

LIFE IN THE VALLEY

INTRO: We'll take a little break from the messages on the parables. Several weeks ago I walked into a valley in my life. I wrestled with discouragement. I stayed there for quite some time. And then, as I have done numerous times before I reminded myself of Paul's words, "Rejoice in the Lord." Then I thought of doing a message on the subject as I also have done numerous times over the years. Then last Sunday morning several times I thought a number of things seemed to indicate I should do a message on this subject. And then our song leader did the song, "Keep On The Sunday Side Of Life." Although it is a rather light song it expresses some great truths.

The first line says, "There's a dark and a troubled side of life." Then it says, "There's a bright and sunny side too." And the next line says, "The storm and its fury broke today, crushing hopes that we cherished so dear." This happens at times and I have written this message for those who may be going through some valley.

Then last Sunday we had evening service and in the introduction to our service the MC reminded us of the trials of life and again I was reminded of this. And so I began to consider to do a message on the subject. Then during the week I sensed confirmation to do this message.

The passage I considered is from the little book of Habakkuk, which is close to the end of the OT. Turn to it. We find our text for this morning in 3:17-19. I spoke on this passage some 14 years ago. Habakkuk says:

*17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls -*

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 *The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills.*

I. THE BACKGROUND TO HABAKKUK

Let me begin with some background to this book. It takes us to a dark period of Israel's history. The nation had been going down for years. God had sent warning through the prophets to both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. Then in 722 BC, because of failure to heed God's warnings, the northern kingdom went into captivity. Judgment had come. Yet all the while God kept warning the southern kingdom. But alas, they went the way of their wayward sister. And in 586, not long after Habakkuk wrote, disaster struck the nation. Babylon came and the horrors that befell the nation would fill books. And Habakkuk gets a preview of what is going to happen.

In giving the background and some information on the book I will quote numerous times from a message I did on the book of Habakkuk many years ago. I wrote: "Well, God has warned the southern kingdom over and over again as He had also done to the northern kingdom. And during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, the nation put away their false gods and restored the laws of God and enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. But when Josiah's son Jehoiakim began to reign, the nation once more fell into persistent sin and grew in its wickedness. And Habakkuk, writing in about 607 B.C., writes just a few years after Nineveh was destroyed and about 20 years before the southern kingdom is also led captive by Nebuchadnezzar. This is the same Nebuchadnezzar who took Daniel captive, and you can read of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in the book of Daniel."

II. THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

So, let me now give you a brief overview of this little book. We begin by reading 1:1-4:

1 *The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw.*

Whenever I read of the burden of a prophet I groan. It seems to me that blessed is the man who can live life without such a burden. Verse 2:

2 *O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save.*

3 *Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises.*

4 *Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.*

The state of the nation is on Habakkuk's mind. It is this that is his burden. It is this that has great potential for discouragement. It can plunge one into the valley of despair. Habakkuk has two things that perplex him. The first could be worded like this: "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?" Well God begins to answer in verses 5-6. He says to Habakkuk beginning in verse 5:

5 *"Look among the nations and watch – Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you.*

6 *For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.*

I think we could read verse 5 like this: "Look among the nations and watch – Be utterly astounded! For I am already working a work in your days." Then God says, "If I told you the work I am already doing, you would not believe it though it were told you." So horrible will the outcome of this work be that Habakkuk would go into shock because of this news. God will raise up the Chaldeans and He will discipline the southern kingdom and it will be very severe.

Let me read a little further: "Well, the Lord has sought to relieve Habakkuk's perplexity, but it has only served to raise a second cause for perplexity with Habakkuk."

