

Habakkuk – An Expositional Study Part 18

Expositional Study of Habakkuk

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Please turn within your Bibles to the third chapter of the book of Habakkuk. We come this morning to the last section of the book, the last four verses, this wonderful prophecy. We're going to see that Habakkuk's experience of the presence of God was something that, though we desperately need, it's not something that is fashionable in any way; truly it never is, but certainly not fashionable in 21st century American evangelicalism because what we see as we look at this passage is Habakkuk's response to seeing God. He sees the Lord and his response has an element of dread, fear, indeed terror, which is swallowed up by joy. And so the title of the message this morning is, "An Awful Joy. An Awful Joy." And I use the word awful in the sense of what it really originally meant, that is to be filled with awe, not just bad. That's how we use the word, isn't it? Awful, that's just awful, that's bad. But the word, its etymology, you can tell from the two words, awe and full. To be filled with awe. But there's a sense in which even that connotation of negativity, of awful, has its place in this passage, in this text.

An awful joy. One of the great preachers of the last century was the man R. C. Sproul. R. C. Sproul was asked one time, what is the single greatest need of our culture today? He answered this in the last few years of his life, so it's been the last 10 years this question was asked. What is the single greatest need of our culture today? Sproul answered quickly, to know who God is. To know God as he truly is. This is where we tend to be so errant, so terribly mistaken. Our view of God, how we conceive of God, it is the nature of the human heart to have an astonishingly low view of God. For those who've been created in his image, it's hard to believe that we can digress to such a level, but we have such a low view of God. The psalmist, in Psalm 50, verse 21, the Lord speaking through the psalmist says, "Your problem is you thought that I was altogether like you." God says that, "You thought I was altogether like you." Another theologian of last century, A. W. Tozer said, the most important thing about you is what comes into your mind when you think of God.

Our greatest need is to know who God is. I mentioned Sproul a moment ago. One of my favorite books that he wrote is "The Holiness of God." He wrote it in the '80s, about 40 years ago. Sproul unpacks in that book the wonder of what holiness is. He postulates that holiness is the defining characteristic of God. It's not like merely an attribute, it's the defining characteristic and he says, because it's the one attribute in Scripture that is raised

to the superlative element, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." That is three times the thrice holy repetition that the seraphim make in God's presence in Isaiah's vision, in Isaiah chapter 6, they say again and again and again, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with His glory."

To be holy means to be set apart, to be distinct, separate from, and so God is ultimately set apart from all of his creation. Everything comes from him, but we are not of him. I mean, we've been created by him, but we are not God. There's nothing in creation that touches the being of God. God and God alone is holy and set apart and so we need to know who God is and see him as he is, and we need to respond to him appropriately. I said that I think we all struggle so much with this. This is what Isaiah was repenting of when he saw the Lord in Isaiah 6. When he says, when he saw the Lord, he saw the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory." The temple shook, the foundations trembled, and he cried out, "Woe is me, I am undone, for I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips." He says, "I'm a man of unclean lips because I have misspoken about this glorious God." Isaiah was a priest. The priests were the people in the Old Testament who taught the Scriptures. The prophets gave the Scriptures, the priests taught them. Isaiah's saying, "I'm a priest, and I've been teaching about Yahweh, and I have seen Yahweh, and I'm a man of unclean lips. What I've been saying about this God is filthy compared to the glory of who He is." Isaiah didn't have a problem with profanity, he's saying that, "I've so far underestimated His majesty, His exalted holiness, that I wish I could take back everything I've ever said, and I live among a people of unclean lips." We think about God, our thoughts of God are so far from who he is, that's what Isaiah is saying.

In Habakkuk, we're going to see in this passage, has a very similar experience. He sees God, and he sees God actually a series of revelations of who God is. He keeps seeing God and he comes to the end here at this last section, and we see his response, and he experiences what theologians have called the *Mysterium Tremendum*. That's a Latin phrase, *Mysterium*, M-Y-S-T-E-R-I-U-M, *Tremendum*, T-R-E-M-E-N-D-U-M. The *Mysterium Tremendum* sounds like tremendous mystery, but the word actually means mystery, yes, is correct, but *Tremendum* doesn't mean tremendous, it means trembling. It's the mystery of who God is that makes you tremble. Like the words of the Negro spiritual, "Swing low, sweet chariot." Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. This is what we're talking about in this passage. This is what the Scriptures present to us. The Scriptures present to us a God who is loving and faithful, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." We've been singing about his love today, but he is also a God of holiness who when we see him rightly, truly, though we love him and he loves us if we come to know Christ, we still are made to tremble in his presence. That's the right response and that's what we're going to see in this passage, and what we see is the trembling though, gives way to joy. It's not merely fear and trembling, it's joy and trembling. Habakkuk saw the Lord, and he responds in awe-filled wonder. We'll see, he says, "I will exult, I will rejoice."

