

"Habakkuk"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Open your Bibles, if you will, one more time to Habakkuk, and you should know how to get there by now. You know, Habakkuk is a great study for those going through hard times, which I'm assuming most of you are.

Because I was taught years ago by a very well-respected preacher that when you preach, seven out of ten people in that room are going to be going through hard times, and the other three will be. And so this is a very pertinent study for us. You know, regardless of whether those hard times come through personal pains, through relationships or whatever, or if they come through broader societal circumstances or upheavals or hardships or common experiences.

But these hardships, though they shake the very foundations sometimes of our faith, And though that shaking may be painful, it is the richest place for us to grow.

[1 : 34] In our faith, in our knowledge of ourselves, and in our knowledge of this covenant God who holds us. In fact, we could confidently say that apart from such hardship, growth will not take place.

You go talk to anyone that you admire of the depth of their faith and the richness of their faith, you will rarely, if ever, find someone like that who has not gone through the crucible of suffering. Because there is something deep and rich that takes place in these moments. And that's what we find here in Habakkuk.

Habakkuk has been in a hard place. He has had his foundations shaken, at least his theological foundations. But now he's been told that even greater physical, societal suffering is going to happen.

You know, and the way that God works, you know, when he brings his people to this place, what he does, he not only takes them there, but then he...

[3 : 00] Sometimes it's these places of brokenness where we feel like we're undone. But it's in that place that God brings us to being undone, and then puts us back together again in a much healthier way.

You know, in this last chapter, what we're going to see is the fruit of what God is doing in Habakkuk's heart. And Habakkuk is determined, what we're going to see in this passage, that he is determined not only to stand firm in who God is, he is also determined to rejoice.

And to do so, he's not saying that pain is good, that we should be in some sense masochistic about it.

But he is saying that there's something even in that pain that is worthy of rejoicing, and even what that pain will bring about is worthy of rejoicing.

And Habakkuk's going to show us how that is done. So, I want you to follow with me as we read this last third chapter of the prophecy of Habakkuk.

[4 : 29] A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, according to Shigenoth. It says, 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 Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Perrin.

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, and the everlasting hills sank low.

His were the everlasting ways. I saw the tents of cushion in affliction. The curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

[5 : 41] 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.

The flash of your glittering spear. You marched through the earth in fury. You threshed the mountains in anger. You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed.

And you crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. 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.

[6 : 52] You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters. And 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.

And though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines. The produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield 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.

God the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer's. He makes me tread on my high places. To the choir master, the stringed instruments.

[8 : 08] Which is interesting. This is a worship song that he has given to us. Let's pray together before we get into the study.

Father, would you help us to worship as we go through the study of your word? Would you lead us to deep worship and deep trust and greater joy?

Pour out your spirit that your work might be done in the depth of our being. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we think about what Habakkuk shows us about rejoicing, and this is the thing, this is, the call here for us is, again, not to just persevere, not just to stand firm in these hard times, the times of confusion, but it is to rejoice.

How do we do that? There are four things that I want us to see. The first, we see Habakkuk bowing in repentance.

[9 : 24] The chapter starts off, this chapter, very differently from the other two. You know, in the first chapter, Habakkuk was praying, but his prayer was full of accusations.

He was accusing God of wrong. He was going to God, questioning why he was not working the way he should have been. And then when God told him how he was going to work, he told God that, nope, that's not going to work either.

And then in the second chapter, we see God really bringing some sobriety to Habakkuk Habakkuk as he outlines just the heart of the arrogant, the wicked, and what they were like.

But that picture was very, very much applicable to Habakkuk himself and his people. But now, there's a different tone.

it's a lot softer. It's a lot more hesitant. And Habakkuk's asking for something different.

[10 : 37] Instead of anger, instead of accusations, instead of railing at God, he's asking for mercy. And that is something very, very different.

it's a monumental shift that occurs somewhere down in the depth of his heart. And that shift comes from remembering.

