

I Will Follow

Faith for Troubled Times, Pt.5

Today we bring to a close our series on this little book of Habakkuk. We've been looking at it for a number of weeks because it helps us know how to handle times of crisis, whether those are society-wide troubles or just your own personal times of crisis. We've seen that Habakkuk has learned the great Babylonian Empire is going to crush his country. Whatever your feelings about what happened in *our* country these last few weeks – as bad as it is - I promise you, it's not the Babylonians.

Now, I want to start off this morning by reading for you the final chapter, Chapter 3, in its entirety. The prophet is now accepting what is about to happen, and he doesn't sugar coat it. It's a picture that quite literally leaves him weak in the knees. But it's realistic. If you understand anything about world history, it is realistic. So let's read this frightful take and then see how it can possibly bring us peace and even joy.

Habakkuk 3:1–19

I A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On "shigionoth." 2 LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. 3 God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.

4 His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. 5 Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps. 6 He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

8 Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? 9 You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers; 10 the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.

11 Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. 12 In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. 13 You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot.

14 With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding. 15 You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters. 16 I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.

17 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, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 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 looked at the last few verses last week and we said the description of no figs, no grapes, no olives, no fields producing food, no sheep, no cattle, that is a starvation level economic collapse. It's like Europe right after World War 2, in which not only millions of people were killed in the violence, there were also millions of people who starved to death in the winter times right afterwards. It's an absolute social disaster. And Habakkuk sees it and at the very end, he comes to face it with poise and patience. In fact, he says it's possible to face that kind of disaster and still have a life of sustained joy in the midst of it.

In 1851, an English missionary named Allen Gardiner was shipwrecked with a number of other people on a little remote, uninhabited island off the bottom tip of South America. And they all died one at a time; he was the last one to die and we know this because of a journal he kept which they eventually found next to his body. And the last entry in the journal cited **Psalm 34:10**, "*The lions may grow weak and hungry...*" - Now here's a man dying of hunger - "*...but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*" And then he wrote "YOLO" with a frowny face emoji.

No, the very last thing he wrote in his journal was essentially this, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God." Here's a man dying of starvation. Here's a man far from home. His body is broken. All his hopes are crushed. And his last words are, "I am

overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God." Now let's think about that for a second. How do you and I ordinarily come to the conclusion that God is good? When do you say God is good? Do you know when you say God is good? When things are going *well* for you.

When your fig trees are blossoming. When the money is there. When health is there. When things are going the way you want. When the circumstances of your life are doing well, *then* you say, "Ah, God is good!" But wait a minute, this man found a way to connect to the goodness and love of God *apart* from life's circumstances. Because everything in his life had gone wrong, and yet he felt overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God. Now how do you do that? Anybody in their right mind would pay a million dollars to find out. And guess what? You're not going to have to; you just have to listen to this sermon for the next 30 minutes. It's the ultimate time share trap!

In this last chapter, Habakkuk has learned to do it too. He's doing it. He says though the fig tree dies - in other words, in spite of *nothing* going right, I can rejoice in the Lord. It's possible. What does it mean to rejoice in your suffering? Not *for* your suffering, but *in* your suffering? We're going to learn four things about rejoicing in suffering. Four things here: *what* it is, *when* it happens, *how* it's done, and *why* it's possible.

Ok, first of all, what is rejoicing in suffering? Do you know what it is? Verse 19 compares rejoicing in your suffering to walking sure-footedly on the mountaintops. See, after he says I'm rejoicing in my suffering, then in v. 19, "*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 what's he talking about? Why this metaphor? To rejoice in your suffering is like walking sure-footedly on the mountaintops.

Here's what the image is getting across. To go up high on the mountain is very dangerous. You know, it's dangerous enough just walking here on level ground, but to climb mountains is incredibly dangerous. I had a church planting friend who fell to his death a few years ago while hiking in Colorado. It just takes one little slip, so to go up there is very dangerous. But if you're able to navigate it, if you're able to walk sure-footedly, if you're able to make it up there – there's nothing like the view from the top of a mountain!

Now in ancient times, it was also the safest place you could possibly be. The people who inhabited the high ground could not be attacked. You can't attack going up a mountain – it's too easily defended. Not only that, the people who were on the heights could see for miles in all directions so they could see what was

happening not only hours, but days ahead. They had the vantage point. And therefore, what we're being told here is while walking on the heights is way more dangerous than walking down here, and yet if you're able to pull it off, it's actually way more safe. Whoever controlled the high ground controlled the battlefield.

