

Habakkuk's Song of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Service

By Rodney Kleyn

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Thursday, November 22, 2012

Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed

P.O. Box 10138

Spokane WA 99209

Website: www.reformedspokane.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/cgprf

The prophecy Habakkuk. And if you have ... if you are using one of the Bibles that you find in the seats there, it is either page 941 or page 646, one of those two page numbers in the Bibles in the pew there. We are going to read from the third chapter of the book of Habakkuk. And maybe you know these words as we read them and you are familiar with them, but you didn't know that they were from Habakkuk.

Habakkuk chapter three. We are going to read the first two verses and then verse 16 to the end of the chapter.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.¹

Verse 16.

“When I heard...”²

And he is speaking here of hearing the justice of God against the Babylonians especially.

When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.³

¹ Habakkuk 3:1-2.

² Habakkuk 3:16.

³ Habakkuk 3:16-19.

We come this morning not simply to count our blessings and to be thankful or to be glad for all the things that God has given to us. If that was all that our gratitude and thanksgiving was today, then it would really be no different than the gratitude of the unbeliever. There are many people. Everyone today is glad for something. They call it Thanksgiving, but they are not really expressing thanks to anyone. They are simply glad that they have what they have, so many of them.

The true Christian's thanksgiving should be different than simply a pleasure or a joy in the things that he has. And there are four things that make the Christian's thanksgiving different. First he is thanking God. He is confessing God as creator. He is confessing God as giver. He is confessing God as sovereign over all the things that come to him in his life. And, second, we are thankful as Christians as those who are unworthy of what we have. Whatever we have is more than we deserve. That is what we confess so that we say even if we have very little, thanks to God, because this even is more than we deserve as unworthy sinners. Third, we give him thanks, especially, for the eternal blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ, for spiritual blessings, for salvation, for forgiveness of sins, for life everlasting, for the hope that we have in the midst of a hopeless world. And then, fourth, as believers we give thanks not just today and not just in words, but we give thanks in every day of our life with all of our being showing that we love the Lord by serving him, by living a life of godliness. That is a life of gratitude and praise to God.

And so we come today not just to count the things that God has given to us and to say thank you to him for them. We are glad we have them, but we come—and this is the purpose of a Thanksgiving day sermon—especially to be instructed in what true thanksgiving is and to learn for what we should give thanksgiving to God.

Well, that is in these verses that we look at this morning from Habakkuk three verses 16 through 19.

Let's look at it under this theme: Habakkuk's song of thanksgiving, because, notice, it is a song. In the beginning of the chapter he calls it a prayer on Shigionoth. At the end of the chapter:

“To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.”⁴

This is a psalm that he writes, a psalm, a prayer of thanksgiving. Let's notice two things: first, his sickening circumstances and then, second, his amazing joy.

What we have in the words of the text here in Habakkuk is one of the most remarkable expressions of gratitude that you will find anywhere in the Scriptures. I think that is probably only two in all of the Bible that parallel it. Maybe the one that comes to mind is Job. He loses 10 children and everything that he has in one day and he says:

“...the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”⁵

⁴ Habakkuk 3:16.

⁵ Job 1:21.

And then he loses his health and he says of God:

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”⁶

That is true gratitude.

The other example of gratitude that may be parallels this or we would say even exceeds it is what Jesus says from the cross when in the deepest hour of his suffering he still looks to heaven and says not God, why, but my God, my God, why? He trusts him, though his Father slays him.

The beauty of Habakkuk’s song of thanksgiving here is expressed in the first word of verse 18, the word yet. That gives us a contrast. Out of circumstances in which we would not look for someone to be thankful, out of very dark circumstances when Habakkuk is surrounded by trouble, when it seems that God has completely withdrawn his loving care, when all is dark, when fears and dangers throng, Habakkuk says:

“Yet will I rejoice in the LORD.”⁷

That is true, pure, real thanksgiving to God. And at the outset that puts a question to us. Could you, could I, could we give that kind of thanksgiving to God in the distresses of life?

