

Rejoice in the Lord

Habakkuk 3

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Welcome to Christ the King. If we haven't met, my name is Penny and I'm the senior pastor here and it is good to be with you. If you're our guest or visitor, we're glad that you would join us this morning. It's good for us to gather together and to worship the Lord because we believe, what the Bible teaches us, that our only hope in this world, our only hope in life, is the hope that we have in the cross. It's the hope that we have in Jesus. And so, each and every week we return, we come back to this place to sing and to pray and to hear from God's word because we believe that this is where a true life and true hope are found. And so, we've been doing this over the last number of weeks. We've been seeing where our hope relies, where our hope lies, where we should look to find our, put our faith and our trust. We've been doing this by looking at the book of Habakkuk.

And so, this morning we're going to finish our series in the book of Habakkuk by looking at Habakkuk chapter 3. So, if you have a Bible, you can turn to Habakkuk 3. Remember, Habakkuk's a minor prophet. It's at the very end of the Old Testament, after Nahum, before Zechariah, Zephaniah, Malachi, some of the other books that maybe we're not as familiar with. The passage is also found on page 786 of the Bible's in your chairs and we project it on the screen. So, as you're turning there, just let's remind ourselves of where we've been, what we've heard. So, in Habakkuk, this very short book, Habakkuk the prophet is seeing a great deal of evil around him. There's evil in the world, there's evil also within God's people. They're doing great wicked, great and wicked things. They are increasing in their sinful behavior and it seems like things are only getting worse. And so, the prophet, he turns to God and he cries out to him, God, do you see what I see? God, why are you not acting? You remember, he complained to God in chapter 1 and God responded. He said, "yes, I do see what you see. I see the wickedness, I see the evil and I'm going to act, but it's going to get worse." You remember, that's what we heard. It's going to get worse, the sin and the rebellion of the people. Because of that, God is going to send the Babylonians upon Israel. They're going to face judgment and discipline because of their behavior. And so, God is calling Habakkuk, my ways may not be your ways. I see what you maybe don't see, but have faith. Put your trust in me, I am working.

That's what we heard in chapters 1 and 2. God calling Habakkuk to have faith, even in the midst of wickedness and evil. So, that was chapters 1 and 2. Well, now we come to chapter 3 and Habakkuk is going to respond to God's call to faith with a song. Now, it might seem strange to us that our book, this book Habakkuk, that's filled with sadness, that's filled with pain, that's filled with judgment and discipline. It might seem strange to us that it would end with a song and yet it does. Because in the end, Habakkuk is going to sing with faith. So, with that in mind, let's read Habakkuk chapter 3.

"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power.

Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels.

He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD?

Was your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation?

You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. Selah

You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high.

The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear. You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger.

You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck.

Selah

You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter me, rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.

You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters.

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. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments." (ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and we ask that as we come to it that you would guide us, that you would open our eyes, that you would soften our hearts, for we need you to meet with us and to show us what it means to be your people. And so we ask that you would, by your spirit, that you would be present, that you would give us understanding, insight, and faith. And we pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, in the mid-1800s, a man named Alan Gardiner led a team of men and women to the southernmost tip of South America. Alan Gardiner and these men and women were going there because they were taking the message of the gospel, they were taking the truce of Christianity to a group of people in South America who had never heard the gospel, who had never heard of Jesus. And so they, this was a missionary team going to proclaim the truth of God's love manifested in the work and person of Christ. And so they were dropped off at the shore, they sailed to the shore, and the boat that took them from Europe to South America sailed away. They had every expectation that it would return in the future with more supplies, with food to help them in their endeavors. But they got off and they were alone. And what faced them was a landscape that was terrifying. It was a hard landscape, a hard topography.

And they met with people and interacted with the people living there who were not receptive to anything that they said. Very quickly they realized support was not coming. They were on their own. Now we know a lot of what was going on because Alan Gardiner wrote down all his thoughts and their experiences in his journal, and his journal has been preserved. And in his journal at one place he writes, “my heart, my heart is warm, warm with praise, thanksgiving, and love to God my Father, and love to God my Redeemer.” They're beautiful words, aren't they? And I imagine that when we hear those words our first thought, knowing that these are missionaries, is that that his heart is warmed with praise because the people that they were ministering to, they heard, and they believed, and they came to faith, and they heard the incredible acts of God, and the gospel broke through their hardened hearts, right? That's what we would think, right? That's what would warm a missionary's heart, wouldn't it? And yet actually this was the very last entry in his journal, the last words he wrote before he died of starvation.

