

Habakkuk 3:17-19

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[0 : 00] Good evening, brothers and sisters. God has brought us here tonight to hear his word! And fortunately, the blessing you will receive!

But this is God's word. It is a living word. It's a word that he quickened to his holy prophets and apostles.

And now as we read it, it continues to be alive and powerful. You know, I think of the words of Jesus. He said, the words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life.

And so our prayer is that this evening that God's word tonight would be a living word to you.

Quicken to your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, gripping your heart.

You know, I was asked to teach a Bible study several months ago. This was at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. And I thought, what would be an encouraging word for people as they're facing the COVID-19 crisis, as they're facing lockdown, as they're facing fatalities from COVID-19, as they're facing economic difficulties, and many people were facing unemployment.

[1 : 27] So I thought of an example of faith in the Scripture, a great example of faith in the Old Testament. And when you think of an example of faith in the Old Testament, who do you think of?

Naturally, you think of Abraham. Exactly. But that's not who we're going to look at tonight. We're going to look at a man tonight, and I pronounce his name a little funny.

You know him as Habakkuk. But I'm in the habit of mispronouncing his name by saying Habakkuk. And guess what?

I'm too old to change. So when you hear me say Habakkuk, you can know in your hearts that I mean Habakkuk, the prophet. I want us to read from Habakkuk chapter 3, verses 17 through 19. Wonderful passage of Scripture, especially for times like this. This is beginning in verse 17.

[2 : 42] I'll be reading from New American Standard. You may have NSD, so it may vary just a little here. Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines.

Though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food. Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls.

Yet I will exult in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength. And he has made my feet like hinds feet. And makes me walk on my high places. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we do thank you for your word. We can't think of the words of your son. That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of your mouth.

[3 : 52] And these are words that you put on the heart and lips of your prophet, Lord. This is your word. And we pray that this would be your word tonight.

We pray that it would be a living word. We pray that you would give us the strength, the ability, by your spirit and by your grace, to live by faith in a time of crisis.

Just as Habakkuk did. Father, we thank you for what you will do tonight. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, indeed, we are living in crisis times.

It was encouraging last week to see in our service to see Michael Hurd. Do you know how old he is? He said, I am 94 years old.

And he said, in my 94 years, I've never seen anything like this. This was the most difficult thing he had ever seen, the greatest crisis he had ever seen.

[5 : 02] And obviously, he had lived through quite a few of them in his 94 years. I want us to look tonight at a crisis in the history of God's people 600 years before Jesus was born.

God's people experienced the exile, a captivity, because of their idolatry. God sent his people, the nation of Israel.

He sent another nation. He sent Babylon to conquer them and to carry them away, captive to Babylon. So here's the question.

God's people, when they were carried away to Babylon, were they all believers? Did they all worship the true God in their hearts?

And obviously, the answer is no. They were all outwardly God's people. They were descendants of Abraham. But not all of them were believing in the true God in their hearts.

[6 : 10] He tells us that in the end of Romans. It says, not all Israel is Israel. There's two concentric circles. One is national Israel, those who are born Jews.

But then within that, in the Old Testament, there was another circle, the inner circle, those who had faith in their hearts. People are doing.

And he was upset with God. Why don't you do something about it? And then God told him what he was going to do. God had a plan.

It wasn't a plan for Habakkuk life. God was going to bring the armies of Babylon to destroy the nation, to destroy the city, to take the people captive, to destroy the temple.

And he was going to use Babylon as his instrument to do this. And now Habakkuk had a second problem.

[7 : 22] The first problem was the sin of the people. God is going to do something about it. He's going to send this evil nation of Babylon to judge his people. Now Habakkuk has an even greater problem.

And his problem is this. God, how are you going to use them as your instrument to judge your people? They are worse morally than we are.

They are idolaters. We've become idolaters. But in addition, they are cruel people. How could you use people like this to accomplish your purpose?

You know, I believe that the book of Habakkuk gives us a model of how we are to live in a time of crisis. It was a time of crisis for Habakkuk.

This was the end of the world. The nation had gone into captivity. The city was destroyed. And Habakkuk lived through all of this into captivity. And I want us to see how he's a model.

[8 : 25] He's a paradigm. He's a pattern for our faith today. If you're following in the Bible, look at chapter 2 and verse 4.

God answered his questions. And he brought him to a place of peace. And God said, Habakkuk, in all of this, you need to live by faith.

There's a famous word quoted in the New Testament. It's just Habakkuk 2.4. Behold his soul. Talking about Babylon.

It's talking about the king of Babylon. And the Babylonian people, they're proud. They're puffed up. They're arrogant. They're not upright. But God said, it's for you.

You will live by faith. You know something? You, of course, know that these words are quoted in the New Testament. They're quoted twice in the New Testament.

[9 : 30] In Romans 1.17. And in Galatians 3.11. And from the New Testament, we understand what that means. The righteous shall live by faith.

We interpret that in light of the gospel. And what God gives us in the gospel. When God says to Habakkuk here, he says, the righteous will live by faith.

What does he mean? Does he mean that if you're righteous, if you're good enough, then you can trust God? That's not what it means.

We know from these two passages, the one in Romans, the one in Galatians, that quotes this verse. When God says, the righteous shall live by faith. That this is in the context of God's care and God's protection.

When it says, the righteous shall live by faith. He talks about those who are righteous in the gospel. Who have received righteousness as a gift from God.

[10 : 31] What does God do for us in the gospel? What does God do for us in salvation? What does God do for us when he justifies us?

He does two things. Number one. He forgives us. Our sins are gone. That's a wonderful thing.

We get rid of our own record. Our record of sin and failure. We're forgiven. It's gone. But does God do anything else for us in salvation?

