

Though the Fig Tree Should Not Blossom

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[0:00] Before we hear the word of God preached, Tabakkuk chapter 3.! I will read verses 17 through 19.

Amen.

Amen.

Well, it is a new year. And so often with a new year, we hear of New Year's resolutions. Gems are bursting with new memberships.

People are tightening their purse strings and spending less money or seeking to tighten their belts and eat healthier. There are resolutions that are made related to decreasing screen time and increasing far more valuable ways of spending your time.

[1:23] Like talking to people? Like sitting in a room just thinking? So many different resolutions made at this time of year with the intention of transforming some area of your life.

We hear of many resolutions. Well, we hear something of resolution here this morning. Now, Habakkuk is not making New Year's resolutions, but we come to now the resolution of this book.

We have resolution as we come to the end of Habakkuk's prophecy. We see the solution to the conflict. Remember, this prophecy began with Habakkuk contending with the Lord, coming to the Lord with questions and bitter complaints.

And the Lord has given answers. The Lord has given grace to Habakkuk. We see a change. We see a transformation even in his life.

So there's much resolution here at the end of this book. The resolution of the matter, along with a man who is resolved to live in a certain way.

[2:33] And it's so very different from the man that we met at the beginning of this book. So we come to the last three verses of the book of Habakkuk. And in these three verses, we see three things.

We see Habakkuk's circumstances. We see Habakkuk's countenance. And we see Habakkuk's confidence. So you could call these the three C's at the end of Habakkuk chapter 3.

Well, let's begin with the first. And that is Habakkuk's circumstances. Now we see these here in verse 17 as they were just read. These are obviously bleak circumstances that Habakkuk is describing for us.

And they are circumstances that will be brought about by the Babylonians. They are coming. And they are coming to bring destruction. Now you could read verse 17 and think that perhaps Habakkuk is only talking in hypotheticals.

That he's saying, though the fig tree should not blossom. Almost like saying, if it should not. Some translations even go that route. They say, even if the fig tree does not blossom.

[3:47] Now it's true that these bleak circumstances haven't come yet. They are still in the future, just as the invasion of the Babylonian army is still in the future.

But don't misunderstand Habakkuk and think that it might not happen. He's not saying that. We see that Habakkuk is simply anticipating the coming circumstances of his life.

He's expecting this is soon to be the reality. The Babylonians are coming. And how does Habakkuk know this? Because God has told him.

Because God says they are coming. If God says it, that settles it. God has promised this. He said it in chapter 1. I'm raising up the Chaldeans.

He had given Habakkuk this vision. And in chapter 2 said, Write the vision. Make it plain on tablets. So he may run who reads it. For the vision still awaits its appointed time.

[4 : 46] It hastens to the end. It will not lie. It seems slow. Wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay.

So Habakkuk knows the certainty, with certainty, that the Babylonians are coming. And what will the Babylonians bring? What we see here, they're going to bring destruction.

Now we should make note of this. Habakkuk doesn't talk about all of the kinds of things that you might expect when an invading army is approaching.

He doesn't talk here about the loss of life. He doesn't talk about the physical damage to towns and cities, the looting and the burning of buildings, the chaos in the streets, the taking of captives.

These are the kinds of things the Lord has already talked about in chapter 1. But Habakkuk doesn't here. No, he focuses very specifically on the agricultural destruction.

[5 : 50] The destruction to the land. Now why is that? Well, perhaps it's because God talked in this very specific way in the book of Deuteronomy.

So keep your place here in Habakkuk, but turn with me over to Deuteronomy chapter 28. Deuteronomy chapter 28.

As Israel was preparing to enter the promised land, in Deuteronomy 28, God laid out for Israel blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

And here's one of the curses, beginning in verse 49. The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.

It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground until you are destroyed. It shall not leave you grain. Wine or oil.

[7 : 07] The increase of your herds or the young of your flocks until they have caused you to perish. Now think back to Habakkuk chapter 1. Remember how God had described Babylon there in chapter 1 verse 8.

Their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle, swift to devour. And what will this eagle of Deuteronomy do? Well, it destroys the land.

It eats their cattle, their crops. It leaves no grain, wine, or oil. Now look back to Habakkuk chapter 3 verse 17. What do we see here?

