

In 1982, the University of Wisconsin Badgers were playing the Michigan State Spartans in a college football game. The game took place at the Badger Stadium in Madison, Wisconsin with a reported 60,000 fans in attendance. Michigan State was winning the football game by a large margin, yet the Wisconsin fans continued to erupt at odd times with shouts of joy and elation. The reporters present were confused, as were the few Michigan State fans who had managed to get tickets. How could the Wisconsin Badger fans be so joyous as their team was being soundly beaten by the Michigan State Spartans?

Later everyone learned the rest of the story. The same day the football game was taking place, a baseball game was being played – the Milwaukee Brewers were playing the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series, and Milwaukee was winning. The football fans at Badger Stadium were listening to the baseball game on portable radios and every time the Brewers scored or kept St. Louis from scoring, the football fans erupted in cheers of joy.

The Christian life is lot like that. In this world of chaos, and sadness, and sorrow, it can appear that we are losing ground, but what the rest of the world cannot see is that we are on a different frequency. Our focus is elsewhere. Our focus is not so much on our circumstances but on a Person – the Lord Jesus Christ, and the final outcome is not in question for us. We know how it all ends – it ends in victory, and in a round-about way, Habakkuk has come to that same conclusion.

We have made it to the end of this little book by Habakkuk which records this conversation between God and the prophet Habakkuk. If you recall, Habakkuk was complaining *to* God, and complaining *about* God regarding the people of Judah. Habakkuk didn't like what he saw in the nation, for its people – God's people had become wicked and violent and corrupt, and as far as Habakkuk could tell – God wasn't doing anything about it. He didn't seem to care.

Well, God responded to Habakkuk's complaint and explained He was aware of the behavior of His people, in fact, God had forewarned His people several times through prophets about their wickedness and yet they ignored His warnings, and unbeknownst to Habakkuk, God was raising up the dreaded Babylonians to serve as His rod of correction.

That news shocked Habakkuk because the Babylonians were a very wicked people, more wicked than the people of Judah, and he could not understand how a good and holy God could use evil people for His divine purposes. God is righteous, but this didn't seem right to Habakkuk, but God assured him it was all part of His

divine plan, a plan that would impact the known world, and in due time, the tables will be turned and the Babylonians will be judged.

As we finished **Chapter 2**, God is in His holy temple, He's in control, and He told Habakkuk to hush. Despite Habakkuk's confusion and concern, the people of Judah will still be disciplined according to plan. God knew this did not make sense to Habakkuk, but to his credit, Habakkuk knew God, and he found comfort and confidence in the character of God. Habakkuk knew he could trust God because of who God is.

I mentioned last week as we looked at **Chapter 3**, this realization of who God is and his close encounter with God appeared to be the turning point for Habakkuk because he breaks out in prayer in the form in a song – a song that recounts the mighty works of God on behalf of His people. Last week, we looked at the first portion of this song, and this morning we are going to look at the last four verses.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Habakkuk 3** and we will begin with **verse 16**.

**I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble because I must wait quietly
for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us.**

I had to wrestle with this passage a bit because depending on how you read it and considering the context of it determines what Habakkuk is actually trembling about.

We know that God had told Habakkuk about the Babylonians. God is raising them up for a divine purpose – to discipline the people of Judah. The Babylonians were described as an arrogant, and brutal, and merciless people, and there is no stopping them – they're coming. Habakkuk knows that many people will be taken into captivity and many others will be slain. Trouble is on the way for the people of Judah. Habakkuk knows this is really going to happen just as God said it would – it's sobering to think about, and those thoughts about the coming invasion would leave anyone shaking in their boots – but in this case, I don't think the Babylonians are the reason for Habakkuk's trembling.

We cannot forget that Habakkuk just had an amazing close encounter with God, and just like in many passages throughout the Bible, those who have had close encounters with God are left trembling in fear, and often times collapsed on the ground because they cannot stand before Him. Habakkuk had a brief glimpse of

God's glory and holiness and power as he considered the mighty works of God in the past. He saw God in the rear-view mirror, so to speak, and he's completely overwhelmed to the point that he feels his body is shutting down.

Habakkuk may be afraid of the Babylonians – that could very well be the case, for they are a scary bunch of people, but I think he is more fearful of God, he's awe-struck, and that's why we are told Habakkuk can **wait quietly for the day of distress** when the Babylonians come.

