

When God Seems Silent: A Study of Habakkuk

Lesson Thirteen: The Struggle is Over! (3:17-19)

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Introduction:

- I. One of the greatest blessings is ☞ “rest.” This is described as ☞ awaiting those who faithfully follow God’s will (Revelation 14:13b). Modern man seeks this rest but it is a ☞ search in vain because he fails to understand what genuine rest truly is.
 1. Many try to define “rest” in terms of this world. An old legend says that Rabbi Judah and his brethren, the seven pillars of wisdom, sat in the temple on a feast day disputing about rest. One said, that it was to have sufficient wealth, yet without sin; the second said, it was fame and praise of all men; the third, it was the possession of power to rule the state; the fourth, that it consisted only in a happy home; the fifth, that it must be in the old age of one who is rich, powerful, famous, surrounded by children’s children; the sixth said, that all spoken thus far was vain unless a man kept all the ritual laws of Moses. The Rabbi Judah said, “Ye have all spoken wisely, but 1 thing more is necessary: he only can find rest, who, to all these things, adds this, that he keeps the traditions of the elders. There sat in the court a young boy hearing all the talk. He looked and said, “Nay fathers, he only loveth rest who loves his brother as himself, and God with his whole heart and soul. This is greater than wealth and fame, and power, happier than a happy home, happy without it, better than honored age, he is a law to himself, and above all tradition.” The doctors of the law were astonished (#5017, 558).
 2. Very few are able to find the “rest” of 3:17-19. They still attempt to explain life’s problems with mortal wisdom.
 3. ☞ 3:17-19 is a grand text that all need to study and incorporate its valuable points.
- II. Habakkuk had begged God to explain life’s perplexities (1:2a). He had struggled to understand and God had revealed that understanding to the prophet.
 1. “Out of that experience came an expression of faith that rises like a tower in the annuals of time” (Yoder, 155).
 2. The prophet now reclines in ☞ a tranquil rest that God’s will is going to be as victorious in the future as it has been in the past. “The coming of God to Habakkuk confirms his belief that the God of Exodus is the living God and gives him strength to remain faithful in spite of anything that may come.” (Gowan, 83).
 3. What led Habakkuk to such tranquility so soon after his expressions of perplexity? Look at his knowledge of three facts that provided this wonderful “rest” to him.

Body:

- I. ☞ Material objects do not offer true rest (3:17; 2:5, 6, 9, 13).
 - A. Habakkuk now realizes that genuine rest is ☞ not found in material possessions.
 1. “Utter desolation” would come and all material goods would be taken. When Babylon invaded Judah all would be destroyed and life would be left bare (Deuteronomy 20:19; Isaiah 9:10; Jeremiah 6:6 for prophecies of this).
 2. The noble trees would be destroyed and thus symbolize Judah’s utter calamity.
 3. Habakkuk understood that things would become even worse before they improved. The agricultural economy would collapse!
 - B. Even though total ruin would come, Habakkuk still found joy, why? Because there are two choices one can make in life (2:4, 5) and Habakkuk had chosen wisely!
 1. Those who are proud of worldly possessions are joyful only if material goods are secure. Yet their joy is shallow for when the figs cease to bloom their joy will vanish! (Hosea 2:11, 12). The ruin of the material brings an end to their joy! (Revelation 18:7-19). “We pursue happiness by running after pleasure and foolishly seek it where it cannot be found; as silly children think to catch the

sun, when they see it setting in the distance. They travel on and tire in vain for the thing they seek is in another world.” (#9333, 426)

2. Those whose joy lies within a deep devotion to God are secure when the material things vanish. These have an abiding possession that cannot be removed and are able to triumph even in the darkest circumstances (Saints, Hebrews 11:13-16; David, Psalm 42:7-9; Asaph, Psalm 73:25; Paul and Silas, Acts 16:25).
3. Habakkuk confidently said, “Even though I starve to death, yet will I trust in God!” This confident trust provides great happiness! Let us enjoy it in our lives!
4. ☞ Beware lest your happiness is based upon material things rather than upon devotion to God and you discover just how empty your joy is! Two illustrations:

