

I will Wait and Rejoice

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[0 : 0 0] Father, thanks so much for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you still speak to us through it. And even though it was written thousands of years ago, the message you give your people in it is still very much relevant for us today.

And so, Father, we pray that you would give us ears to hear and minds to understand and hearts that might be encouraged to keep living for you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, in life, there are many things we rejoice in. My son, last weekend, won his first basketball game of the season, which was very exciting.

So after Saturday, after Saturday, after Saturday of losing, they got one. I don't know who was more excited, the kids or the parents, but there was rejoicing. We won't mention the fact that they had to drop a division before they won.

They still won. But there are other things in life we rejoice in as well, even if we don't use that word, rejoice. So it's what we do when our footy team wins. It's what we do when the kids sleep through the night.

[1 : 0 4] I was just speaking to someone before whose child is not sleeping very well through the night. It's what we do when we have a good report from the doctor or when we have good family news. We rejoice in those sorts of things.

But what happens when things are not good, when there seems to be no good news? What do we do when life goes pear-shaped and is full of suffering? How can we possibly rejoice then?

Well, today we come to our third and final word from Habakkuk. Just to recap the story so far, for those who may have missed some, because it's only three chapters, there was injustice in Judah.

That was the scene. And on the next slide, we saw this. Thanks, Mark. Yep. So from chapter one, we saw Habakkuk's first complaint and God's first answer.

So Habakkuk's first complaint or protest was, how long, God, until you judge the wicked in Judah and save your people? And we saw that God's answer was rather surprising.

[2 : 0 6] He said, well, I'm going to use evil Babylonians to bring justice and save my people. And the lesson we saw, well, that Habakkuk saw was that God is sovereign, that is in control, even over evil, and uses it for good.

He doesn't do the evil, but he's in control of it and uses it for good. So that was the first complaint and the first answer. And then the next slide is the second complaint of Habakkuk.

And we saw last week, Habakkuk's second complaint was, how long then will you tolerate evil like those Babylonians you're going to use? And we saw that God's second answer was, well, there is an appointed time when I will put all things right.

But he said, until that time, you have to trust me. You have to keep living by faith. And so as we saw last week, our lesson was keep living by faith in our holy God, because he's holy, he must judge.

So keep living by faith in our holy God who will put things right. And so now we come to chapter three and Habakkuk's response to all of this. And it seems like he's learnt those lessons because he doesn't give a third complaint.

[3 : 18] There's no third protest. Rather, he moves from protest to prayer, which brings us to point one in your outlines and verse one in your Bibles. Verse one says, A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet.

And then it says, On Shiginoth. Now, if you're wondering what the heck is Shiginoth, no one really knows, but we think it's a musical term. And it's very clear that chapter three was meant to be sung, because at the end of chapter three, it also says, For the director of music on my stringed instruments.

And if you look in your footnotes, there's also a word that occurs throughout the chapter three times called Salah, which is in the Psalms. We don't know what it means, except that it's a musical term.

Maybe it's the point where you'd give a special clap. I don't know. No one knows. But what we do know is that this chapter three was meant to be sung together. And so I should have really asked Devin when he read the Bible to sing it for us.

Do you want to have a go now? Yes. I'm a gamer than I am. But I think it's a song for two reasons. First, it fits with the idea of rejoicing, which is how Habakkuk ends.

[4 : 32] But second, it also helps us to remember words. I mean, songs do that, don't they? They help us remember words. But words, I mean, have you ever had some words stuck in your head because they're part of a song?

You know, the melody, the rhythm, the rhyme, it all helps us to remember the words. And Judah is going to need to remember these words in chapter three.

You see, the Babylonians are about to come and attack, as God said they would, as part of Judah's judgment. And so the people are going to need to remember these words here in Habakkuk chapter three.

Which is why I think they're meant to be sung. But the prayer itself is not only a song, but it actually occurs in verse two. This is where we actually get to the heart of the prayer. Verse two, Habakkuk says, Lord, I have heard of your fame.

I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time, make them known in wrath. Remember mercy. He starts off in verse two by remembering God's deeds which made God famous.

[5 : 35] And he stands in awe of them. And then halfway through verse two, this is the actual prayer. He says, please repeat those deeds in our day, in our time, make those deeds known again.

In wrath, remember mercy. That's what he's asking God. He's asking God to do those deeds again. When my kids were younger, I used to throw them up in the air and catch them.

And when they were lighter and I was stronger. And when I did that, they would often say, do it again, do it again. Have you ever heard kids say that? You know, they do something and they just say, do it again, do it again. Well, in a much more serious way, that's what Habakkuk's prayer is about.

