

Our Only True Respite in the Face of Calamity

Call to Worship: Psalm 90:9-12

Hymn #718- *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms*

1st Scripture: Habakkuk 3:1-16

Hymn (Supplemental)- *Our God Reigns*

2nd Scripture: Habakkuk 3:17-19

Hymn #26- *Our God, our Help in ages past*

Introduction:

Most lost a normal day of life. Many lost electricity. Some lost a tool shed or a swing set or a gate. Some lost trees and/or a portion of their roofs. Others suffered significant material loss; water damage to their homes, submerged cars and destroyed furniture. And still others lost their homes altogether. Many wound up in shelters, and still others lost their very lives. No one expected any of this, but a few weeks ago. Store shelves emptied, "hour" long gas lines, desperate pursuits for batteries and ice, offices and businesses closed, billions of dollars of repair work needed, and on and on and on. All in all, once again, the reality of the uncertainty, instability, and unpredictability of life is brought to the forefront. And this Tuesday, we vote to see who will fill the office of our presidency for the next four years, atop an ailing economy, ongoing gross moral decline, a multi-trillion dollar deficit that we can never possibly recover from, and an unemployment rate of 7.9%.

What might God be saying to us, in all of this? Especially as children of the living God (who ought to be able to discern the times), how ought we to stop in the middle of the hustle and bustle of life, so that we might ponder what God might be saying through these providential events and realities? And what is our place of respite and hope in the midst of such calamities?

Brethren, I wish to bring you encouragement and hope from the Word of God this morning, on the heels of what we have just experienced and continue to experience, and in light of the bleak prospects facing our nation as a whole. You see, while the world, by and large, could never even begin to approach such hope (apart from Christ), by the grace of God, we can stand out as lights in a dark world, showing that our strength and stability ultimately depend on a

Solid, immovable Rock and not the economic status of our country. It is within the prophet Habakkuk's short Book that I believe we can find the same encouragement that he found in the midst of what was soon to be a shattered economy and a time of great devastation for the people of Israel.

I. The troubling thoughts of the prophet Habakkuk

This short, unique Book of prophecy centers upon the burden of Habakkuk as he petitions the Lord regarding two matters that trouble him. The second of these two matters comes forth in response to God's answer to the first matter. Both troubling issues arise out of the prophet's confused and conflicted conscience as he strives to reconcile his understanding of the character of God with present and future historical realities. Striving to satisfy his conscience, the prophet faithfully and patiently dialogs with his God. We can sum up the dialog as follows:

1) The Book begins with a burdened, righteous Habakkuk petitioning the Lord as to why God is permitting His people to continue on in gross sin, in spite of his repeated prayers. The Lord seems indifferent to the ungodly actions of His people and this weighs heavy upon the soul of Habakkuk. This conflicts with his understanding about the holy, righteous character of God. Read Habakkuk 1:1-4.

2) The Lord then responds to Habakkuk, reassuring him that He is well aware of all that is going on and that He is planning to deal with the matter in due time. In verses 5-11, the Lord reveals His plan of action to Habakkuk. He is going to raise up the horribly wicked, terribly dreadful and ungodly Chaldeans to bring judgment upon the Israelites. This unrelenting, barbaric nation would conquer Judah, destroying and exiling many, unknowingly fulfilling God's judgment upon His people.

3) Upon hearing this, Habakkuk is even more troubled, leading him to respond to God with a second question. Read verses 12&13. In essence, Habakkuk is troubled because he has difficulty understanding how God, who cannot even look upon evil, would in fact use a godless, wicked nation to bring judgment upon a nation more righteous than itself. Perhaps, we could better appreciate the prophet's concern if we thought of it in our own context. What if God were

to use North Korea or Iran to conquer and devastate the United States of America? As ungodly as our country is, what if God gave us over to torturous, merciless, immoral, godless savages who had no concern for the dignity that comes with being a human being. This was what it was like for God to deliver His people into the hands of the Chaldeans, and that is why Habakkuk was troubled. And so, he lays this question at the feet of God and humbly waits for His response. Notice Habakkuk's patient humility in chapter 2:1.

Again, although Habakkuk was a prophet of God, He too had to patiently wait upon God for a response. Prophets did not always receive immediate answers to their petitions. God strengthened their faith in much the same way He does ours, by causing them to wait upon Him, so that they might strengthen their faith and trust in God during times of confusion and trouble. Here, the prophet humbly waits, anticipating that in due time, God will correct his own understanding of things. He knew that the dilemma rested within his own confused soul and that His all knowing, perfectly righteous and holy God would, in due time, provide him with a Word of instruction and correction. He knew that "those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength and mount up with wings like eagles" (Isa. 40:31).

II. The Peaceful solution given him by God

In due time, the Lord responds to Habakkuk with a universal statement of blessing concerning the righteous, followed by universal statements of woe against the wicked, which leads the prophet to the only place where he can find strength and stability during the terrible times of judgment that would soon come upon his people.

