

“Rising Above the Circumstances”

Habakkuk 3:16-19

August 5, 2012

Intro: I have not served as a pastor of this church, nor have I been a part of the Medford for community for very long, but I have been here long enough to know that while there are many great things going on in the life of our church, and even many great things going on in the city itself, it is clear that people are going through difficult times. I know this from the hundreds of conversations that I have with people in our church, people in the city, and I know this from my own life. So many of us are experiencing various trials and suffering.

Many people I have talked to have lost their jobs and face unemployment. Others are dealing with fractured relationships. Some of those having just experienced or are considering divorce. Still many others have fallen into the nasty addictions of substance abuse. Many are under pressure because of financial constraints. Many are not sure how to make it through the week because of the constant worry and stress they face due to a family member or friend battling cancer, and some people are still grieving over the loss of a loved one. You know and I know: life is hard. So many of you today could pull your diploma from the school of hard knocks, and the sobering reality is that if you are not going through a difficult time right now, there is a good chance that trouble is on the horizon in some shape or form. Jesus said in John 16:33: “In this world, you will have trouble.” The question is not whether or not we will have trouble. The question is: “How will we respond when trouble comes knocking at our door?”

There is a story of a professor walking across the campus of the seminary where he taught (a seminary is a school that equips people to serve in Christian ministry), and this professor saw a woman who seemed quite distressed and troubled, so he naturally inquired, “How are you doing?” She replied with a statement that we all have heard and even probably have said before in our life, “I’m doing okay, *under the circumstances.*” He immediately replied, “Under the circumstances? What are you doing under there? A Christian should never be under the circumstances.”

Do the circumstances of life get you down? Do you ever feel overwhelmed by the events that press in on you from work, family, and other responsibilities? Have you ever been in a situation in life where you thought, “the whole world is falling in on me and there seems to be no hope?” There is little doubt all of us could answer “yes” to any of those questions. Yet as Hendricks said, “A Christian should never be under the circumstances.” The Christian, through the power of the Holy Spirit, has the power to rise above the circumstances of life and experience triumph in the midst of trial. That message is the message of our text this morning, and we are going to see that in the little OT book of Habakkuk. Please open... Pg. 787 Habakkuk 3:16-19 is going to teach us that we can...

The Point: Rise above the circumstances through an ultra clear vision of God

Our passage is going to teach us four *WAYS* you can rise above the circumstances of life through an ultra clear vision of God. Number one...

I. Rise above the circumstances by trembling before the presence of God (3:16).

- Here’s what is going on with Habakkuk. He was a prophet for God during a very perilous time. It was a time when immorality ran rampant and people had forsaken their God. That was his current plight. If that wasn’t bad enough, God told Habakkuk the dreaded truth that he was going to bring judgment upon His people by raising up the wicked Chaldeans, the Babylonians, to inflict great tribulation upon them.
- Needless to say, the reality of current trouble and the prospect of future suffering was incredibly difficult for Habakkuk to embrace. So much so that in chapters one and two, he wrestles with God by complaining to him and questioning his work. In Habakkuk 1:2, he asks, “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?”
- Have you ever questioned the goodness of God during your suffering? Have you ever wondered if God really cares for you or doubted that he could really come through?
- Believe me, those questions have swirled around our family in the past year. Many of you know we lost my father-in-law to brain cancer on April 5 of 2011. “Why God? Why would you allow this happen to such a good person? How long until you bring healing to his body? Don’t you see how hard this is?”
- The Bible presents us with numerous examples, especially in the Psalms, where people who love God express raw emotion and honest questions to God. God is big enough to handle all of our questions. It’s ok to go to tell him you don’t understand. It’s okay to tell him it doesn’t all add up. It’s even okay to ask “why” and “How long,” but in our wrestling we must continue seeking, listening, and trusting. “