The phrase “**wait quietly**” means to rest patiently and silently, and sometimes that's all we can do, **isn't it?**

I was reminded of the Red Sea experience with God's people in the book of Exodus. God led them to that place where they found themselves between the sea and the charging Egyptian army. God placed them there. It was His doing that they were between the preverbal rock and a hard place – with nowhere to go, and God's people were in a panic, but Moses said to them, “***Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the LORD. Keep silent.***”

Don't fall down in despair, don't retreat in fear, don't raise your fist in anger, and don't get impatient and jump into the sea before it's parted. That's a bad idea. Instead, watch and wait quietly, and let the Lord God Almighty do what He's going to do.

When you don't understand what God is doing, when it seems there is nothing you can do, maybe the best thing and the hardest thing to do is to just wait for the Lord to work. Habakkuk could wait quietly because he knew God, he knew God was at work, and when you know that God is working in your life, you can afford to wait quietly and let Him have His way.

Now, as Paul Harvey used to say, “*Now for the rest of the story.*” Let's look at **verse 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,

Well, this isn't a very rosy picture being painted by Habakkuk. He's describing a complete meltdown as a result of the Babylonian invasion that is coming. In those days, the people in that culture and society relied heavily on agriculture, and figs

and grapes, grain and olives were a staple. They raised sheep and cattle – it was their livelihood, and it will all be gone. The Babylonians will take everything of value to them and leave the land completely desolate. Judah will be wiped out and everything they rely upon and hold dear will be gone.

Habakkuk is facing these terrible facts – they will lose absolutely everything after the Babylonians are through with them, and amazingly Habakkuk says in **verse 18**,

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

This is a beautiful passage that shows us what faith looks like when nothing seems to be going right. Habakkuk acknowledges that the Babylonians were coming and he is still unnerved about it. I get it – he’s human. He’s imagined or he has seen a vision of the land becoming desolate, the buildings destroyed, the farms and orchards devastated from the invasion, but in the midst of this horrible destruction, Habakkuk declares that even if everything he relied upon failed, if everything that gave stability to his life crumbled, if nothing seemed to be going right in his life – yet, and that’s a big “yet”, he’s going to focus on the God he knows – the One he describes as **the God of my salvation**.

Sometimes we might think, *“If God is so great and powerful, why am I going through such a hard time?”* implying that our God is only a God of the good times. Maybe, Habakkuk thought that way but later he realized this was all wrong because the God of the Bible is not just the God of the good times, and now he can say, *“Lord, I know You are strong and mighty, and if we are in dire circumstances, that does not change who You are. You have a good reason for what You are doing, You are in control, so, I will praise You still, and even rejoice in You.”*

Was Habakkuk taking joy in his circumstances? Absolutely not, instead he was taking joy in the God of his salvation in the midst of his circumstances. It’s about his focus.

Warren Wiersbe explains it this way. *“If Habakkuk looked ahead, he saw a nation heading for destruction, and that frightened him. When he looked within, he saw himself trembling with fear, and when he looked around, he saw everything in the economy about to fall apart. But when he looked up by faith, he saw God, and all his fears vanished.”*

It's all about Habakkuk’s focus. Sure, he is aware of the circumstances – he’s not blind to reality, he’s facing the facts, but he can’t lose sight of his God, who is

seated on the throne and in control when things seem out of control. Habakkuk's focus was on the God of his salvation who is not out to destroy His people, but rather to correct them and draw them to Himself like a loving father.

Then Habakkuk continues with **verse 19** and he says,

The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places. For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

I like what Habakkuk tells us here. It's not that the Lord gives us strength in our hard times like a vending machine, but rather, the Lord gives us Himself, and it's in Him that our strength is found. Strength is found in a Person. **The Lord God is my strength**, and when we rely on Him in our difficult circumstances, we are told He will make us surefooted like a deer scampering up the mountains to find safety.

When we began this book, **Chapter 1** was filled with questions by Habakkuk for God. These were questions driven by frustration and confusion, discouragement, and disappointment about the circumstances around him.

How long will I call for help and You will not hear? Why do You make me see iniquity and cause me to look on wickedness? Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?

