

I will Wait and Rejoice

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[0 : 00] Well, that song picks up some of the themes that we're going to be looking at in our last passage from Habakkuk tonight. And if you're listening carefully to Michael's prayers, he also helpfully pointed out some themes that we're going to be looking at tonight as well.

There are times in life when we rejoice. We may not use the word rejoice, but that's what we're doing. We're kind of celebrating. If your team wins, whether it's basketball or online gaming, you kind of celebrate.

There's even emojis for celebrate. Is that right? I don't know. I'm too old. You might kind of rejoice over a good meal or dessert. You might rejoice when someone gets engaged or you get a good exam result.

Or when you get your license, you'll rejoice at those times as well. Well, it's what I'm going to do when I go on holidays, just 25 days to go from today. Not that I'm counting.

But what do we do when we suffer? Or when we see injustice in our world or face it in our lives? Can we still rejoice then?

[1 : 10] Well, today we come to, as I said, the third and final chapter in Habakkuk. And as we do, we'll see that despite the suffering that he is about to face, he can still rejoice.

And so we'll learn how to as well. But before we get to that, let me just quickly remind you of the journey we've been on, particularly if you've missed some weeks. And so in chapter one, Habakkuk has his first complaint or protest saying, how long, Lord, until you hear my prayer, my cry for help? How long until you save us? There was violence in Judah and there was wicked in Judah. And so Habakkuk wanted God to come and judge Judah's wicked people and save Judah's righteous people.

But God's answer was a surprise. God kind of said, well, look at the nations and be amazed. Why? Well, because from among those nations, I am raising up the evil Babylonians to come and judge Judah's wicked and save a righteous remnant group.

And this was so surprising. It led to Habakkuk's second complaint last week where he kind of said to God, well, hang on a second. You're too holy. You're too pure to look on evil.

[2 : 28] So why do you tolerate these treacherous Babylonians? And then in verse 17, is he, that is, is Babylon to continue killing nations forever?

In other words, when, God, are you going to judge Babylon and bring justice to our world? And it's, again, a complaint or a protest that we can relate to, as we saw last week, given the injustice in our world.

And God's answer was, well, guess what? I will. But at the appointed time. His revelation was about the woes of wrath for Babylon, which would happen at an appointed time.

And so Habakkuk had to wait for it. And just like we have to wait for the day of Christ's return when he will judge and put all things right in our world. And so until that day, we had to, like Habakkuk, live by faith in God who will bring it.

Now, it seems Habakkuk has accepted these answers. In fact, the name Habakkuk means to embrace. And so it seems he's actually embraced God's answers because tonight he no longer has complaints or protests.

[3 : 39] Instead, he now moves to prayer. So point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles. Verse one says, a prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, on Shigunoth.

We're told in verse one immediately that this chapter is a prayer. And then you've got that weird word afterwards, Shigunoth, which is probably a musical term. The footnote in your Bible suggests that.

And I think it's musical rather than literary because if you look right at the end of the chapter in your Bibles, notice there it says, for the director of music on my stringed instruments.

And so I suspect it's a musical term. Either way, this prayer is meant to be sung like many of the Psalms.

And so perhaps we should have got Joshua, wherever he is. Where's Joshua? However, maybe we should have got him to sing the Bible reading instead of... Do you want to go now? Do you want to come up? Next time.

[4 : 40] Okay, next time, next time. Yeah. Habakkuk's prayer is meant to be sung. And I think for two reasons, actually. At first, it fits with the idea of rejoicing.

Sometimes when you're in a happy mood, you put on some music and kind of celebrate with music. And people hum or whistle and the like. But secondly, and more importantly, I think, is that songs, music, helps you to remember words.

I mean, have you ever had a song stuck in your head the whole day, whether you wanted it to or not? You know that? Remember that song? That shark song? The baby shark?

Baby shark? Anyway. Anyway, I don't want to sing it because it was stuck in my head and I really hated it. But there's a more kind of more appropriate song, more edifying song, if you like.

This is one that I learned at Sunday school. So, yes, it is old, but kind of more uplifting. So, listen to this one. Yes, my contemporaries know that song.

[5 : 51] Thank you, Sue and Michelle. But it kind of gets stuck in your head and it's more edifying anyway. But I think that's why this chapter is meant to be sung, so that Judah, the rest of Habakkuk's people, will remember it.

And they're going to need to remember Habakkuk's prayer when the Babylonians attack. They're going to need to remember Habakkuk's confident request that we'll see in a moment, as well as his content resolve that we'll see at the end.

