

## All I Want Is You

*Testing Positive: Finding Faith in Crisis: Pt. 4*

We're looking at the book of Habakkuk because this little book in the Old Testament talks about how to handle times of crisis. Times of crisis are not times in which things are getting better and better for each generation but times in which there are wars and pestilence and disease and economic disaster. And there's no denying we are in an economic crisis. Last month alone we lost 20 million jobs in this country making April the largest month of single unemployment since we began keeping records in 1948. Yes we are in economic crisis the only question is how bad is it going to get and how long is it going to last?

Certainly, the speed of this has been a shock, but I think what's worse is we really thought we were untouchable. The largest economy in the world and all. But the Bible is very realistic about how seasons of good times are always followed by seasons of troubled times. And what God wants for His people is to be prepared, no matter the season. To be a source of light, no matter the darkness. And so Habakkuk is one of those places that tells you how to deal with troubled times, whether they're society-wide or just your own personal troubled times. Because none of us are exempt from that.

So we've been looking at this each week, and now we get to the end of the book. Because in **Habakkuk 3:17-19** you get to a beautiful, lyrical ending in which Habakkuk says essentially this: "It's possible to have a life of sustained joy even when *everything* is going wrong in your life and even all of your prayers are going unanswered." Let's look at it, "*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 go on the heights.*"

Now, we're going to look at Habakkuk chapter 3 two weeks in a row. Just the last three verses today and then the overall picture next week. And we're doing that because there's a general and a specific application. Generally - which we'll look at next week - Habakkuk is laying down here how you can rejoice in tribulation, how you can be joyful in the face of very bad circumstances. But in *particular*, he is describing an economic disaster because see, figs, grapes, olives, and grain were the four ways in which the land produced fruit, so you could *eat* first of all, but it was also the way in which you produced wealth.

Sheep and cattle, this is a portfolio here. They had currency back in those days, but that's not where you had your main investments. Your investments were in your land. Your investments were in your livestock – “stock” means a movable asset, this is the origins of our “stock market” wording today. Therefore, what's being described here were these six things. See? No figs, no grapes, no olives, no grain – that's what was being grown in those fields - no sheep, no cattle is a complete economic disaster. It means your portfolio is wiped out. It means your investments are gone. It's all gone!

And what Habakkuk is saying is how do you face *that*? I can't think of a more germane question to ask this morning. How do you face economic scarcity? Now, his answer is fuller than you might think because by talking about a time in which there is no harvest, he is alluding to the principle of the “first-fruits.” Because in the Old Testament, you were supposed to give the first-fruits of your harvest to God. That's where your charitable giving came from. And he's bringing up the possibility of no harvest at all. So the question is, what is our financial responsibility towards God in times of economic crisis?

Now, before we can understand what Habakkuk is saying here, we need to take a look at some background over in Deuteronomy 26, which is one of the places where the principles of the first-fruit is put down. Now, this is a rather long passage, but there's no getting around it. This is foundational to both Jewish and Christian life and we need to understand it. This is what we do each week in service when we receive the tithes and offerings. Remember the popcorn buckets? I miss them! But it's important that we understand the “Why” behind the “What.”

So, let me read you **Deuteronomy 26:1-11**, “*When you have entered the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name and say to the priest in office at the time, “I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our forefathers to give us.”*”

*4 The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression.*”

*8 So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O Lord, have given me.” Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.*

Now, taken together, Deuteronomy 26 and then coming back to Habakkuk 3:17–19, we’re going to learn three things about giving, three things about giving your money away to ministry or charity. The three things are, you should give *sacrificially* - not just out of surplus - you should give *joyfully* - not just out of duty - and you should give *graciously*. So let’s start with the first principle about how you should look at your income, look at your money. You should give **Sacrificially**

In **Deuteronomy 26:2a**, we see the principle of firstfruits. See? It says, “*Take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket.*” If you were a farmer, all of your income basically came during the harvest season. You planted. You sowed. You watered. But then you *waited*. And eventually the harvest came in. It could be a bumper crop, it could be a lean year, it could be a disaster, but at

harvest time, you’d know how much you’d made for the year.

Now, because we’re in hi-tech Austin, probably most of you are *not* farmers, nevertheless, an awful lot of us actually also get our income this way. Many of us look ahead, and we *don’t* know how much we’re going to make in the next year because there are investments - we don’t know how they’re going to do. There’s bonuses - we don’t know how they’re going to be. There are contracts you’re hoping to land. There are gigs - if you’re an artist - you don’t know how many you’re going to get. Maybe real estate, how many houses will you sell? You don’t know how much you’re going to make until you’ve made it essentially. And therefore, you *are* like the farmer – who didn’t know until the harvest, what he was going to make.