Remembering who God is and remembering who Habakkuk is. Habakkuk's standard, where repentance comes from, in the plea for mercy, where that comes from, is a shift of standard of comparison.

What Habakkuk was doing previously was comparing Israel and who they are with these Chaldeans and with the evil of the Chaldeans and the only conclusion he could come to was that, wait a minute, there's something wrong here.

We're better than they are. These guys are terrible. We're your people. But it was the wrong comparison. And from that standard, he had a right to accuse.

[11:55] He thought. But in chapter 2, what God has done, he says, no, you got the wrong measure, the wrong standard.

And that needs to change. And instead of comparing himself to others horizontally, he said, the standard now becomes me.

I am the standard of measure. I am the definition of righteousness. I am the standard of good. And when that standard changes, there are no more demands. There are no more questions. There's no more accusations.

No more railing. No more anger. There's just this plea for mercy. Because Habakkuk came to realize he needed the same mercy before the judgment of God that the Chaldeans did.

[13:14] And now in his plea for mercy, this place of humility he has come to, that's all he can ask for. I think this is the cure for an awful lot of our anger.

back when I told you the story a couple weeks ago of the trial and when my son-in-law was falsely convicted, my immediate response was I got angry.

I got angry not just at people around me, not at just the justice system, not at this judge who presided over this trial, I got angry at God himself.

And like Habakkuk in that first chapter, I went to him and began to accuse him and rail at him and he says what you're doing is wrong. It is unjust.

How can you do this? anger is so often the fruit of arrogance, of saying that I am, have the right to declare you wrong.

[14:50] And that's where Habakkuk was. But he discovered something different. That in the face of who God is himself, we are no different than the most wicked of our society.

We have no more ground to stand on. And we ourselves need to plead for mercy.

only the one who thinks he's right can demand recompense. Only the one who thinks he's right can sit in judgment over somebody else's wrong.

It's the one who is wrong, who is weak, and who understands their guilt that now goes before God and said, the only thing I can ask is for mercy.

I need mercy. And when that happens, there is a softness that takes place in our hearts towards God and then towards everybody else.

[16:16] God is. And that comes from a change of standard where it's no longer us comparing ourselves to someone else, but it's now us in the light of who God is.

As Habakkuk went through all these verses, kind of rehearsing in his mind who God was. grace.

And that brings us to our place where all we can do is ask for mercy.

And it's when this anger is broken by the humility and when we come to God asking for mercy, that is the open door for joy to enter in.

And it cannot. Rejoicing cannot enter until we get to that place. So the first thing is that there is a bowing in repentance, seeing ourselves in the light of all that God is, and stop our railing, and we go to him for mercy.

But the second thing is there's some remembering in worship here. It was not just that Habakkuk realized the greatness and the glory and the holiness of God, but there were some other things he saw.

[17:37] In that low place, he was now rightly prepared to worship God the way he needed to. And so in these verses, he goes through God, but there's a couple of particular verses that tells us some things.

In verse 15, we see this, you trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters, and in a sense what he's saying there, the mighty waters in biblical language is a description of chaos.

And so what he's saying here, it is God who rides over the chaos and brings order. And so he's getting himself refocused here that the chaos himself is now subservient to this God.

But there's something even else more special here. Down in verse 13. And as Habakkuk is talking about God and he's riding through the world in judgment and so forth, you come across this statement.

He says, you went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed, and Israel was his anointed.

[18 : 57] He wrote against all of his enemies for the salvation of his people. You know, as we said last week, you know, a God who controls all things may be one thing, but not necessarily is going to elicit our ready trust.

But it's a God who controls all things and works for us. It's a God who will draw us to himself. And I think for me, at least, when I'm in the midst of hardship, this is the key. He's not coming to destroy me.

He's not coming to destroy my world. He's not coming to tear me down. He's coming to destroy the evil that has come against me.

He is coming to destroy that which truly threatens me. He has come to destroy that which will destroy me.

[20 : 18] He's coming to have put an end to the chaos of this life, but he's coming not against me. he's coming for me.