No fruit on the vine. That means no wine. The produce of the olive fail. That means no oil. And the fields yield no food.

That means no grain. That's all three. Just as God had said, the invading eagle shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil.

[8 : 09] If Israel disobeyed and broke the covenant that God had made with them at Mount Sinai, this is what God said would happen. And so now Habakkuk is simply acknowledging the reality.

This coming reality, just as God promised, it will come to pass. This land will be barren and desolate. No longer the place of bounty and blessing that it once was.

Described in Deuteronomy 8.8 as a good land. A land of brooks and of water, of fountains and springs flowing out in the valleys and hills.

A land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates. A land of olive trees and honey. Habakkuk knows and acknowledges the future that awaits as God is going to bring His judgment on His people for their sins.

So now as that darkness looms, we see Habakkuk's demeanor. As the circumstances are ever so bleak, we see that Habakkuk's countenance is quite the opposite.

[9 : 18] Now kids, the word countenance, it's just kind of a fancy word for your physical appearance, what you look like, especially your face. Now we don't actually see Habakkuk's face this morning.

We can get a pretty good idea of what his face looked like as we read his words there in verse 18. Yet I will rejoice.

Yet I will rejoice. Now this is the second very pivotal yet in the book of Habakkuk and the previous pivotal yet was just two verses back.

Remember last week, Habakkuk was recounting the mighty deeds of God, mighty deeds which so often involved God pouring out His wrath.

And at the thought of that, Habakkuk is speechless. No more arguing. No more complaining. He says, I hear and my body trembles.

[10 : 17] My lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones. My legs tremble beneath me. As Pastor Jeremy said last week, Habakkuk is not okay.

But then we have that word there. Yet. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. He will trust God.

He will put his hope in God and who God is. He will wait for God to bring His just punishment upon Babylon. So now just two verses later, we find that word yet.

Yet again. Here is all of that disaster that awaits. The natural response to that would be to panic. It would be to be beside yourself with worry and fear and anxiety.

Yet, says Habakkuk, yet I will rejoice. He is not filled with terror. He is filled with gladness. He is not down in the dumps.

[11 : 22] He says He is actually treading on the heights. He is joyful. Yes. And He is secure. He goes on to say that His feet are like the deer's.

Now, in northern Indiana, when we think of deer, we probably naturally think of their swift feet. We think of deer like flying through the fields. I still remember driving down the road and a deer was running beside me and I'm like seeing how fast I'm going, how fast he's going.

He's coming towards the road. I'm trying to gauge, do I slow down? Do I speed up? Because deer are fast, swift feet we think of in Indiana, tearing out of the cornfield onto the road that we're traveling on.

But Habakkuk isn't thinking so much about the fast feet of a deer. He's thinking about the sure-footedness of the deer in Israel. Perhaps we would think of a mountain goat or a ram or sheep, these animals that have this uncanny ability to navigate rocky mountainous terrain.

They leap from rock to rock without slipping and falling. They have the ability to say, as verse 19 does, to tread on high places. And so Habakkuk is saying, I do too.

[12:40] Not high places like we might think of altars to false gods. That's not the kinds of high places that Habakkuk is talking about. He's talking about physical, high geographic locations, like the heights of mountains.

Or as David says in 2 Samuel 22, 34, he's secure on the heights. So in the face of grim circumstances, Habakkuk has this unexpectedly joyful, sure countenance about him.

So what's going on here? Is this some kind of strange coping mechanism? Like when people sometimes laugh when they hear bad news. Or maybe laugh when a friend gets hurt as a child guilty of that.

Somehow laughing. I'm not actually enjoying this moment, but you're hurt and now I'm laughing. Is Habakkuk going crazy? Is he losing his mind? Is he having some kind of episode?

Is he forcing some kind of just fake positivity that denies reality? I mean, we see this seemingly wild emotional swing from his body trembling and rottenness entering his bones to now suddenly being filled with gladness and delight.

[14:01] What's that about? Is he so overwhelmed by his circumstances that he just snaps? Does he have some kind of mental breakdown?

And we find this raving man now smiling and laughing when it's clear that he shouldn't be? When he has no reason to? No. Not at all.

That is most certainly not what we are to conclude because Habakkuk has good reason for this sure, joyful countenance about him. He has real, solid truth now informing his emotions and shaping his countenance.

