

Topic	Rejoicing During Difficult Times
Reference	Habakkuk 3: 17-18
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Temptation and self-control has a lot to do with the text that we are going to talk about today. It takes a lot of real Christian maturity and strength to arrive at this place to sing this meaningfully.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in the God my Savior. (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

What Habakkuk is singing is complete desolation. It is about time in Judah where starvation is imminent because there is no cattle in the field, where the economy has completely collapsed. He is talking about the future where Judah is overrun by Babylon and it is so complete in desolation yet he will praise God.

Victory Through Difficult Times

A lot of us are thankfully spared to go through that kind of desolation that Habakkuk went through but you could be having your own troubles. You could have lost a loved one, you could have been struggling with a sense of self-worth, you could have tensions in your family, you could have financial or medical issues and we like to define victory as having our circumstances changing. In the case of Habakkuk, it is about a time when your circumstances don't change and can you be victorious in that.

Definition of Victorious Living.

The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer he enables me to go on the heights. (Habakkuk 3:19)

What he is giving now is basically this image. Starting in chapter 1 Habakkuk is frightened, in doubt and angry because Judah is in disarray and God is telling him the Babylonians are coming. His faith is completely tested, he doubts God, he is upset, he is frightened. All those emotions we are used to when we go through difficult times. In chapter 2 God reassures him that the proud and mighty Babylon will be judged and now we arrive at chapter 3. By the time we arrive at chapter 3 something changes in Habakkuk. He is no longer that frightened person. He still has his doubts but he is no longer that angry person and at the end of chapter 3 he sings this; *he enables me to go on the heights*. The actual Hebrew rendering is mountain. He means it is like a deer who is prancing on top of a mountain and Hebrew people understand it because when you scale on top of the mountain this is where you have security. Because the mountain is

unassailable to enemies and if you look at deer that can prance on that you are familiar with the ground.

Did anything change for Habakkuk?

His circumstances in chapter 1 and chapter 3 are the same. It is like you and I are going through a difficult time and we all pray when we go through difficult time that our circumstances change. When it changes we feel that we have victory but sometimes the problems are just so large it wouldn't go away. Habakkuk is saying that despite all the devastation he will rejoice. So what has happened? This is the first definition of victory.

It is not so much changing your circumstances, it is important by the way let's not underestimate that, it is about changing us from the inside. It is making us so strong as a person from the inside you arrive at the point where you can say *though you slay me yet I will praise your name*. That is what it is, it is a difficult road I have not arrived at that. It is a journey that sometimes I need to take if things are imposed on us, some of us going through difficult times may have that imposed on us, the ones who don't have it may need to prepared for it.

- Focus on God, not on your problems.
- Wait upon the Lord.
- Find Godly balance.

Meditation; yoga, mindfulness all have very bad connotations in the Christian church. If you tell someone I am going for yoga after service, they will tell you the link of that with paganism.

There is some truth in it because even mindfulness which is a technique used in science nowadays. Mindfulness is a technique which is so popular now half of Silicon Valley is using it because they are so stressed there. It is a technique which is taken from Buddhist teachings and a lot of things that Buddhist teach are very useful. They tell you to sit down and control your breathing, count your breathing, take every thought that comes in there, don't judge it, just hold on to the thought let it go and continue that technique. If you need they ask you focus on your breathing or focus on an object and they say that over time you learn to be calmer. It is so common that lot of the CEOs of Silicon Valley practices it. Singapore, they have now mindfulness classes for kids because they are in a very stressful society. We are in a very anxious society.

Can we control our thinking?

You are driving half way and suddenly you think about bad things and go home alone and you recall back and you say, my life has been very disturbed, you are doing things halfway. The church doesn't know how to respond to this because this is meditation. Meditation in essence is focus and some people state of mind is so drawn into their problem that they cannot get out of it and we met people for years like this in church. The church has to respond because the world is

responding and how are we going to help those in our midst who struggle through all of this and the real issue is insecurity.

We are very often have been not able to respond to this and the world has responded with techniques, positive thinking, cognitive things about all sorts of things and so how do we do and Habakkuk gives us in many ways a demonstration of what to do with this and he says this.

Lord I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord, renew them in our day, In our time make them known; (Habakkuk 3:2a)

From verse 3 all the way down to 15, in a very long poetic section he looks at one of Israel's most significant events. The deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, pass the red sea and on to a journey to the Promise Land and he meditates on it on so much detail. He starts off by looking at how God's glory cover the heavens. Then he brings down to all the plagues, the historical thing that Pharaoh fought against God and he goes right up to the waters. It looks like he puts himself right back at this occasion. It is not a 2-second thought; it is a contemplation.

