

Joy in the Struggle

Habakkuk 3

The book of Habakkuk is a wonderful book that helps us know how we can rise above the waves of life's circumstances that can so easily pull us down. We have seen that even when it feels like God doesn't care about what we're going through or isn't listening to our prayers, we can know that he does care, he does know, and he's always working – doing things beyond our ability to see. We've also seen that when things go from bad to worse and it feels like bad things are going to go on forever, we can know that God is in control, and he has made it so that evil always comes crashing in on itself. Evil will not prevail; the glory of God will fill the earth. Now today we are going to see one more way that we can rise above life's circumstances and even experience the joy of the Lord in the midst of them.

Just over a year ago, we were on Christmas vacation in Montana and Matthew was riding on a tube behind a 4 wheeler and hit a patch of ice that swung the tube around and hit a fence post next to a tree. He hit so hard that he broke his leg, so we rushed him to the nearest Emergency room where they did X-rays and discovered that he had snapped his femur right in half and displaced his bone inside his leg. (picture) He had to have surgery, but they informed us they couldn't do it because they no longer had an orthopedic surgeon on staff and were going to have to airlift him to another hospital. (picture) So Matthew and I took an ambulance ride to the airport, got on a private medevac jet with two nurses and flew to Bismarck, ND for emergency surgery the next morning. (picture) Everything went well, he got the best care I can imagine, and we stayed in a large comfortable hospital room for two nights. I was so thankful for the Lord's provision and that Matthew was going to be ok.

Now, one thing nobody talked very much about throughout the whole ordeal was how much everything was going to cost. But I was well aware that visiting two different emergency rooms, taking two ambulance rides, flying in a private medevac jet for hundreds of miles, getting an emergency surgery, and spending two nights in a major hospital wasn't going to be cheap. I estimated there would be tens of thousands of dollars in medical bills – bills that could potentially cripple us financially – probably for the rest of our lives. And even though Matthew was doing well, I should have been starting to feel the weight of the financial

repercussions. I should have begun to sink into a dark hole of dismay. I should have begun crying out to the Lord in desperation because of a hopeless situation. Knowing what was going to happen should have overwhelmed me.

But it didn't. In fact I wasn't really worried about it. I was able to smile and rest easy while we were at the hospital. I didn't worry that we were going to have to live the rest of our lives in a van down by the river. I could rejoice that Matthew was fixed up and doing well and I could actually enjoy that time with him. How was that possible? It was possible because we had health insurance to cover Matthew. And that same health insurance had always come through before, so I trusted it would come through again and we would be delivered from financial ruin. Knowing it had come through in the past gave me confidence it would come through in the future and I was able to be at peace in that situation.

This morning I want us to see how we can experience something similar to that no matter what circumstances we're going through in life – even if you don't have insurance; even if things don't get better; even if the trouble you're in doesn't go away for the rest of your life. That's the situation Habakkuk was in. Not only were there all kinds of terrible things happening around him because his people had turned to wickedness and corruption, but God had revealed to him that things were going to get worse. He was going to send a terrifying and destructive army to destroy his country as an act of divine judgment. He was in a bad situation that was going to get even worse and he would likely reach the end of his life before things got any better.

Habakkuk chapter 3 shows us how he responds to these things – a surprising response that we can learn from and be helped by.

Read Habakkuk 3:1-2

¹ *A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.*

² *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.*

So we see that Habakkuk's response to his terrible situation was to go to the Lord in prayer, and chapter 3 is his prayer. We are also told this prayer is to be "according to Shigionoth," which means when it was recited it was to be

accompanied by instruments with a passionate tempo. So this chapter is written to be a powerful song for people to sing or listen to.

As he begins his prayer he confesses that after hearing the report in the previous chapters about God raising up the Babylonians to bring judgment and then turning around to pour out judgment on the Babylonians, Habakkuk is overwhelmed before the Lord in fear. Terrible times are coming that would be even worse than the circumstances he was currently in. So Habakkuk prays that in the upcoming years of judgment God would revive his work among his people and make it known – that in his wrath he would remember mercy.

