

Joy in Troubled Times

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[0 : 00] Alan Francis Gardner was a 19th century British Royal Navy officer and missionary to Patagonia on the very southern tip of South America.

In 1851, he found himself abandoned with a very small group while he was trying to set up a mission station on the remote island of Picton, which is right at the very bottom of South America in fairly harsh conditions.

Unfortunately, because of bad planning and a range of other things, the whole group died of starvation while waiting to be resupplied.

Gardner was the last one of the group to die. When their bodies were finally discovered by the resupply ship, they buried the bodies and the only thing that they brought back with them was Gardner's journal.

So here's a man in a remote place, the last one alive. The rest of his colleagues have starved to death. His wife and his children are thousands and thousands of kilometres away.

[1 : 24] And the last entry in his journal, he quotes from Psalm 34 verse 10, the lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

And the very last thing recorded in his journal was this. I am overwhelmed with the sense of the goodness of God.

How do you come to that kind of end, but still have a life of sustained contentment and joy in the midst of those circumstances?

Now, frankly, in our world, people, any sane person, would spend an absolute fortune, give their fortune to the answer to that question.

The good news is you don't have to. It's in fact right in front of you in Habakkuk chapter three as we draw our brief journey through this book of Habakkuk to a close today.

[2 : 35] Now, we've seen over the past few weeks that Habakkuk lived in a world just like ours. His nation, Israel, was about to be crushed by the brutal Babylonian empire, which was coming upon them as God's judgment to Israel because of their corruption and their exploitation and their violence and their sin and their wickedness.

Now, Habakkuk was really confused about what God was doing in this scenario and he really challenged God on it. And yet, what he hears from God is that Habakkuk, you think you care about it?

I care about it more. I care about the wickedness and the carnage of this world. And there is a day of reckoning coming where I, God, will put all justice down, all injustice down.

I will bring justice and I will rescue my people forever. And so the question for Habakkuk is, knowing that the Babylonian army is coming, how do you live with that?

How do you live in the day of disaster and carnage and in the troubled times? How did he do it and how do we do it? How do we live in the day of disaster?

[3 : 44] Is it possible to die well like Gardner? Is it possible to sing praise to God in the day of calamity?

To have joy in troubled times? Is it possible for the world to come collapsing down upon us and to sing as we did this morning that the Lord is good to me?

I encourage you to open up the St. Paul's app. There you'll find out, you'll find an outline for today's talk, a Bible passage and a bunch of other stuff that I encourage you to get to.

So St. Paul's app, really three things I want to do this morning. I want to first of all tie faith, grief and joy together. Then look at what does it look like to have joy in troubled times and how do we fuel joy in troubled times?

So faith, a couple of weeks ago, we saw that the major theme of this book is faith in chapter two, verse four, which reads, the righteous will live by faith.

[4 : 48] Then in chapter two, verse 20, which is the end of the chapter, we get at least a glimpse of one of the characteristics of what true faith is. It says, but the Lord is in his holy temple let all the earth be silent before him.

In other words, my spin on that is God is God and we are not. That's the point of verse 20.

God stands outside of his creation, outside of the galaxies that he's made. He's the creator, the master, the rule of all things. And that is the starting point of what it means to have a life of faith. Of course, this rubs up against a culture like ours that has personal autonomy as most likely the highest value.

And unfortunately, too many Christians operate with a personal autonomy view. And in fact, they've got more of a view of God, which is classically called moralistic therapeutic deism.

[6 : 02] Moralism is the belief that at the core of Christianity, you have to work hard to be really good people, got to obey the rules and be good people. People who obey the rules, who are compliant and diligent in religious duties especially.

Therapeutic theology is the belief that God exists to serve me. His job is to make my life good and well and secure and happy and at peace.

His job is to stop the bad things happening in life. God's job is to be a servant, if you like, responsible for taking care of my wants and my needs.

And deism means that he's basically pretty much to stay out of the way unless, of course, I need him. Don't interfere in my life.

Just stay out of the way until I need you. And so you put that together and it's a worldview that way too many Christians operate, especially in the Western world, is that if I do the right thing by God, then he will do the right thing by me.

[7 : 05] And when things don't work out as I plan, his job is to jump in and fix it. That's what he does. And it's a fatal distortion that so many operate with.

