

**Habakkuk:
Making Sense of Today's News**

Sharpening the Focus of Your Faith

Habakkuk 3:1-15

Rev. Freddy Fritz

October 1, 2006

Sharpening the Focus of Your Faith¹

Scripture

This is the fifth message in my series titled, “Making Sense of Today’s News.” Let us read Habakkuk 3:1-15:

¹ **A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On *shigionoth*.**

² **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;
in wrath remember mercy.**

³ **God came from Teman,
the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*
His glory covered the heavens
and his praise filled the earth.**

⁴ **His splendor was like the sunrise;
rays flashed from his hand,
where his power was hidden.**

⁵ **Plague went before him;
pestilence followed his steps.**

⁶ **He stood, and shook the earth;
he looked, and made the nations tremble.
The ancient mountains crumbled
and the age-old hills collapsed.
His ways are eternal.**

⁷ **I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,
the dwellings of Midian in anguish.**

⁸ **Were you angry with the rivers, O Lord?
Was your wrath against the streams?
Did you rage against the sea
when you rode with your horses
and your victorious chariots?**

¹ Much of the material for this message comes from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith Tried & Triumphant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987).

⁹ You uncovered your bow,
you called for many arrows. *Selah*
You split the earth with rivers;
¹⁰ the mountains saw you and writhed.
Torrents of water swept by;
the deep roared
and lifted its waves on high.

¹¹ Sun and moon stood still in the heavens
at the glint of your flying arrows,
at the lightning of your flashing spear.

¹² In wrath you strode through the earth
and in anger you threshed the nations.

¹³ You came out to deliver your people,
to save your anointed one.
You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness,
you stripped him from head to foot. *Selah*

¹⁴ With his own spear you pierced his head
when his warriors stormed out to scatter us,
gloating as though about to devour
the wretched who were in hiding.

¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses,
churning the great waters. (Habakkuk 3:1-15)

Introduction

We live in a very impatient society. We have all been programmed to get whatever we want when we want it. It's the product that counts! And so the value of the process is often lost.

The Russian comedian Yakof Smirnoff made this point about Americans in one of his monologues. Smirnoff is the one who always ended his jokes by saying, "What a country!"

He told the story of when he first visited a supermarket in America. He said he walked down one aisle and saw milk powder—just add water and you have instant milk. He went on a little further and saw soup powder—just add water and you have instant soup. He went even further and he was looking at breakfast powder—just add water and you have instant breakfast. Finally as he

was walking down the last aisle he saw baby powder—and said, “Wow! What a country!”

Although instant everything might be at our fingertips when it comes to our food, it’s not usually like that when it comes to our spiritual growth. It certainly was not like that for Habakkuk.

Lesson

As we near the end of our study of this Old Testament book, I hope you have been able to see the exciting process of change that has taken place in the life of this prophet. God has been tenderly and lovingly taking Habakkuk from a place of fear to faith.

You can see the change in Habakkuk by looking at the change in his prayers. Habakkuk initially responded to the silence of God by questioning God. But now as we come to chapter three verse 2 we find Habakkuk standing in reverence before God.

The book of Proverbs tells us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (1:7). Sincere reverence for God is that necessary starting point in life if you are ever going to respond to life’s problems and difficulties properly.

In C. S. Lewis’ well-known book, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he tells the story of how four children come into the land of Narnia. In Narnia all the animals talk but they are under the evil spell of the White Witch. They hear about the lion named Aslan.

Aslan is the Christ-figure in Lewis’ writings. When the children first get ready to meet Aslan they have a conversation with the Beaver family about him. And in that conversation they learn about *reverence*. The conversation begins with little Susan asking Mr. Beaver, “Who is Aslan?”

“Who is Aslan?” said Mr. Beaver, “Why, don’t you know? He’s the king. He’s the Lord of the whole wood, but he’s not often here, you understand. . . . But the word has reached us that he has come back. . . . He’ll settle the White Witch all right. . . . He’ll put all to right as it says in an old rhyme in these parts:

‘Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight.
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more.
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death.
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.’”

“Is he a man?” asked Lucy.

“Aslan, a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. “Certainly not! I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor beyond the sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is not just a lion—he is *the* lion, the *great* lion.”

“Oh!” said Susan. “I thought he was a man. Is he safe? I shall feel rather nervous meeting a lion.”

“That you will dearie, and make no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver, “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. . . . But he’s good! He’s the King I tell you. You mustn’t press him.”

Habakkuk had been pressing the King of Kings with his questions, but now all that had come to a stop, for Habakkuk’s eyes had now been opened to see God as the good, sovereign King of the Universe, ruling over all things from his heavenly throne to accomplish his perfect purposes—even those things in Habakkuk’s life that just didn’t make sense or even seem fair at first sight.

