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Text: Habakkuk 3:1 - 19

Place: Midweek

Title: God, I can trust you even when everything looks wrong!

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A few years ago there was a craze on hidden 3-D picture puzzles. They looked like a page full of random dots, but if you looked long enough they turned into an amazing 3D picture. Well so they said...

I could never get it! I stared and stared and people would say, 'Can't you see the dolphins leaping?'

'No!'

'What about this one – look! – an eagle! Or this dinosaur!'

'No! No! No!'

I used to get pretty agitated by then because they could see this wonderful picture and all I could see was a messed up jumble of dots! Two people could be looking at the same picture and yet see totally different things.

As we've been going through the book of Habakkuk, Habakkuk has been asking some very heart-felt questions to God. He was deeply offended by the wickedness he saw around him in Jerusalem. And he cried out to God, 'Why don't you do something?'

God replied, 'I am doing something. I'm sending the Babylonians to punish Jerusalem.'

But that threw Habakkuk even more. So he asked: 'Lord, how can you use really wicked people to punish those less wicked?'

In **chapter 2** God replies to that by saying that he knows the Babylonians and their king. They will be held responsible for the wickedness.

When we get to **chapter 3** we see that Habakkuk has no more questions.

He realises that while his questions were honest his focus was on the wrong things. All he could see was the jumbled mess of wickedness. He couldn't see the amazing picture of God's sovereignty, justice and power.

Like Peter walking to Jesus on the water, Habakkuk took his eyes off the Lord and all he could see was the waves around him.

He found that it was coming back to God and understanding his character when his problem fell into focus.

**Verse 20** of **chapter 2** is his turning point. God says to him there, '**But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.**' Habakkuk had taken his eyes off the Lord and all he could see were the waves of wickedness around him. He felt he was sinking and he cried out to the Lord. And as God answers him, reveals his holiness to him, his peace is restored.

It's not that the waves are gone but his focus is again on his Lord. God reached out his hand and took hold of him.

And so now in **chapter 3** questioning and complaining are replaced by prayer and worship. Notice in **verses 1** and **19** of **chapter 3** this is a prayer put to music. Why did he do that?

He is giving his prayer to the believing community. He recognises that he is probably not alone in letting his focus drift from the living God to his problems. And the fact that God has

preserved Habakkuk's story in the Bible shows that his experience isn't unique. This has value for all of us.

Every one of us is prone to worry, and what has been happening here is the essence of worry. Worry is when we take our eyes off God and instead focus on our problems. And the more we stare at them the bigger they seem.

It's like me with those 3-D puzzles. No matter how hard I looked at them I could not turn them into pictures. And then I started getting defensive and self-pitying! Why can everyone else see them and I can't? Why are they so special? It's not fair that they can see it and I can't!

When we focus on our problems we feel the same way: No-one else has the same troubles I have! Why are they so special they get to miss out? It's not fair!

While Habakkuk's complaints are heart-felt, they are a bit self-centred. **'Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?'** he asks in **1:3**. Poor fella!

We've all been there, though! There have been times when all we can see are our problems and we cannot understand why we need to go through them.

Perhaps that's where you are now. There's something in your life, or a whole series of things and you cannot see why they had to happen. And deep down, you're angry at God about them. You didn't deserve this. Other people seem to glide through life and yours is one hurdle after another.

Let's look at how Habakkuk is turned around, and the help he gives us today.

**Chapter 3 verse 2** is the essence of Habakkuk's response.

It's the refrain of his prayer: **'Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.'**

This verse is in two parts.

The first part is his recognition of God's greatness.

He has heard God's call in **2:20** to be silent before him. And in that silence his focus has come back to God. His first response is adoration. He praises God for who he is.

Often that is the one aspect of prayer that doesn't come easily for us. I'm quick to ask for things from God, I'm OK at saying thank you, pretty hesitant to confess my sins, but often completely stuck for words when it comes to adoration. We don't often stand in awe of God's deeds. We don't still our hearts and contemplate his fame.

It can be too easy to rush into our requests and forget to stop and truly understand whose presence we're entering.

Habakkuk's early complaint was 'Why don't you do something?'

Now he realises how short-sighted he's being. God *has* acted in the past. He *has* brought judgement on the nations. He *has* acted in defence of his people.

And so he pleads in the second part of the prayer: Renew those deeds in our day.

Do it again!

He's turned completely around. Before he was focussed on the problem and he argued from there. Now he is focussed on God's character and that becomes the basis of his prayer.

Not his problem. Instead of swirling around, cast adrift in his circumstances, he has a firm anchor to hold on to: the unchanging character of God.

But what deeds is he remembering? What is he looking for again in his day?

In **verses 3 – 15** he remembers what for an Israelite was the great action of God in the past: the Exodus. It was the high point of Israel's history. Prophets, psalmists and kings all looked back to that formative event. It was the time when God stepped in with mighty power to free his people and lead them to the Promised land.

