

O Lord Revive Thy Work

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Bible Text: Habakkuk 3:12

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The book of Habakkuk and the third chapter.

Theologians sometimes refer to prophets like Habakkuk as the minor prophets. But the truth is there has never been a minor prophet and the reason being is because they were all sent of God. They all had the message of God and they all spoke the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

That hymn that we just sang was a hymn written, I think, in about 1858 by a man by the name of Albert Midland. I don't know much about him. I know he was a businessman and I read somewhere that he wrote something over 300 hymns and I couldn't find most of them, but the ones I could find were really good. But I am sure that he got the inspiration for that hymn from this text tonight.

If you will look with me here in Habakkuk chapter three it says:

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.

The prophet's words here are, I believe, both a prayer and a song. That is what that strange "Shigionoth" in verse one means. Somebody defined that as a mournful ode, a mournful song, one of supplication. And the Bible shows us, as a whole, that the Lord is faithful to revive his work among his people in many times of adversity and decline and difficulty. And so I believe that this word or this prayer or song can be applied to every season when the Church or believers individually suffer these declines and difficulties and trials and afflictions.

And if you notice here, I believe he sets for the right word and example because mercy is what we are to flee to for refuge and what we are to rely on as our only plea, mercy being kind treatment of an enemy. And we, as the Lord's people, are always found, I am afraid, though not his enemies, yet being found in a position sometimes even as his enemies. And so we can never say, "Lord, remember our merit or remember what we have done or remember how faithful we have been," but, "Lord, remember your own mercy."

And that is the prayer of my heart. This is the prayer of my heart. I pray the same thing. And I pray on the same ground because I don't have any other for the Lord's mercy.

You see, as I said, the work of God here can mean either his work as it refers to us as individual believers. Does it not say, "For we are his workmanship"¹?

And then naturally, of course, as it refers to his Church as it is as a whole in this world and as it is in all of its visible local expressions. And it has to do with his people and his Church primarily because he says, "Lord, revive." And to revive here presupposes that life is present. And, of course, that life is in Christ. He is our life. And you can't revive that which is not alive.

Actually, what it means here is this. It means to preserve alive. "Lord, preserve alive your work."

And this out to be our plea and it ought to be our prayer, it seems like, even more in these days of apostasy, of unbelief and it should be our prayer for ourselves. It ought to be our prayer for our brethren and it ought to be our prayer for all the Lord's Church here in this world where the same weakness in this flesh. We face the same difficulties. We face the same persecuting world. But I want you to notice, first of all, what it was that brought this prophet to say this.

Verse two he says, "O LORD, I have heard thy speech."²

That surely means on the one hand literally heard from God, but most especially spiritually heard from God. As a matter of fact, here in this verse this word "speech" when he says, "I have heard thy speech,"³ is I have heard thy report. I have heard the hearing.

And that is the same thing that another prophet says in Isaiah chapter 53 when he says it like this, same thing.

"Who hath believed our report?"⁴

Evidently Isaiah and this prophet Habakkuk and all of the Lord's believing people, they have heard something. They have heard from God something that everybody else obviously hasn't heard. I have heard the report.

And here is the reason they heard. Isaiah tells us clearly. He says, "And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?"⁵ That is the only reason one sinner hears from God and another doesn't. And especially the only reason why one sinner hears in the heart,

¹ Ephesians 2:10.

² Habakkuk 3:2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Isaiah 53:1.

⁵ Ibid.

believes, then the other doesn't. It is because he reveals himself. He reveals his truth. He reveals his Son. And this has to do with God's speech. And God's speech is this written Word. And it is the speech of his truth and his gospel that is declared faithfully by those who preach his Word.

He said, "I have heard thy speech."⁶

In the book of Proverbs it says this. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, [from hearing the Word, the speech of God] even his prayer shall be abomination."⁷

He doesn't hear. He doesn't listen first. If he doesn't listen first, if he doesn't believe first then even his prayer is abomination in the sight of God. You remember the King Saul who was told by God through the prophet to take and to slay everything had to do with the people that they were finding as their enemy, destroy everything. One day the prophet came sent of God again and he said to this king, he said, "Now what is this that I hear, the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep? Oh, did not God tell you to destroy everything and keep nothing?"

"Oh," he said, "but we saved the best of the cattle and the best of the sheep to offer to God as a sacrifice."

He said, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken [to listen] than the fat of rams."⁸

He said, "I have heard your speech."

Have you heard from God? I am not talking about God speaking audibly as he did on a couple of occasions in the New Testament, but every child of God, every one who is brought to believe God will hear from God, hear through his Word, hear through his gospel and take what he gives in this book as God breathed.

