

SEQUOYAH HILLS  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**“Habakkuk: And Yet”**

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**Habakkuk 3:16-19 and Mat. 8:23-27**

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Last Sunday, Pastor Jay highlighted how both the Old and New Testaments acknowledge God's awesome glory in miracles, from taming the chaotic waters of creation in Genesis to Jesus' walking on water in the Gospels. Miracles have a purpose. They show God's work and dominion over creation and sovereignty over everything, including the difficult concept of the problem of evil.

God shows up in times of trouble! God comes to us in our: pain, confusion, grief, and need. These divine interventions prove that even the most unstable situations are under God's dominant control. Despite the chaos in our world— political, social, marital, or financial— God's power transforms messes and destruction into hope and well-being, like the covenant promise of God's rainbow after the flood. Our Creator showed this long ago with a beautiful symbol of a covenant promise with a rainbow after the great flood. God transformed the dark turbulence of devastation to something colorful and peaceful!

Today, God still reassures us with powerful symbols. The Communion Table, for instance, symbolizes how Jesus offers Himself as a feast that satisfies more deeply than any temporary thing. Related to the Lord's Supper was the multiplication miracle of the loaves and fish. It is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels and shows Jesus' compassion in meeting our needs.

Jesus said, “I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.” (Matthew 15:32). God watches of you and me. God knows our ways and what we are facing. God has compassion especially when things go sideways.

In the end of the third and final chapter of the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, we have another picture of God showing up, as one of his own learns to trust during troubles.

We're reading Habakkuk 3:16-19, wherein God has previously replied to the prophet's prayer, now we hear the prophet's humble attempt to patiently wait for God, to trust and be joyful even in distress:

***16 “I hear, and I tremble within; my lips quiver at the sound. Rottenness enters into my bones, and my steps tremble beneath me. I wait quietly for the day of calamity to come upon the people who attack us.***

***17 Though the fig tree does not blossom and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls,***

***18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.***

***19 God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer and makes me tread upon the heights.***

***To the leader: with stringed instruments.”***

Prayer: Lord, may we hear what you want us to hear, have the courage to act upon your will, and see the hope of Jesus in the process. Amen

Often when we read the Bible, we realize it’s reading us- our plights and discoveries. With relevance, the prophet Habakkuk shares a sense of security and trust, even though he wrote over 2,500 years ago and right before the Babylonians destroyed his beloved city, Jerusalem.

Overwhelmed by God’s majesty, the prophet expresses **confidence that God will answer his petition despite his present adverse conditions.**

I suspect many of us have felt like there were times when our world was going to collapse, simply crumble with troubles... times of being weary and heavy laden. Habakkuk records his struggles of faith, an evolution through prayer. It reads like a private journal for public consumption. At first, he complains that *it seems like* God doesn’t care, then God shows up in his storm pointing to help. In the end, he is humbled, and before God, even feels physically weak. In the face of an ominous future, he realizes God, in fact, will carry him through.

At a Middle School Conference on Maryville College campus nine years ago, our youth met an inspirational pastor and keynote speaker. Her name was Aram Feinberg. I’ve kept up with her over the years. Aram recently wrote in a devotional, D365, about not being anxious. She says, ”God telling me not to fear is God saying in today’s vernacular, “Hey, it’s me. I’m here. *I got you.*”

When I hear “I got you,” I can breathe more slowly. The clouds of worry seem to thin out, I start to feel better. Perhaps that’s what Jesus means when he tells his disciples during the storm, “Don’t be afraid.”

The power of fear loses its force when the God of love says, “I got you.”

Reflecting back on the text, where the prophet grapples with God and then trusts in God’s miraculous ways, we see Habakkuk tackling the theological issue of *theodicy*. Theodicy explains how God's goodness and providence is consistent despite the presence of great evil, often manifested in human affairs. Specifically, Habakkuk shows how God uses the ruthless Babylonians to achieve a greater good. This concept— how God can use an evil conquering nation for ultimate good — can be difficult to grasp. How can something bad turn out to be good?

Let me begin by illustrating with a song and scientist. Have you heard the backstory of the fund-raising effort of the 1985 smash hit song, “*We Are the World*”? Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie and a great host of super-star legends did the charity single to combat the deadly HIV AIDS pandemic where several million were annually dying in Africa. The funds raised helped with a new discovery years later. A Yale researcher, Dr. John Rose, used his God-given intellect to alter the genes of a

*virus* which helped with the development of a cure for the AIDS *virus*! He used infection to destroy infection!

Like God appears and does the powerful work to tame things which seem untamable, WE, also, are to show up. We are to do work. We are to reveal God's goodness wherever given the opportunity. We are to perpetuate loving-kindness with our intelligence and hands and feet and prayers to continue the work of Jesus on the cross.

Habakkuk's conclusion— “Though the fig tree does not bud...yet I will rejoice in the Lord”— encourages us, as we work, to trust God through all circumstances. But there’s more than that. When we realize our Sovereign is right by us, our perspective can change. Our focus can shift from feeling upside down to feeling joyful. Such delight that we thank God for being our strength. In trusting God, we can discover levity, which might seem like a small miracle in the midst of hard times. We can even break into songs to help express ourselves. That’s why Habakkuk’s closing prayer ends the way it does, with a short tag line... “with stringed instruments.” There may be no other way to worship fully like the worshiper wants to except through a song. If you use your imagination reading this text, you can picture a call-and-response of a worship leader and the congregation.

Hear these last verses of Habakkuk as if chanted in a song:

*“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.”*

The worshipers are transformed as they trust in God.

Sports fans will know what will happen at the end of the month. UT plays its first football game of the season! The faith-based football movie, *Facing the Giants*, features a scene where the coach offers a transformative peptalk. He doesn’t want them to win games, if that’s their main goal. Winning games, alone, is too small of a thing to live for.

He tells his players life can be all about US. How WE can look good, how WE can get glory. But, life is not all about US. We’re not here to just get glory, make money, and die. The Bible says we’re put here to honor God.

God cares about where your heart is...while at work, in your relationships, in the classroom, and while scrolling on social media.

To paraphrase the coach's final words, if something in life feels like a win, we praise God; if something in life feels like a loss, we praise God. This feels inspired by the Apostle Paul, who wrote in Romans 14:8, "If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

So, as we close out this sermon series, remember the lessons from Habakkuk: though... this happens, though... that happens, though... the well seems empty and troubles abound, still... **trust in the provider, and watch God give you joy in the Savior.**

As we face challenges, let this Communion Table be our powerful symbol of the Savior's hope and divine power.

**Prayer: Lord and Savior, Jesus, thank you for confronting darkness directly and overcoming it through your death and resurrection. Renew us with joy and gratitude for the hope you provided in our troubled world.**