Now this is saying when suffering comes to you - and it *will* come to you - when disappointments and failures and hard times come to you - and they will - it's pushing you up to the heights spiritually. What does that mean? This is what it means. I've seen people go through suffering; you've seen people go through suffering and some of them get softer and more tender and others get harder and more rigid. Some get more empathetic and compassionate and others get more cynical and bitter. Some get more humble and others get more arrogant.

You know, there's nothing that can make you more arrogant than suffering, because suffering can make you feel like, "Oh, nobody understands what I'm going through." It can make you feel so self-righteous. Some people get more humbled by suffering; other people get more arrogant. Some people get more like Allen Gardiner, able to face anything; and other people get more fragile. Some people get sweeter; others get increasingly sour.

In other words, suffering will make you either a far better or far worse person than you were before. Suffering will either make you fall farther than you ever have fallen before and actually destroy you spiritually and emotionally, *or* it will put you on the heights. In fact, what the author actually says in verse 19, is “He makes me to go on *my* heights.” Heights of character. Closeness to God. Vantage point, able to see things.

Many of you know Adrienne Moore – she did the announcements in second service, back when we had a second service. Adrienne grew up an atheist but came to faith here at SWFF. Now since that time, she has had brain surgery to have a tumor removed, not once, but twice. It had serious physical ramifications on her health – just terrible stuff.

But if you were to talk to her about it today, she would readily tell you that as terrible an ordeal as that was, she has actually come to be grateful for it. Sure, she would like her health back and her energy levels and all that, but she says that before the tumor she had faith, but after the suffering she has certainly. She says she feels a connection to God that she never would have without the suffering. Now, what happened to her? She was pushed to the heights by her suffering. Your suffering is either going to lift you to the heights or it’s going to destroy you, so you

have to learn how to rejoice in suffering. And if you do learn how to rejoice in suffering, it’s like walking on the mountaintops.

Now secondly, when does rejoicing in suffering happen? The second thing we learn here is not just what it is, which is walking sure-footedly on the mountaintops. When does it happen? And the answer is it happens *concurrently* with sorrow and grief. Rejoicing in the Lord doesn’t come *after* sorrow and grief; it happens *during* sorrow and grief. This is extremely important to see. Look at v.16; it’s all there. Verse 16 is Habakkuk’s response to everything he’s been seeing.

All through chapters 1, 2, and 3, he’s been seeing what God is going to do and how and everything. And then in **Habakkuk 3:16**, here’s his response, “*I heard and my heart pounded...*” - Now can I just give you a little insight? In Hebrew, it doesn’t say “heart”; it says, “My bowels trembled.” Okay, don’t think about that too long, but you get the picture, all right? - “*...my lips quivered at the sound;*” – that means he’s crying - “*decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled.*” – I’m shaking like a leaf, this is not some put on bravery - “*Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.*” In spite of all my fear, I will rejoice in the Lord. In spite of my great terror and uncertainty, *yet* I have peace.

Now we have trouble with that, because we think you can *either* rejoice *or* you can be in deep sorrow, but you couldn't possibly rejoice in your sorrow and the answer is, yes you can. The joy of the Lord happens *concurrently*, happens within the sorrow. It's a very great danger that a lot of Christian people think "rejoice in the Lord" is a kind of stiff upper lip stoicism - "Never let them see you sweat".

A lot of people feel like, "If I'm weeping uncontrollably and if I'm filled with grief and sorrow, it's a lack of faith." That's *not* what you see in the Bible – all over the place. Over in the book of Job is a great example. All those horrible things happened to Job – lost his fortune and his family. And it says, Job tore his clothes, shaved his head, cried out in despair and grief, and yet, **Job 1:22** says, "*In all this, Job did not sin...*"

I'm afraid there are too many Christian churches that would look at Job doing that and say, "What a lack of faith!" And yet the Bible says he didn't do anything wrong. Why? Because rejoicing in suffering happens *within* sorrow; here's how it works. It's not, "Either I'm happy in the Lord or I'm filled with grief and sorrow." Oh no. The grief and sorrow *enhance* the joy, drives you more into God – just like with Adrienne. Just like when it gets colder outside, it kicks the thermostat up right?

Therefore, the sorrow and the grief drive you into God, show you the resources you never had, enhance the joy. And then the enhanced joy enables you to actually feel the grief - *feel* it. See, there's a tendency for us to say, "If I'm grieving then I must not be rejoicing." But look at Jesus, he was perfect, right? Perfect. Yet he's always weeping. The prophet Isaiah said that he would be "a man of sorrows acquainted with grief."