It is not enough that we simply read this and understand the circumstances that Habakkuk is talking about and marvel, stand back and marvel at the fact that he was able to say:

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD.”⁸

But it must enter into our own hearts so that we with confidence in the midst of dire circumstances could say, “Yes, yet will I rejoice in the Lord.”

To do that we must first see the circumstances of which Habakkuk speaks. Habakkuk is a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah shortly after the northern kingdom is destroyed. Habakkuk is concerned as he looks around at things in Judah because he sees the same things happening in Judah as happened in the northern kingdom, the same violence, the same wickedness, the same disobedience and iniquity. And disturbed by this in chapter one he prays to God and he asks for explanation.

What is God’s answer? Why is this going on in Judah? And what will God do?

And God answers him by saying, “This is what I will do. I will raise up the Chaldeans, the kingdom of Babylon and they will bring the destruction on Judah that if you would

⁶ Job 13:15.

⁷ Habakkuk 3:18.

⁸ Ibid.

hear about it, you wouldn't believe it." That is what God says to Habakkuk in chapter one and verse five. He says:

"...which ye will not believe, though it be told you."⁹

This is going to make people just shake their heads in disbelief and whistle. Whew. Could you believe it? Isaiah describes it in exactly the same way.

And Habakkuk not only hears what that judgment is, but he becomes the messenger of it to Judah. God commissioned him to bring this message to Judah. This is what God is now going to do. He is going to raise up the Chaldeans.

All of that just raises another question in Habakkuk's mind. The Chaldeans? But they are more wicked than Judah itself. Why, God? Why raise up one nation more wicked than the other to destroy the other?

And God answers that as well in chapter two and chapter three. He says that the destruction of Babylon will be more horrific, more terrible than the destruction that will come to Judah.

And in this psalm or in this song in chapter three Habakkuk really, in the verses that we didn't read, looks at the vengeance and the justice of God as he comes.

When Habakkuk hears all this, what God is going to do and when he understands who God is in his vengeance he becomes physically sick, literally, physically sick. In verse 16:

"When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself."¹⁰

You have been physically sick. You know what he is talking about. A churning stomach and trembling lips and a shaking body. But Habakkuk is not talking about getting sick here because he has got some virus and some fever inside of him. This is shock in response to what he sees and understands God is going to do to Babylon and to Judah.

He contemplates the horror of what God is going to do. It makes him sick physically, literally.

Now just stop there and think. Do the terrors that God is going to bring on wicked, unbelieving men make you sick like that? Or are you kind of nonchalant? Habakkuk is not nonchalant. He doesn't say, "Well," in a kind of dismissive way, "They had that coming." No, it makes him sick. And when he thinks about what is going to come on Judah it is because of his love for the Church that he is sick, like Psalm 137, the psalmist going into captivity and he says:

⁹ Habakkuk 1:5.

¹⁰ Habakkuk 3:16.

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.¹¹

When you think of the terrors that God will bring on unbelieving men, when you think of the agonies of hell, when you think of the judgments that come on the Church, churches that fall into apostasy, what is your response? Out of love and humility we should respond like Habakkuk.

Moving on. The circumstances that Habakkuk describes here, though, are not simply things that he contemplates will happen to others. He realizes that what is going to happen to Judah is going to come and it is going to touch his own life. That is what Habakkuk sees here.

Look at verse 17. He is imagining how things will be for himself as somebody who lives in the city of Jerusalem at the time when the Babylonians come. And here he is a land owner. He lives in the city, but he has got fields and property outside the city which are the food supply for himself and for his family. Now the Chaldeans have come and they have besieged the city and they have taken what is in the fields and on the vines outside the city. And from his home inside the city he sends out a servant and he says to the servant, “Go out to the vineyard and bring us back some food.”

And the servant goes out to the vineyard to check the orchards, to bring back food and he comes back with his report. There is no blossom on the fig trees. There is no fruit on the vines. All the labor that we put into the olive trees has fallen to the ground and produced no fruit. The fields that we planted, the crops that were coming up they have yielded no food. There is nothing. He envisions complete crop failure, absolute emptiness.

A famine has come and taken most of it away. And what the famine hasn't taken away the Babylonians have come and stripped bare. Nothing in the fields, nothing on the vines.

And so he says to his servant that comes back to him, “Well, if we are not going to eat vegetables and fruit then we will eat meat. Go to the stables. Go to the barns. Get us an animal.”

And the servant goes and he comes back and he says, “The flocks have been cut off from the fold. The sheep are gone. The fold is empty. The shepherds are gone and there is no herd in the stall, no beef, nothing. The Babylonians have taken it all.”

This is what he envisions, complete emptiness, a hopeless situation. From an earthly point of view the only thing left to do—apart from starving to death—is to surrender to the mercy of the Babylonians. This is what he envisions and as he thinks about it you imagine fear overcomes him. These are circumstances that, as you would contemplate

¹¹ Psalm 137:5-6.

them, would paralyze a person. What destruction, what devastation, sickening circumstances, thinking about what is going to happen to the Church and the people of God and Jerusalem they love. He looks at the children. He looks at the prosperity in the city. He looks at the people going about their business. He looks at the buildings and the walls and imagines devastation, destruction, all of it gone.

Now this morning we shouldn't just describe Habakkuk's circumstances, but maybe we can put this in our terms in modern times from an economic point of view. This is what Habakkuk is saying. Though the Dow Jones average plummets and there is no 401k that is left, the wheels of the economy have stopped and I am unemployed. Though the government bail out backfires and taxes are on the rise, I lose my home and savings and yet...

Or we can look at it from a physical point of view. Though earthquake and fire destroy my home and there is no insurance to cover it, though flood waters sweep away my vehicle with my family inside of it, yet...

Or from a health point of view. The cancer comes again. My parents are confused with Alzheimer's. Death is in my family. Though I am flat on my back in the hospital, though depressed and scorned and hated, yet...

Or in terms of the Church. Though the gospel seems to bear no fruit, though our little church folds, though persecution comes and we lose our employment because we are Christian, though they put us in prison, though they beat us and take our children, yet...

Yet what? How does Habakkuk respond here in verse 18? Well, let's see, first, how he doesn't respond, how so may would respond to such circumstances. He doesn't respond with resignation. He doesn't say, "Well, I can't change these things that are happening to me so I guess I will just live with them." That is not thanksgiving. That is not faith. That is fatalism. He doesn't deny reality. He doesn't say, "Well, I am just going to act like this is not happening. If I think about these things they just get me down so much and I just get depressed, so I am just going to live in the now and ignore what is going on around me." He doesn't deny it. He doesn't become bitter and angry and blame God and accuse God of doing things wrong and accuse God of not loving him. That is the response of unbelief to such sickening circumstances.

Does God do what is right? Does God love his people with constancy and faithfulness? The believer says yes. He doesn't respond by taking things into his own hands and say to himself, "Well, I am going to figure this out. I am going to come up with a solution for this." He doesn't speculate and come up with a philosophy or an idea that describes the circumstances of his present life. No, he turns to the Lord.

"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD."¹²

¹² Habakkuk 3:18.

The first thing that we need to hear amid sickening circumstances in our life is what God has to say. Sometimes it seems like that is the last place we go. We are ready to hear sympathy.

“We feel sorry for you in what you are going through.”

We are ready to turn to the world and psychology and counseling of the world, but the Word and prayer? We don't turn there. When we find ourselves in situations like Habakkuk's, what we need above all is what God has to say.

How does Habakkuk respond? In the face of all these troubles Habakkuk rejoices in God. He rejoices in God. He finds in God all that he needs. He rejoices in the God of his salvation. Though his earthly life has become empty and destitute, he sees himself as complete and full in God. He rejoices in the Lord. That joy is a contentment and a trust in God, a quiet trust in God that God is sufficient, that God is all that he needs in those circumstances.

Notice he doesn't rejoice in God here as a last resort. He doesn't say, “Well, I had all these things that I was thankful for and now they have all been taken away from me, but I still have one thing to be thankful for.” No, it is more than that. He doesn't rejoice in God as a last resort. Rather, he rejoices in God before all this destitution comes to him, as he thinks about, as he contemplates these things happening to him in the future. Although the fig tree shall not blossom and there be no herd in the stall, the produce of the olive fail, emptiness comes upon me. Even though those things are going to happen and it sickens me that these things are going to happen, it pains me. Yet, this is his resolve:

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD.”¹³

And that is because in prosperity already he rejoices and finds his fullness in the Lord.