And so how does that affect charitable giving if you’re not sure what you’re going to make. It’s very simple. You wait until all of the harvest is in, right? Until you know exactly how much you’ve made and if you made *this* much this year, then you say, “Well, I can afford to give *this* much away to the ministry and to the poor.” Or if you made *that* much, well, you feel like, “Then I can afford to give *that* much away.”

But that's not what God says to do. That's not the principle. That's the natural way *we* would think, right? You wait until you have it all in, then you decide what to give. No, not according to God. Here's what God says: "I want you to give your first-fruits." Now what that means is you'd go out the first couple of days – harvest season can last a few weeks - and you'd bring in the first part of your harvest. And you didn't know how big the harvest was going to be. You really weren't sure of what the yield would be. This is where the saying originated; "don't count your chickens...before they hatch."

But when it comes to giving to God, it didn't matter. You gave the first part. You gave *before* you knew how much you were actually going to be making. You went, and you laid *that* at the altar. Now, what's that principle? Here it is, if you wait until everything is in, then what you end up giving God is the surplus. Do you know what the surplus is? The surplus is that part of what you can afford to give without it actually cutting into the way in which you live.

The surplus is what you can afford to give and still do all the things you want to do, buy all the things you want to buy, wear all the kinds of clothes you want to wear, go to all the places you want to go.

The surplus is the part of your income you can afford to give without it changing the way in which you live. God says, "No, I don't want you to give your *leftovers*. I want you to give your 'first-overs' - new word."

"I don't want you to give your leftovers. I don't want you to give the surplus. I want you to give out of the *heart* of your income. I want you to give *past* the place you can afford to give and still not change the way in which you live. I want you to give sacrificially. I want you to give until it hurts. I want you to give to the place where it *changes* the way in which you live. Otherwise, you're not giving the way you ought to give."

Now, do you see why this is relevant to difficult times? See, in good times, there's a surplus. In good times, you're making enough money so you can give money away to the church, the poor. You can give your money away and still live the way you want to live. But in bad times, in times of crisis, you can't. So if you have learned to give like this *all the time*, then times of crisis don't change that. See, if you learn to give out of the surplus, then when troubled times come, you don't give anything because there ain't no surplus.

But that's not the way in which God calls you to give. God says you should *always* be cutting into how you live. You should always be giving more than you can afford to give and live just the way you want to live. You have to give *past* the way where you can live just as you want. Your giving needs to affect the way in which you eat, affect where you live, affect the kind of clothes you wear. You ought to give so much that it changes the way in which you live. That's the first principle.

How do you like the sermon so far? What do you think of the first point? You say, "Well, this is a *grim* sermon. I'd better read the fine print about what these subjects are before I decide to tune into church on a Sunday." It's not grim because here's point two. The first point is you should give sacrificially, not out of the surplus. You should give to the place where it changes your life. But the second point is you should give **Joyfully**.

You should give joyfully, not just out of duty. And that also comes out of this middle part of Deuteronomy 26, which I love, because you notice, you are not allowed in the Old Testament to come and bring your gift and just stick it in the bucket. Oh no, see, look at the rest of v.2b, it says you "*Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name*"

Then v.4, "*The priest shall take the basket...*" - that's your offering, your first-fruits - "...*from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God.*" Then what comes after that? V.5, "*Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt..."*" It kicks off this whole little history lesson. Why? How is that relevant to taking up the offering? Was the priest a history major like me and just always had to find a way to justify his degree to his engineering roommates? No, this is a testimony. It's a testimony about the grace of God and the gospel.

Because this testimony is saying, "Yes, I have worked very hard, and this is my first-fruits. But the only reason I was able to get anything from my labor is because this land I'm farming on is a gift. We were in Egypt. We were slaves, and we could never have gotten out of slavery in our own strength. But *God* came in, and He intervened with miraculous deeds. And He saved us, *not* because of what we have done, but because of what God has done.

And therefore, we're saved not by *our* works but by *God's* works. We are saved by grace. And therefore, the land I have is all just a gift of grace." Now do you see what's happening? You're never allowed to just give. You must give and connect that giving to the gospel. Before the Lord you have to *drill* into your heart the mindset that everything you have is a gift. Now, maybe someone out there is saying, "Well, I'm not an Israelite. I work very hard. I'm not a farmer. I'm not an immigrant. How does any of that relate to me?"