Let's read the text of Scripture together. We're going to read the entire third chapter so that you see the prayer that Habakkuk asks. He asks the Lord to move, and then the Lord

shows him, in verses 3 to 15, there is this theophany, the appearance of God. God makes himself known visibly to Habakkuk. He sees what's happening in his present day or what will be happening soon in his present day and as he sees God and he sees what God is doing or going to do, he is struck and look at the impact it has on him. So chapter 3, verse 1,

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. 2 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.

Now here's the theophany, the appearance of God.

3 God comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise. 4 His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, And there is the hiding of His power. 5 Before Him goes pestilence, And plague comes after Him. 6 He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, The ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling. 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? 9 Your bow was made bare, The rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah. You cleaved the earth with rivers. 10 The mountains saw You and quaked; The downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, It lifted high its hands. 11 Sun and moon stood in their places; They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear. 12 In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations. 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. 14 You pierced with his own spears The head of his throngs. They stormed in to scatter us; Their exultation was like those Who devour the oppressed in secret. 15 You trampled on the sea with Your horses, On the surge of many waters.

Now Habakkuk responds to what he's just seen, what he's heard.

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. 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, 18 Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the

God of my salvation. 19 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.

Let's pray.

Our Father as we come to Your word, we come asking that You would show us Your glory even as we have read these things. And so we now consider them. May You open our eyes to see You as You are. Open our hearts, humble our hearts, make them teachable, make the soil of our hearts good soil and have Your way in us. Lead us. Lord, send forth Your light and Your truth, and let them lead us to Your holy hill, to the place of Your habitation. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

An awful joy. An awful joy. Habakkuk saw the Lord, and he responds in awe-filled wonder. It's a kind of terror that gives way to joy. To see God as he is, there is this experience. To see him truly as he is, not as we imagine him to be, but as he truly is, is to be humbled and to be immediately impressed with our smallness in the face of his greatness. And we need to see, do you want to know God? Do you want to know him as he is? If you want to know God, you want to be loved by God, you want to love him more, are you willing to be discomforted? Are you willing to be afraid? Are you willing to wrestle with things that are too much for you? The path to joy goes through this place.

It's not the only thing about who God is, of course. As I said, he reveals his love, his great compassion, his loving kindness, but the God of loving kindness is also a God of holiness and justice and wrath and we must accept him as he is and love him for who he is, all of his attributes. And if you're willing to do that, if you're unwilling to do that, you will not know God. But if you're willing, even trembling in your own heart, knowing your weakness, knowing, sensing we have sin in us, that there's an aversion in the sin nature to submission and to seeing God as he is, but renounce that in your own heart, ask God for grace, that we can see him as he is and love him for who he is. Because when you see him as he is and you love him for who he is, you understand that he is altogether wonderful, that everything that drew back from him was evil in me and absolute foolishness.

He is altogether lovely. He is altogether perfect. And we need to understand that we come as finite beings to an infinite God. Finite beings, we are limited. How can we understand the wonder of all that he is in his infinitude? Of course we struggle. But not only do we come as finite beings, we come as fallen beings. We come as sinners, conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, fools who want to exalt ourselves rather than worship God. And so of course we draw back from these things, and yet repent and ask God for grace. We do so humbly. "Lord, show us Your glory." And enable us, like Isaiah, when he saw the Lord, he said, "Woe is me, I'm undone," the Lord cleansed him. The Lord made him able to dwell in his presence. This is the wonder of the God that we see in these Scriptures. But are you willing to be afraid? Are you willing to know the terror of the Holy One, to be filled with awe? The path to joy goes through this place.

Now, what I want us to look at as we try to unpack this, three points this morning. The first is, let's observe Habakkuk in what he felt. The first point, what he felt. The passage is emphatic in telling us what Habakkuk felt. I mean, think about four lines in a row tell us about his fear, his terror. It doesn't just tell us once. He could have just said, "I trembled." No, he says, "I heard in my inward parts trembled. At the sound, my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones. In my place, I tremble." Four verbs there. The first one, "I trembled." He's shaking. It's a word which pictures frenetic activity that is itself terrifying. The motion, it's like the rage of a horse is an example of how this word's used in natural settings. A horse that is out of control. Imagine a horse out of control and you're in the enclosure with that animal. It makes you afraid. The motion and the power of the horse creates in you a trembling. The activity of the horse creates that. You see, it's like, it comes out from that.

