

Habakkuk- Finding Faith in Trying Times Confidence in the Face of Calamity [Hab. 3:16-19]

In 1861, early in the civil war, a woman named Julia Ward Howe wrote song lyrics in response to the calamity of war. Julia linked the judgement of Isaiah 63 with the triumphal return of Christ in Revelation 19. This poem of tragedy and triumph has been passed down throughout the ages. You might be familiar with the lyrics:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat;
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.

(Chorus)

Glory, Glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on.

We don't know what tune (Shigionoth)—refers to a situation in which things have gone wrong and need to be set right- Habakkuk hummed as he penned his prayer in Habakkuk 3:16-19. I do know that his prayer mediation is in response to the calamity of his life and people. I wonder as Habakkuk reflected on the enduring promises of the Lord, if he had the tune “My eyes have seen the glory” on his mind.

Over the last several weeks I have read emails, texts, and social media posts through tears of burden and celebration as many of you recounted that in the most difficult season of your life you **looked up to the throne of Christ and sang-hummed-cried “Glory, Glory Hallelujah, His truth is marching on”**

Today we conclude a timely message on finding faith in trying times. Today's thought is simply: **Confidence in the face of calamity.**

[Habakkuk 3:16-19] and pray

A Trembling Response (3:16)

I believe you will find no more honest visceral reaction to tragedy and brokenness that you find here in Habakkuk. Four times in this single chapter reference is made to a response of trembling to the manifestation of God's truth and glory (vv 2, 7, 16).

A dialogue scheme that pervades the prophet book prevails to the very end. This is the third prayer to Yahweh and Habakkuk has already received two responses. Habakkuk now understands that the Lord - He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat; Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet! Our God is marching on.

And Habakkuk trembles at the judgment of the Lord. His lips are quivering (picture the prophet). And now he quietly awaits.

We have in this final encounter with the Almighty a picture of each and every one of us and how we should respond to the wrath and real judgment of God. **We must respond to our sin because the wages of sin is death.** The judgement of the Lord is just in response to your unrighteousness.

This exhortation is also very necessary for us in the present day. We see how inclined we are by nature to indifference; and when God brings before us our sins, and then sets before us his wrath, we are not moved; and when we entertain any fear, it soon vanishes. (Calvin)

When was the last time you had a trembling response to your sin? To the judgement of God against iniquity? But we cannot truly and from the heart repent, until our sins become displeasing to us: and the hatred of sin proceeds from the fear of God (Calvin). Until your sins are displeasing – you have not repented. Without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sin.

Church we must tremble in response to our iniquity. The sovereign God will not ignore our transgressions. Oh Lord let us tremble! ***Because of Grace- those who tremble can also Trust!***

A Trusting Plea (3:17)

Confidence- belief that one can rely on someone- begins with belief in the right someone. God's people remain in a time of lamentation. The prophet however turns to praise. Why this strange shift? Because he has heard God's voice and seen a vision from the Lord!

Lest we think that Habakkuk's situation has changed, he rattles off a quick succession of six clauses that seem to grow in severity.

1. **Figs** served as a delicacy in Israel, but their loss did not produce severe hardship.
2. **Grapes** provided the daily drink, but again the loss of the fruit of the vine would produce inconvenience rather than privation.
3. The **olive crop** on the other hand produced oil for cooking and lighting.
4. **Grain** (barley and wheat) provided for the staple diet of Palestine.
5. Both **sheep** and cattle made up much of the wealth of Palestine. Sheep and goats provided wool and the occasional meat.
6. Hebrews did not normally eat cattle, but they were used for preparing the soil for planting and other heavy work.

In light of the worst circumstances, and growing severity, Habakkuk chose to turn his eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face. Even in the midst of **suffering- Habakkuk chooses the Savior.** This is a trusting plea in the face of what the Puritans called "Severe Mercies."

