

A Prayer of Trust

Habakkuk 3:16-19

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As you are sitting there, you can turn or tap in your Bibles to the book of Habakkuk. Today, we will finish our short series on belief in the midst of suffering. As Wayne mentioned, and as you think about the news, as you think about the stressors in your life, in your immediate context and circumstances as well as what is going on all over the world, have you ever wondered what God is up to? Habakkuk did. And we see in chapter 1 how he boldly asks the Lord, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?" We see the Lord answering Habakkuk where He says, "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 you were told."

Have you ever experienced an answer to your prayers but not in the way that you would've thought or preferred? Habakkuk did. He heard the Lord's response but didn't quite understand how the Lord might use a wicked nation to bring judgment, God's righteous judgment, upon His people as well as the world.

Habakkuk addressed the Lord again in chapter 2 where he says, "I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and I will answer concerning my complaint." Habakkuk set his posture to the Lord, and he waited. And the Lord in chapter 2 answered him again, this time providing a vision.

And here, we come to today's passage, chapter 3, where we see how Habakkuk responded to God. Hear now Habakkuk 3:16-19.

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.

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, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let us pray.

Father, hear now my feeble words. Would you bless your people through your word? May my words match up with yours. May your people know something true of you, and may we be blessed by it. We pray these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

Music. You hear it while riding an elevator. You play it in your car while you drive. You probably listen to it or at least maybe see someone running down the road with their AirPods or their headphones on. Music can sometimes convey a very powerful emotion that is often better than words alone. Music very likely enhanced or distracted you from your experience last night watching your favorite show or movie. Think about it. What was the last song you heard or the last album you listened to? What thoughts did it inspire? What emotions did it evoke? Did you even stop to think why you might have listened to it and what you were hoping to happen either during the songs or at least after having listened?

Mine was *Hamilton*. I have listened to that album a dozen or more times. I am getting very, very excited about the Broadway musical being livestreamed on Disney Plus this coming Friday. There was a little commercial if you haven't signed up yet. And I'm also just so excited that my friend John Song will finally get to listen to it for the first time. You can ask about that to him at another time.

There have been numerous studies that explore the psychology of musical preferences. And one such study sought to analyze the possible psychological functions that we have or that we benefit from our music listening. This one study focused on three main categories. One is that we listen to regulate our mood, to evoke emotions. Another category is to achieve self-awareness, that we're thinking and exploring ideas or concepts that the music interacts with. And third, to express social relatedness, a shared experience, something that tells a story of us listening together or touching on something of a cultural moment across generations or across a portion of a culture, how these things bind us together.

Music can express what ails our soul. Music can capture our deepest hearts' longing and our deepest hopes. And we see here in chapter 3 that Habakkuk puts his prayer to music. Now, of course, we don't know what the music sounded like, but we can have confidence that Habakkuk is putting together his thoughts, his emotions, his words for poetic and liturgical use in the life of God's people. How do we know this? Well, verse 1 of chapter 3 and verse 19.

In verse 1, it says that this prayer is according to Shigionoth. We don't know exactly what that word means. However, we have ideas that it refers to a musical instrument or some sort of type of psalm, particularly a psalm of lament. And, likewise, in verse 19 to capstone the chapter and the book, we see Habakkuk giving directions for the choir master that this prayer may be accompanied with stringed instruments. The intention is not only to hear God's vision and to respond in faith but for his prayer to be used in worship alongside other psalms. How can Habakkuk's prayer be used in your personal worship? How can it be incorporated in how we worship the Lord together?

As we have looked at Habakkuk these past few weeks, we have explored the idea of belief in the midst of suffering. These are the moments that we ask deep questions of purpose, of meaning, trying to have understanding. Habakkuk becomes a guide for us in the very questions that we ask of the Lord. It shapes our posture, our position, as Derek preached last week, before the Lord and how we wait as we listen to see who God is and what is He doing. And, likewise, Habakkuk gives an example of renewal where we see his own personal journey of complaint to trust.

