

Message #6

Habakkuk 3:1-2

Jonathan Edwards said when you know God is sovereign you will be “inwardly still and quiet” (*Divine Sovereignty*, p. 109).

Now let’s set the context as to what has happened so far in this book of Habakkuk. The book began by Habakkuk questioning God about the fact that corruption was dominating Israel and God did not seem to be doing anything about it.

God responded by saying, “I am in the process of doing something about it” “I am in the process of raising up the Babylonians to come to punish my people.” God says, “You won’t believe what I am sovereignly doing and controlling” (1:5).

When God told that to Habakkuk, he not only questioned that, but he also wondered how in the world God could use such a ruthless group like the Babylonians to punish His own people, when His own people were far more righteous than they were?

God responded by saying last time (2:6-20)—I will use them and then I will destroy them but he told Habakkuk in the meantime, as I am doing this, **the righteous people will quietly live their lives by faith trusting Me.** God says it is true that I sovereignly permit bad things to happen in your world, in your day, but righteous people realize I am still sovereign and they will continue to live their lives by faith in Me and My Word. **Righteous people believe I do know what I am doing, even when My own people do not know what I am doing.**

Now as we have been working our way through this book, one point we have brought out many times is that the one thing Habakkuk did with all of his frustrations and concerns was go to God and talk to God about them. This man went straight to God and talked to God about everything. This is a very important point to grasp. **Prayer to God is a very important part of not just surviving in our spirituality in this world, but thriving in our spirituality in this world.** Talking to God is a critical key to living life in a world that does not make much sense. This is a key to living life by faith.

That point is clearly brought out in this final chapter of Habakkuk:

A CRITICAL KEY TO HABAKKUK’S STABLE FAITH WAS HIS PRAYER AND HONEST COMMUNICATION WITH GOD AND HIS GRASP OF GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY.

Now notice how **verse 1** begins: “a prayer of Habakkuk.” There are several different Hebrew words used for “prayer” and this particular word (tephillah) is one that refers to an intercessory supplication and entreaty (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 871). William Mounce, in his study of Hebrew words said this word most often refers to a petitionary prayer that one makes to God (*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 532). So this is going to be a prayer in which Habakkuk is going to petition God to do something.

Do not overlook the fact that this petition is coming from a normal, sinful, finite man whose name was Habakkuk. This was a man who had serious questions about things. He is a prophet, which does mean he is a gifted man of God, but he is still a man. He had questions, but he did go to God for answers.

Now the next thing we notice from **verse 1** is that this prayer is “according to Shigionoth.” Now this is a very rare Hebrew word. This apparently means this prayer was written in a poem or hymn form. It comes from a root Hebrew noun that means it was written to be repeated over and over again (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 805, 841). **So this was apparently written in a hymn form that was to be sung over and over again.** This is anything but some light, shallow chorus. This is the kind of hymn that truly does magnify God.

Now the one other thing that I want to point out is that **this prayer was written down**. That is pretty obvious by virtue of the fact that it is in the book of Habakkuk. The reason that I point this out is that many times people pray without much thought or preparation. In other words, many people pray by just “winging it.” But there is a place for carefully thinking through a petition that we are going to make to God. There is a place for writing out a prayer before we pray it.

It is very clear from this text that Habakkuk was a man totally given to the volitional rather than the emotional. This was a man who thought about things. He did not get caught up with “rah rah happy clappy” religion. He used his mind and that is very clear just by virtue of the fact he wrote down his prayer.

Reminds of a story one time I read concerning Charles Spurgeon. Some member of his congregation, who was known to be an emotional windbag type of person, went to Spurgeon’s office and rambled about something and then asked Spurgeon if he could pray. The man asked if they could kneel down and pray. So Mr. Spurgeon agreed. As the man was praying, Spurgeon fell asleep. Well, the man was all upset and shook Spurgeon and said how can you fall asleep when I am praying. Spurgeon said well pray something interesting and maybe I’ll stay awake. God wants us developing and using sound minds, not mindless emotions. Habakkuk wrote this prayer down.