This isn't a book on philosophy. This isn't a book on history although it provides the most accurate history. It is the Word of God. Thus saith the Lord.

And he heard, as all the Lord's people do, in their hearts they heard, hear spiritually, enabled by the Spirit of God, they hear with the hearing of faith. I have heard something. And I will tell you this, one day I heard something and I have not been the same since. I have not viewed things the same way since. I have not viewed myself the same way since. I have not viewed God the same way since. I have not viewed how God saves sinners the same way since. And neither will anybody else who hears what he says.

You see, not many here like Samuel did even in his youth when the Lord spoke to him and he said, "Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth."⁹

⁶ Habakkuk 3:2.

⁷ Proverbs 28:9.

⁸ 1 Samuel 15:22.

⁹ 1 Samuel 3:9.

When God gives by his Spirit all those instructions there in the Revelation to the seven churches of Asia Minor and, therefore, to those that represent the Church in all ages, he says this almost every time. “He that hath an ear, let him hear.”¹⁰

That is what moved the prophets. He says, “I have heard.” And when he says that, “I have heard thy speech, and was afraid.”¹¹

That is why I know that so many people have not in any way heard from God, because they have not the fear that the prophet is speaking of here which is the fear of the Lord which God says is the beginning of wisdom.

They talk about God. They talk about Jesus. They talk about the Church. They talk about all these things. But I know in my heart of hearts that they haven't heard. And I was thinking about this today. Humanly speaking, it would be much easier on this on the mind and the emotions and such as that on the one hand if you never heard.

You say, “What do you mean?”

I mean you could cruise down through this life headed for destruction with ease and happiness and temporal satisfaction and all these things. But if you hear from God, it is going to bring about a fear. It is going to bring about that holy reverence towards him.

I will tell you. I can just remember in some ways when the Lord first began to reveal his truth to me, his gospel to me and I began to find out how he really was it seemed like every expression that I used for God or for his Son just didn't work anymore. And not only that, but the way that I sin just wouldn't work anymore. What happened? I was afraid.

I wasn't afraid. When the Lord reveals his grace we aren't afraid that he will in some how cast us off though we may feel that at the beginning. But believing on the Christ that he revealed as all of our salvation, we don't have a fear that he will punish us or discard us or cast us off. But we reverence him. We have a fear for our families and our friends and our acquaintances and the men and women in our world. We have a fear for that judgment that they will face apart from God's grace.

And so in that light Paul says, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”¹²

But unregenerate people, the apostle says they have “no fear of God before their eyes.”¹³

¹⁰ Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22.

¹¹ Habakkuk 3:2.

¹² 2 Corinthians 5:11.

¹³ Romans 3:18.

And I see that every day. I see that on every hand. I see that, it seems like, on every t-shirt I meet and every bumper sticker and every word that comes out of somebody's mouth and, most especially, by religionists in this world. They have no fear of God. Before their eyes.

And so when the Lord's people who have heard his speech, who have heard and have some knowledge of his Word, of what he says, of what he requires and what he commands, even us as his people, when we see a decline, when we see the lifelessness or the lack of vitality in our own selves and among the Lord's people and the Church as a whole you can't be satisfied.

You see, all these false prophets in his day as well as in our day they are quite willing to accept the counterfeit. They are quite willing and satisfied to delight in that which has the outward appearance, that form of godliness.

But the prophet looked around and he saw the decline. He saw what was going on. He saw what was being said. He saw how God supposedly was being worshipped and what was declared by the false prophets and because he heard God's speech, he knew something about God's Word.

He said, "I was afraid."

I am afraid for my generation. I am afraid for the Church in this day in one sense of speaking.

And it reminded me of this. It reminded me of a day in 1 Kings. Let me read it to you. It says:

And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.¹⁴

He went into the temple. He went into the king's palace. He took out everything that was of any worth and value. He gutted those places and he even, it says, took what was very important and that was the gold shields that Solomon had made. That makes me think of the great work of Christ our Solomon. And we are living in this day in which it seems like that men have taken and they have gutted out of everything that would pertain to God that which is good and lasting and real and true. In other words, everything that glorifies God, everything that gives his people hope and peace and joy and comfort. They have gutted it out and there isn't anything left. And they have done this. Listen to this.

So what did King Rehoboam do?

¹⁴ 1 Kings 14:25-26.

