

“A Faith That Worships”

Let us pray: Gracious and Loving God, we praise you for the gift of your Word and for the way that it guides us into deeper experiences of faith. Please unlock your Word to us today. Guide us by your Spirit closer to you, and closer to your will for our lives. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

1. Almost five months ago, on Christmas Eve, I preached a sermon entitled **DEFIANT JOY**.
2. In that particular sermon, I talked about how many of the characters from that original Christmas story –characters like Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary, and even the shepherds **all chose an attitude of joy in the midst of some of life’s more stressful unplanned events**.
3. Within that sermon, I quoted the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk as an example of defiant joy, for in the 3rd chapter of Habakkuk, it says,

**“Thought the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vine,
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.**

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

4. This passage may just **be my favorite passage in the whole of scripture because it is one of the Bible’s strongest affirmations of faith.**

5. I chose to share this particular passage to multiple congregations on Christmas Eve because I felt that **joy was something that we should all cling to tightly as we enter into 2020.**
6. **Knowing nothing of a coming pandemic, I believed 2020 would be hard on us all because of the upcoming Presidential election.** I worried that the increase in political debate would produce a stronger political divide and that divide would lead **to increased anger and a significant reduction of joy.**
7. By the summer of 2020, **I anticipated that we would already be tired of hearing about the Presidential election** even 4 months prior to the actual event
8. Little did I understand or know what the future held. But I was right about one thing...
9. **In 2020, We have had to fight to hold on to our joy.**
10. Covid-19 has been an unexpected storm, and Friends, if we are looking for guidance on how to handle unexpected storms in life, we should look no further than to the prophet Habakkuk. **In the 3rd chapter of his short book, Habakkuk drafts a God-given framework of how to weather life's unexpected storms.**
11. **In response to the prolonged oppression suffered by the people of Judah** by both the Assyrians and later the Babylonians, **the prophet goes to God in prayer.** As I mention in chapter 1, this prayer begins as a complaint and later leads to a debate with God. But that same prayer also led the prophet to listen for God's response. At the very beginning of Habakkuk chapter 3, the prophet prays again saying,

“Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. **Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known;** in wrath remember mercy.” (Hab. 3:2)

Not only does the prophet ask God to repeat his mighty deeds by delivering His people, Habakkuk turns this prayer into a song.

12. If you were to look closely at the text of Habakkuk chapter 3, you would see that there are 5 musical notations within this passage which is only 18 verses long.

Although we do not know the specific tune that these words were sung to, **we do know that this song would have been repeated over and over and over again and hence Habakkuk's prayer to God would have been repeated over and over again.**

13. Following his approach to God in prayer, Habakkuk spent time reviewing God's faithfulness.

14. We should make sure that we never write God off until we have taken the time to reacquaint ourselves with the stories of God's faithfulness to His people in the past. Friends, I will be the first to admit that the Old Testament is not exactly easy to read, however, within Genesis and Exodus we find mighty stories of God's deliverance. From these stories we learn that **God is not always quick in answering the prayers of His people, BUT God is faithful in keeping His promise.**

15. There are over 100 Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah, all of which were fulfilled in the New Testament by the person of Jesus Christ.

16. Friends, as we review God's faithfulness to His people in the past, we would do well to review our own feelings regarding life's storm and God's solution. We should be honest in sharing these thoughts with God.

17. Habakkuk says openly in verse 16 of chapter 3, "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."

18. Clearly, the prophet was scared about the future. He was scared both by the ongoing oppression and scared by how God's promised deliverance might occur.
19. **After praying, and after reviewing God's faithfulness to His people in the past, after honestly sharing with God his feelings about the future, the prophet Habakkuk chose to place his faith** in God even when there was no sign of God's deliverance on the horizon.

Remember, **"Thought the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vine,
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.
The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like
the feet of a deer; he enables me to tread on the heights."
(Hab. 3: 17-19)**

20. I love this verse because of the prophet's choice. It is a choice made in a difficult situation. It is a choice of faith and trust made under less than desirable circumstances.
21. And yet friends, that **choice is not unlike the choice God makes to love us. God does not choose to love us and place His faith in us when we are at our best. Rather, God chooses to love when we are at our worst, when there is no indication that we will ever return that love.**
22. **It is a decision more than a desire. And at times during our faith life, and especially during challenging times, we are going to need to make a decision of our own to place our faith**

and trust in God, even when we do not see any evidence of God's deliverance.

23. This is what the prisoner of war did during WWII when he scratched the words into a concentration camp wall, **“I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when I am alone. I believe in God even when He is silent.”**
24. This is what the apostle Paul did when he wrote, “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. I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.” (Phil 4: 12-13)
25. This is also what my dear friend and mentor did after fighting cancer for so long. As he went into his harshest treatments he shared, “I can't be sure what lies ahead in the next couple of months, but I am in no doubt as to my priority and supreme aspiration, to say close to the God revealed in the life of Jesus and trust in His ways with me.”
26. **Friends, as we face the challenges of today and the challenges of tomorrow, we have a choice to make.** My prayer is that we will **follow the example of the prophet Habakkuk and choose faith, choose to trust in God, even when we see no sign of God. Choose joy**—even defiant joy recognizing that God is at work even now in our lives and in His world.
27. **May God help us grow these deeper roots of faith.** Amen.