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A Thriving Faith, Part 3

Proverbs 3:5-6 is a frequently memorized verse.

Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

We love this verse! Not only is it great poetry and so attracts us by virtue of how well it is written, but the call is so crucial! How important it is as we work out our salvation that we NOT “...lean on our own understanding” when it comes to God’s will for our lives, BUT struggle and

strive to “trust in the Lord with all our heart!” For if we do this, if we cultivate a heart of dependence upon and devotion to Christ, Proverbs 3 says that “God will make our paths straight!”

What does this “straight path” look like? Most of us have no clue as to what this means! It sounds good and so we want it. But exactly what God is talking about here escapes us! A “straight path” comes as a result of a thriving faith!

We are looking at a Psalm which Habakkuk wrote to encourage a nation which was about to go through a severe trial, which literally would shake their world to pieces. The year is 605 BC and the nation of Judah is at the precipice of judgment on account of its rebellion against the Lord!

At first, Habakkuk struggled on account of God’s plans for His people. But then the prophet was floored with the glory of God, the beauty of His name, and so the greatness of His plan. This resulted in faith and trust and so a “straight path.” How did this “straight path” manifest itself in the life of Habakkuk? It is to that we turn our focus. A straight path manifests itself primarily in two ways; first by submitting to God’s providences.

Submission to God’s Providences

Habakkuk 3:16, “I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble...”

This passage represents a culmination of much thought and prayer on the part of Habakkuk. At the beginning of this Psalm, Habakkuk said the same thing he does here, “I have heard the report about Thee” (3:2). In that instance, he was inspired to pen the Psalm before us. Now he repeats the sentiment, but this time is speechless (no planned response [2:1], just reverence and awe)! In this quiet and reflective state, he notices that his body has been traumatized, “my inward parts trembled.” The word for “tremble” is used for “reverence and awe” (cf. 3:2). This is godly fear embodied! Habakkuk is so moved by what God is about to do, that he suffers convulsions in the pit of his stomach!

Next, “at the sound my lips quivered.” The word for “quivered” is used in Scripture of the clash of cymbals. If you have ever held cymbals in your hand after you’ve struck them together you would notice that the result is an intense trembling of the hands and arms. That’s the picture that came to Habakkuk’s mind as he sat before the Lord. But it wasn’t his hands or arms that were tingling; it was his “lips.” This is somewhat ironic. At the beginning of this prophecy, Habakkuk wouldn’t stop moving his lips as he accused God and endeavored to manipulate Him. Now when he wants to be silent before the Lord, they move uncontrollably!

Next, “decay enters my bones.” Obviously Habakkuk is not being literal here! However, what he writes is quite vivid. Imagine what it would be like to have your bones rot within you. Forget the pain; the point is that they no longer would support your frame. Instead you’d feel weak, unsteady, and unable to stand! You’d have to sit down. That is the idea here!

Finally, “in my place [lit. “beneath me”] I tremble.” Habakkuk just referenced “trembling” (vv. 2 & 16a) and he’s returned to it here now for the third time. Yet by now the “trembling” has gone beyond his gut to involve his entire body. In fact, the “trembling” could refer literally to tremors of the earth (as if an earthquake occurred). But its usage clearly is in reference to the bodily effects that the Lord’s message had on the prophet. On top of everything else, Habakkuk noticed that his legs would not stop shaking! And how could it be any other way? Recall Psalms 29 and the powerful effect of the word of God when it comes to the earth.

Psalms 29:3-5, 7-9, “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord is over many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful, the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; yes, the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon... The voice of the Lord hews out flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord makes the deer to calve, and strips the forests bare, and in His temple everything says, ‘Glory!’”

