

Faith in Troubled Times

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[0 : 0 0] let's join together in prayer now let us pray and lord you command us at all times to praise you even in troubled times even in troublesome times such as we are living through at this moment we still praise you we still give you thanks we still honor you as we must for you are god you are the living and true god you are the one to whom we call upon even in this service this evening and again lord we pray that we will know your presence with us as we have gathered together in your name to worship you and so lord we we pray truly that we will know to whom we are calling to whom we are worshiping we're worshiping you the lord the maker of heaven and earth one to whom alone we we call upon and so lord we pray your blessing upon our time of worship this evening we truly know that blessing that comes from gathering together in your name even through the means that you've given to us in order to to have that that coming together as you call us to do to be at that church to be called out we called out from the world and called to you and lord as we pray for ourselves we pray for others at this time we pray for our queen and we thank you lord for our testimony we particularly pray for our message later this evening that her message will be blessed and that you will uphold her and her family at this time we pray for our family at this time we pray for our political leaders we ask that they will be given wisdom in order to deal with this virus in a way that it truly it deals with the problem in a way that that that speaks of of your giving to them that wisdom and so lord we pray for those who who again have to deal with these difficult matters on the front line we think of doctors we pray for nurses we pray for our paramedics we pray for our auxiliary staff we pray for hospital cleaners hospital porters we pray for those in every area of the national health service for the management we pray lord that you will guide you will guide and direct them and all the various and many decisions that they have to make and lord we look to you you are our very present help in time of trouble and so lord we look to you for our health for our strength that we look to you to protect us to provide for us look to you oh lord who deals with us according to your mercy and so lord we ask that truly we'll know what it means to rest in you we thank you lord for this day that you've given to us even for the blessing of the sun that shines even for the blessing of all that we see around that speaks of your creation we thank you lord that you give to us we truly can enjoy so here is lord as we wait upon you as we read from your word as we proclaim your word as we sing from your word bless each and every aspect of our fellowship of our worship again lord we pray that you will grant blessing upon our time of of speaking one with another of fellowship we thank you lord for the means that you give us it's still to commune and to communicate one with another so here is lord as we as we turn now to your word bless us each one from the youngest to the oldest and lord we pray all these things in and through the name of jesus amen

now we're going to read from the old testament last week we were looking at habakkuk chapter 3 verse 2 we're going to read from habakkuk again the first six verses and then the last four verses so habakkuk chapter 3 reading verse 1 to 6 and then 16 to 19 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 god came from timon and the holy one from mount param 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 his were the everlasting ways i hear and my body trembles my lips quiver at the sound rottenness enters into my bones my legs tremble beneath me yet will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come up on people who invade us yet i will rejoice in the lord i'll take joy in the god of my salvation god the lord is my strength he makes my feet like the deer's he makes me tread in my high places and then the afterword to the choir master the strings strings strings instruments and it's especially verses 16 to 19 that i want to spend just a relatively short time this evening you know it can be a temptation you know to grow maybe a little weary when we continually focus on a particular theme especially when we're going through a particular crisis such as we are at the moment in our own country and indeed throughout the world you know the temptation is to think that you know we've heard enough about exercising faith in god in troubled times the temptation you know the temptation you know is to think that you know we know it all but we don't know it all and we do need again and again to be reminded of the response that that every christian has to make to to what's happening in in the world around to realize that what is happening is under god's providence and to recognize that as so and to put our trust and faith in him in troubled times to be those truly who are people of the faith because you know when we think of faith how faith is demonstrated in scripture we see that it runs right through scripture you know think of faith the faith that's seen in the in the promises of god it's the story of scripture you see that summarized in in hebrews 11 where where the author lists the the many heroes of faith men and women who persevered in faith as they as they trusted in god as they as they placed their hope in him for salvation and that salvation that was fulfilled by the in the lord jesus christ