He had to be, do you know why? Because when you're not all absorbed in yourself, you can feel the sadness of the world. And therefore, what you actually have here and not only here, there are a lot of other places - I could quote them; I won't take the time to do it - the joy of the Lord happens *inside* the sorrow.

It doesn't replace the sorrow. It doesn't come *after* the sorrow. It doesn't come after the weeping. The weeping drives you into the joy, enhances the joy, and then the joy *enables* you to actually feel your grief without it sinking you. In other words, you're finally emotionally healthy. That's when it works.

Now, number three, how do you do it? How is rejoicing in suffering done? Now that we've shown you this rejoicing in the Lord doesn't happen *after* the weeping and the heart pounding and the lips quivering and the knees buckling; it happens *during* it, then you begin to realize rejoicing in the Lord is not just a feeling that comes if you hold on long enough.

Rejoicing in the Lord is a discipline. It's something you do. And if you want to know what that is, I'll suggest there are three parts to it. It's repeating, remembering, and rejoicing properly.

First, repeating. Notice what he says, **v.18**, the famous verse, "*Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*" Now something happened there that happens so often in the Bible. It's such a deep pattern in the Bible that those of us who have read the Bible for years get so used to it we don't even notice it, but I want us to notice it. What happened in that verse? He repeated himself.

Do you see it? It says, "I will rejoice in the Lord ..." and then he comes right back and says, "I will be joyful in God my Savior." – "rejoice" and "joyful" are the same word there.

Now why did he say it twice? Did Habakkuk just need a better editor? No, the Bible is *always* doing this sort of thing. The Bible constantly repeats itself. And if you look carefully at this verse, it's saying the same thing but a little differently. And by saying, "I will rejoice in the Lord ..." and then saying, "I will be joyful in God my Savior," it's a little different and therefore, you understand it better by having it said twice. It goes a little deeper into you and your understanding is a little bit richer. This kind of repetition is a constant pattern in the Bible.

Why four Gospels? Why wasn't one enough? They're covering the same territory; by the time you get to the third Gospel you say, "Yeah, I know he rose on the third day. I know he ate with his disciples the night before he died. Why do I have to learn about this four times?" And the answer is because every time it's the same and yet every time it's different and it goes in deeper. And your understanding is better. And it's over and over and over.

God warns Pharaoh, sends him two dreams. Joseph gets two dreams about the future. So many of the miracles were repeated. Jesus feeds the 4,000; Jesus feeds the 5,000. You know I've seen so many skeptical critics who say, "It's pretty obvious that's the same thing and the Gospels basically have two contradictory, kind of botched accounts of the very same thing. If Jesus fed the 4,000, he wouldn't come right back and feed the 5,000," which shows these are people who've never read the Bible. Nothing happens in the Bible once. Everything is happening over and over and over and over again.

Why? An old British Bible commentator puts it perfectly like this. First of all, he quotes **Psalm 62:11** which says, "*One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard:*" And then he says, "God teaches us by this method of repetition through scripture with good reason. The human mind is incurably centrifugal," – that means moving away from the center - "forever flying off in a tangent. It must be brought back to the great central truths of the Gospel over and over. Our minds must be made literally to *con-centrate*, to concentrate"

Now here's the point, Jesus Christ on the cross, in the moment of his greatest agony. How in the world did he have the presence of mind and spirit to form his response to the most excruciating pain by quoting the Bible? How could he respond by quoting the Bible?

Psalm 22:1, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" The only way Jesus Christ would have been capable of that was because he *drilled* the Bible into his heart over and over and over. You meditate on it over and over again.

You worship. You take a text and you study it yourself. Then you take a text and you talk about it with your friend. Then you take a text and you study it in your small group. Then you take a text and you hear me or somebody else preaching about it. Very rarely am I telling you something up here you've never heard before. But every time you get it, it goes a little deeper and a little deeper. And that's the *only* way you're going to change. It's the only way you're going to be able to handle suffering or even crucifixion. Repetition. The discipline of repeating, of going over. That's the first part, repeating.

Secondly, remembering. The main thing Habakkuk does in chapter 3, which is actually amazing, is all of the chapter is basically a restating of the Exodus. All of it is a recounting of the Exodus. The pestilence and the plagues, that's how God got them out of Egypt. The shaking of the ground, that's Mount Sinai. The trampling of the sea, that's the crossing of the Red Sea. In a sense, you can say that what he's doing is going back to "the Gospel", because the Exodus was the Gospel - at least the Gospel in the form Habakkuk had at that time.