That was the impact of God’s voice upon creation; now it was powerfully and brutally shaking the prophet! If you’ve ever experienced a near-miss accident while driving a car, you will have a small inkling of how Habakkuk no doubt felt here. Imagine a large truck veering into your lane. You honk, brake and begin to pull off the road and hope that the truck driver sees you and heads back into his lane. The result is traumatic; your body aches, your stomach is in your throat, your head buzzes and your joint hurt. The massive adrenaline surge can’t be relieved because you are strapped to your seat. All you can do is shudder and shake.

This is what Habakkuk is describing much more than simply “quake, shudder, and feel sick.” And this trembling led him to make an incredible commitment to Lord:

Habakkuk 3:16b, “...Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise *who* will invade us”

The language is NOT that of resignation, BUT of active commitment, faith, and reliance! The idea is “I will/must, by all means, wait quietly [on the Lord] for the day of distress.” Clearly the fight had been taken out of Habakkuk and in its place was a stubborn trust! Let us remind ourselves of that which took the fight out of this prophet! See, Habakkuk was NOT brought to the point of exasperation because God was bigger than the prophet (though recall in his flesh that is exactly what he expected, cf. 2:1)! RATHER, Habakkuk was moved to a “stubborn reliance” upon God because he saw four things (recall the truths which were unveiled to Habakkuk in chapter 2):

- This world/age is NOT the final state!
- At the end of all things, every man, woman, and child will render account for their life in this age!
- On that day, not the slightest sin will be overlooked!
- The burdens of this life are but momentary and light in comparison to the glory that

awaits us in eternity!

If you had cancer and a prophet approached you and said, “You must have surgery, then chemotherapy, and through it all you will suffer greatly, but in the end you will be better than you were before and you will live a full and wonderful life,” how would you approach the coming baptism? I dare say with confidence and strength in the Lord! You wouldn’t be excited about the struggle or coming pain, but you’d be confident and secure knowing that everything was going to be fine!

This is the conviction that faith gave to Habakkuk in this passage. But it is not only him; this is the result of a thriving faith in the lives of ALL God’s servants! Being confident of the end from the beginning, Paul said this:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Psalms 23:6, “Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life [that doesn’t mean he was going to experience an easy life; we know there would be times in his life when he would dwell “in the valley of the shadow of death”; rather this speaks as to confidence that faith brings to the life of a believer], and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Psalms 46:10, “Cease *striving* and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

And such was the disposition and confidence of Habakkuk! His world was about to be shaken to the core and destroyed; there would be no recovery! Yet Habakkuk had the glorious conviction that “It was well with his soul!” And as a result, he was NOT sidelined by bitter providence, BUT rather could:

- Give himself fully to the Lord and His providence.
- Entrust himself to a faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Peter 4:19)!
- Submit to God’s providence even though in the short term, it wasn’t going to be alright.

That is the point of Habakkuk 3:3-15 and the Psalm/Song Habakkuk endeavored to teach his generation! Yes, calamity was coming; their world was going to fall apart! But if you have Christ you don’t need ease of days! Recall the words of Pastor Jared Wilson:

...it’s possible that God’s plan for us is littleness. His plan for us may be personal failure. It’s possible that when another door closes, it’s not because he plans to open a window but because he plans to have the building fall down on you. The question we must ask ourselves

is this: Will Christ be enough?

That truly is the question: Is Christ enough for us in life? Must we have more: “Christ AND... [fill in the blank]”? That brings us to the second result of a thriving faith; delighting in God’s person.

Delight in God’s Person

Habakkuk 3:17, “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”

Habakkuk is NOT simply being poetic (although again this is great poetry). He is anticipating the brutal lot that lay in front of everyone in Judah. In this regard notice that what the nation was about to experience was NOT due to drought or plague, BUT the ravages of war!

Habakkuk 3:17, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines [marching soldiers obviously knocked the flowers off of the tree so that there could be no harvest, and whatever remained they would take for themselves], *though* the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food [there weren’t workers to attend the grove or the field because of war; as such crops weren’t planted and orchards were tended to], though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls [in the ancient world armies lived off the people they conquered; as such there was no food because “flock and cattle” were taken to supply the invading army].”

