know, on the weather maps, you've got this warm front that comes in.

It's what kind of God did. And so this seems to be what Habakkuk has in mind with the mention of those same place names, the mention of plagues that went before him. Or even in verse 6, where he mentions how God stood and shook the earth.

You might remember at Mount Sinai, the whole mountain shook violently, it says. Or in verse 8 and following, where God rages against the waters. And in the verse 10, lifted up the waves on high and the mention of chariots.

It kind of reminds you of the parting of the Red Seas where Israel went through and the waters closed in on the chariots of the Egyptians. Now, verse 11, sun and moon stood still.

[10:21] When did that happen in the Bible? It starts with, it was when Josh and then Uah. Joshua, you remember this? Joshua made the stand. Are you with me? No?

That's when Joshua prayed that the sun would stand still. Okay, so you've got this list of deeds that Habakkuk remembers in this poetic language. And the point is, God has a history of judging nations and saving his people.

But it's not just the deeds of the Lord that Habakkuk remembers. It's also the Lord of the deeds. That is, he remembers God's character as well.

You see, as you look at what someone does, you get an idea of who someone is. And so as Habakkuk remembers God's deeds, he inevitably remembers God's character, if you like.

I mean, he's already started to talk about God in verses 3 and 4, God's holiness and glory and splendor and power. But if you look in verse 8 there, he actually starts to change the way he speaks.

[11:25] You see, before he was speaking about God in the third person. You know, he did this, God did that. But in verse 8, he changes to speak directly to God in the second person. You did this.

You did that. And as he does, he starts to talk more about God's character. In particular, God as a warrior who is mighty to save. And so it talks about uncovering his bow and calling for many arrows. It talks about spears and fighting and things like that. In fact, I think verse 12 and 13 is a good summary here. It says, In earth you strode through the earth, and in anger you threshed the nations.

You came out to deliver your people to save your anointed one. And he does that in this mighty way, which is picked up by this warrior language.

You see, Habakkuk remembers not just God's deeds, but God's character reflected in those deeds. That God is a mighty warrior who saves in a mighty way.

[12:31] Who will judge the nations and save his people. And so if God has done this in the past, if he has a tendency of doing this, if it's in his very character to judge the nations and save his people, then it gives Habakkuk confidence that God will answer his prayer to do it again.

That God will judge the nations and save his people again in the midst of the years. And so armed with that confidence, Habakkuk now resolves or decides he will wait for God to do that.

And he will rejoice even in him. So point three, verse 16. He says, I heard about this coming judgment on Judah and my heart pounded.

My lips quivered at the sound. Decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines. Though the olive crops fail and the fields produce no food. Though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stores.

[13:40] Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God, my savior. The sovereign Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to tread on the heights.

You see, here Habakkuk begins by speaking about and admitting that he is terrified about the thought of God's judgment coming on Judah. In fact, it makes him physically shake.

See verse 16. It leaves him with a heart that pounds, lips that quiver, legs that tremble. To use a modern expression, it leaves him quaking in his boots. Why?

Well, because he knew that while Judah deserved judgment, and we've seen that, those who were righteous among Judah are still likely to get caught up in the suffering of God's judgment.

And yet, he resolves to wait patiently for God to judge the Babylonians and to save a remnant of his people. And to put everything right, as God said he would in chapter 2.

[14:45] And if that's not amazing enough, he also resolves to even rejoice in the Lord. Even if everything goes pear-shaped. Even if everything is lost.

You see what he says? Though there is no fig, sorry, though on the fig tree it does not bud, there are no grapes on the vines for wine. There's no olives for olive oil. There's no fields that produce food.

Though there is literally nothing, he still determines that he will rejoice in the Lord. To put it into our perspective, it's like saying, though I suffer as a result of living in a fallen world, a world that is under judgment, Genesis 3, though I suffer because I live in a fallen world, though I find out that a loved one has cancer, though I have health issues myself, though I am lonely, though I lose my job, though I lose a spouse or a child, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

They're extraordinary words, really, aren't they? So how can Habakkuk say them? Well, four quick reasons which I've listed on your outline. It really summarizes the book.

First, he has learnt the lesson of chapter 1, that God is sovereign even over evil, and uses it to bring good. Second, he has learnt the lesson of chapter 2, that God will one day put all things right in the world at his appointed time.

[16:11] Third, he remembers here in chapter 3, the past deeds of God, the one who has saved his people time and time and again through judgment in the past.

And so he's confident God will do it again in the future. That's why in verse 18, Habakkuk calls God my saviour. And fourth, he also acknowledges here in chapter 3, that God sustains and strengthens him.

That's why in verse 19, Habakkuk calls God my strength. God enables him, you see, to walk on the heights, which is a picture of triumph. God strengthens him, you see, to persevere through suffering and to triumph over it.

And it's because of those four reasons, Habakkuk is able to rejoice in the Lord. And I take it it's the same for us. You see, we have the same God whose tendency is still to save through judgment, whose tendency is still to remember mercy in wrath, who is still mighty to save.

In fact, these qualities about God led God to the greatest of all his deeds in history, the giving of his holy son, Jesus, for us. For it is in Christ Jesus that we see the greatest expression of God remembering mercy in wrath.

[17:34] It's at the cross of Christ that we ultimately see God saving through judgment. You see, we, like Judah, deserve judgment because we too sin.

