

In Wrath Remember Mercy

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to read from God's Word. We're going to read from the Old Testament. We're going to read from the book of Habakkuk, the Old Testament.

Habakkuk chapter 3. And we're going to read the first two verses and then the last three verses. So Habakkuk chapter 2, reading verse 1 and 2 and then verse 17 and 18.

Let's read from the beginning. A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigeonath. O Lord, I have heard the report of you.

And 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.

And then we read in verse 17. For the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines. The produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food.

[1 : 10] 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.

Amen. And this evening, well, this evening's service, we're going to focus particularly on verse 2 of Habakkuk chapter 3.

There's actually so much in this verse that it actually has been more appropriate to leave till next Sunday evening. The latter verses that we read, 17 to 19.

But we're going to look at verse 2. And we can read verse 2 again in Habakkuk 3, where we read, O Lord, I have heard the report of you.

And 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. You know, not since World War II have we seen such a national crisis.

[2 : 14] That's the one that we're living in at the moment. From World War to world pandemic, the issues are global. And the church, during these days, during these weeks, during these months, the church has been called to act as salt and light in this climate of fear and apprehension.

We're living in times of uncertainty and anxiety. And that's why we continue to trust in Almighty God. We trust in our Sovereign Lord.

He gives you, He gives me that sure hope that the whole world is in His hands. We have that assurance that our times are in His hands.

Whether it be our times as a church, our times as a congregation, our times as individuals, our times as a world.

Our times are in the hands of our God, of our King. And yet, many are asking at this time, where is God in all of this? What's God saying to us as a nation, as a people, as a church, even as a congregation?

[3 : 32] What's God saying through this crisis? Because if He's all-sovereign, and we believe He is, if He's all-knowing, and we believe He is, if He's all-powerful and all-loving, well, what's God saying to us in permitting this world crisis to progress?

Well, where do we find the answer? Well, surely we find the answer in His Word, where God has given us His answer to this crisis.

You see, the Bible wasn't written, you know, just for the time period in which it was written. The Bible is written for all generations.

The Bible is for all generations to live and to learn about God, so that we learn His ways and know His ways, and above all, to learn the way of salvation.

The Bible is as contemporary now as when it was first written. And this little Old Testament book of Habakkuk is so relevant for the times that we're living in.

[4 : 39] I know this passage was preached on a few months ago when Andy was preaching in January, but I do want to return to it because I do believe that even the words that we read in verse 2 are so appropriate for the moments in which we're living.

And there are so many principles that we take from this book and indeed from this passage. And as I say, God willing, we'll look at verse 2 this evening, and next Lord's Day, look at the remainder of the verses that we read at the latter part of chapter 3.

But let's look at what we see first of all in relation to God's dealings with His people. And as I said, the Bible was written not just for the time it was written.

It's written for all generations. But we have to, of course, know the situation, the time when this book was written. And for Habakkuk, this prophet, he was so perplexed.

He was concerned about the way that God had intervened in the nation. I mean, to Habakkuk's astonishment, God had announced to him, as we see in chapter 1, God had announced to him that God was raising up a pagan people, the Babylonians, to punish Judah, the country where Habakkuk was a prophet.

[6 : 00] And Habakkuk just couldn't fathom this unexpected turn of events from the hand of God. Just couldn't get his head around this. Why will God, the holy God, allow pagan Babylonians to have their way with Judah?

And, you know, Habakkuk in the early chapters, he expresses his anxious thoughts before God. He comes before God in prayer. And God answers.

God answers. And God tells Habakkuk that he will allow his people to be punished. But he will, in his own time, restore his people.

God will revive his people. God's going to intervene. But he won't intervene in that restoration immediately. It's for God's people during these times of plague, during these times of persecution. It's for God's people to trust him, even through these years. And God will, as God says to Habakkuk, as God does now, God will teach us to use these words and to see that these times are there to bring us back to himself.

[7 : 20] To trust in him. To wait for him. And to know that for sure, God hasn't forgotten his people. He hasn't forgotten you. He hasn't forgotten us.

And while God had raised a pagan people to carry out his judgment in that time of crisis, in Habakkuk's time, some two and a half thousand years ago.

Well, God hasn't raised up a pagan nation to carry out his purposes. He hasn't done that now. But he's certainly raised up, we have to say, a deadly pestilence, surely to bring us to our knees and to teach us, to teach us many things.

But to teach us that man is so fragile, that man is so weak, that God is sovereign. And that it is to him in whose trust we place. You know, when we have to be so honest with ourselves as individuals, as a church, as a nation.

And that we have to admit before God and before one another that we have backslidden into moral chaos in this world. We've ignored his law.

[8 : 32] We've exercised so much lip service to his laws and to his ways. But our hearts have been so consumed with self and our love for God and our neighbor has been so cold, so fragile, so lukewarm even.

And God is teaching us surely through this time of suffering that we're not the masters of our fate. We're not the captain of our soul. God is the captain and God is the Lord. God's sovereign. And we say it again and again, and we must say it again and again, that God is in control.