There is a progression in this text. Habakkuk moves from that which is optional (and maybe even an indulgence) to that which is essential/crucial. “Figs,” “fruit,” and “olives” represented the choicest products of the land in ancient times.¹ They were not staples, but a treat if present. In contrast, the grain of “the fields,” “flock,” and “cattle” encompass the necessities of life: specifically bread, milk, and meat. Such was the course of deprivation in the ancient world when war came to a land. The first to go were the extravagant things... and then food altogether! Yet amazingly and supernaturally (the prophet clearly has been buoyed by God’s grace), Habakkuk says that he was willing to live in a world without these things. How so? It was on account of the basis upon which Habakkuk now lived his life.

Habakkuk 3:18, “Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”

This statement is huge! The biblical concept of “exult” encompasses much more than simply praise. Habakkuk here is NOT simply saying, “Though all these bad things happen, nevertheless I will praise the Lord”- although that was true. To “exult” and “rejoice” in something speaks of one’s fundamental joy, confidence, or satisfaction. It is the basis upon which a person conducts themselves in life and so constitutes an essential part of their world-view. And so, for example (and I’m going to be very simplistic here). To “exult/rejoice” in *money* is the disposition of the materialist. In this worldview, “good” and “bad” are defined by the overall impact that an event or decision has on one’s material possessions. For the hedonist, it is *pleasure*. “Good”

and “bad” are determined by the impact something has on their ability and have fun.

In this regard notice: the basis of one’s “exultation” is determined by *what one considers to be a crisis!* Let me ask you: What moves you to anger or worry? Is it a lack of respect in the home? Is it a lack of funds? Is it an election? Is it physical want/depravation? Is it an uncertain future? That which moves you to anger or worry is that over which you “exult!” And sadly, most Christians today rarely rise above the world in this regard and so hover somewhere between the materialist and the hedonist. They love God NOT for God’s sake, BUT for their own sake and for what He gives them. Do you remember Christ’s indictment of the crowds?

John 6:26: “Jesus answered them and said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs [not because you saw testifying miracles which proclaimed me to be God and so because you love God you now are loving Me], but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled.’”

They didn’t care about Christ. What they cared about is what Christ could give them! And so it is in so many places today in the body of Christ! Take away a Christian’s music in worship and they’ll leave the service! Take away ease and prosperity and the Christian will renounce Christ. Think of it! What would it take for most Christians today to “curse God and die”? It is far less extreme than the loss of one’s family like Job’s wife anticipated! In fact, why is it that Job didn’t curse God and die when he lost everything? Because Job didn’t exult in health and family- his joy and rejoicing was in knowing and loving Christ and His word.

Job. 23:12, “I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.”

In other words, a crisis to Job was NOT the loss of his well-being, BUT a clouded understanding when it came to God’s word/will- which is why Job carried on for so long in his struggle with God! Truly, *Job exulted in the Lord; he rejoiced in the God of his salvation!* We see it in Asaph! Though he struggled with competing worldviews which at times made him envy the wicked and their seemingly easy life, nevertheless and eventually his “path was made straight,”

Psalms 73:23-25, “Whom have I in heaven *but Thee?* And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

We see it in Moses! He’d rather stay in the deserted region of the wilderness with its scorpions, heat, and want, rather than enjoy the best this world has to offer without God.

Exodus 33:15, “Then [Moses] said to [God], ‘If Thy presence does not go *with us*, do not lead us up from here.’”

See, Moses exulted in the Lord! Then there’s one of the sons of Korah. If given the chance to spend a weekend in Bill Gates’ vacation home on a deserted island *and so miss church* or stay in

his tiny earthen baked, Palestinian hut *and attend church*, Korah's son would choose the latter 1000 times to one.