faith exercised by by old testament saints and even in the most adverse of circumstances but even in these adverse circumstances they still look to god they still look to god for the fulfillment of their hope in him and even as habakkuk reminds us earlier in his book he reminds us of that great truth that the just shall live by faith and you who know the lord jesus as savior you can testify to that faith that that saves that faith that keeps saving that gifted faith that that god's blessed you with so that you know that you've been made right with god and it's the great truth that the apostle paul wrote often in in romans chapter 5 that that great doctrine of just that doctrine that tells us that a person has peace with god through the gifted faith that god gives that we're justified made right with god through faith so faith then that that true saving faith in god is absolutely central to to the story of the church it's that faith that you exercise in believing in the lord jesus it's that faith that that we continue to exercise in god as we as we continue to trust in him for all things and in all circumstances even in the the frowning providence that frowning providence of god that that the christian still has faith in to know that behind that frowning frowning providence there hides god's smiling face and it's that ongoing sure steadfast faith in god that faith in god even in troubled times that's what we want to look at in these verses and in in habakkuk chapter chapter 3 these verses 16 to 19 three headings as we generally have in our in our sermon to look first of all what we might call patience in the storm that we see in verse 16 and then in verse 17 to 18 these great words where we see peace in desolation peace in the desolation and then verse 19 where we read of power power in the lord so let's look at verse 16 again let's read verse 16 again i'll just read it where we see the theme of patience in the storm where habakkuk says 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 people who invade us so the prophet habakkuk's fully aware of the trouble that's about to afflict the nation of judah his nation his people he knows it's going to be a devastating time he's been told by god that there's going to be a fierce army from babylon that's going to invade judah and to bring absolute havoc upon the nation and god's told habakkuk of his judgment and he's called habakkuk his prophet of that judgment because the people have been indulging in idolatry and so god's going to send the fierce babylonians to punish the people of judah already habakkuk has pleaded to god for mercy we saw that last week in wrath remember mercy and habakkuk acknowledges that god is justified in his wrath in his wrath but habakkuk the prophet is pleading that god will still show mercy to sinful people even in that time of trouble that time of trouble

that's coming upon the people of judah then habakkuk's praying now that they're going to that he prays that a moment a time of trouble will come upon judah's enemies and that the people of judah are freed from from their oppressors and during that time of of waiting on on that full force of god's judgment on his enemies what do we read in verse 16 we see habakkuk is is utterly overwhelmed he's absolutely distraught at what's about to happen to his people because there's this impending invasion force that's going to cause so much devastation on the land and that makes habakkuk as we see physically sick emotionally sorrowful you see the language that habakkuk uses in verse 16 he speaks of his body trembling i mean he's literally shaking in sorrow he's just got no strength left in himself he's physically and emotionally drained because he's received god's revelation about the future but despite his feeling distraught despite his feeling helpless he will wait patiently for the deliverance of god's people that's what he says there yet i will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us that word yet in other words despite my trembling despite my trembling of what i've received from god directly about about what's to come despite that real horror that's awaiting the the nation of judah habakkuk says i will be silent in my waiting for god to intervene i'll be patient i'm not going to allow my emotions to to overwhelm me habakkuk saying i will wait on the lord because habakkuk knows that god's actions are perfect god's timing is perfect god's ways are perfect habakkuk knows that god will put an end to the the destruction of his people when god does act in mercy habakkuk doesn't know how long that's going to be he doesn't know as we were chatting some of us earlier this morning habakkuk doesn't know the details of god's providence but he knows that god works all things well and so habakkuk will continue to trust in god because he knows that god is lord and we can apply that even to our own situation today because it's for you and for me to wait patiently on the lord to wait quietly on the lord to wait for him and on him during these days weeks months even of the difficulties that we're living through because we bow before the lord who does work all things well and so we wait patiently for him we wait patiently on him wait on him to have his way with the world to have his way with us as a nation as a church as individuals as families because we have to admit that in many ways the unthinkable has happened it's happened in the world the spread of this coronavirus that's destroyed so many lives and has caused so much distress but we wait on the lord quietly we wait on the lord with patience because we recognise that god's timing is perfect even in the matters that we see around us and so we continue to trust in him continue to exercise faith in the one true god and we pray that this crisis will come to an end and pray that you know when we do emerge from these days that we're going through yes that we'll continue and maintain and deepen our faith and trust

in our god and that we will acknowledge before him that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven and so I ask you as I ask myself are you waiting quietly are you waiting with patience on our lord and saviour in these days because that waiting involves surrendering everything to him that waiting involves resting in the lord jesus and that waiting declares that your faith your faith in god triumphs over every adversity and so we are to go through this time of waiting this time that god has given us to examine our lives and so I ask you to do that as I ask myself to do this examine your life test your heart examine your ways and return to god with all your heart in what nearly two weeks now since we've been enduring this this lockdown but ask yourself have you what have you learned during this time have you learned the more to trust in god have you deepened your faith in him have you bowed in heart before god who does all things well

