

# Guest Speaker Jake Cronin

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! I gotta get my timer out. I heard last time Taylor was here, he preached for four hours. So, I don't want to do that today. It is such a joy to be here at this church.

I remember two years ago when Trinity Grace was planted, and I've not been able to spend a Sunday morning with you guys yet, but it is so fun to look out and see so many new faces, people I've not met before.

And it's just evidence that the gospel is going forth, that this church is getting work done in Athens, Tennessee. And so, it encourages my faith to be here. It encourages Cornerstone's faith.

Just watching you guys be faithful to step out in faith and plant this church. So, thank you. Thank you for your example to Walt and to the members of this church. I'm so grateful for your example.

[ 1 : 06 ] And I also want to thank you guys for your faithful investment in the Pastors College, both to allow me to come here this morning to preach God's Word to you, but also for sending the Hollingsworths.

I know that this young church plant to send out one of their families, especially the Hollingsworth, was a sacrifice. And they have become such dear friends to us. We just have so much fun with them.

And so, this is one of the stories I wanted to tell this morning. My first experience of Taylor in the classroom, we're taking Greek, and so we had to learn the alphabet over the summer.

And we go around the classroom, very first day of class. It's like everyone is introducing, everyone's kind of a little unsure what's going to happen at the Pastors College. And so, we come in. I still don't know any Greek to this day, but we're supposed to learn the alphabet.

And the first guy goes, and I'll do it in English because, like I said, I don't know any Greek. And the teacher calls, anyone know the alphabet? This guy goes, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and we're kind of all impressed, kind of fast. The next guy goes, it's like ABCDFGHHK.

[ 2 : 11 ] And it's like, whoa, that guy studied a whole lot. And then finally, OK, we want one more person to volunteer. And Taylor raises his hand. He's like, I think I know the alphabet, but I really feel like I learned better with song and I learned better with mnemonic devices.

So he begins singing the alphabet. And this was the slowest song I've ever heard in my life. I think Taylor is still singing the Greek alphabet seven months later in Louisville right now.

It was A, B, C. And the teacher cut him off and was like, can you write a rap song for the Greek alphabet?

So you got to harass Taylor about stories like these. He is just such a fun guy to be around, such a joy in the classroom. I respect him so much and I respect Walt so much.

And so I'm just jealous for them to come back and be a part of this church and serve you guys.

Well, we can get started. You can turn in your Bibles to the book of Habakkuk.

[ 3 : 12 ] If you don't know where Habakkuk is, you can turn to Matthew in the New Testament and flip back a couple books. You'll find it. They're a minor prophet. Well, I'm sure over the course of this last year with plans canceled, more time spent in our homes than ever before, it's safe to say that I'm not the only person who has spent a couple nights watching movies.

When things go south and a plan is canceled, I go home and I maybe watch a movie with Ellen.

And I realize that me and Ellen have completely different ways of picking movies. While Ellen may go for a specific genre or even a classic, I realize I like to know what other people are liking.

So I like what people are talking about, what people buy into. And I found a good way to gauge this is the highest grossing movie list of all time. These are the movies that have made it, that people

have bought into and watched over and over again.

And when looking up the list of the highest grossing movies, movies like Harry Potter, Avengers, Avatar, Star Wars, Frozen, The Beauty and the Beast, they make the top list.

And I'm sure you've heard of these movies. I'm sure you've watched some of these movies. And I started wondering, what is it about these movies that so many people have watched, so many people have wanted to view?

[ 4 : 30 ] And I realized there's a simple thread that pulls all of these movies together. All of these movies share one thing in common. And right in the middle of all their plots, there's a transformation of some kind.

It's really interesting. Anakin Skywalker turning into Darth Vader. Spoiler alert if you haven't seen Star Wars. There's Steve Rogers injected by serum to turn into Captain America.

A man being bit by a spider to turn into Spider-Man. We see cars driving down to turn into the Autobots. I think our culture has a fascination with being transformed.

Well, I found the book of Habakkuk and our text does exactly that. It shows a man being transformed before our very eyes. If this book was turned into a movie, it too could make the highest grossing movie list of all time.

