

Habakkuk 3:1-3
(Luke 1:46-55; Ephesians 2:1-10)
“In Wrath Remember Mercy”

Introduction

This little book of the Bible is a word for us in the hard places of life. It opens with the prophet questioning God’s silence in the face of injustice and violence. “Where are you, Lord, and why do you not answer my cry?” Then the Lord answers, and his answer seems worse than his silence. He will end the injustice and violence of his people, not by sending the sweet season of revival and reformation for which the prophet hoped, but rather by sending the armies of Babylon to plunder and destroy Jerusalem and carry their leading people into captivity. What do we do when the Lord’s answers seem to make things worse than they were when we asked him to intervene?

The prophet goes to his watchtower, to wait for the Lord to act, to see what the Lord will do, and to record the vision the Lord gives him. The essence of the vision is a revelation of the difference between those the world admires and those whom God counts as righteous. The great of this world trust in themselves and seek their own pleasure, while those the Lord counts as righteous have come to an end of self-confidence and self-worship, have placed their confidence and hope in the Lord and are seeking his pleasure.

We dare not miss the fact that the vision addresses us all. It concerns not only the world, but also the people of God. It challenges us not only in our fears, but also when we think that we don’t need the Lord, that we have things covered, when we think that we are more gifted, more competent, more worthy of the good things of life, of the blessings of God, than those whom we see as weak or failures or more wicked than we see ourselves as being. It calls us to consider well where we have placed our confidence in facing life and death and to ask whose pleasure it is that we are seeking.

God promises that when he is done using Babylon to discipline his people, he will punish Babylon. The second chapter ends with a call to be silent before the Lord: “The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before him.” It is a call to worship. And in this posture of silent worship before the Lord, Habakkuk composes a prayer, a song of praise and worship.

The entire final chapter consists of this prayer-song to the Lord, and this morning we will simply look at the first three verses, which answer three crucial questions for those of us who would learn to pray prayers that honor God and move his heart to act on our behalf in the midst of life’s troubles: First, *how* should we pray, then *what* should we pray, and finally, what should we expect to see God do in answer to our prayers?

Body

1. If we would pray in a way that honors God, *how* should we pray (3:2a)?

We should approach prayer with our hearts and minds focused fully upon the Lord. In true prayer, we get to know the Lord a little better:

- First, pray in the fear of the Lord.
- Then, pray in faith in the Lord.
- And finally, pray in the joy of the Lord.

2. If we would pray in a way that honors God, *what* should we pray (3:2b)?

We should pray for those things that will bring him glory:

- We should begin by offering prayers of submission to God's will.
- We should pray for the revival of God's people.
- We should pray for the mission entrusted to God's people.
- We should plead for God's mercy in the midst of his judgment.

3. If we pray in this way, *what* should we expect to see happen (3:3)?

We should pray in expectation that God not only hears, but answers the prayers of his people, as he has always promised to do:

- We should expect the Lord to act, to reveal his glory among the nations.
- We should expect the people who see his glory to respond with praise.

Conclusion

In the midst of a national crisis, a crisis that threatened his own safety and peace and that at first caused him tremendous anxiety and fear, the prophet now finds himself at peace, with a prospect of mercy in the midst of judgment and joy in the midst of calamity. How? What happened to change the prophet's heart and mind? *He turned from self-worship to the worship of our great God and King.* This is always, finally, the heart of the matter: whom do you worship? Whose pleasure do you seek? As long as you and I seek the Lord in order to try to recruit him to do our will, to help us to achieve our dreams, as long as our prayers focus on ourselves or our problems and fears, or on the world around us, we cannot understand or pray effectively for ourselves or our families and friends, or for the world around us.

Our confidence and joy and hope are restored by going to the watchtower and waiting upon the Lord, seeking his face in submissive prayer, trusting him to do what is right – whatever the cost to our peace and prosperity – and expecting him to act in his own good time to bring glory to himself and good to his people.

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