Now in **verse 2**, we see just exactly how Habakkuk approached God. This is certainly not in some light, fluffy, charismatic name it and claim it shallow prayer. **When Habakkuk approaches God, he does so very humbly and reverently.**

This is so important that I want to take the time today to carefully observe all that Habakkuk does in **verse 2**. There are five petition observations we want to make:

PETITION OBSERVATION #1 – Habakkuk begins by acknowledging that he had heard the report about the LORD. **3:2a**

Now at first glance that seems odd, because certainly as a prophet of God, he knew a lot about God. In fact, if He didn't know truth about God, he could not have been a prophet.

A key to what Habakkuk is saying is found by the double use of the proper name for God—“LORD,” which is YHWH or Jehovah, or as Jews pronounce it YOVAH. This is the name for God that emphasizes the fact that God is the covenant God of Israel, and that He is the great I AM who is and can do anything He wants to do by virtue of the fact He is God.

When Habakkuk says he had “heard” the report, it means he had not only listened to a lot of teaching about God and had not only studied the Word of God, but now God had told him just how sovereign and in control He actually was. God just got done telling Habakkuk, you quiet down because I am in My Holy Temple and I am running things.

Habakkuk finally believed that God does control everything and that He does carry out judgments by using godless people and godless nations. God had told him that.

Habakkuk was not some theological novice coming to God in prayer; he now had a great level of understanding about just how sovereign and how powerful God truly was. He believed that God was in control even over corrupt politicians.

Now what we will observe from this book is that **in the first two chapters, Habakkuk is debating with God; but in chapter three, he is acknowledging the greatness and the sovereignty of God.** The tone of the entire book changes in chapter three. Our question is what prompted the change? I think we see our answer right here—**Habakkuk got his focus off the corrupt religious and political world and he got his focus off the bad things happening to him and his people and put his focus back on the Sovereign God.**

When your mind goes back to the truth of God, the problems of the world seem to dim. Habakkuk begins this prayer with a total and complete focus on God and His sovereignty.

Dr. R. A. Torrey told a story of a man who contacted him for a long time about something he had been praying about. He said that he was confident that it was God's will, but he was not getting an answer. Torrey said he told him that he had been a member of his church for 30 years, he was S. S. superintendent for 25 years and he had been an elder at the church for 20 years. He said to Dr. Torrey he could not figure out why God was not answering his prayer and asked for an explanation. Dr. Torrey said I can explain this easy. You think because you have been a member for 30 years, superintendent for 25 years and elder for 20 years that God is obligated to answer your prayer. He said you have forgotten who you are talking to. This is the Sovereign God. It appears that you are praying to him in your name and not Jesus name. The man listened to Dr. Torrey and said, “You have hit the nail square on the head. I see my mistake.”

We cannot expect God to answer our prayer until we understand the gap that exists between we who are finite and God who is infinite. Habakkuk saw it clearly. God was the Sovereign “I AM.”

PETITION OBSERVATION #2 – Habakkuk begins by acknowledging that he fears God.
3:2b

Habakkuk bowed himself before God in total and complete humility. He did not go into the presence of God demanding things. In fact, it is clear to me from what we see that Habakkuk didn't think he deserved to even be in the presence of God. It is clear here that he had a tremendous reverence and fear of the Lord. He literally had a fear of God.

Now the particular Hebrew word translated “fear” (yare) is one that means to have such a holy reverence for something that it literally causes one to tremble (*Ibid.*, pp. 364-365). Now notice what it was in **verse 2** that brought Habakkuk to this point of reverence—“he heard the report about You.”

In other words, it was hearing the truth of the Word of God that produced a godly reverence concerning the holiness and sovereignty of God.

The more we accurately know of the Scriptures, the more we will accurately know truth about God and the more we accurately know truth about God, it will produce a godly, holy, reverential fear of Him.

This is why we say with dogmatic certainty that these churches that are entertaining crowds with their man-made worldly methodology, cannot possibly be right with God nor are they seriously committed to the Scriptures. Those who are given to carefully hearing the Word have a reverence and fear of God, just like Habakkuk.