And so that's the idea here, trembling. God's action, his impressive motion to deal with things, his wrath creates this response. In fact, that word's used twice in the verse, same word, tremble at the beginning of the verse, same Hebrew word at the end of the verse or the end of that section. There's four clauses, "I heard and my inward parts trembled, the sound, my lips quivered, decay enters my bones, in my place I tremble." Both of those trembles are the same word repeated. But not only tremble, the beginning and end, but quivered. "My lips quivered." Again, shaking. Think about when your lip quivers, you're afraid, you're hearing something that seizes you emotionally, you can't control it, it just quivers. And then a third verb, entered, "decay enters my bones." Decay enters.

And look at the, he's describing this kind of trembling and quivering fear that goes to the bones, and he pictures it as all-encompassing. Look how he describes it. "My inward parts trembled." Now, some translations say body. I don't think that's a good translation. This actually is the innermost part of, this is a word that describes the insides. The NIV says heart. They're getting it closer. But I think inward parts is the best way to translate it. It's just the inward parts are trembling. It's like, he's not just trembling on the outside, he feels his organs trembling. But think about that, his organs, the inside of his body, "I feel trembling in the depth of my being. My lips are also quivering. My bones are feeling the fear." And then the last of those four lines, "in my place I tremble." This "in my place," some translations say legs. It has the idea of that which is underneath; that's why they're struggling to come up with the right way to translate this word. The underneath, the foundation of myself is trembling is kind of the idea. So it's like, my lips, my internal organs, my bones, the very foundation of what I'm standing on, everything is trembling. Everything is afraid because of what I've seen. He's describing deep down visceral emotion.

I mentioned the word tremble actually comes from, the idea is that there's motion out here. Actually, it's interesting, the word in chapter 3, verse 2, when he says, "in wrath, remember mercy, in wrath, remember mercy," the word for wrath is the same word, same root word as the word trembling in verse 16. It's the idea of God's anger, but it's a word which means excitement raging. I mentioned it's like the commotion of a raging horse. So he says, "in wrath, God, in Your wrath, remember mercy." And God's about to display his raging motion to deal with our sin, to deal with his people's sin. So he says, in wrath,

remember mercy, and this word, like I said, it's the noun form of the, well, it's a related noun to this other word for, which is also a noun, well, the verb tremble. So that is a verb. Noun, verb, it's good to keep those things straight. The noun wrath is related to the verb tremble and so the idea is God's wrath, his active pursuit, his commotion, the stirring that's happening where he is displaying his anger at sin creates in me, the reciprocal part of it is trembling.

Habakkuk says, "I was intensely afraid because I see what God is doing, and I realize that God, in a sense, is coming for us. He's displaying His wrath in our own arena." Now, we know he's coming for salvation, so he's actually coming to deal with not us, strictly speaking, but our sin. He's not coming to destroy us, he's coming to destroy our idols. But he is coming with ferocity and intensity and Habakkuk in seeing that is humbled and afraid. You know, you look at the Scriptures, you see this kind of reaction. I mentioned Isaiah in his response to the Lord, but you know, another prophet that saw God in ways that made them tremble was the prophet Daniel. Daniel had some amazing visions himself. In chapter 7 of Daniel, he has a vision of four dreadful beasts. It's like the Lord pulls back the veil that separates the physical world from the spiritual world and we see there's a connection that what's happening before us that our eyes can see is organically connected to what's happening in the world of the spirits, demons and angels and God moving things. There's a world we can't see. Colossians 1 says that through him all things were created, visible and invisible. The invisible is what Daniel is seeing. In seeing the invisible, his response is fear, terror. 7:15, he says, "As for me, Daniel," this is after he sees the vision, describes what he saw, "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me and the visions in my mind kept alarming me." Verse 19, he wants to know about this fourth beast. He's really torn up about the fourth beast in that vision. "Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze in which devoured, crushed, and trampled down the remainder. I wanted to know what was going on with that." Skipping on down to verse 28, after he's told everything, at this point, the revelation ended, "As for me, Daniel," after he's had the angel explain to him, he's had an angel explain to him exactly what's going to happen, it's all going to work out, it's all going to be good, look what he says, "At this point, the revelation ended, as for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me, and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself." He's white as a sheet. He is terrified at what he's seen.

Chapter 8, he sees another vision, and in verse 17 he says that the angel Gabriel has come to him. "So he came near to where I was standing," 8:17, "and when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face." He sees an angel. He's frightened. He sees this vision. He's frightened. "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end." Hey, it's not going to happen right now. That doesn't solve his problem. Verse 18, "Now, while he was still talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with face to the ground, but he touched me and made me stand upright." Verse 27, "Then I, Daniel," after all the conversation with the angel again, "Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up again and carried on the king's business, but I was astounded at the vision and there was none to explain it." He's impacted. It's not like he just is able to put kind of a Pollyanna sort of feeling, "Well, God's in control and I'm just going to be happy."

