

When Things Don't Change

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- [0 : 00] What do we do? That's the situation that Habakkuk found himself in in chapter 3.!
- And pouring out his complaints to the Lord about how wicked the land of Judah had become and how God was idly watching and not doing anything about it.
- And the Lord told him, I am doing something about it. I'm raising up the Babylonians. And they will bring judgment on the land of Judah.
- And Habakkuk complained. He said, well, Lord, why are you going to do that? How are you going to use a people more wicked than the people of Judah to bring judgment on them?
- And the Lord did not answer Habakkuk right away. And we see Habakkuk taking the position in verse 1 of chapter 2 where he says, I'm going to stand and I'm going to wait to see what he's going to say to me.
- [1 : 23] And the Lord spoke to Habakkuk in chapter 2. And we considered that last week. The Lord spoke to him.
- And he told him essentially that the righteous are to live by faith. And that the wicked will be judged.
- And the Lord was saying to him, although I'm going to use the Babylonians to bring judgment on the people of Judah, I'm going to judge the Babylonians.
- But what you and all righteous people need to do is you need to persevere. You need to live by faith. You need to trust me in what I'm doing. And know that I'm going to punish the wicked.
- And the Lord in chapter 2 details how he was going to bring about that judgment on the Babylonians, who he would use to bring judgment on the people of Judah.
- [2 : 34] And what we see in chapter 2 is in five statements that begin with, woe to him, the Lord tells Habakkuk how he is going to bring judgment on the people, on the Babylonians.
- But this morning we've come to chapter 3. And it's the final sermon in this short series. And what we see in chapter 3 is Habakkuk's response to the answer that God gave him.
- So if you've not yet turned there, please turn in your Bible to Habakkuk chapter 3. And we'll be reading verses 1 through 19. Habakkuk chapter 3, beginning in verse 1.
- I'm reading from the English Standard Version. If you don't have a Bible, there should be one under one of the chairs nearby in front of you. So please use that and follow along.
- Habakkuk 3, beginning in verse 1. A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, according to Shigunah.
- [3 : 42] O Lord, I have heard the report of you. On your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years, revive it.
- In the midst of the years, make it known. In wrath, remember mercy. God came from Timon. And the Holy One from Mount Paran.

Selah. 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. Then the eternal mountains were scattered. The everlasting hills sank low.

[4 : 50] His were the everlasting ways. I saw the tents of Cushion in affliction. The curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

Was your wrath against the rivers, O 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.

[5 : 59] 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.

Selah. 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. I hear and my body trembles.

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 the people who invade us. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fig, nor fruit beyond the vines.

[7 : 14] The produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no fruit. 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 dears. He makes me tread on high places. To the choir master, the stringed instruments.

Would you pray with me? Father, thank you for the privilege of having your word and hearing your word. Would you speak to us now as only you can?

Lord, you know what we need? And whether we are gathered in this place this morning, or we are listening by live stream in this moment, or we would listen in the days ahead.

[8 : 25] We trust your providence to speak to all of us. Lord, you know what we need to hear from you.

Lord, you help us now to posture our hearts that we might hear and heed your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Well, notice that last week, the last words of the Lord that we considered from Habakkuk chapter 2 is in verse 20.

In his response to Habakkuk, these are the last words that Habakkuk heard the Lord say. But the Lord is in his holy temple.

Let all the earth keep silence before him. In verse 20, the Lord seems to be saying to Habakkuk, I, the sovereign Lord, have spoken.

[9 : 39] And what I have said, I will do. And now let everyone keep silence. He's saying to Habakkuk, I've heard your complaints.

I've heard your doubts. I've heard your objection to me using the Babylonians. But I'm going to do that. Now let all the earth keep silence before me.

The sovereign Lord has spoken. But for Habakkuk, things have not changed. Despite his objection, the Lord is still going to use the Babylonians to bring judgment on the people of Judah.

And he and everyone else. God calls. God calls. To be silent. As we conclude this sermon series this morning.

from the book of Habakkuk, here's what I want us to consider. When the Lord has spoken, how should we keep silence before him?

[10 : 50] I think in Habakkuk chapter 3, we have a faithful example of how we can and should keep silence before the Lord when he has spoken and things have not changed.

And in our remaining time, I want us to consider three faithful ways of doing so. First, we should keep silence by praying.

