

Crisis, What Crisis?'

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Preacher: John Lowrie

[0 : 0 0] please in the word of God to the book of Habakkuk. It's been Harvest Sunday. We're taking a break from our regular studies in Philippians. Habakkuk, if you know, most Christians know their Bible, and you can usually recite Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. Most Christians, when they come to the last five books of the Bible, just get lost. There's H's and Z's, and you never know what order they come in. Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. So you can either use the street index at the front, or just get to Matthew, go back a bit into Malachi. Then you've got the H's and the Z's. The first H is Habakkuk, and we're going to look at this book together. It's usually my custom not to preach for long on Easter and Christmas. I always assume maybe folk come in from the estate. They're not used to a 30, 35 minute, 40 minute, in my case, sermon. So I don't subject MD to that. So I'll probably just preach for about 15 minutes or so this morning on this passage. It's a big passage, though. Let's just begin. In fact, before we pray, I just want to thank everybody who's done this. I must confess, I really like Harvest, and this is first class.

Who did this? Did you do that? You guys. A team did this. That's very good. This whole thing, and that just looks wonderful. It just looks very, very nice indeed. So thanks for all the contributions. They will be well used, and it is a token of what the Lord has done for us. He's met all our needs as well. Let's just ask for the Lord's help now as we come to his word. A loving Father, we praise and thank you for your word, but most of all, we praise and thank you for who you are.

Lord, we've just been singing a song, Lord. It reminds us, Lord, of difficult times. Lord, in times when we despair, perhaps, but that song reminds us that you take us through deep waters. You never leave us nor forsake us. You are to us what we need, and Lord, there is dross, perhaps, in each one of our lives that you do want to consume and to refine the gold in our life, and Father, forgive us, Lord, when we doubt you and we don't like what's happening. So, Father, help us to understand this book, Lord, that you have recorded for us, that you want to teach us from on this Harvest Sunday. So, Father, speak to us now, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I like Harvest. I must confess it's a time to reflect. It usually comes near the end of the year, and yet I personally think back over another year. This is a token of God's faithfulness to us. I usually do the same on January the 1st, or usually the last Sunday of December, which is between Christmas and New Year or whatever, and we usually, it's a good time to stop and to reflect and to give testimony to God's goodness and faithfulness. So, hopefully, you've not just rocked up with a tin of beans this morning, but gratitude in your heart to what the Lord has done and what He means to you, and really praising Him and thanking Him for His faithfulness to you, taking you through, perhaps, not just financial difficulties or providing for you financially, but even spiritually, meeting those needs as well. Times when you've known peace and joy and rejoicing in the midst of difficulties. That's how real our God is. Earlier last week, last Monday, maybe it was because a new harvest was coming. Habakkuk was one of my readings. I tend to read, the plan I use is four or five chapters a day, and so usually when you come to the book of Habakkuk or Zephaniah or whatever, they don't say, read Zephaniah chapter one, they say, read the whole book. So, Habakkuk was that. It was good to sit down from the start and just read Habakkuk. I love Habakkuk. It's a special book to me. In many ways, the Lord used this to bring me into ministry, simply because I was a young Christian. I was asked to preach, and not preach, but take the Bible study. I hadn't been saved very long, and I thought, wow, I'm getting to speak at the

[4 : 0 6] Bible study, and I chose Habakkuk for some reason. I went to the bookshop in Glasgow, thought, what book will I look at, and chose Habakkuk. Took three days off work to prepare. That's how committed I was.

Took three days off work, and the Lord blessed that time together. It just shows you, if you put the effort in, the Lord will bless, and it was well received, and I never forgot it. It was the first time I

spoke in public, and eventually the Lord called us into ministry. So, this is a soft spot in my heart. But I was reading this, as I said, on Monday, and I came to, you know, the well-known verses. These are verses that are often quoted right at the end of Habakkuk, talking about rejoicing. Let me remind you of these words, and they leapt out at me on Monday. Habakkuk 3, 17 to 19. Habakkuk says this, though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails, and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the sheepfold, and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior. The sovereign Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to tread on the heights. And then it says, which is still scripture, for the director of music on my stringed instruments. This is a cheerful thing. You're supposed to sing this. There's music playing as well. This is quite some verses to consider at harvest time, especially in the midst of a cost of living crisis, here's an image, of those who just struggle to make ends meet. And I stopped at these verses, and I looked at them in the midst of watching the news and hearing about the price of fuel and various things. And I know these verses. I've known them for many years. You've known them. You've heard many sermons on them as well. But it caused me to stop and to realize that the vastness of what these verses are saying.