You see his entire team had ran out of food, and the ship that was supposed to deliver more food to them was delayed. And so very slowly, very painfully, one by one, they all starved to death until Gardiner was the last one. And as he's recording how the food is running out, and the hunger pains are starting to bear upon them, Gardiner wrote in his journal, “Psalm 34:10, the young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.” That might seem strange to us, that this man who's starving would speak of God not withholding good things, that this man who is dying would give praise and thanksgiving. I mean that might sound strange to us, doesn't it? And yet that's exactly what Gardiner wrote in his journal. And it's not just what Gardiner wrote, but it's actually what we hear from Habakkuk, isn't it? Habakkuk, he hears the evil and injustice, they are abounding, that the Babylonians, this terrible threat, they are coming. He's sure of it in verse 2 where we read, “I've heard your report, your wrath is coming.” Nothing has changed. And then in verse 17 he writes, “though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olives fail, and the fields yield no food. The flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herds in the stalls.” This situation is bleak, it is dire, right? Famine is coming upon the people, threat is coming upon them, a terrible enemy is bearing down.

Remembering the Lord

And Habakkuk responds, verse 18, “yet I will rejoice in the Lord.” How could Gardiner say his heart is warm with praise at the point of death? How could the prophet say that he will rejoice even though famine is coming? How can we have faith in the midst of suffering? That's what Habakkuk 3 is helping us to see this morning, that the reason that Habakkuk can have faith in the midst of suffering, listen, in the midst, not because of suffering, but in the midst of suffering, is because he remembers the Lord. He remembers the Lord, he remembers who the Lord is, that's what we see in verses 3 through 15. Habakkuk is recounting the great deeds that God has done in the past. Did you see it? He came from Mount Paran, he brought plague, he shook the earth, he showed his power and salvation, he crushed the wicked and trampled the sea. Okay, so if we're thinking about our Old Testament, we're thinking previous to Habakkuk, what event do you think he's describing when he talks about plague and power and salvation and sea? Well, it's obvious, isn't it? He's talking about the Exodus.

He's talking about the Exodus where God brought plague upon Egypt and he defeated his enemy and he trampled, he parted the sea and brought salvation. You see, for the Old Testament people of God, the Exodus was the great act of redemption. It was the great act of redemption, the day when God not only heard the cries of his people, that they were in

bondage, that they were enslaved, but he acted on their behalf. He sent plague upon Egypt, he brought judgment against the oppressors, and he rescued his people. It was the act of salvation. And God's people would invoke this time and again. They would remember the exodus in times of celebration as well as times of suffering, right? Think about when they celebrated. They would celebrate once a year the Passover, right? And then the Passover, what would they do? They would not only eat and they would drink, but they would also rehearse and remind one another of what the Passover pointed to, that God had delivered his people, that God had rescued them. That's what they were celebrating.

But it wasn't just in times of celebration that they remembered this great act of salvation. It was times of suffering as well. So if you were to read through the Psalms, you would come across all these lament Psalms, right? There's more lament Psalms than any other genre. Many of you have heard me say that many, many times. But one of these particular laments, Psalm 77, we don't know what the psalmist is facing in this lament. We don't know the trouble that is coming upon him. We don't know the circumstances, but we know that he is in distress. And so he prays to God, and as he prays to God, he recounts the Exodus. He reminds himself of God's salvation, that God has acted in the past. You see, the Old Testament people would remember who God is, that he is the God who sees the suffering of his people. He hears their cries, and he is merciful. That's what Habakkuk's remembering.

Look at verse 2: "Oh Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, oh Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years, revive it. In the midst of the years, make it known." Right? God has made known the plan. Judgment upon evil, discipline upon his people. It is coming in the form of Babylon. He has made it known, and Habakkuk says, in your wrath, remember mercy. Remember mercy. You see, Habakkuk recognizes what's coming. He knows the threat, and yet he can still ask God for mercy. He can ask God for mercy. He can pray this way because he knows God has been merciful before. He knows it is God who has shown his mercy in the past. Habakkuk's remembering who the Lord is. The counselor Dan Allender and the Old Testament theologian, Tremper Longman, in their book, *Cry of the Soul*, they write this. They say, "memory is a creative borrowing of the past as a template of what we hope for the present. To remember the past is to reshape the present with desire and hope." And that's what Habakkuk's doing. He has hope for the present and hope for the future because of who God was in the past. You see, to ask someone to be merciful who's never shown mercy is simply wishful thinking. But asking for God's mercy, well, friends, that is rooted in the very character of our Lord that has been demonstrated time and again in the past.