And that brings us to our third C. Habakkuk's confidence. He is confident in the Lord. We see this in verses 18 to 19.

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.

[15:06] He makes me tread on my high places. That's such an important phrase. In the Lord. At no point in this prophecy have we found that phrase entering into Habakkuk's vocabulary until now.

Now he says, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. He is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer's.

He makes me tread on high places. Habakkuk is joyfully secure because he finds both his joy and his security in his God.

Again, what a transformation that we see take place in the prophet. From bitterly complaining to joyfully proclaiming the Lord.

He is my strength. What an end to Habakkuk's prayer. This prayer that we see was to be sung. Habakkuk's song then.

[16:09] This song is echoing yet another song that we find in God's Word. We've rehearsed a few songs even today. We've considered Moses' song. We've considered even the song of the Lamb.

Now we have Habakkuk's song. Well, here's a fourth song to add this morning and it's a song that David sang. It was a song of deliverance that he sung in 2 Samuel 22.

And in part of that song, David says this, For by you, I can run against a troop. And by my God, I can leap over a wall.

This God, His way is perfect. The word of the Lord proves true. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him. For who is God but the Lord?

And who is a rock except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.

[17:13] We certainly can hear much of David's song in Habakkuk's song. And I think David's song really holds the key to understanding Habakkuk's song. How can anyone rejoice in such circumstances that Habakkuk finds himself in?

How can you and I rejoice in the midst of great suffering and terrible trials in this life? Well, because we remember the words even of David's song.

This God, His way is perfect. So the book of Habakkuk doesn't finish with the ravings of a man who's gone crazy. This is the joyful confidence of a man who can say, this God, His way is perfect.

Habakkuk's gaze isn't ultimately on the circumstances all around him, but on the God of His salvation whose way is perfect. So come what may, Habakkuk will rejoice in Him because God's way is perfect.

His every word proves true. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him. What precious words of promise for us.

[18:30] Like Habakkuk, we face trials in this life, great pain and suffering simply because we live in a fallen world. Yes, sometimes we experience pain and suffering indeed because of the foolishness of our sin.

That's certainly true. But other times we experience pain and suffering simply because of the effects of sin. Creation groans. We groan. We long for that future hope of final salvation when sin and death are no more.

But until that day, suffering in some way is unavoidable. We've seen the suffering of Habakkuk, the suffering that he anticipated as the Babylonians would destroy the land.

The fig tree would not blossom. There would be no fruit on the vines. There would be no herds in the stalls. Even if all of that comes to pass, Habakkuk would rejoice.

That might not be our trial, but something is. What's your even if? More than that, what's your even now?

[19:43] What trial are you currently facing? Maybe it's not fig trees failing to blossom. I don't think we're expecting that right now. Maybe it's not lack of fruit on the vine, but there are heavy sorrows that we face.

What trials are you going through? You can fill in the blank with your own suffering and with your own affliction. And may you also be able to say with Habakkuk, yet.

Yet. Not because you're minimizing your trial. Not because you're pushing the thought of it out of your mind or being unrealistic. Habakkuk is no Pollyanna.

He isn't modeling for us what it looks like to just find something positive in every situation. Because Habakkuk, and this is the key to the book, you can't miss it.

Because Habakkuk isn't looking to the situation. That's not his focus. That's not where his gaze is. Though it is reality. That is reality. He's not faking it.

[20:46] He's not pretending otherwise. But his gaze isn't ultimately on his circumstances. No, he's resolved to look to his God. The God of his salvation.

This God whose way is perfect. Whose every word proves true. And that must be our resolve as well. I'm going to keep looking to my God whose way is perfect.

even as I encounter dark trials in this life. Come what may, he is my hope. He is my strength. He is my salvation.

We can say this. Not because we're looking at our circumstances through rose-colored glasses. Not because we're doing that, but because we're looking by faith to our all-wise, all-powerful, perfectly good God.

And, this God never changes. So often isn't our first hope for the circumstances around us to change. I wish that this wasn't happening right now.

[21:54] If only this hadn't come about. Now for Habakkuk, interestingly enough, the circumstances had changed. Only they had gone from bad to worse.