Contemplate is a word that is quite lost in today's church, to contemplate, meaning what he has done is that he has found a quiet place at home instead of trying to empty his mind and count 1 to 10 or assuming a yogic position and instead of sitting down and complaining to himself, he sings his mind into something very tangible, the great escape and as he does that things change. This is very powerful because we have something better. We have the risen savior and what God is telling you today is to contemplate on the gospel. How God saved you from slavery in sin and crossed that slavery and you are on that journey now to that Promise Land and he is asking you to contemplate on the gospel. The day God saved you, how God changed you slowly and mold you. He is asking you to contemplate on how the savior took our sins, the magnificence of that, how God who is so big became man and how he was transformed and that is why we do things like this.

This is a reflection of being dreaming about the gospel, of grasping the gospel, entrenching the gospel's every facet of it from the crucifixion to the night before right down to the risen savior and you make a practice of doing this as Habakkuk did on the exodus. At the end of it you would do what he did, after this he sang a song and when you do this daily you will sing this

Because He lives I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives all fear is gone.
Because I know He holds the future
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives.

Did we really-really mean that? And that is what he does he ponders on it. Some of us might say, we tried it but it didn't work.

Psalm 55:

16 But I call to God, and the Lord will save me. **17** Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice..... **22** Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

What David and Habakkuk is doing is teaching us very simple. Habits are very hard to break out and bad habits will impinge your life. What we don't realize is that, spiritual habits also impinge your life and he has developed a spiritual habit of daily absorbing God in his life and meditating on the past goodness of God he finds in scripture. We call this practicing the presence of God.

There was a very good book written by a catholic man, The Practice of the Presence of God. This book is so Christ centered, protestant writers like Henry Nguyen, John Wesley, A.W. Tozer all commended this book.

The writer of this book was a soldier. He joined a monastery called the Brotherhood of Resurrection and he was so filled with peace, grace, he never yelled at anyone or he irritated anybody. Everybody asked him why are you so happy, you are just a cook. He was not a preacher and when he died they discovered a few letters and the Abbott took the letters complied it and it became this book. He says this

But when we are faithful to keep ourselves in His Holy Presence, and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him, and doing anything that may displease Him, at least willfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may so speak, a familiarity with GOD, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In fine, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of GOD is rendered as it were natural to us. Give Him thanks, if you please, with me, for His great goodness towards me, which I can never sufficiently admire, for the many favors. He has done to so miserable a sinner as I am. May all things praise Him. Amen.

You are I are not going to get out of this bondage of insecurities, unhappiness and depression. The truth is contemplation on God, the gospel and contemplate it as a habit, day, noon and night make it daily and as you do it over time, over months, over years you suddenly find you are happier. This is the promise of God and then you can tomorrow say this,

The sun comes up
It's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass
And whatever lies before me
Let me be singing
When the evening comes

Habakkuk found reasons to rejoice in the Lord. We have to ground ourselves in that. The word of God is God's breath and every prayer that goes out comes back with blessings and strengthens us.

Wait Upon the Lord:

After going through this entire part of contemplating on the Exodus he says this verse

I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us
Habakkuk 3:16

It is a picture of a person who is in intent pain. His heart is pounding. His lips are quivering, he is decaying in his bones, his legs are trembling. Scholars say that he is feeling all this because he was anticipating the Babylonians. Bible is very real and this is the real pain we all struggle with and all of us have our scars and we have all these things that grips us, the fear that may be my child is like this or may be my finances will be like that. First Habakkuk looked back on what God did and now he looks forward to the promise of a God of justice.

God tells us to wait and then he will reward and Habakkuk does this. There is a link between temptation and tribulation. How you and I deal with our sinful nature will impact whether you feel you are depressed or fearful or anxious and all these bad feelings. We just don't recognize that connection; it is a very important truth.

At my age I have friends who want to keep mistresses and the extent they will go to make sure that their wives don't find out about it, the way they conceal it and the amount of money they put in there and then they boast upon it in social medial and when you read it you want to hug him because that little thing which you go to such extent to do is going to put into a fearful place, fear of exposure, fear of humiliation, fear of many things and you just probably blew 10,000 dollars which you can spend on your kid's education fund. We could multiply this on anything but there is a link between the two.

Why can't you and I just switch us off?

We are not in control of our minds, we say we are but we are not. These things put you in bondage. Habakkuk is telling you that we cannot switch this off either and here is the real incriminating, we don't want to switch this off but we want to switch other things on. We want to keep things that are appealing to us on, but don't want to put things on that makes you depressed, unhappy. Habakkuk is telling us that you wait on the promises of God in the meantime you strengthen your legs and you walk in obedience and as you do that God changes you.