Read verses 2:2-4. Here we have that foundational OT text, which the apostle Paul used to confirm his universal understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Our Lord ensures Habakkuk that those who humbly set their trust in Him; that those whose lives are governed by God's promises, are those who are just in the sight of God. And that confidence in God and His promises will be used by God to carry them through every difficulty that life brings their way.

And then in verses 5-20, our Lord also confirms that the wicked will not succeed in their endeavors. He pronounces woes, universally upon all of the wicked who have not faith in God, continuing in their prideful ways of disobedience. God here reassures Habakkuk of the fact that His justice will not fail. The just will live by faith, the wicked will be judged and God's glory will fill the whole earth. And this leads Habakkuk to the only place of contentment and rest in light of the coming Chaldean invasion, namely, the sovereignty of God.

III. Habakkuk's final outlook on the thoughts that troubled him

While what he was beginning to see before his own eyes (recorded at the beginning of this Book), caused him to wrestle with that which seemed to be in conflict with God's holy character, Habakkuk was reassured by the Word of God, that God is just and good and that He will fully accomplish all of His holy will in accordance with His holy character. He was reminded once again of the big picture of God's sovereignty over all matters, and this was his resting place. In chapter 3:1-16, Habakkuk further builds upon what God had told him, by reflecting upon God's sovereign and faithful acts of the past. This helped to strengthen him to be prepared for the future. And so, he can joyfully close with the unnatural words found in verses 17-19.

Conclusion

What does all of this have to do with us in the year 2012? How can this provide us with strength, stability and encouragement, amidst the calamities, trials and tribulations that we must continually face in this life? Well, let me answer that with a few applications brethren:

1) First, let us continue to thoroughly remind ourselves of the sovereignty of God over all matters. Every intricate detail of life is wholly within the bounds of His sovereign care. There are times when God may stretch us with His silence, but by faith in His promises, even when things seem to conflict with our own reasoning, let us humbly trust that God is working with the big picture in ways that we cannot comprehend. We don't need to know the future. We don't have to understand all of the "whys" and "hows" of life. If we did, then God would have

provided them for us. But rather, God has given us those things which we need and which are far better; things which strengthen and improve our faith. He has given us all of the promises in His Word. And not one of them will fail. And they are more than sufficient to provide us with all that we need to find strength and stability to persevere through every unknown path and conflict we will ever face on this side of heaven. Is God not sovereign over hurricanes and gas prices, and all of the conveniences and inconveniences of life? Is God not sovereign over every aspect of our economy? By faith, let us stand fast today, trusting God for tomorrow.

The sovereignty of God was the very cornerstone of Charles Spurgeon's sanity, such that he would have easily caved in to the numerous inward and outward trials he faced, were it not for his unwavering belief in God's sovereignty. If we could but continually bring ourselves to say that God is sovereign even over this present matter; that this is His handiwork for some good work in me and for His glory, then we too can stand firm no matter what challenge comes upon us.

2) Brethren, along with our understanding of God's sovereign direction over our immediate circumstances, let us always reflect upon the fact that God's sovereign direction has an ultimate goal in mind, and that is our salvation. No circumstance and no created thing can ever change your complete salvation in Christ. It remains incomplete in the present, but it will most assuredly find its completion in due time.

In spite of the horrible judgment that was to come upon his nation, Habakkuk could joyfully sing the words found in verses 17-19. Let me translate this text into a modern day interpretation that suits our context:

“Though I have no occupational means of supplying the needs of my family and though every grocery store, restaurant and means of acquiring food is shut down; though the stock market crashes and the US dollar completely loses its value; though the economy of the United States of America completely collapses and though God closes every material window of blessing, which we have taken for granted...Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” I know where I stand with God in Christ! “I know whom I have believed in and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that Day.” I know I will sit and sup at the marriage supper of the Lamb. And I know that even here,

“The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer’s feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.” My God will yet uphold me! Nothing could ever rob me of my eternal joy in Christ. “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25&26).

["In the world, *you will* have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world...in Me, you have peace!"

The Gospel

Such confidence of hope and assurance only belong to the true children of God. Are you a child of God this morning? That is, are you a Christian? Are you one who God has justified through faith in Jesus Christ? If not, then you can expect nothing but the woes and curses of God upon your soul. If you are resting your confidence in the United States of America; if you are resting your hope in our economy or your job or the stock market or anything else that is bound to this short lived life, then you’re banking everything on a mirage that will soon blow away like a vapor. And then you will face God and have to give an account to Him for how you have lived this life with the body and breath He has loaned to you for His glory. And you will be held to the standard of His holy Law found in the Ten Commandments; those commands, which every one of us has failed to keep. But if you repent of your sins now and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; if you call upon Him, trusting only in Him to bring you to God, then you can have the full assurance of hope that only God’s people are entitled to. You can confidently rejoice in the God of your salvation, no matter what trial comes upon you.

Close with Psalm 46.

AMEN!!!