Instead of getting better, his circumstances only got worse. Remember when he had first cried out to God, how long? Well, that was when he was looking at Judah.

And he was looking at the sin of the people of Judah. And it was bad. He was crying out to God because of it. But then things went from bad to worse. as God then says, I'm going to bring this pagan people.

And they're going to destroy the land. And they're going to ransack the temple. They're going to burn it down. They're going to carry the people off into exile. There is no doubt about it.

Yeah, Habakkuk's circumstances, they changed from bad to worse. And yet, Habakkuk's spirit went from bitterly complaining to overflowing with joy.

[23:02] How can that be? From bad to worse, yet from complaining to joy. Because by faith, he's looking to his God, the God of his salvation.

His trust is in him and in his wisdom. It is a wisdom that is beyond our understanding. It is a wisdom that requires us to live by faith.

And it's a wisdom that should move us to worship. That's what Habakkuk did. That's what Paul does too in Romans chapter 11.

Romans 11 ends with Paul reflecting on the wisdom of God and then bursting with praise. He says, Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

[24:03] Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.

Amen. the temptation! The temptation that we often face is to try to make the God who is inscrutable to be scrutable to us.

The God who is beyond our understanding. We want to be able to fully and completely understand him. That itself is really just a form of what Adam and Eve were tempted with in the garden.

To be like God. To be able to wrap our arms around him figuratively speaking. To be able to grasp him fully. But that's not what we see in the resolution of this book.

We don't see a man who grasps God and his wisdom. We see instead a man who rests in God and his wisdom. Not grasping all of God and his wisdom but resting in God and his wisdom.

[25:13] Habakkuk didn't get all of the answers that he was after. But he got something far, far greater. He gained a deeper trust in God. He didn't fully comprehend God in his ways but he learned contentment and so he could rejoice.

You know the apostle Paul learned something of that lesson as well. Remember when Paul was imprisoned in Rome and he was writing to the Corinthian church.

He doesn't tell them that he was reading his Old Testament scrolls and he had come to Habakkuk but perhaps Habakkuk was on his mind because the lesson that Paul says he learned is really the same lesson that Habakkuk learned.

Paul says in Philippians 4, that sure sounds a lot like Habakkuk doesn't it?

God the Lord is my strength. It makes sense though doesn't it? How similar Habakkuk and Paul sound because Habakkuk's God is Paul's God and for all of us who are in Christ he is our God as well.

[26 : 44] Inscrutable, unsearchable, incomprehensible, beyond our understanding, beyond our fathoming, his paths we can't trace out.

That's how the NIV translates Paul's words in Romans 11. How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. Meaning you can't track him.

It's the idea of a hunter tracking the path of an animal. He's following the impressions left by the animal's feet. He traces the path of that animal.

And if he's a good hunter he finds it. Well even the best of hunters can't track God. God's paths can't be traced.

His plans can't be tracked. You and I can't figure out all that God is doing. Habakkuk has come to this realization as well.

[27 : 45] So what will our response be? Frustration with God or filled with joy in God. If you want to figure out God and his ways you'll be frustrated.

You are sure to be frustrated. But those who live by faith those who humble themselves before this unsearchable God we are filled not with frustration but with joy.

The same joy in the same God as Habakkuk because this is the God of our salvation. Now what salvation is Habakkuk talking about?

In one sense Habakkuk's looking forward to the future deliverance from the enemies of Judah. A deliverance that God had accomplished before in the past.

Habakkuk had already referenced that deliverance in his prayer. Back in verse 13 he had said 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.

[28 : 58] God had accomplished salvation for his people before. He had brought them up out of Egypt. He had brought them into the promised land. He had brought down the walls of Jericho.

He had brought the kings of many nations to their knees in defeat. And he would do the same to Babylon. He would bring that great nation to its knees. He had promised it already to Habakkuk.

And so while God did not spell out deliverance for his people as the end result of that, Habakkuk can look back in history and he can see how God had done it before. So he can be confident God's going to do it again.

God had crushed the head of the house of the wicked and he would do it once more. But there's an even greater deliverance that Habakkuk was looking forward to.

When God would crush not the head of the house of the wicked, but the head of the serpent, just as he had promised in that first glimpse of the gospel in Genesis 3.15.

