

"Choosing To Trust"
Habakkuk 3:16-19
Series: Book of Habakkuk [#8]
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl
November 23, 2008

Theme: **You Always Can Choose To Trust God.**

Introduction

Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego. If you went to Sunday School as a child, you probably know the story of these three men. In 605 B.C., right after the events in Habakkuk, Nebuchadnezzar's army came against Judah. He took some of the best and brightest young men from Judah back to Babylon to be trained to serve his court and empire. These three were in that group. They stayed true to God, who blessed them. So, they quickly became leaders in Babylon the superpower.

But then their world went crazy. They faced a terrifying situation and choice: either to bow down and worship a 90' tall statue the king had erected; or, continue to trust God, not worship the statue, and be burned alive in a super-heated furnace. It was a terrifying situation, a terrifying choice.

They chose to trust God. They told the king, "God ... is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But even if he does not, let it be known to you, O King, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up." (Daniel 3:17-18). They chose to trust God.

As we conclude our series in Habakkuk, we are thinking about "*Choosing To Trust*," choosing to trust God. We know it can be easier to trust God when life is going well than when it is not. One of the truths we learn from Habakkuk is that *You Always Can Choose To Trust God*.

Every believer needs to learn to choose to trust God in all circumstances. To live and say, as in the words of the chorus we sang earlier,

Blessed be Your name in the land that is plentiful where Your streams of abundance flow. Blessed be Your name.

Blessed be Your name when I'm found in the desert place, though I walk through the wilderness. Blessed be Your name.

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me, when the world's all as it should be. Blessed be Your name.

Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering, though there's pain in the offering. Blessed be Your name.

That is easier said and sung than lived. And so, let's look at these closing verses of Habakkuk for some help.

Habakkuk's Circumstances: Terrifying.

Habakkuk faced real and certain terror. He opened his prayer back in verse 2 with, "LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear." Verse 16 describes that response in more detail,

"I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us."

Let's review. The book opens with Habakkuk's distress from the sin, violence and perversion running rampant in Judah, and then also from God's silence. He had brought his concerns to God, but was met with silence. He asked God how long this could go on without judgment or even an answer. And still, silence.

When God finally answered, Habakkuk neither liked nor understood all that God said. Yes, judgment was coming on Judah for her sin. But, that judgment would be administered through the ruthless, wicked, cruel Chaldeans who, in turn, would also be judged. "How can this be? How can God use *them* to judge His own people?"

God answered again. He assured Habakkuk that the Chaldeans would be judged. He underscored that the righteous, those who are right before Him, will live by their faith in all times and circumstances, including the coming terror.

The narrative ends with that at the end of chapter 2. In the grand psalm of chapter 3, along with the overall focus on exalting God, His power and salvation, there are more pictures of God's devastating future judgment.

The judgment on Judah was at hand. Habakkuk knew it was coming soon, and that it would be terrible.

I have cited Jeremiah a number of times in this series because he was a contemporary of Habakkuk. He lived through the final two-year siege of Jerusalem and its fall in 586 B.C. He describes some of what he and the people experienced during the siege in the book of Lamentations.

- The people gladly sold their most valuable possessions for a bit of food (1:11), and children were constantly crying for food and dying for lack of it (2:11-12, 19).
- The leaders and people were in a perpetual state of mourning (2:10).
- Priests and prophets were killed in the temple (2:20).
- Mothers were so desperate for food that some boiled and ate their own children (2:22; 4:10).
- Bodies lay abandoned in the streets, left unburied (2:21).

- Personally, Jeremiah felt abandoned and tortured by God (3:1-18), and was a laughing stock to all the people because of his faithfulness to God (3:14).

Yes, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, all the people faced real and certain terror.

In addition to that, Habakkuk faced hypothetical and possible terror. Go to verse 17.

“Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls,”

This is beautiful poetry, but not a beautiful picture. Nor is it just hyperbole to bolster his statements in the following two verses. The Babylonians often employed a scorched earth policy. They wanted nothing left for any survivors they did not relocate to have as a base for rebuilding.

And so, while this was hypothetical, it was possible. This verse pictures the total collapse of farming—crops and livestock. One factor that made the Great Depression of the last century so devastating in North America was that, on top of the economic collapse, the rain didn’t come, the winds blew, crops, herds and flocks failed in what we call *the dirty thirties*. Our economy today is in serious trouble. Imagine how much worse it would be if the world-wide economic meltdown was joined by a long world-wide drought.

Habakkuk’s circumstances were terrifying.

Habakkuk’s Response: Fear.

Remember, in verse 2 Habakkuk tells us he heard the reports about God and he *feared*. We come again to verse 16 where he uses a series of quick brushstrokes to picture that fear.