There's an element, and when you see things as they are, there's an element of profound impact.

Chapter 10, another vision. Verse 7, "Now I, Daniel, alone saw this vision while the men who were with me..." He's got, there are men with him, he's having a conversation, and he sees the invisible world. The men don't. He has this vision. They don't see it. It's like they're sitting there, they don't know what's going on. But look what it says about, it still impacted him. "The men who were with me did not see the vision, nevertheless, a great dread fell on them and they ran away to hide themselves." They don't see anything, but they sense the presence of God and they run. "So I was left alone," verse 8, "and saw this great vision, yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor and I retained no strength. But I heard the sound of his words, and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees." To be with God is to be confronted with our smallness, his greatness, and at times leads us to tremble, to be afraid. This is who the God of the Bible is.

So he felt intense fear. Habakkuk feels a fear that goes to his bones, that the very foundation of his soul is trembling. His lips are quivering. And he expresses it, and he expresses it in worship. Think about this now. This is also, the context of this, when we read it, in verse 1, I said, "according to Shigionoth," which is a musical instruction, and then verse 19, the last words of the book, "For the choir director on my stringed instruments." This is a song. This is a hymn of worship. Habakkuk is telling us what he saw, and then he's setting it to music. He says, "Listen, we need to do this in the context of worship," that the response of when you see God is you worship. And he's worshipping the Lord, even though there's this element of discomfort.

You know, if you're not willing to be made uncomfortable, you will not know God. You can't. God doesn't say...this is a perversion of the gospel in our day, that God loves you as you are. That's not true. That's what people say, God has unconditional love. God's love is better than that. But it's not unconditional. That is to imply that you can stay like you are and God will love you. No, God loves you as is while you're a sinner, he loves you, but his love will not allow you to stay like you are. His love will change you. And so that's where the problem is. It's not really, he loves us in spite of our condition, there's one sense in which that's true, but he really loves us in a way that's contra the condition. We deserve wrath. He loves us anyway. And he does love all people and invite them to be saved, but to know his love, to experience his love, you cannot stay where you are. You cannot remain unchanged. That would not be love from God, for God to leave you or me in our sinful state, heading toward hell, that's not love. He invites us to be saved.

So Habakkuk felt this sense of fear. So what he felt, the first thing we needed to see, and let's think about that in light of the second point, what he felt was because of what he saw. What he saw. He had reason to feel afraid because of what he had seen. If we really look carefully at what he saw, he sees the Lord. The Lord is coming. Verse 3, "God comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran." God is coming. He sees the Lord visibly. He sees God coming. And when he sees God, he doesn't see the God that

we might make him of our own imaginations. You know, some theologians sometimes imagine or talk about the fact that how people, the low view of God that we have, that people imagine God to be kind of a grandfatherly, you know, gentle, okay with however you are, God, almost like kind of a Santa Claus, just wants to give you good things. He really would like you to be better, but he understands that you won't, and he's going to just be good with you. But that's not the God of the Bible. That's a God of our own imagination. The God of the Bible is a God who is determined to punish all evil and to put an end to all evil, to destroy sin, to destroy the works of the devil. And isn't that what he should do? I mean, why would he let the devil keep messing up his world? Why would he let that happen? He's determined to deal with it. And this is what we see though. But when we understand that it makes us afraid because we know we're also sinners. It means he's got to deal with us. But the good news is he is a God of love. He's holy, but he's also loving. God is love. John tells us, 1 John chapter 4.

What does he see? He sees God's anger, his wrath, his rage, verse 8. This is the vision he saw that led to this response in verse 16. What he saw in verses 3 to 15, climax in this emotional, just overwhelming feeling of fear in verse 16. And what was it? Look at verse 8, "Did the LORD rage against the rivers, Or was Your anger against the rivers, Or was Your wrath against the sea..." Your anger, your anger, your wrath, your rage. Verse 12, "In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations." He sees God as a God of rage and anger and wrath. That's terrifying. He sees God as a God who's willing to do violence. Look at the violence he sees. What he saw, he saw God's anger, A, 2A, B, his violence. Verse 8, "That You rode on Your horses, On Your chariots of salvation? Your bow was made bare, The rods of chastisement were sworn. You cleaved the earth." Look at his weapons, look at his weaponry, look what he's doing. Verse 11, "They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear." I mean, he's got a rod. He's got a bow. He's got arrows. He's got a gleaming spear. He's not brought his weapons for nothing. It's not a display. It's not a parade that's being, you know, you watch the military on parade. This isn't a parade. This is warfare. The Divine Warrior has come on the scene. Verse 14, "You pierced," look at this graphic description, "You pierced with his own spears The head of his throngs." Verse 13, the second part, "You struck the head of the house of the evil To lay him open from thigh to neck." You cut him open. This is God. The God we imagine to be a grandfatherly, kind, benevolent, just sort of not really on top of everything, just kind of going along. This is the God of the Bible.