If we're not careful we can fall into a trap in our thinking and I think that trap is very well represented by a prayer by the great philosopher, Bart Simpson. [**Bart Prayer - :09**]. Ah, from the mouths of babes, the human heart is revealed. We pay for this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing. Like the adults, we can act shocked, but he's just saying what a whole lot of people are thinking.

The reality is, the things you have are not really yours. You say, "But I've worked hard to earn them." Okay, with what? "My talents." But who gave you your talents? "My health." Well, who gave you your health? "Well, I've just worked very hard." Okay, yeah, but let me just suggest something to you, if instead of being born wherever you were born, you were born on a mountain in Outer Mongolia, I don't care how hard you would have worked; you'd still be poor. Let's be honest, there are plenty of people that work a whole lot harder than you do, but because of the circumstances of their life, that will ever translate to the kind of money you make.

It's very easy to say, "I pulled myself up..." *Nobody* pulls themselves up by their bootstraps. First of all, a lot of people are born without boots! But there are all kinds of ways in which God opens doors for you by *where*, and even *when*, you were born. I'm really missing baseball right now and I was reading a tweet this week by the Yankees hard-throwing closer, Aroldis

Chapman in which he threatened to bean an Astro in the head once the season starts – as a die-hard Rangers fan I really enjoyed it! But imagine God had gifted you with the ability to throw a 100mph fastball with pinpoint precision – cool! – *but* you were born on an 18<sup>th</sup> century Creole plantation. Have fun cutting sugar cane and dying of typhus at the ripe old age of 27!

I mean, look, *everything* you have is a gift. And if you drill that into your heart - which is what the Israelite was supposed to do when he gave - to the place where you say, "Ah! I only have what I have because of the benevolent generosity of God - the grace of God - and therefore, I give, radically, this gift to Him..."

So you're supposed to connect the grace of God to the gift so you *want* to give. Are you starting to see this? Listen, even though when I said you must give until it hurts, we're talking about hurts your budget, hurts your lifestyle...but it shouldn't be hurting on the *inside*. It shouldn't be a teeth gritting, "Okay, I have to do this."

Jesus puts it like this, he says in **Matthew 6:19-21**, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***"

Now, why does Jesus say in the midst of talking about giving, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”? He is saying whatever your heart **most treasures** will be where your money goes **most effortlessly**. You will always most joyfully spend money on the thing which your heart most treasures.

I got an email last Friday that they had re-opened the Half-Price Books on South Lamar. So the kids and I put on our masks and went. It was heaven! That is my happy place. I was having withdrawals. I love books. My dream is to basically one day have a house that is just one big room with floor to ceiling book shelves and a bed in the middle. Unfortunately that is *not* Deanna’s dream. But I have never once walked into a book store and said, “Ok, how much do I *have* to spend? Let’s get this over with.” No, usually, it’s Deanna going, “Here’s how much you’re *allowed* to spend.”

During the first year of our marriage I worked at a bookstore where I got employee discounts – I would basically bring home my paycheck in a box. I’ve never been more happy. Whatever you most love, whatever your heart most rests in, you actually have to be careful to not spend *too* much, right?

Therefore, listen this is the second point, but maybe, come to think of it, maybe it isn’t all that comforting. It’s just as bad as the first point! Okay, I admit it. Here’s how you know where your heart really rests.

This is how you know whether your relationship with God is just a kind of impersonal, abstract, “Yes, I believe in God. I have to give my money to the ministry and the poor. Okay, where do I write the check?” or whether you’ve actually experienced His grace, whether you actually know that without Him, you’d be lost. If you’ve actually experienced God’s grace, if you know His love, if your heart rests in His grace, you will *love* to give. You’ll have no problem with it.

Giving sacrificially will be a joy. Giving to the place where it changes the way in which you live will be a joy. It won’t be a problem. And that’s how you can tell whether you actually know God personally or whether your relationship with God is very impersonal. So you must give sacrificially, and you must give joyfully. And if you’re not able to give joyfully and sacrificially, that tells you there is something wrong with your heart in your relationship with God.