Psalms 84:10, "For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand *outside*. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

We see it in Paul who could have had an easy life had he stuck to the privileges that would have come from being a Pharisee of Pharisees. But his fundamental joy, confidence, and satisfaction was NOT in earthly riches or gain, BUT Christ.

Philippians 3:7-11, "But whatever things were gain to me [the easy and extremely lucrative life of a Pharisee of Pharisees], those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

It was this conviction/worldview which radically altered Habakkuk's life and so how he approached a very difficult future. You gonna threaten him with the loss of his "necessary food"? While this was a difficult prospect (which again is why he "quivered" as he wrote this passage, cf. 3:16-17), nevertheless his greatest prize in life was the relationship he had with Christ! Yet I will exult in the Lord [His person and work], I will rejoice in the God of my salvation: again this isn't simply a statement of adoration; it is an affirmation that his most cherished possession in life is Christ! William Nicholson wrote this in 1862:

Growth in faith will be manifested by increasing deadness to the world. The more faith discovers of the beauty and glory of the Savior, and the splendors of that heavenly country to which the Christian is bound, the more worthless will this world appear! (Nicholson, 2014)

So it was in Habakkuk's life! That which moved Habakkuk by book's end was NOT earthly peace or security, BUT God: His Person, His Work, His Plan, His Beauty, and His Future! Let me ask you: has life whittled you down to this? Has it brought you yet to this place- where all you want or claim is Christ? If it hasn't, I assure you it will!

Talk to any patriarch of the faith, and they will tell you that life is NOT a game; it is a serious endeavor that is not kind to its pilgrims! In fact, the optimism and naivety of youth will end either in disillusionment or a greater pining for the return of the King! There is no middle ground! Ought this to make us dour and gloomy as we work out our salvation? Absolutely not! In fact it is just the opposite! You want to find a gloomy individual? Go to a nursing home and behold the ravages of sin upon the human psych. There you will find some of the angrier and

disillusioned people you will ever meet! It is no wonder why this age group has the highest suicide rate. Fantasy will produce hope and excitement only for so long.

In contrast, approach a patriarch of the faith, a man or woman of God who is “sober-minded”- and you will be charged and renewed by their love of Christ and their longing for His return!

Years ago I visited a nursing home where I was privileged to be a part of the closing days of a dying matriarch of the faith. To visit this woman you had to go to the community room where she spent her day surrounded by 30 or 40 other patients. And what a contrast! Many in the room had lost their minds and so rocked back and forth in their wheel chairs cursing and spewing out vial words of anger and resentment! In contrast, this dear Christian woman sat in peace as she longed for and anticipated the return of her Lord! She did not speak of what she didn't have; but what Christ in His grace had given her! She embodied the fruit of the Spirit: “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness...” (Galatians 5:22-23).

How was it that she was able to die so well? Her hope and exultation was NOT in her beauty, strength, health, popularity, security, self-esteem, and the like. No! Her hope and exultation was Christ! Speaking of Habakkuk, D. W. Baker wrote this:

His rejoicing is grounded in, and springs from, the relationship which God has with him and his people. Stripped of all else, he can never be deprived of his covenant God (cf. Joshua 1:5; Romans 8:38–39). (Baker, 2009, pp. Vol. 27, 76)

That is why while the prospect of starvation was nerve-racking, nevertheless Habakkuk's confidence, hope, and joy persisted! For God had not, nor would He ever, move! The point of this Psalm written for the people of God is so that we too might have this conviction in life! Yet to have it, we must stubbornly cling to God by faith! “The righteous will live by his faith!” (Habakkuk 2:4)

Bibliography

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Nicholson, W. (2014, June 1). *Grace Gems*. Retrieved from gracegems.org: http://gracegems.org/Nicholson/growth_in_grace.htm

End Note(s)

¹ cf. Joel 1:7; Hosea 2:12; Micah 4:4; 6:15; Deuteronomy 6:11; 8:8.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 1, 2014. Greg is the minister of Bethel Presbyterian Church