

I WILL BE JOYFUL IN GOD MY SAVIOR

Habakkuk 3:1-19

Key Verse: 18

“... yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

Last week, in chapters 1 and 2, we heard Habakkuk ask the Lord two troubling questions on his heart. First, “Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?” (1:3) God’s reply was not nice and easy: **“I’m raising up the Babylonians”** (1:6). It meant, I’ll use Babylon to punish my people Judah. This led to Habakkuk’s second question: “Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (1:13) In God’s answer were five woes pronounced on wickedness. God also answered, **“but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness [or, faith]”** (2:4). Habakkuk’s final chapter 3 is a prayer or song of Habakkuk, expressing his confidence in God. In the midst of coming or current desolation, Habakkuk has joy in God. Let’s learn why.

First, Habakkuk’s prayer request (1-15). Habakkuk already brought some troubling questions to God in prayer. Habakkuk was a man of prayer. God gave him answers that were difficult to accept, not easy and nice: God would punish his people, and then later, God would punish the punisher. When we come to God in prayer, we really don’t expect him to answer like this. Rather, we hope or ask God to solve the problem quickly and easily. After all, that is what we want: a quick and easy solution, don’t we? Prayer is not so easy, and God’s answers are not always what we prefer.

So what could Habakkuk pray after hearing God’s reply? Let’s read verse 2: **“LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.”** The prophet remembers here the fame and awesome deeds of the Lord. He recalls what he has heard of God’s past deliverance of his people. What did he recall?

In verses 3-15 he refers to things that God had done in the past or perhaps even in his own life time: He mentions God’s glory, praise, splendor and power. There was pestilence and plague. The earth shook and mountains crumbled. Tents and dwellings were in distress and anguish. God raged against the sea. He rode horses to victory like a champion. Rivers split. Mountains writhed. Torrents swept by. Sun and moon stood still. In wrath God threshed the nations. He came out to deliver his people, to save his anointed one. He crushed the leader of the land of

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wickedness. In poetic form, the prophet remembers God's mighty hand of judgment and deliverance.

There are so many stories among God's people that he could be referring to, such as the judgments and plagues on Egypt and God's glorious and mighty deliverance in the exodus. God is an awesome God. Habakkuk prays, **"Repeat your deeds, Lord, in our day. In our time, make them known."** He knew that God foretold judgment and wrath. So he prayed, **"In wrath, remember mercy."** O Lord, be merciful.

The word "repeat" can also be translated "revive." **"Revive your works, Lord."** It's a prayer for God to show himself as mighty and glorious, the Deliverer of his people. God is holy and he will judge. But God is also merciful, and he will save his people who trust in him.

We learn from Habakkuk to recall in our prayers the awesome deeds of the Lord, both in history and in our personal lives, and to ask God in his mercy to keep doing his mighty deeds. Renew, repeat, revive your awesome deeds, O Lord! God has done mighty deeds in history, for his people Israel, and even more through his Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Jesus healed the sick, drove out demons from people and even raised the dead. Finally, Jesus died on the cross to take away the guilt and penalty of our sins, and then he rose again from the dead! Especially, Jesus has saved and changed so many lives by the power of the gospel.

I grew up in a church-going home. But after a few months in college I was confused, among other things, by my father's death, fraternity life, and a Mormon girlfriend. I confessed in confusion and frustration, "I don't really believe in God. I don't know what I believe." Then I prayed, "God, if you exist, just let me know the truth and I'll give my life for it." Within a few months, the resurrection of Jesus Christ gave me hope and a new life. My dream to make much money was changed to serve Christ. Still, I'm challenged in my spirit to live for Christ and to make disciples of Jesus as long as I live.

This can be discouraging when I don't see much tangible fruit in the form of disciples or when my children don't have very strong faith, at least by my standards. Yet I can pray, "Lord, do your mighty work. Let me see your awesome deeds. And have mercy on me and this nation. Work your amazing grace through your holy word and in all attendees at our Louisville conference, for the sake of your kingdom. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

Second, no matter what, I will be joyful in God my Savior (16-19). The prophet quivered and trembled at the sound of the approaching enemy. But he knew about God's ultimate justice. So he said, **"Yet I will wait patiently for the day of**

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calamity to come on the nation invading us.” According to God’s promise, the day would come when Babylon would have to face calamity due to God’s justice.