Now, as challenging as all this is - and I know it has been challenging - when you get to Habakkuk, when you get now to the end of chapter three, he is actually moving everything up to a whole other level. The next level is giving **Graciously**. Do you know why that's the next level? Because he is saying, "What if there *are no* first-fruits because there is no harvest? What if there was a situation in which God was not providing any food at all, and we're about to starve? What if there was a situation in which God is not providing any *protection* because the invaders have come, and we're about to be trampled by the barbarian horde?" You say, "Well, how would God allow that to happen?"

Well, we've been talking about that for several weeks in Habakkuk. There's a lot of evil in this world, and God sometimes lets it happen. It *does* happen! He works through disaster. That's another sermon - go back and listen if you've missed. But the point is, there are millions of people - good people, believers in the Lord - who have faced this situation. Not just economic scarcity, not even just bankruptcy, but starvation, persecution. See?

And Habakkuk says, "I want you to know that it's possible even in *those* situations to make God your treasure, to rest your heart in God and rejoice in Him." How? Look carefully. You rejoice not in the circumstances, because there are no circumstances to rejoice in. You rejoice in God your Savior.

Look, in the *past*, my salvation is, "My sins have been forgiven. There is no condemnation for me." And in the *future*, my salvation is, "I'm going to get a new body. I'm going to be resurrected, and I'm going to live in a new heavens and new earth." And Habakkuk says, "That's enough!" It is possible to say, "Look, everything else is going wrong, but if I have that - if I have my salvation - that's all I need. I can maintain poise. I can maintain peace and joy. Even when *everything* else is going wrong, I can still give God my heart even in the worst situations."

Now, at this point, I think most rational people would say, "Habakkuk, what you're saying is right...but I don't see how I can do it. Habakkuk is right, but I don't see how I can do it. Yes, I *know* I should rejoice in my salvation even when everything is going wrong, but I try, and I *can't*." And here's the reason why you can't...and then let me give you the reason why you actually *can*.

You can't because, at one level, Habakkuk is the wrong kind of example. You know how, sometimes when you see someone do something - you see your neighbor build a patio and you get inspired to do it too. Some examples inspire us to copy. But some examples just make us want to quit. You see a master guitar player and you just want to throw your instrument away - "I'll never be as good as *that* so what's the point?"



Well, Habakkuk is being a really good example; “I can rejoice even when God has taken everything away from me. I can still rejoice with nothing!” Are you inspired by that example? Let me speak for probably a lot of us. I’m not inspired by that example; I’m *crushed* by it. It’s too high. I can’t attain to it. And when I just see Habakkuk trusting and rejoicing in God even when everything has been taken away from him, that example just discourages me. Because I say, “I can never be like that.” And I can’t, and you can’t either if you just try to be like Habakkuk.

But if you look to the one to whom Habakkuk *points*, that will change your heart. Now who is the one to whom Habakkuk points? You know, a couple of times after his resurrection - after he was raised from the dead - Jesus said to his disciples, “You know, one of your big problems is you don’t know how to read the Old Testament. It’s all about me.” We talked about this in the *Tale of Two Testaments* series back in the fall.

And so when I see Habakkuk standing there, rejoicing and trusting in God when everything has been taken away from him...as an *example*, it crushes me. But when I look to the one to whom he points...the one who had everything taken away from him - when he got to the end of his life, Jesus Christ had only one possession, his robe, and even that was taken away. He was stripped naked, and he was put on the cross, and even his Father’s love was taken away.

Do you know what we have in Jesus Christ? Here’s somebody who had no bank account, who was wiped out, who had nothing in his pocket. He didn’t even *have* pockets. *Everything* was taken away from him, and yet on the cross, he says, “My God, my God...” That’s the language of the covenant. You know, the covenant is, “You shall be my people, and I will be your God.” That’s *intimate* language.

On the cross, Jesus is not saying, “I’m not getting anything out of this relationship so I’m out of here.” That’s consumer language. But on the cross, he is rejoicing and trusting in God though *everything* is being taken away from him. And why did he do it? He did it for you and me. And this is the secret. This is why we *can* live like Habakkuk is suggesting we live. And this is the reason why we *can* move to a new level, even a greater level, than what we have in Deuteronomy 26.

Because in the Old Testament, the Old Testament saints were supposed to remind themselves that God had saved them from Egypt. It was free grace. They didn’t deserve it. They couldn’t have attained it themselves. It was free, unmerited grace. But what they didn’t know is that it was *costly* grace. What you and I know but what they didn’t know, is it was costly. Why costly?