That's what we see Habakkuk doing after hearing that despite his objection to the Lord using the wicked Babylonians, God was going to do so.

And we find Habakkuk, in response to that, praying. Now I know this seems a bit odd because you would think, well, praying is not being silent.

So clearly what the Lord is saying in verse 20 of chapter 2 is not to be absolutely silent in terms of say nothing.

[12 : 02] Because if that were the case, Habakkuk would be disobeying what the Lord said. Instead, the silence that the Lord is calling for relates to the complaints that Habakkuk made in chapter 1.

Where he is doubting the character of God. He is questioning the ways of God. And now the sovereign Lord has spoken. And he is telling Habakkuk what he is going to do.

And now that he has spoken, Habakkuk needed to be silent about his complaints. But again, not Habakkuk, only the whole earth. When God has spoken, we keep silence.

Humbling ourselves before him. Submitting ourselves to him. Because he does all things well. And so here in chapter 3, Habakkuk is now the one who is formally doubting and formally questioning.

He's quieted his heart. And now he's praying. And more than praying, what Habakkuk is doing is he is worshiping the sovereign Lord. Bible scholars tell us that in verse 1, this word, Shigianoth, is some kind of a musical notation.

[13 : 21] And what we see, especially when we look at verse 19, the ending part of it, where he says to the choir master with stringed instruments, we see that Habakkuk is doing more than praying.

He's singing. He's singing. He's singing. Habakkuk, this is a psalm. It fits the form of the psalms that we find in the books of psalms.

Habakkuk is praying to God, but his prayer is in the form of a psalm that was written to be sung. And these are the words of a man who has been humbled before the Lord who has spoken.

These are the words of a man who is now seeing the Lord very differently in chapter 3 than he did in chapter 1. And it's transformed his response.

He's doubting and questioning in chapter 1 and here in chapter 3, he's worshipping and trusting. And this change is rooted in the fact that Habakkuk is now reflecting on his knowledge of God, of the sovereign Lord who has revealed himself in history.

- [14 : 33] And he's reflecting on God's mighty work. And he's expressing his reverence for God. And here in verse 2, we find the only requests of Habakkuk in this entire chapter, the only requests that we find him making are two things.

Two things in chapter 2. He petitions the Lord about his work and his wrath. He asks the Lord to revive his work in the midst of the years.

He's saying to the Lord, I've heard about you, heard about the great things that you've done. Oh Lord, would you revive your work in the midst of the years? Would you do in our time what you did in times past?

And then knowing that God is going to bring judgment, he says to the Lord, he says, Lord, remember mercy in the midst of wrath.

Those are the only two petitions that Habakkuk is now making of the Lord, that God would reveal himself in his works. And that the Lord would remember to have mercy in the midst of his wrath.

- [15 : 43] In verses 3 through 15, Habakkuk recalls and recounts the Lord's mighty appearances in judgment. And victory over his enemies on behalf of his people.

The language recounts some of the major events in the history of the nation of Israel when God revealed himself in power and glory and in judgment.

So, for example, in verses 3 through 7, it seems to be pointing to when God appeared to the children of Israel at Mount Sinai, which is recorded in Exodus 19, verses 18 through 20.

And then in verses 8 through 10, he seems to be recounting the powerful crossings of the Red Sea and the Jordan River. In verse 11, he seems to be pointing to that great day, that great victory that Joshua and the children of Israel won at Gibeah against the Ammonites, against the Amorites, sorry, when God caused the sun and the moon to stand still so that they can fight and completely vanquish the enemy.

And what he helps us to see is that even though Israel fought these battles, he says it was the Lord who was really fighting for them.

- [17 : 10] God was the one who fought and brought about the victory. In verse 12, Habakkuk praises the Lord as the one who judges the nations of the earth, showing that he is the sovereign one.

The only one who is fit to judge is the one who is the sovereign Lord. He judges the nations. Habakkuk recognizes this.

Remember how the Lord told him in chapter 1. He says, look among the nations and see what I'm doing. He says, the Babylonians who are coming, he says, they're not coming in a vacuum. I'm raising them up.

He's recognizing that the sovereign Lord has a right to judge the nations. And then in verse 13, Habakkuk recites the reason that the Lord has done all of this.

Look at what he says in verse 13. 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.

- [18 : 17] This is all very figurative language, but he's speaking about a God who acts on behalf of his people, a God who brings salvation to his people. God has revealed himself in majesty and in power, and he has acted for the salvation of his people.