Back in that courtroom so many years ago, what I thought was a death blow was actually the embrace of a friend.

God because he saw greater enemies in me.

He saw a knowledge of him that was extremely limited. He saw things in my heart that had to go because he was fighting for my joy.

He was fighting for my good. He was fighting for my growth. And I didn't know it.

[21 : 33] But this is what Habakkuk has come to see. It is what I saw a few months later. you know, the last time I preached this book was, I told you, we were in that courtroom in August.

It was September. It was during the height of the pain. And what he was showing me was, all this time, I mean, I was angry and struggling, but it wasn't until a friend came to our church and simply took me back to the God who was for me.

That I had a father who did control all things, but a father who was working for my salvation and for my joy and for the riches that he wanted for me.

And this was the process. And so at the heart of rejoicing in the midst of these trials, is coming to grips with the one who is at work and what he's doing.

And sometimes he wants more for us than we want for ourselves. So we begin with repentance, acknowledging his greatness and glory, but then we acknowledge that the one that we bow before is the ultimate father, the ultimate good, the ultimate savior.

[23 : 19] But then there's a third thing. And this may be the hardest of all of this. The third thing is trusting him in honesty.

prophecy. And this is one of the remarkable things about Habakkuk. When he says there in verse 16, I mean, look what he says here. He says, I hear, and my body trembles, my lips quiver at the sound, rottenness enters my bones, my legs tremble beneath me, yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

Now, there's a difference in translation here that some versions have. And I don't think this one is necessarily the best, but it's hard to tell.

Because one of the ways that this is also translated, particularly in the New American Standard, is that I will quietly wait for the day of distress for the people who will come and invade us.

And I honestly think that fits the context here a little better. Because what Habakkuk sees, what he now can tell is coming is disaster.

[24 : 34] Because when he gets down to the next verses where he says, though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, and on and on, every bit of that is going to happen.

In fact, things are going to get so bad in Jerusalem that mothers are going to cannibalize their children because they're starving, because of the siege that the Babylonians are going to bring on the city.

You can read all about it in Lamentations. It's grotesque. Habakkuk is going to experience all of that.

And still, he says, I will rejoice. Is he nuts? How do you rejoice over that?

That this is not hyperbole, but he looks square at the hardship and all of its ugliness and still rejoices.

[25 : 57] In fact, we could also say, unless we do look at the reality of our pain and suffering squarely, we do not exercise faith.

one of the ways we often try to find joy in the hardness of life is basically downplay the suffering. We downplay the pain that we experience.

We don't want to talk about it. We need to be positive. Now, if there's something wrong with talking about if we're really in a hard place, talking about how hard a place that is, because somehow we think that's not faith.

Faith is putting the smile on our face and just being happy. And so we ignore her. We kind of just put it aside and pretend that it doesn't hurt.

Focus on the positive, but what we may actually be doing is minimizing the pain to accommodate our weak faith.

[27 : 08] because, see, faith, when there is no challenge, is no faith. But when faith is shaken and challenged, when we face the reality of this chaos and confusion and hardship, that is when faith is real.

people. You know, in my case, I had been angry for months, and finally somebody reminded me of who God was, and something changed in my heart.

and I had an opportunity to go spend about three days alone. Well, not alone, but in a wrestling match with God himself and his word and wrestling with the realities of what was said and looking at the pain in the face and trying to make sense of all of this, wrestling, trusting him, asking him a lot of questions.

It says, all right, what is all this stuff in your word about justice? How am I supposed to pray now? How am I supposed to pray when I prayed all these years for something and you gave me just the opposite?

how am I supposed to trust you with things that are very dear to me because you hurt me?

[29 : 04] How am I supposed to deal with you? And that conversation, that wrestling match, was transformative.

It led me to repent to some of the people that were very dear to me. It led me to a spring of joy that I was so desperately thirsty for because I found God himself.

