



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 13 Issue 23

June 6, 2014

A Thriving Faith, Part 4

In Titus, Paul makes an important observation when it comes to false believers:

Titus 1:16a: “They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*...”

Truly, a man or woman’s core beliefs will be reflected in how they conduct themselves:

Proverbs 27:19, “As in water face *reflects* face, so the heart of man *reflects* man.”

There is an element here where we must be careful. For while the heart of man is reflected in what he does, let's be honest, the heart of a redeemed man is a battle ground where.

Romans 7:14-23, "What we want to do we don't; and what we don't want to do, we oft-times do."

Galatians 5:17, "...the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh... so that you may not do the things that you please."

Having said that, generally it is true that what we believe will translate to how we live.

Proverbs 23:7, "For as [a man] thinks within himself, so he is." (Isaiah)

A. W. Tozer reflecting upon this wrote the following words:

Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, 'What comes into your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man...

The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous [or telling] fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. (Tozer, 1992, p. 9)

What an incredible observation and one to which we must give heed, especially as we long to be godly men and women! What we think today in the deepest parts of our heart will determine to a degree our spiritual maturation in years to come.

So what is the conviction, the core belief, which lies at the base of a thriving faith? Habakkuk 3 answers that! Habakkuk wrote a Psalm to encourage a nation which was about to go through a severe trial, which literally would shake their world to pieces! The year is 605 BC and the nation of Judah is at the precipice of judgment on account of its rebellion against the Lord! At first, Habakkuk struggled on account of God's plans for His people. But then the prophet was floored with the glory of God, the beauty of His name, and so the greatness of His plan. This resulted in a profound change in Habakkuk where pride was replaced with trust! This conviction was twofold, the first is the Christian's support.

The Christian's Support

Habakkuk 3:19a, "The Lord God is my strength..."

This is a most amazing confession which no doubt transformed "the valley of weeping into a spring" in the life of Habakkuk! When the prophet arrived at this point, "the Lord God was his strength" no doubt he saw the world in a completely different light.

Notice, the basic meaning of this word is "strength" from which follows a variety of translations: "wealth," "power," "army," "substance," "goods," etc. The word is used 244 times in Scripture which is a lot! And in almost one half of its usages the referent is to that of an "army" or "force." For example:

- In 1 Samuel 10:26 it is translated, "band of men."
- In Ezra 8:22 it is used of a "band of soldiers."
- In 2 Chronicles 33:14, it is used in reference to the captains of an army.
- The term was used to reference the entourage which accompanied the queen of Sheba when she visited Solomon (1 Kings 10:2; 2 Chronicles 9:1), which is a fabulous starting ground for us as we seek to understand this word.

When you think of a very important person (VIP), what role would their "entourage" serve? When a king or world leader visits another nation, what does their "retinue" do before, during, and after the visit?

The work is multifaceted. It begins with a security detail which ensures the safety of the individual. Then there is the accommodation's staff which ensures that the person has an adequate place to stay. There are those in charge of communication, health care, food, transportation, the press, and much, much more. In fact, in March of this past year when President Obama visited Brussels for a one night stay, his entourage involved over 900 people, a \$1.5 million hotel bill, and \$10.4 million for the security detail using more than 45 vehicles and 3 cargo planes! Every need and contingency was anticipated and met! The

That is the word used by Habakkuk at the culmination of this Psalm! As the prophet anticipated his descent into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, he knew that he was not going to enter into the valley alone! To the contrary! Like the man on the Verizon commercial followed everywhere he goes by the hundreds of people supporting his cell phone, Habakkuk went with an Entourage who anticipated and prepared for his visit!

Ironically, the events of Daniel 3 occurred not much longer after Habakkuk. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were taken from Judah in 605 and placed in the service of the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a megalomaniac and erected a golden image of himself to be worshipped at a set time by all in his kingdom. When the time came for the idol to be worshipped, it was discovered that three Jewish boys refused to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's idol. Accordingly, they were confronted, tried, and thrown into a fiery furnace to be consumed by the flames. Yet they had an Entourage, didn't they?

Daniel 3:24-25, "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he responded and said to his high officials, 'Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?' They answered and said to the king, 'Certainly, O king.' He answered and said, 'Look! I see four men loosed *and* walking *about* in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods!'"

The three men were called out of the flames and they weren't singed in any way! They didn't smell of smoke. Not a hair on their head was harmed. How was that possible? Again they had an Entourage who went before them, with them, and who provided for their needs before, during, and after the ordeal!

Daniel 3:28-30. "Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.' Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon."

Realize the prosperity of these three men was secured regardless if they had been consumed or not!

This is a powerful example of what Habakkuk meant as he looked toward a difficult future and confessed, "The Lord God is my strength!" From this passage, we conclude that Habakkuk lived with The Conviction of God's certain involvement in his life. In other words, he knew he was never alone!

