In Wrath Remember Mercy

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Scripture: Habakkuk 3:1-16

3 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.

Introduction

Well, what do you do when there seems to be trouble up ahead and God seems to be delayed? You've laid your complaint out before him. Even his answer, his method seems to be shocking. Habakkuk is in that state. He's wondered at what God is doing and why he hasn't done something soon enough. And he's asked those kinds of questions, poured out his heart in that kind of way, laid before the Lord his complaint, if you will, asking the Lord to answer. And the Lord has told him how to live, how to think about that kind of coming trouble, how to think about with the the right perspective those kinds of difficulties.

He's told him in chapter 2:4 (sort of the heartbeat of Habakkuk) that the righteous shall live by his faith as a constant reminder of a promise that the righteous will live and the way of the righteous is the way of faith, to trust the Lord and his promise and that's how one becomes righteous in fact is through faith not by your own merits and your own goodness and doing what you can to earn anything. It is being declared righteous through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he's saying to those who look out in the world and are troubled, difficulty in understanding what the Lord is doing or what's going on and why he doesn't act quick enough and why he would choose this way. And the answer is the righteous shall live by his faith. But he goes on to describe in chapter two that these great promises of the Lord, that yes he is doing something and he is doing something that is going to promote his own glory - that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God's glory and in fact the Lord is in his holy temple he is in fact working – that phrase “but the Lord” in verse 20 of chapter 2 kind of sets it in context. It it puts every problem in its proper place, if you will. But the Lord, we know that kind of terminology all through the Bible.

But God, but the Lord is constantly saying to us, setting all the problems and troubles of life rightly in their place. Babylon is real. It's going to be horrendous, but the Lord is sovereign. And you might say of Habakkuk, his circumstances have certainly not changed. The Lord is not calling off the Babylonians. They are coming. And that has not changed. His circumstances have not changed, but something in Habakkuk has changed. His perspective has certainly changed. And he's heard God's

word and he's turning that into prayer. He's praising the Lord. All of chapter 3 is that put into to a prayer and that's what faith looks like. You'll find though no one knows exactly what it means to be according to Shigionoth, it's some kind of musical terminology and certainly at the end of chapter 3, this is meant to be thought of as a song, putting that before the Lord, singing it for God's people. There's something wonderful about that. Singing in the face of trouble and trial and difficulty, singing truths about God, reminding ourselves of who he is. It's the beauty and the wonder of all that we sang earlier. Though troubles assail us, the Lord will provide. We sing it to one another. It's what Habakkuk is saying before us. And now put to us in this form of prayer. How does faith pray when trouble is coming and God's work is fearsome? In fact, such faith looks to the Lord and who he is, trusting in the one who is sovereign. That phrase “in wrath remember mercy” might capture the essence of what Habakkuk is praying - how he's thinking about the situation, the trouble. Faith responds in that kind of way to coming trouble by looking to the Lord himself, pleading for his mercy, remembering his salvation and trusting his promise and that's what Habakkuk shows us in this text

I. Pleading for the Lord's Mercy | Habakkuk 3:1-2

Look at first of all in verses one and two - Habakkuk pleading the Lord's mercy The Lord is in his holy temple. And this is a prayer of faith as Habakkuk remembers and recounts God's mighty works. It's true, isn't it, that oftentimes the the Lord will set his people praying by often sending them trials.

Certainly the Apostle Paul prayed , but the Lord would drive him to it even more with a thorn in his flesh. You would pray often and frequently about that. We see the the Lord's people being driven to prayer in times of trouble and the Lord will use that in our own life. And that's what he's doing. And Habakkuk is rather honest in his prayer. Oh Lord, I have heard the report of you. I've heard your announcement. I've heard your report that you've given. The announcement you've made concerning your work, which is the Babylonians are coming.

And I fear it. He says, he's not pretending. He's referring to that work that the Lord said was coming, that he was going to do in his day back in chapter 1 verse 5. That's the work he's referring to. Habakkuk had laid out his first complaint and the Lord responded with saying, "I'm doing a work in your day. Be be astounded and wonder. I'm doing a a work in your day that you wouldn't believe it if I told you. That work is what he's pointing backwards to. The work is the Lord bringing the Babylonians in judgment.

And Habakkuk, though yes you might say, there is some reverential fear in that way - a godly fear and reverence and awe towards God. Here he's saying he's afraid. It's used in that kind of context because you find him at the end trembling - his body quivering and shaking at all of this. That terminology of trembling is used throughout. In fact, the word wrath is connected to that. It means something like that of trembling and Habakkuk is being honest.

