



The prophet Habakkuk could see the coming onslaught. God's people were about to be overthrown by the Babylonians. Habakkuk cried out to the Lord for justice, but accepted his fate as judgment and correction. His cries are our cries today. We pray from a position of longing and hope, wanting above all that God would send his Kingdom. We watch and wait for heaven to come down. We long for the Kingdom Come.

Kingdom Come - I Will Rejoice • Habakkuk 3:17-19 • Jennifer Holz • Nov. 26, 2017

This year we have an extra Sunday in between Thanksgiving and our first Sunday of Advent. We get the gift of lingering in thankfulness. We get to push the pause button and have an extra moment in our busy lives to take a breath of praise.

Every year the pace of the holiday season seems to get faster and faster. We get Halloween out of the way, and make a mad dash to Christmas. It seems that Thanksgiving barely registers on our holiday list before we surge ahead into the Christmas season. We long for the joy that Christmas promises to bring. In the midst of all the darkness and conflict, we long for a savior. I love this prayer by a little girl who clearly didn't think we had enough holidays in our calendar: *Dear Lord, please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter. There is nothing good in there now.* Ginny.

But let's not get to Christmas too fast. Let's enjoy giving thanks a moment more. As God's people, **giving thanks** in everything, marks who we are and who we are becoming. So, be invited into a longer moment this year to give thanks and to bring a sacrifice of praise to the altar of the Lord. Advent will be here soon enough.

Today, we finish our sermon series in *Habakkuk*, and our final Word gives us a glimpse into the heart of this prophet who sees the storm coming. In this man whose very name means "embrace," we see a faithful follower of God whose life of praise is rooted in a faithful God Who never leaves or forsakes His people even in the darkest moments.

So, let's read from *Habakkuk*. 3:17-19. We find the prophet in prayer before the Lord. These are his final words.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk's Prayer

The prophets were people of prayer. They wrestled with God, they bared their souls and emotions. They spoke up when they saw something not fair, or just, or right. For Habakkuk's closing words and thoughts to be in the form of a prayer helps us understand that he lived a life of faithfulness. He waited upon the Lord. That he prayed in the face of the coming storm speaks volumes to us about how we might live faithfully in the midst of difficulty. Prayer is how we engage with God. Prayer is the way our hearts connect with the heart of God. The prophets prayed, Paul prayed, and Jesus prayed.

The language of prayer in Scripture is vast and accessible. No prayer is off limits with God—there are no words that God doesn't want to hear from you. Wherever you are, whatever you are feeling, whatever darkness is surrounding you or coming toward you—everything can be brought to God in prayer. Throughout Scripture, we have many models of prayer: Isaiah argues with God, Moses bargains. Habakkuk demands an answer, and King David praises and confesses. Jesus prays in surrender in the garden, and the psalmist waits on the Lord. Zechariah prays a prayer of submission

and the psalmist prays out of desperation and bewilderment. The disciples pray the Lord's Prayer as we do.

I grew up in the Village 7 area. It was a brand new neighborhood when we moved there in the early 1970's. Throughout the neighborhood, a series of pathways called "the Greenway" were created to connect everything together. It was a walkable neighborhood long before that became a thing. My brothers and I walked to everything: our school, the pool, playgrounds, the arcade, Red Top Hamburgers, 7-11. We moved back into that area several years ago and the pathways are still there. In fact during this past summer, they were getting renovated and refreshed. It's a very different neighborhood in many ways, but the Greenway is still there and connecting so much.

I think a lot about prayer being like the Greenway. Over time, much time, the paths of prayer that the saints have carved out become familiar pathways to God. Long before any of us came into being, long before we even knew we could pray to the Lord, there were people in deep relationship with God carving out prayer paths that would be walked on for the centuries to come. As we pray, we walk the well-worn paths of the faithful before us. When we bend a knee to the Lord, our words, our emotions, our situations are not new to God. We pray after those who have sought the Lord in joy and in pain, in uncertainty and in praise. There is comfort in knowing we are not alone.

Whatever your challenge, whatever your difficulty, whatever your despair, you are not the first to cry out to the Lord. Habakkuk and others teach us to pray. They give us words and patterns when we don't know what to say. Habakkuk's prayer in chapter 3 provides a pattern of prayer: He remembers the great deeds of the Lord; he calls on the mercy of the Lord. He wrestles through his questions. He vows to wait patiently for what the Lord brings. In Habakkuk's prayer we discover that we too can bring everything to God, and that God hears and responds. Habakkuk (along with all the great prophets of the Scriptures) teaches us to pray.

