

Trusting God Alone

Trusting God in Trying Times

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

It would only be appropriate for me to ask you in light of that magnificent anthem whether that hope belongs to you in our Lord Jesus Christ or not. When we rise, as magnificent as that was, that was a miniscule fraction of the glory that will belong to us in Christ when we actually rise on that last day to be with him and if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, I invite you to faith in him. He calls you to come to him to be saved from your sin. The crucified and resurrected Lord of all, Jesus Christ, calls you to faith to believe in him for your eternal salvation. D.C., thank you for giving us a magnificent entrance into the glory that awaits us one day soon who belong to Christ.

I invite you to turn to the book of Habakkuk in the back of your Old Testament as we close our conference on "Trusting God in Trying Times" here this morning. We have had a magnificent weekend together and we come to the culminating point of the book of Habakkuk and of the point of the conference bringing us to a magnificent climax where we realize that trusting God alone is enough for the broken shattered human heart. Trusting God alone. That's what Habakkuk learned. As we've gone through the book, we saw that at the start he was shattered in his spirit. He was a man full of unanswered prayers and unanswered questions. "God, why is society collapsing around me as I serve as your prophet to them?" God tells him, "Habakkuk, you think that I'm not doing anything, you think that I'm standing idly by, but actually I'm raising up a world power to discipline my people, to teach them not to sin." Habakkuk says, "God, I believe you. I trust you. You are holy. You are eternal but how is it that you can use a wicked people to accomplish your purposes? I need to wait on an answer to find out how to satisfy the continued dilemma of my soul." And God answers him and he says, "Habakkuk, you must look still to the future. I'll use these people for a time but then I'll bring judgment on them. In the meantime, understand this, Habakkuk," Habakkuk 2:14, "that there is a coming day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord and all of these questions will be swallowed up in victory when Christ reigns over the world and every tongue confesses and every knee bows in recognition that Jesus Christ truly is the Lord of all and all glory belongs to him." In the meantime, Habakkuk, in the meantime, Christian friend here today, remember this, Habakkuk 2:20, that, "the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him." That the glorious majesty and the sovereign exaltation of God calls for a response of silent worship; that there becomes a time where the troubled heart simply needs to bow before God and honor him

and let the fact that he is Lord and King be enough to satisfy every trembling aspiration and brokenness of the heart. The Lord is in his holy temple. God sovereignly reigns. There is a time for questions to cease and to simply bow in worship and submission before him.

That's what Habakkuk does in chapter 3, verse 2. He says, "LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy." In other words, he says, "God, I understand that you're about to pour your wrath upon the nation. I'm not complaining. I'm not asking you to change your mind. I simply appeal to you to remember that as you rightly exercise your wrath on your disobedient people, that you would remember in the midst of that that you're a merciful God and that you would tend your wrath with drops of grace and mercy to preserve us through the discipline that we so rightly deserve." Incredible prayer. I think it's one of the greatest prayers in all of the Bible when you remember the fullness of the context.

So what's happened in the book of Habakkuk that we've seen this weekend is that Habakkuk has been brought from a place of confusion to confidence; from tears to triumph; from failure to faith. And what we've seen is that as God brought him through that process, he has given to us a model to follow as well in our own weakness and times of brokenness and times of failure, times of questions. Beloved, I want you to know and to understand and to obey God's word in this, that you do not have to live in a continual unbroken pattern of discouragement no matter what your circumstances are. That is not the calling of the Christian life. You are called to a higher level of existence, a higher level of heart gratitude and worship to the living God. You are called to trust him for the simple reason that he is worthy of your trust, not because of how circumstances might turn out in your earthly life.

What does it mean to trust God? We framed the question this way, really: how do we trust God? Because as we said, everybody understands that has been around the Christian realm for any length of time, that you're supposed to trust God but simply to have the command doesn't tell you how to implement it and to appropriate it in your life and to let it become a changing, defining force in the way that you live. Those are two different questions. I said it this way I think on Friday night, the messages start to run together after a while. It's one thing to go to a mechanic and say, "How do I fix my car?" and you would think it's very strange if the mechanic just turned around and told you, "Well, fix your car." You'd say, "Wait a minute, the whole point here is how do I get from here to there? I need you to fix this and not simply tell me to fix it." In other words, as so often happens from Christian counselors, Christian teachers, Christian pulpits, people will tell you, "Trust God." Well, do you know what? When you're going through a discouraging time, that's not helpful because you're saying, "How do I trust God in this?" and it's not an answer to the question on your heart to turn the question into an imperative. "How do I trust God in the midst of this sorrow?" Trust God. That's non-responsive. To use a cognate word, it's irresponsible to deal with people's souls that way.