- In chapter 2, God basically says, “Hey, I have everything under control. I will act with justice. Just remember, ‘the righteous shall live by faith.’”
- That brings us to chapter three where Habakkuk presents a simple, yet very bold prayer that leads into a huge vision of God.
- Look at verse 2 of chapter 3: “O Lord, I have heard the report of you. And your work, O Lord, and do I fear” The NIV says, “I have heard of your fame...” (NIV) Now, look at his requests: 1) Revive your work. 2) Make it known. 3) In judgment remember mercy. This is a great way to pray. This is going hard after God in prayer, bold, audacious prayer. Pray like that when we gather for prayer in Medford Square on Friday mornings.
- Beginning in verse 3, Habakkuk experiences what we all need this morning: an ultra clear vision of God. He is confronted with the awesome, majesty of God.
 - There is nothing more crucially important for life than knowing God and having a clear vision of God. Our deepest need in life is a clear vision of God.
 - **In his excellent book, *Knowing God* (which is on our resource table), J.I. Packer says, “Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.” - J. I. Packer**
 - Habakkuk three helps us take off the blindfold. This vision of God provides a sense of direction and understanding, particularly when the heat of life intensifies during times of great trial and difficulty.
- It speaks of a God whose “splendor covers the heavens” and whose “praise fills the earth.” (verse 3), a God who can only flash a preview of his power because his omnipotence would simply overwhelm us (verse 4). It speaks of a God whose ways are eternal (verse 6) and who will execute justice on his adversaries and victorious salvation for his people in (verses 7-15). In light of all of this, we come to verse 16, that tells us the first way we can rise above the circumstances and respond to the greatness of God.
- First, Habakkuk responds by trembling in the presence of God. The text tells us Habakkuk underwent a change in his physical disposition due to entering into the presence of the Lord. His body trembled. His lips quivered. Rottenness entered his bones, and his legs trembled. When one finds himself in the presence of greatness, this is the natural response.
- Pic: Have you ever been in the presence of greatness? As a little boy, just being in the presence of my favorite basketball player changed my whole disposition. How much more should this be true when in the presence of God. That’s what happened to Habakkuk. He found himself in the presence of God and he trembled.
- In your daily pursuit of God... when we come together for worship, are you aware of the greatness of his presence to the point where it fills you with a sense of reverent awe and humility? God esteems those who tremble before him.

Trans: We can not rise above the circumstances by trembling with fear in the presence of God. Number two...

II. Rise above the circumstances by trusting in the sovereignty of God. (3:16c)

- When the circumstances of life begin to press in on you, you will either run from God or run to God? So many people run from God. They either throw their arms out in disbelief that God is there and that he cares, or they throw their fists up to contend with God, but finding our way through the storms of life begins and ends with faith.
- Where do we see faith in this text? Look at the end of verse 16. “Yet, (even in the midst of this coming pain) I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.”
- Wait. (four-letter word...)
- Most of us are not always patient people. Grocery. Traffic. Waiting for God to provide the perfect job or perfect spouse and the same is true in our suffering.
- We can wait and trust because we know this God of Habakkuk 3 is in perfect control even when we cannot make sense of what is happening around us. He knows how things will turn out. Nothing is a mystery to Him, and He is moving all of history toward accomplishing his purposes.
- Your world, this world, though it may feel like it at times, is not spinning out of control, but we can trust that God takes all things and works them for our good and his glory.
- Isaiah 30:15 says: **“For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’ (Isaiah 30:15)**
- **Arg:** Think about this: Your faith is as good as the one you are putting your trust in. Let me say that again, Your faith is as good as the one you are putting your trust in. This morning I am not asking you to exercise an irrational, blind faith. I am not asking you to place yourself in another frail, finite human being’s hands who will inevitably let you down. Put your faith in the God who never fails. Joshua 23:14 tells us that not one of his promises has ever failed, but they have all come to pass.
- Habakkuk 2:4 says, “the righteous shall live by his faith.” Does that describe you? Are you daily trusting in the sovereign power of God?