For God to do those deeds again. As I said, Babylon is about to attack as part of God's wrath or judgment on Judah. And so Habakkuk prays that God would remember mercy in wrath.

Not that God would ever forget his people. The Hebrew word remember means to act. And so Habakkuk is praying that when the Babylonians come, God would act and show mercy in his judgment.

[6 : 43] That God would do again what he's done in the past of saving his people through judgment. In our Bibles, in verse two as well, Habakkuk actually asked God to do this in our day.

Do you see that? Halfway through verse two. Repeat them in our day, in our time, make them known. But those words in our day or in our time are literally in the midst of the years, as it says on your outline.

In the midst of your years, make them known. And that's a much more general statement, isn't it? Than in our days. And I think it shows a much more contented Habakkuk who trusts in God's timing.

In fact, in verse 16, he will wait patiently for the day of judgment to come on Babylon. You see, he now has patience. He now has a contentment in God's timing.

And so Habakkuk's prayer is that in the midst of the years, sometime in the years to come, he's saying, in God's timing, that you will repeat your deeds and remember mercy for your people.

[7 : 48] That's what he's praying. But what are these deeds that Habakkuk wants God to do again? Well, he starts to remember some of them. Point to verse three. Verse three to 15 really is Habakkuk remembering God's past deeds.

Have a look there. He says, God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. I don't know if it's Paran or Paran. I'm, you know, Melbourne, Paran. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.

His splendor was like the sunrise. Rays flashed from his hand where his power was hidden. Plague went before him. Pestilence followed his steps. He stood and shook the earth.

He looked and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. But he marches on forever. And so it goes. Here, Habakkuk remembers the various deeds of the Lord in history.

It's not particularly clear which deeds Habakkuk has in mind. It's all very poetic language, isn't it? But I think we can have a reasonable guess. And I suspect verses one to seven and perhaps even to verse 10 are talking about the time when God rescued his people from Egypt.

[9 : 06] And we get a hint of that. I mean, verse five, you see there, plague and pestilence are mentioned. And this reminds you of the ten plagues on Egypt, which God used to bring Israel out.

But also in verse three, he mentions these names, Timon and Mount Paran. And so to give you an idea of what's going on, on the next slide is a map. So Timon is in the red.

That's a red dot. Mount Paran is the yellow dot. And Mount Sinai is the bottom of the region of Sinai with the blue dot. And so they're all on the southeast of Egypt.

You've got to kind of come up from the southeast around the top and in to Egypt. And that's what the Bible seems to suggest that God did when he would come to rescue his people from Egypt.

So the next slide from Deuteronomy chapter 33. This is what Moses said about the Exodus, the rescue from Egypt. The Lord came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir, the location of Timon.

[10 : 07] He shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones from the south or perhaps southeast from his mountain slopes. Surely it is you who love the people.

And this is what Moses says God did when he came to rescue them from Egypt. And so on the next slide, have you seen those weather maps? We got a warm front moving in or it's kind of like God kind of moved from the southeast, like a warm front up over to rescue the Israelites from Egypt.

And that seems to be what Habakkuk has in mind in these beginning verses with the mention of plagues and pestilence. Even in verse 10, torrents of water swept by the deeps, roared and lifted up the waves on high.

Perhaps that was the parting of the Red Sea. We're not exactly sure. But the point is God has saved his people in history and judged the nations. That's what he's done in the past.

And so Habakkuk is praying that he would do it again in the future. But it's not just the deeds of the Lord that Habakkuk remembers. It's also the Lord of the deeds that is God's character.

[11 : 13] You see, as you look at what someone does, you get an idea of who someone is. And so as Habakkuk remembers God's deeds, he inevitably remembers God's character. It's how he started in verse 3 and 4 about God's holiness and glory and splendor and power.

But in verse 8, he actually changes the way he speaks. Do you see there? Habakkuk was speaking about God in the third person. He did this. God did that.

But in verse 8, he changes to speak directly to God. Second person, you did this or you did that. And as he does, he starts to talk more about God's character.

And in particular, God who is a warrior, who is mighty to save, as we sung in our first song. And so, for example, verse 9, you uncover your bow and you called for many arrows.

Of verse 11, sun and moon stood still in the heavens, perhaps talking about the time of Joshua, and the glint of your flying arrows at the lightning of your flashing spear. And so it goes.

