

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

True Hope for Your Future!

Habakkuk 3:16-19

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October 8, 2006

True Hope for Your Future!¹

Scripture

This is the sixth and final message in my series titled, “Making Sense of Today’s News.” Let us read Habakkuk 3:16-19:

**¹⁶ 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.
¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
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,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.**

For the director of music. On my stringed instruments. (Habakkuk 3:16-19)

Introduction

Benjamin Franklin, though not a Christian, always had a deep admiration for the Bible. While in Paris, France, as an ambassador for the United States, he found himself being mocked by several skeptics for his appreciation of the Scriptures. So he decided to

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

find out how well these skeptics knew the book they professed to scorn. One evening he approached them with a manuscript that contained an ancient poem he said he had been reading. He told them he had been impressed with its stately beauty. They asked to hear it. He then read to them Habakkuk 3:17-18.

Franklin reported that his reading was received with “exclamations of extravagant admiration.” They said, “What a magnificent piece of verse! Franklin, where did you find that? How can we get copies?” He took great joy then by informing them that they could all obtain copies quite easily by turning to Habakkuk 3:17-18!

Today I invite you to examine that same passage of ancient Scripture with me so that we might discover together the answer to the question, “What is it that makes these verses so magnificent?” I believe it is the courageous way that Habakkuk had learned to embrace all of his adversities and still have true joy in life.

Lesson

As we come today to our final study of Habakkuk, I want you to see that the key to Habakkuk’s experience of joy in the face of adversity was *his faith!* In the trenches of real-life struggles, Habakkuk had learned a lot about the nature of true faith in God.

Over the last several weeks we have followed this personal and somewhat painful journey of the prophet after he learned that the Babylonians were about to invade and attack his nation. And we have seen him progressively transformed by God from the point of a paralyzing fear to a mature faith.

In these final verses I want you to see two faith facts so that you will be prepared to stand strong in true joy the next time the winds of adversity blow your way.

I. True Faith Often Includes an Element of Fear (3:16a)

First, true faith often includes an element of fear.

Habakkuk wrote, **“I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled”** (3:16a).

Habakkuk no longer had any theological or philosophical problems like he did earlier. He saw everything now with perfect clarity. But even so, he was still very afraid about the Babylonian invasion that God had told him was coming.

Note the many anatomical terms he used to describe his fear. He says his **heart pounded**, his **lips quivered**, **decay crept into his bones**, and his **legs trembled**. He used these terms to show that he was shaking with fear throughout his whole being.

“Now, wait a second!” you say, “I thought you just said that Habakkuk had finally come to a mature faith. What is all this fear business then? Surely a person of true faith doesn’t have fear like that? Or does he?”

A fallacy going around today is that true faith is never accompanied by fear, that the concepts of faith and fear are antithetical and incompatible. And yet we see in this verse that nothing could be further from the truth. We discover here that this mighty prophet of God, this great man of faith, trembled like a leaf in the face of his threatening circumstances.

God’s greatest men and women of faith have often been those who at their most intense times of testing found themselves racked with fear.

We find in the pages of Scripture that Abraham, that great father of the faithful, knew time and time again what it meant to be fearful when he faced the uncertainty of his future. King David admitted that at times his heart was failing him in spite of his faith. The prophet Jeremiah felt at times that he just could not face the obstacles that were before him. John the Baptist, while languishing in prison, found himself struggling with fear at what was lying ahead.

Even the mighty apostle Paul gives us a telling glimpse into his inner life in 2 Corinthians 7:5 when he wrote, “For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were

harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, *fears within*.” Imagine Paul fearful? Have you ever thought that the great apostle could really be fearful? How could that be possible? This man who has expressed in such glowing terms what it means to have trust in God. This man who has told us how Christ is sufficient for us in all things, and how God will always supply all our needs in Christ Jesus. Paul fearful? Yes, just like other great men and women of faith. And just like Jesus Christ who in the Garden of Gethsemane struggled with his fears before the Father.

Contrary to what many Christians think, faith usually becomes harder—and not easier—as you mature spiritually! God usually treats new Christians with a special kind of tenderness, much like a parent does a newborn.

That’s why new Christians tend to see so many striking answers to their prayers at first. But as the Christian life proceeds, they tend to become more and more rare. The refusals, too, are not only more frequent; but they become more unmistakable, and more emphatic. And at first glance this seems to be all backwards. Shouldn’t our faith become easier, not harder, as we grow up into greater spiritual maturity?

C. S. Lewis answers “No” in one of his essays on prayer. He writes, “There is a mystery here which, even if I had the power, I might not have the courage to explore. Meanwhile, little people like you and me, if our prayers are sometimes granted, beyond all hope and probability, we had better not draw hasty conclusions to our own advantage. For, if we were stronger, we might be less tenderly treated. If we were braver, we might be sent, with far less help, to defend far more desperate posts in the great battle.”