A young gentleman was discussing the pleasure of the fox hunt. A minister present could not see the fun of being unhorsed and bruised or immersed in a quagmire. He exclaimed, “Is this the way to happiness? Do you call this pleasure? I feel grateful I have discovered another way to happiness than the one you have mentioned.” The young sportsman expressed a wish to know of a better way. “I have,” answered the minister, “a map in my pocket which will describe the way, and the only true way to bliss.” Having raised his curiosity, he took out a small pocket NT and pointed to these words, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” The minister then placed the New Testament into the hands of the young man. Most people want happiness in some other way than through Christ (#9339, 427).

Oromazes (the major god in Persian paganism who is associated with light and opposed to darkness) had an enchanted egg in which he boasted that he had enclosed all the happiness of the world. When the egg was broken it was found to contain nothing but the wind. Many pursue the promise of happiness, offered by the world, only to find they are empty! (#9343, 427).

II. ☞ Happiness can exist regardless of your circumstances in life (3:18).

- A. Habakkuk’s circumstances were not good and the prospect of their ☞ improving was a foolish wish.
 1. Injustice would continue; the economy would worsen; the national conscience would fail; the government’s corruption would deepen.
 2. Everyday living would become a “chore.” There was nothing positive about life. Nothing! Yet, the prophet found peace. Was he deluded? Did he ignore reality? How could it be?
- B. Habakkuk’s happiness ☞ was founded in God’s power NOT life’s circumstances.
 1. This is a significant point.
 2. Life’s circumstances may be terrible yet we can find joy (Philippians 1:12).
- C. How can we develop this inner happiness?
 1. ☞ It begins with a knowledge of God that instills a trusting confidence in His power. Philippians 1:16, “am set” literally “have been placed”. Paul trusted that God knew what He was doing, he thus had a blessed contentment (Philippians 4:11b).
 2. ☞ Knowledge of God brings “peace” to the saint’s heart (John 14:27; 15:11). This peace comes as we “depend” upon God to provide. Many are frustrated because they fail to depend on God. Many are deluded into believing they have “Peace when there is no peace.”

Jeremiah 6:14, “They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ but there is no peace.”

Isaiah 48:22, “There is no peace for the wicked,” says the Lord.”

Isaiah 57:2, “He enters into peace; They rest in their beds, each one who walked in his upright way.”