I see the work coming and I can't avoid it. It's going to happen and it terrifies me. That's what he's saying. He's pouring out his fears honestly before the Lord. I fear that work that you're doing. I wonder if we think that sometimes, if we realize how good it is to be honest before the Lord and things that frighten, that make us afraid sometimes. We think we have to keep the stiff upper lip perhaps that maybe a slight bit of stoicism. There are lots of ways I suppose you can deal with problems, things that are really and truly frightening and scary in life.

Maybe try to explain it away, deny it, avoid it. Perhaps lots of ways that aren't good and appropriate. Habakkuk teaches us, I think, to be honest before the Lord of what makes us afraid,

but to interpret it in light of who God is. That's where Habakkuk is leading us. He's praying in light of that. I've heard the report, your report and your work, oh Lord, do I fear? And he begins to to pray and ask the Lord to do something in the midst of the years.

Revive it. What is he praying? I don't think he's praying for the Lord to keep his work going though that is somewhat true. And certainly there's a sense in which a prayer of faith is bowing humbly before the Lord in reverence and adoration and asking him humbly to do his work and can carry that on. But I think what he's praying here in light of of Habakkuk's own fear and trembling in the face of this coming judgment of the Babylonians coming, they were a brutal people. And you can read of that elsewhere in scripture of their brutality and what they would do and carting people off to exile.

And Habakkuk has that in mind in the midst of the years. He's saying in the midst of those years of judgment and the Babylonians coming, Lord, revive not it but him. I think he's referring back to chapter 2 verse4 and the one who is righteous by faith through faith in Christ. He's praying. That word “revive” is something like keep alive, keep going. I don't think he's saying as he's experiencing and expressing being afraid of what the Babylonians are going to come and do, what they are, what they mean, what they are like.

Oh Lord, preserve your people. Keep the one who's righteous by faith. Keep him living by faith. Help him to persevere. Cause him, in fact, to persevere. Keep him going in the midst of it all. Keep him living. Make the remnant believer go on living in the desolate time of the Babylonians. That's what he's praying. It's what Habakkuk teaches us to pray as well. I think that the Lord would keep us living by faith. He would point us to that again and again in a variety of ways. Primarily, doesn't he tell us to keep our eyes fixed on the author and finisher of our faith, the Lord Jesus Christ? In order to run the race with endurance - to keep going. We're trusting that the Lord is going to hold us ultimately and he would call us to keep our eyes fixed on Christ. And so he's praying even in that context with a sense of mercy from the Lord to persevere and preserve and to keep us going, to keep God's people going and trusting and to know he says in the midst of the years, make him know. I think that is the idea. Make him know. Make him know how to function and navigate the circumstances and the trials and the troubles as they come, as hard as they are. Let the righteous one by faith in Christ make make him to live and go on and persevere and know what you're doing and to know you, the Lord God. Isn't that the way that the book of Proverbs would remind us in Proverbs 3:5-6, that we would not lean on our own understanding but in all our ways to know God.

That's what Habakkuk is praying and he's praying that because of what he knows about God, because of what God has said already. I think he's referring back to all that God has said previously, certainly in chapter 2 verse 4, that the righteous will live by his faith. Oh Lord make that so - make that happen. He's praying according to the promises of God, according to the word of God. That's how our prayers should be. That's what prayer looks like. And that sort of thing is what's pushing him in his prayer. He's remembering what God has said, but he's certainly remembering who God is, what God is like. That's why he prays in wrath, remember mercy. There's some impulse in Habakkuk that knows that God is a God of mercy.

And in the midst of that wrath or perhaps even trembling, in the midst of the trembling scenario, in the midst of the the judgment that's coming, in the midst of the Babylonians, Lord, remember mercy. Habakkuk appeals to the character of God. There's some kind of gut sense, you might say, from Habakkuk that God is merciful. That behind all of it, the Babylonians and and all the problems and the troubles coming that behind all of that is infinite mercy. You remember, perhaps, Lamentations 3. It's a wonderful chapter and passage. It gets at the heart of, I think, what the saints know to be true of God and what the impulse is towards him. In Lamentations 3, the Lord will not

cast off forever. But though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men. He doesn't afflict from his heart.

Sometimes we have a wrong view of God and who he is - that he must delight in bringing us trouble again and again and he delights in it. No, he doesn't. He does not afflict from his heart. There's something behind it. He is compassionate, abounding in steadfast love. He is full of mercy. We see that exemplified in the Lord Jesus Christ - how often sinners and sufferers were crying out to Jesus for mercy and he was quick to give it and show it.

He's a God full of mercy. He knows how to be merciful in the time of trouble. His mercy is warm toward his people. It is normal, not exceptional. And so we might not know everything that God is doing in this world and this life and all the troubles, but we know what God has said. We know what God is like. And it's appropriate to pray “In wrath. Lord, remember mercy”, remembering who God is.

