

Hab. 3 The Prayer of Habakkuk: A Model of True Worship and Its Benefits

In this passage we see one of the most beautiful prayers in all the Bible. He has considered many of the great questions of life in the midst of coming judgment. And, God has answered. And he has no further case to make. He has pleaded his cause. He has concluded his dialogue with Almighty God. And the outcome is worship. In fact, cp. 3 will serve as a model prayer of worship in the dark years that are about to fall upon Israel. This is why I have titled the sermon: The Prayer of Habakkuk: A Model of True Worship and Its Benefits. Today, as Christians, as those who “live by faith,” we have many of the same questions. And though our circumstances are different, the truths that anchor our souls and give us the greatest of benefits are still the same as the ones found here in cp. 3. Therefore, we need these words and truths this morning. I have 3 truths and then some benefits to follow. (I will only mention the first two truths.)

1. True Worship Begins with God. Look at 3:2. Habakkuk says, “**O Lord, I have heard the report of you . . .**” This is his “person,” WHO He is. You may say, “*Jon, you are stating the obvious.*” This is true, but Oh how we need to be reminded because when our focus moves away from God to the things of this world, we cease to worship him rightly. Consider all the times in the book that Habakkuk acknowledges the person of God. Look back at 1:12, He says, “**Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?**” And in v. 13: “**You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong.**” In v. 14: “**You make mankind like the fish of the sea . . .**” Look at 2:20, which is right before Habakkuk’s prayer: “**But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.**” In these ways Habakkuk’s focus is God and who He is. He is holy. He is eternal. He set apart as creator. He is sovereign. I think of the Lord’s prayer. “**Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**”

2. True Worship Remembers the Works of God. As Habakkuk waits for the coming day of judgment he worships God by remembering what God has done. Look again at v. 2: “**O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work . . .**” And then he continues in v. 3: “**God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran.**” Teman and Paran are south of Canaan, as he remembers how God brought them from Egypt. And in the same verse: “**His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.**” V. 4: “**His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power. 5 Before him went pestilence and plague followed at his heels. 6 He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.**” Cush and Midian probably refer to those peoples who opposed Israel as they were making their way to Canaan; and then with Midian during the time of the judges as God judged these peoples and gave Israel victory.

Vv. 8-12: “**Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord? Was you anger against the rivers, or you indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation? 9 You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers. 10 The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high. 11 The sun and moon stood still in their**

place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear. **12 You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger. 13 You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. 14 You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter me, rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret. 15 You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters.**” In all of these words, Habakkuk worships by remembering the great works of God. And He knows that in the coming days, as the entire nation is defeated, destroyed, and carried away into Babylon, they must remember God’s covenant of faithfulness. This brings us to the third truth where we will spend most of our time.

3. True Worship Remembers the Purpose of God to Do Good to His People. Now, I must say that the purpose of God in all He does is his glory. The purpose of God in this world is that every creature both in heaven and on earth reflect his glory and give him the glory due his name. Look back at 2:14: **“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”** However, the way in which He does this is to SAVE his people. We must know that ALL the person and work of God is directed for our good! Do you remember our catechism? One questions says, “Why does the Lord uphold, preserve, and govern all things in Heaven and Earth?” Answer: “God does all for his own glory, & for his peoples good.”

For Habakkuk, as he considered the coming judgment of God upon Israel, he knew that the “righteous person will LIVE, and this by faith.” He knew that in all the ways we just read of God’s great judgment upon his nation, he knew that STILL, God would not abandon his covenant and his promise to save his people. Habakkuk knew that even if the “eternal mountains” were scattered and the “everlasting hills” sank low, God would work all these things for the salvation of his people. He knew that the judgment of God upon both Israel and Babylon (and any other nation) is to bring salvation to his people.

Look again at v. 13: **“You went out for the salvation of your people.”** Look also at v. 8 again: **“Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord? Was your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation.”** Here we see God pictured as one riding a chariot of salvation. Now, on today’s modern warfare, a chariot pulled by a horse wouldn’t last long. But, in that day, the strength of the army is often measured by how many horses and chariots they have. (I think of the movie Ben Hur.) Well, we know God is Spirit. And in his essence, He does not ride chariots. But, his great power and wrath, though directed at sin in the world, fulfill his purpose of bring salvation to his people.

A good picture is the Prophet Elijah. Do you remember what happened? In 2 Kings 2:11 we read: **“And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”** Elijah, one of only two (we know of) that God took into heaven. Another picture: Elisha. At one time the entire Syrian army was looking for him and they surrounded the city of Dothan where he and his servant was staying. And his servant was afraid (to say the least). And I imagine a very calm Elisha prays that God would open his eyes. And what happens next? In 2 Kings 6:17-18 we read: **“So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. And when the Syrians came down**

against him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, “Please strike this people with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness in accordance with the prayer of Elisha.”