Our little time of suffering is not worthy of our first night's welcome home to Heaven – Samuel Rutherford

It was in jail that John Bunyan wrote the pilgrim's progress. It was in the face of death- after being discharged from Yale with TB and spitting blood that Brainard became a missionary to the Delaware Indians.

What did these men know? That when the fig does not bud- they will trust in the One who will not fail. **Often the greatest trust springs from our deepest tragedy.**

A Triumphant Confidence (3:18-19)

In light of all that has happened- the wickedness of the people of God and the severe judgement of the Almighty-- **This transition from the complaining prophet to the rejoicing prophet surely must be seen as a work of God's sovereign grace.**

How does this change happen? From complaining to rejoicing? From brokenness to confidence? Habakkuk exhibited the kind of relationship with God which **enjoyed the divine Person more than the things** he could do for the prophet.

When your hope and relationship with the Father is built on what He can do for you, your world will crumble. ***When our confidence is in temporal comforts- your hope is not eternal.***

This is why the prophet radically proclaims: the Lord my Lord is my strength!!

This is the only place outside the Psalms (16:2; 68:20; 109:21; 140:7; 141:8) that the phrase *yahweh 'ādōnāy* (“Sovereign LORD”) occurs, expressing the divine personal name preceded by his title. The names emphasize the power and majesty of God. **Habakkuk used the strongest names for God available.**

So before our very eyes the message of Hab. 2:4 finds fulfillment. **Habakkuk lives—by faith. (NICOT, 247). A life of faith is at triumphant confidence.**

What is confidence? Read Hab 3:17-18

Response

On January 28, 1945, as World War II was groaning to a close, 121 elite Army Rangers liberated over 500 POWs, mostly Americans, from a Japanese prisoner of war camp near Cabanatuan in the Philippines.

The prisoners, many of whom were survivors of the infamous Bataan death march, were in awful condition, physically and emotionally. Before the Rangers arrived, the primary Japanese guard unit had left the camp because of Japan's massive retreat from the Philippines. The new situation was precarious. Japanese troops were still around and in the camp, but they kept their distance from the prisoners.

The men of Cabanatuan didn't quite know what to make of their new freedom—if freedom was in fact what it was. And then, without warning, the American Rangers swept upon the camp in furious force.

But one of one of the most interesting facets of the story was the reaction of many of the prisoners. They were so defeated, diseased, and familiar with deceit that **many needed to be convinced they were actually free.**

Was it a trick? A trap? Was this real? One prisoner, Captain Bert Bank, struggling with blindness caused by a vitamin deficiency, couldn't clearly make out his would-be rescuers.

He refused to budge. Finally, a soldier walked up to him, tugged his arm, and said, ***"What's wrong with you? Don't you want to be free?"*** Bank, from Alabama, recognized the familiar southern accent of his questioner. A smile formed on his lips, and he willingly and thankfully began his journey to freedom.

Do you want to be free? Confidence in Christ is this—knowing that the righteous will live by faith. Knowing that there is therefore now NO condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

Today do you need to hear the voice of your rescuer? To truly know that you are free in Christ.

John 3:16

A Trembling Response- A Trusting Plea- A Triumphant Confidence!

Notes

This is a prayer of faith, a song/poem of declaration. In 3:1 the term *tevilla*, “prayer” is a general term that designates prayer or human attempts to address YHWH directly.

The reference to *Shigionoth* has been particularly problematic. It appears in psalm 7, which is a psalm of lament. It therefore seems best to understand *shigionoth* as a reference to a situation of distress.

It would then refer to a situation in which things have gone wrong and need to be set right (Berit Olam, 480).

Some commentators have insisted that 3:1-19 could not be an original part of this prophecy. Nowhere else do that words of an Israelite prophet take the form of a poem composed for celebration in the context of the worshipping community (NICOT, 212).

Hab. 3:16 I heard, and I trembled within; my lips quivered at the sound. Rottenness entered my bones; I trembled where I stood. Now I must quietly wait for the day of distress to come against the people invading us.