He then goes on in the main section of this chapter to describe a glorious vision of God as a mighty warrior bringing salvation to his people and destroying their enemies. My understanding of this section is that Habakkuk is remembering all the glorious works God did to deliver his people from slavery in Egypt and give them possession of the Promised Land. He was probably thinking of the terrible plagues God inflicted on the Egyptians to overpower Pharaoh and force him to release the Israelites. Then there was God's mighty works of salvation at the Red Sea where he pushed back the waters to allow his people to pass and brought them crashing back again to destroy Pharaoh's army. He was probably thinking of when God's presence descended on Mt. Sinai with flashes of lightning and peals of thunder, and the people were terrified by the presence of the glory of the Lord. He likely also had in mind God's unstoppable power by which he routed the Canaanite nations and drove them out before the people of Israel.

With all these things and more on his mind, he has this powerful vision of God as a conquering war hero, coming to rescue his people and he writes it down in poetic form. Rather than breaking it down and trying to explain each section, I think it will be more powerful for us to read and hear it as an overwhelming whole.

Read Habakkuk 3:3-15.

³ God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. ⁴ His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power. ⁵ Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels. ⁶ He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were

scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. ⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. ⁸ 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? ⁹ You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers. ¹⁰ The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high. ¹¹ The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear. ¹² You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger. ¹³ You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters. ¹⁶ 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.”

What a powerful vision of the glory and might of the Lord! Nothing stood in his way as he set out to deliver his people. His appearing was glorious and terrifying. Not only did the wicked shake and tremble before him, but the mountains, seas, and rivers did as well. He was an unstoppable hero that would come to deliver his people. All throughout this vision you can see references to the mighty works of God that he had done to rescue his covenant people in the past. Works where he literally shook nations, split oceans, destroyed armies, and even made the sun and moon stand still. No power on earth could stand in his way. It was a vision that even made Habakkuk tremble with weakness.

And as you look at what he says at the very end, he also believed God would come in the same way to deliver them again. God had proved himself faithful and unstoppable in rescuing his covenant people in the past, and he would do it again in the future. So even though Habakkuk knew that he would face very difficult days ahead, and those difficulties would likely extend beyond the span of his life, he had the confident assurance that God would come again to deliver his chosen people.

And that brings us to these profound verses at the end of this book – verses that are worth printing out and putting on the fridge so that we remember them every day and especially when we’re going through ongoing suffering.

Read Habakkuk 3:17-19.

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,¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

There is a way to actually experience joy in the midst of bad circumstances in life. And that is to do the same thing that Habakkuk did at the end of this book. To remember all the things that God has done for you in the past to deliver you from misery and despair and know for certain that he will deliver you in the future.

Each of us can probably point to past experiences when we’ve seen God deliver us from trouble. It might be a particular problem you were facing in this life that was overwhelming to you and you didn’t see a way out, but here you are today because God delivered you. Remembering those kinds of things can give us strength and confidence that he will deliver us again. That’s what King David did in 1 Samuel 17:37 as he was about to face Goliath in battle: *“The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”*

But there’s more remembering that we can do. Perhaps the most powerful thing we can remember is the fact that when we were lost in desperation and sin, trapped in bondage to condemnation and guilt, God lifted us up out of the pit and gave us a new life in Christ. He shone his light in our hearts so that we could see Jesus and believe and be forgiven and set free. We can remember that God did the unthinkable 2,000 years ago – he actually came to earth in the form of a man, lived a perfect life among us, suffered and died on the cross, and rose again. Nothing could stand in his way. Nothing could keep him from doing the only thing that could save us from our sins. God did that for you and for me. And when your life began and the time was right, he overcame every obstacle and brought that salvation to you. Nothing could stop him or get in his way. The very fact that

you're sitting here and hearing my voice this morning is a series of miracles and mighty works of God. Humanly speaking, none of us should be here; it's impossible, but not for God.

And no matter what kind of difficulty you may be going through, not only can you know for sure that he is with you and he will give you what you need each day to overcome and make it through, you can also know that there will be a day when the risen Christ will come back again to deliver all his people out of this darkness to be with him forever. He will destroy every one of his enemies and there will be a new heaven and new earth where we will dwell with him for all eternity, free from all pain and suffering forever and ever. What a glorious day that will be!

So no matter what you're going through today, you are not without hope. Like Habakkuk you can rejoice in the Lord as you remember everything he's done for you and that he will always be with you and one day he will come back again to deliver us from all our trouble forever.