[12 : 15] God has this picture of God as a mighty warrior who is mighty to save. And I think verses 12 and 13 really summarize this section. It says, In wrath you strode through the earth, and in anger you threshed the nations, and you came out to deliver your people to save your anointed.

You see, the picture we have of God's deeds and God's character is someone who will save his people through judgment, who will remember mercy in wrath. And so it gives Habakkuk confidence that God will answer his prayer to do it again in the midst of the years.

And armed with that confidence, Habakkuk now resolves or decides he will wait for God to do just that. In fact, he will even rejoice in God. Point three, verse 16.

Habakkuk says, Yet, Here, Habakkuk begins by admitting that the thought of God's judgment on Judah, Well, it makes him physically shake.

He knows Judah deserves it, but it makes him, well, it makes his heart pound. His lips quiver. His legs tremble. To use a modern expression, it leaves him quaking in his boots.

[14 : 20] Why? Well, because he knew that while Judah deserved this judgment, those who didn't, those who are still following God, would still be caught up in the suffering of it.

And yet, he resolves to wait patiently for God to put things right, for God to judge the Babylonians, to save a remnant of his people, and to put all things right.

And if that's not an amazing enough response, then he even decides or resolves that he will rejoice in the Lord, come what may. And they're extraordinary words, if you think about it.

Just see the words of verse 17 and 18. He's saying, Though there are no figs on the fig tree, no grapes for wine, no olives for olive oil, no food, no sheep, no cattle, though there was literally nothing left yet, verse 18, yet I will still rejoice in the Lord.

To put it in our terms, it would be like saying, Though I suffer as a result of living in this fallen world, a world under judgment, Genesis 3, though I'm caught up in that judgment, you know, I still suffer because I live in a fallen world, and though I may suffer health issues, though I may find a loved one has cancer, though I am lonely, though I lose my job, though I lose a spouse or a child, yet I will still rejoice in the Lord.

[15 : 47] Think about that for a moment. They're incredible words, aren't they? Despite that kind of suffering, he's still going to rejoice in the Lord. How on earth can he say that? Well, four reasons which are all on your outline.

First, very quickly, he has learnt the lesson of chapter 1, that God is sovereign even over evil and uses it to bring good.

Second, he has learnt the lesson of chapter 2, that God will one day put all things right in the world at the appointed time. Third, he remembers here in chapter 3, the past deeds of God, the one who saves through judgment in the past, and so he has every confidence that God will save through judgment in the future.

That's why in verse 18, Habakkuk calls God my saviour. And fourth, he also acknowledges here in chapter 3, that God will sustain and strengthen him.

That's why in verse 19, Habakkuk calls God my strength. God enables him to walk on the heights, which is a picture of triumph. In other words, he relies on God's strength to help him persevere through suffering.

[17 : 01] God won't save him from suffering, but will bring him through it, to triumph over it. But it's because of those four reasons that Habakkuk is able to still rejoice in the Lord, because he knows who God is, and what God has and will do for him.

I take it it's the same for us. You see, we have the same God, whose tendency is to save through judgment. He has a history of saving through judgment, of remembering mercy in wrath.

And we have a God who still is mighty to save. In fact, the character and deeds of God led to the greatest of all God's deeds in history, the giving of his only son, Jesus, for us.

For it's in Christ Jesus, that we see the greatest expression of God remembering mercy in wrath. It's at the cross of Christ that we ultimately see God saving through judgment.

For we, like Judah, all sin. And so we all deserve to be judged for that. And yet God gave his only son, Jesus, to take our judgment in our place, so that we could be saved from it.

[18 : 13] And so God saves us through the judgment that Jesus took. And in Christ, God remembers or shows mercy to those who believe.

And so the first question for us this morning is, do I believe? Do I trust in Jesus? For it's only by trusting in Jesus that we can receive mercy and all the promises that come with it.

And for us who do believe, then the greatest of all God's past deeds shows us that our future is secure. Kind of like what James was saying before. See, whatever suffering we may face as a result of being caught up in this world that's under judgment from the fall, God will ensure that we make it home to heaven.

And so on the next slide, some well-known verses from Romans chapter 8. Paul says, what then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare even his only son, but gave him up for us all.

How will he not also, along with Jesus, graciously give us all things, all things we need to make it home to heaven? And so Paul says later on, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[19 : 28] You see, if God was willing to give up his own son to save us in the past, then you can be certain he'll give us whatever else we need to bring us home in the future to heaven.

I mean, if God has done the hardest and most costly thing, giving up his only son to save us because he loves us, then do you not think that God will do the easier thing of bringing us home to heaven?