So let us read it in 1:12-2:1:

12 *Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.*

13 *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he?*

Habakkuk is saying, "Lord! You have appointed Israel for judgment! Now Lord, you cannot behold evil or look on wickedness. How can You think of using a nation more wicked than Judah to punish her!" Verse 14:

14 *Why do You make men like fish of the sea, Like creeping things that have no ruler over them?*

15 *They take up all of them with a hook, They catch them in their net, And gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad.*

16 *Therefore they sacrifice to their net, And burn incense to their dragnet; Because by them their share is sumptuous And their food plentiful.*

17 *Shall they therefore empty their net, And continue to slay nations without pity?*

I'll continue the quote now: "David Levy gives Habakkuk's second question like this: 'How can a holy God use a sinful nation to accomplish His righteous purpose?' I would put it like this: 'Lord, Judah is wicked, but they are not anywhere near as wicked as Babylon. How can You use someone more wicked to punish someone less wicked? This seems out of character for You God. I don't understand. Why would You make some people, including Israel like fish in the sea,

and use someone as ungodly as these Babylonians to catch people less wicked than they are like fish in a net. And to top it off Lord, when they are all done with the net, they sit down and worship the net. How can You use a nation like this for such purposes?' Habakkuk has asked again. And look at how he closes his time of questioning in 2:1:"

1 I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.

Well, the Lord begins to answer Habakkuk in verse 2 like this:

2 Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it.

3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry.

4 "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

Here we have an amazing contrast. The proud, the Babylonians, are contrasted with those who live by faith. And who lives by faith? The just! Those who live right! And who was higher in pride than Nebuchadnezzar, of whom we read in Daniel how God humbled him? The Lord then speaks of how Babylon was built but it was built for the fire, or destruction. Let me describe this city of the proud for you.

In my notes on Habakkuk I said this: "I quote from David Levy of Friends of Israel who in turn quotes from Dr. Harold Willmington who writes thus of Babylon, 'Superbly constructed, it spread over the area of fifteen square miles, the Euphrates River flowing diagonally across the city. The famous historian Herodotus said the city was surrounded by a wall 350 feet high and eighty-seven feet thick--extending thirty five feet below the ground to prevent tunneling, and wide enough for six chariots to drive abreast. Around the top of the wall were 250

watchtowers placed in strategic locations. Outside the huge wall was a large ditch, or moat, which surrounded the city and was kept filled with water from the Euphrates River...Within this wall were one hundred gates of brass...The famous hanging gardens of Babylon are on record yet as one of the seven wonders of the world. Arranged in an area of 400 feet square, and raised in perfectly cut terraces one above the other, they soared to a height of 350 feet. Viewers could make their way to the top by means of stairways, which were ten feet wide. Bablyon was literally a city of gold (see Isa. 14:4). The city had fifty three temples and 180 altars to Ishtar.'"

"And why is all this work that went into Babylon vanity? Well, you will remember from the book of Daniel when a hand appeared and wrote on the wall. I'll give it with its interpretation according to Daniel: MENE, God has numbered your kingdom and finished it. TEKEL, You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. PERES, Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians." That happened in this city.

"Let me tell you what happened. On October 11 or 12, in 539 BC, the Babylonians had a great big party. You can read of it in Daniel 5. But unbeknown to them, the Medes and Persians diverted the Euphrates River and that night of the big Babylonian party they entered the city on the river bed. Neither the high thick walls, the deep foundations of the walls, nor all the kings horses and all the kings men could deliver them and the city fell in one night! Here was the one city that exceeded Nineveh for magnificence, and it is overtaken in one night!"

Let me read verse 4 of Habakkuk 3 again:

4 *"Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.*

Let me read a little further:

"So, Habakkuk's second question was this: "How can a holy God

use a sinful nation to accomplish His righteous purpose?" Now let me summarize God's answer to Habakkuk's second question like this: "Habakkuk, yes, I will allow a very wicked nation, the nation of Babylon to destroy your land and your city, but at the appointed time I will deal with them. In the mean time, every person who is truly just, though all this evil is to come upon your nation, is to live by faith. The just shall live by faith. That is my answer to your second question", end quote. And may I say, this is His answer to us, wherever and in whatever circumstances we may be. The just shall live by faith.