And just with Habakkuk, we acknowledge that truth when we come before him in prayer. And yes, we realize we're living in these perplexing times. And so we plead that, as Habakkuk pleaded with God, that God in wrath would remember mercy.

Now we'll look at these words in more detail in a moment, but I pray that there'll be words of encouragement. It's so important at this time that, you know, we are encouraged by God's word.

[9 : 44] It's so important to encourage one another. God's word gives us that encouragement. And to realize, yes, God is giving us this time to shake us up, to shake his church, to waken us up and to trust him.

And to have that faith that strengthened us as we look to the one who is on the throne of glory. So let's look at these verses in more detail.

Three things, I pray for our benefit. Three things for our comfort. We were thinking of the God of all comfort this morning. And let's again turn to his word that gives us that comfort.

Comfort to strengthen you. Comfort to strengthen your hearts as you seek to draw near to him, as you seek to wait upon him. So three things. And the first is that we remember God's work in the past.

Habakkuk says, O Lord, I've heard the report of you and your work. O Lord, do I fear. Habakkuk's acknowledging that God isn't silent.

[10:49] That God is the ever faithful God. And Habakkuk's declaring before God that, yes, he knows that what God has done for his people in the past is a confirmation.

That God will continue to bless his people both now and in the future. Habakkuk's so sure that God who blessed his people in the past is the same God who blesses his people now and will continue to do so.

He says, I've heard the report of you and your work, O Lord, do I fear. And Habakkuk's looking back over the sweep of history, the history of God's people.

And Habakkuk's aware of the so many times that God delivered his people. God blessed his people. For example, when God delivered his people from the oppression in Egypt. When God brought his people into the promised land.

And as Habakkuk thinks on what God has done for his people, he's in awe of God. He fears God. And that fear takes him to worship.

[11:54] Surely as we're worshiping God even now, we pray that we will have that fear of God. Because we've seen in his word, we've seen God's works of old.

We've seen the works that God has done that shows that God, the God who's been faithful in the past, will continue to be faithful in the present and faithful to his people through all generations.

And surely that's a timely reminder to ourselves today. You know, in the midst of so much anxiety, in the midst of so much uncertainty, we know that we have the God who is the one true God, the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

And so, yes, as we look back and see the works that God has done for his people, even as we see them in the pages of history, the pages of his story, the Bible, then we're led to have that assurance that God is our very present help in times of trouble, even these present times that we're living in.

And as we think of the works that God has done in the past, then, of course, we see ultimately the work of God in sending his one and only son, the Lord Jesus, for us.

[13:16] And Jesus died for our sins. Because when we think of why Jesus came, he came to deal with a crisis. The crisis of sin was real.

The spread of the virus of sin affected and affects the entire human race. Nothing that man could do, nothing that man can do, could prevent the spread of that infection to every human being.

But Jesus came. And Jesus came to free his people from the plague of sin. Jesus, by his death, has delivered us from the power of sin because he took our sin upon himself.

And, you know, as we look around even today, when we see the devastation that the coronavirus is making in the world, as we see the devastation of the deaths of thousands, and as we're living in these days of constriction and restriction, we'll be assured that the virus of sin is not going to bring about the eternal death for all for whom Christ died.

And so we have that absolute assurance that you who are in Christ by faith, that you are safe eternally. And so we can echo the words of Habakkuk that he gave there in the first part of verse 2.

[14:39] Lord, do I fear? I mean, Habakkuk, as we said, he's in absolute fear of God. And no longer is he fearing these hordes of Babylonian soldiers about to sweep upon Judah.

Habakkuk has fear, the true fear of God, the true reverence of God. And again, this surely is a timely lesson for ourselves. So many are living in fear of this virus.

Even in the last few hours, we've seen statistics that show that every age group in our country is scared of the virus. A majority, anyway, is scared of this virus.

Now, of course, there has to be a healthy fear of what's happening. Just as we're doing at this moment, we're exercising care and precautions. We are facing a real danger, yes.

But surely our greatest fear and our greatest reverence has to be towards God. Because God is Lord. And God is the faithful Lord. I'm saying it so often because these words are so pertinent and so real.

[15 : 49] We are echoing the words of Psalm 46. And the latter part of Psalm 46 that says, I will not be afraid even if the earth gives way.

And surely then your fear, your true fear has to be towards God who's sovereign. And in control of the events that we're living through. But then secondly, in verse 2, we see this call for revival. Revive. Revival of God's works in the present day. As we read, in the midst of the years, revive it. In the midst of the years, make it known. So Habakkuk has this renewed confidence in God. That God truly is actively interested in his people. And so Habakkuk's moving on in his prayer. He's now making a plea before God. He's pleading before God that God revives his people. That God's works, his saving works are revived. And Habakkuk knows that unless the Lord quickens the heart of his people, unless the Lord builds the church, then what we do in the Lord's name is going to be in vain.