And so what is his request? Well, it's in verse 2. He says, Habakkuk prays that God will repeat his past deeds that made God famous and made Habakkuk stand in awe.

And those past deeds included saving through judgment. Or as he says, in wrath, remember or show mercy.

And so Habakkuk prays, repeat those deeds again. In wrath, show mercy again. Through judgment, save again.

[7 : 12] It's a bit like when my kids were little. I used to throw them up in the air and catch them. And they would say, do it again, do it again. And because they were my kids and I wanted to and because back then I was able to, I can't now, I would do it again and throw them up in the air and catch them.

Well, Habakkuk's request is for God to do it again, do it again. And he's confident that God will because they are his children. And he is their God.

Notice in verse 2 in your Bibles are on the screen that the word Lord is in capitals. Whenever you see the word Lord in capitals, it's God's personal name, Yahweh. This is the covenant name of God.

The name that he gave Israel was just for them, not for the nations. It speaks of God's covenant relationship with them, that he is their God.

They are his people. As Habakkuk will say at the end in verse 18, God, my Savior. Habakkuk uses his personal name in verse 2 twice to highlight it, to remind Israel that when they sing his prayer, they can be confident that God is willing to answer it because he is their God.

[8 : 29] What's more, he is able to answer. I mean, there's no point being willing to answer. You've got to be able to answer it as well, aren't you? And so to remind his people that God is able, Habakkuk now recites some of God's past deeds.

Point to verse 3 to 7. It says, God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount. I always keep saying Paran, but it's not Paran, it's Paran. 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. The ancient mountains crumbled. The age-old hills collapsed. But he marches on forever. I saw the tents of Cushion in distress. The dwellings of Midian in anguish.

And on it goes. Here, Habakkuk recites the deeds of the Lord in history. But he does so in like lyric form. You know how song lyrics, you know there's a meaning, but it's not always clear.

[9 : 34] And so even here, we're not exactly sure which events he's talking about or even if they're in historical order. But there's enough here to see echoes of the Exodus from Egypt to their promised land.

And so, for example, these names of Teman that was in Seir or called Edom. Mount Paran is south of Mount Sinai. It's where God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and sent him to Egypt to rescue his people.

And Moses himself says later on in Deuteronomy that that's where God came from to go and rescue Israel from Egypt. He came from these places. And so it is a reference to the Exodus, you see.

Or verse 5 talks about plagues and pestilence. Does that remind you of anything in the Old Testament? Isn't it like the 10 plagues that came on Egypt?

Or verse 10 talks about the idea of waters being lifted up on high. Can you remember an event where the waters kind of parted and lifted up on high? That's the parting of the Red Sea, isn't it?

[10 : 50] And then in verse 11, which we didn't read, you've got the idea of the sun and moon standing still, which reminds us of an episode in Joshua chapter 10 where Joshua is fighting some people in the promised land and God made the sun stand still.

And so there are these echoes here, I think, of the Exodus, Israel's rescue from Egypt to their promised land. But the point is Habakkuk recites these great deeds of the Lord rescuing them that they might remember he is able.

In fact, he doesn't just recite the deeds of the Lord. As he does, he also talks about the Lord of the deeds. That is God's character of power.

So verse 4, if we just skip backwards to verse 4 there, it talks about his splendor, missing the R on the screen, sorry, but God's splendor and power. And people only saw rays of his power when he parted the Red Sea and sent plagues.

The rest of his power was hidden in his hand, it said. In other words, God only needs, he's so powerful, he only needs a ray of power to do these mighty deeds. A pinky of power, if you like.

[12 : 04] The rest is hidden in his hand. Or verse 6, he's so powerful that when he stands in judgment, the earth shakes, the nations tremble, the mountains crumble, the hills collapse.

That's how powerful God is. What's more, he's a powerful warrior. And so verse 8 talks about him riding chariots.

That's military language. Uncovering his bow when calling for arrows. That's military language. God is a powerful warrior.

Today's historians all regard this guy as the greatest warrior in history, Alexander the Great, who spread the Greek culture everywhere.

We haven't got a Greek person with us tonight. Just talk to Tula. She'll tell you all about it. And he was a great warrior. Undefeated in battle, he was. Conquered the known world.

[13 : 05] And yet, compared to God, Alexander the Great is like a teeny tiny mouse. Maybe with some cute ears, but easily squashable. And since God is this powerful warrior, then he is able.

Verse 12 and 13 kind of summarize it for us. He's able in wrath to strove through the earth. In anger you threshed or judged the nations while you delivered, verse 13, your people.