[17 : 29] I mean in your in your patient in your patient waiting have you truly surrendered all to god god god has given us this time to wait upon him to trust in him to deepen our faith in him and ask yourself is that happening in your life are you truly following the lord jesus are you depending on him for all things well I pray that god will grant you that patient waiting upon him even in the storm that we're going through but then secondly in verses 17 to 18 we see peace in the desolation let's read these verses again though the fig tree should not blossom nor fruit be in the vines the produce of the olive fail in the fields heal no food 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 this of course is Habakkuk speaking at a time when the economy was essentially rural the economy of Judah was centred mainly on the land the crops that produced the necessity for people to have a livelihood crops such as the figs or the grapes or the olives but of course the animals such as the sheep and the cattle they were all very much the mainstay of Judean society the Judean economy but of course if and when the tragedy occurred the Babylonians invaded lives were going to be lost jobs were going to be lost health was going to suffer even the very lack of animals would mean that would have an impact on the worship that the people had known even going through the motions of worship and you know you can project that scenario today and what we're experiencing our economy is being damaged by the pestilence by the virus jobs are being lost health suffering even our very worship has been impacted in a way that we wouldn't even envisage even a few weeks ago but as with

Habakkuk so with ourselves as we survey the scene around us well look at what Habakkuk is saying as he looks around the impending devastation he says from the heart yes he acknowledges these things are the mainstay of our economy they've been the mainstay of if you like the health and wealth and means of worship that they've been so used to but he knows that ultimately he knows ultimately that his existence is not based on these things but his existence is based on the source of these things it's in God and you know during this time of severe restriction we have a damaged economy we have restrictions in every area of our life even in our normal worship practices but even in these difficult days surely we're being taught by God to look to what truly matters what truly counts what's truly important in your life and to find strength in what and who truly matters and we have to ask what and who truly matters and of course it's our

Lord and Saviour it's that following him it's finding our comfort and security well not in a fragile economy it's not even in our physical well-being it's not even in the forms of worship that we enjoy now all these things are important these are all God given and we thank God for them but remember first and foremost it's our Lord and it's his word that truly gives full joy true joy and full satisfaction it's our Lord who brings true contentment remember what Jesus said Matthew 4 man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God we need bread of course we need food to sustain our bodies we'll pray that as we'll look at on Wednesday evening we will pray that prayer give us this day our daily bread that's not the be all and end all of life because the one true

God isn't our belly it's God himself and so we'll rise above the fear that's so endemic across our land we'll rise above those things that don't truly satisfy and we'll have that confidence and trust joy in the Lord that even in these difficult and dangerous times we can express even as Habakkuk expressed in these words yet I will rejoice in the Lord I will take joy in the God of my salvation look at these words again yet I will rejoice in the Lord here's Habakkuk whose heart is secure in the Lord of course he's been afflicted yes he's been overwhelmed but above all else he knows that the Lord with whom that he has that relationship God who's made that covenant with Habakkuk and his people God is the same covenant God the God of faithfulness whom Habakkuk has placed his trust in

[23 : 19] Habakkuk knows that he has a secure relationship with God the Lord the faithful God and that's surely a comfort for you in all circumstances think of the covenant the blessing of the covenant relationship that you have in God through the Lord Jesus Christ God sent his one and only son to die for you he sent his son so that you be reconciled with God so that you have peace with God God sent his son so that you're made right with God so that you have that eternal relationship and that eternal love with God and God's not going to withhold from you every blessing that he showers upon you even in these times of adversity you know I think we often use the expression every blessing we've used it so often I've used it so often I'm sure many of you have used it often when you're wishing God's blessing upon someone for their particular spiritual well-being but remember every blessing every good and perfect gift comes from

