

June 1, 2008

“Rejoicing in the LORD”  
Habakkuk 3:1-19

FCF: Confused and scared – how do we go forward?

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because the LORD is God,  
(magnet) we can rest and rejoice in Him.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

How do we go forward when we’re confused and scared? It’s an issue on high bridges. Operators of some the longest and highest spans now offer a driving service. On request, a bridge attendant will get behind the wheel of your car and drive you over. Michigan’s Timid Motorist Program has helped over 800 people a year to cross the Mackinac Bridge, which runs five miles long and stands as high as 200 feet above the water. And at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, which runs four miles long and also stands 200 feet above the water, over 1000 motorists have been taken over in a year.

When you’re confused and scared, there are times the only hope you have is to turn the wheel over to someone else. And that’s not just with bridges. That’s with life.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Habakkuk 3:1-19

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Remember where we are in our study. The prophet Habakkuk has lodged two complaints with God. The LORD had the ability to act. His prophet felt the security to ask. The LORD responded to Habakkuk’s complaints. He would do something about the state of things in Judah. And what He was to do would involve the Babylonian armies. But they wouldn’t be let off. They too would be judged. In all this was a call to faith.

Flowing from all this is a prayer (READ Habakkuk 3:1). Really, it’s a song. “Shigionoth” is a musical term found in the psalms. As is the threefold “Selah.” This comes out all the more in the instructions at the end (READ Habakkuk 3:19b). So what we have is a prayer set to music to be sung by the LORD’s people. Worth knowing.

So too is another feature here found in the psalms – an assessment of the circumstances and a resolution in spite of those circumstances (READ Habakkuk 3:16-18). These “yet’s” are the clues to the theme of Habakkuk’s song – what we are to do in the midst of trials and troubles and how we are to do it. That is, knowing the LORD is God – not us, not anyone or anything else – knowing the LORD is God, we are to do two things. We are to rest and we are to rejoice. Such is the theme of Habakkuk’s song.

That said, what did this mean for Habakkuk? And what would it mean for us?

**I. YET RESTING**

How are we to rest in the midst of trials and troubles? (READ Habakkuk 3:16)

*A) What This Means*

After all that has transpired thus far, what is Habakkuk saying here?

1. Quietly waiting

What is it to “quietly wait?” The terms imply being settled, resting, being quiet and then waiting – especially after much movement. The word is used to describe the settling of the ark after the Flood, of birds landing on a tree limb, of the sigh of a weary heart.

2. Setting and significance

This is what Habakkuk is saying he will do. And the setting of this is significant. He knows there is trouble coming for Judah. And he will not be exempted. He’s going to see and feel the effects of this onslaught just as anyone else. But now he’s ready.

*B) How It Comes*

(**READ Habakkuk 3:16b**) But how does this come about?

1. Not natural for Habakkuk

Understand that this was not natural for Habakkuk. Remember how this book started in chapter 1. The prophet of the LORD was fretting, worrying, impatient with the LORD.

2. The need to remember the LORD's work

Verses 2 to 15 are the answer, the source of this newfound patience, waiting and resting. In order to rest, he had to remember. He had to remember. And that's what he's been doing through most of this song. Note the imagery here – allusions to Canaanite myths, showing just who really is in control. Verses 3 to 7 are God's coming, a theophany. Powerful images harkening back to the exodus, the LORD's freeing His people from bondage in Egypt, the great saving work of the Old Testament – nature and nations alike convulsing at His approach. Then verses 8 to 15 are God's combat, the Divine Warrior coming forth to rescue His people – violent images of a great battle waged and won.

The thing being that it is in reviewing the LORD's acts in the past that Habakkuk is able to then rest in the present. And from this then came his prayer and his song.

*Application:*

That call to patience, the need to rest in the LORD, is still with us today. And the reality is that it is no more natural for us than it was for Habakkuk. Which then means we too need to review, to remember the LORD's mighty works. All which are recorded in different forms in the Scriptures – historical prose, poetic verse, public and private letters. Where else? Reading biographies, stories, and then recalling our own as well.