Years ago there was a very famous movie called The Shawshank Redemption. It won many Oscars basically because of a side story of an old man called Brooke. Brooke was a man who was sentenced to prison for many years probably for murder. Prison is not a nice place but he has been there for so long he can navigate the terrain. Prison is a place of misery and pain, nobody wants to go to prison and he is in hardcore prison. One day he discovers because he has been there for so long that his sentence is up and he can now go home. He is a free man, he is no longer in bondage, he is out of prison, he can now go out to the real world and do all the things that was denied to him for 30 years and here is how he takes his freedom and we are like that.

When the son of man sets you free you will be free indeed but we are all in bondage, why, because he is so comfortable in his prison life, even though it is a horrible life he cannot take the new free life out there, he becomes lonely, he becomes unhappy, eventually he hangs himself. The prison for all of us is the prison of our minds and when we say we want to keep sin and we try to tell ourselves and say we don't have the self-control to get pass that you will fall into a place of depression and fear and anxiety and unhappiness because self-control is waiting on the lord on the promises of God and as you walk and wait you fight sin. Temptation was the first sin that entered the world. The second sin was fear. Because of that temptation Adam and Eve hid themselves because they feared God.

All of us struggle with sins. In this congregation there are three different groups of people, the defeated Christian, the double life Christian and the denial Christian, you throw a stone we are in one of these categories, the denial Christian cannot see his sin. When you pull it out and wait on the Lord you will slowly progress to a place where you be less fearful and more happy. Because looking back teaches you to look forward and in doing both you look inside of yourself or to put in simpler words, knowing God is knowing who you are.

Some people will say **I am** not very successful, **I am** mediocre, **I am** not beautiful, **I am** not successful as a mother, **I am** not very good in my work. What you say after **I am** defines you and this is all in a subconscious level. You can say other things, I am good at my work, which means my work defines me. I am good looking, because I am good looking guys will like me that defines me. That is the prison of the mind. What Habakkuk is saying is that even though everything is devastated I am blessed.

By this you must then say I can be happy that is God's mandate. I can be victorious, I can fight sin, I can overcome this. It will take me my whole life but by God I can and I will wait on the Lord. Too often we say I can't and our lives are unhappy.

So when you go out to work and you don't do well you feel insecure, they are connected but when you tell yourself I am going to get on my knees, Lord I am going to forgive this person who hurt me and took everything away from me and by God I will say I can. Over time as you contemplate on God, you find it does not go well, illnesses come you are standing on a hill. It is a very profound and very simple truth.

Find Godly Balance

At the end of first few verses that is what Habakkuk says. He tells God

In wrath remember mercy. Habakkuk 3:2a

Wrath and Mercy: He by now recognizes the character of God, that God is a God of grace and love and forgiveness but God is a God of righteousness and wrath. Some Christians put themselves so much in kindness and grace, they think they can sin and God's grace will forgive them. Some Christians put themselves so much into wrath and righteousness they are just unhappy people, they are just joy killers, but scripture teaches us that victorious living is finding yourself in that tension between the two.

So here is a particular message to all of you who don't have problems, the question is where is that source of strength. Because if you say is the Lord and not all these things you must be prepared to take risk and push yourself that is the evidence. Either that and your unbalance in your faith. First is this in between balance.

Looking forward and Back: As you look forward what do you do. Habakkuk look forward to the promise and he looked backwards. Some of us look forward and we are fearful. God says look back and see what I have done for you. Some of us cannot look forward because we are always looking back. We think of how we were abused emotionally or physically and that traps you and finding balance is both looking back and looking forward.

Personal and Communal: The entire chapter 3 is now corporate. He is asking Israel to sing this, never go through this alone as with everyone else.

Sorrow and Joy: Habakkuk is at the same time unhappy but happy, it is like I have God's grace but I must have God's wrath. I look forward and at the same time I look back. Everywhere in scripture where there is sorrow there is joy. James say this consider pure joy when you find tribulations of any kind. Here is one thing I want to tell all of you, if you practice contemplation in God and sink yourself of God, know the God of the past and the future, know yourself. When you go through this deep storm it will not collapse you, because in the depth of it there will be that joy and that joy says I am a child of God and God will anchor me and I am worthy to be victorious and that is God's challenge for you today.

So if you are going through a difficult time or you have been living a very defeated life I want to say that it is your birthright to be happy, to be joyful, to be victorious, to live life in the fullest and not let all this negativity shackle you.

Martin Lloyd Jones wrote a book called Spiritual Depression. It is really interesting. He says Christians are oxymoron. He say, if you look at the Bible everybody was happy; Paul, Peter whatever circumstance they are happy. If we look at Paul, he says I learn to be content whether I am in need or whether I am in abundance. But Christians nowadays are completely unhappy, it is a contradiction. We are the poorest testimony to the world. He says this really interesting statement.

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: "Why art thou cast down-what business have you to be disquieted?" You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: "Hope thou in God" - instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: "I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God."

Defy, be happy and live the life God has planned for you.