By the end of his prayer, Habakkuk is naming the reality of all that surrounds him. He is holding nothing back. He paints a harsh picture of his moment. As he looks around his eyes see nothing but emptiness—a barren desert, a hollow wasteland, not a world of plenty, but a world of want.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,

No fruit, no drink of gladness, no field to harvest, no meat on the table. It is the very opposite of what our Thanksgiving tables looked like this past week. If Habakkuk had invited us to holiday at his house this past week, we would not leave stuffed or full. We would walk away with empty stomachs. Even worse, all we would see for the foreseeable future would be emptiness and devastation with no end in sight.

How do you deal with emptiness and hopelessness? When you are completely spent, done, at the end of your rope... where do you go? What do you do? How do you deal with

the ache, the need, the despair?

We all have our strategies: Work harder, get angry, disappear into silence, blame, read, run, journal, drink lots of coffee, study more, cry, pray, vent out to a friend, set goals. We have lots of strategies. I won't bore you with mine, but one little word clues us in that something has altered Habakkuk's path to total despair (which would seem totally justified in this moment).

There is a small word here that breaks the logical progression of all that has gone before it: the word: YET...nevertheless, in spite of, however, even so...*I will rejoice in the Lord*. Where Habakkuk's prayer path finally ends, is not in total hopelessness, but in total praise. In the midst of all that is happening and all that he sees, Habakkuk leads us to a place of joy.

A Place of Joy

It's a surprising end to his sentence in many ways. Habakkuk holds in his hands both desperation and joy. Misery and gladness. Utter desolation and unreserved delight. *How is this possible?*

You see, the Lord has given Habakkuk a vision of fullness (2:14), that he clings to...*the earth will be full of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*. Picture the ocean. That's a lot of water. God's presence in the world is like an ocean: Thick and teeming. Soaked and Saturated. It reminds me of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetic words: "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every bush afire with God." God's presence is thick in our world. But sometimes it is not obvious. Everything around us at times seems to speak of God's absence. Habakkuk doesn't deny it—this is not sugar-coated, denial. This is clear articulation of the misery of this moment. And yet, his prayer and his heart find fullness and joy; strength and steady ground.

yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Habakkuk's heart is not guided by what he physically sees around him, but by what God has given him to "see"—a vision of the fullness of the glory and the presence of the Lord. He may not feel it, but in the presence of a God who hears him, who speaks to him, who answers his pleas and fills him with hope—Habakkuk chooses joy.

Author, Ann Voskamp, in her book *1000 Gifts*, (a book about gratitude), reminds us that the word "rejoice" is a verb, not a "pulsating emotion." "True saints know that the place where all joy comes from is far deeper than that of feelings; joy comes from the place of the very presence of God." (p. 176).

She recaptures Habakkuk's words like this: "Though my marriage tree may not bud and though my crop of children may fail and my work produce little yield, though there is no money in the bank and no dream left in the heart, though others may choose different ways to live their life, til my last heaving breath, I will fight to the death for this: 'I will take joy.'" (p. 176).

In a world that is dark and difficult, where we can see the storms coming, where there is hardship around each corner, how will the people of God respond? What will they do? How will they position themselves in the world? How will they help turn the evil tide?

God' people will choose joy! Unlikely, unexpected, and overflowing joy. God's people will lead the world in delight, exultation, elation and joy. In a world swirling in darkness, evil, emptiness and hardship...the people of God will choose to rejoice.

Is joy really our strategy?

Habakkuk's answer would be yes! We are and always have been a people marked by joy. "I will be joyful in God my Savior." Long before Jesus was born, before God enacted the great rescue of humanity in the time and space of a stable and a manger, Habakkuk knew that God was his Savior. All the prophets knew and proclaimed the good news of the Lord as their Savior.

- You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress. Isaiah 17:10
- This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous **Savior**. Jeremiah 23:6
- But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Micah 7:7

We don't think much about the prophets being joy-filled people, but their words, their lives and their joy was anchored in the promise of a savior. And our joy is also anchored, not in our circumstances, but in a savior who has come to rescue us, Jesus. We will rejoice in God our Savior!