And yet God gave his only son, Jesus, to take our judgment in our place so that we could be saved from it. And so God saves us through the judgment that he took, that Christ took.

In Christ, God remembers to or shows mercy to us who believe. And so the first question for us this morning is, do you believe? Do you trust in the Lord Jesus?

For it's only by trusting in Jesus that we can receive mercy and be saved. And for us who do, then the greatest of all God's past deeds shows us that our future is secure.

I mean, if God was willing to give his only son for us in the past, then will he not also do whatever he needs to do to bring us home to heaven in the future? In fact, Paul writes this on the next slide from Romans chapter 8.

[18:40] He says, what then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with Jesus, graciously give us all things?

That is, all things we need to make it home to heaven. And so Paul ends, towards the end of that chapter, says, so even despite suffering, he says, we are more than conquerors because of God, through him who loved us.

God enables us and saves us, not from suffering but through suffering. And Paul knows that God will do that.

I mean, you don't give up your only son to die for someone, which is the hardest and most costly thing to do, only not to bring that person home to heaven, which is the easier thing to do. Paul is saying here that if God is willing to give up his own son to save us in the past, then you can be certain he'll give us whatever else we need to bring us home to heaven in the future.

And God will help us conquer or triumph over suffering. Like Habakkuk, he won't save us from it, but will always bring us through it into glory. And so because of this, Paul rejoices, which brings us to our second reading.

[19 : 57] So turn there in your Bibles and we'll finish there. So page 1181. Philippians chapter 4, page 1181.

So Philippians chapter 4, verse 4. It sounds a bit like Habakkuk, doesn't it? Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near, about to return. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Now, when Paul says, rejoice in the Lord, we need to remember that he's not on some sunny beach, enjoying life, going, yeah, rejoice in the Lord.

Paul is in prison and he's not sure if he's about to be executed. And yet, he can still write, rejoice in the Lord. How can he say that?

[21 : 16] Well, because he's learnt the lessons of Habakkuk as well. Habakkuk chapter 1, just like there, Paul knows God is sovereign, even over evil, and works for our good. And so that's why he says in verse 6, Or like Habakkuk chapter 2, Paul knows that God will one day send Jesus to return, to put all things right.

And so Paul says in verse 5, that the Lord Jesus is near. That is, his return is the very next thing on God's agenda. And so it is near.

As James says, Jesus is standing at the door, ready to return. And so you can rejoice in the Lord, that it's about to happen in God's time, in the midst of the years.

And like Habakkuk chapter 3, Paul knows that if God has saved him in the past, then he'll certainly bring him home to heaven in the future, like we saw in Romans. And also like Habakkuk chapter 3, Paul knows that God will sustain and strengthen him until God brings him home to heaven.

And so Paul says in chapter 4 verse 12 of Philippians, he says, I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I've learnt the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

[22 : 35] I can do all things through him who gives me strength. You see, both Habakkuk and Paul knew God and the Lord Jesus.

They knew the good things they had in him. They relied on him to strengthen them. And so even though life around them went pear-shaped, Habakkuk suffered as a result of judgment on Judah. Paul is sitting in jail, not sure if he's about to be executed or not.

Yet they still find reason to rejoice in the Lord because of what they have in the Lord. I was speaking to a member of this service, Graham Nichols, who many of you know.

And we were talking about our visits to Pauline Rash, who passed away earlier this year. And Alan's given me permission to speak about her. Now, for those who didn't know Pauline, she had motor neuron disease, which is a cruel disease because your mind stays sharp while your body decays.

And so for about two years, she was trapped in a decaying body. She could understand everything, but could not speak and towards the end could only move one hand. And yet, as Graham and I talked about our visits, we both found we had the same experience.

[23 : 44] You see, we would both go to encourage Pauline, only to walk away being encouraged by Pauline. And for me, it was that she was still rejoicing in the Lord.

She still smiled when you walked in. She still smiled, especially when you suggested we pray. She was absolutely certain of where she was going. As many of you know, the last words she was able to type with her hand were going home to Jesus.

He was someone who was like Habakkuk chapter 3, whose life went completely pear-shaped. And yet, she remembered what she had in the Lord.

And she still smiled. She rejoiced. She didn't deny her pain or resign herself to it such that she got depressed. Nor should she try and be stoic, you know, stiff upper lip and become grumpy.

Nor was it a kind of jumping up and down, sort of rejoicing. No, no. It was a deep, contented joy, which caused her to still smile, despite her pain.

[24 : 48] I don't know what you are facing in life at the moment. But whatever it is, do remember whom we serve. The God who is sovereign over evil and uses it for good.

The God who will send his son to return to put all things right. The God who has already given his son to save us. And if he's done all that, he'll certainly bring us home to heaven.

And the God who will strengthen us in the meantime. And so though the fig tree does not blossom, though the crops yield no food, though you suffer loneliness or loss of job, though you suffer sickness or loss of a loved one, we still have reason to rejoice in the Lord.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this minor prophet of Habakkuk, which teaches us major lessons for life.

And Father, I thank you for many people, not just like Pauline, but many people, even in this congregation today, who are continuing to rejoice in you, despite great pain and suffering in life.

[26 : 07] Father, help us all to remember who you are and what you have done for us in the Lord Jesus, that come what may, we can still rejoice in him.

Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.