June 21, 2015 Don Riley

Habakkuk’s Glorious Answer

Habakkuk 1-3; 2:14

It is with great joy that I preach again this 2nd Sunday of a six week series on the Glory of God. Thank you for your warm welcome, your enthusiastic reception and your vibrant spirit. It is to the glory of God that you love to worship, that you love one another, that you disciple after the Great Commission and you take in strangers such as the one filling your pulpit this morning. I thank our heavenly Father for all the fathers assembled here today. So in response to the 5th commandment I honor all fathers here, and wish you a Happy Father’s day.

If you are a father here today, be encouraged to stand strong in the strength of the Lord and in the strength of his might. It is a fearful thing to be a father. We sneak into it ill prepared not due to our own fathers, but because of our poor sense of listening and observing. And we worry. Two friends were talking and one said, “I’ve subscribed to a new service that is kind of interesting.” His friend said to tell him about it. So the first man said, “ Well, all I have to do is text the person and this person does all my worrying for me.” The second man asked, “Well, that’s amazing! Is it expensive?” “No, it’s only $1,000/week.” “$1,000/week! How can you afford $1,000/week?” The first man said, “Well, that’s his worry!” Why pray when you can worry?

A funny thing about human nature: it makes a person feel important if he or she has something to worry about. It gives them the illusion that for any solution or any problem, that the solution they come up with is the best remedy, but without divine help.

Habakkuk was a worrier. Habakkuk was a Jewish priest who became a prophet. He lived in Jerusalem about 600 BC. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Micah. He was what we call a minor prophet. The different between and minor prophet and a major prophet is simply the length of the book. Major prophets have long or many chapters, like Isaiah with 66. Habakkuk has 3. Habakkuk is called a minor prophet with a major message. He lived under the evil King Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim earned his totin chip sharpening his knife by cutting up Jeremiah’s scroll and throwing it in the fire, piece by piece. The Hebrew name Habakkuk means to embrace, to wrestle. He wrestled with some very serious issues and problems of his day. He struggled and wrestled about what was happening to his nation as he lived under this evil king. He struggled as he saw the moral corruption of Juda. He struggled as he saw the encroaching evil King Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon about to take over Judah. He worried.

Habakkuk is asking questions. The first one being, “Lord, how long?” How long shall I cry for help? Habakkuk is essentially saying, “God, are you indifferent? How long shall I cry for help and you will not hear? Or cry to you violence?” Habakkuk then asks God, “Are you inactive?” (verse 3) “Why do you idly look at wrong?” Destruction, violence, strife, contention. The law is paralyzed. Justice never goes forth. The wicked surround the righteous. Justice goes forth perverted. The Lord answers in verse 5 through 11.

Then in verse 12 Habakkuk asks, “Are you not from everlasting, my Holy one?” He is essentially asking God if God is being inconsistent in using an evil Babylonian nation to put his chosen people into exile. How can a holy God allow all this unholy stuff to go on? He is essentially asking 3 questions: Are you indifferent? Are you inactive? Are you inconsistent? This is a very contemporary message.

You can pick up a copy of The Commercial Appeal today, you can google The Drudge Report. Why would 21 year-old Dylan Roof walk into a South Carolina black church last Wednesday during a Bible study and shoot and kill the pastor and eight others? One year after our Veterans Affairs Department was exposed as having long wait time, a report just yesterday came out saying that the wait time of a month or longer to see a doctor is now 50% higher that it was during the expose of last year. Our immigration system is broken. A Texas judge ruled that our executive branch exceeded its legal authority with its immigration order last year. But what does the White House do? It ignores the judiciary and continue with deportation of as many as 5 million who are in the country illegally. Law is paralyzed and justice is not going forth. Some laws are so down right stupid that they are funny. Do you realize right now there is a law in Chico, California enacting a ban on nuclear weapons and there is a fine of $500 for anyone setting off nuclear explosives within the city limits. Habakkuk, your problems are the same as those we see today.