We're not going to do with you that way this morning here, we're going to show you how to trust God in the culminating message of our time and we've been looking at this whole matter of trusting God in trying times and we've given this definition. How is it that I trust God? You can write this down if you haven't already, you trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word. I'll say that again. I'm only halfway through the sentence: you trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word and then you rest your confidence that he will ultimately deal with you consistently with those ways. Should I say it one more time? Sure, I'll answer my own question because I really want you to get this. You trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word and then you rest your confidence that he will ultimately deal with you consistently with those ways.

Let me say something really important that's kind of assumed through all of this: this is a hope, this is a confidence, this is a trust that belongs only to true Christians. If you are a rebel against God, if you have not been converted, if you have not been born again, the only expectation you have from God unless you turn to Christ, the only expectation for you is an outpouring ultimately of his wrath upon your disobedience and your indifference to the Gospel of Christ. It's no good, it doesn't do a non-Christian any good to ask, "How do I trust God for the problems in my life?" you've got a much bigger issue to deal with which is the reality of your separation from God because of your sin. And God has given you an answer to that which also involves trust but it's a matter of turning in humble trust to Christ and saying, "I need a Savior to deliver me from wrath. Oh crucified, resurrected, risen and ascended Lord, would you save me from my sin?" That's how you need to trust God if you're not a Christian here today and until you come to that point, everything else I have to say today is a closed book; it doesn't belong to you, these are promises that belong to those who belong to Christ, who belong to the one true God by the one true way that he has appointed to come to him, the one true way through the Lord Jesus Christ who said, "No one comes to the Father except through me."

With that in mind, understanding that we extend our hand to those of you who are not Christians and we plead with you to come to Christ, with that said, I can only leave you there and leave you alone in your conscience before God and the Holy Spirit and turn my attention now to those who gather together as a believing people of God and to give you the help and the encouragement that God would have for your souls today in the midst of the difficulties that you're going through. We realize that some of them are heavy and based on the authority of God's word, I can tell you that the answer to the sorrows of your heart are found in the things that we're talking about this morning. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph. End of chapter. End of book. This is where you find your hope, focused on trusting God alone.

Well, what are God's ways? You'll have to review the full messages if you haven't been with us. I can't cover all of the material again. But we've seen six points. We said this, is that, first of all, you need to remember and realize that God's ways are not your ways; that there are times in life where things are not going to go according to your desire. That doesn't mean that God isn't in control. It doesn't mean that he has stopped blessing you. It

means that he is exercising his sovereign prerogative of God over all to do what he wants in your life even when that's contrary to your desires. One of the things about belonging to Christ, one of the things about calling him Lord is recognizing that he has the sovereign prerogative to order circumstances in your life as he sees fit and that it's not our job to object to that and say, "No, I want my life to be different." At what point is Christ Lord when that's our attitude and expectation? No, God's ways are not your ways. We realize that sometimes God will do things that are unexpected, that are surprising, that are painful, sometimes that are majestically more glorious than anything that you ever could have thought, but God works in our lives according to his wisdom, not according to our expectations and desires. There will be times where you are surprised.

We said, secondly, that God's ways are often hidden; that you're not always going to understand what is going on, what God is doing, what his ultimate purposes are. When sudden death hits your life or an unexpected illness strikes you and you say, "Where did this come from? Why?" And the question becomes, "Why? Why me? Why now? I had other plans. I had a different agenda here. Now something else has taken over my life and I have to respond to that." And the natural question is, I'm not condemning the question, the natural question is, "Why is this happening?" Well, beloved, what you need to understand and this is absolutely liberating, is to realize that many times there's not going to be an answer to that why question. There's not going to be an evident question why. And things can be so simple. Things can be so clear and evident to you when you just frame the issue properly. When you come to those unexpected times and you ask the question why, realize that there may not be answers to that because God's ways are often hidden. Change the question. Change the question, beloved, and ask the question who? Who is this God that is in charge of my life? Then when you ask the question that way, setting aside your problems for a time and you just start to meditate on the person and the nature and the character and the promises of God, who is this God, then you're in a place where your spirit can go and find productive answers that are rooted in truth and the revealed word of God. Habakkuk needed to learn to move away from, "Why, God?" to "Who, God, are you?"