In essence, Habakkuk was asking what we often ask God, "***Lord, why is all this happening and why don't You do something about it?***"

That's what Habakkuk initially came to God with, and as we have progressed through this book, notice that the circumstances around Habakkuk have not changed – the people of Judah are still running amok in sin and the Babylonians are still coming. The circumstances have not changed one bit, but Habakkuk has changed and the questions of "***Why is all this happening and why don't You do something about it?***" no longer seem as important as the question of – "***Who is my God?***"

The truth of the matter is, we all have to deal with the Babylonians in our lives. In varying degrees, we all face adversity, and hardships, and trouble at some time or another. And when trouble comes our way, and there seems to be no end in sight, and things just don't make sense, it's so easy to get fixated on the circumstances

around us and to become so consumed with the desire for answers to our questions that we lose sight of the God of our salvation who is ultimately in control of our circumstances.

Now, I am realistic enough to know that our questions for God of “*Why is this happening and why don’t You do something?*” will never go away when facing adversity and hardship and trouble, but even so, when struggling with those questions, don’t forget these questions:

Who is my God? Who do I belong to? Who is always with me? Who is in control even when my life seems to be out of control? Who knows the number of hairs on my head? Who has engraved my name in the palm of His hand? Who loves me more than I could ever know?

You see, you don’t have to know everything when you find yourself in difficult circumstances. You don’t need all the answers to your questions when facing the Babylonians; you just have to know who your God is.

Rick Warren is the pastor of Saddleback Church in California and the author of the book “The Purpose Driven Life.” On April 5, 2013, Rick and his wife Kay experienced a horrible tragedy in their lives when their 27-year-old son Matthew committed suicide after suffering for a long time with severe mental illness. In July 2014, Kay Warren put to paper what she was thinking about on what would have been Matthew’s 29th birthday, and here is some of what Kay wrote:

On July 18, 1985, I gave birth to our beloved gift of God, Matthew David Warren. Holding him in my arms that morning, I had no idea how dark the journey would get for him – and for those who love him. All I knew that bright morning was that I was madly in love with him, and could see nothing ahead but a mother’s dreams of a good life for her son.

*I remember Easter 1985 – I was sick in bed, unable to go to church. Rick took the kids to church and I stayed by myself for a few hours – the TV remote by my side as my only companion. Somehow, I dropped the remote and couldn’t retrieve it – so there I was, alone on one of the most joyous holidays, with not even a TV preacher to keep me company, full of anxiety and fear for myself and my unborn child. I painfully reached for my Bible and it fell open to **Habakkuk 3:17-19**:*

“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, 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.”

This was a word from the Lord to me – and I determined that even IF my worst nightmares came true – if my baby died, or I never walked again – that I would trust in God my Savior; I would rejoice in the Sovereign Lord.

Matthew David Warren was born and everything seemed fine. But by his first birthday, we began to wonder. And by his second and third birthdays, we knew he wasn't like his older sister and brother.

*When he took his life – after battling and fighting so hard for decades – a friend sent me **Habakkuk 3:17-19** in a sympathy card. She had no idea this passage was incredibly significant to me, but it was a fitting “bookend” to his life. Because I had feared for years that he would take his life....it became his greatest pursuit and my deepest anguish.....I had to come to the point in which I said as I had 27 years before – “EVEN IF my worst nightmare comes true and he takes his life, I WILL rejoice in the Lord; I will be joyful in God my Savior.”*

So today – his 29th birthday – through weeping – I shout it to the watching universe: I will rejoice in Lord; I will be joyful in God my Savior. My heart remains wounded and battered, but my faith is steady. There is, and will be, as Steven Curtis Chapman says, a “glorious unfolding” of all that God has in store for me and my family. God is faithful to His promises of rebuilding and restoring the ruins – and I am confident that I will yet be a witness to many, many, many lives healed and hope restored – all because of my beloved gift of God, Matthew David Warren. I miss you, darling boy.....but it will just be for a little while.

This is a mother who lost one of the dearest people in her life, who faces her very painful and gut-wrenching reality, and yet she does not lose sight of the God of her salvation and the hope He brings.

What if, like Habakkuk, everything you relied upon failed? What if everything that gave stability to your life was gone? What if nothing seemed to be going right for you? What if the Babylonians are barreling down on you? What then?

Those are tough questions, but maybe this is a better question – a question only you can answer for yourself: If it was just you and the Lord Jesus Christ, could you be content in your circumstances? Would Jesus be enough for you?

Source Material:

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