

## **Praise Unconquerable Habakkuk 3:17-19**

### **Introduction**

Last week pastor Tim Chevalier taught us from 1 Thessalonians 5 that our attitudes and expressions of rejoicing, praying, and thanksgiving grow from our connection to God. He cited a well-known passage from Habakkuk that declares in essence, “no matter what happens to me and my community, I’m going to praise the Lord.”

Habakkuk 3:17-19

**17** 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.

What makes these verses so memorable is the bold paradox they present. Everything is going wrong, but I’m still determined to praise the Lord with joy. *Anybody can sing for joy when life is going great. But it’s striking and seems even crazy to be rejoicing when*

*life is brutal and you've lost nearly everything.*

On the one hand, such an audacious declaration is inspiring. On the other hand, it can seem out of touch, the kind of sentiment you might express when you're on an emotional high. One of those exaggerations that come from our mouths in a worship service, only to vanish from our true feelings in the cold light of a Monday morning.

So what's up with these verses? What do they mean? What's going on in the real-life experience of the prophet that he would say such a thing? If we can answer questions like these, I believe you and I will find a source of thanksgiving and joy that cannot be quenched by even the worst of circumstances. Praise Unconquerable.

1. Devastation (17)
2. Joy (18)
3. Strength (19a)
4. Song/Worship (19b)

### **1. Devastation (17)**

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,

Important for us to realize that what Habakkuk is describing here is not just a bad growing season. As difficult as that would be especially in an agricultural society, what he's talking about is far worse. He's describing devastation caused by an imminent military invasion of his homeland. Not just an economic downturn, but the loss of everything.

How can anyone in his right mind be joyful or thankful in such humiliation and defeat? Here's the key: the devastation has not fallen upon them merely because the Babylonian military is so brutal and strong. Babylon is merely a pawn in the hand of God Himself.

Habakkuk lived in a time when his native country was increasingly wicked and God seemed to be doing nothing to stop it. It seems as if those practicing evil were getting away with it. Sound familiar?

Habakkuk 1:2-4

<sup>2</sup> O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not hear?

Or cry to you "Violence!"  
and you will not save?

<sup>3</sup> Why do you make me see iniquity,  
and why do you idly look at wrong?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.

<sup>4</sup> So the law is paralyzed,

and justice never goes forth.  
 For the wicked surround the righteous;  
 so justice goes forth perverted.

God answered Habakkuk's cry for justice. No one is getting away with anything. God had a plan in place to bring justice upon the evil doers.

Habakkuk 1:5-7

<sup>5</sup> "Look among the nations, and see;  
 wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days  
 that you would not believe if told.

<sup>6</sup> For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
 that bitter and hasty nation,  
 who march through the breadth of the earth,  
 to seize dwellings not their own.

<sup>7</sup> They are dreaded and fearsome;  
 their justice and dignity go forth from  
 themselves.

That answered Habakkuk's first concern but it created a great one. How could God punish the evil of Judah with a nation more wicked even than they? God's answer is much like the first. The Babylonians won't get away with the evil they practice anymore than will Judah. Nobody gets away with anything. The Judge of the Universe will deal with them.

Habakkuk 2:9-13

<sup>9</sup> "Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm! <sup>10</sup> You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life.

<sup>11</sup> For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.

<sup>12</sup> "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity! <sup>13</sup> Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing?"

(Compare 2 Peter 3:10-13)

Habakkuk 3:3-6

<sup>3</sup> God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*

His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

<sup>4</sup> His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power.

<sup>5</sup> Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

So the devastation is not just from the horrors of an invading army. It is from the

hand of God as He works His justice in the earth. Knowing that God deals with injustice and cruelty and all forms of evil in the earth is a cause for gratitude, even if we go through a time when divine judgment devastates our own surroundings and circumstances.

*Fretting about evildoers getting away with their wickedness and the harm they do to others is completely unnecessary. The Lord is the perfectly righteous avenger of wrongdoing.* That's why we do not avenge ourselves but leave it to God's wrath.

### **Applications**

- What evil practices do you see people seeming to get away with that tend to make you outraged or fretful?
- What possible calamities tend to make you fearful?
- How could the conviction that God will not fail to judge righteously help control your outrage and worry?

Psalm 37—Fret not because of evildoers—they will fade, wither, be cut off.

But what about the harsh reality of living in a time of impending judgment? The prophet is overcome with fear anticipating what was coming. His knowing that God is in control working His plan does not mean Habakkuk does not feel the weight of the troubles and

pain. Sometimes people make light of the pain, sorrow, and alarm as if people of faith should not and do not feel this way. Don't try to comfort weeping people with happy songs. Weep with those who weep. Enter into their pain. Glossing over the painful realities other people are going through does not give comfort. It shows disrespect and lack of compassionate understanding. We have to hold the full force of the devastation along with the realities that offset it. There is a tension there that we must keep in place.

Habakkuk 3:16

I hear, and my body trembles;  
my lips quiver at the sound;  
rotteness 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 will happen to those who are not joining the sinning crowd? Will they suffer in the same way?