It has action and drama, accusations, rumors of war, visions of warriors. And in the middle of it all, in just three chapters, Habakkuk transformed.

[ 5 : 33 ] If you've never read the book, you should go home this week and read it for yourself. It's absolutely amazing. It is so fascinating to see the story just come alive. Right in the opening scenes of this book, Habakkuk, he's complaining to the Lord because justice has gone forth perverted by the people of God.

They've done violence and been wicked. And it seems like God is doing nothing about it. So he cries out to God saying, are you just God? Do you see what your people are doing?

And then God answers him. He answers that he indeed is just. And because he's just, he's going to raise up the nation of the Chaldeans or the Babylonians to come and punish Israel for their sins.

After hearing God's answer to his first complaint, Habakkuk, he's struck. And he's even more worried now. He doesn't like what he hears. So he mounts another complaint against God.

He believes that this coming nation to destroy Israel is worse than his own people being wicked.

This is a more wicked nation than us, God. How could you do this? Are you thinking wisely?

[ 6 : 44 ] God, are you wise at all? God kindly answers this prophet once again by telling him justice will come even for the Babylonians.

They too will be destroyed for their wickedness against God's people. Then we move to the climax of the whole story. God takes the blinders off Habakkuk's eyes and he reveals who he really is to Habakkuk.

Habakkuk, he's now silenced of any accusations against God. He realizes that God is both just, he's both wise, and he breaks into a song of praise, remembering God's past deeds, as well as looking forward to what God will do in the future.

So look with me. This is where we are in our text. Chapter 3, verse 17 through 19. The most important part of our time together this morning.

The word of the Lord. 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.

[ 8 : 04 ] 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 with stringed instruments. What an amazing transformation.

From the first accusations in chapter 1, to this prayer of waiting patiently on the Lord, and being joyful, rejoicing in Him.

I think this text, it wants to teach us something this morning. And I think it wants to teach us, for those who trust in God's promises, they will find unshakable joy and sustaining grace no matter what.

No matter what the circumstance, no matter what season of life you're in, for those trusting in God and His promises, you will find joy. You will find strength in the Lord.

[ 9 : 03 ] Habakkuk shows us that even if we haven't found joy perfectly, even if we've spent our time of suffering with more questions about God's goodness or His justice, than praising Him, we too can be transformed this morning to rejoice in the Lord and find strength in Him.

This text, it's split up into two sections. It's easy to follow. You can see in verse 17 and 18, is the prophet's response to suffering, and in verse 19, is the prophet's confidence in suffering.

So let's look at the first point, the prophet's response to suffering. Remember, Habakkuk, he's just told that this mighty nation of Babylon is going to come up and destroy His people for their sins. This nation of Babylon, they're described in chapter 1 as bitter and hasty, dreaded and fearsome. They would have been taking people's lives, both literally, they would have killed people, as well as taking people into captivity to build cities and roads and walls.

They would steal people out of their countries and bring them back to Babylon. They were living a life of luxury based on the backs of other people. And now God is telling Habakkuk that they are going to come against Habakkuk and his people.

[ 10 : 22 ] Babylon, they would come and attack cities surrounding their opponents to cut off all food sources, leaving people completely hopeless. Chapter 1, verse 10, explains Babylon like this.

At kings, they scoff. Rulers, they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. It seems like it's a game for Babylon as they mock their opponents.

It reminds me sometimes of an older sibling mocking their younger sibling as they just ruthlessly beat them in a game. Their army, Babylon's army, is strong, and God tells them they're going to come against him.

Nothing about the picture in chapter 1 is exciting. It's just bleak. There's darkness on the horizon. And that's what we also see in verse 17 in our text.

Habakkuk, he starts listing items falling away for us. And it becomes more and more severe as the list goes on and on. So he starts out, the fig tree should not blossom.

[ 11 : 25 ] Figs in Israel, they would have been a delicacy during that time. So it's not something that people would necessarily rely on for their main food source, but it's something that if it was taken away would cause a slight blow to the local economy as well as the health of the people.