What has happened here is amazing. **Habakkuk was so refocused on God and His Word that he was not afraid of the Babylonians who were coming for judgment purposes; his fear was of the LORD.** When Habakkuk was focused on the Babylonians, he was disturbed; but when he let his mind focus on the Sovereign God, his thinking changed.

What he realized is we don't need to fear corrupt political leaders. We don't need to fear what is happening in history in the United States or any nation of the world. We don't need to fear all the religious spiritual frauds; we need to fear God. We need to keep hearing about God, not about the world events. The more we know of God, the more we will fear Him and when we fear Him right, the more we will want to talk with Him.

When we pray, there needs to be a very reverent attitude of just exactly who we are addressing. When we pray, we are talking to Almighty God, who is in sovereign control over everything that is happening.

As Habakkuk thought through the work of God, it humbled him. He realized how great God was and how insignificant he was and he feared God.

PETITION OBSERVATION #3 – Habakkuk begins by requesting that God revive His work.
3:2c

Now this first request is for God to revive His work in Habakkuk's day. Notice what it is that Habakkuk is praying about—a revival. He is praying about a revival of the work of God.

The Hebrew word “revive” (chayah) is one that literally means bring something back to life (*Ibid.*, p. 274). It is a word used to describe something that is brought back to health and life from a terrible, sick condition.

So Habakkuk is praying that God would start a new reviving life work in Israel. Habakkuk is asking God to bring people back to spiritual life. James Montgomery Boice made an interesting observation when he said usually when we pray to God about some specific project or issue, we ask God to revive “our” work rather than His work (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 103). He said most of the time it is about our desires, not God's desires. That is not how Habakkuk prayed.

Habakkuk said, “revive **YOUR** work.” The bulbs were beginning to go on in Habakkuk's theology. He was coming to terms with just how sovereign and powerful God was. So Habakkuk asks God to “revive your work, **in the midst of the years.**”

That prepositional phrase “in the midst of the years” means that Habakkuk is asking God to do a life work in the middle of the present day and time in which they lived. **He wanted God to do a great work in his own time, not just the end time.**

God is the Sovereign God in His holy Temple and He is controlling all things, including those politicians and religious leaders who are evil. Habakkuk realized that God has the power to revive His own people right here and right now.

God has the power to command His blessings and His life work on anyone at any time.

PETITION OBSERVATION #4 – Habakkuk begins by requesting that God make His work known. **3:2d**

John Calvin said not only did Habakkuk want God to sovereignly do a work in His people, but he also wanted God to “show it to be in reality Thy work” (John Calvin, *Habakkuk*, p. 137). In other words, Habakkuk is asking that God would make it known that He was the One who had done this right in their time, right before their very eyes.

So in all reality, Habakkuk wanted the glory to go to the Sovereign God who had done the work. Notice the emphasis: Habakkuk wants God to do a dramatic work in the present time and He wants God to make sure that all people realize this is His sovereign work.

This is amazing. Habakkuk has developed from a man who is questioning God into a man who is petitioning God. Habakkuk has developed from a man who is debating with God into a man who is trusting in God.

What was it that produced this transformation? The answer straight out of **verse 2** is prayer and hearing the Word.

PETITION OBSERVATION #5 – Habakkuk begins by requesting that God remember His mercy in His wrath. **3:2e**

It is clear that Habakkuk knew that if God were going to start doing His prophetic work, it meant He would have to judge even His own people. To revive Israel would mean He would need to pour out His judgment and wrath. So he prays, God please “in your wrath, remember mercy.”

Now we all have a flesh and since we all have a flesh, we know, if we are honest, that our flesh has failed us and God time and time again and we do deserve the judgment of God. But as Calvin said, the thing we always want to remember as God’s people is that even when we make God angry, “he never forgets His mercy in his dealings with His elect” (*Ibid.*, pp. 139-140).

We need prayer prayers like this. Dear Lord, revive your work and accomplish your will in our lives and in the life of this church. Make your work known here. May people in Kalamazoo and all over the world realize that you are doing a powerful work at this place. And please, dear God, in doing this work remember your mercy. For without your mercy we are without hope.