

God of my Salvation

Habakkuk 3:1-19

Covenant Waterfall, 12 September 2021

Read

Pray

Introduction

It's easy to trust God when things go well, when you've got a roof over your head, food on the table, a job and pay cheque, a stable government and peace in the land. For many of us, we just take these things for granted as normal. We thank God for these many blessings, if we have them, see them as tangible evidence of his goodness and faithfulness. And indeed they are.

But what happens when things completely fall apart? When there is no roof over your head, no food on the table, no job, no peace and security? We got a small taste of that some weeks ago. Some of us who are fearful there is more to come. Is God then not good, nor faithful when calamity strikes? Has he abandoned his people in times like these? Is it impossible then for us to trust him, if we don't see tangible evidence of his goodness and faithfulness?

This morning is our last sermon in Habakkuk. And it is precisely these issues that Habakkuk has been wrestling with in his prophecy. God has revealed to Habakkuk that calamity is about to befall upon the nation of Judah. Their lands and livelihoods are about to be destroyed by the Babylonian invaders, and they will be deported to a foreign land as captives. And what's more, God himself has ordained all this to happen. How then does Habakkuk respond? We saw that at first, he was horrified – how could God use these wicked Babylonians to destroy his own chosen people? But what we will see now, is that Habakkuk has come to terms with God's plans. He realises that because God is our Saviour and strength, despite these chaotic circumstances, we can still trust him.

- Habakkuk's prayer
- God will come for his people
- God of my salvation

A. Habakkuk's prayer, vv.1-2

“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. ²O 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.”

Remember the context so far: started off with Habakkuk crying out to God about the wickedness in Judah, asking God to do something about it. Never did he think that God would answer by raising up the wicked Babylonians to invade Judah and take them into exile, devastating the nation. He can't understand it and questions God in this. God then promises that wicked Babylon won't be spared either – last week – he pronounces five woes or judgements upon the Babylonians.

Now in response to all this, Habakkuk prays a final prayer – actually a Psalm – a song, incorporated into the Jewish hymnal (use of Selah – musical term). In this psalm, Habakkuk finally comes to terms with what God is going to do. Remember from chapter 1, he seriously challenged God, accusing him of not being true to his character in punishing Judah. That accusatory tone has now changed here. Verse 2 – he now comes before the Lord in fear and humility, and wants God to make known his will, to exercise his wrath that he has promised, while remembering to be merciful.

B. God will come for his people, vv.3-15

In Habakkuk's prayer, he sees a vision of the glory of God. It's a vision of God's majesty and power being revealed upon the earth. It's a glimpse of what God will do in the future, when he returns. It describes God's ultimate victory over all the earth – that one day he will subdue all of creation, bring every nation to submit to him, and establish his everlasting kingdom upon the earth.

Verse 3 starts this vision off:

“God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendour covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. *Selah*”

It tells us that God will come down to earth, his splendour covering the heavens and the earth full of his praise. He will come from Teman and Mount Paran. Where are these places, and why are they significant? They are in the area around Mount Sinai. What happened at Mt Sinai? God entered into covenant with Israel – he promised to be their King, and they his people – giving of the law through Moses. He had just saved his people from slavery in Egypt and about to lead them into their Promised Land.

Now, God returns to earth in the same place. But he doesn't come only as King of Israel, but he comes now as king over the whole earth, in order to save his people from among every nation.

Verses 4-6 continue...

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.”

God's glory is revealed through a blaze of bright, brilliant, awesome light – rays flashing like the sun. As awesome as this picture is of God's glory, verse 4 tells us that it is only a veiled glimpse of his power. His full glory is even greater than this!

As he comes in his glory, might and power, verse 5 tells us that **“pestilence and plague follow at his feet...”** God's glory is terrifying. In his pure holiness, all sin and all his enemies will be destroyed. So God coming in glory is also a manifestation of his wrath and judgement.

Verse 6 continues and tells that God now stands before the earth and measures it. This gives us some perspective of just how great and infinite God is, in comparison to his creation. The earth, before God, is just like a soccer ball, able to be measured in his hands!

He then looks at all the nations of the world and shakes them! All nations and rulers of nations think that they will last forever, remain powerful and rich, being able to continue to live for their own glory. Yet what we see here, is that every one of them is subject to God. It is God who is Lord over all the nations. He shakes them – he is sovereign over them. He determines all their destinies, he raises them up and he brings them down. None will last forever.

Then he scatters the great mountains of the earth and sinks low the everlasting hills. These great mountains ranges like the Himalayas, Alps, Rockies, Drakensberg – when we look at them, we think they will last forever – seem so steadfast and eternal. But before the Lord, they will be scattered and sunk low.

Before the glory of the Lord, these seemingly eternal things – powerful nations and great mountains, will melt like butter before the him. They are finite, none of them will last forever. Only God alone is everlasting, infinite, eternal and sovereign!

Why then will the Lord return in his glory to the earth? This is what verse 8 asks:

“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?”

Will the Lord return to show wrath against the rivers? Has in mind when God turned the Nile to blood. Will the earth return to show indignation against the sea? Has in mind, parting of the Red Sea, where he delivered his people to salvation.