And when you ask that question, what do you find? You find that God's ways are holy. That he is pure. He is perfect. He would never do anything to bring ultimate harm to you. Ever. He could not do that and why would he do that? After Christ came to the cross and offered himself and gave his life blood to save you from your sins, if he has given you eternal life, won't he give you everything else good that is associated with that? Why would he be your friend on the cross and then turn to your enemy in life? It's not true. He's our friend all the time. He always designs our good. He is holy. It could never be any other way. Build your life on that principle no matter how hard things are right now or how disappointing they might be.

As part of that, we said that God's ways may make you wait. You may have to wait before the circumstances unfold and turn more to your liking. You may have to wait as you grow in Christ before you start to have an understanding perspective. God doesn't deal with you as a microwave and just put you in and give you 30 seconds on the microwave and suddenly you pop out and you're mature and everything is fine. It doesn't

work that way. Beloved, the truth of the matter is and I can say this because I'm addressing it to my own heart and you need to understand this and you need to understand that I'm saying this to you to love you, to encourage you, to help you to understand: the reasons that you go through such difficult times in your life is tied to the depth of the corruption that is in your heart. It takes a long time to work out that corruption and one of the ways that God purifies you is by bringing trials into your life that humble you, that sanctify you, that make you dependent on him. By nature, you are proud. By nature, you are self-sufficient. By nature, you think you can do it on your own and God brings these pressing difficult trials into your life in part to teach you that that's not reality and to deliver you from that self-sufficient corruption so that you are happy to simply be a humble disciple at the feet of Christ and whatever he wants is sufficient for you to be content.

As I said on Friday, I'm not going to repeat it all, there are many years of that process grinding on me and so I speak from personal experience when I speak of the pride and the corruption in my own heart. Your problem is that we share a like nature and, so part of what we do is we complain against the trials and say, "I don't deserve this. This isn't fair. This isn't what I wanted." Well, by what right do we frame the issue like that? By what right does a sinful creature come before an uncreated God and say, "I had my expectations here and I expect you to fulfill them"? Where does that come from? Where does that level of presumption come out of a human heart before a holy God? "I wanted health. I wanted prosperity. I wanted fame and fortune and here I am, I find that the means are meager and people despise me and I'm isolated and my health isn't what I want it to be." Yeah, exactly. Realize that God is teaching you to depend upon him and find your sufficiency in the nature of who he is rather than in the nature of your circumstances. That is where God is glorified. That's where God is honored; where a man in dependence is prostrated before him and says, "God, you are enough. I need nothing else." And if you're a Christian, deep in your heart, even if you sometimes forget and sometimes it's fuzzy and not completely recognized, deep in your heart is this desire: you desire that your life would be used to glorify Christ supremely and nothing else matters by comparison to that.

Well, before you can attain that goal, God has to purge you so that that actually becomes your desire and he burns off the dross of self-sufficiency and human ambition to leave you with a heart that says, "God, if you are glorified, then that's enough for me." That's what we see going on in Habakkuk's life. His ways may make you wait. We saw that his ways are still future. God is not done. The final chapter has not been written in your life or in human history. We don't know the outcome of all of the trials in our lives and so we need to wait. We need to be patient and remind ourselves that God is still on the throne, his ways are still future and therefore we are content to give him time to work out his purposes even more. Beloved, you must approach life that way. You cannot evaluate the outcome of life based on what is happening in your life today right now. Whether it's good or bad, you cannot do that. You don't know the future and God has much more of his purpose still to work out. James 4 reminds us, you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow so on what basis do we presume to evaluate whether God, what God is doing in our life today is good or bad if we don't know what our life will be like

tomorrow? We simply have to humble ourselves of our sufficiency, of our pride, humble ourselves of our sense of being capable of judging the purposes of God for whether they're good or bad. You have to set all of that aside and say, "God's ways are still future and I'm going to trust him and I'm going to patiently wait until he works out the outcome that pleases him." When you come to that point, that's where you come to that point of submission. His ways call for complete submission and you realize, "I just need to submit and trust." That's what Habakkuk did in verse 2 of chapter 3.