In **chapter 1** Habakkuk complained that God wasn't doing anything.

But as he remembers the Exodus, these verses are full of God's actions.

It is such vivid language, full of power and movement. God comes down to earth and strides across it like a colossus. Mountains collapse, plague goes before him. Sun and moon stand still in awe as he joins the battle for his people.

**Verse 12: 'In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations.'**

Why did God come down as a warrior? Why did he thresh the nations?

**Verse 13: 'You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one.'**

In **verses 14 & 15** he refers to the Red Sea.

The opening of the Red Sea meant deliverance for Israel. Its closing meant Egypt's destruction.

That's why his refrain in **verse 2** says, '**in wrath remember mercy.**'

God's justified anger at the nations for their rebellion is tempered with mercy for his people. And so Habakkuk has hope for his people. In **chapter 2** God has declared his intent to display his wrath against Babylon. And so Habakkuk prays that in that expression of wrath God will remember to be merciful to Israel.

That like for Egypt, Babylon's destruction will mean deliverance for Israel.

When Habakkuk remembers God's deeds in the past, his present troubles come into right focus.

And we'll see in a moment how that helps him in the present.

But for us, what great expression of God's deeds do we look back to?

Do we have to think all the way back to the Exodus?

No. As great as that event was, there has been a greater Exodus since then. **Isaiah 59:15 & 16** say this: '**The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own hand worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him.**'

God steps into battle again to save his people.

Not at the Red Sea, or at Sinai, but at Calvary. It was there he poured out his terrible wrath, not on his enemies, but on his beloved Son. And by doing so he reconciled his enemies to himself.

This side of the Cross we may still cry out, "God, what are you doing about the wicked?"

But the cry rings hollow when we see what he has done about wickedness.

What he has done about *our* wickedness.

In wrath he remembered mercy. In punishing his Son he demonstrated limitless mercy to his enemies. In **chapter 2** Habakkuk fell into the trap of grading people's righteousness and wickedness. 'Sure we're bad,' he said, 'but not as bad as them!'

The Cross brings us all up short. None of us deserve anything but his wrath. We have all offended him.

Our question in suffering is nearly always 'Why me?'

The Cross makes us realise the question should be 'Why *not* me?' After all I have done, why should I expect to be treated well?

But the amazing thing is that in wrath God has remembered mercy. Jesus suffered that you and I might live! God has seen our greatest need: Salvation. And his Son left the glory of heaven and came down and worked salvation for us. He has gone to the heart of the matter, the essence of why we suffer, and dealt sin a crushing blow. He has defeated death, our greatest enemy!

When we realise that our other problems come into perspective.

We can say with Habakkuk, **'Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.'**

Habakkuk looked back to the Exodus. We look back to Calvary. But now he and we are both in the same place: We have peace and hope in the present.

We see how Habakkuk expresses that in **verses 16 – 19**. **Verses 17 & 18** are one of the greatest expressions of hope and trust you will read in the Bible: **'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, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.'**

When everything looks bleak, we can not only bear it, but even rejoice in the Lord.

**Verse 17** describes a total destruction of the land: there is nothing left. In Habakkuk's time there was no such thing as ducking down to the supermarket when the cupboard's empty. Not even waiting for foreign aid if things were really bad. Even if he had absolutely nothing and the future looks terrible, yet he will rejoice.

How can he do that? Because God has met his greatest need. He is **God my Saviour**. He may die, but God will still keep him. He has a sure hope for the future regardless of what he can see around him.

What a change we can see in him! From complaining to peace. He has been reminded of why he loves God.

When Satan accused Job before God he said that Job only loved God because God had blessed him. Satan said, 'Take away those things, even his health, and he will soon curse you to your face!' So God put that claim to the test and Job proved that he didn't love for what he got, but for who God is.

Paul puts it this way in **Romans 8:31 & 32**, **'If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?'**

Then in **verse 38** he concludes, **'I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'**

That's where Habakkuk has come to now in **chapter 3**. Complaints are stilled when we focus on the character of God. Peace and trust replace worry and fear when we realise that in wrath God has remembered mercy.

No matter how severe your trial is at the moment, it's not strong enough to separate you from Jesus.

But what trials do is expose where your love is grounded.

Do you love God because of what he does for you, or do you love him for who he is?

Could everything be stripped away, like in **verse 17**, but you would still say, **I will rejoice in the Lord?**

In the week before Katherine and I got married we had the rehearsal where Katherine practiced walking down the aisle over and over again while the fellas lounged around and joked.

But then we went over the vows.

As we practiced them, the enormity of what I was going to promise on Saturday hit me: 'I take you to be my wife; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish as long as we both shall live. This is my solemn promise.'

I was promising that my love wasn't going to quit just because things got tough.

Habakkuk expresses that kind of love for God. For better or worse. Even really, really worse! True love doesn't give up.

What do your trials say about your love for God?