Not just his anger, his violence, but look at his impact on creation. This is when God comes, this is what comes with him. Before him goes, verse 5, pestilence. Plague comes after him. God comes and pestilence goes before him and plague coming after him. It makes COVID or anything like that look small. When God comes on the scene, death goes before him and death goes after him.

Look at verse 6, look at the effect on creation, "Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, The ancient hills collapsed." When God comes, the mountains disintegrate. The hills collapse. They fall down at the presence of so great a God. Verse 10, "The mountains saw You and quaked; The downpour of waters swept by." The water runs

away from you. "The deep uttered forth its voice, It lifted high its hands." It raises its hands in surrender. The sun and moon are afraid to move. They stood in their places. They're terrified. They're struck terrified and cannot move at the presence of this God. And then, when you, the light of your arrows, then they run away. "They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear."

Creation is terrified. It crumbles. It hides. Habakkuk sees this, he sees that the God of the Bible is, as the author of Hebrews said, our God is a consuming fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Terror is appropriate in his presence. Trembling is appropriate when he reveals his wrath and his holiness, and this is a part of who he is. What God is, what God does can be frightening, and we need to understand that. Now, there's joy on the other side. Don't forget that. There's amazing, mind-blowing love on the other side, but we can't escape the fact that he is a holy God. And what he does and who he is, as we behold him, there is an element of right and appropriate terror but it's not a terror that runs away. No. The Bible pictures fear of the Lord that sees him as he is and runs to him for mercy, because he's also a God of great mercy. He's a God, though he is terrible and fearful, this incredible being, he receives those who come to him tenderly. And it's an amazing paradox, but we can't miss this part. This is the part we don't think about, we don't want to think about, we distract ourselves from and we do that to our own hurt, and we do that to the diminishing of his glory in our own lives. We can do nothing to diminish his glory as it is, but we diminish it in our own lives, our understanding of his greatness.

You think about this idea of what he does can be terrifying and God is so kind. When you look at the Scriptures, you don't see much of this. We're talking about a passage that you don't see. This is not every passage of the Bible. These are just a few, you know, spread out here and there that sprinkle in almost just like seasoning. God knows we can't handle much of this, but we have to hear it. There has to be, and it's like, if you make a dish and it's got certain spices in it. If you leave spices out, it's not that dish, is it? It's just, that's not even a worthy example.

The glory of who God is, all of his attributes need to be seen and appreciated in all the splendor of who he is and what he does, what he is, can be at times terrifying. Think about what happened when God set his presence among his people. God, in Exodus, delivers his people from Egypt, slavery. He's going to take them to Canaan, and on the way, they stop at Sinai, and he enters into a covenant with them. He said, "I brought you out to be My people, a kingdom of priests. I want you to live with Me in holiness, set apart unto Me, and you're going to be a kingdom of priests. The way I deal with you is going to show the whole world who I am." Kingdom of priests. What's a priest? A priest stands between man and God. Israel was to be a kingdom of men and women who stood between God and men. Do you see that? To bring the world to God. He says, "I'm going to do this. This is My plan for you. And I'm going to put My presence in your place. I want you to build Me a tabernacle, a tent of meeting." And he gives great specificity to everything about it. God tells them exactly what they must do, how it's to be erected, everything about it, every piece of furniture in it, to the minutest detail. He goes to great specificity about everything they're going to do in that. You know, the bread that's to be

made, this recipe, the incense that's to be made is to be precisely this recipe. "And when you do that and you come into My presence, you who are sinful can come into My presence if you come My way."