Maybe I could summarize these two chapters like this. First, Habakkuk asks how long he is to pray before the Lord does something? And the Lord says, "I am already at work. I will bring the Chaldeans upon Judah to discipline her." And then Habakkuk asks, "Lord, how can you use a nation more wicked than Judah to discipline her?" And the Lord says, "I will use a nation worse than Judah to discipline her, and when I have done that, I will deal with that nation. I will destroy her."

In my notes I then said with regard to chapter 3:

"We now come to chapter 3. I am no expert on the prophets and would not have you think I am. But let me tell you how I see this book. Habakkuk had a real battle going on in his mind. He could not understand what God was doing and how God would let the Babylonians destroy their beloved country and their beloved city, Jerusalem. It raged in his heart. May I ask, do you have things that rage in your heart? Then you are a candidate to experience what Habakkuk, or shall we call him the Wrestler (as his name seems to mean), experienced with God. He, like Jacob of old, wrestled with God until he prevailed and found peace with God in the midst of his very troubling circumstances", end quote.

In verses 1-2 it says:

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.

2 O LORD, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O LORD,
revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of
the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy.

Of verses 3-15 I wrote: "In verses 3-7, Habakkuk had seen what God would do in the future, and he has told his readers. In verses 8-15, it seems to me, he speaks to the Lord in the past tense of what would happen when the prophecy was actually fulfilled. This prophecy may have reference to Babylon's destruction, but I cannot help but think it speaks mostly of the tribulation time."

We come then to Habakkuk's conclusion in verses 16-19 and the purpose why I gave all of what I gave. Habakkuk had two matters that greatly perplexed him. He thought he saw inconsistencies in the character of God. And like Job of old, who felt somewhat like Habakkuk, when God was done with him he realized how good and right God was. Then Habakkuk gives a conclusion to his book that is unparalleled anywhere else that I know of in the Bible. So look at how Habakkuk concludes in verses 16-19:

16 When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops.

17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls -

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills. To the Chief Musician.

It is these words we want to now consider. So we looked at the background to Habakkuk and then a brief look at the book of

Habakkuk. And now we want to make an application to our lives from this book. Habakkuk has entered a deep, dark, foreboding valley. His nation will be overcome by the Babylonians, and little could be more frightening. We will look at his frightful experience and his godly resolve.

III. THE APPLICATION OF HABAKKUK

A. His Frightful Valley

We begin this point then with the frightful valley Habakkuk entered. When I originally thought of this passage for this message I had not thought of this verse but it is most important to our subject. Look at verse 16:

16 When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops.

Habakkuk had entered his valley. He said, "When I heard, my body trembled..." The word 'body' would better be translated 'belly'. I ask you what kind of news makes your belly tremble? What did Habakkuk hear? Well, he heard that God was already preparing the Chaldeans to discipline disobedient Judah. Judah will be invaded by Nebuchadnezzar and when you know the Chaldean people you can picture the gruesome scene that is to follow. And Habakkuk's belly trembled.

Then he says, "My lips quivered at the voice." Then he says, "Rottenness entered my bones." And then he says, "I trembled in myself." What lay before the Jewish people was very frightening. While Habakkuk's people lived in pleasure and pride, Habakkuk foresaw the future and he quaked all over because of what he had heard. When our future is uncertain it can make us quake. What caused Habakkuk's body to undergo such trauma was what now lay in the future for his nation.

Now there is most difficult clause in this passage. Some translations say, "...I trembled in myself that I might rest in the day of distress..." Others say something like, "...I trembled in myself yet I will rest in the day of distress..." Lange's comprehensive commentary translates it as, "I trembled in myself that I am to wait in silence in the day of trouble." The English Standard Version says, "...I trembled in myself. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us." My knowledge of the Hebrew language is very limited. But the translation of this version makes the most sense to me in light of the whole passage.