God it's God who's formed that right relationship with you through the finished work of the Lord Jesus and that truth then tells you just as Paul affirmed in his great letter to the Romans 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 with him graciously give us all things and since God who's given to you who are his that blessing of salvation in Jesus since God didn't spare his one and only son but gave him for you you have all that you need in Christ you have all that you need for for life for every circumstance so that you can declare before a watching world that you're content in the one who's loved you with that everlasting love and in these days of social economic distress in these days of human uncertainty well you can testify just as Paul testified in that same section of the left of there in

Romans 8 that nothing but nothing can separate you from the love of Christ not tribulation not suffering not distress not deprivation of life's goods not even danger no your steadfast faith in your heavenly father or in your steadfast faith in your heavenly father as Paul tells us you're more than conquerors through him who loved us and let's dwell in that truth let's rest in the love that we have in the Lord Jesus you may well be deprived of so much that we've taken for granted even in these difficult days but the one thing that you're never deprived of is the love of God in Christ Jesus and I pray that that truth inspires you and energizes you that that truth lifts your spirits you realize what truly does bring joy and eternal satisfaction and that truth that knowing that you are more than conquerors through him who loved us that that gives you a renewed energy of heart because we see that renewed energy in Habakkuk as he tells us there in verse 19 the heading the power that power in the Lord look at verse 19

God the Lord is my strength he makes my feet like the deers he makes me tread on my high places Habakkuk's actually using military language here this is the language that's associated with triumph triumph in battle as a result of God having given his people the victory for example if you look at that expression to have swift feet like the deers that was actually considered one of the qualifications of a soldier in Habakkuk's time this ability to move fast in the course of battle and then he makes me tread in my high places again that spoke of a triumphant army when an army defeated its enemy in battle very often the battle would take place in a valley and to show triumph or to show an expression of triumph the triumphant army would go into one of the high ridges and look down and triumph on the valley where that victory had been won so you know this was a bit like a victory lap in the olympics and so that kind of gesture there in the high places indicating that they triumphed over adversity and battle in other words that they were conquerors and you who are in Christ you know victory through Christ

I mean Habakkuk could speak of you know God giving him that strength to run like the deer and walk in triumph over there in the mountain riches and in this time of trouble when surely we give thanks to God that God gives you that strength to persevere that strength to yes to show in the world that you're living in the world so much that has an element of uncertainty that you have a sure certainty that your certainty is in the unfailing love and kindness of God that love and that kindness sustains you it enables you to persevere the love of God preserves you protects you provides for you in all your needs and that you can truly say that my cup runs over with his goodness and I'm sure like myself you know in these present circumstances that we're living in there have been a measure a relative measure of problems maybe even bewilderment

[29 : 30] Habakkuk that's what he experienced when he looked initially at the circumstances the way out of the valley of despair is that confident trust in the wisdom of God to have that full awareness of his love for you that love that won for you your salvation and that love that keeps you secure in his care and that love that will never let you go so in this time of trouble there is a time of trouble well be strong in faith be patient be patient with God's timing in these days continue to wait on the Lord and be at peace with God even as you continue to trust that knowing that his ways are not always our ways that his ways are perfect for our good your good and for God's glory and yes be empowered be empowered in him to be more than conquerors through Christ who loves you if you don't have that assurance if you're listening in and you know these days are just days of full of fear and such rampant uncertainty well just consider your life and ask yourself what's truly important to you and realize this that what truly matters isn't first and foremost material things or even physical well being these are important these are

God's gifts to you but what truly matters is the well being of your eternal life your eternal soul so turn to him repent of your sins trust in Jesus trust in the one who came to give his life for you and you'll know that peace in him you'll know that patience in waiting on him and you'll know that power that enables you to do all things through Christ who strengthens you and so may God bless to us this time of worship this time of fellowship one with another let's call upon God in prayer let us pray then we'll sing again in Psalm 34 let's pray Lord we pray that you truly will grant to each and every one of us even all who are met in this form of worship this evening grant to us Lord we pray your peace your peace that passes understanding Lord grant to your people that power that enables them to do all things through Christ who strengthens them

Lord help us each one to know your ways our perfect ways that you are the one who has given your people that victory in Christ and so Lord teach us in these days to trust in you to depend on you to know that truly you do all things well in your perfect providence hear us Lord as we as we sing now hear us Lord as we as we are about to close the service and bless us Lord in the remainder of this evening we pray these things in Jesus name Amen