And it's a wonderful thing, it's amazing. God's going to, and his glory cloud dwells among the people. And we love this kind of thing. We're like, "God, look at God coming to dwell among us. Isn't this awesome?" But there's this element of holiness and reverence and appropriate fear that we need to have because they just built the tabernacle. They just finished it, the end of Exodus 40. The book of Leviticus covers about a one month period. It's amazing, just one month. They're at Sinai. They finished the tabernacle at the end of Exodus. They erected it according to God's design. God's glory cloud fills the tabernacle, and now they're beginning to offer sacrifices. In Leviticus, tells them what kind of sacrifices they're to offer, exactly what they're supposed to be, how they're supposed to be done, and in that 30-day period, just 30 days, think about that, they've just gotten this from God, what happens in Leviticus chapter 11? Nadab and Abihu carelessly approach the Lord with incense that's not mixed according to the precise specificity that God gave them and as they bring incense, they think they're coming to worship God, but they're not coming according to his specific plan, God sends fire out from his altar and kills both of them. Instantly, they're dead. It's the death penalty. Bam, you're gone. These are two sons of Aaron. Aaron is the high priest. Moses rushes to Aaron and says, "Aaron, do not weep. You have the garment upon you. You are holy. You cannot weep or mourn now. You must not mourn in this moment because you are holy, set apart unto the Lord. That is, if you do, you're going to die too. You've got to finish what's happening, lay aside your garments, and then you can go and mourn."

This is the holy God of the Bible but he's making a way for us to come dwell with him. It's all grace and mercy at the same time. Think about, that's when they build the tabernacle. When God puts in David's heart to build a temple, make the tabernacle permanent, this is 400 years later, more than 400 years later. The period of judges has come and gone. Saul has been king. Now David is king. God puts in David's heart to build a permanent structure, the temple, and he wants to do it. And so he's making preparations. The Lord told him, "You can't really build the temple, but you can make preparations for it." And so he brings the Ark of the Covenant from where it had been in Shiloh down to Jerusalem. But they made the mistake of not reading what God had said about moving the Ark. God had said, "When you move the ark, there's only one way to move the ark, and that is, the Ark in My presence travels on the shoulders of My priests. You put these poles in these holes, these rings on the side of the Ark, you slide poles through them, and you carry them on your shoulders, but you do not touch My Ark." They didn't read carefully. David's excited. He's all fired up about what the Lord's doing. He loves God. His desire is to honor God. His heart is to glorify God. And so he says, "Send for the Ark," and they send for the Ark and they go down there and they put it on a brand new ox cart. They had the sense to put it on a brand new one. Can't be something that's been used for anything else. They build an ox cart just for that. Isn't that enough? I mean, the ox cart is pristine. They're bringing the ox cart with the Ark on it to Jerusalem. It hits a thing in the road and it's unsettled and the Ark starts to tip to the side and a man named Uzzah lifts up his hand and does what any of us would have done if we were in

that moment, he touches the Ark and puts the Ark so it won't fall. And immediately God kills him, strikes him dead instantly. David is so distressed by this that he says, "Stop the procession into Jerusalem. Leave the Ark here. It's a fearful thing for us to approach God." And he's depressed, he's distressed, but things were so good. What happened? Well, the Lord tells us in 2 Chronicles, it's in 2 Samuel and 2 Chronicles, this story, I mean, in 1 Chronicles, it's 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles. He tells us what happened. David realizes that the Scripture says it's supposed to be done this way. And so he sends the people now and they bring it in to Jerusalem on the poles, just like God had said.

Now think about this. God is such a holy God that he would do what he did to Nadab and Abihu and to Uzzah. I mean, that's, when you read the stories, I know my heart is like, "Gosh, I mean, he was trying to do good, Lord, why did You kill him?" It's because we have such a low view of God, such a high view of ourselves. Actually, Sproul, I heard a sermon by him years ago on this, and he made this point. He said, you know, we think in our own reasoning that for the Ark to fall into the mud would be such a tragic thing that we can't imagine that so Uzzah puts up his hand to keep it from hitting the earth and he doesn't realize that what he's done is he has touched the Ark with a sinful and wicked hand. The Ark would have been much better hitting the ground, falling into the sea, than touching a human hand. So great is our wickedness. We would do it and then be indignant. Like David, he was really upset with the Lord. You see, it's a fearful thing to come into the presence of a holy God and yet, if you just are willing to humble yourself and to keep listening and trusting that he is good and that my perception must be wrong, what happens is you find out, yes, my perception is always the problem. He's always right. He's always good.

But see Habakkuk feels what he feels because he's seen what he's seen. He's seen the holiness of God and he is rightly terrified. But what did he do? Third point, what he did, not just what he felt, what he saw, but what he did that shows us how we need to approach such a glorious God. In a word, he worshiped. He just worshiped the God that revealed himself. He puts it to music. "I may not like what I see, it may terrify me, but I'm going to praise You because You are God and I was created to worship You." And so in a word, he worships. Well, I want to give you four points that kind of flesh that out, what it means to worship.