Putting Our Confidence in the Lord

And so this is why Habakkuk and we can rejoice even in the midst of trouble, even in the midst of suffering because of who God is. We remember he's the God of mercy, the God of our salvation. He is the God we can put our confidence in. And that's what Habakkuk's doing. Not only does he remember the Lord, but he puts his confidence in the Lord. And we see him putting his confidence in the Lord in the last fourth of our passage. In verse 16, he says, "I hear and my body trembles. My lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones. My legs tremble beneath me." Now, that I know doesn't sound like confidence, right? I mean, that sounds like a great deal of fear. And rightfully so, right? I mean, the Babylonians, the Chaldeans are coming upon him. And so, of course, his body is going to tremble. Of course, his lips are going to quiver and his legs are going to become weak. Judgment's coming. But did you hear what he says after that? "Yet, I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come

upon people who invade us.” You see, he says, suffering and exile, they are coming, but I have confidence that God will act. That he will act. He will act upon this nation that he is sending against us. That this judgment, this discipline isn't the end. No, God will act on our behalf. That's what he has confidence in.

And his confidence isn't just in this, but it continues. Look at verses 17 through 19. “Drought and famine are coming,” but he says, “yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” Did you hear how he described him? The God, not of their salvation, not of other's salvation, the God of my salvation. That's how he describes him. Verse 19, “God the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer. He makes me tread on high places.” Habakkuk knows that God is his strength. He makes him like a deer, sure-footed, bounding, ascending to the heights. I'm sure all of you see deer running in and out of your yards, right? I mean, we see them every single day right? I go out frustrated because they keep eating my flowers and that were supposed to be deer repellent, but they're not. But there they are in my yard, running and bounding, right? And my yard is sloped like many of y'all's yards, and you watch the deer, and they go flying down the hill, and they leap over your neighbor's fence, or my neighbor's fence, and they land, and they don't hesitate, and they're perfectly stable, and they run up and down the hillside, and there's no problem. Their feet are sure. If I tried to run down that hillside at half their speed, I would fall and break a hip or hurt myself, right? But their feet are sure.

And what Habakkuk is saying is that those who put their confidence in the Lord, that like the deer that is sure-footed on the hillside, like the deer bounding to great heights, that's what we're like. That the Lord makes us sure-footed. Because our confidence isn't in ourselves, our confidence is in him. That he strengthens his people. He makes us firm. We put our confidence in him. So the question we need to ask ourselves is, this morning, right now, where is our confidence? Where have we put our confidence? Have we put in our abilities? Have we put in our looks, our youthfulness? Have we put in our intelligence, our physical strength? Have we put in our relational connections? Have we put in our ingenuity? Where have we put our confidence? A number of years ago, in an interview, Michael Bloomberg, Michael Bloomberg, very successful, very wealthy individual. In this interview, he was talking about his philanthropy, and he was talking about his charitable giving. And he said in this interview, “when I get to heaven, I'm not stopping to get interviewed. I'm heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close.” Now, there's no question where he has put his confidence. It's in his good works, in his charity, in himself.

But what about us? What about you and me? You see, friends, the overwhelming message of the Bible is that our confidence cannot rely on our charity, as great as it might be, or on our strength, as strong as we might be, or our good deeds, as many as we might try to have, or anything else that we do. No. The grounds for our confidence is only the Lord. He, not me, not you, is our strength. He, not me, is our salvation. And he has shown that salvation. He's shown it in the Exodus, but he's shown it in something even greater than the Exodus. The salvation that Habakkuk longed to see, the one that we remember each and every week when we come here to worship, the salvation that comes only through Christ. Because in the cross, we see something better than the Exodus, a greater display of mercy and salvation, that Christ took our judgment on himself, and in the wake of the cross, he brought mercy. So that is why, despite our circumstances, regardless of our situations, that is why we can rejoice. Because of who God is. Because our confidence is in him.

Now listen, suffering still may come. Difficulty will still rise. The Babylonians were still knocking at the door. Habakkuk won't see return from exile. The field still will bear no fruit. The flock will still be cut off. And yet, I will rejoice. Not because of suffering. Not because of discipline. Not because of hardship. No, I will rejoice in the Lord. That's what Habakkuk says. And we began asking, how could a starving and dying man speak of a heart warmed with praise? And how a prophet could speak with joy and sing with joy, though judgment was coming? And we've seen the answer. We've seen the answer that when we remember who God is, when we put our confidence in him, we see that he transcends our experience. He transforms our circumstance. Because he is the God who isn't far off. No, he is near. He sees your pain. He hears your cries. He is the God of your salvation. So friends, whether we are celebrating or suffering, whether it is clear skies or cloudy, we remember who he is. We put our confidence in him that he is the merciful God. The Lord of our salvation. The one we rejoice in. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you. Thank you for the message of this short little book. That you are near your people. That you see us in our affliction. That you know our circumstance. And you share in our suffering. That you have come near to your people in Christ. And you, Father, you are our great salvation. And so we pray that we would remember that. That we would turn our eyes to you and put our confidence not in ourselves, not in what we have accomplished, not in our skills or abilities, but our confidence would be in you and you alone. And what you have done on our behalf. And so turn our eyes towards the cross and let us rest in Christ. The one who has suffered on our behalf. The one that we rejoice in. We pray all this in Christ's name and God's people said together, Amen.