Feet Like a Deer

Habakkuk finishes his prayer with an image, a picture of a deer on a mountain. He uses this literary device called a simile, where one thing is compared to another to make a description more vivid in our imaginations.

The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.

Habakkuk begins his prophecy with a desperate voice: *How long O Lord, must I call for help but you do not listen? How Long must I cry out violence, but you do not save?* And he ends his prophecy with the picture of a deer running on a mountain in strength, in grace and in vigor. A beautiful animal living fully into what it was created to do.

He calls on our imaginations to "see" what God has made and to watch as God pours his strength into His creation. And then he says, "you are the deer."

He makes my feet like the feet of a deer.

The deer's feet navigate every rock and every dangerous crevice as it climbs to the top of the mountain. The deer is strong and nimble, sure and graceful. Hannah Hurnard was a missionary to Israel in the early 1900s. She wrote of her experience of watching these sure-footed creatures: "From the garden of the back of the mission house at the foot of Mount Gerazim we could often watch the gazelles bounding up the mountainside, leaping from rock to rock with extraordinary grace and agility. Their motion was one of the most beautiful examples of exultant and apparently effortless ease in surmounting obstacles which I have ever seen."

She would go on to write her allegory, *Hinds' Feet on High*

Places, about the little girl named Much Afraid, who served the Great Shepherd. In many ways the story mirrors her own life—of how she doubted, didn't like people, was utterly ashamed of a stutter she had—and how the Lord found her at 19 years old and gave her “feet like a deer” to face her fears and follow the Great Shepherd.

He makes my feet like the feet of a deer.

Think about your feet—according to some experts, the average person walks 7500 steps per day. Those who wear Fitbits are consciously trying to take 10,000 steps each day. Walking is good for the heart, good for our overall health. Walking strengthens our bodies. Picture your feet scaling the rocks of a mountain path (some of you do this all the time) effortlessly, sure of your strength, moving up and up, higher and higher.

Walking in faith and obedience also brings strength to one's life. Such power comes from the Lord. Habakkuk wants us to know that the Lord is the giver of strength—strength to walk, to climb, to get to the high places of faith. In the midst of great difficulty, the Lord makes our feet strong, able to move, to walk forward, to follow his path. In Habakkuk's prayer, our job is to rejoice, God's job is to be our strength and together we run up the mountain.

In the midst of difficulty—Habakkuk's steps are easy to follow: Pray, rejoice, walk.

And then Habakkuk writes one final instruction at the end of his manuscript. It's not part of his prayer, or his prophetic book, but it probably shouldn't be missed.

For the Director of Music. On my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk's prayer is being sent to the director of music, or the chief musician, the minister of music. It is to be set to music, it would seem. His prayer is to be sung, or at least accompanied by stringed instruments. We pray, rejoice, walk...and we sing! The reality is God's people sing. They always have.

God's People Sing

If you've hung around church at all, this is no surprise to you. We sing. We love music. Music helps us to bridge our reality with God's reality. Habakkuk knew this—singing God's truth helps us to grab onto joy. A song fills in the gap between head and heart; mind and soul. In Psalm 96 we are commanded to sing: *Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.*

That is what we do when we gather in worship—we sing for joy the song of the Lord. As we prepare leave this place today, we do so with a song in our lips and the joy of the Lord in our hearts.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.

Amen.

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STUDY GUIDE

KINGDOM COME • I Will Rejoice

Habakkuk 3:17-19

UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in God's Word

- Read our passage for the week, Habakkuk 3:17-19. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one or two more times.
- What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- What is Habakkuk's response to the loss and suffering? If someone said to you that Habakkuk is just being naïvely positive, what would you say in response?
- In the face of scarcity, in the midst of loss, Habakkuk chooses to respond to the abundance of God. What does it look like to choose to rejoice in the Lord? How do we do this in practical ways?
- What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage or from our time together that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

IN: Connect with the Family of God

- Reflect on your own story: When you didn't “feel” like rejoicing in the Lord, how have brothers and sisters encouraged you to joyfully respond to the Lord in worship?

OUT: Connect with the World around us by Joining God in God's Mission

- Imagine a different way of living. If you were to go about your day from a place of abundance—trusting and responding to who God is and who we are in Him (Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. –Luke 12:32), what would change?
- How would your treatment of people change?
- How would your response to your circumstances change?