God does not merely make salvation “possible.” But instead, he does everything to complete and fulfill the salvation of his people. How does he do this? In the OT we often see God working to preserve his people, not letting them utterly perish as they deserve. But, in all these things, I believe Habakkuk was looking forward to an anointed One, the One to come; the One who will come and bring finality to God’s answer of salvation. We know this to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even in this text we see 2 pictures of Jesus. Look at v. 13: **“You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed.”** There is much disagreement over this translation. The KJV says it this way: **“You went forth for the salvation of your people, even for salvation with your anointed . . .”** Who is God’s anointed? Well, often it is the King, whether it be David, Solomon, or others. In one instance from Isaiah, Cyrus is referred to as God’s anointed. Why? Because God uses him to free his people from captivity and send back Jerusalem. (This may be the correct interpretation here in Habakkuk.) But, let me ask, *“Who is God’s anointed concerning the ONE who will bring salvation to his people?”* It is the Lord Jesus Christ! . . . **“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). **“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus . . .”** (1 Tim. 2:5). Do you remember when Jesus first began his ministry. He entered a local synagogue and he opened up the Scroll of Isaiah and he read these words: **“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound . . .”** (Is. 61:1) Today, Jesus is God’s anointed One. What did he do to bring salvation?

Look at the 2nd part of v. 13 where we find our 2nd picture. Habakkuk says, **“You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck.”** This verse is also difficult to translate. But the picture is clear. Here we see God “crushing the head of the ‘house’ of the wicked.” Here, the house is pictured as being wicked. And God is pictured as “crushing” the head of this house. Do you remember the words of Jesus who says in Matt. 12:29: **“Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.”** In the context of Habakkuk, he speaks of Babylon. But this judgment is only a picture of God’s anointed One who will do what? He will fulfill God’s promise from Gen. 3:15 which says, **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”** This is the cross of Christ: the ultimate place of judgment and the accomplishment of salvation for God’s people.

At the cross of Christ, we see the “strong man.” This is Satan and all his power of God’s people. Today, if you are in Christ, there is nothing Satan can do to “hold you” any longer. But, there is more, much more to the work of Jesus on the Cross than binding the “strong man.” And the difference is infinite. Even worse is the judgment of God, the wrath of God, and that which separates you from a holy God. The cross of Christ does not only bind the strong man, the cross of Christ also takes away the “enmity” between you and God. There is “expiation” as your sins

are taken away. And, more importantly, there is “propitiation.” Because of the cross of Christ you sins are thrown as far as the east is from the west. And, NOW, God looks down upon you with favor . . . not judgment . . . not wrath . . . not as an enemy, but as a loving Father . . .

ALWAYS. Col. 2:13-15 sums up these truths well: **“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”** Brothers and sisters, in these 2 pictures in Habakkuk, we see both the PERSON of Christ (who He is), and the WORK of Christ (what He has done). So today, we have Habakkuk’s fulfillment. And as we go through trials and tribulations, waiting for the great day of judgment, we WORSHIP. As Habakkuk focused on God and his works, we do the same, as we look unto Christ.

Look with me to Heb. 1:1-3. **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.** Here we see WHO He is, his person. And then in 3b: **“After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .”** Here we see WHAT He has done. In this way, we worship. As Habakkuk remembered who God was and what He had done in Israel’s history, today, we look upon the Son. And Yes, we remember all the ways God has worked in the OT. And we learn of who God is and what He is like in the OT. But, we know that ALL God’s promises and their fulfillment in the Son.

This prayer of Habakkuk is also a Psalm. It’s intention was to give God’s people the truths necessary to endure the coming judgment of God. This is why this prayer is also a model for those have faith, Christians, us here today . . . as we go through life . . . as we go through sickness and the loss of loved ones . . . as we go through trials and tribulations . . . as we go through depression and anxiety . . . as we witness the general judgments of God upon the nations . . . as we wait for the final day of judgment . . . we have these words as an anchor for our souls. So, what are some of the benefits that come as we worship God through the Son? What are the blessings we receive by faith as we live in this sinful world. I have 4 benefits in closing.

1. In Christ we are recipients of the mercy of God. Look at v. 2 again: **“O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”** I think what He is saying is this: “Lord, when you bring the Babylonians, show your people mercy.” Well, in Christ, we are the recipients of the mercy of God. We do not deserve God’s grace. But, God so loved the world . . . And no matter what comes our way, we find mercy that our sins are forgiven and we are right with God.

2. We are content. Look at v. 16: **“I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.”** As Christians, as those who truly worship the living God in the face of Jesus Christ, we are content. The Bible says that godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim. 6:6).

3. We have joy. Look at v. 18: **“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”** While the world frets and worries about everything around them, as Christians, as true worshipers, we rejoice. We have a joy that can only come from God. Rom. 5:1-5 says, **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”**

4. We submit to the will of God in all things. Look at vv. 17-19 together. **“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places.”**

Let me ask, *“Is this how you pray when you consider the evils in this world?”* Is this your experience? This only comes as we worship rightly, and this as you look unto Christ. Do you remember the Garden of Gethsemane? As Jesus considered his own death, the cross, and All the wrath of God that would fall upon him in the place of his people, what did he say. **“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”** (Matt. 26:39). Today, as true worshipers, by the power of the Spirit, we are able to do the same.