“And king Rehoboam made in their stead...”¹⁵ in the stead of these shields of gold, “...made in their stead brasen shields, and committed them unto the hands of the chief of the guard, which kept the door of the king’s house. And it was so, when the king went into the house of the LORD, that the guard bare them, and brought them back into the guard chamber.”¹⁶

And they were nothing but brass. They were in the place where the gold used to be and I just imagine that the king had those men to spend the greater part of their day polishing that brass to make it as shiny as it was and yet all the time it was nothing but a counterfeit.

Habakkuk looked around in his day and he saw those shields of brass and those people polishing them in a sense as hard as they could trying to make like this is the truth. This is the gospel. This is God. We are worshipping him doing all these things. This is grace. This is love. This is mercy. This is everything. But it wasn’t. And because he had heard the speech he had heard God say how he was and how he could only be worshipped through and by a sacrifice and [?]. He heard all these things from God and he looked about him and he is afraid.

So what does he pray for? He prays for God to do something.

You know, if there is a chief shame, I am afraid amongst the Lord’s people... I am not talking about false professors here. I am talking about the Lord’s people. If it is a chief shame among us and me the most shameful of us all, it is that we spend more time complaining about the way things are, talking about the way things used to be rather than asking God to do something.

He said, “Ye have not because ye ask not.”¹⁷

This flesh finds it so much more easy to complain and murmur and think about all the things. It is just like somebody was saying once about a Welsh preacher. They said, “You can always tell a Welsh preacher.” Why? Because he is always preaching on revival. He is always talking about how things used to be. I don’t know about that, for sure, but I have heard it.

But Habakkuk prays for God to work, to do something by his life giving Spirit, to do something to work for his work. That is what his people are. That is what his Church is. They are his planning, the Scripture says. They are his building.

And Paul, writing to those Philippians with their difficulties just like every other church there in the New Testament, he said, “I am confident of this. I am confident that God who has begun this good work in you he will perform it right until he brings you to stand in

¹⁵ 1 Kings 14:27.

¹⁶ 1 Kings 14:27-28.

¹⁷ James 4:2.

his presence. He will perform that work because it is a good work and the only one who can do a good work is God himself.”

You see, everything that pertains to a believer, everything that pertains to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ which is his body is according to God’s plan. He planned it all. He purposed it all. He purchased it all and he produced it all. It is his work.

When I first began to hear and believe the gospel I thought you could revive this denomination that I was in. I was going to be a part of leading the Southern Baptists back to where they came from and belonged. And then after a while the Lord finally taught me that you can’t go back to where you have never been. And he never will revive somebody else’s work. He will not revive man’s work because there is no life in it. He only revives his work. And he always revives his work because he alone is the one able to bless and revive and preserve a life. And if he wasn’t and if he didn’t, if he left us to ourselves, what would we be? And that in a hurry.

But way back in Ecclesiastes he gives us something that you can just hold on to this. The wise Solomon, led by the Spirit, he said, “I know that, whatsoever God doeth,”¹⁸ now this is just what he does. Sometimes I hear people say, “Well, I don’t want this to fall apart.”

I don’t care if everything that God is not in falls apart. And you needn’t fear for what he is in. He will preserve it. But he said, “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.”¹⁹

It is his Word.

I know us preachers. We get all bent out of shape sometimes. We are fretful and fearful about this and that and the other, but we just have to be brought back again and again to remember this is his work.

Isaiah again.

“Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.”²⁰

“Ask me about my work,” he says. Don’t tell me about your work. Ask me about my work.

And so the plea goes out in Psalm 85. He says, “Wilt thou not revive us again?”²¹ And for a reason. “...that thy people may rejoice in thee?”²²

¹⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:14.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Isaiah 45:11.

²¹ Psalm 85:6.

²² Ibid.

That is what happens when the Lord revives his work. His people go back to rejoicing in him and only him. And I am convinced that he will do whatever it takes to bring all his people back to rejoicing in him, not in each other so much, not in the local church so much, not in this or that or the other, but when he revives his work it brings those people to rejoice in, to trust in, to remember their hope is only in him and him alone.

Let thy work appear unto thy servants.

“Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us.”²³

“The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.”²⁴

It is his work. And that is why he gets the glory.

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it.”²⁵

Christ said, “Upon this rock I will build my church.”²⁶

All his people are born not of the flesh, but of God. This salvation is of the Lord. And so he says, “I have heard your voice. I heard your speech. I heard and in the depths of my soul I heard as words from the living God. I heard it as necessary words. I heard it as truth which will never falter. I heard it as your purpose which will never fail. I heard it as it reveals who you are and as it declares the only way of salvation in that one that you have appointed, Christ Jesus, by his cross. I have heard that. I looked around and I was afraid.”