That brings us to our new material for this morning. Point 7 for the conference, point 1 for this morning: God's ways are proven from the past. How do you trust God? You remember all of these things that we were talking about and then you also remember that God's ways are proven from the past. For Habakkuk and his people, violent exile was immediately ahead in their future. This rising Chaldean power was soon to descend upon them and carry them into exile and it was going to be difficult. It was going to end life as they knew it. And for Habakkuk, the outcome of this is something that was going to extend beyond his lifetime. The changes in society and culture around him were things that he was not going to see the ultimate outcome with his earthly eyes. How is it as a lover of God's people, as a prophet of God to them who desired their well-being, how was it that he did not fall into immense discouragement in the face of that certain reality that God had revealed to him in advance? Well, in verse 3 through verse 15, there is something special going on. Habakkuk is remembering. He is reciting. He is recounting how God had acted on behalf of his people in the past and we won't go through all of it, it's a difficult passage, quite frankly, there's a lot of a obscure geography; there's a lot of complex poetry that is in the midst of it, and it's a difficult passage to understand. But we can distill a few simple principles by looking at a couple of representative verses that will serve our purposes for today.

To simplify what we're about to hear, let me just give you this little bit, this summary overview statement. When Habakkuk gave his prophecy, there had already been about 1,500 years of Israelite history beforehand. When God called Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, on through, there had been generations and generations of God working and delivering his people. Habakkuk alludes to some of that and in the course of it, in the course of that history from time to time, God had done miraculous things to deliver his people. He had shown that he had the power and the desire to deliver them from their distress. It's really crucial. If you think, just to remember the exodus, the Egyptian army bearing down on the people on one side and the Red Sea in front of them on the other, they were doomed to be destroyed because they couldn't go into the sea without drowning; they couldn't go to the army without being destroyed. It was over for them and yet what did God do? By his power and his desire to deliver his people, he parted the waters and led them through and when the Egyptian army tried to follow, the waters came back and they were drowned. A supernatural act by God to deliver his people. Beloved, the whole point of that is that in the past as God dealt with his people, he showed his power to deliver them from humanly impossible situations in order to effect their deliverance. What Habakkuk is doing here is he is remembering different episodes like that in Israel's past in order to strengthen his faith that God would do the same thing again in the future.

Look at verse 8 with me, for example. Habakkuk 3:8. Habakkuk is asking rhetorical questions here as he looks to the past. He says,

8 Did the LORD rage against the rivers, Or was Your anger against the rivers, Or was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, On Your chariots of salvation?

What did God do when he was delivering his people from Egypt? Well, he did the ten miracles in Exodus in the beginning of Exodus. One of the things that he did was that he turned the Nile river into blood and fouled the water in order to loosen the grip of the Egyptians on his people. As we just said, he parted the Red Sea. What Habakkuk is saying here is why did those supernatural phenomenon, why did God do that to the natural elements? Why did he turn a river to blood? Why did he divide a sea? Habakkuk says, "Was it because you were angry at the river? Were you mad at the river that you struck it like that? Were you mad at the sea that you divided it's natural existence and parted it when the people went through and you, as it were, rode on your horses, on your chariots of salvation? You came majestically to bring deliverance to your people. God, when you were doing those supernatural things, were you angry at nature when you did that?" The obvious answer is no. "No. You weren't angry at all with the elements. What were you doing then, God, when the natural elements were turned upside down? What were you doing? You were riding on a chariot, as it were, in order to bring salvation to your people. God, you have the power to turn a majestic river to blood in order to deliver your people. You can split a sea in order to deliver your people. Not only can you, you have done it in the past."