What about ISIS? Many of you heard me say that last week, I had just gotten back from Boy Scout camp where I taught Citizenship in the Nation. The boys scouts were required to write a letter to their senator and their representative. It was amazing to me that every single scout, there were about nine in the class, wrote to either Senator Alexander or Senator Corker or their Representative about ISIS. In February, FBI Director James Corney said ISIS has gone from a terror start up overseas to a chaotic spider web in the US with young Muslim men being radicalized in all 50 states. He was making that announcement in Mississippi. 3 men in federal custody tried to blow up Coney Island. A few months ago, Lee Cornell, age 20, of Green Township, Ohio was arrested in an alleged plot to blow up the U.S. Capitol. At a cartoon competition in Garland, Texas, 2 radical Muslims were stopped by security forces as they tried to shoot their way into the meeting. Habakkuk is very contemporary. God where are you? Are you indifferent? Are you inactive? Are you inconsistent?

Prophets who laid out the bad news, then, as today were seen as being overly negative. I was born in Washington D.C. My father was and Air Force colonel stationed at the Pentagon. I grew up loving America even as I do today. I put my hand over my heart. I love the national anthem. I love the flag. I am a patriot. I love America. It is difficult to give you those facts and statistics because I dearly love this country and I believe in this system.

Habakkuk had a remedy even as we have a remedy today. His response is in chapter two. He went up in his prayer tower and took his stand and stationed himself. The Hebrew word for stand in chapter two verse one means to cease, to remains, to stay. Habakkuk not only set himself in prayer, but he stationed himself in prayer. Habakkuk wanted an answer and the Lord answered him. The Lord said write down the vision. God gave him so much, too much, for us to consider this morning. But God gave to Habakkuk what He wants to give to every one of you today.

3 Gs. He answered with God’s grace. Verse four of chapter two says, “The just or righteous shall live by faith.” That’s the old testament. It took three new testament books just to unpack that. The Just, Romans. How should you live, Galatians. By faith, Hebrews. That is the New Testament gospel given to Habakkuk in 600 BC. That is grace. The second G, glory. Verse 14 of chapter two says, “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the water covers the sea.” We will come back to that in greater detail. And finally, the third G is government. Verse 20 of chapter two speaks on government saying, “The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all keep silence before him.” God’s grace teaches us not to live by sight, but by faith. That is grace. God’s glory teaches that one day the entire world will be permeated with the God of the Old and New Testament. That is glory. God’s government is depicted as The Lord is now on this throne. He is in control. When fear knocks on the door of your heart, you can send faith to answer it and he will answer it. God is in control. He is still on his throne.

Let us look down deeper into one of these verses. Habakkuk chapter two verse fourteen, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” We can say God is powerful. We can say God is merciful. We can say God is holy, but we do not say God is glory. Why? Because God’s glory is the sum total of all of that he is.

Moses wanted to see GOd’s glory. God said no. Why? Because God’s glory is the story of Moses, it is the story of Habakkuk, it is the story of every person seated here today at Woodland Presbyterian this morning. God’s glory is the summary of everything He does. God’s glory is the summary of everything He has planned. The history past, the beckoning future. His whole redemptive story of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is part of God’s glory. God’s glory is your story. He initiated in your life to bring you into a vibrant relationship with Him to live for His glory.

In this verse “as the waters cover the sea,” isn’t that repetitive? Isn’t that wasted wording? Isn’t the sea made of water? Isn’t saying as the water covers the sea like saying “a sandy beach,” “a funny joke,” or “molecular air”. You probably know 70 to 75 percent of the earth is water. 97 percent of that water is salt water, and 3 percent is freshwater. 68 percent of the freshwater is trapped in glaciers. 30 percent of freshwater is in the ground. The earth is saturated with water. Right now you either feel comfortable or uncomfortable because this air conditioning, it’s all about water. And when you walk out of here today, you will be welcomed by the great Memphis humidity, right? Happy Father’s Day, you scorchers. The people in the Middle East think about water all the time. Water is the oil of the Holy Land. If you control it, you have power. Gaza’s water reserves historically contributed to the Gaza Strip dispute. Syria wants access to its old borders in Galilee before 1967 but giving them back would give access to the Sea of Galilee, Israel, and Jordan shore access to the Yarmouk River which has the same volume as the Jordan and it flows through the cliffs of Galilee. Both countries study how much the other country pulls from the Yarmuk River System. Water is everywhere. The earth’s atmosphere is full of water. The earth’s surface is covered in water. The earth’s interior is filled with water. Scientifically, water is everywhere.

