*I am going to assume that all of you have seen a golf ball, and if you’ve looked at it closely, you’ve noticed that they are covered in dimples – but that wasn’t always the case. The first golf balls in Scotland were smooth, because it was thought that a smooth surface would make the golf ball fly farther and straighter. But these old golfers later discovered that when the smooth golf balls got scratched and roughed up over time, they actually flew farther because of an aerodynamic principle. So as a result, the old golfers would cut grooves and make shallow holes in their golf balls. Eventually, it caught on and golf balls were manufactured with dimples instead of smooth surfaces.*

*In some respects, we are all similar to golf balls. God knows that if our lives are perfectly smooth, we wouldn’t go as far. He knows that a few rough edges and some rough experiences will actually take us farther in life.*

I think it is fair to say that during these past few weeks, we have all had a few rough experiences and difficulties. I don’t know of a single person who has not been impacted in some form or fashion by the coronavirus outbreak. Fear and anxiety have been added to our already stressful lives, our normal routines have been dramatically disrupted, our liberties – which we highly value, have been temporarily curtailed for the greater good, and for a people who live as if they are in control – it has become plainly evident that we are not – never were. It’s a difficult and sobering time for all of us.

I thought long and hard about what to share with you this morning because I wanted my message to be timely and relevant and thoughtful to our current situation, but I also wanted to share something that was hopeful and assuring.

I was reminded of a sermon that I preached to you from **Habakkuk** back in 2018 – and just to refresh your memory, this little book told us about the sinfulness of God’s people, it introduced us to a prophet who was clearly angry about it, and it gave us a foretaste of the impending judgment that was coming to them as a consequence of their sin.

If you recall, the prophet Habakkuk did not like what the people of Judah were doing. It seemed the righteous were wrongly suffering and the wicked were prospering – and even worse, it seemed that God was doing nothing about it.

But God tells Habakkuk that He was already working on their sin problem and judgment was in fact coming for Judah just like Habakkuk had desired, but God was going to use the wicked and merciless Babylonians to carry out His divine judgment. The Babylonians were certainly coming, and Habakkuk became fearful about it, and in his distress, he imagined what was going to happen to them during the invasion. And this is what he said in **Habakkuk 3**, beginning with **verse 16**:

**16I heard and my inward parts trembled,
At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble.
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
For the people to arise who will invade us.
17Though 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,**

In this passage, Habakkuk painted a really grim picture of the Babylonian invasion and how their way of life would be severely impacted. Those things they relied upon for their sustenance and their satisfaction would be gone. He said the fig tree would not bloom, there is no fruit on the vines, no olives on the olive trees, the fields are not producing crops, the flocks are scattered, and the cattle are nowhere to be found. He provided this hopeless summary of their sad condition – nothing seemed to be working in their favor.

Now to add some timely relevance for us, I could add the stocks and 401K’s have tanked, the kids cannot go to school, the churches are closed, there are no sports, I can’t go to my favorite restaurant for bottomless French fries, and toilet paper is in short supply.

So, it’s not a pretty picture painted by Habakkuk, but in light of these dreadful conditions, he says something unexpected. Habakkuk says, beginning in **verse 18**,

**18Yet I will exult in the Lord,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
19The Lord God is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.**

Habakkuk knows the Babylonians are coming and that many people will be taken into exile and many will be slain. He knows the land will be pillaged and ruined. Yet, in the midst of this invasion described by Habakkuk, he declared that even if everything he relied upon failed, if everything that gave him stability in life was taken away, if nothing seemed to be going right, if everything was gone – God was not. He declared that his strength was not in fig trees or in vines or in fields or in flocks, but only in the Lord – the God of his salvation.

But Habakkuk also said something else that may seem surprising, and that’s where I want to focus this morning.