Do you remember the Passover? The night before the Hebrew slaves were taken out of Egypt, the angel of death had been sent into the land. And every single family in Egypt was going to pay for their sins. That's what the angel of death meant. God sent out His justice into Egypt, and everyone was going to pay for their sins. Every family was going to pay for their sins through the death of their firstborn. Remember that? That was the last and the final plague.

Well, what about the Hebrews? They're sinners too. How would *they* escape? And God says, "Here's how you escape, you kill a lamb - every family in every home - you kill a lamb. You paint the blood on the doorframe of your house and you take shelter under the blood of that lamb." Well, the Israelites did that, and they escaped and out they went. But surely on the way out they were saying, "How did that save us? How did the blood of those sweet, little, wooly, quadrupeds save us? How did that happen?"

It must have been pretty mysterious, but John the Baptist knew, because centuries later, **John 1:29 (ESV)** records, "*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*" Those little lambs were pointing to Jesus. On the cross, Jesus Christ had *everything* taken away from him to pay for our sins, to save us.

And here's the thing that the Israelites didn't understand; when they were taken out, God's grace to them was unmerited, but they didn't know it was costly. In other words, they didn't know the only reason they could be saved was because God *gave* - because God *gave* his only Son, because Jesus Christ *gave* his blood.

Now remember what we said about sacrificial giving? We said God says, "I want you to give not just a surplus. I don't want you to give just what you can afford without changing your life. I want you to give *past* the place where it changes your life." Did God give...did Jesus Christ give...past the place where it changed his life? Jesus Christ did not just give to the point where it *changed* his life, Jesus Christ gave to the point where he *lost* his life! And he lost his life for *you*. And when you see that - when you see his grace was costly, when you see he died for you, he did *all* that for you - that will take your heart, and it will make him your treasure.

And when he becomes your treasure, it won't be a problem to give. Do you know why? Because you're going to say, "If *you* gave to the place where you lost your life, then I can certainly give to the place where it changes my life. If you gave to the place where you lost your life for me, I can give to the place where I change my life for you."

And that's the reason why whenever I see somebody who grasps the grace of God - the costly grace of God in Jesus Christ - it changes your heart so you can give sacrificially and joyfully. And you can give under *any* circumstances - any circumstances at all. There's always something to give. There's always the widow's mite. Remember that story? There's always *something* you can give, and you'll want to give.

Christians who understand the grace of God go to the mat even in tough times. And you know, if you go on past in Deuteronomy 26, if you go on a little bit further, it tells you about tithing. **Deuteronomy 26:12** and following, says that was the guideline that God says, "*When you have finished setting aside a **tenth** of all your produce in the third year, the year of the **tithe**, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.*" The Levites were the ministers, the people who ministered at the altar. And then there were the poor. Do you realize this *commands* that we give to refugees? We are to give both to the church and to the poor. We are commanded to tithe.

But when you experience the grace of God, you always *want* to push past that 10 percent. You know, in Luke 19, there's a story when the crooked tax-collector, Zacchaeus, had a life changing encounter

with the grace of Jesus Christ and he says, "Look, Lord, I'm going to give 50 percent of my money away." Did Jesus say, "Oh, no, no, no, Zacchaeus, you only need to give 10 percent. Let's not get crazy here?" No, he said, "Great! That will help us seek and save a lot more lost people."

Listen, if, because you understand the grace of God, Jesus becomes your treasure, you're going to always want to go past. Remember, anything you really, really love, you always have to stop yourself from spending. You don't say, "How much do I *have* to spend on it?" You say, "How much *can* I spend?" And therefore, anybody who really grasps the grace of God gives sacrificially, joyfully, tries to push past that 10 percent *and*, as a result, the Levites and the aliens rejoice.

I love **v. 11** where it says, "*And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.*" Do you know what that means? If you are shaped by the grace of Christ so much that you give radically and joyfully, then your money becomes a **form of grace** because your money keeps ministries going, which liberates people *spiritually*.

And your money helps the poor and the aliens and the widows, which liberates people *physically*. So weirdly enough, when God's grace liberates you so you're able to give, then your money becomes a form of God's grace. Your money starts to become a vehicle through which God is liberating people spiritually and physically. Isn't that amazing?

And when you realize the grace of God to the place you start to give *sacrificially* and *joyfully*, that will then turn your money into something *way* more than money. It will become a vehicle for God's grace. The Levites and the aliens will rejoice in all God has given you. Look at what Jesus Christ did by giving himself away. Look at the lives he changed through his radical giving. Now you go and do the same.

Let's pray...