Of course, when he doesn't work the way that I expect him to work or determine him to work, that's when faith in God is deeply, deeply rocked.

One of the characteristics of genuine Christian faith is it lets God be God. We submit to his wisdom and his sovereign rule over all things.

And in chapter three, the final chapter of Habakkuk, we see Habakkuk practicing genuine faith. And the whole chapter is a prayer of faith.

But there's something else I want us to see. Even though he's practicing faith, he's a man deeply grieved at the same time.

[8 : 20] In verse 16, we get a glimpse into what faith in troubled time actually looks like in practice. Have a look at verse 16 with you. Get your Bibles open.

Habakkuk 3 verse 16. This is really important. Listen. I heard my heart pounded. I heard and my heart pounded.

Now, literally, what that reads in the literal language, in the original language, is my bowels trembled.

Now, try not to think about that too much. But wherever your mind went in that moment, that's exactly what's going on here. My bowels trembled.

My lips quivered at the sound. That is, he's crying. He's crying uncontrollably. Decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled. He is shaking like a leaf.

[9 : 17] He is so overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. And then he says, yet I will wait patiently, which means a deep peace and repose.

Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. He's weeping uncontrollably with sorrow.

He needs to change his underwear. He's a crumbled mess on the ground. And at the same time, he is filled with peace.

Now, we have trouble with that. We think you can either have grief and sorrow or you can have peace and joy.

It is possible, according to this, to be in deep sorrow and yet rejoice at exactly the same time. Joy in the Lord happens within the sorrow, not once the sorrow passes.

[10 : 40] It's a mistake to think that sorrow and grief is a lack of faith, as we often might interpret it in our modern eyes.

Job chapter one, earlier on, is a clear example of this, earlier on in the Old Testament. Horrible things happened to Job. Lost his family, lost his fortune, lost his friends, lost his health. And it says, he tore his garments, he fell on the ground and he cried out to God. And then it says, in all these things, Job did not sin.

Don't be afraid of the grief. Grief is not the opposite of faith. It can, in fact, enhance our faith in God because it drives us into God.

The grief drove Habakkuk into God rather than away from God. And that's what faith is. Faith allows you to feel the grief in such a way that it doesn't sink you.

[11 : 58] And the remarkable thing, as I've already pointed out here, is that it's not just that his grief and faith go together, but his grief and joy go together.

As we venture into verses 17 and 18 of chapter 3, we see that Habakkuk's faith flowed over into joy in troubled times.

Now, we struggle with this one as well. We don't just struggle with grief and faith, but we struggle with joy and grief in troubled times.

Normally, we declare God is good when the fig tree is fruitful, when the health is good, when the money's there, when the holiday was a blast, when we're surrounded by loved ones, when the circumstances are going the way that we assume that they should go, we go, ah, God is so good to me.

And yet, there's nothing remarkably Christian about that. Anyone can do that. Habakkuk found a way to access the goodness of God despite the calamity.

[13 : 19] Most people infer the goodness of God when things are going well. Habakkuk, on the other hand, came into direct contact with it when things were going terribly wrong.

Have a look at verses 17 and 18. Though the fig tree does not bud and there's no grapes on the vine, though the olive crops fail and the field produces no food, though there are no sheep in the pen, no cattle's in the stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will be joyful in God my Saviour. Now, what he mentions here is no small matter. There's no crops, there's no food, there's no sheep, there's no cattle.

It's a calamity. It's like all the crops have failed. There's no imports coming in. The shelves of Woolworths and Coles and every other, they're all empty, not just the toilet paper and the flour. Everything's gone. There's no storehouses out. Wherever they are in this country are empty. Well, there's nothing coming in. This is an absolute social disaster.

[14 : 35] And that is what's coming when the Babylonians are coming. And yet he rejoices and he is joyful. His joy doesn't replace the sorrow.

His joy doesn't come after the sorrow. When the grief drives you into God, it drives you into the joy that only God provides.

And therefore, you can grieve deeply without being crushed. So the question before us is how did Habakkuk get to that point?

How did he get to verses 16, 17, 18 and 19? How did he get there? Well, the rest of chapter three answers that.

We get a glimpse of it in the introduction in his prayer in verse one of chapter three. Lord, I have heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.

[15 : 41] Renew them in our day. In our time, make them known. In wrath, remember mercy. Now, Habakkuk's grief and joy expressing faith in God is based on God's track record.