But it's not severe. It's not everything they would rely on. Next, he says, nor fruit beyond the vines. Grapes, among other fruits, I'm sure would have been eaten for food as well as made into drinks. So this being taken away would be a loss, but more as an inconvenience rather than just a severe blow like the first one. They would still have other food. They would still have other drinks to enjoy. But this is still not a good situation as they've lost the figs and now the fruit. The produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food. Now this is where we should feel it become more and more tense. The fields yielding no food would have significant effects on every person within Jerusalem. If they couldn't get out to their fields to keep them, they would become overgrown, destroyed.

[ 12 : 32 ] The army, I'm sure, even would be eating their food. The flocks being cut off from the fold and no herd in the stalls. This would mean loss of clothing from the wool, meat for the diet, even the ability to sacrifice these animals in the temple to God.

This was not just a loss of something physical at this point, but for the people of God who were faithful, the loss of sacrifice in the temple for their sins. It would cut deep.

Losing one of these items would be hard on the people, but the combination of all of these together would be devastating. It would provide incredible economic hardship, loss of daily provision, and for some, loss of hope.

Not to mention, this isn't happening because you forgot to go get the food for one day or because you just have one bad apple on a tree.

It's happening because there's an army encamped around your city, ready to either kill you or take you back to Babylon as a slave. Once again, the picture is bleak.

[ 13 : 41 ] I recently read a news story of a guy named Joe Flavel. On March 1st, 2020, Joe was hit by a car in the UK, and this was just two weeks before all of the UK went into lockdown for the coronavirus.

And he actually, just two weeks ago, woke up from, or I guess a few weeks ago now, woke up from a coma after being hit by this car. So he's been asleep for the last year when all of the coronavirus has taken place.

His family was so thankful that Joe was alive and well. He was waking up. But what they were most perplexed about was how are we going to explain a year like we just had to Joe?

It's crazy. We all hear bad news in our life or go through trials or suffering, but sometimes we have the privilege of taking days or weeks, maybe even months between these blows.

I can't imagine the cumulative effect of Joe waking up to a world completely different. A year of bad news, just ready to be told to you. Having to understand your new condition after being hit by a car, learning to walk again, eat again, understanding how you miss family outings and birthdays and time with friends and school.

[14:52] Thousands of people have died while you slept. Still, none of your family is able to visit you, only allowed Zooms because of this virus. It's not just the one thing that is severe, it's the combination of these multiple blows.

And we see Joe is experiencing, we see Habakkuk experiencing in our text. So my question for you is, how do you respond to suffering?

How do you respond to hardship? When trials come your way, what is your response? We've all experienced the devastating blows this world has to offer where one bad thing happens after another.

Maybe loss of job. Maybe financial hardship. Maybe death of a loved one. Maybe another miscarriage.

Your spouse or your friend has sinned against you. Anxiety or depression from another question you're wrestling with. A sickness that comes back to haunt you.

[16:06] I'm sure some of you in here now who heard news this morning or last night that are thinking through, how do I respond to this hardship? As if we're wearing a backpack and one more weight is added for us to carry and burden us.

We've all experienced it. I know I have. Just in 25 years of living, experienced sickness and death of loved ones.

I know you've been affected as well. But what's amazing is I think Habakkuk and more than that, God's word has something to say to us this morning.

God's word has a way to teach us how to respond to these trials. I love the first word in chapter 17 is though. This is not just a list of bad things happening and falling away.

Habakkuk is making it explicit. Though these things fall away. Though the fig tree not blossom. Though there be no fruit on the vines. Though the produce fail. Though there be no fields.

[17:19] Though the flock be cut off. Look at his response in verse 18. I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Habakkuk has found something greater than these worldly things to place his joy in.

Verse 18, it's an expression of Habakkuk's faith in God. He can rejoice in God because as all things in this earth can be taken away, only God is certain.

He can take joy in the God of his salvation because only God is able to save. He can take joy in God. It's amazing. Yes, Habakkuk's circumstances look dim, but what he fills his time with is rejoicing in the Lord.