If you noticed, Habakkuk did not say he would just “gut it out” through the invasion, rather he said he would **“rejoice in the God of my salvation**.**”** Are you kidding me? In light of the devastation coming his way, when everything that provided stability and satisfaction would be ripped away – how in the world could Habakkuk rejoice? How could he have joy in the midst of this? That’s what I want to explore with you.

First, let’s define what joy is because I want to make sure we are all on the same page, and I think it is important to draw a distinction between *joy* and *happiness* as some people may consider these words to be interchangeable – but they are not. When for example James said, "**Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,**" he's not saying to be *happy* or *giddy* about your trials. Happiness is different. Happiness is circumstantial, it’s situational – it comes and it goes. If you think about it, happiness is tied to what’s happening, which might explain why Habakkuk is not singing, *“If you’re happy and you know it clap your hands.”* Understandably, Habakkuk is not happy about the Babylonian invasion and the destruction they will bring with them, but somehow – he still has joy.

So then, what is joy if it’s not the same as happiness?

I read several definitions of joy that are floating out there, but the one that really resonated with me was the definition of joy provided by Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church. And I think it really stuck with me because this definition comes from a man who suffered the terrible loss of his 27-year-old son to suicide. With that for our context, listen to his definition of joy.

Pastor Warren said: *“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”*

I absolutely love that, and if you think about it, didn’t Habakkuk essentially say the same thing?

Joy is this deep-seated trust that God knows exactly what He is doing in my life, and in spite of my circumstances, in the end, when the dust finally settles, I know it’s all going to work out for my good and for His glory, and that’s worthy of my praise. That’s joy.

I want Habakkuk’s joy. I want the kind of joy that Warren defined for us – I think we all do, but where does this joy come from?

As expressed by Habakkuk, biblical joy is inseparable from our relationship with the God of our salvation. As a fruit of the Spirit, joy is a response to the revelation of God actually stepping into our lives and the realization of God’s ultimate purpose to conform us into the image of His Son.

British expositor G. Campbell Morgan said, *“Our joy is in proportion to our trust. Our trust is in proportion to our knowledge of God.”*

I couldn’t agree more. Our *joy* is ultimately linked to what we *know*, and the Bible speaks to this point in several places. Let me share with you some examples of just what I mean. Turn with me to **Hebrews 10**, beginning with **verse 32**.

**32But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 33partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.**

Similar to Habakkuk, these guys had been experiencing their own troubles. The writer of Hebrews reminded these new converts that when they became Christians, they really suffered for the Lord, being rejected by the Jewish community and perhaps being counted as dead by their own families and friends. And when they weren’t being persecuted themselves, they helped other Christians who were being persecuted, putting themselves in danger again. So, it was a tough time, but then we come to **verse 34** where we read:

**For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.**

These people described here were able to endure their hardship, even accepting the loss of their possessions – with *joy*, because they *knew* they had a heavenly possession that couldn’t be taken away. Their *joy* was linked to what they *knew*.

I’m not done. Let’s look at another passage. Turn with me to **James 1:2-4**. This is a very popular passage, especially meaningful during hardship and difficult times – times like some of you are experiencing right now. Listen to what James tells us.

**2Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

This letter by James was written to Jewish believers scattered throughout Asia Minor – on the run due to persecution, and right out the gate in his letter, James tells his readers to take *joy* in their trials. That seems so counter-intuitive to us. Most people count it all *joy* when they escape trials, but James is telling them just the opposite, to **“consider it all joy... when you encounter various trials.”**

How can he say that?

We can consider it all *joy* – we can have this quiet assurance and confidence, even in trials and hard times, because we *know* something. And what do we *know* here? We *know* our faith will be tested, and its part of God’s work in our lives to make us complete, lacking nothing – in other words, God is conforming us to the image of His Son. We can have *joy* in our trials because we *know* it is part of God’s purpose and plan for us.

It’s not about my circumstances or my difficulties or my trials, it’s about the One I *know* who is in control of my circumstances and my difficulties and my trials. And because I know God is in control, I can have the assurance and confidence that it’s all going to work out for my good and for His glory.