That's the rest of Habakkuk, Habakkuk three. It's the first part of this chapter. Habakkuk looks back at God's track record of saving his people.

Now, what you see in this first 15 verses, if you like, is the recounting of the Exodus events events of Israel, where God rescues his people out of slavery in Egypt.

And the main thing that Habakkuk does in chapter three, and is the source of his joy, is he remembers. Habakkuk remembers God's mighty acts of judgment on Israel with the devastating 10 plagues.

He remembers the spectacular way in which God rescued Israel from oppressive slavery in Egypt. He remembers the trampling of the sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army as they attempt to follow Israel through the sea, and yet God closed the waters over them.

[17:11] He remembers the shaking of Mount Sinai as God appears to Moses and gave Israel the Ten Commandments as his newly formed people. He remembers the day that the sun stood still in the sky as God brought judgment upon the Amorites through his people.

He remembers the parting of the Jordan River for Israel to walk across on dry land so that they could go in and take possession of their new, new home, the promised land.

See, what Habakkuk remembers is the Exodus events, rescuing from slavery, the formation of the people of God and being taken in to the place that God would dwell with them in the promised land. The Exodus events, the salvation event in the Old Testament. Habakkuk is going, if you like, back to the gospel as he knew it.

Israel was in slavery. They didn't have the power to get themselves out of it. God came and miraculously did what they could not do through the leadership of Moses.

[18:33] They were saved by what God did for them through Moses. Habakkuk is remembering the saving of God's people until he gets to verse 16 and he has peace.

He connects what he knows about God's saving actions in the past and he puts them into his present. In his confusion, in his uncertainty and his pain of his current calamity, Habakkuk looks back at the faithfulness of God through history and everything that God has done for them and the result of it and he has peace.

He's reminded of God's trustworthiness and goodness his mercy, his salvation. That's what gets him to his place of peace and joy in verses 16 to 19.

But let me just say, if you are listening to this right now, you and I have got a leg up on Habakkuk because we get a perspective of even the exodus events that even Habakkuk doesn't get.

We've got a little bit more of an insight here. We get that by virtue, that is, we get this perspective by virtue that we are living on this side of history, of the life, the ministry, the death and the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ.

[20:31] In Jesus Christ, we can be loved and accepted and approved by God in a way that even Habakkuk couldn't fully grasp with the exodus events.

The exodus events where Moses leads Israel from slavery into their new home, the promised land where God would dwell with his people was simply a forerunner to a greater rescue and a permanent future home.

The exodus that Jesus pulls off is the ultimate one. You see, Moses risked his life to liberate Israel from social and political bondage in Egypt.

Jesus gave his life to liberate us from evil and wickedness and sin and death itself. On the night before the liberation that Moses commanded Israel to slay a lamb and to put their blood on the doorposts of their houses so that the angel of death would go straight pass over their house, that they would live and be liberated from slavery.

and yet we hear in the New Testament that Jesus is the Lamb of God who shed his blood so that God's judgment would pass over us and that we would be liberated from sin and death and live forever with him.

[22:06] In Exodus 28 we read that Moses engraved the names of Israel the children of Israel on precious stones and he had those stones placed on the breastplate of the high priest.

So when the high priest wearing the breastplate walked into the tabernacle to do ministry before God on behalf of the people of Israel he had their names written over his heart.

And we discover in the New Testament that Jesus is the great high priest who sits at God's right hand intervening for those who are his.

And our advocate the Lord Jesus he has our names those who trust in him written in his heart.

All who have faith in him are precious to him they are priceless to him and that's what lasts and that is why the Christian still has everything everything even when they lose everything.

[23:28] they are told to do and they're so excited that things went so well they had power they're becoming famous they're accomplishing great things and Jesus says to them in verse 20 do not rejoice that the spirit submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

what he is saying is that your value your worth your importance your significance your happiness your joy is not tied and should not be tied by what you accomplish.

He is saying that there is something even greater than power and wealth and reputation and achievement knowledge it is that your name is engraved in heaven.

More important than your name being on a degree on a on a desk on on the top of a large bank account a title deed an award is that it is engraved in heaven.