And this passage this morning guides us in a prayer of trust. It's in the midst of suffering that we are often confronted with what we trust, is it not? When what is most dear to us is threatened, that is the moment when what we most trust is revealed. In the midst of suffering when we experience pain and affliction, when we experience or witness oppression and injustice in the world around us or maybe even personal experiences in our own circumstances, the mind and the heart long for reprieve. These are the moments that our eyes begin scanning for ways out. Our bodies gravitate towards paths that are the easiest. But as we look to God, a prayer of trust strengthens our belief in the midst of suffering.

Today, we're going to look at four brief things. A prayer of trust understands God's salvation. A prayer of trust considers loss. A prayer of trust leans on the Lord. And lastly, a prayer of trust cultivates our joy.

So let's dig in and first look at how we can observe from this passage and glean from God's word that a prayer of trust understands God's salvation. When you're reading the Bible, at any point, a good question to ask is when in the story is this happening? For example, does it have to do with the covenant that's being made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob? Is it showing us what is happening in God's redemption of God's people through Moses and as He gives the law, as He leads to the promised land? Does it deal with David's kingdom? Does it deal with the crushing blow of Israel and Judah when they experience hundreds of years of exile and they long await a return? How do we see God's salvation being even predicted and accomplished all throughout the story but how that crescendos, how it culminates in the salvation, the very work and mighty actions of the Lord Jesus Christ?

For Habakkuk, it is part of the prophetic books of the Bible. And just as a brief background and review, this is working in a time in Israel's history long, long ago in the southern kingdom of Judah. And Habakkuk is writing in light of a covenant relationship with the divine, with the Lord God Himself. And this relationship between Himself and the people come through this covenant that began with Abraham

but even seen before God's gracious working in the world, in His creation, and in His deliverance. But we see God's people experiencing the enemies from outside themselves but the corruption and the sin and the idolatry from within. And what is on the horizon for them is an external force, the wind of another empire coming through and crushing them. Where is the Lord's justice in all of this? That is what Habakkuk asks.

And so we see a personal journey of this prophet understanding God's redemptive history. Chapter 3, it provides these poetic reminders of God's deliverance in the Exodus, God's mighty acts that evoke holy fear, this fear of a righteous God. And we see God's power demonstrated in divine judgment. And in the life of God's people at this point in the story, Habakkuk laments. He laments of his circumstances. He laments of what is to befall God's people.

He was reminded in chapter 2 verse 20, "But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him." And after hearing the vision of God's judgment upon Judah by the hand of the Babylonians, he hears God's pronouncements, these woes of judgment addressed to them throughout chapter 2. And Habakkuk stands amazed. He stands amazed and in awe of God's glory, the glory of the Lord. And so we see what he prays in verse 16, "I hear." And even as it washes over him, he is taking note of himself, his body, his emotions, everything that is being affected as he is hearing from the Lord. "My body trembles; my lips quiver," that shaking before as you're trying to find words when your lips are just moving, but there's nothing coming out of your mouth. "Rottenness enters into my bones," a despair. And from head to toes, from top to bottom, there is a trembling.

But Habakkuk is not left there in despair. No. At this moment, Habakkuk knows the Lord is present. And he knows the Lord will act in His timing according to His redemptive purposes. And as he trembles, he trusts the Lord. And, therefore, he can say, "Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble." This prayer of trust understands God's salvation.

Second, we can observe that a prayer of trust considers loss. This is important because if you and I don't honestly look at what we could lose, then we risk not fully knowing what we can gain. Jesus, He said in Mark 8:36, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forget his soul?" This teaching throughout the gospels in Jesus's ministry is fundamental to what it means to follow Him. He says it multiple times and in multiple ways this invitation to follow Him is to consider what is loss so that you may grab hold of what is gain. And as a disciple of Jesus Christ, this comes back to us again and again throughout our lives as if it's the great onion of our heart and as we're peeling the layers back. We have to return to this place and consider the loss.