Here is a farmer. Here is his livelihood, you could say. And there are five areas of income. You could say he's not just an arable farmer. He's not just a couple of sheep or whatever. It talks about figs, verse 17. Even if there's no figs. My neighbor in London grew figs. He used to always give us figs every year. He'd come in. He was a guy from Greece, and he grew figs. He also had grapes as well. He would do this. You can grow them in London. You can't grow them in Scotland. Anyway, maybe you can a greenhouse.

But no figs, no grapes, no olive crops, no field crops. So the fields produce no food. We just watched a video of a man who was struggling in that area. No sheep or cattle in the stalls. Yet he says, I will rejoice and be joyful. Here is somebody with no income whatsoever. Everything fails. And he says, yet I will rejoice. And I thought, that's just, that just blows your switches. How can you say that?

[7 : 29] As Christians, it's so easy for us just to say, well, the Lord will do it. Do we really believe this? You never know how strong your faith is until it's tested. And I've known Christians that come to church where they all rejoice and stuff. They lose their job. They lose their income. They lose their health. Then the tire hits the road. And can we say, even though these things happen, yet I will be joyful and I will rejoice. It's verses that just seem so out there that are they really true? Can we really do this? As I said, this is a well-known passage. It's often quoted at this time. And perhaps you can say this. Perhaps your faith has never been tested that you would be able to say this. But it was good for me on Monday to read the whole book because the book ends very differently, if you know the book of Habakkuk from how it begins. Habakkuk is dealing with big problems, right? It's a very different book from the other books of the Bible. Habakkuk is a prophet of the

Lord. He's not sent to God's people to warn them or to tell them or to instruct them or to teach them or to command them. Instead, Habakkuk's whole dialogue is between him and God. It's a bit like Job.

And Habakkuk is struggling. So let's look at his mindset because it made me ask the question or try to answer the question. How do you get from being confused about God and maybe complaining to God, because that's what he is, to rejoicing? And that's what I thought we would spend the rest of our time just looking at. So let's look at this. I've called this crisis. What crisis? It's how Habakkuk finishes, even if there's no food or whatever, and there is a crisis, a financial income, economic crisis. I'm fine. I'm okay. I will rejoice and I will give thanks. So first of all, then, the book begins with Habakkuk complaining. He complains. If you have Habakkuk open before you, look at some of these verses. God's people aren't living as they should. This is the day in which he's living. God's people have wandered away from God. They have neglected God's word. Violence is on every hand. Injustice is abounding, and God's leaders are just a waste of space. And that's what he begins in verse 2. Here's his complaint. How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you don't listen, or cry out to you, violence, but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me? There is strife and conflict abounds. Therefore, the law, the word of God, is paralyzed. Justice never prevails. The wicked hem and the righteous, so that justice is perverted. That is his problem. It's a lifelong common problem in the world today. You're here because you love the Lord. You've got to know the Lord. But there are

many people throughout the world who say, if there's a God, why doesn't he stop the violence? Why doesn't he deal with the poverty and the famine? Why doesn't he come down and sort all of this out? And they very much feel the way Habakkuk feels as he begins this discourse with God. That's his complaint.

Lord, don't you care? There's violence. People are being beaten up. There's injustice. People are being robbed. And then the Lord responds in verse 5 of chapter 1. Basically says, don't worry, Habakkuk, I have a plan in place. Look at these words. Look at the nations and watch, and be utterly amazed.