So let me say with some trepidation that I think the meaning here may be this: When Habakkuk heard what would happen to his people by the Chaldeans, his whole body went into shock. But he would rest in the fact that God would later deal most severely with the Chaldeans. Knowing the outcome, he could rest in that. If this is correct, the promise that God would deal with the Chaldeans was a consolation to Habakkuk. God would save Israel in time from the Chaldeans. So what gave him confidence for the future was that God would not let the Chaldeans get away with what they would do and He would restore Judah. That is exactly what took place.

Maybe there is some fearful thing before some listener, and it has put your body under extremities. How does one handle such things? Well, let me say this: in all our troubles we do not usually get to see the outcome in the here and now. But we know that no matter what happens, if we live right in the end the outcome will be glorious. In the here and now we are to live by faith, and when we meet the Lord, for all eternity it will be worth it all. You see, it is the end that counts. In our service last Sunday evening our MC shared 1 Peter 4:12-13 with us, and it says:

12 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial
which is to try you, as though some strange thing
happened to you;*

13 *but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's
sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may
also be glad with exceeding joy.*

And then he said something like this, that it is the end that counts. Is it the end that counts for you? If my understanding of our passage is correct, Habakkuk rested in the fact that he knew the end. God would take care of the Chaldeans and Israel would live again.

So that brings us to Habakkuk's godly resolve.

B. His Godly Resolve

Let me read verses 16-17 with the slight retranslation of verse 16:

16 *When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the
voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in
myself. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble
to come upon people who invade us.*

17 *Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the
vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the
fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off
from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls -*

18 *Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my
salvation.*

19 *The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like
deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills.*

Here is the picture I get. Judah will be invaded by Babylon with the purpose of discipline for their sin and to bring about repentance. Yet Habakkuk will wait quietly because the Lord has also promised to deal with Babylon. And now, when the invasion takes place, life as usual will come to an end. The fig tree will likely

no longer blossom. It was such an integral part of Israeli life. The vine, such a treasured commodity in Israel would likely no longer be grown. The labor of the olive, which yielded the precious olive oil would no longer be available, and the fields would not produce food. The flocks would be cut off from the fold and the herd would no longer be in the stalls. It was a bleak and dark picture. Life as they had known it for so long would now come to an end.

But Habakkuk says, "Yet, in spite of all this, I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Now I ask, how can one rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of one's salvation when the picture before one is so bleak? Well, Habakkuk had the promise of God and so do we.

So let me point out where the real battle is fought. It is fought in the mind. Here God or the devil wins. In the Bible, the mind is called the heart. God and the devil both want our mind. How we think becomes very crucial, and especially in the valleys of life. Paul says in Philippians 2:5-7:

5 *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*
6 *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to*
be equal with God,
7 *but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a*
bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

When he says, "Let this mind be in you..." I would translate, "Let this kind of thinking be in you." Living by faith and rejoicing in the Lord takes place in the mind. We are to learn to think like Jesus thought. How did Jesus think? He thought he could let the most precious thing of His godhood go. He could let His divine glory go. He thought making Himself, the second Person of the Triune God, of no reputation, taking the form of a slave and coming in the likeness of men worth doing because the

end would make it worth it. And what was that end for which He did all that? Providing salvation for mankind. It was His provision for the spiritual needs of all lost mankind. That is how He thought. Hebrews 12:2 says of Jesus, "...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The end, the joy set before Him, will make it all worth it.

Then in Philippians 4:8 Paul says, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things."

Eight times the word 'rejoice' occurs in Philippians. In 4:4 Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" Paul was in jail. I suppose he learned something there. He says he has learned to be content in whatever state he found himself.

And Habakkuk says, "Though all these things come upon us, I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Now I ask you, how do you do that when you are in circumstances like Paul was when he penned the book of Philippians, or Habakkuk when he penned his? How do you do that when your most cherished things are gone? How do you do that when the future looks so very bleak?

