

Habakkuk's Prayer

Scripture: Hab.3:1-19; Psalm 73

Introduction

- Questions: Problem of evil – why does God allow it? How can God possibly use “evil” for “good”?
- Summary of Habakkuk’s major themes in messages 1 & 2
- Habakkuk has no further complaints – he is consoled because he has heard God speak = the “revelation” of God’s plan.
- At the end of Habakkuk chapter 2, we were in the presence of God in His Temple with the earth silent before Him. At the opening of chapter 3, we are led to join Habakkuk in his prayer though we will note that it is not a prayer with a primary focus on “petitions.” It is rather a mixture of recollection and response.
 - Compare: Prayer is an intimate fellowship in which “memories” of the past have a continual effect and blessing.
- Habakkuk’s prayer = a psalm – v.1.
 - “Shigionoth” (v.1) – a highly emotional poetic term probably related to literary or musical matters.
 - “For the director of music, on my stringed instrument” – v.19b. Hence obviously sung and used in Jewish celebrations and worship.
 - Application: This shows the place of singing in our experience of growing in faith – singing is the language of the heart – how important it is to be a singing Christian and church – cf. Eph.5:19-20.

1) HABAKKUK IN PRAYER

- a) Much of Habakkuk’s prayer is a dramatic recitation of God’s mighty works in bringing deliverance to God’s people in the past.
 - i) V.2: “LORD, I have heard....” “Oral transmission” of God’s truth and repetitive story-telling of the great salvation events was the usual as well as a

most powerful way for OT Hebrew believers to hear, receive and be reminded of God's revelation. This was a fundamental part of their national Jewish identity. Cf. Today's believers and the written Word.

- ii) V.3-15: A dramatic presentation portraying God as the mighty Warrior/King victorious over His enemies – note: the many references to the Exodus; also other high moments in the salvation-history of God's people defeating their foes.
- iii) Question: What is the benefit or value of this exercise?
 - (1) Obviously the unchanging God is still the Deliverer (Saviour) of all His people who trust in Him – no enemy force/power can withstand their advance.
 - (a) Application: That means that He can and will do it again.
 - (2) God's people are called to “remember” God's great saving act on Calvary – see 1 Cor.11:23ff, also lesser events in our lives (the consequence of this first and greatest event) – know our *heritage*, not just our *inheritance*.
 - (a) Compare: The inroads of existential thinking that places significance only on the NOW moment and the consequent degeneration of a value placed on our “roots” and also the important role played by “fathers” and “mothers” of the faith who give the link between the past and the present.
- iv) V.2b: Remembering all these great events causes Habakkuk to “stand in awe.”
 - (1) This is more than a mere fascination or just an interesting story – more than just sentimental feelings or even a sense of national pride and well-being, cf. patriotic feelings on Anzac Day.
 - (2) Not merely a listing of past events and circumstances that would interest “history buffs” and those with a more sentimental bent for the past.
 - (a) Application: Our responses to whatever God does or has done in our lives – either a response of praise/worship or “mere coincidences.” Here is no glib or thoughtless response but rather we are called to respond with praise, awe, and thanksgiving.

- (b) Question: Is this our customary response? Do we have open eyes to behold God's deeds and then to praise Him with all our hearts?
- (3) Summary: Habakkuk is remembering what God has already done = His great acts of delivering His people from disaster, because of His faithfulness, e.g. Gideon and the Midianites – what about his present situation?
- b) Habakkuk prays – v.2b: “O LORD, revive Thy work in the midst of the years....” – “In wrath, remember mercy.”
 - i) Habakkuk prayed that God would bring life once again as He had done in the past.
 - (1) Application:
 - (a) Today our hearts cry out, “Lord, as You did in the early days of the church, show Yourself powerful in saving Your people from their enemies from without and within.”
 - (b) This is not a substitute for hard-work in the present. We must guard against thinking that the revival we pray and long for will suddenly remove all weaknesses in the church.
 - ii) Habakkuk also reminds God that He is merciful – a recognition that His wrath is indeed justified in judging His people, yet “please be merciful.” See Psalm 103:8-9.
 - (1) Application:
 - (a) This is a very biblical way of conversing with God, i.e. reminding Him what He is like and so what His people may expect of Him.
 - (b) Examples: in moments of financial distress, remind God of His faithfulness; in sorrow, remind Him of His compassion; in times of rejection, remind Him (and yourself) of His unconditional, accepting love.
 - c) Question: Where does all this lead Habakkuk? To a place of rejoicing and trust.