This is the focus of Habakkuk's reflection. This is what he considers as he prays to the Lord, the Lord who has spoken. He is in awe, and he is amazed at God.

I mean, think about this. This is such a contrast. This is Habakkuk, who is in chapter 1, saying to God, God, you're not just.

How could you look on wickedness and not do anything? And God says what he's going to do. He says, God, how could you do that? That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Why would you use a nation more wicked than us to bring judgment on us?

That's not the back that we see here. God has spoken. He's made all the difference. And now he's reflecting on God as he is. You know that song, I can see clearly now? You can see clearly now.

[19 : 34] He's seeing the Lord as the Lord really is. And he is in awe, and he is amazed at God. And he's praying.

And he's submitting himself to God. And he's not complaining. Now, those of you who may be tracking with the first sermon and hearing this this morning, you may be wondering, well, I remember somebody saying to me as we were leaving on Sunday, two weeks ago, saying, I'm so glad for that message this morning.

I said, why? He said, because I know I could bring all my complaints to God. I could just pour my heart out to him. And I know hearing this this morning that the Lord is saying, let all the earth keep silence before him.

You could wonder, well, could I really do that? Yes, you can. Yes, you can do it exactly as Habakkuk did it, as he poured out his doubts to the Lord, as he poured out his complaints to the Lord.

But when God speaks, when God responds to those complaints, let all the earth keep silence. And we shouldn't consider that strange, because I think those of us, for example, I am pretty sure to the person this morning in this room, we've had our parents say to us, I've spoken, and that's it.

[21 : 08] I don't want to hear another word from you on that. And if mere mortals like us will take that, where we've heard, we've heard, we've been heard out, or we hear our children out, and once we've heard them out, we say, okay, that's it.

You can complain about something else, but don't complain about this thing. I've spoken on this one. And so, yes, we can pour our hearts to the Lord. Yes, we can bring our doubts and our complaints to the Lord that we don't understand and we don't see.

But when God speaks, let's be silent. And you know, one of the other things about it too, is that in time and over time we grow.

And when we're minded to complain, when we're minded to doubt, we remember, you know what, God did speak. And it seems like what he said then could really inform what I need to be hearing right now.

So I just want to help us to understand no contradiction there. It's on this particular issue now. We need to be silent when God has spoken. Bring something else, but he's spoken on this one.

[22 : 20] So let everyone keep silence before him. But praying is not the only way that we keep silence before the Lord when he has spoken.

The second is what we see Habakkuk doing. Not only do we see him keeping silence, we also see him waiting.

Well, not only praying, sorry, but we see him waiting. He's not only praying, but he is waiting. And that's what we see him doing in verse 16. Look at what it says in verse 16. That's what Habakkuk is doing.

He is now waiting. Waiting. And notice what has happened to Habakkuk is he has become overcome by the majesty and power and awe of the Lord as he has powerfully revealed himself.

And he is connecting here in verse 16 what he says in verse 2. Notice in verse 2 he says, O Lord, I have heard the report of you. He's now concluding and saying, I hear, in verse 16, I hear, and my body trembles.

[24 : 00] As he recounts this all-powerful, all-sovereign, unmatched Lord of the universe, acting in history as he has acted in undeniable ways of powerful displays.

He says, it affects me. My body trembles. My lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters my bones.

My legs tremble beneath me. That's the effect of one who has caught a glimpse of the sovereign Lord, revealed in history, and the sovereign Lord who has spoken to him.

That's why when people just say to me, oh, you know, the Lord spoke to me. I saw this, and they're just casual about it. I say, yeah, really? No, when God shows up, when God gives us a revelation of who he is, and that's what we see in the pages of Scripture.

People are undone. People are affected. And that's what we see Habakkuk experiencing. He says, I hear.

[25 : 14] I tremble. My lips quibber. Rottenness enters into my bones. My legs tremble beneath me.

Habakkuk ends this by saying, yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

This is the one who complained about the Lord doing this, and now he has come to a place of rest and trust and submission, and he says, God, I'm going to wait.

I'm going to wait quietly for the day of trouble to come upon the people who invade us. It appears that the invasion had already started.

It appears that the sovereign Lord had fulfilled the first part of his word in allowing the Babylonians to bring judgment on the land of Judah.