[17 : 02] And we pray that God will give that increase. And so Habakkuk's praying for that increase. Habakkuk's praying that, you know, God brings life to his people. That God shakes us into being a people who are renewed and actively renewed in our love for him and one for another.

We're praying that God will revive his works. That God will revive us. That just as God revived his people in the past, so God revives us even here and now.

And surely that has to be your prayer as you, you know, cry to God even in the present crisis that we're living in and living through. Praying that that reviving, renewing work of God will happen in our land and indeed in every country of the world.

Pray that there'll be that renewed vision to serve God. Pray that there'll be a renewed zeal for the work of the gospel. Pray that there'll be a fresh outpouring of God's spirit in his church.

Pray that the church will truly be triumphant as God's church on earth. And give thanks that, yes, God is speaking to us through these times. You know, we have to confess before him that we've been so lacking in our compassion for the poor, in our lack of zeal for the work of God.

[18 : 24] We have to confess before him that we haven't loved him as much as we ought. We haven't loved one another as much as we ought. And we pray that God truly will have mercy upon us and revive us, us as a church and as a people.

And so Habakkuk pleads before God that God in wrath would remember mercy. That's really our third point, that God's righteous wrath is acknowledged and his mercy pleaded for.

This prayer that we've read there in that verse, in wrath, remember mercy, that prayer has been offered so many times in so many places, so many churches, so many homes, in so many contexts, so many life situations.

That plea that we know that reviving of God and that God's word be central in our lives, in our lives as individuals, our life as a church, as a nation.

In wrath, remember mercy. And so we truly do acknowledge that God has been absolutely right. He's been angry with us for our weakness, for our failings.

[19 : 38] God has every right to punish his church and to purify his church. And we have to collectively confess before God our sins, as well as confessing before God our personal sins.

And truly to seek his forgiveness, to seek his mercy. And that we pray that God will keep from us what we deserve, that God will keep from us his continued punishment for our sins.

We're living in dark and difficult days. But surely God's using even the circumstances of the coronavirus, just as he used the circumstance of the pagan Babylonians against Judah.

Surely God is using the means by which God has chosen to turn us around, to turn us back, to bring us back to himself. And to do that in wholehearted commitment to him, to serve him for his glory.

We are to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And even through these times that we come back to God truly, to enjoy him, to glorify him. We are being tested.

[20 : 52] We're being tested even as a church. The apostle Peter wrote in his first letter, chapter 4, for it's time for judgment to begin with the family of God, with the household of God.

And we do believe that God is speaking to us. He's God speaking to the world and its weakness. And he's surely speaking to the church and its weakness, just as he was speaking to his people in Habakkuk's time.

And so when God speaks, we listen. We've been living lives that have dishonored God. Whether we're thinking of ourselves as a nation, or as a church that's grown so cold to the gospel, our own zeal for mission.

You know, we can catalog so many of our weaknesses and our failings. But we thank God that God is using these means to bring us back to himself.

You know, we confess that, you know, as a church, we've been so worldly, where the world has been at the center rather than the Lord Jesus. And we pray that the values of the world will be dismissed, and that the value of the gospel will become and back to be central in our lives.

[22 : 08] You know, like lemmings that rush over a cliff. And that's how it seems so often in the way that we've been conducting ourselves and neglecting God's word. So we pray that God will have mercy upon us, and that in wrath, he will remember mercy.

So we don't give up pleading with God for his mercy. These days are days of God's providence towards us. And we pray that we will have done with lesser things.

And we pray that God's light truly will shine in our hearts as he gives to us what we don't deserve. We don't deserve his grace. We don't deserve what God gives to us.

We thank him for that. And we pray that God will keep from us what we do deserve. That God will truly show mercy upon us. Another Lord's Day service has almost come to an end.

Another day of confinement in our homes. Another day when we've called upon God. But may we know that, well, we've been physically confined, as it were.

[23 : 17] That confinement isn't in relation to our coming before God. We are. We've been given that freedom, that liberty to call upon God and to show that we truly do trust in him.

So use these times. Use these days well. These days will come to an end. And may they not be forgotten. But may we use these days in thankfulness to give him the praise and to give him the glory.

And so may we truly fear God in these days of pandemic and truly trust in Almighty God, knowing that God does all things well. And for that, we give him the glory and we give him the praise.

Amen. And let's join together again in prayer. Let's pray. And then after we come together in prayer, I'll give a benediction. Lord, you test us and you try us.

And we pray, Lord, that through these times of testing and trying, that we will come through us as silver is refined, as gold is refined, and that we will surely know that you are the one who refines us, who changes us.

[24 : 29] And so, Lord, we thank you for these times of testing. Lord, restore us, we pray. Revive the works of your works in these days.

And again, Lord, as we pray, in wrath, remember mercy. Lord, we bless you for this opportunity to gather together in your name. We thank you, Lord, for even the opportunity you give us later to come together in fellowship.

We thank you, Lord, that you bless us in these ways. So go before us, Lord, in all things. And now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest upon and remain with us, both now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.