

I Will Rejoice in The Lord

Andrew Neville 1/11/20

Habakkuk 1-3

Sermon Summary

What if – we were told by the Prime Minister that the country was returning to Level 4 tomorrow. How would you cope? How would you cope if the country collapsed economically?

The prophet Habakkuk lived at the time of the rise of Babylonian power and predicted its invasion of Judah in the period 597 BC to 605 BC.

In 975 BC the nation of Israel split in two. Jeroboam became King of Israel – the 10 tribes that became the Northern Kingdom, while Rehoboam became King of the Southern Kingdom, comprised of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. In 732 BC the Assyrians trashed the Northern Kingdom and dispersed the Jews elsewhere. The remaining two tribes, despite the lesson learned from the treatment meted out to Israel, failed to make any changes and slowly backslid into the same conditions and worship practices of their former countrymen.

About 626 BC, Habakkuk receives an oracle from the Lord. He must have been under a burden for his country for some time because he opens by beseeching God with the cry, “How long O Lord must I call for help?” Habakkuk is obviously in anguish over the plight his country is in. Something more than a lockdown is coming.

Continuing in Habakkuk 1:1-4, the prophet questions God as to why he has to look at injustice, destruction and violence, strife and conflict while God does not seem to be listening to him. It is the sort of dilemma we face today.

But then God does finally reply to him with a message that Habakkuk probably was not expecting (verses 5-11). “Look at the nations” God states; see what is unfolding before your eyes. God is going to use a wicked foreign power to cleanse Judah. It is not going to be pleasant. It is NOT the justice Habakkuk expected.

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1 details the prophet’s second complaint where he suggests that the Lord’s eyes are too pure to look on evil, so how could He use Babylon to execute judgment on them? When you don’t see your own sins, the consequences are often bewildering. We always want justice in the world to fall on the unjust the way we want it. But God’s way is frequently out of “left field” and leaves us hurt and stunned sometimes. Yes, justice is coming to the world, but one thing is certain, the righteous will live.

The Lord answers Habakkuk’s second complaint in Hab. 2:2-20. Habakkuk is the first prophet to receive the knowledge of the blessing that “the righteous will live by faith” (Hab. 2:4). The phrase is an insert among the practices and consequences of those who are “puffed

up". Within that chapter, 5 **woes** are pronounced and the consequences of them. Judgment is coming.

The apostle Paul was much moved by the idea that salvation comes by faith in God's grace not by works. He wrote: "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17).

Martin Luther was a monk who initially hated the God who executes judgment, until he read and **saw (understood)** Paul's living by faith principle enunciated in Romans 1:17. Whenever humans live by the secular idea that success, achievement and satisfaction are based on our prowess – and not in God – we are doomed to failure. You cannot put your faith in your works. True life cannot be attained that way.

All of Habakkuk chapter 3 is a prayer put to music. God is described as a divine warrior coming to bring justice to an evil world. Habakkuk 3:16 begins the climax. The prophet suggests we wait patiently for the day of calamity to fall upon us. This is tough to take in; it means we are to remain faithful no matter what tragedy is standing before us.

So, what is this faith, and how does it work when under attack?

1. **Faith produces a patient calm.** No matter how much your heart pounds, your lips quiver, your legs tremble, God is in control of history.
2. **Faith produces a joyful heart.** In 586 BC Babylon isolated Jerusalem. In 605 BC it crushed the city and dispersed its inhabitants where they eventually sat down by the waters of Babylon – and wept (Psalm 137:1). [Note: it was at this time and place that the people of God worked out what it was to be a Jew and what Judaism meant. P.] When all goes wrong, when life as you know it finishes for good, when chaos and disorder rule the streets, if you still have faith, you will relax in the strength of the Lord and be joyful in God your savior.
3. **Faith produces confidence.** Despite bone-chilling events, and times of doubt and discomfort (they will come), a Christian must go to God's Word and receive a fresh understanding of Him. Then you will come to a place of hope and comfort. This is sufficient no matter how the storms of life buffet.

Discussion Questions

1. **Read Habakkuk 1:1-4.** How does Habakkuk's complaint sound like a complaint we might have today?
2. **Read Hab. 1:5-11.** What is the gist of the Lord's answer? Would it satisfy you to have this kind of reply? Explain.
3. **Read Hab. 1:12-2:1.** Why is Habakkuk reminding God of some of God's characteristics?
4. **Read Hab. 2:2-20.** To whom do the five woes apply? The people of Babylon? The people of Israel? The people of America or NZ? Do they apply to individuals or nations?
5. **Reread Hab. 2:4 and Romans 1:17.** Why was the apostle Paul so inspired by this passage in Habakkuk and why was Martin Luther, in turn, so inspired by it as well? How important is this concept to our faith?
6. **Read Hab. 3:1-19.** Which passage in this prayer/song most inspires you?

Prayer Points

Please pray:

That Northcross church members emulate the mindset and attitude of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3:16-19)

For those in the church with physical health issues, for those with spiritual health issues and those with mental health issues.

That we might be a church which recognises that there is more to people than we see, and that we should show acceptance and compassion.