“I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble.”

Let’s take a look at these four descriptions of his fear.

First, he tells us he was *agitated*. He writes, “my inward parts trembled.” The word translated “inward parts” is often used in the Old Testament to refer to the belly, stomach or womb. The word “trembled” is the same one used in verse 7, and means to tremble, quake, rage, to be agitated. We could paraphrase this phrase,

- “my stomach was churning” or,
- “my stomach was growling” or,
- “my stomach was tied in knots.”

He was agitated by stomach-churning fear.

The title of an article on the stock market from the New York Times News Service about a month ago started with the hyphenated word “Stomach-churning.” The article stated, “Fear is running high on Wall Street. Just look at the fear index. With all those stomach-churning freefalls and sharp reversals in the stock market recently, traders are keeping a nervous eye on an obscure index known as the VIX (the Chicago Board Options Exchange Volatility Index). It measures those wrenching market swings. A rising VIX is usually regarded as a sign fear, ... The higher the VIX, the more unhinged the market looks.”

Habakkuk was *all shook up*, agitated with fear.

Secondly, this fear left Habakkuk speechless. He described it this way, “At the sound [of the reports about God] my lips quivered.” The word *quivered* means to tingle when used of the ears. For example, In Jeremiah 19:3 God directs the prophet to tell the people,

“Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will *tingle*.’”

Three of the four uses of this word in the Old Testament are in this way.

The word also was used to refer to quivering, shaking or trembling in fear, as here in Habakkuk. He was so frightened that he didn’t know what to say. And, if he thought of something, he could only stammer. His fear left him speechless.

Next, he was *wasted*. In colloquial usage or slang today that expression can, among a number of things, refer the debilitating effects of being under the influence of some substance.

His phrase is “decay [or, rottenness] enters my bones.” The phrase “my bones” does not speak literally of the physical bones in his body. It refers to his whole being, how he feels. We see this in a positive sense in Proverbs 3:8 where it tells us that a fear or reverence of the Lord will bring “refreshment to your *bones*,” and in 15:30, where it tells us that “Good news puts fat on the *bones*.”

In line with what Habakkuk is describing, Jeremiah tells us in Lamentations 1:13 that, in His fierce anger, God “From on high... sent fire into my *bones*, and it prevailed over them.” Habakkuk felt his energy, his vitality wasting away because of the fear that had gripped him.

And, finally, Habakkuk was shaky. He tells us, “and in my place I tremble.” He still is *trembling*. This time “in my place.” The word for “in my place” has the basic idea of being below or under something. So, back in verse 7 when we read, “I saw the tents of Cushan *under* distress,” the word *under* is the same word that is used here.

What Habakkuk is saying is that he didn’t have his “legs under him,” or his legs had “gone out from under him.” His fear caused him to be *shaky* on his feet. Remember, he is

describing his actual physical and emotional reactions. We find the opposite picture in Moses' blessing in Deuteronomy 33:27, "The eternal God is a dwelling place, and *underneath* [our word] are the everlasting arms."

Here Habakkuk, as it has been said, was shaking from head to toe. Unlike some, I do not see this fear as a sign of immaturity or lack of faith which was suddenly transformed in the following moments and verses. It was and is a normal response to terrifying news. Most, if not all of us can identify with that from our own experience.

The key thing is that Habakkuk did not give in to the fear, or consider it as something he could not overcome and would be stuck with until, hopefully, it would go away. He knew he could make a deliberate, conscious choice of how he was going to proceed from here; and he did. That choice was based on knowing God and God's truth. Habakkuk does not tell us about the time line and details of how this choice worked out. But we see his choice and its result.

Habakkuk's Choice: Faith.

Habakkuk chose faith, to trust God. Why? Go to the last verse, verse 19, "The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places." Back in verse 16 he admitted he was agitated, speechless, wasted, shaky—without any strength. But he did have strength from beyond Himself: from the supreme Lord or Master, from the Eternal Self-Existent One; from God Himself.

He knew the *report* about God from King David, who prayed in 1 Chronicles 29:12,

"Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone."

He also knew King David's testimony of experiencing this in Psalm 28:7,

"The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him."

He knew God's promise through Isaiah,

"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." (41:10)

And, of critical importance, Habakkuk not only believed but experienced this truth by trusting God.

He made the choice to trust God. And God, his strength, gave him steady, sure feet underneath him to replace his wobbly feet. He now was like a deer surefootedly making its way on the steep, rocky mountain sides.