Well, let me ask what it means to rejoice in the LORD in our passage in Habakkuk? To rejoice in the Lord is to be elated in Him or to exult in Him. And when we learn to do this we glorify Him and that is exactly what He created us for. So how do we exult or rejoice in Him when life is difficult?

When Habakkuk heard that God was raising up the Chaldeans to come and discipline Judah, his body was in shock at what he had heard. What all must he have feared? Loss

of a wife? Family? Loss of all the joys of normal life when the olive and the grape grow and the herds are in the stall? What did he think he would face?

You see, what caused his body to go into shock was his outward circumstances. It is amazing how joyful we can become because something good has happened to us in outward circumstances. It is also amazing how despondent we can become just because of possible loss, never mind when we experience actual loss. Is it not amazing how our external life affects our inner life? But it is here especially where we can learn to rejoice in the Lord.

And here is the question: How can I rejoice in the LORD when my external circumstances bring shock to my body? Or, can it actually be done? Well, that is what Habakkuk is telling us. Let me read verse 18 once more:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

First, he says in spite of what is coming, he will rejoice in the LORD. That is Jehovah God, the triune God. He will rejoice in Him. How do you do that? It seems to me that we can rejoice in Him only as far as we know Him. Knowing is a matter of the mind. Let me recommend first that we need to know God's Word.

Nights are often the hardest when we are in the valley. And it is worth it to take time during the day to look after times at night when sleep wants to be illusive and things are difficult. The first thing important is to know God's Word. One might memorize or ponder a passage. Since my work is in the Scriptures I can call on all kinds of Scripture at night. Usually it is something I am pondering in message preparation. When we think of our circumstances, all kinds can trouble our mind at night. It is hard to discipline our mind in such times to think of Scripture, but this is very important.

Turn to Matthew 14. One day Jesus sent the disciples to return across the Sea of Galilee. We'll pick up the story in verse 22:

22 *Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.*

23 *And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.*

24 *But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.*

25 *Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.*

26 *And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.*

27 *But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."*

28 *And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."*

29 *So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.*

30 *But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"*

31 *And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

32 *And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*

Peter was OK when he kept his eyes on Jesus. As soon as he looked at his circumstances in life he began to sink.

That is what often happens to us. And to keep our eyes on Jesus we need to know the Word of God.

Second, one can think of God's **works**. We have an example in this account of Peter walking on water. But we can begin at creation and think of God's works. The more we know God's Word, the more of His Word and works we can think of. When you read through Scripture again and again, going from beginning to end, you gain a lot of things to ponder.

Let me share what I find most helpful. I take some attribute of God and ponder it such as creation, His holiness, His righteousness and so on. When I think of God at night I often think of His attributes. I rejoice that He is righteous. I know in the end when all is said and done, everything will be made right. I listened to a speaker a while ago and he said that if the atheist is right, most people will never get justice. And there is no one who does not want justice when it comes to one's own life. We are designed to desire justice. He gave the illustration that after Adolf Hitler did away with six million people he committed suicide. And if there is no life after death, those six million will get no justice. But God is righteous. He is just, which is related to His righteousness. And you and I can rest assured that in the end, all justice will be served.

Let me tell you this, if you do not have some sin to confess; if you have not wronged someone and need to confess it you have much to be thankful for. You can rejoice in God's forgiveness and cleansing. Many times I rejoice in the fact that God is holy. I rejoice in the fact that God is omniscient. What if God had to call His angels together and say, "The sun is slowly burning out and I don't know how to fix it." What if He said, "Come, please and help Me. I created man and now more and more of their cells are going out of order and I don't know what went wrong." But God knows.

Do you know what Scripture says? Yes you know. It says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God." Do you know what is required now, if I claim I love Him? It requires that I believe Him. What if I am worried about tomorrow? What is the answer? The answer is to trust Him. How hard is that? Well it depends on how big one's problem is. When we don't trust Him we cannot rejoice in Him. When I understand He is omniscient and trust He will lead me in right paths, I can rejoice in Him. Oh, faith is a most difficult thing for us. It requires the laying aside of pride.