Here is God in the past remembering mercy in wrath. For while he judges the nations, he saves his people using his anointed one.

Perhaps a slightly better translation of verse 13 is this, where it says, you went forth for the salvation of your people, for salvation with your anointed.

And the word for anointed here is Messiah. And so here is God saving his people with his Messiah. And notice, again, it reminds us that they are his people.

[14 : 18] Verse 13 says, for the salvation of your people. And so here is God, who's both willing and able to do it again.

This is why Habakkuk recites God's past deeds and character. To give his people confidence that God will answer his prayer. For if God was willing and able to save them in the past, then he is willing and able to save them again in the future.

Because they remain his people. And he remains completely able. And so armed with this confidence then, Habakkuk resolves to wait and rejoice.

At point three, verse 16. He says in verse 16. I heard 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 of Babylon invading us.

[15:26] Here Habakkuk now changes from speaking about God to speaking about himself, what he will do and how he feels. And he admits here that the thought of God's judgment on Judah terrifies him.

Verse 16. His heart pounds. His lips quiver. His legs tremble. In other words, the thought of Babylon coming to judge leaves him quaking in his boots.

Why? Well, because he knows that while the wicked in Judah deserve judgment, that's what he prayed for in week one, chapter one. There are some like him who will get caught up in it.

And the thought of facing such suffering makes him understandably quake in his boots. And so while God will use Babylon to judge Judah's wicked and save a righteous remnant, this saving is going to be a long and sometimes painful process.

It will be salvation through the judgment that's coming. First, Babylon attacks them and takes some of them captives.

[16:36] And then at the appointed time, God with his anointed one will judge Babylon and bring his people back to the promised land, just like he did in history.

And so Habakkuk resolves or decides to wait patiently for that day. He has learnt the lesson of last week to live by faith until the appointed time when God puts things right.

Even if that appointed time is after he dies, actually. His request back in verse two said for God to repeat these things in our day, but it's literally in the midst of the years.

which is much more general, isn't it? And it could actually come after his days, after he dies, which it probably was.

Because it was about 65 years later when God used King Cyrus of the Persians to conquer Babylon and release his people back to the promised land.

[17:40] We've got archaeological evidence of this, actually. And God even called Cyrus in Isaiah his anointed. The word is Messiah.

His anointed one, Cyrus. Here is God coming with his anointed one to rescue his people from Babylon.

Of course, Cyrus isn't the anointed one, is he? We all know that starts with G's, N's, N's, N's. Anyone? Oh, thank you, that one person at the back.

Excellent. Jesus, yeah. Either way, though, Habakkuk resolves to wait patiently for that day to keep living by faith even if that day comes after he dies.

But he resolves to do something even more than wait patiently. He will even rejoice. Verse 17 and 18. He says, Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

[18:53] I will be joyful in God my Saviour. These are extraordinary words when you think about it. He's saying, Though there may be a whole lot of suffering as he gets caught up in the judgment on Judah, though there may be no grapes for wine, no olives for oil, no crops for food, no livestock for meat in our terms, though there may be no Uber Eats or DoorDash, everything's gone, the internet's crashed, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

Even if I suffer starvation, even if I am taken, I will rejoice in the Lord. How can he say that? It's worth noticing at the start, by the way, that he rejoices not in his suffering, but in the Lord.

Do notice that. There is a distinction. But still, how can he do this? Well, first of all, because God is his Saviour. He knows God will save them, albeit through judgment, because if he did it in the past, he will do it again in the future, for they are still his people and God is still able.

And so he can wait patiently and even rejoice for God is his Saviour. But second, verse 19, God is also his strength.

The reference here to being like a deer, having the feet of the deer and treading on the heights is actually a quote from Psalm 18, where David is being pursued by King Saul and people are out to get him and David speaks of how God strengthens him to keep him trusting in God throughout it all, even find joyful contentment in the face of suffering.

[20 : 47] And it's the same for Habakkuk in verse 19, which is why he quotes it. The sovereign Lord is his strength, the one who helps him to keep trusting him, remembering that all things work for the good of those who love him and even find joyful contentment in the face of suffering.

This is why he can wait patiently and even rejoice in the Lord when life is hard. And it's the same for us, point four. Are you sure we don't have to live through God's judgment with Babylon, do we?

I mean, the nation of Babylon is not coming to invade us here in Melbourne. But we do have to live through God's judgment on this world, don't we? Because of sin, this world is fallen.

It's cursed. It's under God's judgment, as Michael said before in his prayers. As early as Genesis chapter 3, we are told this. God says to Adam, cursed is the ground because of you, Adam, because of your sin.