3. Peace naturally ☞ leads to a trustful focus. Many only focus on their problems instead of looking for the possibilities that God can do. “Rejoice” (3:18) refers to an excitement. Why had he changed so drastically? Because his focus had changed!
 4. ☞ Refocus leads to abiding inner happiness. Habakkuk could not rejoice in circumstances, but he could rejoice in God (Philippians 4:4-6). We may not rejoice in our circumstances in life, but we can rejoice in who the Lord is; what He has or will do for us! (Isaiah 12:2; Psalm 5:12b).
- D. Earthly life is filled with tribulation and discouragement. ☞ Only as we look above earthly trials and hope in God’s power, are we able to find genuine happiness! (Isaiah 54:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Psalm 13:6; 17:14, 15; 31:19).
- E. ☞ If the Scriptures are a delusion, where will we seek our happiness? In wealth? It is a splendid incumbrance. In honor? It is a glittering bubble. In the pleasures of the world? They are like the brine of the ocean to a thirsty palate, will irritate rather than satisfy. In entertainment? This is only a temporary opiate, not a lasting cure. Only in the precious promises of God’s Truth and its renewing energy on our hearts; in the discoveries of God’s love to poor sinners; in the displays of God’s infinitely rich grace; and in the hope of His everlasting glory. In these grand specifics we can find true health, ease, and felicity! (#9341, 427).
- III. ☞ Faith in God provides the only security (3:19).
- A. Luther, when making his way into the presence of Cardinal Cajetan, who had summoned him to answer for his heretical opinions at Augsburg, was asked where he should find a shelter if his patron, the Elector of Saxony, should desert him. “Under the shield of heaven!” was his reply. (#9054, 388) Psalm 5:12b.
 - B. Habakkuk’s last words identify him as ☞ a mighty man of faith. His ☞ trust in God will remain regardless of circumstances (like Job 13:15; Two Hebrew children, Daniel 3:18).
 1. Habakkuk felt he could face whatever would come in life. ☞ “In spite of everything he could rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation. Such a God, he knew, would not forget him, and such a God would certainly bring him through” (Lloyd-Jones, 75).
 2. “Habakkuk... with conditions unchanged, passed from the cry, “How long?” to a song of triumph, to a life fulfilled. We watch him go step by step from despair to knowledge, from knowledge to trust, from trust to submission, from submission to peace - the peace of the living God” (Ungerer, 69).
 3. From this triumphant verse we uncover two questions that impact modern believers.
 - C. ☞ How are we to live “by faith”?
 1. We are to go on doing the right things in life no matter what happens. If so doing brings persecution or isolation, we must do the right thing because that is what God desires!
 2. We are to obey God with a willing heart (Psalm 103:21). We are not to obey as a sour duty, gritting our teeth with grudging reluctance. No! We serve with joy because we know who the God we serve is and how futile it is to serve the world!
 - D. ☞ How are we to describe the security that God provides? Two phrases are used.
 1. “Hind’s feet” (Psalm 18:33). The deer is one of the surest footed animals. The image tells us that regardless of how difficult life gets, we will not stumble if our trust is kept focused on God (Jeremiah 17:5-8). This metaphor also symbolizes fresh energy and is parallel with rising up with eagle’s wings (Isaiah 40:29-31).
 2. “High Places” (Deuteronomy 32:13). This metaphor presents the idea of security - high above all danger and victory - in a position of authority (Micah 1:3). The figure denotes the ultimate triumph of God’s people over all oppression.
 - E. All who possess this “faith” in God will be joyful because they have enduring security! (Nehemiah 8:10b; Psalm 27:1).

Conclusion:

I. Augustus the Emperor, hearing that a gentleman of Rome, who had a great burden of debt, slept quietly and was at ease every night, desired to buy the bed upon which this man slept. He thought that if he could sleep upon the same bed then he would be able to find the rest he sought (#5017, 558)

The only genuine rest is found when we have a trusting faith in Jehovah God. This prophecy began with doubt and distress but has now proceeded to an unwavering trust in God. It thus closes with notes of triumphant confidence and hope!

II. Habakkuk's prophecy is now up-dated.

1. History has verified the prophet's conclusion! We are thus in a wonderful position to see how everything God revealed was literally fulfilled. The Chaldeans were raised up; they did destroy the Israelis; Israel was carried into exile. But God's judgement fell upon Babylon and the remnant was brought back.
2. But our hope rests on historical facts beyond the Exile's restoration. We can look at the facts of salvation that God has brought through Christ. We can marvel at God's workings to redeem fallen man. We can trust in the Resurrection, the establishment of the Church, the triumph of Christianity over previous persecution and errors. History wonderfully illustrates the principle which buoyed Habakkuk's faith!
3. "Habakkuk's faith... was practical and mundane in its implications. It could stand the test of total crop failure and the destruction of everything one held dear. It did not depend upon God's promises that He would always supply health, wealth and prosperity in order to earn Habakkuk's trust, belief, and respect. When the lid blew off everything, He was still the sole object of praise and adoration. The reason was simple: He was Lord; He was in charge; He would remain true to His word even at the end of the historic process when all else had come and gone" (Kaiser, 200).

III. Where do you find yourself today?

1. Chapter 1 - Are you living in worry about life's injustices, wondering if God is going to do anything?
2. Chapter 2 - Are you living waiting for God to explain life's inequities?
3. Chapter 3 - Are you living by faith, worshipping God's omnipotence and sovereignty?