He kept on seeking God, that's the first thing. He kept on seeking God. He sought God and he kept on seeking God. In spite of the fact that his seeking God kept, listen to this, his seeking God kept making him uncomfortable. I mean, look at chapter 1, he's seeking God. "Lord, why do I cry out violence and You don't save? How long did I call for help and You don't hear? Why do You make me see iniquity?" He goes to the Lord. He seeks God with his problem and what the Lord tells him in answer to that, remember Habakkuk's all torn up about the fact there's wickedness all around him among the people of God. He's really, he is just distressed. This ought not be this way. He's indignant. "Lord, why are You allowing this to happen?" So he seeks God. That's what we need to do to worship God. You first want to seek him. He seeks God and you know, God reveals himself to him. God answers him and God says, "You wouldn't believe what I'm about to do. You would not believe if I told you. I'm going to tell you and you won't believe it."

And he says, "I'm going to bring the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, those wicked men that live over in Babylon, I'm going to bring them in and they are going to wreck Judah and Jerusalem. They're going to be the rod of My instrument to discipline My people. I'm going to bring them and I'm going to deal with it."

Now Habakkuk did not like what he heard but he has a sense of reverence and he doesn't run away. He then continues, the beauty is, listen, this God that is so holy, this God who is so holy that he inspires terror, asks you and me to pour out our hearts to him. He wants us to have relationship with him. He's just telling us, "Listen, it's an amazing thing for you to be able to approach Me, but I want you to come and I want you to tell me how you really feel." That's what this book is saying. Don't hide it. You don't have to come acting like everything's okay. Because he's so great, I've got to be terrified. I'm not going to tell him how I really feel. No, this God wants you to tell him how you really feel. He wants to have a conversation with you. Can you believe that? Isn't that astounding? That he cares to hear me or you talk about your life. He really cares. He wants you to pour out your heart honestly to him and you're like, "Lord, it's a dangerous thing to pour out my heart to You." I mean, well, there's a sense in which it is, but ultimately he's a God of tender mercy. He abounds in loving kindness. Remember what Moses saw in Exodus 34, "The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious." Look at this, this is how God describes himself. "I'm the Lord, the Lord, Yahweh, Yahweh, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness, who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin." Six things about his mercy and his loving kindness. You hear that? Then he says, "but who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." The seventh thing, he finally got around to his wrath.

So run to him, pour out your heart to him, but just understand as you do, you're going to encounter things that you don't like and the question is, what do you do when you encounter them? Habakkuk kept on seeking God. Even as it hurt, he kept seeking him because he knew the Lord is good to those who seek him. "If you seek Me, you'll find Me. I will be found by you, declares the Lord." And when you find God as he is, there is nothing that thrills the soul of a human being more than to see God as he is. It's what we were made for, so go after him. So he keeps on seeking.

So he doesn't stop the discussion and just run away. He goes back to the Lord in verses 12 to 17 and he says, he reasons with God, "You're from everlasting to everlasting. How can You do this?" He's frank with him. "How can You use those who are more wicked than us to punish us?" But he does it with a sense of still a sense of reverence. You kind of see as it goes, he keeps asking questions, but he keeps getting more humble and more reverent, but the one thing that doesn't change is he keeps pouring out his heart transparently to God. God wants a relationship with you that you pour out your heart to him. I don't know why he would want that with me or you, but he does.

The wonder of who he is, keep on seeking, and so after that, he gets a second answer. He says, "Lord, why do You do this?" And God says, "Look, I've got news for you. I'm going to deal with them." "Well, this is pretty good. I'm glad You're going to deal with him, but You're still dealing with us and I've still got problems." And then chapter 3:1

and 2 is his third time of seeking him and you see a little more humility now. "A prayer of Habakkuk...I have heard the report about You and I fear." As I look at what I know, I fear. O Lord, but he surrenders to God and he keeps seeking, and he gets, God reveals himself again, and at the end, he's still seeking God. Though he keeps hearing things that he doesn't necessarily like, what happens as he goes along is, what he didn't like, he comes to understand, "I should have liked, and in fact, I do like."

So he seeks. Secondly, he keeps submitting to God. Wait, I'm sorry, keeps seeing God. Second point, I kind of already did that one too, but let me give you the four points. Keep seeking and keep seeing. When he reveals himself, don't stop looking. Keep looking. Even though at times God says things, I mean, there's all kinds of truths in the Bible that are difficult, that you want to actually sort of just not think about. That's not the life of faith. The life of faith is when I find something that's uncomfortable, I don't like about God, press on in the Scriptures, is this what the Bible is saying, first of all? And if it is, "Lord, I want to love You as You are." Keep seeing God.