This leads us to the climax of Habakkuk’s prayer in verses 17-19. Pastor Bill Acton passed away last week at age 97.¹ He wrote a short sermon on this passage titled, “Unconditional Faith.” He contrasted “though” in verse 17 with “yet” in verse 18. There are six “though” conditions mentioned (17):

1. Though the fig tree does not bud
2. And there are no grapes on the vines
3. Though the olive crop fails
4. And the fields produce no food
5. Though there are no sheep in the pen
6. And no cattle in the stalls

These six “though” statements describe a time of economic and financial disaster, like a time of drought and famine. Such would be the time when Babylon invaded. Such is the time when we are under God’s wrath or disciplinary judgment or Satan’s attack. We remember Job who suffered through disasters that destroyed his children and property. There are difficult “though” times that all people go through from time to time: poor health, financial or job struggles, family or relational problems, property or possession loss. At such times, people sometimes become bitter and even abandon their faith in God.

Habakkuk was either going through or foresaw the coming disaster. Even so, he had “yet” faith. He said in verse 18, **“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”** And he added in verse 19, **“The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”**

Habakkuk had faith that overcomes the situation. His faith gave him joy and strength in God his Savior and Enabler. Habakkuk found joy in the Lord in the midst of current or coming disaster.

I mentioned Job already. He had a similar faith. He said in Job 13:15, **“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.”** Even if God killed him, he would still have hope in God!

David had a similar faith. He wrote, **“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me”** (Ps 23:4).

¹ www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/acton_bill/

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Apostle Paul had the same faith of “though, yet.” He wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, **“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”**

Pastor Bill Acton, whom I mentioned already, said that to have “yet” faith is to believe that the Lord supplies our need. He mentioned 9 things he thought of that the Lord supplies to his people: wisdom, courage, love, grace, forgiveness, purity, honesty, truthfulness, and faith. These are things that we need continually as Christians. These don’t come from within ourselves. They come from the Lord. They come from the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that, **“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”**

It is not natural to be joyful in difficult times. But joy in the Lord comes through the Holy Spirit. Mary, the mother of Jesus, had her life turned upside down when it was announced to her that she would become the mother of the Messiah. At first, she was troubled in her heart. But after visiting her relative Elizabeth and receiving confirmation from her of her blessedness, she broke out in song. She said, **“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...”** (Lk 1:46b-47)

Worldly joy happens when we have some success or victory. But spiritual joy comes even in times of suffering and hardship for God’s glory. Jesus said to rejoice and be glad in times of persecution for righteousness for great is such a person’s reward in heaven, along with the prophets (Mt 5:12). The apostles did just that in Acts 5:41 which says, **“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”**

Elisabeth Elliot was married to Jim Elliot only four years when he was martyred in Ecuador. At her funeral just three years ago, Joni Eareckson Tada spoke. Joni is a quadriplegic, paralyzed from the shoulders down after she had a diving accident at age 17. These two women had their share of extraordinary suffering. And Joni testified at Elisabeth’s funeral that they both agreed on the following statement: “No one participates in God’s joy, without first tasting the Son’s afflictions.” Elisabeth also told Joni, “Suffering is not for nothing.” And yet another meaningful quote from Elisabeth is this: “Of one thing I’m perfectly sure, God’s story never ends in ashes.” [video clip of the 5 Wheaton martyrs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLcfZhevZsU>, from 3:40-4:37]

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Apostle Peter agreed that heavenly joy comes through experiencing Jesus' sufferings. He wrote in 1 Peter 4:13, **"But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."**

We know that Philippians has been called the letter of joy. Actually Paul wrote this letter while in prison. Yet Paul kept repeating, **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"** (Php 4:4)

What is your "though" that you are currently struggling through? In spite of your "though" do you have the joy of "yet"? "Yet" joy or "yet" faith comes when we remember who God is and what he has done in history, in today's world and in your own life. Do you know who Christ is and what he has done for you?

C. S. Lewis was an atheist. After becoming a believer in Christ, he eventually wrote a book called, "Surprised By Joy." He described his conversion as follows: "I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?"

St. Paul, C. S. Lewis, Joni Eareckson Tada, Elisabeth Elliot, and many more. The world has been blessed by their lives for Christ. And they all testify to the joy to be found in the midst of many difficult circumstances by knowing Christ.

Whatever circumstances we are in, we have reason to be joyful in God our Savior.