As God comes, creation certainly submits to him, verses 10-11 explain:

“The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high. ¹The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear.”

All of creation surrenders to God, the whole earth bows in submission to him. When the Lord returns, creation – the mountains, waters, the sun and moon, will all be subdued before him.

But it is ultimately God will return to earth for two things: Firstly, to execute his justice upon all nations of the earth. Verse 12, **“You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed**

the nations in anger.” All peoples and nations have thought that they could live how they please – they’ve exulted themselves, been corrupt, engaged in every sort of sin and immorality, injustice, oppression and violence – just like the Babylonians and every empire and government to this day. It’s just the system of this world – not just nations “out there” that are sinful, but every single human being, all of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, broken his law. It is for this reason that God will return to earth on the Last Day, to exercise his perfect justice. He will destroy his enemies, punish the wicked and right every wrong.

And the second reason God will return to earth, is to save his own people. Verse 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”

Though he will destroy all the wicked, he will save a righteous remnant. Who is this righteous remnant? Remember two weeks ago – Habakkuk 2:4, “The righteous shall live by his faith.” So who is righteous? Everyone who realises that they are in themselves unrighteous, but instead puts their faith in God’s perfect righteousness: they are the righteous who live by faith! Everyone who trusts in the Lord for their salvation!

God promises here in verse 13, to return for the salvation of his people – the righteous who live by faith. He will never abandon us or lose us. How will God save his people? Verse 13 says, **“You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed...”** From the English translation, it makes out as if the “anointed” is God’s people whom he will save. The Hebrew reveals something different though. Firstly, if “anointed” referred to God’s people, it would be pluralised in the Hebrew. It is not – it is singular – i.e. “anointed one”. Hebrew for anointed one = *mashiach* = Messiah. Secondly, the Hebrew can also be translated as **“You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation with your anointed.”** In other words, God went out for the salvation of his people, whom he will save through / with his Messiah. It is God’s Messiah / Anointed One who will save God’s people.

How will God’s Messiah save his people? Verse 13 continues to say that the Messiah will crush **“the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck...”** God’s Messiah will destroy the enemy by crushing his head. Who is the enemy? Is it Babylon, other evil nations, wicked of the earth? Ultimately the force behind all evil – Satan himself. He will

be judged and destroyed – his head crushed – by the Messiah, when the Lord returns on the Last Day.

C. God of my salvation, vv.16-19

“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.”

Habakkuk’s vision of God’s glory now comes to an end. He is left trembling, his lips quivering and quaking in the fear of God, as a result of what he’s seen. Overall, God has revealed to him that the evil Babylonians will overrun Judah and desolate them. He’s also seen that ultimately God’s justice will prevail – he will destroy the wicked, and save the righteous. But in the meantime, he decides to wait quietly for calamity to fall upon his nation, and humbly submits to God’s sovereign will.

Verses 17-19 bring to conclusion Habakkuk’s response to God:

“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places.”

Though calamity strikes, though there will be no figs, grapes, olives, no wheat from the fields, no flocks – basically no staples: no wine, oil, bread, fruit and meat – what we need in order to survive. Though there will be famine and disaster in the land. Despite these circumstances, Habakkuk rejoices in the Lord. He takes joy in the God of his salvation. How come? His trust and security is not in the things that God gives him, but in God himself, and his sure promises.

God is the One in whom true strength is found – who makes his feet like the deer’s. God is the One in whom true joy is found – he sustains us despite our circumstances. And God is the One in whom salvation is found. All who trust in him shall not be put to shame – he will

surely save all those who put their faith in him. He will never leave us, nor forsake us!
Indeed, the righteous shall live by faith!

Conclusion

What will happen if everything in your life falls apart? Lose all earthly goods, government collapses, violence? Get angry and bitter with God? Curse him? Think he's abandoned you? Lead nowhere. Reveal your own unbelief and hardness of heart. The truth that we've seen revealed here in Habakkuk is that it is the righteous who live by faith. In other words, though calamity may come, though our comforts may be taken away from us, we still trust in the Lord. In the Lord whom is our joy, strength and salvation.

How has God promised to save us, in the midst of all this wickedness? Verse 13 – through his Anointed One, his promised Messiah, who comes to crush the head of the enemy. What we have here in Habakkuk is a promise of the gospel, that we first see in Genesis 3:15. After fall – sin and evil entered the world, humans separated from God; God promises to fix this mess by sending the seed of the woman (a descendant of Eve) who would one day crush the head of the serpent.

That promise was fulfilled by God's Messiah – Jesus, who came to earth, died on the cross for sins in our place, rising on the third day, forgiving us our sins, disarming Satan's power, and restoring God's people to God forever. This destruction of Satan will only be completed when Jesus returns to earth and then, as Romans 16:20 declares, **“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”** Hope – evil and wickedness will be destroyed.

Brothers and sisters, repent of your unbelief and trust in yourselves, and trust instead in God's promised Messiah, Jesus: the One who has crushed the head of the serpent. The One who forgives your sins, who counts his perfect righteousness to you by faith, who strengthens you by his joy, who promises to never leave you, nor forsake you – despite the chaotic circumstances around us, who seals you by his Spirit for eternal life with God. Trust in him who truly saves, strengthens and preserves for all eternity!