Now, I have one more passage to share with you, one you likely know or at least have heard before and it comes from **Nehemiah 8:10**. The last portion of the verse reads, **“for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”**

When God’s people returned to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile in Babylon, the people were gathered together and Ezra the priest read the Law to them. This had not been done for long, long time. God’s people got back into God’s Word, and it revealed just how sinful and far they had drifted away from God, but it also became known to them that God was gracious and forgiving and did not treat them as they truly deserved. He was still working in their lives, and I say all of that to say this:

In difficult and trying times – especially in times of your own failure, you need to *know* something else as well: Because of the finished work of Christ, because of God’s love and grace – He is *joyous* about you, and that is absolutely powerful to know. The *joy* of the Lord – His *joy* over you, is your strength. God is *joyous* about His relationship with you, and it’s in this relationship with Him that we find our inner strength, our refuge and our security.

So, now we can say, our *joy* is based what we *know* or better yet, on who we *know*.

I want to share something with you that really drives this point home, and it is as real and as hard as it gets.

*Some of you have been following the posts of Michael and Kelsey from CrossPointe Baptist. About two months ago, Kelsey gave birth to their daughter – Sophia.*

*Sophia was born with a very rare and severe disorder that affects the early development of her body joints which, as you might imagine, impacts the function and the range of motion of the associated limbs. And if that wasn’t hard enough, when Sophia was delivered, she wasn’t breathing, she suffered extensive injury to her brain, and her leg was fractured.*

*Since her delivery, Sophia has taken her family on a wild roller coaster ride of very promising highs, surprising and unforeseen twists and turns, and deep dark excruciating lows. When it seemed that one condition was improving, another complication would develop causing Sophia’s health to deteriorate.*

*I can’t imagine the heartache and the pain suffered by all who love and care for Sophia – her parents, her grandparents, aunts and uncles, church family, and even hospital staff who have given her the best medical care humanly possible. As I speak to you, Sophia’s condition is still very much touch and go.*

*But in the midst of all of this terrible heartache and pain, Kelsey said this and I quote,*

*“We believe that God will continue to heal Sophia and we are pursuing that healing but our miracle may not look the way we want it to. Regardless, Jesus is enough. Sophia could live for 100 more years or she could die tomorrow. Regardless, Jesus is enough. Our faith is not a false gospel that teaches health, wealth, and prosperity. Our faith is in the Son of God who came from heaven, lived a sinless life, suffered and died on the cross, and rose again so that we may spend eternity with Him. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.” He is enough. In the good, He’s enough. In the bad, He’s enough. In the waiting, He is enough. In the doubt, in our fear, in our wandering, He’s enough. In our laughter, in our rejoicing, in our healing, He’s enough. Jesus will always be enough no matter what happens to Sophia.”*

Although it is a very difficult time for this family, you can still sense the *joy*, expressed by Kelsey.

Remember, *“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation.”*

In so many words, Kelsey tells us that her *joy,* her assurance, her confidence is found in a Person she *knows*. She *knows* that Jesus is enough, and this knowledge comes through an intimate and personal relationship with her Lord, so that even in hardest and painful of times – she can still have *joy*.

You can have *joy* too.

You can have *joy* because you *know* that God is in control of all the details of your life, and that ultimately everything is going to be alright.

You can have *joy* because you *know* that God remains the same, even though your circumstances can suddenly and dramatically change.

You can have *joy* because you *know* God has a purpose and a plan for you.

You can have *joy* because you *know* God will never leave you nor forsake you.

You can have *joy* because you *know* God is gracious and He is joyous about you.

I asked earlier: How could Habakkuk express *joy* in light of the destruction that awaited God’s people? He could express *joy* because he *knew* the God of his salvation – the source of his strength.

Do you want this *joy*? It’s only found in the Lord. Do you *know* Him?

Source Material:

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