At another time during the days of Joshua, he delivered them with phenomenon in the sky. Look at verse 11 of Habakkuk 3. I realize that for the sake of time you're having to take my word on a couple of these things. We're not going to the cross references in the older books of the Old Testament. Habakkuk says in verse 11,

11 Sun and moon stood in their places; They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.

God in the days of Joshua, you can read it in Joshua 10, made the sun stand still in order to give victory in battle to the troops of Israel when the battle was particularly fierce and they needed a little more time to complete the victory. Scripture says that the sun stood still. That doesn't happen, by the way, if you've ever noticed. Supernaturally God did something in time and space and history in order to effectuate deliverance, salvation, help for his people. That's what he did. You see, the Old Testament narratives are not allegories, they're history and that's very important. Do you know why, in part? Because an allegory doesn't strengthen your faith. If you say, "Oh well, this made up story, someone made up this story in the past," that doesn't help you when you need real time and space deliverance in your life, does it? It's completely different to look back and say, "God literally turned a river to blood. God literally made the sun to stand still. God

literally split a sea because he was motivated to help and deliver his people." You say, "Oh, if he could do that, imagine, he could deliver me too."

And the key to understanding this whole passage, verses 3 to 15, is found in chapter 3, verse 13 where Habakkuk, as it were, answers all of his rhetorical questions and sums up what his real point is in reciting all of this geography and history. He says, speaking to God, praying to God, continuing the dialogue with God, he says,

13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the evil To lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah.

"Selah" being a word that means "stop and think about this." Habakkuk says, "Stop and think about what I've said here." God did all these supernatural phenomenon and why did he do it? He went forth, in other words he exercised his power like that, look at verse 13 with me again, "You did this for the salvation of your people. You did it to deliver them." In other words, so part of faith is remembering that God has proven his ways in the past. God has shown his power in the past in a way that shows how magnificent, how unlimited is his omnipotence, his power in order to accomplish his will. There is no barrier to the power of God to do what he wants to do. No president future or past or present, no world leader, no world government, has the power to hinder the purpose of God. He will do what he pleases.

That's a little bit of a sense of the passage. Let's kind of walk through some present-day implications for you here today and what it means for your faith. In the midst of your trials, you need to step back and use history to inform your faith. History in this sense, biblical history. Look, back up even further, you believe the Bible, right? You believe the Bible? Yeah, the Bible is true. What it says happened happened. Well, when you go and you read through the pages of the Old Testament and you read the New Testament and the miracles of Christ and the miracles of the apostles and their prophetic utterances, you're reading things that actually happened in time and space. What you see as you read that is you should see a principle that emerges out of all of that, a transcendent principle and it is this: that God delivers his people when it seems impossible in the eyes of men. God delivers his people when it seems impossible in the eyes of men. That's what he does. He is a Savior. He is a Deliverer. He is a Rock. He is a Refuge. He is a Fortress. That's who he is and so what you do in the midst of your trials that are overwhelming you, what I needed to do and didn't know at the time, is that you look back into the past and you say to yourself, "God has done great things," and you remind yourself, "God hasn't changed. He will do great things again in the future." You just have to wait to see the fulfillment. In other words, beloved, unlike financial reports and financial advertisements that says the past is not predictive of the future, we don't have to think that way in the Christian life. For us, God's actions in the past are an absolute predictor of what he will do in the future. Speaking broadly, God saved his people from impossible conundrums in the past, he will do it again in the future because he hasn't changed. He's still just as powerful and faithful to his people now and in the future as he was back then. That's who God is and we believe him for it.

Now, beloved, here's the thing: Habakkuk reached this point of faith 600 years before the time of Christ. You and I are in a much better, much stronger position than Habakkuk ever was. You've got to understand this. You just have to understand this and embrace it and let it define your life. Here's how you should think now as a Christian. Now as a Christian, you look back in the past but you look back at something different than the deliverance of Israel. Oh, we can look back at that and rejoice in it but we have something even greater than the deliverance of Israel to look back on, we look back at Calvary. We look back at the Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, doing the ultimate act of deliverance for his people; delivering them spiritually from their bondage to sin, from the penalty of sin, ultimately to deliver them from the power of sin. Oh, beloved, I say this strongly to encourage and strengthen your heart, I say it knowing that this is what I needed to hear 25 years ago: as a Christian in the midst of your sorrows, in the midst of your struggles, in the midst of your spiritual indifference and mediocrity, you need to wake up, you need to be stirred up by looking back at the cross. What did God do for you there? Our Lord Jesus Christ in true flesh and blood offered up his righteous life as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God against your sin so that you would not be punished, but that you might be delivered and reconciled to God for ever and ever more. Amen. Scripture says, "Greater love has no man than this, than he lays down his life for his friends." This is what Christ did for you in the past recorded and explained for us in Scripture.