His response to suffering is to wait patiently and rejoice. For me, I've found this text so helpful over the last few weeks. And I've been trying to learn and grow from it.

I've found just taking time each day, just practically for me to thank the Lord, to pray for little things in my life, even in the midst of sickness, even in the midst of suffering.

[18:26] Thanking God for my wife, for my family, for good food, for sunshine, and even rain, for beautiful flowers to pass by on the interstate coming here.

Things I just don't deserve. I think now you may even be wondering, what has changed Habakkuk? Why is he so different?

How did he get to a place where he can joyfully wait on the Lord? When we first met Habakkuk, he's suffering because justice is going forth perverted by his own people.

His own people would have been worshiping Baal, a false god. They would have been setting up idols. They would have been offering their children and animals to the sun god. The king would have been corrupt in the eyes of the Lord.

And then God tells him a nation's going to come against them to destroy his own people. And then in chapter three, Habakkuk breaks out into a prayerful song rejoicing in the Lord.

[19:24] I don't know many people who take, yeah, suffering and trial are coming your way like Habakkuk does. Well, I think the answer is found shortly before our text in chapter three, verse two.

It says, Oh Lord, I've heard the report of you and your work. Oh Lord, do I fear in the midst of your years, revive it in the midst of the years, make it known in wrath. Remember mercy. So after hearing the report of the Lord and seeing a great vision of the Lord as a mighty warrior, Habakkuk struck with this report. So much so that he fears God more than he fears the coming trouble. His excitement then is not for the trial coming. His excitement is for the one who is coming. His excitement revolves around the Lord and his coming justice for the wicked. And his coming mercy for those who trust in him. His rejoicing in the Lord is an expression of his faith in God that he will do what he has said he will do.

[ 20 : 28 ] Habakkuk has been given the gift of faith. And this is what's changed him. He knows in chapter three through accounting these previous fulfillment of God's kindness to his people, that God again will be merciful to his people.

Doesn't this story add up or sound too familiar at this point? Bad things are happening. The nation is corrupt. People are divided. Those who say they know God have disobeyed him. Some are faithful, yet some have fallen away. Questions are mounting about God's goodness and his justice. Suffering is present and sin is active. And some, like Habakkuk, are recounting the works of the Lord. I know it sounds familiar to me. It sounds like the world we live in. But this is one of the reasons I love God's word and its relevance to us for all of the centuries, for all of our life. And by way of application, I think it would do us great good in remembering, just like Habakkuk had remembered the works of the Lord. Just like Habakkuk hears the work of the Lord and remembers his deed, we should do the same.

[ 21 : 43 ] We should remember his covenant to us. We should remember his mighty acts. Remember that at one time you were far off. You were dead in your sins without hope, deserving nothing but the wrath of God.

But you have been bought by the blood of Christ. Remember that Jesus came to this earth also as a mighty conqueror, stronger than the nation of Babylon. He conquered every temptation to sin. And in the end, he conquered the final enemy, death. Sin. Sin. Remember that Jesus rose from the dead and he sits at the right hand of the Father and he intercedes for you now. Remember that the Spirit gives you faith to believe all of his promises to you. Remembering is good for the soul. It brings peace and comfort knowing our greatest need has been met in Christ. Although trials are near, we can remember God and his promises to us and rejoice in him. He's been faithful in giving his only son. He will be faithful in all else.

[ 22 : 49 ] Romans 8.32 reminds 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?

I think this includes joy in our suffering. Maybe you're here and you have a hard time remembering. You have a hard time wondering why this is good news this morning for you. What does God have to do with my hard circumstances? Maybe you can relate more with the questions in chapter 1 and chapter 2. Is God just? Is God wise in my trial? Well, if this is the case, I want to tell you, Christ loves to save sinners. Do you want comfort? Do you want peace in your soul? Start with where you are in relation to God. If the Lord does judge evil like we see in these first two chapters, if he does indeed punish the deeds of the wicked like he'll do for Israel and like he'll do for Babylon, then we need to be made right before him.