Because the children of Israel were in slavery and bondage and they didn't have the power to get themselves out, but God came and He miraculously intervened; He entered history and brought them out. And they were saved, not by what they did, but by what He did. That's the Gospel, and here's what Habakkuk is doing; he's telling himself and he's reminding himself and he's remembering and remembering and remembering the Gospel until he gets to verse 16 and he says, "Okay! Now I have peace."

You see this all through the Bible. **Psalm 42:5**, the psalmist says, "*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put **your hope** in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*" Who's he talking to? Is he talking to God? No, it's not a prayer. Is he talking to his listeners? No, it's not a sermon. Who's he talking to? **Psalm 103:2**, very famous psalm, "*Praise the Lord, **my soul**, and forget not all his benefits*" Who's he talking to? "My soul." What's that mean?

He's *remembering*. What he is saying is, "I have to connect what I know about God and what He's done in the past to my present." My favorite example of this is in Luke chapter eight. That's one of the accounts in the Gospels of the famous story of Jesus calming the storm.

Jesus is on a boat with his disciples and a terrible storm comes up. And the disciples are panicked and they go to Jesus and they say, "Master, we're going to die! Don't you even care?"

And Jesus calms the storm, and then he turns to them and says, and I love the way he says it, (**Luke 8:25**) "***Where** is your faith?*" Notice he doesn't say, "You poor guys, you need more faith. We'll pray for you." He says, "*Where* is your faith?" Do you know what he's doing? He's saying, "You know who I am! You've seen what I've done! You have the faith; get it out! It should be here. Where is it? You're not remembering."

You know "remembering" - if you think about it - the word is actually a rather grizzly metaphor. I mean, it is the opposite of "dismember" don't forget. Your hand, your finger, your arm, your leg, it's been cut off and now you're putting it back. You're reconnecting it; you're sewing it back on. This is remembering. Jesus is saying, "You know who I am, but you're not connecting it to the storm. You know who I am, but you're not connecting it to your heart. There's no reason for you to panic, but you're not remembering."

And see, rejoicing in tribulation says instead of you looking at the storm, instead of looking at the waves, instead of looking at the circumstances, you go back to the Gospel. You go back to the Exodus. You go back to what God has done. You know who He is; you know what He's done. What does it mean if He raised Jesus from the dead? What does that *mean* to me now? And you're repeating and you're remembering, but not only that, you're rejoicing.

That's the third thing, rejoicing Now see, this word- let's really think about this - "rejoicing" can't simply refer to feeling. In **Philippians 4:4**, Paul says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" Very famous phrase. And you look at that and you say, "How in the world - rejoice in the Lord *always*? How can Paul *command* that we always feel happy?" And you know what? You *can't* command that we always feel happy and therefore, he's *not* commanding we always feel happy. He's talking to you about a discipline.

Whatever rejoicing is, it can't just be to feel happy. But the word "rejoicing" shows us it's not just a mental thing; it's not just a stoic thing. It's not, "Okay, I'm going to think about what I should do and I'm just going to do the right thing." No, it's more than that. Rejoicing means to treasure. It means to savor.

Rejoicing means to take something that has happened and say, "What *should* this mean to me? How *should* I feel about this? Look at what God's done. Look at how God is. Wait a minute, that must mean...!" And suddenly you're adoring. That's not the same as thinking. You're appreciating. You're valuing. You're praising. And that gets us into the secret.

Habakkuk looked at the Exodus - which was the Gospel as far as he knew it - and that's what got him to the place where he said, "Even though I've fallen down, even though I'm trembling like a leaf, I have a deep peace. I can rejoice in my suffering." But we have a leg up because we have a perspective on the Exodus he didn't have. What is that perspective? In Luke chapter 10, Jesus sent out his disciples and he gave them the power to heal people and to cast out demons. And they went out and they had all kinds of great things happening.

And they came back and they said, "Wow Lord, even the demons are subject to our name!" They were real excited. They were getting results. Look at all the things they were accomplishing. And Jesus has the audacity to say, (**Luke 10:20**), "*However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written ...*" - It's the word for "engraved" - "*...in heaven.*"

Now here's what he's saying about that. Back in those days, in fact even today, to have your name engraved in stone or engraved in metal meant you'd accomplished something. It means an award; it means something big. It means you are significant. You are valuable. You've done something.

And so here's what Jesus is saying, "Don't you dare look out at the things you are accomplishing in the world. Don't you look and say, 'I made law partner; therefore, I'm somebody.' 'I got into that school; therefore, I'm somebody.' 'Look at my grades; I'm somebody.' 'Look at the money I've made; I'm somebody. I have a name.' No!" He says, "Stop rejoicing in that. Stop focusing on that. Stop banking on your accomplishments in your mind. Because when your circumstances change, you'll be destroyed."