So, beloved, 1 John 4:10. I remember questioning the love of God in light of things that had happened in my life. If God loved me, how could this happen? How could he allow this? How could he do this? And it was a quagmire spiritually to be in, and that's not good thinking, but I understand that maybe a few of you are like I was then, you're like that now, "How could God love me and this be the way my life is?" Beloved, there is a simple answer to that question that lifts you up and brings you out of it. 1 John 4:10. I remember having a little pocket New Testament, I still have it on my shelf at home, a little red cover NASB, reading it on the second floor of a Wendy's restaurant in downtown Chicago, asking those questions, "How could God love me when it's like this?" And I remember with power reading that little \$2 New Testament bringing words of priceless, infinite value. 1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Beloved, do you understand something? As a Christian, you have no right whatsoever to question the love of God. The love of God has been settled eternally at the cross. If Christ laid down his life for you as a voluntary substitute that you might be delivered from sin, there's no question about the love of God in your life. That's already been answered. Asked and answered never to be questioned again. And I treasure that moment in the midst of that dark despair when that single verse clarified and rebuked my wicked soul and said, "How dare you question the love of God in light of Calvary." And I think I can honestly say since that moment, I have never questioned the love of God again. If you know Christ and you know that he hung on that cross thinking of you in his sufferings in order to deliver you from sin, Satan and judgment, then there should never be a doubt in your mind about the love of God.

I've expressed it this way, God's word is sufficient but sometimes a picture helps. Could you imagine 2,000 years ago being at the foot of the cross, Christ is in the midst of his suffering and with full knowledge that he was acting as a substitute for you, that he was voluntarily becoming a Lamb on your behalf to save you from sin and all of your guilt, knowing all of that full well, you walk up to him as he hangs nailed to the cross and say, "You know, I'm not really sure if you love me." Can you imagine? Do you know what? It's no different today to question the love of God as a Christian in your heart. It's no different than going back to Calvary and spitting on the cross saying, "I don't believe this is real love." Are you kidding me? No, no, you see, this is where we just have to be completely humbled by the greatness of Christ and the greatness of his word, the greatness of the word written and incarnate. That Christ, of all people, hung there to deliver you from your sin. That Christ gave himself up in love for you. And to bow before that and say, "Lord, I don't understand anything else about my circumstances, I am still struggling, I am still hurt, this is still really difficult but there is one thing clear right now is that you love me and I'll never question that again." Christian, that should be so settled in your heart when you walk out the door today that it is never questioned in your mind again. You're just not allowed to go there. We cannot question the love of God. Why? Because he has proven it in the past. We look back.

Do you know what? But there's more than that. As you look back, as you look at the history, you have your own history as a Christian to look back on, don't you? Don't you remember the early days of your conversion when you were filled with the joy and the recognition that you had truly been born again and the wonderful peace and joy that flooded your soul even if it's been clouded in the interim? Don't you remember that? Oh, Christian, don't you remember? Don't you remember those times in the past where God answered your prayers in your situation and brought you help that you couldn't have imagined? Don't you remember that? Don't you remember the way he has blessed your footsteps and given you deliverance? In retrospect looking back where he directed you in a way that you wanted to go but now in retrospect you realize that would have been disaster and God stopped me.

There was a girl named Nancy that I thought I wanted to marry at one time, and when she said no, it broke my heart and I, "God, why this?" It sickens me to remember it. If my desires had worked out at that time, that would have been awful. I would have married the wrong Nancy. God in his wisdom that I didn't understand at the time said no. "Oh, God! Boo-hoo-hoo!" That's what I was like. It sickens me. But now I look back at that and say, "Oh, God, thank you. You have proven your ways in the past, that your wisdom is higher than mine, your ways are better than mine, your thoughts are better than mine." What a magnificent act of providence that he replaced the wrong Nancy with the right one, and those six kids that I have that you all love too, none of them would be here. God has proven his superior wisdom to mine in the past and do you know what? If you would just think about it for just a few seconds, you would realize that he has done that repeatedly for you as well.