So keep seeking God, keep seeing God. Thirdly, keep submitting to God. That's what he does that's so beautiful. He keeps seeking the Lord, even though he finds things that he doesn't like, but as he sees God for who he is, he keeps submitting his own desires to God. He realizes, "It's just, you know, it really doesn't matter what I think or what I want. It's who You are." And isn't that completely reasonable? Isn't the most unreasonable thing in the world to think that you or I, as finite beings, I mentioned earlier, we're finite and we're fallen, as a finite being that you can measure who God should be or what he is. Isn't that just absurdly ridiculous to think that you could do that, that I could do that? We're finite. We have no ability to understand the infinite. Now add to it that we're fallen. Is it rational that I should think that I should tell God how he should be, given that I was conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity? That I've been proud from my mother's womb, and like Spurgeon said, pride's the first sin to rear itself in the crib, and it's the last one before they put you in the ground. Pride. Pride. Pride. Do I think that I can judge who God should be? That's absurd.

So I should be ready to humble myself under whatever he says. Be sure that he says it, but humble myself under it, submit. And Habakkuk keeps on submitting to God. Like you see it beautifully when he says that in verse 2, "O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known." "Lord, do Your work. You've told me You're going to do this work. I'm not crazy about what You've told me at all. I don't really like it in myself, but I know You're good and therefore I know that I should like it and that this must be best, and so do Your work, Lord. But in wrath," but here he pours out his heart, "in wrath, remember mercy." As if God needed that, but he wants us to say it. It's a beautiful thing when someone prays like that, "In wrath, remember mercy, Lord."

So he submits. So he keeps on seeking. He keeps on seeing. He keeps on submitting, and he keeps on trusting, that's the fourth thing. And this is what makes up worship: you seek God, you see God, you submit to God, and you trust him. This is, you believe, this is faith. The life of faith. The life of faith seeks God. "And without faith, it is impossible to

please God for He who comes to Him must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Faith seeks God, seeks God as it sees God, it submits to who he is and it places your trust in him. It's a surrender that just says, "Lord, You are good and You do good." This is what you see in the Psalms. The Psalmist pours out his heart to God. He complains sometimes, and yet in the end, he surrenders because God knows what he's doing. And you know, when you push through things, some of the most beautiful things in life are going to be when God takes you through the most unpleasant circumstances. You know, you don't know how much you love your spouse, until you go through really difficult things together. Sometimes relationship problems. Sometimes things happen in your marriage that you're just like devastated. You can't believe, "Is this the person I married?" And you feel that and yet you keep with the Lord and you trust in God and you find it, "Oh, this person I married is the most wonderful gift I've ever, could have ever imagined." This is what God wants for all of us and you're like, you know, the longer I'm married, I think I can't believe she has stayed with me. I cannot believe it, because you get to know more and more how foolish you are as a man.

But the Lord does things through those difficult times. He does that, the closest moments are when you go through adversity and difficulty together. God brings you together. To see his glory, you have to be troubled deeply in your soul and then humbled so that you can receive revelation of who he is. And so he takes you through perplexing things. You come to doctrines that you don't like, you know, unconditional election, and you wrestle with that. Some of you are probably wrestling with that now. It took me three and a half years of seminary to wrestle through that. So I give a lot of grace to people who take a long time with that. That was studying full-time for three and a half years. I was a hard-headed, Christian. My wife became a Calvinist in like 30 seconds. Here's a message, boom, that's it. I'm like, no, you can't go, you cannot change your theology that quickly. You've got to spend some time. So three and a half years later, I changed my theology to agree with her. But you're troubled by things and you cling to God and you trust him and you see that he's altogether wonderful. It's always that way. The heart of faith will always lay hold of God, more of God. He troubles you. He has to because we've got to have our sin exposed, our unbelief that's still there. "I believe. Help my unbelief." That's what Habakkuk did. He kept seeking, he kept seeing, he kept submitting and he kept trusting. May the Lord help us do that.

Let's go to him in prayer.

Our Father, we rejoice in who You are. Lord, we confess that as we come to Your word, we so often find ourselves to be approaching truths that are too great for us. We feel that there's no ability in our own souls to be able to handle these things. We feel unworthy to talk about them and yet we know, Lord, that You're a God of grace and mercy, though You're also a God of holiness and wrath, and You will teach us if we will humble ourselves. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Lord, make us ever more humble. Make us more teachable. Help us to be willing to press through the unpleasant things that we find unpleasant. because in You there is nothing that is ultimately unpleasant, only that which is entirely lovely and good. We thank You that we see that supremely in the cross, that we see that the greatest evil the world ever witnessed was the

cross, the greatest injustice, the greatest ugliness, the greatest outpouring of evil, and yet, at the same time, the greatest display of love and mercy, wrath, justice, and tenderness, forgiveness, and love all together. How good You are, O Lord. Help us, help us love You more and serve You more faithfully. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.