[11 : 22] For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even though you were told it. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and peteous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. There are fierce and dreaded people that are law to themselves and promote their own honor. And then you have this picture of verse 8. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong. Horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour. They are intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind.

They gather prisoners like sand. They mock kings, scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities, building earthen ramps. They capture them. Well, you can just imagine how, if you've never read this before, that makes things worse for Habakkuk. He's going, I'm going to use the Babylonians. When we looked at the Old Testament, you remember, this ruthless people, the Lord is going to use them.

And this just confuses them even more because what God is about to do doesn't make sense to him. He has a picture of who God is and what God is like. And God now says, I'm going to act in a way that's just going to, you just wouldn't believe. And I'm going to use this, these people, the Babylonians. And basically Habakkuk says, how can you use somebody who's worse than the people that you're actually going to punish? They're worse than Israel. Look at verse 12 of Habakkuk chapter 1. He reminds, he brings his doctrine of God before God. Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my, note this, holy one, you will never die. You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment. You, my rock, have ordained them to punish. But your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? In other words, he's not pleased. This makes things worse. What God is doing doesn't make any sense to him. So then you come into chapter 2 and he takes the role of a watchman. He's in the huff, basically. And he just doesn't like the answer, doesn't understand what God is doing, doesn't get any of this. So in verse 1 he says, I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts. I will look to see what he will say to me and I will answer what I am to give to this complaint. In other words, he sees injustice, he sees difficulties, cries out to God. God says, I'm going to do this and it doesn't make sense to him. And it's very confusing and no wonder he's complaining. The Lord responds. And secondly, then he is corrected in this. He's told, something that perhaps helps him understand that God is in control. He's given a vision. He says, what will happen in the future, it might appear slow in coming, but write this down and it will certainly come. And what the Lord is basically doing is saying that God will be faithful to his character. That though he will use the Babylonians, they will have to give an account for, they will work according to their own disposition, but God will not allow them to go unpunished and to escape as well. Look at verse 2 of Habakkuk 2, write down the revelation. Verse 3, the revelation awaits an appointed time. Don't linger, wait for it. And then he mentions the Lord knows how bad the

Babylonians are. Verse 4, see the enemy is puffed up. His desires are not upright, but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness. We'll return to that in a minute. Indeed, wine betrays him. He is arrogant, never at rest. Greedy is the grave. Verse 5, like death is never satisfied. He gathers to himself all the nations, continues or takes captive all the peoples. And then you have this series of woes.

[15 : 52] We won't go through it, but he mentions that an unjust economy, slave labor, drunkenness and violence and idolatry. Look at verse 18 of chapter 2. He, this whole area of idolatry, what values an idol carved by a craftsman or an image that teaches lies? Woe to him who says to wood, verse 19, come to life or to a lifeless stone, wake up. Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver. There is no breath in it. Verse 20, the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all

the earth be silent before him.

And what God is showing Habakkuk and us this morning, that not only will Babylon not escape, although the Lord would use them to act according to their natural disposition to punish his people who have rejected him, that God will deal with all wrongdoing and with all sin. And this is what comes to Habakkuk, that God is faithful to his character. He is a holy God. He is faithful and just and true. And then in verse 3, chapter 2, Habakkuk likes us and he says, do it now, Lord, do it now. Lord, I have heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds. Repeat them in our day, in our time. Make them known. And then from verse 3 to verse 6, the power of God is described. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise rays flashing from his hand where the power was hidden. He stood, verse 6, and shook the earth, made the nations tremble.

In other words, just in these words, Habakkuk is reminded that God's ways are not our ways. His ways are higher. But he doesn't deny himself. He is still a holy, a righteous, a loving, and a caring God. And one day all these things will be sorted. All these things will be righted. And then you come to chapter 3, verse 13. You came out to deliver your people to save your anointed one. He's reminded of a God who saves, a God who's able to save. He'd done it in history. He saved them from a nation in Egypt before. This is recalled in verse 13. You came out and also to save your anointed one. If you know your Bible, it's speaking about the ultimate descendant of David, today, God is still a holy God. He is faithful to all his attributes. He's always loving and kind and gracious. And he's still in the saving business. That's what he does. He saves people. He saves nations. And he does this through his anointed one. In the vision that God gave to Habakkuk, he says, I'm going to do something in your midst that you'll be utterly amazed. If I try to explain it to you, you wouldn't get it.