The images of quivering lips, rotten bones, and trembling are expression of the psalmist’s own fear and anxiety while waiting for YHWH to act (Berit Olam, 487).

The dialogue scheme that has run throughout the book prevails to the very end. But this time the prophet is speechless. By a patient rebuttal that never swerved from his point, the Lord has shut up his servant to a position of passive acknowledgment of the rightness of his ways (NICOT, 242).

Trembling

Four times in this single chapter reference is made to a response of trembling to the manifestation of God’s truth and glory (vv 2, 7, 16).

But we cannot truly and from the heart repent, until our sins become displeasing to us: and the hatred of sin proceeds from the fear of God, and that sorrow which Paul regards as the mother of repentance. (2 Cor. 7: 10.) (John Calvin)

This exhortation is also very necessary for us in the present day. We see how inclined we are by nature to indifference; and when God brings before us our sins, and then sets before us his wrath, we are not moved; and when we entertain any fear, it soon vanishes. (Calvin)

17 Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls,

God's people remain in time of lamentation. The prophet, however, turns to praise. Why? He has heard God's voice and seen God's vision. (NAC)

The six clauses of v. 17 seem to be in ascending order of severity, with the loss of figs ranking least and the loss of the herd in the stalls causing the greatest economic damage.

Figs served as a delicacy in Israel, but their loss did not produce severe hardship.

Grapes provided the daily drink, but again the loss of the fruit of the vine would produce inconvenience rather than privation.

The **olive crop** on the other hand produced oil for cooking and lighting. Grain (barley and wheat) provided for the staple diet of Palestine.

The failure of the **fields** to produce food might mean starvation for large segments of the population.

Both **sheep** and cattle made up much of the wealth of Palestine.

Sheep and goats provided wool and the occasional meat for the Israelite diet.

Hebrews did not normally eat cattle, but they were used for preparing the soil for planting and other heavy work.

The word that introduces this verse could be regarded as setting up only a hypothetical possibility. Instead, the passage describes a series of facts that shall transpire. These dreadful things shall happen.

A double triad of objects may be noted, moving from the optional to the essential items for human survival (NICOT, 245).

The fig tree, the fruit, and the olive represent the choicest products of the land as seen in passages such as Joel 1:7, Hos. 2:12 and Deut 6:11.

The grain of the fields and the flock and cattle encompass the necessities of bread, milk, and meat.

The promised mercies of God's mercies of God to his people extend well beyond all material losses. The entire present world may pass away, but God's grace to his people shall endure (NICOT, 245).

18 yet I will celebrate in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!

I celebrate

The cohortative, i.e. according to §48c, the 1st pers.^[1] sing. or plur. of the imperfect lengthened by the ending ׀, ^[2] represents in general an endeavour directed expressly towards a definite object. While the corresponding forms of the indicative rather express the mere announcement that an action will be undertaken, the cohortative lays stress on the determination underlying the action, and the personal interest in it (Gesenius)

The transition from the complaining prophet to the rejoicing prophet surely must be seen as a work of God's sovereign grace (NICOT, 247).

More than "toughing it out" or "hanging in there" Habakkuk would be "joyful" in the God of his salvation (cf. Jas 1:2; Rom 8:35–37).

Habakkuk exhibited the kind of relationship with God which enjoyed the divine Person more than the things he could do for the prophet.

19 The LORD my Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to walk on mountain heights!

Habakkuk echoes David's words in Psalm 18:34.

So before our very eyes the message of Hab. 2:4 finds fulfillment. Habakkuk lives—by faith. (NICOT, 247).

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Illustrations

God is not looking from the ramparts of heaven observing how history unfolds.

Application

Not a weak faith but a perplexed faith torments Habakkuk in 1:12 (NICOT).

“Frankly this cure is worse than the disease” (Begg).