And although we are God's people, we still get caught up in it, don't we? We sometimes suffer the effects of this fallen world, whether it's disease or disaster or even death.

[22 : 02] And we still see injustice in our world and face it in our lives. And yet we too are to wait patiently for the day when God will come with the anointed one, not Cyrus, but...

Oh, excellent. We went from one person to five people. That's... But we'll get there. We'll get there. Yeah. Come with Jesus to judge the nation and save us fully. And not just spiritually, but also physically with a new body and a new heavens and earth, the new creation, which is our promised land.

Where there'll be no more disease or disaster or death. Where to resolve to wait patiently to keep living by faith until that day, just like Habakkuk did.

Even if that day comes after we die, like it probably did for Habakkuk. And we had to even rejoice in the Lord too. That's what we heard in our second reading from Philippians 4, rejoice in the Lord.

How often does it say rejoice in the Lord when? Always. Always. Doesn't that mean not just good times, but bad times too? That's what always means, doesn't it?

[23 : 13] And in case we haven't got the message, he says, again I say rejoice. And do you know where Paul was when he penned this? He was in prison. And the Roman prisons were much worse than the prisons are today.

Now this rejoicing is not about jumping up and down going, oh, I'm in prison. I know, it's not like that. It's about having a confident contentment because he knows the Lord.

It's about being a glass half full kind of person because of the Lord. But how? How can he do this? How can he wait patiently and even rejoice? Well, like Habakkuk, by remembering God is our saviour and our strength too.

God is our saviour through Christ. For through Christ's death on the cross, he has saved us spiritually in the past. And if God has done that greatest deed for us in the past, then we can be certain he will save us fully in the future.

That's the point Paul's making in Romans 8. It says, God who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not along with Christ graciously give us all things.

[24 : 26] All things there is not the car of our dreams or the house we want or things like that. All things refers to the things we need to keep going and to bring us to our promised land.

We do remember God is our saviour through Christ. If he has saved us in the past, he will certainly not let us go but will save us fully in the future. And God is our strength by his spirit.

For by his spirit he strengthens us to keep trusting him by reminding us of his word and the lessons we've learnt. And by his spirit God strengthens us by giving us peace when we pray as we heard in our second reading or reassurance when we read his word or encouragement as we gather.

even contentment when we suffer. As Paul goes on to say in that Philippians reading these well-known verses he says I've learnt the secret of being content in any or every situation.

And what is this secret? Well, it's the last sentence. It's relying on God for strength. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. You see, like Habakkuk, like Paul, we're to remember firstly that God is our saviour through Christ.

[25 : 47] He saved us in the past so he'll certainly save us in the future for we are still his people and God is still able. And we're to rely on God our strength by his spirit by praying and reading and meeting together.

And when we do those two things then like Habakkuk, like Paul, we can wait patiently and rejoice in the Lord even when we face hard times in this fallen world.

Let me finish with a story of one of our members who used to come to Nine O'Clock Church. She's since passed away, gone home to glory.

Her name's Eve. I used to visit her regularly. She couldn't walk. She lost the use of her legs and she was in care accommodation and so most days she would stare at her four walls of her room until they kind of took her out into the common area.

She did find it hard to wait patiently. She told me that sometimes when she woke up she was disappointed. Oh, the Lord hadn't taken me yet. When's he going to take me home, Andrew? That sort of thing.

[26 : 55] And yet, as we read the word together and prayed together, she could still wait and even rejoice in the Lord. For as we read the Bible, God's spirit strengthened her and reminded her that he is her saviour through Christ.

So he will one day save her fully and give her a new body. And it helped her to wait patiently and to rejoice in the Lord. She even said, I never really liked my legs, Andrew, so the thought of getting some new, better looking legs, that appeals to me.

You see, she remembered that God is her saviour, God is her strength and it helped her to keep waiting patiently. It wasn't always easy and to rejoice in the Lord. Remembering God is our saviour, relying on God as our strength enabled Eve, Habakkuk, Paul enables us to wait patiently and rejoice in the Lord even when life is hard in this fallen world.

Let's pray that we would do the same. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, help us to remember that you are our saviour through Christ. You have saved us in the past so you will certainly save us in the future for you are willing and able and help us to rely on you our strength by praying, reading and meeting together that by your spirit you will strengthen us.

Help us to remember you are our saviour and to rely on you our strength that we may wait patiently and rejoice even when life is hard. We ask it in Jesus' name.

[28 : 33] Amen. Amen. Thank you.