What loss does Habakkuk consider? Look at verse 17 where he mentions produce, and agriculture, and livestock. He mentions figs, and grapes, and olives, and sheep, and cattle. When these things are present in the Bible, they are often spoken of in the context of flourishing, of signs of prosperity. All is well among the people and all is good in the land. With them comes consistent provision for sustenance, opportunities for economic stability, but even more than that, these things are signs of thriving culture. Vocation and craftsmanship, they thrive. Family and community flourish. Wisdom is embodied and is passed on from one generation to the next. These are the very pictures of God's people experiencing God's covenant blessings as they experience His goodness and His kindness.

And so when Habakkuk is considering these things as loss, he is recognizing the very possibility, the very real possibility that these things will be absent in the future. Consider the devastation where agriculture and livestock are plundered to feed invading armies, where they are taken as tribute and taxes to satisfy the conquering empires leaving the people without and leaving the land barren. When these things are present, there is flourishing. And when they are absent, it's pulling the threads out of the fabric, and it starts to unravel.

When what we value most, what we need most gets threatened, it is natural to want God to protect us and to fight for us as a warrior. These pictures here in chapter 3 give us that image of a mighty warrior vindicating us and judging the ones who have taken and who have destroyed. And He is. The Lord is that.

The Lord is mighty to save. He's steadfast. He's kind. He's forever faithful to His promises. And Habakkuk is resolved to see God, to see God both in His divine judgment and in His abundant mercy. He is comforted by the bigger picture so much that he wishes, he longs for, he welcomes God's justice even if all of life collapses.

Such moments truly test our faith. We must be confronted with questions asking ourselves is our faith shallow? Have we created an illusion with our thin faith? Do you and I trust God in so far as He serves as a magic token that must provide these luxuries and safety? When life is good then God is good. But if life gets hard or we experience evil, then we wonder how good God can be.

Christian, have you personally, individually, but have we also as a church of Jesus Christ, have we domesticated God's sovereign will? Have we reduced His redemptive purposes to just being my personal feelings or merely my individual salvation in Jesus? Have we done such tragedy, such a travesty to the gospel of God's kingdom that we either ignore or we minimize the need to speak truth and to pursue justice in our relationships and in the world? Doing so fall short of God's glory, and it fails to live in light of God's gospel, His salvation.

And so friends, those viewing today, brothers and sisters in Christ, it is in these moments that what we trust gets revealed. It is not sufficient by itself just to know God's redemptive plans or to consider potential or real loss. Those things are important, but they have to go together with the next thing. Our trust must be anchored. It must be rooted to the Lord.

And so as we look at this prayer of trust, a prayer of trust thirdly leans on the Lord. This is the very foundation. Habakkuk is trusting the Lord's word, and we see and witness Habakkuk's transformation, his experience of welcoming, of opening up to the work of the Lord. This trust hinges on this little word in the English, "yet." Look at verse 16. "Yet I will quietly wait for the day." This is a rest. This is a confidence. And this resting is despite of and it's in contrast to Habakkuk's initial reaction of trembling there in verse 16. He's not left there shaking. He is beginning to have a firm foundation. And this only comes from trust in the Lord.

We see it again, that contrast, this loud, this very musical hinge, this pivot in verse 18. If there is no provision, if there is no prosperity, even then, I will trust in the Lord. Why? How can he come to this radical transformative experience? It's because of verse 19. The Lord is his strength. The Lord will lead him into the paths, the high places. He will cause his feet to tread like the deer's. This high place certainly has a picture of mountains. It can have allusions to high places of worship. It can also have triumphant battle imagery of where the Lord is leading us to know where we can have our confidence, that despite what seems like shaky ground around us, the Lord gives us a sure footing.

We see this very much in how Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. Although it's different words than Habakkuk's prayer, it's the same prayer of trust when He teaches His disciples to pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. May your glory shine forth. May your kingdom come. May your will be done. Make it so. Bring it forward. We welcome it. We long for it. Come. It's inviting for the Lord's work to be done, and that place of trust gives us the security and the confidence to long for it all the more but to quietly wait. And that's not a passive waiting. That's active. There's movement in that because it requires an abiding in that each and every day, moment by moment.