So, and so you remember that. Here's the key to trusting God. You say, "How do I trust God?" Here's how you do it: you remember all of these things that we've been talking

about. You remember your own personal history with the faithfulness of God and you take that and you let it inform your present crisis, your present struggle, your present sorrow, and say, "Oh, God has proven himself in the past. Do you know what? The only right thing for me to do, the thing that I want to do, is I want to trust him now in this thing, this new thing that I don't understand." Do you see how simple the principle is? I realize that it's difficult to engage it and embrace it with your heart when you're disappointed but the principle is simple. How do you trust God? You remember his ways and then you say, "I'm confident that he will deal with me in the future in a similar way." One of the benefits of being a Christian as you go along a longer period of time, you've got a longer history with God to draw upon. But even if you're a new Christian, you still have more than enough to draw upon because you've got the pages of the Bible where a reliable record of the faithfulness of God is set before you in a way that cannot be denied. God has given you so much, Christian. You have every reason, you have every right, you have every prerogative, you have every responsibility to trust him in return. That's the way it is and so you say, "Do you know what? Things may be difficult now but I remember what God has done in the past. I remember his promises for the future therefore my soul," you start to preach to yourself, you start to talk to yourself, you say, "my soul, therefore, take courage. My soul, be a man. Be strong because the Lord of angel armies is by my side. He's the same God now that he was then." The God who has blessed you in the past will bless you in the future again.

That brings us to our final point, point 8: God's ways bring transcendent joy. God's ways bring transcendent joy and, beloved, I use the word "transcendent" advisedly. This is something that transcends time and space and earth and human recognition and ability. Transcendent joy. Biblical joy, biblical trust does not mean that you deny the reality of the problems that you face. Far to the contrary. It doesn't mean that you won't feel the implications of the pressures that you are facing.

Look at chapter 3, verse 16. Habakkuk is now bringing the plane into a landing if only he had known what a plane was 2,600 years ago. Habakkuk 3:16, Habakkuk says,

16 I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble. [Why? Why are you shaking in your boots, Habakkuk?] Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise who will invade us.

Sometimes translators translate it a little bit differently but what is Habakkuk saying here? He's describing the physical impact of what is about to come upon him. He's literally trembling. He has had this magnificent revelation from God, that would make you tremble; he's also mindful that a ruthless foreign army is about to invade his land, his people and life as he knows it is going to completely end and physically he responds to that with fear and trembling. Charles Feinberg says this, he says, "Habakkuk knows that his homeland is to be overrun by the Chaldean invaders and he feels it deeply. It is hard, indeed, to stand by and see the inevitable stroke fall upon God's people." Habakkuk here is describing the fact, "I have submitted to God. I'm trusting in him. In wrath, remember mercy but, oh, wrath is going to be something really hard." And it affects him.

You see, Christian, one of the things about walking through this life, one of the things about walking by trusting God is that it does not exempt you from human difficulties, from human trials. Sometimes trusting God will take you right into the core of them and it's a delight to contradict charismatic teaching on that point. James says, "Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials." The book of Acts says, "Through tribulation, many traditions we must enter the kingdom of God." So, of course, trials are going to come and they wouldn't be trials if they weren't difficult. So Habakkuk is recognizing the reality of it and he honestly assesses the fact that life as he has known it will come to an end.

Look at verse 17. We're bringing the plane in for a landing now. Habakkuk says, he is trembling and yet, verse 17 and 18 express the unconquerable resolve of his heart which should be the unconquerable resolve of your heart as well. He says,

17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,

He says, "If I have absolutely nothing to sustain my human existence, what will I do?" Verse 18,

18 Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

He's stating his present resolve, he is also stating what his future experience will be by faith. "I know who God is and I will exalt and rejoice in that." It's a perfect day for us to have this text in front of us because these verbs of exaltation, of rejoicing in the God of my salvation, do you know what they speak of? They speak of enthusiastic rejoicing and singing and shouting. What a great day to have our friend with us when that's the topic. Habakkuk is saying that, "Even though life may collapse around me, my soul is going to be filled with enthusiasm, with joy, with gratitude. Why? Because Yahweh is God." You see, God's character and God's ways give him – watch this, it's so important – God's character alone, God's ways alone, give him every reason that he needs to be completely joyful. His circumstances are independent and cannot diminish that joy. Why? Because God is who he is.