Philippians four verse four:

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.”¹⁴

You see, his thanksgiving is not just being glad he has what he has. It is not first for earthly things. It is not determined by what he has, but his joy and his thanks, his gratitude, his fullness, his contentment in life he finds in God. God is all that he needs.

We rejoice in God regardless of what we have or don't have.

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also.
Our bodies they may kill.
God and his truth are living still.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Philippians 4:4.

This is all that we need.

He rejoices here in an unchanging God. Notice that.

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD.”¹⁵

The name that is used for God here is the name that refers to his unfailing faithfulness as the immutable God, the God who never changes, the I am that I am. Because God is unchanging, his care and his love and his promises are constant. And so looking to this God even though all the circumstances of life may change, looking to this God he is able to see there is one thing that doesn't change and that is the constancy and the faithfulness of God. And he is able to see looking to God that even though the circumstances of his life change, God is faithfully changing those things for him and for his good.

Malachi chapter three and verse six:

“For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”¹⁶

That is the reason for this joy. Life is real. It brings its troubles. It has its pain. It makes him sick. He feels all those things, but through the pain and the tears and the sickness and the hunger he is looking to God, the unchanging God. And an unchanging God means unchanging praise and gratitude. He depends on God, his joy. His contentment is not based on the circumstances that will change. It is not hoping that God... that the economy will become different and the sickness will go away, that he will out live his problems. But he rejoices in the Lord.

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”¹⁷

The word here for salvation is to rescue someone and that describes what God has done in salvation. He has reached down to us in the darkness, in the misery, in the mire of our sin and rescued us. He sent his Son to carry our sin, to bear the weight of the wrath and the justice and the suffering that our sin deserves. He has delivered us, lifted us from the guilt of our sin, from the power of our sin. He brings us up unto himself to joy with him, joy with the Lord.

How does he do that? We understand that he does that through all the circumstances of our life. Everything that he sends to us, good and evil, is a part of that salvation that he is working. He is using all things to save us. That is the message of the Word of God to the believer in the sickening circumstances of his life. In his love and his wisdom God is directing everything to work for our salvation.

“I will joy in the God of my salvation.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Habakkuk 3:18.

¹⁶ Malachi 3:6.

¹⁷ Habakkuk 3:18.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.”¹⁹

He is the God of our salvation. That is his name. That is his name in the sickening circumstances of life. No matter what the troubles of life are, the child of God looks at him and says, “The God of my salvation.” And all these things, too, come from him.”

When we have that conviction we can say, “Yet... No matter what the circumstances of life, yet will I rejoice in him.”

And the strength for that comes from him also. Verse 19.

“The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.”²⁰

There are two images here from the creation. He will make my feet like hinds’ feet. You have seen a light footed deer effortlessly jumping through the woods barely, it seems, touching the ground. Or you have seen pictures, perhaps, of the mountain goats climbing up the rocky slopes in a place where we would ... it would be impossible for us to find a footing. And they rise above even the mountains. He is saying this is the kind of strength that God is going to give to me, the ability to rise above the circumstances of my life. Regardless of my strength I won’t get bogged down by sickening circumstances, but I will rejoice in the Lord. God the Lord is my strength. Depending not on my strength, but on Jehovah God, trusting him as the unchanging, the faithful, the saving God, trusting his promises and his mercies. This is strength in sickening circumstances.

And that is true thanksgiving. Though everything crumble around me, though I face death itself:

“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”²¹

May that be your confession today no matter where the Lord leads, may he give you his grace to say, “Yet will I joy in him.”

Amen.

Father, we thank you for this beautiful song and prayer from Habakkuk. We pray, Lord, that today as we give thanks something of the heart and the character of this confession of Habakkuk may be ours so that we in true faith for real things, eternal things may give thee praise. We ask it for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Romans 8:28.

²⁰ Habakkuk 3:19.

²¹ Habakkuk 3:18