As we lean on the Lord in a prayer of trust, it very powerfully connects with the fourth, which is that a prayer of trust cultivates our joy. These things go hand in hand. In verse 18 where he says, "I will rejoice," this is more than just emotion. It is that, of course. But it's showing jubilation. It's triumphant elevation.

Now, this joy, this rejoicing is not just temperament as if some people have it and others don't, or it comes more naturally to this person and more difficult for that person. No, it's not just temperament. It's also not just mere emotionalism as if you have to show it a certain way either to prove it to yourself or to prove it to God or to others. This is showing what is true from the inside out, what is true and

anchored and held fast to the righteous judgment and abounding grace of the Lord Jesus. This joy is not fake, nor can it be manufactured. It is true because the one you place your trust in is sure and He is steady. Your circumstances cannot shake you and they cannot separate you from His hand.

You see, verses 18 and 19, this conclusion of the book is a crescendo of this prayer. It's the very chord progression in this musical number that moves toward this loud jubilant song of praise because it is of something that's true inside of Habakkuk. It's not just sweet buttercream on dry cake. It's not new paint on rotting wood. It is the compelling truth that elevates your soul, that brings you up from a low place where you rise up. It is not some spiritual pep talk that you muster up or must trick yourself to be motivated. This joy that can be cultivated in a prayer of trust is anchored to the Lord Himself. And by doing this, by practicing it, by activating your faith in such a prayer of trust, doing it with others, and reminding each other because when life does get hard in your own circumstances, or when you flip on the news, and either you disagree with what take is given on the screen or you're just tired and confused, or you're angry, these are the moments that we reveal what we trust.

Habakkuk's prayer of trust is the capstone of his conversation with the Lord. He began his conversation with questions. How long, O Lord? I need you. Where are you? And after laying his heart bare, he waits. He listens for the Lord's answer. And the Lord's words transformed Habakkuk. And what began as a complaint for justice ended with a prayer of trust.

In just a few moments, we're going to be singing "Amazing Grace." It was written by John Newton, and it's been a beloved hymn for well over 200 years. Years before becoming an Anglican priest, Newton as a younger man sailed in the British Navy. He left the British Navy. He was arrested. He did all kinds of things on the seas. He also was a slave ship captain. And in his life, he came to a point where he needed to cry out to the Lord. Unfortunately, it was not recognizing the sin of what he was participating in and the great evil on this world, particularly the sins of our country, and laying the foundation of what it means to subjugate a brother, to subjugate someone who is made in the image of the Lord.

But, nonetheless, he was in a situation where he cried out and sought help. And he wrote later about that moment. He said this. "The 10th of March is a day much remembered by me, and I have never suffered it to pass unnoticed since 1748. The Lord came from on high and delivered me out of deep waters." Now, Newton went on to grow and develop and strengthen his faith. Many, many years later, he did come to repudiate those things he participated in. And as he coined these words in "Amazing Grace," we see how Newton experienced God's salvation. As he considered his life and as he considered this moment, as he considered what he participated in, they were all loss to him. And he was found. And there he experienced all the gain by trusting in the Lord and rejoicing in Him as the source of His joy. Newton knew what Habakkuk knew.

And so we may hold to that truth, that God is just and God is merciful. He will judge perfectly, and He will accomplish His salvation completely. He does this as He marches on through history involving Himself in His purposes. Oftentimes, we don't understand. But we wait, and we listen, and we respond in faith, and we live by faith. May we respond with trust and praise to Him. Let us pray.

Our Father, strengthen us by your word. I confess I don't often know what to say in these months, but I look to your word. I look to your grace to abound. I look to your mercy. I look to your wisdom. Help my belief in the midst of suffering. Help our belief in the midst of suffering. May we give praise to your name recognizing all glory be unto it. All thanks and praise to you. In Jesus Christ. Amen.