And what he's saying here in Luke 10 he stops savoring and treasuring and doting and fondling in your mind the things that are so easily destroyed by calamity by viruses by disease by hardship by suffering by global financial crises when circumstances change and they will for all of us he says you will fall in that moment eternal life in Jesus is the only thing that the Babylonian army cannot destroy as we just read from Romans chapter 8 who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword no in all these things we that is those who put their faith in Jesus

[26 : 09] Christ are more than conquerors through him who loves us for I'm convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor demons neither the present nor the future nor any powers neither height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord when calamity comes when the times of trouble come all things can be taken away from us except this one the one of promise of life forever the one promise that you are my much loved child that is secure nothing can touch that the source of joy in the Christian life is not whether things are working out in my life in the moment the way that I expect them to be it's not even what God might in fact be doing in me right now it is what God has done for me then in Jesus historically 2000 years ago that guarantees a future for me forever of hope and joy for the Christian even the worst of things will turn out for good the good things can never be taken away and the best things are yet to come so how do we fuel a life of joy despite the circumstances now this is the great thing about Habakkuk if you followed us through this season over the last you know it's been a quick one four messages through Habakkuk but you notice it starts with complaint the book of Habakkuk starts with Habakkuk complaining against God because of the coming calamity and yet it ends with joy verse 18 again yet I will rejoice in the Lord I will be joyful in God my saviour now this is not a classic stiff upper lip attitude from Habakkuk this is not Habakkuk being stoic here and it's not him being indifferent to the trouble we fuel our joy in troubled times by constantly going back to the gospel of the

Lord Jesus Christ and remembering see Habakkuk in verse 18 says the same thing twice I will rejoice I'll be joyful says it twice remembering remembering remembering remembering repeating it repeating it repeating it Habakkuk is calling us here to the discipline of going back remembering and rejoicing in what we have now at first glance it's easy to miss the way that this prayer ends there's this little subscription at the end which reads for the director of music on my stringed instruments you see this chapter is not merely a personal resolution of faith which was achieved by Habakkuk this prayer of faithful submission to God is meant to be duplicated and celebrated amongst God's people for generations to come this prayer this prayer is intentionally placed in the first person so that it draws each of us into the prayer into the experience of surrendering to

God together and rejoicing in his salvation and so while the mood of Habakkuk is somber this song is not somber verses 17 and 18 of Habakkuk 3 would have to be some of the most uplifting verses in the entire Bible integral to the life of faith despite the calamities is turning our remembering of the gospel into repeated praise of and to the redeemer and the sustainer of life the Lord Jesus Christ you see rejoicing in the gospel means to treasure it it means to savor it it means rejoicing is to take something that has happened and to say this is the most important thing that's happened to me over and over and over again rejoicing is to adore who God is and what he has achieved it's not the same as knowing it's not the same as thinking it is appreciating it is valuing in his daily devotional book my rock my refuge

Tim Keller writes this the character of this praise praise that is praise to God is to be glorious what is glorious praise glory has connotations of weightiness dignity magnificence and beauty glorious worship is exuberant never half-hearted it is attractive not off-putting it is awesome never sentimental it is brilliant not careless it points to God not to the speakers so worship should never be trivial never pretentious and so as we draw our time in Habakkuk to a close in this coronavirus season we're going to do that now not with the words of Habakkuk three but with words written by another one who faced a day of calamity more than 2,000 years after

[32 : 34] Habakkuk Horatio Gates Spafford was a prominent American lawyer and Presbyterian church elder in the 1800s he lost almost his entire fortune in the great fire of Chicago of 1871 scarlet fever killed his four year old son in exactly the same year and two years later he decided to take a holiday take the family what was left of his family on holiday to Europe for some respite

unfortunately Spafford was held up with business and so he had to stay behind but his wife and his four daughters travelled ahead of him to Europe and he was going to meet them afterwards on the 22nd of

November 1873 while crossing the Atlantic the ship that his wife and his four daughters were on was struck by an iron sailing vessel and it sunk and 226 people lost their lives including all four of Spafford's daughters when his wife finally got to Europe she sent a telegram saved alone Spafford sailed to England as soon as he could and as he sailed over the location of his daughter's death in the Atlantic Ocean he wrote a hymn it's called It Is Well With My Soul Though Satan should buffet though his trial should come let this blessed assurance control that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to his cross and

I bear it no more praise the Lord praise the Lord oh my soul let's stand and sing that together