Trans: Rise above the circumstances by trembling before the presence of God, trusting in the sovereignty of God, and #3...
Rejoicing in the Goodness of God

III. Rise above the circumstances by rejoicing in the goodness of God (3:17-18).

- Check **vv. 17-18**. Do you see the stark contrast between the complaint of chapter one and Habakkuk's praise of chapter three? Not only does he place his trust in the Sovereign Lord, but now he is able to rejoice! British preacher **G. Campbell Morgan** pinpoints this change when he asserts, "**Our joy is proportioned to our trust and our trust is proportioned to our knowledge of God.**" This joy is not rooted in the outward circumstances of life. Habakkuk's joy is rooted in his relationship with the God.
- App: If you seek to find your joy in the circumstances of life, you will be severely disappointed. Why? Because they are constantly changing. When, however, you seek to find your joy in God, you will never be disappointed. Why? Because God never changes. He is perfectly satisfying!
- Rise above the circumstances by finding your joy in God, not your circumstances.
- Listen, if circumstances were supposed to produce joy, Habakkuk would not have had any. Notice the desperate situation described in verse 17 where we discover a progression of losses that moves from bad to worse. Moving from a loss of fig blossoms, to there being no fruit on the vines, to a failed olive produce, to barren fields, to the flock being cut off from the fold, and ending with the desperate state of there being no herd in the stalls, the situation could not get much worse. The economic rug has just been pulled out from under his feet.
- However, it is here that Habakkuk says in verse 18 that he will "rejoice in the Lord; and take joy in the God of his salvation." His strength and joy was found in God in the midst of his suffering.
- Here is some incredible hope and power for you. Because God is so infinitely satisfying. Because God is in control and has a plan for our lives. Because Jesus says, "I am the bread of life and the living water." It doesn't matter if the car won't start, there's hardly any food in the fridge, the bank account said you just over drafted and now owe them money, the person at work has it out for you, or your family member just came down with cancer, you can still have contentment and joy in life because our hope in God and our joy in God transcends our circumstances.

Trans: Finally,

IV. Rise above the circumstances by finding strength in the power of God (3:19).

- I want you to notice something. There is a rhythm in this passage that is too important for us to miss this morning. Verse 16: "I hear..... YET I will" Verse 17: "Though the fig tree should not blossom..... YET I will..."
- Do you see that? Habakkuk is faced with incredibly difficult circumstances. He is staring in the face of fierce opposition, but each time he makes the choice to fight back with faith saying, I will trust, I will rejoice, I will walk in what I know to be true of God.
- So the final question we should ask ourselves is this: How can we fight back, especially when the circumstances of life drained us of our hope and our strength? **Verse 19**
- "God, the Lord, is my strength." Is that good enough for you? How will you make it through another day, another challenge, another trial? God is our strength! This is made clear in the final two lines of verse 19: "*He makes* my feet like the deer's; *he makes* me tread on my high places."
- Don't miss the incredible transformation from his position in the valley of complaining to the heights of the "high places." is due to his proper perspective of his position before God, thus resulting in faith, turning to confidence and joy.
- Pic: When the weight that you carry is too much to bear, allow God to strengthen you. Run to him in prayer. Open up this Word and soak it in. Be reminded of the character of God, the works of God, and the promises of God.
- Let me hit you with one verse before we wrap this up. "**He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**" (Romans 8:32)

Conclusion:

- *When the shadows of suffering fall on your life, rest in the shadow of the cross.* The cross and the resurrection of Jesus answer once and for all the questions of Habakkuk three: God is here. He is in control. He is good. And he is powerful! Because Jesus died and was raised, we know that through faith in him we can not only rise above the circumstances, but that we will one day rise above and beyond all of these circumstances. How?
- Because when Jesus said in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble" he didn't stop there. He said, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world!"
- Rise above the circumstances through him.