And yet there is more! Notice the expression, "The Lord God..." Habakkuk joins two important words together here: "the Lord" which speaks of God's transcendency and awesomeness and the word "God" which speaks of the Lord's session as absolute ruler of the world! Habakkuk lived with the conviction that this Awesome Ruler went before, beside, and within him!¹ And so it is with us!

This Being goes with you as well today! Everywhere you go, you are accompanied by this Entourage! In fact, this is a core conviction of all God's people.

Matthew 28:20b, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

After all, His name is Emanuel which translated means, "God with us!"

How could Habakkuk face a difficult future with such courage (cf. vv. 16-18)? He knew he was never alone! Oh Christian, seek such a faith this day! And yet, this isn't the climax! The text brings us yet to an even more glorious conviction about the Christian's ability.

The Christian's Ability

Habakkuk 3:19b, "The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places..."

The poetry in this passage is so rich and beautiful I personally think it obscures Habakkuk's meaning which is even more glorious than the poetry. Notice with me four key expressions:

First we begin with the biblical idea of "high places." Why were the various and sundry kings of Israel and Judah were frequently called to tear down the "high places" (Exodus 34:13; 1 Kings 15:14; 2 Kings 18:4)? After all it was believed in the ancient world and expounded upon in Scripture that God dwells in a "high place."

Isaiah 57:15a, "For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell *on* a high and holy place..."

In other words, if you want to fellowship with God, you have to go to a high place (which today we know is Christ)!

Psalms 24:3, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place?"

This is a key question, "Who can ascend into God's presence and so enjoy fellowship with Him?" The answer he gave was one who had "clean hands and a pure heart." And so we read this after God brought His people out of slavery to Mount Sinai:

Exodus 19:3, "And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel.'"

At the time of Moses in order to fellowship with God you had to ascend a mountain- a "high place"!²

This in fact is the origin and so the basis for the purpose and function of an altar, it was an elevated platform, a high place, which could be erected in any geography. This high place was believed to be the dwelling place of God, as it truly was on the altar in the tabernacle/temple!

Now because God set the boundary and place of His dwelling, the tabernacle/temple, all other "high places" in Israel were to be destroyed by the king. For now they represented nothing less than self-styled worship; an attempt on the part of the worshipper to manipulate God and so bring Him down to their level! God alone sets the terms, limits, and boundaries for His fellowship! And by way of note, today we now understand that Christ Himself is the Altar (cf. Romans 3:35; Hebrews 13:10)!

So with Habakkuk's reference to "high place" in our text we understand that he is talking about the place of fellowship and communion with God! Moses, describing what God was to His people during their *wilderness wandering* said this:

Deuteronomy 32:13, "He made him [His corporate people in the desert] ride on the high places of the earth, and he ate the produce of the field; and He made him suck honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock."

In other words, though God's people sojourned in the wilderness, nevertheless they were not bereft or abandoned. They enjoyed deep and abiding fellowship with God here described as "...riding on the high places of the earth!"

The next key term here is "hind's feet."

Habakkuk 3:19, "...He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*..."

A "hind" was a female deer which populated the high country of Palestine. On account of how God created them, they were quite nimble in this rugged terrain moving with ease from one rock outcropping to the next. Accordingly the expression "...He has made my feet like hinds' feet..." reflects a preparatory work on the part of God in the life of someone which makes them adept/skilled at an activity or skill. As the "hind"/"stag" was created to move with ease upon the rocky, treacherous, and elevated terrain of this region, so the individual in whom God works becomes skilled at a certain activity. What specifically is the activity here? It is "walking on high places!" This is, fellowshiping with God!

That brings us to the third word that is of some import here, "my"- "...and makes me walk on MY high places!" There is no question that once again Habakkuk is here quoting from another portion of Scripture- specifically:

Psalms 18:33, "He makes my feet like hinds' *feet*, and sets me upon my high places."

These are the words of David in which he describes the glorious protection and provision that he enjoyed from God. The context here is NOT one of ease and abundance, BUT trial and difficulty. Earlier in Psalm 18 David wrote this:

Psalms 18:4-6a, "The cords of death encompassed me, and the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God for help..."

That no doubt is why David speaks as he does in this context, "...MY high places..." See, David's "high place"- the place where he enjoyed deep and abiding fellowship with God- was the battlefield and those times when the war wasn't going in his favor, when death was but a step away! At those times and in those places David discovered the rich and abiding presence of His

Savior!

And so it obviously was in Habakkuk's life! As he considered the future in light of the present, he knew the well-being of the nation and of himself would be compromised. Again, so brutal a future as this made the prophet physically ill (Habakkuk 3:16-17)! Yet he embodied the words of Korah, "Passing through the valley of weeping, they make it a spring..." In other words, the coming tragedy, turmoil, and hardship would be Habakkuk's High Place where he would meet and fellowship with God! And so it is with us! Where is Christ today? If you want to fellowship with Him, where must you go? We must go to the wilderness (cf. Hebrews 13:12-13)!