[26 : 19] And we see Habakkuk waiting, not complaining, but waiting, waiting for the Babylonian invasion to end and waiting for the Lord to bring judgment upon them, waiting for the day of trouble that the Lord said he would bring upon them to happen.

Brothers and sisters, when God has spoken, part of the way that we keep silence before him is waiting. Not complaining, not questioning, but waiting.

And I think it's one of the things that generally we don't do well. I certainly don't do it well. Don't wait well.

I think it's true for most, if not all of us. We don't wait well. But you know, the truth is this. The harder it is for us to wait, the more difficult it is for us to wait, the more we need to learn to wait, it seems like the longer we are made to wait.

You know, sometimes when we can get people to move a little faster by, you know, being anxious and rushing them, oh, the Lord. He's the sovereign Lord.

[27 : 48] He knows what we need. And so when we are anxious and don't wait well, it seems like we are made to wait.

But you know what? Even in waiting, waiting is not in a vacuum. Waiting is not in a vacuum. When God makes us wait, God is having us to wait on Him, but at the same time, God is working in us.

God is working on us as we wait. And He's using the waiting to conform us more to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's using the waiting to cause us to be more patient, to cause us to be more trusting. And the good news is He knows our frame.

He knows we are dust. And He is good and kind and compassionate towards us. And when God has spoken, we should keep silence by waiting.

[28 : 58] But that's not all. When God has spoken, not only should we keep silence by praying and waiting, but third and finally, like Habakkuk, we should also keep silence by rejoicing.

that's what Habakkuk resolves to do in the midst of all the uncertainty that he faced from the invading Babylonians.

Look at how he says it in verses 17 and 18. verse 17.

salvation. Destitution and starvation and the loss of all the agricultural investments was what Habakkuk and the rest of the people of Judah were facing.

These were very real possibilities for them as the Babylonians were invading them. The Babylonians were plunderers. And in the time of war, producing food in the fields and maintaining animals was just very difficult.

[30 : 28] You stood to lose every single thing. And in the face of possible starvation and financial ruin, as Habakkuk fervently prays to God and as he quietly waits for the day that the Lord would bring judgment on the Babylonians, he wholeheartedly determines to rejoice in the Lord and take joy in the God of his salvation.

So let's not forget, despite Habakkuk's objection to the Lord using the wicked Babylonians to bring about his judgment on the land of Judah, God didn't change his plans.

So Habakkuk's circumstances in a sense really haven't changed. But he keeps silence. And he submits to God's way and he determines to rejoice in the Lord and not in his circumstances.

And how wise is that? That is so wise because our circumstances are always subject to change. Our circumstances are never the source of true joy.

And here we shouldn't get the picture that what Habakkuk did was he decided to dance around and jump around and say I'm going to rejoice in the God of my salvation.

[31 : 52] That's not the picture at all. As a matter of fact, the very language tells us that's not what Habakkuk is doing. He's resolving to do something because he doesn't feel like doing it. It's not natural for him.

There's no part of his being that wants to rejoice in that kind of jubilant outward way and display.

Habakkuk resolves to rejoice in the Lord and the God of his salvation pointing to the true source of his joy and the true satisfaction of his soul no matter what.

No matter what. And I think for us we could easily read over verse 17 and not make much of it because we just don't identify with losing stuff in the field, losing animals.

We don't identify with that. But we can take that into modern terms. And we can say if I lose my job, if my business goes from underneath me, if I'm on the brink of poverty and starvation, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

[33 : 17] I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Habakkuk was fine with God doing things the way that he had chosen to do them.

he was going to rejoice instead in the God of his salvation. Friends, this is not natural, nor is it easy, but it is the source of true joy.

And what Habakkuk did is what we really are called to do. It should be the same for us. And I wonder this morning, what situations have you prayed about?

that remain unchanged and may not change. And about which you like Habakkuk and I like Habakkuk need to say, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Is it healing that hasn't come despite many prayers? Is it financial difficulties challenges?

[34 : 31] Perhaps relational challenges? Is it marriage that seems unlikely to happen or even last? Perhaps it's the hope of a child that's growing dimmer by the year.

Or maybe it's something else. God has to love God but in the fallen world where none of our lives is as we would want it to be perfectly, every one of us who put our trust in Christ have an opportunity to say, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. And how is this possible? How is it possible to do this?