Of course he will. That's why Paul says we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, because God will help us conquer or triumph through suffering. Like Habakkuk, he won't always save us from it, but he will always bring us through it to glory.

And so because of this, Paul rejoices, which brings us to our second reading. So turn in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 4, and we'll end here. It's page 1181.

Page 1181. So Philippians chapter 4, verse 4, sounds a bit like Habakkuk.

[20 : 40] Rejoice in the Lord, always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Near to returning. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now we need to remember at this point that Paul, when he says rejoice, is not sitting on some sunny beach going, yeah, rejoice, you know, life's great kind of thing. Paul is actually in prison when he writes this, and he's not sure if he's about to be executed or let go.

And yet, like Habakkuk, he still says rejoice in the Lord. How can Paul say that? Same reasons. Like Habakkuk chapter 1, Paul knows God is sovereign, even over evil, and works for our good.

That's why he says in verse 6, not to be anxious about anything, but to pray to our sovereign God, and God's peace will guard our minds. Or like Habakkuk chapter 2, Paul knows that God will one day send Jesus to return, to put all things right.

[21 : 55] That's why Paul says in verse 5 here, that the Lord Jesus is near. Not just near us by his spirit, but near to returning to put things right. And near in the sense that it's the next big thing on God's agenda.

It'll still happen in God's timing, yes, but it's the next big thing on God's agenda. As James puts it, in the letter of James, Jesus is standing at the door.

That's how he describes it, ready to return. He also knows the lessons of Habakkuk chapter 3. Paul knows that if God has saved him in the past, then God will bring him home to heaven in the future. And also like Habakkuk chapter 3, Paul knows that God will sustain and strengthen him until God brings him home to heaven in the future.

That's why Paul says in verse 12, chapter 4 verse 12, he says, I know what it is to be in need. I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

I can do all this through him who gives me strength. See, like Habakkuk, God is his strength as well. And so even though life around them went pear-shaped, even though judgment came and suffering came to Judah in Habakkuk's day, even though Paul is sitting in prison, not sure if he's about to be executed, they still had good reason to rejoice in the Lord because of who he is, because of what he's done, because of what he will do.

[23 : 31] I was speaking to a member of our 9am congregation called Graham, and we were talking about our visits to Pauline Rash, who passed away earlier this year. I'd mentioned her to you before last year or beginning of this year, I think.

And her husband has given me permission to talk about her today. But for those who didn't know Pauline, she had motor neuron disease, which is a cruel disease because your mind stays sharp while your body decays.

And so for about two years, she was trapped in a decaying body. She could understand everything that was going on and what everyone was saying, but she could not speak.

And towards the end, all she could move was her one arm about that much. And Graham and I talked about our visits to Pauline, and we both found we had the same experience.

We would both go to encourage Pauline, but would walk away being encouraged by Pauline. Why? Because despite her suffering, she was still rejoicing in the Lord.

[24 : 36] Couldn't believe it. You'd walk in and she'd smile. You'd ask, can I pray with you? And she'd smile and try and move her head. She was still rejoicing in the Lord Jesus.

She didn't deny her pain or resign herself to it such that she got depressed. Nor did she try and be stoic, you know, stiff upper lip and become grumpy. Nor was it a jumping up and down kind of rejoicing.

I mean, she couldn't. No, rather, she remembered what she had in the Lord Jesus and rejoiced in him with a deep, contented joy, such that she still smiled despite her severe suffering.

Now, I know there are others, even in this congregation, who are going through terrible trials, and yet they say they're still happy in the Lord. It's an incredible testament.

I don't know what you're facing in life at the moment, but whatever it is, do remember whom we serve. The God who is sovereign over evil and uses it for good.

[25 : 39] The God who will send his son to return to put all things right. The God who has already given his son to save us, and so will certainly bring us home to heaven. And the God who will strengthen us in the meantime.

So though the fig tree does not blossom, nor the crops yield no food, though you suffer loneliness or loss of job, though you suffer sickness or the loss of a loved one, yet, yet, we have reason to rejoice in the Lord.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this, what's called a minor prophet in the Bible, but actually teaches us major lessons.

Father, we thank you for the reminder today that we still have reason to rejoice. Father, we thank you for those examples of Christians who have gone before us, and indeed Christians who are sitting amongst us, even now, who do it tough, tougher than we know, and yet still rejoice in the Lord.

Father, help us to remember what they remember, who you are and what you've done for us, and that we always have reason to rejoice in you. Father, we pray these things in Jesus' name.

[27 : 00] Amen.