This awesome God controls people and nations and, beloved, we can't help but just get right personal with each other here and to address, maybe, something that is all too common for you and I to say in our hearts in the midst of chronic problems. What do we say? We say, "I'll be glad when this is over." I understand the sentiment but that's not the biblical faith. You mean that you will reserve gladness until your circumstances change? That is your expression of what it means to trust God? Hardly. No. No, the Christian position, the biblical trust, is more than biding time until things get better. No. No. No. No. No. No. No. A thousand times no. That is not biblical trust. That is not worthy of our Christ to let your soul stay there. The Christian position, the nature of true trust says,

"I acknowledge that this is difficult. I realize that it may not get better, that it may not change, but that's not the perspective that governs my heart. I know the living God. He is good. He is in control. He loves me. That's all I need. My heart is at rest because it is united to the Christ who will never let me go."

I remember when I finally came to understand this at the end of that seven year up and down slog. I was preparing a paper for seminary on the book of Habakkuk and it finally dawned on me, after all of these years, it had been right in front of me. The force of it literally made me stand up from my chair and I called out in a verbal voice, "This is it! This is what I've been looking for for seven years!" And what's the answer? It's this simple: God is who he is and God does what he does. That's enough. All of a sudden, I didn't need to know what happened to my dad's soul when he died unexpectedly in that plane crash with my brother. All of a sudden, I didn't need answers to all of the people who had questioned my faith along the way. All of a sudden, I didn't need promises about anything else in that glorious moment, not that I haven't faltered back and forth since then, but in that glorious moment, it was clear what the answer was. God is God and I believe that and that's enough.

His ways aren't my ways. That's okay. His ways are hidden. That's okay. Why is it okay? Why can I be content not knowing the answers? Why can I be content having my deepest earthly hopes broken and unsatisfied? Because God is holy. Because God is true. Because God has proven his ways in the past. Because God has given promises about what the future is going to be like. I'm going to stand face-to-face one time somehow in a way that I can't explain with millions of others, but somehow one day, one moment, there's going to be a time where I am face-to-face with Christ and I have his full undivided attention and I am going to look into the face of resurrected glory and when that happens, nothing else is going to matter. Even if it's just for a moment and then they send me off to the remote corner of heaven that my unfaithful life deserves and I sit there for the rest of my eternity alone, that would be enough. Oh, I saw the face of Christ! That's enough. That's the outcome of all of your trials, Christian, face-to-face in the presence of Christ. That's enough to satisfy your heart. That is all that you need. So beloved Christian with health issues, beloved Christian with broken family relationships, with disappointments fresh on your heart, grieving over a loss, facing a very uncertain future, concerned from whatever perspective about the future of our nation, culture and world, take these great truths about your God and rejoice.

Look at verse 19. Habakkuk says,

19 The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places.

It's the picture of a mounting sheep climbing up steep, difficult terrain, rocky terrain, one misstep and it would fall back and be destroyed and yet with confidence it bounds up the mountain because of the sure feet that God has given it. Christian, that's a picture of the reality that your Christian life can be. Going through dangerous, difficult territory that would be a threat except for the fact that you belong to this God and therefore everything

is confidence, everything is joy, and you rest and live your life according to that one true reality. That's trusting God in trying times.

Christian, that's your prerogative. That belongs to you. Christ purchased this package of wonderful truth, of wonderful reality, and gave it to you and bestowed it upon you in your Christian life. That belongs to you. Birthright. It's your inheritance. It's also your duty. In light of these things, you need to bring your soul into a point where it gladly conforms to this great spiritual reality that God has given to us in Christ.

Bow with me in prayer, would you?

Do you know unassailable joy? It is your responsibility and it is your prerogative. May God give us grace.

Father, may you give us grace to follow what Habakkuk has taught us and help us to find that same transcendent joy. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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