All the while, probing with questions. What has the LORD done? And how has He done it? Understand that it's not always the same way. Nor is it always how we expect. Much as with the exodus – Israel on the run, their backs against the water, Egypt pressing in, disaster seemingly imminent. And then, seemingly from nowhere, comes the LORD. It's not always how we expect. But it's always how we need. Often when we have nothing else, nowhere else to go, no one else to turn to, He comes. Which brings us back to this very simple but so very critical thing to know and embrace – the LORD is God. The LORD is God. So we can remember these times and then rest in Him.

## II. YET REJOICING

We can rest and we can even rejoice as well (**READ Habakkuk 3:17-18**). This is what shows us this resting is not simply resignation. For there is a real rejoicing here.

A) *What This Means*

1. To rejoice in the LORD

But what does it mean to “rejoice in the LORD?” The word has a sense of triumphing over enemies, of reveling, glorying, exulting. In the LORD – in who He is, in what He has done, is doing, and promises to do. In the face of all else, the prophet then rejoiced.

2. Even when everything else is gone

Even when all else was gone. Now understand this is no longer poetic imagery at this point. This was painful reality. Judah's was an agrarian economy. And this is what was coming. All the external signs of things going well were to be stripped away.

(**READ Habakkuk 3:18**) How? How is this possible when all is gone?

B) *How It Comes*

*Illustration:*

(**READ Habakkuk 3:19**) There are areas of the Judean hills where nothing can live but the deer. The LORD made those places – barren and harsh though they be. And

He placed those deer in those places. But, not only that, He also made them able to tread, to run, to skip, to frolic in ways no other deer can on “high places,” with great balance.

The idea is this. God, in His infinite wisdom, at times puts us in such places. But He also, in His infinite mercy, gives us feet like deer. Enabling us not only to cope but to thrive, to triumph, to tread, to go on the heights. He both places us and enables us.

1. Not natural for Habakkuk

Now, please understand that, again, this rejoicing in the LORD was no more natural for Habakkuk than the resting. Think back to his questions, his concern, his complaints.

2. The need to see God as all-sufficient

Through this, his chief need was to see the LORD as all-sufficient – not the fig trees, the fruit, the produce, the fields, the flocks, or the herds but the LORD. Now he was surely thankful and appreciative of such things. He was no stoic, unengaged and unattached. He was very much engaged and attached. But to what? To whom? Going into this trauma, to what or to whom was Habakkuk looking? Not the provisions but the Provider. Not the sustenance but the Sustainer. He received them but he did not ultimately rely upon them. He delighted in them but he did not ultimately depend upon them.

His joy rested not in shakeable circumstances but in His unshakeable relationship with the LORD – unshakeable in that nothing could shake him loose out of God’s hands.

*Application:*

So, again, his resting in the LORD was far richer than just a resignation as to how things would be. It was a rejoicing. And followers of the LORD are to do the same. To say, *“Though gas prices rise and my retirement fund falls, though the kids are sick again, though those dearest to me seem distant, though I have no idea what to do next, though the lump be malignant, though all my best efforts come to nothing, though the heat of this crucible goes on with no relief in sight, though everyone else abandons me, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will rejoice in the LORD.”* Why? *“For He is my strength. Not even those good things. He guides my step. He will see me through.”* And so we are not grimly resigned to a miserable fate but able to remember, rest, and then deeply rejoice.

**CONCLUSION:**

Another architectural analogy. If you’ve ever lived or worked in a skyscraper, you know they sway in the wind. There’s no danger but it can be distressing for those inside. So when engineers and architects designed the Citicorp Center in New York, they decided to do something about it. At the top of the 59-story building, they installed a machine called a “tuned mass damper.” The machine is essentially a 410-ton block of concrete, attached to huge springs and floating in a film of oil. When the building sways, the block’s inertia works to damp the movement and, thus, to calm queasy stomachs.

But here’s the thing. When we need stabilizing, when everything starts swaying, we need more than 410 tons of concrete on springs and oil. We need God Himself. We need His Word. And we have it. There we see He is indeed our strength. He is the One who is behind our placing – wherever we are. Nothing beyond His control. He is the One who enables, who makes feet to tread. Nothing beyond His aid. He is the One who loves us with such a powerful, steadfast love, that we cannot slip away, we cannot slip through His hands. And how do we know? Because He has said so. And, even more, He has shown so through His Son – sent to live and die for us that even in the swaying we might know we are secured to Him. That is the gospel, the best news we could hear.

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