

## The Joy of Salvation – Habakkuk 3:16-19

**Main Idea:** Habakkuk trembles at the judgment coming upon Judah yet chooses to rejoice in the God of his salvation, finding his strength in the Lord alone.

### **I. The Trembling | Habakkuk 3:16**

Habakkuk has spent the whole book wrestling with God, and chapter 3 turns that wrestling into a sung prayer handed to the choirmaster (v. 19). Having just recounted God's mighty acts at the sea, the mountains, and the standing sun (vv. 3-15), the prophet remembers that the Babylonians are still coming, and his body responds, "I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me." Habakkuk's body expresses the depth of his fears. He remains a man who knows his God will save, yet still feels his knees buckle at what is coming.

Scripture never treats this kind of fear as proof that faith is absent. Remember that Habakkuk opened this song admitting a different fear: "your work, O Lord, do I fear" (v. 2). **The reverent fear of God is meant to guard you against fearing the things the world fears.** Isaiah told a trembling nation, "Do not fear what they fear... But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" (Isaiah 8:12-13). The problem is rarely that God's people fear too much. It is that they fear the wrong things. When Babylon seems larger than God, it's easy for your peace to unravel. **When God is trusted as larger than Babylon, the same threats are real, but they are put in their place under God's sovereign hand.**

What we do with fear, not whether we feel it, reveals what our faith is rooted in. David's body wasted away while his enemies plotted his life, but he frequently proclaimed, even in his fear, truths such as, "But I trust in you, O Lord... My times are in your hand" (Psalm 31:14-15). **God's command "Fear not" is never a call to ignore the reality of danger, but in His presence being promised,** "Fear not, for I am with you... I will strengthen you, I will help you" (Isaiah 41:10). So we are not told to empty our minds or talk ourselves into calm. We are told to look to the Lord, cast our anxieties on him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:6-7), and wait. Habakkuk does both. He trembles, and he waits for the day of trouble, certain the Lord will deal with what only the Lord can deal with. Jeremiah, who lived through the very judgment Habakkuk foresaw, wrote from the aftermath that it is good to wait for the salvation of the Lord (Lamentations 3:25-26).

### **To Ponder:**

1. What are some common ways our culture tries to deal with fear apart from God? In what ways have you seen Christians adopt those same approaches?
2. If God repeatedly commands his people to not fear, what does it practically look like for God's people to be obedient to this in the face of dangerous, terrifying, and difficult circumstances?

### **II. The Rejoicing | Habakkuk 3:17-18**

As the song continues, Habakkuk lists six losses ordered from bad to worse: the fig tree, the vine, the olive, the field, the flock, and the herd. They move from luxury to necessity until nothing is left to keep a person alive. Every item was a visible sign of God's covenant favor on the land he had given them, the very things God promised when they got to the land of wheat and vines and fig trees and olive trees (Deuteronomy 8:7-10). The reality is that losing these exact blessings was the covenant curse God warned would fall on a disobedient people, vineyards planted but no wine to drink, olive trees that drop their fruit, seed carried to a field that yields almost nothing (Deuteronomy 28:38-40). **Habakkuk understands the consequence of his people's sins, God removing these blessings, but still proclaims "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation."** This serves as a reminder that our joy should not be rooted in the blessings God gives, but in God himself, our greatest gift.

Habakkuk does not deny the loss or pretend it will not hurt. He acknowledges it and then refocuses, the same thing the psalms of lament do when they shift from fear to trust, "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation" (Psalm 13:5). This is the difference between happiness and joy. **Happiness depends on circumstances. Joy in the God of salvation does not.** That is why the New Testament sets joy in the middle of suffering rather than in its absence, "Rejoice in the Lord always," was written from a prison cell (Philippians 4:4); "Count it all joy" when trials come (James 1:2-3); apostles left being persecuted rejoicing when they were counted worthy to suffer (Acts 5:41).

This joy is a fruit of the Spirit and a gift of God (Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 15:13), and it cannot be conjured by arranging our circumstances perfectly. This is where many believers lose joy. They tie it to their children, their health, their finances, or even their ministry, and the moment one of those gifts fails to meet expectations, their joy goes with it. **Habakkuk's joy survives the loss of everything because it was never rooted in the gifts but in the Giver, the God of his salvation.**

#### To Ponder:

3. Why can biblical joy remain even when circumstances are painful? What practices help cultivate joy in God during seasons of disappointment or loss?
4. Why does suffering often reveal what we love most? And what good gifts in your life would be hardest to surrender to the Lord?

### III. The Strength | Habakkuk 3:19

The book closes with the reason a believer can wake up when everything is falling apart and not merely grit his teeth and endure, but live with joy: "God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places." Habakkuk does not say he has become a strong person because he knows God. He says God is his strength, that without the Lord he could not do this at all. The deer he pictures is the kind that keeps its footing on steep and dangerous mountain slopes, and that is exactly the image he wants, stability and surefootedness given by God in the most dangerous places a person can find himself. This is total and complete trust in the Lord rather than in oneself. We live in a culture that prizes self-reliance and tells us to dig deep and find the strength within, but **Habakkuk points the believer in the opposite direction, because the steadiness we long for was never meant to come from us; it is the Lord himself holding us up where we could never keep our own footing.**

Habakkuk is not the only one able to have this kind of assurance, he is singing words David sang. He borrows directly from Psalm 18:31-33, where David proclaimed that God was his strength and made his feet like a deer's, secure on the heights. David wrote that near the end of a life spent running from Saul, hunted and accused, delivered again and again, and his final conclusion was that the strength had never been his own. **Believers must rest in the Lord trusting and obeying even when circumstances are unfavorable, believing that the Lord will sustain them through those circumstances.** Habakkuk learned from David and sings the same song as the Babylonians bear down on him. We are meant to do the same, to look at the hardest things in our own lives and lean into the Lord, knowing that God is our strength.

But we have to know this Lord who gives strength, the God of our salvation. Back in verse 13 Habakkuk sang, "You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed." He knew God as the one who rescues, even though he did not see the fullness of that salvation the way we do on this side of the cross. **We read his song knowing that salvation has come in Christ, and that Christ is the strength of every believer.** This is why Paul could say, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). The strength is not his, it is Christ's, and resting in Christ he could endure the worst of circumstances with joy. Paul prayed the church would grasp this, that we would know the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe, the very power that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20). The same power that brought Jesus out of the grave is what holds his people steady and sustains them with joy when everything else is crumbling.

#### To Ponder:

5. How is man/woman's strength defined according to the Bible versus according to the world? How do men/women practically depend on the Lord as their strength?
6. Why is self-reliance so attractive even though Scripture repeatedly warns against it? What are the consequences of depending on one's self?
7. Habakkuk writes this song to be sung by the congregation together for the purpose of stirring one another up to glorify and remember God. Are there areas of your life where you have neglected to participate in stirring up and encouraging other believers? (Consider Hebrews 10:24-25)