"You'll fall down off the mountain because when things go wrong, if your heart is rejoicing and fixating on those things and that's how you feel, like you have a self and you have an identity, it'll all be gone. No!, he say, I want you to rejoice in this; that your names *are* - past tense - *already* engraved, already written in heaven. You're already accepted. Your place is already there. You're already loved."

Now how in the world can he make such a claim? Here's how. **Last point; Why it's possible to rejoice in suffering.** Did you know Jesus met Moses? In Luke 9, Jesus goes to the top of a mountain - he's on the heights - and on those heights, with his disciples, suddenly he began to shine - he became glorious. It's called the transfiguration. And Moses and Elijah appeared and **Luke 9:31** says something no English translation quite knows what to do with. It says "*They spoke about his **departure**, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*" Most translations say, his departure or his going-forth or something. But in the Greek, it literally says Moses and Jesus were talking about "*his exodus*", Jesus' exodus, that he was about to accomplish.

Can you imagine? Here's Moses showing up and saying, "I pulled off a great Exodus. Oh, you should have been there! Someday they will make a movie about it. But, the exodus *you're* about to pull off is the ultimate one." What is he talking about? Here's what he's talking about. Moses risked his life to liberate the children of Israel from political and social bondage. But Jesus, the ultimate Moses, gave his life in order to liberate us, not just from political and social bondage, but from **evil and sin and death** itself.

See, the first Moses *risks* his life to liberate his people, but the ultimate Moses *gave* his life. Not only that, the first Moses slew a lamb – remember this from last week? - and put the blood on the doorposts so the children of Israel could be forgiven and they could be liberated. But the ultimate Moses – Jesus - *was* the Lamb. It was his blood he gave so we could be forgiven, so we could be liberated from sin and evil and death.

And Exodus 28 describes how the first Moses engraved the names of the children of Israel – one for each of the 12 tribes - on precious stones, on sapphires and rubies and diamonds. And he put them on the breastplate of the high priest, his brother Aaron, so Aaron, when he was ministering in the tabernacle, had the names of the children of Israel engraved over his heart. But the ultimate Moses, Jesus Christ, is *the* High Priest and he stands before the Father.

And we're told everything in the Old Testament about the tabernacle, the temple, all is a kind of copy of what's happening in the heavenly places. And Jesus Christ *because* he gave his life, because he was the Lamb, Jesus Christ right now stands before the Father, as it were, and - if you believe in him - your name is over his heart.

And when the Father looks at your name, He sees a diamond, He sees a ruby, He sees an absolute beauty because Jesus Christ was the ultimate Moses who gave his life - didn't just risk his life - and who shed his blood - didn't just shed the lamb's blood. You can absolutely know that right now your names are written in heaven if you believe in him. Now *use* that!

See, Jesus says, "Don't rejoice in the fact you made partner, or you made money, or you made it into the school you want. Stop doing that. Stop focusing on that. Stop fixating on that. Stop comforting your soul with that. Here's what I want you to think about, when you get discouraged - Ok, you've lost money - but your names are written in heaven. That's *real* wealth! Think about that until you're okay. And if somebody rejects you and you've lost some friendship or you've lost some reputation, but your names are written in heaven, that's *real* approval! That's real love! Think about that!"

What Jesus is saying is, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Rejoice that I'm the ultimate Moses. Think about what I have done and live on a plain of who you are in Christ and focus on that and treasure that and dream about that until you can handle anything." That's how it's possible.

How can you find joy in suffering? Remember, Rejoice and Repeat. Wash, rinse and repeat. You know how I'd like to end the sermon – and this series? With communion. That's what it's for "Do this in remembrance of me..." Now, thanks to Ms. Rona we can't do that right now. Not physically. But nothing can keep you from doing it in your heart. To remember that his body was broken for you. To remember that his blood was shed for you. To remember these things and proclaim the Lords' death – in every area of your life – until he comes. Do it over and over and then do it over again.

And each time we repeat, we *remember*. Your name is written in heaven. And every time you remember that, what do you do? You *rejoice*. What's the worst this world can do to you? God's got you. You will be with Him forever in utter perfection. Who cares what's in your bank account? Who cares what she thinks of you? Who cares when you can venture out to a concert again? Hey, these are good things...but they're not the ultimate thing. Rejoice that your name is engraved upon the heart of the High Priest, Jesus Christ.

Let's pray...