[ 24 : 00 ] Knowing our greatest need of being secure from the wrath of God brings peace, even when smaller trials come, even when larger trials come. Knowing that we are in Christ gives peace because for all of eternity will be made right and be before him.

Now would be a great time to call out to the Lord for salvation and be able to look back at this time, be able to remember this time God's kindness to you. What a joy it is to trust in the God of our salvation. How good it is to rejoice in the Lord. I love that these scriptures are an encouragement to me. As I've witnessed faithful examples, even by some in this church, it's so exciting to come back and see faces that I've seen before, to see people who are at Cornerstone, and I've been able to witness,

been able to watch you rejoice in the midst of suffering.

Thank you for being an example to me. Thank you for teaching me what it looks like to wait on the Lord with joy in the midst of suffering. Well, we've seen Habakkuk rejoicing in what seems like the worst circumstances.

Well, why could he rejoice when all is failing around him? And this is what we see in verse 19. The reason he can rejoice, the prophet's confidence in suffering.

[ 25 : 23 ] Verse 19 says, God, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer's. He makes me tread on my high places.

Habakkuk's confidence for life and strength is found in God alone. As all other things are stripped from him, he only has the Lord to cling to.

Although he was scared about the news that Babylon would come and destroy their city, he remembers that God will also bring justice even for the Babylonians.

He holds fast to the promise that God has made to him. In chapter 2, after Habakkuk's second complaint about God being wise, the Lord answers this, Write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.

For still the vision awaits its appointed time, it hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come, it will not delay. And in chapter 2, verse 8, Because you have plundered many nations, speaking of Babylon, all the remnant of the people shall plunder you.

[ 26 : 33 ] So to sum up what has just happened, the Lord has this prophet write down on tablets that Babylon in the end will be destroyed. And when you think it's not going to happen, write it down and keep waiting.

And when you still think it's not going to happen, keep waiting because it surely will come.

Habakkuk has great confidence that this God whom he serves holds fast to his promises.

Having confidence in the right thing makes all the difference. If Habakkuk had confidence in figs or fruit or produce or the flock, his hope would be lost.

If his confidence was in the strength of his city or the walls, even his financial provision, the ability to store up goods, his hope would be gone. Instead, he puts his confidence for strength in the Lord.

It reminds me of this time I went to a mission trip in Honduras when I was in high school. The goal of our mission trip was to build a church building outside of Celotecca, this small town, and it was a three-hour drive from our hotel every day.

[ 27 : 41 ] And so we got in our cars and we loaded up and we're going over this mountain. It was a three-hour drive one way and we get done with the very first day and it's just a ton of work and we have to drive back. And I think afterwards we decided this just doesn't make any sense.

We should stay in the town so that we can get work done all throughout the day. We can get to work right away. So one of the villagers were so kind to offer their house for us to stay in.

And it was probably a quarter of the size of this room and someone made 30 makeshift cots for us to sleep on. And I remember walking into this house and there was just a few hammocks strung up on the rafters of this house tied to the structure of this building with all these cots laid out that we were going to sleep in.

And I remember the first person got on the cot after this long day and this thing just tumbled down to the ground, just hit the concrete. And all of us are making fun of this person for eating too much at lunch and not working hard enough throughout the day.

And they got up, go to another cot, and within seconds that one crumbles down to the ground. And we're like, okay, you cannot touch or even look at any of our cots from now on. All right, we have 28 left.

[ 28 : 45 ] We realized very shortly after this, this was not a weight issue or a height issue. This was a cot issue. So as slowly as people start getting ready for bed, they're moving onto their cots just real slowly.

And then you hear the wood crack and just tumble down to the concrete. Just one person after another. It looked like a war zone in this place when we woke up. All these cots just spread out, broken wood everywhere.

And I think I was one of the most energetic people the next morning because I was safely suspended in the air, in my hammock, that the Lord graciously allowed me to sleep in.

And it was just such a silly, silly just view of seeing all these cots and broken. But my point is, it's crucial to put your hope in the right things.