God was strengthening him in this terrifying time, making him “walk” on his “high places.” The word “walk” used here is interesting because it frequently means more than just to walk around, but to march, to tread, to tread down, or to trample. It is used back in verse 15, “You [God] *trampled* [there’s the word] on the sea with Your horses, on the surge of many waters.” God had control over the seas.

God was making Habakkuk surefooted, trampling down all the high, steep *places* and enemies, whether it was uncertainty or fear. Go back to Moses’ blessing in Deuteronomy 33 again. He concluded it this way, “Blessed are you, O Israel; who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, who is the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, and *you will tread upon their high places.*” (33:29)

Habakkuk chose to trust God because God was his strength.

Every choice we make has consequences or results. We find one very important result of Habakkuk’s choice to trust God in verse 18. In this terrifying nightmare, Habakkuk rejoiced in God. Verse 18. “Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”

How could he do this? How could he find joy in God when terrible things were terrorizing him? How could he rejoice in God when God did not spare him, and other faithful believers, from the horrible disasters? How can you or I do that in our worst nightmares?

To start, realize that this, again, is a *choice*. “*I will exult...I will rejoice.*” The “I” is emphatic. One translation underscores this with “Nevertheless, I, I will rejoice...” He chose to rejoice, first of all, in God, whom he knew. He knew the character and heart of God. He knew the faithfulness of God. Then, he also knew and rejoiced in God who was his salvation — in that day, in every day, eternally.

“But,” you may say, “that doesn’t fully answer the question! *How* could he, *how* can I choose to rejoice in God in such body and soul-numbing times?” The answer is that God, who was his strength and salvation, who put his feet back under him, also gave him the perspective and ability to truly rejoice as Habakkuk was trusting Him. Having the ability to rejoice in that time was the fruit God produced in him as Habakkuk lived by his faith. *Choosing to trust God leads to joy in God.*

Let’s go back to Jeremiah in Lamentations once more. The *weeping prophet* wept and wept in despair. He wrote, “My eyes fail because of tears.” (2:11). In his deep trouble, he said, “My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So, I say, ‘My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the LORD.’” (3:17-18)

Tucked into this ongoing lament are some amazing and precious words,

“Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD’s lovingkind-

nesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I have hope in Him.’ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD.” (3:19-26)

You see, he also chose to trust God and so experienced the fruit of being able to rejoice in God. To be sure, it was not an immediate and final work, but an ongoing one. Jeremiah, like we, had his ups and downs. A few verses after this grand statement he wrote, “My eyes run down with streams of water because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes pour down unceasingly, without stopping.” (3:48-49)

Conclusion.

Choosing to trust God is not always easy. *But, “You Always Can Choose to Trust Him.”*

A father and his young son were out in the country climbing around on some cliffs. The man heard a voice from above and behind him yell, “Hey Dad! Catch me!” He turned around and saw his young son jumping down off a rock right at him. The boy had jumped first and yelled at his father on the way down. Dad reacted quickly, caught him, and then both of them tumbled to the ground. Dad was more than a little startled and upset, and said, “Can you give me one good reason why you did that?” His young son said, in a matter of fact way, “Sure. Because you’re my Dad.”

His choice to trust his Dad was natural ... at that point. He knew his Dad. Throughout the days, few years and experiences of his life, he had learned that he could trust his Dad. It wasn’t automatic. It was a process. There was a learning curve. But now he knew he always could trust his Dad.

That father-son relationship is a bit like our relationship with God. He is true, pure, loving and faithful; He is trustworthy. He will never drop us. Remember Moses words again, “The eternal God is a dwelling place, and *underneath* are the everlasting arms.” (Deuteronomy 33:27). Every time we choose to trust Him, it builds our trust in Him. That makes it easier to trust Him. Wherever your level of trust with God is today, whatever your circumstances are, you *can* choose to trust Him. If you do, you will find He is trustworthy, His everlasting arms will catch and hold you.

As you go to God now,

- thank Him for giving us this brief glimpse into the life and heart of Habakkuk, a man who was learning to trust God more and more in circumstances that were rapidly becoming more and more difficult.
- Thank God that He is *your* strength, that He is the God of *your* salvation, and that He will bring joy back into *your* heart.

- If the sun is shining on you today, if streams of abundance are flowing and the world is as it should be, thank Him. And, make sure you are trusting *Him*, not the blessings you enjoy.
- But if Habakkuk’s experience is your experience, if in your life the fig tree is not blossoming, there is no fruit on the vines, there are no olives, crops, flocks and herds; it is all desolate; if you are agitated, speechless, wasted and shaky, bring yourself and all of that to God again today. Jump, leap out to Him in faith and say, “God! Catch me!” He will.

© 2008. Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture, unless otherwise noted, taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission.