

## ABUNDANT JOY IN FEAR THROUGH FAITH IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

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**Scripture:** Habakkuk 3:16-19

How often, when you meet friends and you ask them, "How are you doing?" the response more often than not is "Well, I'm doing good under the circumstances." And I wonder! Under the circumstances? What are you doing under there? Why? Because for a believer, for a child of God, he can never be under the circumstances. He should not be under the circumstances. And why is that? Because God never deals us a raw deal. He always makes us victorious. We may not know it at that time, but we need to believe in it. We need to be clear about that because there is no way that we can remain under the circumstances. But sadly, we find ourselves victims of that statement. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, we do think that we are doing okay under the circumstances.

### Habakkuk 3:16-19

*<sup>16</sup> I heard and my heart pounded,  
my lips quivered at the sound;  
decay crept into my bones,  
and my legs trembled.*

*Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity  
to come on the nation invading us.*

*<sup>17</sup> 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,*

*<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

*<sup>19</sup> The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the heights.*

Habakkuk is one of the minor prophets, a very small book in the Bible. It has 3 chapters and it revolves around the theme of justice, faith and trusting in God's sovereignty.

Chapter 1 basically talks about Habakkuk's confusion at God's dealing with the situation that is happening to God's people and how God wants to intervene. And there is tremendous amount of confusion and misunderstanding or lack of clarity in Habakkuk's understanding of what God plans. Chapter 2 gives an explanation into God's plans and what He intends to do with the Babylonians. And finally, chapter 3 is Habakkuk's response in praise and prayer and declaration and trust of God.

We're going to be meditating on 3:16-19, but I'm going to go back and forth and also give some references. But if you look at it from a simple point of view, when I said God's child can never be under the circumstances, there is only a win-win situation. There is never a loss-win situation, never a loss-loss situation. It's always a win-win situation. And what do I mean by win-win situation is simply Philippians 1:21 where Paul says, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." And if that is the confidence, then where is the loss? Where are you ever under the circumstances? You're dealing

with a situation, but you're going to come out victorious. And that's what is happening here with Habakkuk.

But let me put it into perspective. As usual, I would bring something out from my days at sea. But today, I'm not. I'm going to give you one of the times while flying. Monsoons in Bombay is the worst time to take a flight out. However, if you compare it to some of the flights in the world, it is smooth. The normal landing in those situations can make you remember God much more closely.

So, southwest monsoons, and you're at the airport waiting to take off, and there's no news when the flight is going to take off. You're waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and hours go by. Finally they say, "We are boarding," and you're all into the aircraft. Then the plane starts rolling out from the gate and onto the taxi-way. You're already making plans of your arrival. There's strong rains and winds outside as the aircraft opens up onto the runway and then it comes to a halt at the end of the taxi path, and you're waiting. You don't know when the aircraft is going to take off.

The pilot is giving intermittent updates, "We're waiting for permission." Some of you, or your neighboring passengers would be getting jittery, anxious, constantly pressing the buzzer and calling for the stewardess. "What's up?" And she's got the same old answer, "Waiting for permission," as if she knows anything better than what's happening in the cockpit between the pilot and the air traffic control. And soon you hear a small announcement: "Crew to your stations!"

You think: Wow! We're going to take off. And the aircraft pulls out of the taxiway, comes to the dumbbell; you suddenly hear the engines roaring and you get pushed back into the seat; acceleration is taking over, and you're happy. The aircraft is shuddering, there's a lot of noise, and as soon as it's up to speed, it takes off. And all those people who were a little jittery, heave sighs of relief and settle down comfortably. The aircraft is flying smoothly in the air, and you're already thinking about your destination, one and a half or two hours ahead.

Then suddenly, the aircraft just drops 100 or 200 feet in the air, buffeted by the turbulence. You can hear the engines again, roaring and pulling up. There's shuddering, and the seatbelt sign keeps flashing. The pilot says, "Everybody to be seated." There's heavy turbulence – the overhead bins open up, maybe things fall down. The guy next to you is holding onto his armrest or maybe even your wrist even though he doesn't know you. It's absolutely unnerving; you don't know what's happening. What are you doing? You don't have the option to say: I'm not taking this flight. Let's go back. No, that doesn't happen. You're in there for the ride. You don't know who's in the cockpit. You don't know how capable he is. You don't know how competent he is or how much of experience he has in dealing with this type of situation. But you just sit still. You have no choice but to just go on. So much of chaos and buffeting, the up and down motion! Then, suddenly in a split second, bright sunlight fills the cabin. The aircraft breaks the cloud cover and it's above the dark clouds. It's beautiful sailing from there on to your destination. And you don't know what happened!

That's what is Habakkuk's point of view here. He sees calamity coming up on his people. He sees a situation which is unnerving. He sees something which does not give him the confidence of what the future holds. He has no choice but to trust in the Lord. and that's a question that I would like to ask many of us. How often, when the cloud is dark and gloomy and difficult, do we just hold on tight being fully assured that God is in control? Or do we try to take the situation into our own hands, failing to commit to the Word of God that is filled with promises, repeatedly encouraging us?

Okay! So while you have that image in your mind and you're flying high, let's look at Habakkuk 1. What happened there? During that time, Habakkuk is looking at all the wrongs that are happening. The Jews, who are supposed to be God's people and obeying God's Word, were doing everything that

was not supposed to be done. They were engaged in every kind of evil. They were disobeying God, practicing idolatry. And God was patient with them. He was so patient that they took it for granted. They just kept nudging God's grace a bit more. They said, "Let's see how far we can go. Let's see whether we can get away with that."

Like Habakkuk, many prophets down the line and before him, were given the Word from God to caution them. "Don't do this. Stop what you're doing." But they failed to pay heed. They continued to disobey. And Habakkuk was deeply burdened. He starts wondering what is happening, and he's so saddened by the situation. He starts praying to God and he says, "How long are you going to let this continue? How long are they going to continue to do evil. How long are You going to make me look at injustice and You do nothing? Your law is broken every day and the courts are paralyzed. The law doesn't seem to be able to do anything. How long is this going to go on?" That was the cry of Habakkuk to the Lord.

Then God answers. "I'm not going to do nothing forever because I am bringing in the Babylonians." Suddenly Habakkuk doesn't know what's happening here. Where did the Babylonians step into the picture? "They are a ruthless and ambitious people. They are powerful militarily, and they are going to sweep across the whole earth. They're going to seize one country after another, snatch them up like eggs from a nest. They're going to collect them all. They're coming here and they're going to destroy this country and they're going to tear down the walls. They're going to burn the king's palace; they're going to burn the temples. The house of the Lord will be destroyed because of the sins of the Jewish people. They are coming!"

Wow! I don't think Habakkuk would have been comforted hearing these words. He was, at this time, worried about what God's people were doing, and suddenly God says, "I've got a solution. I'm bringing in the Babylonians." It's like being in the deep blue sea and being suddenly thrown into the frying pan. He is obviously confused. He doesn't know what kind of plan this is. Is God really playing it out right?

And all this while he was complaining about the wickedness of his own people. They were being wicked; they were doing all the wrong things. They were into idolatry. But at least they were still praying to the living God. They were still on that path even if they were flirting with it. But God, You're bringing in pagans, wicked people to come and destroy Your own people? You're going to destroy Your own kingdom, Your own temple, all that you want the people of God to be doing?

And then God answers that as well. He says, "Write this down for it speaks of the end. This is the way I will behave to the end of the world. So write it down that every generation can come and read it and understand what I am doing in history." That was God's intent – that people down the line would know that God can set an example for us to learn from. But unfortunately, we don't learn from history. We read history; we know what has happened, but we all repeat the same mistake. We just don't learn from it.

What was God's answer to Habakkuk?

1. The Babylonians are going to end as well. They too will be destroyed. The solution to the wickedness in the land was bringing in the Babylonians, and they're going to destroy all the wickedness. They are going to completely overwhelm the land, but they too will come to an end. They too will be destroyed.
2. How is that going to happen? They are going to be destroyed by another people who themselves are going to build an empire. They are going to raise up towers and mighty

structures. They will rise for a while; they will have their day in the sun. but in the end, all human empires will amount to dust in the wind. So now, there is a solution to the problem and that problem will also have its solution. There will be destruction after destruction, and destruction after destruction. And at the end, all human empires will amount to dust in the wind.

3. How is that a solution? As Habakkuk wonders, God probably knows what his doubt is. Because He says, "I am building My own kingdom. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. That was God's final intent. That was the plan that was going to come to pass. Only one kingdom will be left, the kingdom of God.
4. The righteous will live by faith. Those who have faith, who are able to hold steadfast to that seat rest, irrespective of the situation, will live. They will be the one who will enter the kingdom of God.

And ch. 3 is Habakkuk's response to this.

Now ch. 1 has fear kind of demonstrated. Ch. 2 takes that fear up a notch. And then you come to think: Is that fear real to me? Am I going to face something like that? Yes, we are. If you look back at history in the last decade or two, we have had situation after situation: 26/11, and the year before that attack on the Taj here in Bombay, the riots, simultaneous attacks in the trains, September 11, the attack on the Twin Towers, absolutely unexpected. 13/11 – the attack in Paris in broad daylight, and the very recent attack in Israel and in Gaza, the ongoing war.

All this while, fear for us was something that was happening out there, at the border. We watched what was happening on the news and were not affected. But suddenly, what shocks us is that war is not being fought at your doorstep. You don't know what's going to happen next. It's right there in your neighborhood.

In fact, if you've been tracking the news, the effect of the Israel-Gaza confrontation has started having repercussions in Delhi. There have been riots, and it's not going to be very long before it's going to happen in the streets outside here. Social media is bringing it right to our doorstep. Fear is no longer in a distant land; it's outside your door.

So, I think Habakkuk's message is basically something that we need to hold on to because it shows us what to do in times of fear, moving into faith. And then what do you do in that faith?

v. 18 ends with the word used as "joy". I wonder why happiness is not used. Why doesn't it say situations will go wrong, but you'll be happy. Things are going to go sideways, but you'll be happy? No, it doesn't talk about that. it says joy. It only talks about joy. I wonder how many of us have actually looked at the difference, and there seems to be a stark difference between happiness and joy. I think we get confused or we kind of dilute that broad difference. I found this on the net, and what was happily surprising was that the definition is very biblical.

### **Happiness and Joy**

- Happiness is external; joy is internal.
- Happiness depends on circumstances, while joy is independent of circumstances.
- Happiness is an emotional response, while joy is an act of will.
- Happiness is having what you want, while joy is wanting what you have.
- Happiness is an external euphoria, while joy is inner contentment.

- Happiness is an effect while joy is the cause.
- Happiness is the result; joy is the foundation.
- Happiness is inconsistent; joy is consistent.
- Happiness is temporary, while joy is eternal.

Few points here and there kind of give you the words, but how do you define happiness and joy? Let me put it this way. You could be grieving a situation, for example, the death of a near one. you will obviously not be happy. It's not a situation where you can say: I'm happy! But you can be joyful at that time, knowing that there is eternal life even after death. Happiness and joy. And that's why the Bible doesn't talk about happiness. That's why Habakkuk did not say happiness in the Lord. he talks about joy.

And here's the surprising part. The bible has a secret which has been told to everybody, and in a million copies sold every day. That secret is out there in the open, but we don't follow it. Philippians 4:12, Paul says, "<sup>12</sup>I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

This is an exact repetition of what Habakkuk said. Paul is talking about it in the New Testament. Habakkuk played out the situation as he saw happening during his time, about the sheep and the pens, and the olive trees and the grape and the vine. And Paul talks about whether "I'm fed or I'm hungry, I'm going to be content and do everything in Christ." How often do we respond in that manner? How often do we get up in the morning and we are wondering whether there's money in the bank, whether I have job security, whether there's food on the table, whether I'll be able to deal with whatever comes my way? We kind of respond to it, be what it may, I'm going to get on with it.

Habakkuk 3:17 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 Savior." And Paul had said "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

How do you practice this? It's easier said than done. It's good to put on a placard and put up on a wall, on your entrance, but how do I practice it? Then you recall the story of Paul and Silas. They were in a dungeon, something which has quite a scary meaning to it. I don't know how many of you have had an opportunity to see any. The nearest one would be in Port Blair. It's known as *Kalapani*. Some of them are really scary. The dungeons of Amsterdam! The word dungeon brings to mind something which is deep, buried down in the ground. It's not easily accessible. It's dark, damp. Envision your kitchen in the middle of the night when there is no light, and you see a cockroach come out. Imagine that – no light forever, with what all creeping around. No sunlight, warm, moist, dank, unclean, obviously dirty.

Paul and Silas are down there. What are they doing? O Lord! What has happened? Why am I here? Why am I struggling? No! They were singing songs of praise. They were worshipping God. They were not overwhelmed by the situation of being down there. Obviously very sure that they will not come out of it alive. But what were they doing? They were just worshipping God. And when that earthquake hit and everything broke, and the jailer thought that they had escaped, what did they do? They said: Don't worry, we are here. Come join us. Their response was utter joy in the situation that was really requiring them to be concerned about their future. They were being persecuted for having spoken the message of God. And Habakkuk is traversing the same journey from fear to faith, and from faith to joy in the Lord.

Now if you look at fear perse, fear has a very significant effect on mankind. It has a devastatingly psychological effect. Fear can take you places where you didn't know you could go. Fear can land you in situations where you thought you'll never be. And the bible has verses on how to deal with fear.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23)*

*The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. (Psalm 27)*

When you look at these verses, the bible is very clear. Don't be afraid. It's fine. I have you on my side. But at the same time, the bible also talks about fear being good, and that is absolutely necessary.

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding, (Prov. 9:10)*

*Through the fear of the Lord, a man avoids evil. (Prov. 16:6b)*

So you have fear to not be afraid of, and you have fear to make sure you walk the path.

Then Jesus says, "I tell you friends, do not be afraid of those who can kill the body and after that can do nothing to it. I tell you, the one to be afraid of is the one, who after the body is killed, has the power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him." Jesus also tells you what you need to be fearful of. And it's a promise from God that though the fear is there to make sure that we walk the way God intended us to, the fear that the world is talking about will have no effect on us.

How does the world strategize in response to fear? This is something you would have seen many times every day of your life – some aspect of this response being enacted by the world.

#### **Four types of response to fear:**

- 1. Determinism:** This is like – it's going to happen; I can't do anything about it. might as well just go with the flow.
- 2. Detachment:** I don't want to think about it. if I don't think about it, it won't have an effect on me. I'm fine, let's not worry about it and get on with our lives.
- 3. Distraction:** This is what we all do very often. let's find something else to engage ourselves in. Let's go party, or go to eat, watch a movie, or best of all, let's go shopping. Let's just continue shopping till that time we have nothing else to worry about.
- 4. Determination:** This is more of a military response. Be a man, deal with it.

But whatever be the response that the world has, all these four are temporary. They cannot have a consistent response. You have to come back from the mall at some time or the other. Even they close down.

What was Habakkuk's response to that? Prayer. He simply prayed in faith, knowing the Lord that he prays to has demonstrated in the past how He works in situations like this. He says: What God has done for His people with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He led them out of Egypt and He

led them through the Red Sea. He gave them water through the rock. He gave them food from the heavens. He was their cloud of shadow in the day and a pillar of fire in the night. God didn't abandon them. He made sure that they were provisioned for at every walk of life. there was nothing that could overwhelm them.

And we have similar assurance in the New Testament.

Matthew 7:24-29 <sup>24</sup> Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

Matthew 24:35, He goes on to say, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

When you look at a promise of God in situations like this, where you can place your foundation on God Himself, and you don't have to worry about the circumstances, there has got to be a response. And that response is joy. What did Habakkuk do? He says: "I am going to accept what God is doing. I am very clear about the situation that God has set into motion. There is a calamity coming down. There is going to be a destruction of God's people." But Habakkuk went back to the past. He went on all those promises that God had done in the past. He knew what God had done for the Israelites when He brought them out of Egypt. He knew what God had done for them during the exile. He knew God's protection was very real. For Habakkuk it was part of the bible, as what we see in history. For us, we have much more. There is much more instances of those promises that we can bank on.

But what does he say: "I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us." He's seeing destruction. He's seeing the situation absolutely out of control. But he decides to just wait patiently for God to do what He needs to do. And what is his response? His response is intentionally choosing joy in faith.

While I was preparing this, again I was wondering - it's good to read, nice words. It has a lot of meaning when you are reading it. But how does this become an act of response? How does it become intentional? It's simple. The only way that you can do it is for you to have this kind of a repetition in your mind. It has to constantly play in your mind when the situations go wrong, when things are not going right, that you are able to recall. While Psalm 23 may be the easiest verse to recall, it's words like this which put it into real life understanding of what can go wrong.

So I was wondering how that can be done. We have a song I would like you to listen as it puts it nicely here.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

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 Savior.

I will be joyful in God my Savior.

The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
He enables me to tread on the heights.

A verse like that can be turned into a song of praise and assurance. And that's what Habakkuk did. When you read Habakkuk, you wonder how that can be his song. This is how it can be a song.

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.  
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;  
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
He enables me to tread on the heights.

This is very old school English. It talks about what was real to them at that time. if I bring it to something more close to home, the Message version says it this way.

<sup>17-19</sup> Though the cherry trees don't blossom  
And the strawberries don't ripen,  
Though the apples are worm-eaten  
And the fields are stunted,  
Though the sheep pens are sheepless  
And the cattle barns empty,  
I'm singing joyful praise to God.  
I'm turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God.  
Counting on God's rule to prevail,  
I take heart and gain strength.  
I run like a deer.  
I feel like I'm king of the mountain!

That is what is Habakkuk's message.

No matter how bad the circumstances are, no matter how unreal the situation seems to be, no matter how real the end may be, but we just need to hold on to that seat and be in there for the joyride of your life. we want to break that cloud and come out over the sunlight shining into your life. and I think it's the words that we can hold very dear to our everyday living. And if we can learn this song, then we'll be able to deal with the situation.

Amen.

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