With this, notice the final expression, "...He has made my feet like hinds' feet"- with the emphasis on "...He has made..." Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God, the Lord specially equipped Habakkuk that he might fellowship and so commune with God in the valley of the shadow of death!

Think of it. There are depths in the ocean where the pressure from the weight of the water is so great, a pinhole prick in the armor of the submarine would produce a stream of water so powerful it could cut through a man! Yet at these depths, delicate sea creatures swim effortlessly! See, they have been fashioned by God for their environment!

That is what God does in the life of His people! He fits them for "the high place" in which they and they alone would fellowship with God. For some the high place is abundance and ease of days where pride isn't a problem. For others, it is tragedy and loss of well-being or loved ones. It is unpredictable and unforeseeable. Yet in and through it all, it involves God hand selecting His children, equipping them for the providence He has ordained for them, and so enabling them to "make it a spring" where others would curse God and die!

This was Habakkuk's conviction because he anticipated a difficult future. The Lord God was Habakkuk's strength. Though deep may be his valley, nevertheless the Lord would provide for ALL his needs! Like the entourage of a great king, prior to entering the trial, the Lord Himself would descend into the fray to prepare the way. And while there, God would attend to all of the Prophet's needs.

He made his feet like hinds feet to walk in Habakkuk's high place. Furthermore, while plunged to great depths of pressure in an affliction for which he was hand-picked, Habakkuk would discover that God made him adept at fellowshiping with the Lord with alacrity and grace in such an extreme environment of pressure! It was this conviction with which Habakkuk moved forward here!

And Christian, it is with this conviction that you too must move forward in your life! You may not like the providence that God has placed before you. But you must know and be convinced that God has specially equipped you to swim at such depths!

The Key to A Thriving Faith

Habakkuk 1:2, “How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, ‘Violence!’ Yet Thou dost not save. Why dost Thou make me see iniquity...”

Following God’s reply, Habakkuk said this:

Habakkuk 1:12a, “Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We will not die...”

Following God’s second reply, Habakkuk said this:

Habakkuk 3:2, “Lord, I have heard the report about Thee *and* I fear...”

Each of these passages reflect an important aspect of Habakkuk’s relationship with God which proves to be THE KEY to this entire book. Do you see it? We’ve danced around it throughout this study. What is it? Habakkuk’s struggle with God and the consequential growth took place because Habakkuk in his trial did NOT flee *from* God BUT *to* God! Even though at times he was raving mad, nevertheless Habakkuk still went to God in prayer! Had he in his sin ran into a cave to lick his wounds, this book would never have been written and Habakkuk would never have grown as he did here!

Now it is the Lord Himself who draws men and so we give the credit for this disposition to God. However insofar as Habakkuk was responsible (which he was), we note the importance of NEVER, EVER stopping the dialogue which God calls us to in His word!

Matthew 11:28, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

I love this! Christ here does NOT say, “Come to me *AFTER* you have fixed your life and now have a proper attitude and approach...” NO! Christ says, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden...” David exhorted his generation:

Psalms 62:8b, “...pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.”

The command here involves hurting people going to God and talking honestly and frankly with Him! Oh Christian, don’t ever stop going to God in your pain and sadness! And don’t ever stop listening to Him as He speaks in His word! In fact, through the example of Asaph, we are exhorted to do nothing less.

Psalms 73:16-17, “When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; *then* I perceived their end.”

When Asaph was moved to anger at God for His apparent lack of care, the psalmist did NOT run from God, BUT to God in worship! As he dialogued with God through His word, that is when the

growth came- as he ran to God and not from God! In this regard, D. W. Baker observed this from Habakkuk 3:18:

Habakkuk, in the midst of deprivation and suffering, still feels able to call God 'mine' (cf. Psalms 63:1). The intimacy of the relationship is sure and solid, based as it is on the firm foundation of God's covenant promises of an eternal relationship with his people (cf. Deuteronomy 7:6, 9) rather than being based on emotion or passing human whim (cf. Numbers 23:19; Hosea 11:9). (Baker, 2009, p. 76)

Christian, who cares how you feel about God at any given moment?! If you want a thriving faith, pour your heart out before Him; God is your refuge and strength!

Bibliography

Baker, D. W. (2009). *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)*. Chicago, IL: IVP Academic.

Tozer, A. W. (1992). *The Knowledge of the Holy*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

End Notes

¹ As He did with Elisha, "...And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, 'Strike this people with blindness, I pray.' So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha." (2 Kings 6:17b-18)

² Cf. also Psalms 113:4-5.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 6, 2014. Greg is the minister of Bethel Presbyterian Church