Before this God Habakkuk now found himself standing in reverence. There was no longer any questioning of God like before. He had progressed from being intellectually perplexed over his problem to a position far above that. We find instead an attitude of reverence before God and a submission to his perfect will.

Rather than badgering God with questions, we now find the prophet singing a prayer to God.

But the question we are forced to ask is this: “Since Habakkuk’s circumstances have not changed, why the dramatic change in his heart—from complaining to singing?” Something happened in

the interval between the prayer of the first chapter and the prayer of the third chapter, and it changed Habakkuk.

What brought about this change? And what can we learn to strengthen our faith in the midst of the many confusing problems and trials we face in life? The answers are found in this prayer—recorded for us in Habakkuk 3:1-15. Here we discover two life-changing responses to adversity, modeled for us by Habakkuk.

I. Shift Your Focus from Your Fears to the Faithfulness of God (3:2a, 3-15)

First, shift your focus from your fears to the faithfulness of God.

In verse 2 we find that Habakkuk has taken his mind off his fears of the coming invasion and focused his attention on the faithfulness of God's character. In verse 2a he said, **“Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.”**

In order to overcome his fears of the coming invasion, Habakkuk purposefully reminded himself of what he knew. He knew that God is a loving God who had always been faithful to his covenant promises to care for his people and fulfill his purposes through them.

In verses 3-15 the prophet reminded himself of God's faithfulness to his people as it was shown in several great events in the history of Judah.

Even though these verses are hard to understand because of their poetic structure, don't allow that to keep you from seeing the big picture. And that is seeing the mighty and awesome display of the power of God and the faithfulness of God as he led his people out of Egypt, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land.

In verses 3-7 Habakkuk used graphic Hebrew imagery to look back at God's mighty actions at the Exodus. God is described as rising up from the southern mountain ranges of Teman and Paran to rescue his people. God is described as a giant striding across the earth startling the nations, shattering the mountains and

collapsing the hills. Nature is described as violently convulsing and crumbling under God's awesome glory, splendor and power.

In verses 8-15 Habakkuk described God as a Divine Warrior who exercised judgment on behalf of his people. Verse 8 referred to his parting of the Red Sea and later the Jordan River. Verse 11 referred to the miraculous victory God gave Joshua over his enemies the Amorites—recorded in Joshua 10.

The thing that sustained Habakkuk in the midst of the fear and perplexity that gripped him was the shifting of his focus away from his fears to the proven faithfulness of God. He looked at the past and focused on God's great deliverances and, in that, he found hope for the future.

As a believer in Christ, you are meant to follow this example during times of adversity. You too are meant to find hope for your future in light of God's faithfulness to you in the past. You are meant to look back not only at God's great works of deliverance for Judah but also to the way God has always been faithful to care for his people since then, including his care for you as well.

And today, you have even more to look back on than did Habakkuk. You can now look back not only at all the things God did for Judah but you can also look back and see how he has faithfully provided for you an even mightier deliverance—through the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. And how he has proven himself over and over in your life as well to be a faithful God.

Although God's faithfulness is a relatively easy concept to understand intellectually—the truth is that when it comes to applying it to your life, experientially and personally, it can become very difficult. One reason so many of you will find God's faithfulness toward you so difficult to grasp is because you have experienced the pain of a lot of human *unfaithfulness* in your life. You know what it's like to trust someone for something, and then to have him let you down.

Someone once said to you, "You're my one and only." And then you discovered he or she was seeing someone else. Maybe your parents promised to show up at a program at school, but they

forgot about it or they were too busy. Maybe you trusted your boss for a raise that never came. You trusted a friend with a secret he didn't keep. With each act of unfaithfulness toward you, you have subconsciously withdrawn into your own little world and developed intricate strategies whereby you trust almost no one anymore—including God.

Today I want you to realize that no matter what you may be facing and no matter how many people may have failed you in the past—God will never fail you. He will never let you down. He will always fulfill his promises to you.

These mighty acts of God recorded in this text are meant to show you that God is able to save you who look to him in faith through trust in his Son. God has bound himself in a solemn covenant to you in Jesus—never to abandon you and always to provide for your real and deepest needs. In Romans 8:32 Paul wrote, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

And yet I know that some of you today are facing problems that look outwardly like God has let you down. It's very hard to believe that God is being faithful to his promises, and you are fearful for the future. You really doubt God's faithfulness even though you know you shouldn't. And you feel guilty about your doubts.

Let me share with you an encouraging word about your doubts. When doubts about God's faithfulness begin to flood your soul—don't despair. Don't get down on yourself because you doubt God. For there is a sense in which doubting God's faithfulness is a vital part of that necessary process by which God develops genuine faith in your life!