You see, God’s mature children, in fact, *especially* God’s mature children, are not immune from having bewildering times of fear and unanswered prayer. True faith *is* compatible with fear!

So stop coming down on yourself—or others—simply because you are fearful and wrestling with your fears. Stop always equating spirituality with those who have an absence of fears and

struggles. For those who are not in touch with their fears are often the least, not the most, spiritual.

The primary message of Habakkuk, found in Habakkuk 2:4, is that you are to *live by faith* in this life. And that does not mean you must hide your fears and struggles. When you live by faith you can be honest with yourself, with God and others. You can let people know that you, like Habakkuk, struggle at times with real fears in the midst of your faith.

The story is told of former boxing champ Mohammed Ali who was traveling by airplane one day. As the flight attendants were going through their normal pre-flight duties, telling everyone to buckle up, they noticed that Ali had purposefully unbuckled his seat belt. So one flight attendant said to him, "Sir, please fasten your seat belt."

Ali replied in his typical style, saying, "Superman don't need no seat belt."

And without even missing a beat the flight attendant snapped back, "Superman don't need no plane either! Now buckle that safety belt!"

Friends, we live in fearful times. We don't know what the future holds. We don't know if we will be a victim of terrorism or a nuclear bomb or a senseless shooting. We don't have to pretend that we are like Superman and have no fears. Habakkuk shows us that true faith often includes an element of fear.

II. True Faith Knows How to Rejoice in God in Spite of Difficult Circumstances (3:16b-19)

And second, true faith knows how to rejoice in God in spite of difficult circumstances.

In Habakkuk 3:16b-19 we have what some have called the greatest statement of faith in the entire Bible. Here Habakkuk proclaimed his faith in the midst of a very graphic picture of the types of things that were most likely going to happen when the Babylonians attacked his land. He said, "**Yet I will wait patiently for the**

day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, 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 God my Savior. 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’s reference to the deer suggests the anticipated energy and surefootedness that would certainly be his—even when the foundation under him was greatly shaken. No matter what he may face, he was confident that he would remain standing because he trusted in the *Sovereign Lord as his strength!* And no matter what may come, he would be joyful because he trusted in *God as his Savior!*

What had Habakkuk learned that strengthened his faith? Last time we saw how he learned to look back on the past faithfulness of God and, in so doing, find hope for the future. But today I want you to see that Habakkuk’s faith was not only encouraged by his look back but also by his look ahead.

In the preceding verses, Habakkuk 3:1-15, we see not only a description of the mighty acts of God in the past but also a picture of what God is going to do one day at the return of Christ. It is a picture of a great and glorious future hope, a time when God will come in power and glory delivering his people, judging his enemies and making all things new.

Habakkuk had just been given a vision from God of a future world that was coming. And in that vision—he found himself coming alive with new hope and faith in the face of his present struggles. Habakkuk learned that although there would be battles lost—the ultimate war will be won! His cause and this world will not end in a final defeat but in joy.

Habakkuk learned that history is not an end itself but a transition time, a parenthesis between Eden and the new heaven and earth still to be formed by God. And that even if everything looked out of control now, God is firmly in control and one day he will

make all things right and new. And for that reason he could have true joy in his difficult circumstances.

You and I are meant to find great comfort in Habakkuk's vision of the future. To the person who suffers, Christianity offers the only true hope. And that hope rests in God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth. A place where there will no longer be pain or suffering or injustice.

I'm afraid this is a foreign concept to some Christians in our day. It is usually written off as irrelevant "pie in the sky" theology or seen as a form of religious escapism. But the truth is that this perspective is meant by God to undergird and strengthen your faith during times of adversity and hardship.

Yes, it is helpful to know that your suffering has a divine purpose. But it's just as important to know that your suffering is temporary! You see, because of Christ's death and resurrection you are awaiting a world where every tear will be wiped away and suffering will disappear (cf. Revelation 21).

The Bible gives us unusual metaphors to picture this world. Streets of gold and gates of pearl, all which are meant to symbolize the paragon of luxury. Whatever heaven is, it will banish all of the discomfort of this life and usher in new, unimagined pleasures. We have shadows of it now. Fleeting longings that some profound joy, which escapes us so quickly here, will one day fill us. It's as if we are in a dark room but little chinks of light are seeping through—brief glimpses of virtue, glory, and joy, subtle hints of truth and justice—all convincing us that beyond the walls there exists a world worth all of our enduring.

From time to time God allows us little glimpses into what things will be like at the end. When God gives us those little glimpses, and we put them all together, they all say the same thing. They all shout, "We will win!" Knowing that can make all the difference in the world.

Have any of you ever videotaped a football game because you had to be gone when it was being shown? And then you find out that your team won even before you get a chance to watch the

game? Have you ever noticed how much differently you react to circumstances in that game? Your team drives all the way down to the 1-yard line and fumbles the ball. Your team gives up 35 points in the first half. But you don't lose hope, do you? Why? Because you know that in the end your team wins.