In 2023, God still does amazing things. And the world needs to hear about a God who is amazing, who they may struggle with about his justice and why his violence and what about the poor? Why doesn't God do something? God is still in the business of saving people. He doesn't always work in the ways that we would want him to work, but he's a loving and a caring God. He does deliver his people. He does save through his anointed one. And that's why Habakkuk says in chapter 2, verse 14, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

[19 : 46] The world, there is a message to take to this world that God is good. God is holy. He has an anointed one. He has done something that people should be amazed at, that they can have a real and living relationship with the living God, the creator of all things, heaven and earth. And that real and living relationship is through his Son. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to do anything to obtain his favor. We come as sinners before his presence. This was the sermon that, this is what happened, you remember, when Jesus from Nazareth, he went to Nazareth, where he'd been brought up, a rough area. Can anything good come from Nazareth? He went to a needy people. He went to his own people. Verse 18, the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me. He is the Lord's anointed one to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. To know Jesus is to know the favor of the Lord in your life today. Whatever needs that you might have, he knows, he sees, he loves, he cares. You remember, when Jesus died, he rose again. And Peter, his first sermon to the masses, they'd heard about Jesus, they'd heard about their own sin.

What must we do to be saved? They cry out. He tells them, repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. With many other words, he warned them, pleaded with them, save yourselves from this corrupt generation. The generation in which we live was the same generation as Habakkuk lived in. Violence, oppression, unbelief, idolatry, not worshiping God as he deserves and saying this is God, looking to their own ideas to save them. We live in the same generation. And if we are to be saved, if we are to know, love and fellowship with God, it will only be through Jesus, through recognizing him that he is the only one who can save us and can be to us what we need. This is the simple gospel. It is received by faith. That's why in verse 4 of chapter 2, the enemy is puffed up. People today are puffed up, but the righteous person will live by faith or by his faithfulness, depending on the version.

In other words, we are made right before God when we trust him, when we give up trying to save ourselves, when we desire this relationship with the Lord. I was preaching at my daughter's wedding, and in the passage I preached on with Psalm 127, unless the Lord builds a house, we labor in vain.

There were Christians and non-Christians alike, and I was trying to encourage my daughter and her husband to put the Lord first. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you. Jesus himself tells that to us, doesn't he? This is why, thirdly, we can rejoice, because we have this relationship with the Lord. It's not a given. We need to come in repentance and faith. We need to be restored back to him, that there's nothing hindering our relationship with him. He's not Santa Claus, that we live our own life, and we just say, can you give me this, and it happens. It doesn't work like that. The Lord wants us before anything else. He wants our heart. He wants us to trust in him, as he wanted Habakkuk to trust in him. God already knew what he would do with the Babylonians, and with every other corrupt nation, with every other form of sin, that God is still holy, but he's still a God who saves, and a God who not only saves from sin, but his desire is to save us from sorrow, and not to be stressed, and to be worried. Jesus, the anointed one, when he came, what did he tell us? He couldn't have painted, he couldn't have said it clearer. I tell you, he says in [24 : 21] Matthew 6, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air, look at the flowers of the field. Can you by worrying add a single hour to your life? Why do you worry, verse 26, about clothes? Look at the flowers of the field, and the grass of the field. He says, so do not worry about what shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear? Imagine saying this to people today who are worrying about those things. Maybe you're here today worrying about those things. If I said that to you, you'd think, well, what do you know, John? Don't worry. It's easy for you to say you've got a salary, you do whatever, but I'm not saying this to you. Jesus says this to you, and if you have a real and living relationship with him, the Lord knows how to meet your needs, whether those needs are financial, or practical, or emotional, or spiritual. He's a God who loves you, who cares for you.

Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. This is the Savior that we serve on Harvest Sunday. Jesus says, the pagans run after these things, but your heavenly Father knows that you need them. I like that. He knows our needs. These are needs. These are basic needs that we have, and he knows what we need, and he can meet those needs. But then he says, seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be yours as well. That is the problem with the world today.

It's still running after things, and waving its fist at God, when really we need to come humbly before God. We need to seek his kingdom first. We need to seek his righteousness, and confess that we don't have this righteousness, and come to be cleansed, and to be reconciled back to him. When we have that, then all the promises of God's word become ours. They become, the Bible is full of promises. I had a book, I think I've still got it, all the promises of the Bible, and it's great when you look at all the promises that are yes in Christ Jesus. Without Christ Jesus, they are no. We are separated from him, but in Christ Jesus, all the promises to you are yes, John. They're yours, and although you might begin through a confusing time, and you don't know what will happen, trust me. That's what the song we were singing about, and that is why he rejoices. Now, what is he rejoicing in? It is not his situation. Sometimes you can't rejoice in your situation, but you can rejoice in the Lord. Look at that. That's what really leapt out at me. He says, though these things happen, though I have no income whatsoever. The stalls are bare. Everything's bare. He says in verse 18, yet I will rejoice in what? In the

Lord. I will be joyful in what? In God my Savior. And so he rejoices in who God is. He's now rejoicing in the God that he didn't understand, but somehow in his process of thinking, he's come full circle to trust trust in God. Even when the wheels come off big time. I will rejoice in him. I will be joyful in God my Savior. That is the difference. It is the Lord who makes all the difference to us, and that's why fourthly and finally, that's where his strength comes. Verse 18 is his strength in verse 19. Note the word sovereign Lord, and even the word Lord is the covenant name for God. The sovereign Lord is my strength. This is what will keep me going. I was beginning to doubt whether God was sovereign, whether he was wise, whether all the attributes of God that he once held, he began to doubt. Now he's come full circle. He still does not understand everything. The vision is still to be fulfilled about the knowledge of God going through the earth and the Lord's anointed one. But

what knowledge he has, he believes, and he trusts in the Lord. And therefore, he might not rejoice in his situation or be joyful in what's happening, because you wouldn't rejoice in no crops or what have you, but you can still rejoice in the Lord.

And that is quite something to be able to say. But if we can rejoice in him and focus on him.

Sometimes we were too busy looking at the waves, isn't it, when Peter was asked to step out the boat or when he wanted to step out the boat. As long as he looked at Jesus, everything was fine. And then when he looked at the waves, he began to sink. Whenever we look at our problems this week or the weeks that lie ahead or whatever you're facing, they will bring you down always. That's what happened to Habakkuk. But whenever you look to the Lord, you can rejoice in him. Your joy can come from him. And when you're rejoicing and joyful, that is your strength. The sovereign Lord is your strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer and enables me to tread on the heights. Perhaps we need to hear what God said to Habakkuk. Look and watch and be utterly amazed, for I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if it were told you. Maybe the Lord needs to do something amazing in our days, in your life, to amaze us once again of his love and his grace, his mercy, and his power. Let's know, may we know this, a difficult time in the situation in the world.

[30 : 35] Global poverty, fueled crisis, various things that could cause us to despair, but our hope and our trust is always in him. May we be able to say what Habakkuk has said at the end of this very important great wee book of the Bible. We're going to stand and sing an old one, one that we often sing, one that we can easily sing but not worship in. It's so well known, great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father. We could sing this and not worship. So let's own the words. Let's just say an amen to almost every line that you sing. Just affirm them in your heart and praise the Lord for his faithfulness towards us is indeed very great. Let's stand and we'll sing together.

Again, I'm going to stand and sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. I'll sing together. Let's sing together. A bijouf fight or a batouf fight or a unquote dress. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's eat together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together.

German arches and let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Manuel arches and let's sing together. Let's sing together. Mu skis and let's sing together. Let's sing together. Thank you. ■■■ander Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[33 : 43] Thank you.

Thank you.