Yes, he does. He does something even better than forgiveness. Forgiveness is good. But what is better than forgiveness? It is to be made righteous in God's sight.

It is to be declared righteous. Have you ever thought, what is the difference between those two things? Have you ever made that distinction in your mind? Between being forgiven and being made righteous?

[11 : 32] That's an important distinction. Righteousness. Excuse me. Forgiveness is good. But righteousness is better. Forgiveness is getting rid of our own bad record.

That's good. But what's better than that? We're given the record of Christ. What he did as a man. His perfect obedience.

His obedience to the death of the cross. And that is given to us in the gospel.

In the gospel, when we are righteous by faith, we are given the very record of Christ. So that when God looks at us because we are in Christ, he sees the obedience of Christ.

You know, why do you and I have confidence to live by faith? Why do we have confidence to live by faith in a time of crisis? Is it because we're good enough?

[12 : 44] No. If I had to stand before God in the hope that he would help me because of my righteousness, because of how good that I am, I would have no confidence.

But you see, when we're made righteous, then we can live by faith. You see the connection between those two.

If you have faith that you have been made righteous in Christ before God, then you'll have faith that God will take care of you and meet you in all the circumstances of life.

Interpreting it to live by faith in the context of this book, in the context of the book of Habakkuk, one thing it means. It means to trust God when we do not understand.

Have you had that experience? We all have. That's a very common thing for believers. It was in Habakkuk's day, and it is in our day.

[13 : 55] But we can trust God to take care of us. We can trust him when we don't understand because we have been made righteous in the gospel.

That's pretty bad.

Remember, this is agrarian society. What did they have? Nothing.

This is really bad. It just could not get any worse in the circumstances in Judah during the captivity. But what is his response? Here is this remarkable response in light of these terrible circumstances, which could not get worse.

[15 : 05] What did he say? He said, yet I will exult in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

Some translations say, I will rejoice in the Lord. And then again, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. What is the reason for his rejoicing?

Is there a reason for his rejoicing? I believe there is. I will rejoice in what? In the God of my salvation.

And what is that salvation? It is that the righteous shall be saved. What is that salvation? It is that not only that our sins have been forgiven as we put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, but also that we have been declared righteous.

That is the reason we rejoice. There's an objective reason for you and I to rejoice tonight. It transcends our circumstances.

[16 : 35] It is the fact that God, the God, the creator of heaven and earth is also the God of your salvation.

That is a reason to rejoice. No matter how bad it gets, you always have a reason to rejoice. Because of God and his salvation and what he's done for you.

You know, this tells us about the nature of Christian joy. Christian joy is not dependent upon circumstances.

It's in spite of circumstances. And it is often contrary to circumstances. You know something?

Even though I know this intellectually, I know that God is the God of my salvation. I know theologically, I know intellectually, I know conceptually, what God has done for me in Christ.

[17 : 36] Still, it is at times a hard thing for me to do to rejoice. Even though I have an objective reason to do it, it's hard to rejoice. You know something?

God has got to strengthen us to rejoice. He's got to strengthen us to live by faith in troubled times.

And I like the picture of the life of faith. And we're given that in verse 19. It's all about a mountain. There are a few mountains here in the UK.

Imagine you are going up a mountain. And you're starting in the plain. And you take the trail up a mountain.

And as you go up toward the summit, as you go up toward the peak, the trail narrows. And the angle of the incline is steeper. And all of a sudden, there are rocks that are easily broken away. [18:41] And you look away to either side, and there's an abyss on either side. And if you fell off the trail, if you slipped, it would be certain death. As you get up toward the path, as you get up toward the top of the mountain, it becomes a difficult path.

A dangerous path. A treacherous path. And that's the picture here. He makes me walk in my high places.

What are your high places? Through the difficult paths that God has chosen each one of us to walk. Those are our high places. And they're the same for many of us, but they're different for many of us. Those are our high places. The path is slippery.

It's narrow. It's easy to fall off of. And what does God do? He makes us to walk.

[19:50] In other words, He makes us walk the life of faith in a difficult path in a time of crisis. Now what other imagery does He give us here?

He says, I will give you dearest feet. In other words, in this difficult path, the path of faith in a time of crisis, I will make you sure-footed so that you can walk this path.

So you will not step. And so you will not fall off. Let's say again to those words in verse 19. The Lord God is my strength.

He has made my feet like burning feet. That is like deer feet. And He makes me walk on my high places. In the gospel, He forgives us.

In the gospel, He makes us righteous. And He quickens our strengthens our faith to walk rejoicing in a long difficult path.

[21:02] So what do we see here? Five things I want us to take away from this passage tonight. You and I can trust God because He's declared His righteousness righteous.

You don't have to worry do I deserve God to take care of me. Have I been good enough for God to take care of me to meet my needs? It's not about you and your performance.

You have been declared righteous in the gospel. You can trust God because He's declared you righteous. Faith and trust in God.

Faith is trusting God who we do not understand. Why did this happen? Nebuchadnezzar did not understand. But he did the right thing. He sought God in prayer.

God answered him and gave him insight. Here's the third thing I think we need to see. Christian joy is not dependent on circumstances.

[22:05] Very often it's contrary to circumstances. number four there is an objective reason for you to rejoice as a Christian and that is your salvation and the more you meditate on that the more you meditate on your sin but now in your sin you've been made righteous the more you will rejoice as you focus on what God has done for you in Jesus.

fifth thing I want us to see God strengthens us to walk this life of faith he strengthens us to walk in all high places on difficult mountain trails that are dangerous and treacherous we all have our high places we all need to walk by faith we all need our faith anchored in the gospel in what Jesus has done for us forgiving us and declaring us righteous we all need to rejoice and God strengthens us to do that and to walk in that let's not get any prayer any prayer any prayer