There is a difference between the sin of unbelief and the difficulty of doubting. Jesus always made a point to distinguish between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is *can't* believe. Unbelief is *won't* believe. Doubt is honest. Unbelief is obstinacy. Doubt is looking for light. Unbelief is content with darkness.

During those fearful times of darkness, remember Habakkuk. Take your eyes off all your future fears and look back and reflect

upon the faithfulness of God to you in the past. Learn to rest in the truth that the God who has always been faithful to you in the past has bound himself in covenant always to be faithful to you in the future. And in so doing you will find God transforming your fears into faith.

II. Shift Your Focus from Your Purposes to the Purposes of God (3:2b)

And second, shift your focus from your purposes to the purposes of God.

As long as Habakkuk focused his attention on his welfare and what he thought was right for himself, he was miserable. But once he took his mind off his purposes and his desires and began to focus more on God's purposes and God's desires—he was set free and transformed!

In verse 2b we find that Habakkuk was no longer concerned for seeing his purposes and his plans succeed. What he wanted now, more than anything else, was for God's plan to succeed.

And if that plan of God included the invasion of the Babylonians—then so be it. His prayer now was a prayer for God to do his perfect work of renewal, however or whatever that might be. In verse 2b he reflected on God's purposes and prayed, **“Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.”**

Earlier Habakkuk would have prayed for God to change his mind regarding the Babylonian invasion—not to pour out his wrath. That would have threatened Habakkuk's life work and brought pain into his life. But now in humble submission, he simply prayed, **“In wrath remember mercy.”**

Like Habakkuk, our problems can almost always be traced back to our natural tendency to focus on our own self-centered purposes in life, instead of focusing on God's purposes for us.

There is a lot of confusion today about the purpose of the Christian life. There is a message going out that God's great goal

for your life is that you be comfortable, happy, living out a wonderful plan which includes no calamity, evil, tragedy, sickness, poverty or personal pain. That if you'll just trust God, all your worries will be over. That if you'll just believe in Jesus, you'll never be defeated again. Friends, that teaching is not only unkind, it's downright unbiblical.

Instead there needs to be some honesty today. Someone needs to be bold enough to say, "When you believe in Jesus Christ, you may very well step into a world of testing you have never known before. And the reason for that is that you will become the object of God's transforming love. And God, by his Holy Spirit, will begin forming the character traits of Jesus Christ into your life. And frankly, you cannot have them formed in your life without undergoing the fire of pain and adversity. You see, God's great goal for your life is not that you are comfortable and satisfied and feel good, but that your life will bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ as you are more and more conformed to his character."

And since this is God's goal for you, you can expect some pain in your life. When you suffer, that does not mean you are being disobedient. In fact, it might mean you are right in the very center of God's will for your life. The path of obedience is often marked by times of suffering and loss.

When I face difficult times, I return to verses like this, and do you know what I have to do? I have to change my perspective!

I have to force myself to see life from God's point of view—rather than mine. What is often considered a loss now leads to a gain later. And I don't mean it's always a material gain.

God's purposes are to build internal character into your life, to give you a deep peace, to provide you with things money just cannot buy. Security replaces insecurity. You receive purpose and renewed direction. You gain a new understanding, compassion and a wisdom you never had before.

So remember, when you are going through seasons of uncertainty and perhaps even trial and difficulty, remember to shift your focus from your purposes to the purposes of God.

Conclusion

John Bannister wrote a poem about how our life is like a weaving:

My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me;
I may not choose the colors, He knows what they should be;
For He can view the pattern upon the upper side,
While I can see it only on this, the under side.

Sometimes He weaveth sorrow, which seemeth strange to me;
But I will trust His judgment and work on faithfully;
'Tis He who fills the shuttle, He knows just what is best;
So I shall weave in earnest and leave Him with the rest.

Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why—
The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.
He knows, He loves, He cares. Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives His very best to those who leave the choice to him.

God is the Weaver. He is putting all things together in your life like a beautiful weaving. You can only see the under side. And sometimes it doesn't make sense to you at all. But remember, God's view is the upper side, and one day you will be able to see what God is doing. Until then, follow the model of Habakkuk and live by faith in him.

Shift your focus from your fears to the faithfulness of God.

And shift your focus from your purposes to the purposes of God. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Our Father in heaven, life is often filled with perplexity and questions. Sometimes we struggle with trial and difficulty. Some even deal with pain and suffering. And, in all of this, it is so easy for us to become fearful.

I pray that you would help each one of us shift the focus from our fears to your faithfulness. You are ever faithful, and you will never fail in your promises to us.

And help each one of us also to shift our focus from our purposes to your purposes. Take away our self-centeredness so that we can focus on your grace and mercy in our lives.

All of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

May the God who controls today's news help each one of you to trust him fully. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.