In the creation account even before the 2nd day, the Spirit moved over the face of the waters. The 2nd day God separated the water and earth from the heavens. The 3rd day he separated the earth from the seas. Then in the Garden, He had different rivers. The reason Abraham migrated to Egypt was due to the lack of rainfall. There was a drought and dry wells. Naomi and her husband traveled to Moab because a famine from lack of rain. Rebekah was found for Isaac at a well. Jacob met Rachel at a well. Moses met Zippora at a well. In the oral law of Judaism, the Mishnah distinguishes between living water and common water. Living water was that which came from the hand of God. John the Baptist called followers to come to the living water. Isaiah said, “Come, all you are thirsty. Come to the water.” Jesus said, “Let everyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within them. When Jesus was pierced on the cross, living water flowed from his side. Remember God’s glory is His total character. Remember, that in Jesus we beheld His glory as of the only son of the father? So God’s glory in summarized in Jesus. Thus the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the water covers the sea. One day the whole earth will know about Jesus. Jesus will saturate every cubic inch of the earth, Jesus and the saving knowledge of him will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea!

Are you saturated with Jesus? Is your surface life covered with the life giving life of Jesus? Is your surface life covered with the life giving life of Jesus? Is the spiritual ground water under your spiritual surface being filled to the full with the living water of Jesus? Be encouraged-spirit filled water logged Christians, you are not alone. One day every molecule of oxygen and every two molecules of hydrogen will know that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. How can you tell?

Remember Habakkuk. He was down in the valley of worry and he questions. But he went to the watch tower of prayer. Chapter 3 teaches us to worship. Habakkuk showed his saturation of glory by his joy. Habakkuk starts out in chapter 3 and says, “Now I hear.” He says, “Lord this work you are doing, I fear it, but in the midst the years, make it know, revive it.” So because of seeing God’s grace, God’s government and especially God’s glory, Habakkuk says in chapter 3, verse 17 even if Kroger has no groceries-even if the fields has no crops, even if the economy tanks, because of God’s glory, I will rejoice. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength. If you look to the world, you worry. If you look to the Lord, you worship. This is what Habakkuk did. This is what I implore you to do. I implore you to do something radical. I implore you to pray. To station yourself in prayer until God shows you his grace, until God shows you that He is control in his government, and finally that God’s grace would fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. It takes hard prayer. You will never hear me say that praying is easy. It is hard work.

I remember when I was a youth minister over at Second. A young man came in and he wanted to talk about a girlfriend. I was real impatient. I figured it was easier to tell him about Egyptian hieroglyphics that adolescent testosterone. So I dismissed him and said, look there is a chapel right here, why don’t you go in there and pray for an hour. Have you ever prayed for an hour? He said no. I dismissed him, hoping he’d quit coming everyday. I had such compassion. Just kidding. I love this kid. I recently did his mother’s funeral. He is a dear, godly guy. But when he was in high school I sent him in the chapel to pray for an hour, even if he had to time himself. When he came back he did not want to talk to me. His face shone. He said, “I don’t need to talk to you. I’ve just heard from God.”

Woodland, pray. Pray until you feel like it. Pray until you break through. He wants to show you glorious things. He wants to give you glorious answers.

How can you tell, Christian, that you are water-logged, saturated, permeated and filled with God’s glory--you have joy! You rejoice in the Lord! Psalm 67: 4 says, “Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.” Psalm 100 verse 2 says, “Serve the Lord with gladness.” Phil. 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice!” If you leave here today and have a sense of joy, not happiness. Its the difference between and thermostat and a thermometer. The thermometer is happiness. The thermostat is joy. Are you with me? Sometimes it takes a lot of praying before you have joy in the midst of deep, hard suffering. We are going through a difficult time in this nation. But God’s grace enable us to live by faith. God’s governance allows us to know that He is in control. And finally, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. Rejoice. Habakkuk rejoiced in his glorious answer. Christians rejoice in your glorious God. Rejoice in your glorious Jesus. Be filled with the Spirit moving among us in glory. Rejoice, again I say rejoice!

Let us pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, take us from the valley of worry to the mountain of worship. Put is in that watch tower where we hear of your grace, where we hear of your glory, and we hear of your government. Enable us to have joy, joy unspeakable, joy that comes from a heart that has met with you. Lord teach us to pray the kind of prayer that gives us a glorious answer, even the kind of glorious answer you gave to Habakkuk. We pray rejoicing. We pray saturated. We pray believing that one day the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. Amen.