2) HABAKKUK AT PEACE

- a) God has revealed Himself and spoken. He experiences a very strong physical reaction – v.16a – perhaps he even became ill. Cf. Jeremiah’s or Ezekiel’s experiences in hearing and receiving the Word of God.
 - i) This shows the terrible and awesome majesty of God’s presence.
 - ii) Compare: If we can hear God’s Word and remain dull, then we need to ask:
Have I really had a living encounter with God?
- b) Habakkuk accepts God’s plan to bring calamity through the Babylonians – v.16c. He isn’t resisting God’s plan any longer, or asking God for another solution.
 - i) Nevertheless in his waiting, he will continue to hope in God’s deliverance no matter how black it might appear around him. This is a far different response to bland resignation or fatalism.
- c) Habakkuk chooses to rejoice in the LORD – vs.17-18 – cf. idealism or a worldly view that “things are going to get better.”
 - i) Even though all the devastating events of v.17 are all aspects of God’s judgment upon His people (see Deut.28:15ff), nevertheless Habakkuk chooses to look away from the events to God and to rejoice in Him, i.e. in His lovingkindness, grace, omnipotence, faithfulness, et al.
 - ii) Application: Sometimes / occasionally we are confronted with catastrophes (major or minor) – we are tempted to conclude in such circumstances that God is for some reason withdrawing His loving and protecting hand from us – this kind of response results in depression, not rejoice.

Conclusion

- At the end of this psalm and book, Habakkuk makes a powerful confession of personal faith – v.19.
 - He believed God would strengthen him supernaturally for whatever lay ahead of him and his fellow-Jews.
 - The result: he would be “sure-footed” like a deer – even on the dangerous, rugged heights, he would not stumble because the LORD would sustain him. Cf. Isaiah 40:27-31.

- Habakkuk began with the question: “O LORD, how long?” After hearing God speak, he ends with the clear declaration: “The LORD GOD is my strength....”
 - This does not mean that all his troubles were over and gone. God never promises to do that for His people, i.e. to make their paths free of troubles and difficulties, or thorns amid the fragrance of the roses. However, He does promise to sustain His trusting servants with His divine strength.
- We have learned some important principles which when followed will guide us safely through any troubled waters that we may encounter in life:
 - God is sovereign – He is King, in charge and in control. Therefore, we may put aside all anxiety because we may be sure that our loving Father has His hidden hand/finger on each seemingly chaotic situation in this world – both on the local and personal level as well as on the global level.
 - God is the mighty Warrior/King – He triumphs over all His enemies and causes His people to share in His triumph, though He gives us the “privilege” to also share in His sufferings – see Phil.1:29; see also Rom.8:16-17; 2 Cor.1:3-4; 2:14-16; 4:8-12 – it is clear that even when Satan is allowed to touch our lives, even these through the working of God’s glorious power as it was for Christ work out for Satan’s defeat and the destruction of his evil schemes.
 - Don’t walk by a trust in the power of our human minds to fathom God’s ways and works – rather relax and rest (= faith) in God’s superior wisdom so that you are able to press on in patient and persevering hope that through His mercy and grace, you will see one day witness the victory of God.
- Here is a divinely inspired message given by God to encourage us to move ahead with confidence and peace: “Father God is leading and going ahead; therefore, all is well!”

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