II. Remembering the Lord's Salvation | Habakkuk 3:3-15

Well, he takes us from that to think about the Lord's salvation. Not only the Lord's mercy, but his salvation. And if you look at verses 3 through 15, he begins to revel in who God is even more. And in a deeper way, he's explaining something deep and wonderful about who God is. Certainly, he is full of mercy. But notice - this is a God who is awesome in glory. There's some splendor and majesty about him. And I think Habakkuk has this view of God that has put put all the troubles in their right place in their proper perspective.

Babylon might be terrifying. It will be are terrifying. But the Lord, you might say, is more terrifying, more glorious, more awesome, more wonderful. Creation is being described here as being disturbed and trembling at his coming and his presence. And the Bible in various places describes that about God in his presence in a metaphorical kind of way. An analogy and something of the wonder and the glory of the Lord as he comes and draws near.

He is awesome in glory. But there's something about his power that's invincible that has bolstered Habakkuk. Not only his glory. You might remember the mount of transfiguration in Matthew 17 and Jesus giving his disciples a little glimpse of his glory to remind them certainly of the glorious one, the holy one, who he is. You see in the book of Isaiah chapter 6 and Revelation chapter 4, this picture of Jesus on the throne glorious and majesty and splendor. It's to put things in the right perspective to see who's on the throne and ruling and whose power is inevitable, invincible. The description here is of a divine warrior. Think of the language here used throughout in verses 8-12 of a bow and arrows and spear and marching and trampling.

The nations cannot withstand him. His power is fearsome. And Habakkuk seems to be overwhelmed by this description of who God is and his holy majesty and his power, his glory. Martin Lloyd Jones said of this text, "Our troubles can nearly all be traced to our persistence in looking at the immediate problems themselves instead of looking at them in the light of God." So long as Habakkuk was looking at Israel and the Chaldeans, he was troubled. Now, he has forgotten Israel as such and the Calaldian and his eyes are on God. He is now concerned for the glory of God and for nothing else.

That's where the Lord would drive us in the very midst of our troubles and problems singing as it were of his glory and power and majesty, realizing that there might be what our world calls superpowers and we might be even living in such a nation. We pray for our nation, but the Lord is the true and real superpower. Not to make that a cliche or light of it but that is true, isn't it? That is

what Habakkuk is realizing and singing about and praying of the Lord's invincible power. And it's the wonderful news, isn't it, of the way the gospel is described? The gospel, Paul would say in Romans 1, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

And that's what the Lord is doing in his saving purpose. Do you see all this description? Look at where it culminates. Look in verse 13 and all the way down to verse 15. You went out for the salvation of your people. He's ready to destroy the world. He's ready to destroy - bring the earth to nothing for the sake of his people to save them. He's wanting to remind Habakkuk of that great truth of what he's doing in this world.

Yes, the Babylonians are frightening, troublesome, but the Lord is saving his people in a mighty way. And this wonderful description of God, I'm reminded of in Deuteronomy 32 and 33 in the song of Moses as it's called. And he describes the Lord, talking of Moses, singing this song and describing how the Lord would come to the aid of his people and describes Israel as Jeshurun, and saying the Lord rides through the heavens to rescue his people, to save his people.

How concerned he is for you, how concerned he is for your salvation. It's a call to trust the Lord in what he's doing in the midst of trying times, troubling times, difficulties in our world, all around us, problems in life. Yes. What is God doing? He's saving. And he will save his people always in wrath. “Oh Lord, remember mercy” he's saying.

III. Awaiting the Lord's Promise | Habakkuk 3:16

Well, that leads to the final thing we see in the passage.

We see Habakkuk awaiting the Lord's promise. That's what faith looks like. That's how he's praying, looking and pleading with the Lord for his mercy and concentrating on what the Lord's doing in this world, his saving purposes, and then awaiting according to the Lord's promise. Waiting on the Lord's promise. Look in verse 16 again as he describes this wonderful, wonderful passage. 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 - not us but people who invade us. He's praying according to the promise that the Lord will deal with the enemies. The Lord knows how to take care of the enemies. It's much like Asaf in Psalm 73. Habakkuk is praying along the same lines, thinking and remembering, concentrating on God's promise that will never fail and to wait. It's a description of the life of the believer.

To wait quietly, not literally quietly, but in calmness and confident hope and trust in the Lord who says he's coming. The way the Bible ends for us, the way the Lord Jesus tells us what he tells us and how he tells us to think and live. I'm coming soon. We say, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus." He knows how to save and deliver his people even now to uphold them and to hold them forever and to rescue them and deliver them.

Conclusion

Faith does not necessarily remove our fear of frightening providence, but it teaches us to bring that fear before the holy and merciful God and quietly entrust ourselves to him, looking to Christ, the author and finisher of our faith, who works all things together for our good.

Let us trust him.