You must learn to see your present pain and struggles in the light of eternity! A lifetime of 70 years is a long time to us. You can develop a lot of ideas about God and how he can seem to be unfair and unloving. But is it reasonable to judge God and his plan for the universe by the brief time you spend on earth?

I wonder if you would complain if God allowed you one minute of suffering in an entire lifetime of comfort? He has allowed you a lifetime that includes suffering, but that lifetime is a mere minute of eternity! Your brief life now is a proving ground, a mere dot in eternity—albeit a very important dot.

Next time you want to cry out to God in anguished despair, blaming him for your miserable world, remember: less than one-millionth of the evidence has been presented! To view your pain properly, you must learn to await the whole story. Author George MacDonald says, “The Lord has come to wipe away our tears. He is doing it; He will have it done soon. Until then, he would have your tears flow without bitterness; to which end he tells us that it is a blessed thing to mourn, because of the comfort on its way.”

The great theologian, Berkouwer, once wrote, “Pain can be seen as the great ‘Not Yet’ of eternity. It reminds us of where we are, and fans in us a thirst for where we will someday be.”

In one sense there is no ultimate solution to the problem of pain until Jesus returns and recreates the earth. You are to be sustained by faith in that hope. And that faith, although at times mixed with fear, should not be a timid faith but a bold, confident faith in an all-powerful God.

Some years ago a weary traveler came to the banks of a river for the first time. There was no bridge, it was in the midst of cold winter, and night was falling. As he looked out over the surface of the river, he noticed that it was covered with ice. What should he

do? Could the ice hold him up? With darkness approaching, it was vital that he get to the other side. So, despite much fear he began to creep cautiously across the surface of the ice on his hands and knees. About half way over he heard the sound of singing behind him. Out of the dusk came a man, whistling and singing as he was driving a horse-drawn load of coal across the river. Here he was on his hands and knees, fearful that the ice might not be strong enough to hold him up, and there went a man, his horses, his sleigh and a full load of coal upheld by the same ice because he knew that the ice was thick enough to hold them all.

How many of us are like that old traveler? We are trusting in God cautiously, timidly. Let's not approach God timidly as though he might not be able or willing to hold us up in our difficulties. Let's go to him boldly, confident that he will be what he has promised us he would be.

Conclusion

Frank Boreham, in one of his books, tells of a conversation he once had with a somewhat naive and Pollyannish woman named Jeannie. He said to her, "Jeannie, supposing. . . ."

At that point she immediately cut him off and then began to berate him saying, "Now don't you have anything to do with those supposings! I know them all. Suppose I should lose my job. Suppose I should lose my money. Suppose I should lose my family. Suppose I should lose my health or my life and all the rest. When those supposings come knocking at the door of your heart—you just slam the door and bolt it, and don't let any of them in!"

Now, from a worldly perspective that's pretty good advice. It's certainly a lot better than always worrying over some problems that will probably never happen. But it's not as good as what we have learned from Habakkuk.

When the supposings came knocking at Habakkuk's door, he did not slam the door and bolt it. He opened the door and said, "Come on in!" Suppose the fig tree does not bud? Suppose there

are no grapes on the vines? Suppose the olive crop fails? Suppose the fields produce no food. Suppose there are no sheep in the pen? Suppose there are no cattle in the stalls? Suppose there is another terrorist attack? Suppose there is a calamitous war? “Come in, come in!” cried Habakkuk.

He learned not to fear the supposings anymore. Why? Because One greater than these or any other supposings was in the room with him. That greater One was the Lord. The One he knew would give him the necessary strength even in the most threatening of times.

William Cowper, the great English poet, who had tasted severe anguish and intense mental suffering in his own life, knew this truth personally. He cast Habakkuk’s testimony of faith in God into these great lines:

Though vine nor fig tree neither,
Their wonted fruits should bear,
Though all the fields should wither,
Nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet, God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice;
For, while in him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice.

Whatever your circumstances, whatever calamity or adversity comes your way, the prophet Habakkuk calls you to rejoice and to live by faith in a mighty and sovereign God.

And remember that true faith often includes an element of fear. And that true faith knows how to rejoice in God in spite of difficult circumstances. 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

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PRAAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the prophet Habakkuk. Thank you for all that we have learned in these past six weeks from the prophet Habakkuk as we have studied his book.

Father, we realize that we live in a dangerous and treacherous world. We face difficulties, trials, adversities, wars, terrorist attacks, and all kinds of problems every day. Thank you that your word teaches us that you have already won the victory. Thank you for the hope we have of an eternity with you and without any pain or suffering or difficulty or tear.

In the meanwhile, Lord, teach us that true faith often includes an element of fear. And also that true faith knows how to rejoice in God in spite of difficult circumstances.

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.