## **2. Joy (18)**

yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

*God is not just a God of justice and wrath. He is a God of mercy and deliverance even in the middle of the judgment. He will continue to take care of those who are trusting in Him.*

He is their God of salvation, and that truth creates genuine joy even in terrible times.

Habakkuk 2:3-4

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Devastating judgment is surely coming, but those who are righteous because of their faith in the Lord will survive. They will thrive during the crisis. God’s hand will be on them even in the suffering.

We know some of their names: Jeremiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego. Ezra, Nehemiah.

They lived through a time of devastating judgment among a disobedient people and pagan powers. But they had amazing journeys of faith with stunning impact on those around them. The devastation did not strip from them their purpose or power or impact. Their lives still preach to us today. If anything, the troubles they endured highlighted and increased their significance. *Light is custom made for darkness.*



Fretting and fear are no help in meeting the troubles of the times. Neither is seeing ourselves as better than the worldly-minded crowd. We need insight into why the times are as they are. We need courage to do our part. We need confidence that we are on mission placed by God exactly where we are when He wants us there.

Furthermore, not only would these faithful ones like Daniel and his friends survive and thrive, they were part of a larger redemption story leading to total Divine victory that will one day fill all the earth.

Habakkuk 2:14

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

These salvation realities are why Habakkuk prays the way he does.

Habakkuk 3:2

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.

He is not asking for something God is reluctant to give. He is praying for what God has already promised.

*The gospel is news that brings joy. Your connection to God's salvation plan changes everything about what the crises of life mean.* If God can use the cross of Jesus to grant Him the crown, He can certainly take whatever trials and persecutions you bear and not only to deliver you from their power but to turn them for amazing good.

### **Applications**

- How does it change the way you view whatever devastation you face to know that the Lord God will not fail to rescue you no matter what happens?
- In what ways can you rejoice that God is master of turning bad things to good purposes and defeats into victory?

### **3. Strength (19a)**

GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.

It's one thing to know that one day all will be well. But how are we to navigate the difficulties of the present distress?

Answer: our strength is Yahweh Adonai—the covenant God who is the great I am; the Master of His people and all the universe.

Ephesians 6:10-13

**10** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Here Habakkuk describes the strength God gives as making his feet like that of deer. If you've ever seen how deer move over rugged terrain, you know what Habakkuk is saying. Smooth and swift, navigating deep gullies and leaping tall fences effortlessly as if they choreographed every move. You try to walk the same terrain and you're amazed how they could move across it so rapidly.

God gives us astonishing ability to navigate difficult terrain through many dangers, toils, and snares. Amazing grace. You look back and it's hard to believe you made it through.

And there's more here.  
"He makes me tread on my high places."

These words describe conquering victory. Other places in the OT they are used of God

Himself. Habakkuk will experience participation in the victories God brings. He cannot lose. He is a citizen of the everlasting kingdom that will never fail. No wonder his praise cannot be conquered! There is always reason to give thanks to such a Savior-God who sustains and strengthens His people all the way to final victory.

### **Applications**

- What would relying on the Lord's strength look like in your life?
- In what ways are you tempted to rely on yourself, and how can you shift that reliance to God instead?

### **4. Song/Worship (19b)**

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

We might look at these words as a mere footnote, but they tell us that this passage is not just Habakkuk's personal experience with no relevance to anyone else.

He writes chapter 3 to be sung in corporate worship.

Three times in the chapter you see the word *selah*—"Stop. Think about the truth here."

*In times of looming devastation and in the midst of the storm, stop and think on what you know is true about God, His character,*

*His activity in human history, His complete victory, His mercy, His salvation, His strength. When you do joy wells up in your heart and gives voice to a song of praise to Him. That's why God's people have always been a singing people, no matter what the crises of the times.*

### **Applications**

- When can you take time to stop and meditate on how God has been working in your world and continues to do so?
- In what ways are you praising God on your own and with other believers for the strength and victory He gives?

### **Conclusion**

These verses capture what makes our thanksgiving and praise to God invincible and never-ending.

1. Devastation (17) God is bringing justice to the earth. No one gets away with evil.
2. Joy (18) God is saving His people.
3. Strength (19a) God grants superhuman ability to navigate all the present troubles and bring us to final victory.
4. Song/Worship (19b) We have every reason to sing to Him with all our hearts and worship Him in adoration.

Closing Song: God, the Uncreated One

## **Summary of Applications**

- What evil practices do you see people seeming to get away with that tend to make you outraged or fretful?
- What possible calamities tend to make you fearful?
- How could the conviction that God will not fail to judge righteously help control your outrage and worry?
- How does it change the way you view whatever devastation you face to know that the Lord God will not fail to rescue you no matter what happens?
- In what ways can you rejoice that God is master of turning bad things to good purposes and defeats into victory?
- What would relying on the Lord's strength look like in your life?
- In what ways are you tempted to rely on yourself, and how can you shift that reliance to God instead?
- When can you take time to stop and meditate on how God has been working in your world and continues to do so?
- In what ways are you praising God on your own and with other believers for the strength and victory He gives?