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Glory: The Character of God / God's Faithfulness; Steadfast Love / Exodus 34:6-7; Hab 3:1-16
Habakkuk 3:1-16 teaches us two life-changing responses to adversity that are modelled for us by Habakkuk.

Introduction

I am currently preaching a series of sermons that I am calling, “Glory: The Character of God.” In this five-week-long series, I am exploring God’s self-revelation of himself to Moses in [Exodus 34:6-7](#).

God revealed several of his attributes to Moses in [Exodus 34:6-7](#), which reads as follows:

⁶ The LORD passed before him [that is, Moses] and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

Two sermons ago, we examined the truth that God is merciful and gracious. Last time, we examined the truth that God is slow to anger. Today, we will examine the truth that God is faithful.

The text that I would like to use to see that God is faithful is from the Prophet Habakkuk.

We don’t know much about Habakkuk. He most likely wrote his prophetic book somewhere between 640 - 615 BC.

God had used Assyria to bring about the fall of Israel in 722 BC. Now, Assyria was about to fall to Babylon. Moreover, God was going to use Babylon to bring about the fall of Judah, which took place in 586 BC.

Habakkuk wrestled with the fact that God would use a pagan nation to punish his own people.

Nevertheless, by the end of the book, Habakkuk has learned to trust in the faithfulness of God who works out all things for his own glory.

Scripture

Let us read Habakkuk's prayer in [Habakkuk 3:1-16](#):

¹ A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

² O LORD, I have heard the report of you,
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.

In the midst of the years revive it;
in the midst of the years make it known;
in wrath remember mercy.

³ God came from Teman,
and the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*

His splendor covered the heavens,
and the earth was full of his praise.

⁴ His brightness was like the light;
rays flashed from his hand;
and there he veiled his power.

⁵ Before him went pestilence,
and plague followed at his heels.

⁶ He stood and measured the earth;
he looked and shook the nations;
then the eternal mountains were scattered;

the everlasting hills sank low.

His were the everlasting ways.

⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;
the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

⁸ Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD?

Was your anger against the rivers,
or your indignation against the sea,
when you rode on your horses,
on your chariot of salvation?

⁹ You stripped the sheath from your bow,
calling for many arrows. *Selah*

You split the earth with rivers.

¹⁰ The mountains saw you and writhed;
the raging waters swept on;
the deep gave forth its voice;
it lifted its hands on high.

¹¹ The sun and moon stood still in their place
at the light of your arrows as they sped,
at the flash of your glittering spear.

¹² You marched through the earth in fury;
you threshed the nations in anger.

¹³ 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. *Selah*

¹⁴ You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors,
who came like a whirlwind to scatter me,
rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.

¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses,
the surging of mighty waters.

¹⁶ I hear, and my body trembles;
my lips quiver at the sound;
rottenness enters into my bones;
my legs tremble beneath me.

Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble
to come upon people who invade us.

Lesson

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 like that when it comes to our spiritual growth.

It certainly was not like that for Habakkuk. As Habakkuk wrestled with God about how God worked out his plans in history, an exciting process of change took place in the life of this prophet. God had 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 in chapter 1. But now as we come to chapter 3, we find Habakkuk standing in reverence before God.

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 during the many confusing problems and trials we face in life?

The answers are found in this prayer—recorded for us in [Habakkuk 3:1-16](#). 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; 3-16)

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, "O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear."

Habakkuk uses the word "fear" here in the sense of "reverence and awe."

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 has always been faithful to his covenant promises to care for his people and fulfill his purposes through them.

In verses 3-16, the prophet reminded himself of God's faithfulness to his people as 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 in the Exodus. God is described as rising 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 8-16, 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 amid the fear and perplexity that gripped him was the shifting of his focus away from his own 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 at 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 that 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 can 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 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 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 difficulty, remember Habakkuk.

Take your eyes off all your 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 to be faithful to you always 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 about 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, "In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it 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 and 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 but also 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 in your life, to give you deep peace, and to provide you with things money just cannot buy.

Security replaces insecurity.

You receive purpose and renewed direction.

You gain new understanding, compassion, and 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.