[30 : 00] That first promise in God's word of salvation for his people. When God told Satan in the garden of Eden of a future offspring, a future descendant of Eve, God would put enmity between him and the serpent.

Satan would bruise his heel, but he would crush the head of Satan, that ancient serpent. In Jesus Christ, we meet the serpent crusher.

And when he went to the cross to pay for our sins, salvation was won. His heel was indeed bruised by Satan in his dying on the cross.

Oh, but Satan's head was crushed as God's perfect plan of redemption was accomplished. And Jesus rose from the grave, victorious.

Now that was a plan that would have drawn many questions of its own on the surface as it unfolded. A plan that would have seemed foolish.

[31:04] A plan that would have raised eyebrows in surprise. In fact, it does still raise eyebrows in surprise. A suffering savior?

A suffering servant savior? Dying on the cross will somehow accomplish salvation? Salvation at the Red Sea?

That makes sense. Salvation at the walls of Jericho? That makes sense. Those were great and glorious victories where God showed himself mighty and triumphant in ways that all people would recognize and understand.

But a man dying on a cross for the salvation of his people? How's that going to work out? That plan has left many scratching their heads with questions and confusion.

salvation. In fact, we find two such individuals who were basically scratching their heads after the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus.

[32:07] They're on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. After Jesus rose from the grave, he appeared to these two disciples as they walked along that road and were told that their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

So they didn't know who this was. Now Luke tells us that they had been talking about these things that had just happened. They were talking about how Jesus had been delivered up to be condemned to death and was crucified.

They were talking about how there was this crazy report going around that Jesus was in fact alive. But it's clear that they did not yet believe that this report was true.

They didn't know what to make of it. Because when Jesus approached them and asked what they were talking about, Luke tells us they stood still looking sad.

They couldn't trace out God's plans. They couldn't figure out or understand his perfect eternal plan of salvation. They couldn't wrap their minds around the idea of a suffering savior who would die.

[33:15] That plan of salvation didn't make sense to them. Not without God opening their eyes to see it, but a perfect plan it was. For that suffering savior who died on the cross, he rose again, defeating sin and death, and he accomplished the greatest salvation of all for God's people.

A salvation that even Habakkuk could anticipate as he lived by faith. It was a salvation that went far beyond any salvation from any physical enemy in his day.

An everlasting salvation brought by an everlasting God. And so yes, Habakkuk could have feet like the deers. He could tread on his high places.

He could have such confident joy and security in the face of impending disaster because he could say those words from all the way back in chapter one.

We shall not die. And we can say those words too. And we can say with even more of God's plan having been graciously revealed to us, we can say come what may in this life, we shall not die.

[34:31] Because our trust is in the God of our salvation. Sin and death have been defeated. Death has been swallowed up in victory. So the grave is not the end for you, Christian.

No. Not six feet down. Not the end for you. The end is found on the heights. Not just the heights of the mountains though as Habakkuk says, treading on his high places.

No, it's far better than that. What he saw dimly we see far more clearly now. We aren't just treading on high places. God says that we're seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

We live because Christ died and rose again and he lives for us. Death did not have the final word with Christ and it will not have the final word with us either.

That reality, it gives us a confident, sure hope in life and in death. In the face of such hardships and pain and suffering in this life and in the face of death when this life is over.

[35:40] So we can say with Habakkuk, though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit beyond 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. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you that you have not only given us your word to reveal the plan of salvation to us, that perfect plan, but for so many of us here this morning, you have given us eyes to see and hearts to believe and to embrace all that you've said.

You've caused us to be born again. You've given new life to us through Christ. You've made us that we would repent of our sins and turn to Christ for salvation and find life in him.

And so, indeed, Father, we can come before you this morning overflowing with joy as Habakkuk is. Not because everything in life is perfect or going just as we'd like.

Indeed, we face many dark trials, many grim, bleak circumstances, and yet, Father, we have the hope of salvation in you. So, cause our eyes to look to you.

[37:07] Cause our gaze to be lifted to the heavens, to be reminded of the great hope that we have in Jesus Christ, the sure hope that we have in him, the hope of resurrection life that eternity awaits us of joy in your presence forever.

We shall not die, as Habakkuk says, and you have promised that to all who are found in you. So, give us joy this morning as we go from here to live lives that bring you honor and praise.

We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen.