

Praising God for the Evil Days
A Sermon on Habakkuk 3

by
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1. Introduction

2. Habakkuk Petitions the Lord (3:2)

- a. *He asks for the Lord to revive His work and make it known among His people in the midst of the years.*
 - i. There are two things he petitions the Lord for in v. 2. Habakkuk asks that God revive His work and make it known in the midst of the years.
 - 1. The prophet's focus is not on revival nor an escape from the judgment to come.
 - a. The truth of the matter is that the time for revival and repentance has long passed.
 - b. As the Lord said in Habakkuk 2:3, this is a fixed judgment; things are already in motion and the Lord will not turn away His judgment from Israel.
 - ii. Instead, Habakkuk prays for the Lord to carry out his work in the midst of the years.
 - 1. When he asks for this to be done in the midst of the years, he is talking about his own day.
 - a. There's this "in-between" time, where the faithful straddle the present godlessness of Judah, the invasion of Babylon and a future salvation of the Lord, so there is a tension that remains.
 - b. There are forces at work that leave the people of God in the midst of evil days. This is the problem of Habakkuk in a nutshell: the problem of unresolved tension.
 - 2. Ultimately, Habakkuk is asking for judgment to come quickly rather than delay and the reason for this is rather simple.
 - a. The promise of judgment is immediately attached to salvation.

- i. Whether or not the prophet understands the fullness of what this will look like, he recognizes God’s plan and purposes are far greater than this one moment in Israel’s history.
 - ii. He asks that God would fill the tension of this “in-between” time with a knowledge of this work.
 - b. There’s a sort yearning in the heart of the prophet here that I believe many of you can sympathize with.
 - i. We stand in much the same position.
 - ii. As we straddle this in between time, just as the prophet cries out for mercy in v. 2, so too do we.
- b. *He asks for the Lord to remember His people in mercy.*
 - i. The reason for this should be very clear; the judgment of God on any people is nothing to be trifled with. We’ve caught a really good glimpse at what this looks like in chapter one.
 - 1. The Babylonians are a fierce and impetuous people—they are a people of war, oppression, violence.
 - a. They make up the rules as they go—they don’t submit themselves to the standards of anyone else.
 - b. They have one agenda, and that agenda is to take what they want by whatever means they see fit—and in this case, they’re going to be successful.
 - 2. Yet the important thing to realize here is that Habakkuk is asking that in the Lord’s anger, He remember mercy.
 - a. He says, “Lord I know You are enraged with Your people, but take pity on us. Have mercy.”
 - b. Notice Habakkuk doesn’t ask for God to turn away from His anger, but that in His anger, the Lord remember mercy.
 - ii. This is a prayer born out of complete acceptance of the Lord’s will.
 - 1. This a complete and total surrender to God’s desires and this is a heart attitude that is severely lacking in our prayers so often.

- a. Much of our prayers are consumed with what we want, yet Habakkuk's prayer starts with asking that the Lord's will be done.
 - b. That is counterintuitive to how we pray more often than not, isn't it? We are always asking to escape whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.
2. The prophet's mind has completely shifted from where he was at before. Yet in the midst of that he does an incredibly human thing: he asks for mercy.
- a. He accepts what the Lord has said He will do, but he asks, Lord, would you remember mercy?
 - b. Habakkuk is asking for God to remember His everlasting covenant loyalty to His people—yet he does so in complete submission to the chastisement of God.
 - i. My simple point to you is that genuine petition puts the first things first.
 - ii. Genuine, worship will not just accept God's will, it will ask for it to be done—it will seek His mercy in it, knowing that God *loves* to give mercy.
 - iii. This brings us to our second mark of genuine worship, which is praise for the God of mercy, vv. 3-15.

3. Habakkuk Praises the Lord of Mercy (3:3-15)

- a. *In this section, Habakkuk is bringing to remembrance all of the deeds the Lord has done with His people.*
 - i. What happens here is really rather marvelous—because the prophet gets a firsthand view of all these incredible things the Lord has done.
 - 1. He gets caught up in a vision; the veil gets pulled back, and Habakkuk catches a glimpse of God performing these mighty works.
 - a. I've always thought it would be cool just to see some of these things happen.

- b. Think of how amazing it would be to see the Red Sea parted so you can pass through and see the waters on either side—only for it to come crashing down upon Pharaoh’s soldiers.
- 2. What happens to Habakkuk though is different; he doesn’t just see what happened when God did these things, he actually caught a glimpse of God doing them.
 - a. The way everything is described here is as if the Lord is walking on the earth and all of these things are going before Him like an army goes before the king.
 - b. Israel saw the events firsthand, but Habakkuk sees God performing these events firsthand—and this shakes the prophet to the core.
- ii. The purpose of this section is to showcase all of God’s great and marvelous acts of salvation throughout the history Israel.
 - 1. If you’ll look down at vv. 3-4, you’ll notice he draws out two geographical locations: Teman and Mount Paran—these are two locations on either side on Mount Sinai.
 - a. What he’s alluding to here is found in Deut. 33:2.
 - b. Teman is on the opposite side of Mount Paran, so what Habakkuk is describing here is the shining brilliance of God’s glory from East to West.
 - i. What’s on full display is the majesty and Kingly authority of Yahweh, but it is intrinsically tied to God’s covenant with Israel through Moses.
 - ii. He is ultimately linking the events at hand with the Exodus from Egypt and the promise of the Holy Land, and we see this clearly in v. 5 when he refers to plagues going before Him and coming after Him.
 - 2. In v. 6-7 the prophet is referring to Exodus 19 and 20, when Moses went up to Sinai and the ten commandments were given to him.

- a. Exodus 19:18 tells us that Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire—but the mount itself quaked violently and all the Israelites trembled in fear.
 - i. In v. 7 then we find two different people referenced, the Cushites and the Midianites.
 - ii. At this time, they were close enough to Mount Sinai that the drapes of their tents shook when the Lord descended to meet with Moses.
- b. The point of vv. 6-7 though is not simply to highlight the power and might of the Lord.
 - i. There is a tight connection here between the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai and the giving of the Law and the covenant.
 - ii. He's alluding to the fact that while there are structures that seem permanent on the earth, only the ways of the Lord will truly endure.
- iii. In v. 8 the prophet gives a series of rhetorical questions, concerning God's use of nature itself.
 - 1. The questions deal with whether God was enraged with the waterways when used for judgment.
 - a. This is still set in the context of the Exodus; the prophet is speaking of the transformation of the Nile when he turned the water to blood in Exodus 7, but also the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14.
 - b. He's showing that by Divine rite, the Lord uses nature itself as His weapons of war.
 - 2. Broadly speaking, he's referring to these acts—not just as acts of vengeance, but as the means of deliverance and salvation for God's people.
 - a. The waterways themselves are at His command; He simply gives forth the word and they obey.

- i. We see this in v. 9 where God is depicted, having removed the bow from its sheath and the arrows of His word strung, ready to fire at His release.
 - ii. He gives the example at the end of v. 9, showing that God's word went forth in the Creation of the earth, yet it also depicts times of judgment in the past.
 - b. What he's seeing here is the flood in Noah's day.
 - i. The terminology in v. 10 is the same as we find in Gen. 7, where it says all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.
 - ii. And yet Noah and his family were spared.
- 3. Then in v. 11, he refers to Joshua 10:12-13, where he commands the sun to stand still and the moon to stop until the nation of Israel could defeat the Amorites.
 - a. In every conceivable moment, God has intervened to preserve His people.
 - b. When times looked bleak and hopeless, the Lord was poised to act and save His people.
 - i. When all hope seemed lost, the Lord intervened and rescued His people.
 - ii. The reason for this is very simple: God is Creator, and therefore, Creation itself yields itself to Him fully.
 - iii. What that means then is that the things you and I see unfolding in the world every day—the incredible destruction and devastation of nature itself, is a testimony of praise to the One it yields it.
- b. In vv. 12-14, he simply summarizes all of these glorious acts of salvation.
 - i. This is where Habakkuk's vision is looking forward in one sense as well.
 - 1. He's applying what He knows of God's mighty deeds to the judgment that is about to come.
 - a. He's seeing God's work in the past and then seeing how God is poised to act to deal with the sins of Judah and Babylon.

- b. He recognizes that God’s plans never stop at judgment and destruction—but culminate in redemption.
 - 2. In all of this he speaks of the fact that nothing can stand in the way of God’s salvation.
 - a. He is recounting God’s history in marvelous terms and he’s using this as a means to apply it to his current circumstances.
 - b. In other words, he is caught up in a vision of God’s mighty deeds in history—and this puts everything into perspective.
- ii. The second mark of genuine worship then is to praise God for all His mighty deeds.
 - 1. On the one hand you look back upon the faithfulness of God.
 - a. This is a rather simple principle, but one I find many Christians struggle to do.
 - b. Yet my argument is that by looking back upon the work of God and seeing His hand then, you’ll be moved to trust in His faithfulness in the midst of your trials and sufferings now.
 - 2. On the other hand, are the sure promises of God that are yet to come.
 - a. Much like Habakkuk, we live between two great and glorious days.
 - b. In our time of waiting, we not only ask God to bring His work to pass; we not only ask Him to make it known; we not only ask Him to remember mercy—we praise Him in the midst of these years.