See, Jesus is our great example in this. There was a sermon that Jonathan Edwards preached, of course, obviously years ago. It was called Christ's agony.

And this is what Edwards says as he describes Jesus' preparation for going to the cross. He says, when he had, when Jesus had a full sight given him, what that wrath of God was that he was to suffer, the sight was overwhelming to him.

It made his soul exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Christ was going to be cast into a dreadful furnace of wrath, and it was not proper that he should plunge himself into it blindfolded, as if not knowing how dreadful the furnace was.

[30 : 37] Therefore, that he might not do so, God first brought him and set him at the mouth of the furnace, that he might look in and stand and view its fierce and raging flames, and might see where he was going, and might voluntarily enter into it and bear it for sinners as knowing what it was.

Christ obeyed and trusted the Father, knowing full well what it meant. But it's interesting there, we see in Hebrews 12, a little bit more of a description there.

He says, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, he endured the cross. He endured the cross, he persevered through the pain because he knew what was on the other side, and he knew the one he was entrusting himself to.

And that was the faith that had to be demonstrated. But this is the kind of faith we're called to.

To trust God in light of, in full view of, the pain. Don't minimize it. Look at it squarely in the face.

[32 : 04] Take it to your good Father who is working for your salvation, and give it to him, and say, what do I do with this? Meet me here.

But that's exactly what happened, God does with Habakkuk. We get to that fourth point where he says, Habakkuk now comes to that place where he rejoices in hope.

He rejoices. Let's read, let me read those verses again in verse 17 and 18. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor the fruit be on the vines, the fruit of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice.

I will rejoice. How can he rejoice? Because of hope.

There is a hope that has now been generated through his repentance, through his coming to see who God is, remembering the salvation that he is working for even in light of this situation, and he anchors his soul into now what he knows.

[33 : 35] And from that, he cannot be budged. And then he goes on to describe it. Well, let me just say this. His rejoicing had nothing to do with the change of his circumstances.

And that's not what he prayed for. He wanted to meet God in the midst of those circumstances. We rejoice in the hope sometimes, unfortunately.

Our hope is only based on circumstances changing. And this is where our prayers become very frustrating. Because we pray for a cure of our cancer and it's not cured.

We pray for relationships to be restored and they're not restored. We pray for things to happen that we just know we cannot stand and if God were faithful he'd fix them and they don't get fixed.

That's not where Habakkuk's joy was found. It was found in someone. God now that before he didn't understand.

[34 : 52] But a God now he was willing to trust. Because he remembered how good he was. And basically saying you're the best option here.

It's a good option. I don't know what you're going to bring. But you won't change. He quotes again verse 19.

The Lord is his strength. He makes his feet like the deer's. He treads on those high places. Have you ever seen the deer up on those jagged rocks? It looks very treacherous.

And that's the way life looks for a lot of us. But for those deer they are firm. They do not fall. And that's the way Habakkuk now sees himself.

I'm in a world that appears to be very treacherous and scary and dangerous but my feet are firm because they are now founded in the one who is for me.

[35 : 57] When God's good gifts are no longer present the one who trusts him say that may be bad but it's okay because I still have what I want and that's you.

So in the end here's the question when we get into these hard places who am I going to trust? Who am I going to trust?

And the one that appears sometimes to be against you is actually the one fighting for you.

And he's inviting you in to a deeper knowledge of himself. He says come to me. Come to me and learn from me.

Come to me. I am destroying your enemies. I am working for you. I am willing to move heaven and earth to see you grow.

[37 : 13] Trust me. That's the invitation. Come to him.

I don't know what your situation is. Come to him. He's good. Let's pray.

Father would you help us to trust you. Sometimes we're scared of trusting you. We don't know you. But would you reveal yourself to us even as you did to Habakkuk would you show us our helplessness but then remind us that you're fighting for us and you're riding through the earth in salvation for us.

So come save us in the midst of our troubles. Save us for yourself and fill our hearts with rejoicing because of the hope we have in you.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org friends, on ouression onppo and thank you for more time