And again, let us not minimize what Habakkuk was facing. He very well could have had tears in his eyes but he had joy in his soul because the joy of the God of our salvation is true joy.

It's what Jesus talks about when he says, he talks about it in the form of peace when he says, peace I give you, I give you a peace that the world cannot give and the world cannot take away.

[35 : 57] The joy is the same. It is a joy that is in spite of circumstances. It is a joy that is rooted in God himself.

and rooted in the God of our salvation. How is it possible? Habakkuk tells us in verse 19.

He tells us how he was able to move from a place of doubting and questioning the Lord in chapter 1 to this place of trusting and rejoicing in the Lord in chapter 3.

He says, God, the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the deers. He makes me tread on my high places.

God, the Lord, strengthened Habakkuk. Habakkuk says, the Lord has made my feet like the deers, and he makes him to tread on the high places.

[37 : 07] You know, this statement, Habakkuk is actually making a particular admission. And to appreciate what he's really saying, in the original language, we're able to tell that he is referring to a female deer, not a male deer, but a female deer.

deer, and the female deer was well known for the ability to go up hills and mountains and to be sure-footed and to scale dangerous places and not fall like other animals, and apparently even as the male deers would do.

And in this statement, what Habakkuk is really saying is that my feet are not like the sure-footed feet of the deer.

My feet slip and slide. My feet cause me sometimes to get in God's face and say, God, don't you care? God, what are you doing?

He says, but the Lord makes my feet to be like the female deer. He is my strength, and he makes me to be sure-footed.

[38 : 29] When I am prone to slip and slide, he gives me the steadiness and the sure-footedness in my feet so that he enables me to tread in the dangerous places and be safe without losing my footing.

He enables me to navigate life. When I come to those difficult places, we are left to myself, I would slip and slide, and it would be disastrous.

God gives me strength, and he helps me that I don't lose my footing. Brothers and sisters, it's the same for us. We have no strength away from the Lord's strength.

Left to ourselves, we'd all fall on our faces. Only the Lord can strengthen us and keep our feet from slipping and sliding as we navigate the dangerous places of life.

Habakkuk ends with these words in verse 19, to the choir master, with stringed instruments. And we see that Habakkuk chapter 3 is not just Habakkuk's prayer and psalm, it is a prayer and a psalm for God's people, and he commends it to the choir master.

[39 : 50] He's essentially saying, take it and let the people sing it. And life being what it is, we now have reason to sing it and we will always have reason to sing.

We will have reason to sing it because there will be times when we complain to God, God speaks and our situation hasn't changed.

And we're called to see him for who he is. We're called to rejoice in him. We're called to draw our strength from him and not from our circumstances.

We sing the song my hope is built on nothing less. But Jesus blood and his righteousness, I dare not trust the sweetest frame. And friends, life is filled with sweet frames.

And they invite us, they say, rejoice in me. Rejoice in this sweet frame. Rejoice in that. Friends, they only lead to sorrow because they can never last.

[41 : 05] The only true frame that we can lean upon for a true source of rejoicing is the Lord himself. And so may we join Habakkuk this morning and may we sing.

May we sing of the Lord who has revealed himself in history. And may we sing of the Lord who is worthy to be rejoiced in no matter what adversity, the difficulty we face.

when Habakkuk prayed and was recounting the deeds of the Lord as we saw earlier. He recalled God's great salvation when he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, the great exodus, when he brought them through the Red Sea and he destroyed Pharaoh and his army who were coming behind them.

Brothers and sisters, this morning we have a greater reason to recall and rejoice because God brought about a greater salvation than that on Calvary's cross.

And Jesus Christ spread out between two thieves and extended between heaven and earth, brought about a salvation for undeserving sinners like you and me.

[42 : 33] and friends, that is reason to rejoice. That is reason to rejoice like no other. And we need to recall that, that the God of history has acted, he's acted to save.

And I think it's important for us to recall it, especially now as we celebrate Christmas, because we're celebrating a Savior who's come into the world who was born to die to save his people from their sins.

And brothers and sisters, no matter what it is we are waiting for this morning, and no matter how it turns out, rejoicing in the God of our salvation is far superior, far superior, because I won't change.

And that is our only sure and lasting possession in this life. If we have Christ, we have what lasts. Everything else, everything else is temporary.

God has acted to save his people. And so may we rejoice in him today because of that great and unchanging salvation.

[44 : 04] God has