4. Habakkuk Confesses His Fears (3:16)

a. Habakkuk confesses his fear of the judgment to come (16b).

- i. Verse 16 forms a bookend with v. 2, to highlight all of what we just went through in the last thirteen verses.
 - 1. The reason for this is that it informs how the prophet can come to praise God for the evil days.
 - 2. Yet the prophet does something so wonderfully human here. He shows fear.

- ii. There is an aspect to this that I believe the vision of God Himself frightened the prophet.
 - 1. I get annoyed with people who downplay the severity of judgment from God because they treat it flippantly.
 - a. They say things like, “The American church needs to be persecuted because then she will be purified.”
 - b. And they’re not wrong in that statement—but rarely do they ever stop to think of what that actually means for them.
 - 2. For members of the early church under the reign of Nero, it meant being dipped in tar, impaled on a pike, and then lit on fire to be used as torches for Caesar’s dinner parties.
 - a. For Habakkuk, it meant watching people he’s known his whole life get brutally killed, carried off to slavery, starve to death—and more.
 - b. If you’re caught up on the Bible-reading plan, you’ve been seeing the destruction play out in the Minor Prophets.
- b. It’s no wonder his entire body is quaking, his heart is beating wildly, his lips are trembling, his teeth are chattering, and his bones feel as if they are rotting from the inside out.
 - i. Habakkuk understood full well that judgment is an ugly, ugly thing and we ought to never make light of that reality.
 - 1. Even if you don’t suffer under the weight of it, you have front row seats to see it unfold.
 - 2. Habakkuk sees his own countrymen as the walking dead; they are carrying about their business like God’s judgment will never come, yet the prophet knows the day is fixed, and he shakes in dread.
 - ii. Sometimes in life, there are things so beyond our ability to understand and to cope with that the only thing we can do is plainly admit our dread.
 - 1. The Lord is not shocked when you confess your fears to Him. He is not even remotely surprised by what you fear.
 - a. Yet I would regret not telling you that your fears will not go away this side of heaven.

- b. What I mean by that is not that you should indulge whatever things cause you to have fear. Not in the least bit.
 - i. What I mean by that is that we live in an unsafe world.
 - ii. Having your fears absolved does not mean the thing that provoked your fear in the first place goes away.
- 2. I raised the issue before, but I genuinely believe the American church is in for a hard road ahead.
 - a. I can't tell you if open persecution will happen, but I think you'd have to be naïve to believe that it is impossible in our generation.
 - b. You need to recognize that since God has decreed your suffering, you will suffer. The question is if you will suffer well.

5. Habakkuk Adores the Lord of His Salvation (3:17-19)

a. *Habakkuk will triumph and rejoice in the Lord in spite of what may come (vv. 17-18).*

- i. Even if the fig tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit on the vines, if the yield of the olive fails, and the fields produce no food, even if the flock disappears from the fold, and there are no cattle in the stalls, yet I will triumph in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

- 1. This is a rather beautiful confession of faith in that can only be arrived at by seeing things in light of God's ultimate plans for redemption.
 - a. The prophet is keenly aware of the judgment to come—yet he finds joy and delight in God Himself.
 - b. In essence he says, "Everything around me can go away, but I will trust in you."

- 2. Think of this in modern terms with how we view our own comfort, safety, and provisions.

ii. God Himself will be his strength and safe refuge (v. 19).

- 1. The Lord God, that is Yahweh Adonai, is my strength, and He has made my feet like deer's feet, and has me walk on my high places.
 - a. He invokes the personal name of God, Yahweh.
 - b. Yet he likewise refers to God as "Lord" or "Master" – which is a title, recognizing God as the Sovereign One.

2. What might be missed in a casual reading of this last verse is that he quotes from Psalm 18.
 - a. David wrote Psalm 18 when God delivered him from the hand of Saul.
 - b. The rest of the psalm goes on to talk about how the Lord is a sure rock and stronghold, a mighty Savior, who gives David's enemies into his hands so that he is victorious—and that's what our prophet is alluding to here.
- b. **Conclusion:** *though He slay me, yet will I trust Him—for He rescues me from harm and is victorious over all.*
 - i. My simple appeal to you in light of all of this is that in much the same way, this is the cry of your heart.
 1. We know that there is a day coming where the Lord will return and set all things right.
 2. You will continue to see this world grow hostile to the Christian faith.
 - ii. In those days, because they will come, I invite you to remember that with judgment comes salvation. He will keep you from harm, yet He will do so much more.
 1. There will be a day when your mourning is turned to joy.
 2. Yet I would argue that this is a joy you can have now if you will make the God of your salvation your joy.