I have found pondering the attributes of God most helpful. You see, what we think about and feed our mind is very crucial. With the internet now you can simply type in the words, 'the attributes of God' and get a whole list of them. Then one can study them. And you can work with them in your mind until you understand them to your satisfaction. And then you can think on those things. You can remove worry and replace it with rejoicing.

In verse 18, Habakkuk says first that he will rejoice in the Lord. Then, in the second clause he says, "I will joy in the God of my salvation." Now this raises another question. Is he speaking of his personal salvation? Or is he speaking in the name of the nation, as Jamieson, Faucett and Brown say? He could be referring to the salvation God would bring when He put an end to the Chaldeans as promised earlier by the Lord.

However that may be, he is counting on his salvation. Now let me mention something here. I have told different ones in my family over and over regarding the church difficulties we have been through, that if you did not sin in any of that, and have nothing to make right, rejoice in the Lord. I might say that to all: If you do not have a sin or some sins that need to be confessed and repented of, that alone is worth rejoicing in the Lord for. From time to time I do something and it

requires repentance and oh, rejoicing is impossible until I clean it up. And oh what exultation in the Lord it causes once it is confessed and repented of.

The Lord came to deliver us from our sins, and nothing delivers like confession and repentance. And when Habakkuk says, "I will joy in the God of my salvation", he is saying, "No matter what comes, this is what I will do."

Now I ask you, how can I be sure I am truly rejoicing in the Lord? One can rejoice when things are good; but one can truly know when one is in the valley and one is rejoicing in the Lord. The prophet's body, in his outward circumstances, was in shock from bad news. But in his inner man, he was rejoicing in the Lord. This is possible.

And then look now at verse 19. He says, "The LORD God is my strength." I have only known if that is so in my own life when I was in the valley. Here weakness sets in, especially as I get older. Here there come whisperings of all kinds. And then when I begin to think about God, not my circumstances, I learn if He is in fact my strength.

Now it is hard to be thankful for difficult circumstances in life. It is hard to be thankful for the onslaughts of demons. But there are some things that can only be learned in the valley. There are things one cannot learn anywhere else. Habakkuk says:

19 The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills.

Time and again, when we gain the victory in the valley, the Lord makes our feet as sure as deer's feet and He causes us to walk on our high places. Sometimes in the valley it seems like the sun will never shine again. But if we learn to live in victory, it will shine again and we walk on our high places.

CONC: And in conclusion, let me ask, how many years did Habakkuk live with the knowledge of what would happen? Did he warn people over and over again? Did he go through many nights of deep anxieties? Was he alive when the Chaldeans came? Did he go into captivity? We do not know. What we know is that he resolved to rejoice in the Lord, the God of his salvation no matter what came.

Now you may not be in the valley right now and the message is in particular for those who are. But it may not be long until you are there. The song, *Keep On The Sunnyside* says, "The storm and its fury broke today; Crushing hopes that we cherished so dear..." So I think the assignment I am about to give could be valuable for all.

This is the assignment: Years ago we attended some meetings with the Sutura Twins, who were revivalists. And sometimes they gave this assignment: They said, "For the next week you may not ask God for anything. All you may do is thank Him." So let me give you an assignment. For the next week you could set yourself to rejoice in the Lord first thing in the morning. Then pray about any important requests. And then for the rest of the day, whenever worries set in, in your mind set yourself to either give thanks for something or to rejoice in the Lord. It is very difficult to get out of the habit of worrying or asking for things only. If you lie awake at night, discipline your mind not to dwell on difficulties in your life. Give thanks for whatever you can find to be thankful for and then practice rejoicing in the Lord. Maybe read up on some attribute of God during the day and then ponder it and rejoice in the Lord in that.