And so he prayed, “LORD, revive they work.”²⁷

You see, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is characterized by truth. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is characterized by grace. It is characterized by love. It is characterized by mercy. And when the Lord revives his work he revives and brings again a fresh and a new display of these things. He revives and the truth becomes much more important than it was. He revives and grace becomes much more important than it fell to be. Graciousness and love and mercy, not only the mercy and love of God to us, but the likewise manifestations of that by his Spirit through us.

You notice he didn't say, “Well, I guess if it is just going to be it is going to be.” No, he prays.

²³ Psalm 90:16-17.

²⁴ Psalm 138:8.

²⁵ Psalm 127:1.

²⁶ Matthew 16:18.

²⁷ Habakkuk 3:2.

“LORD, revive thy work.”²⁸

And he desires God to do what is necessary to be done which may and often is severe. Just remember mercy. And your professing Church in this world in which we live, do something for your glory. Make known. Make yourself known.

That is the delight of the Lord’s people. Lord, get honor for yourself. Get glory for yourself. Make manifest yourself not only to me. Do that. Please make known your power and your presence and your quickening Spirit in my own heart in this work, but, Lord, in the Church and in the world, make known your gospel.

Did you know that the Lord God has joined his glory to doing good for his people? His glory, his honor, having committed himself to it in that everlasting covenant, his glory and honor is joined to his doing good to his people. His promises, his providence, his power all work not only for the good of his people, but for the glory of his name.

He said, “Make known; [and] in wrath remember mercy.”²⁹

Now the Scriptures say that the Lord’s people will all be saved from wrath in Christ. But the Lord all the days of his world since the fall has clearly demonstrated his wrath toward the inhabitants of this earth. The effects of which have often fallen on his people.

Habakkuk looked out at this nation and this world in which he lived just like it is in our day. He looked out in it. He saw inevitably and God had told him this is what he was going to do. He is going to bring his wrath and judgment. But he said “In the midst of it, remember mercy.”

Remember the one who is the Lord our mercy. Remember the one who will be the mercy performed. And he calls him by that covenant name Jehovah, O Lord. I hear that all the time, “Oh, Lord.” I want to say to people, “If you only knew who you were talking about.”

Jehovah God.

And he calls him, “O, LORD, oh Jehovah.”

In his redemptive character, the Redeemer, the eternal, the self existent one. Oh Lord. I have heard your speech. I have heard your report. I have heard and you have brought me to believe your gospel. I was afraid. Revive thy work in the midst of the years for as the years approach. And those are the years of God’s purpose and the years of our individual lives and the years that precede the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the years of these last days. This year, this hour. Revive your work. Remember mercy. Cause your gospel to go forth in power. Work in the hearts of men and women in this world to bring them

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

to a knowledge of Christ and especially work in the hearts of your believing people that we might know this refreshing.

Make known.

One old writer said, “Make known more of himself as the covenant God and Father of his people. Make known more of his mind and will and of his love and grace and mercy in Christ, that he would make known more of Christ, of his person, of his offices and his grace, that he would make known more clearly the work of his spirit and grace upon their hearts and display his power and the efficacy of his grace in reviving it and carrying it on that he would make known more largely his covenant and promises, his truth and faithfulness in the performance of them. That he would grant a larger measure of knowledge of all divine things of the gospel and of the truths of it such as is promised and is expected will be in the latter day when the earth shall be everywhere filled with the knowledge of the Lord.”

Look back over in chapter two and verse 14. In the midst of all that he said about this people and this work, he says in verse 14, “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”³⁰

So evidently old Albert Mill Midland he had some knowledge of this passage. And so he wrote this hymn and this is the first verse. We sang it.

Revive thy work, oh Lord.
Thy mighty arm make bare.
Speak with the voice that wakes the dead,
And make thy people hear.

Oh Lord, I pray, revive your work. Help us to see the difference between man's work and your work and in the midst of the years remember mercy.

Lord, we pray that you would hear us tonight for Christ's sake. Lord, we know that this prayer, this Word affects so many individuals, so many circumstances, so many things even in the world in which we live. We don't know them all. And oftentimes, Lord, we have difficulty discerning what is your work and what is not. But that doesn't change your prayer. We pray that you would revive your work. Cause us, Lord, to continue to hear your speech, your gospel, your Word and continue to give us that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, that fear of the Lord which brings us to know we have nothing else to fear and, Lord in all things help us. Save us or we perish. Keep us from falling and preserve us unto that day and by your grace we will praise you for eternity and by your grace we will begin to even this day that all honor and power and glory forever and ever be yours. Amen.

³⁰ Habakkuk 2:14.