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Sermon Notes

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A Model Prayer

Habakkuk 3:1-2

I. Habakkuk 3: The Prayer of a Prophet

A. Chapter 1: Problems of a Puzzled Prophet

1. Habakkuk's First Complaint: agony over his people's sin
2. God's Answer: the Babylonians are coming!!
3. Habakkuk's Second Complaint: agony over God's judgment

B. Chapter 2: God's Sovereign Plan... Judgment and Salvation

1. Answer #1: The Babylonians will be judged in turn
2. Answer #2: All human labor apart from God is fuel for the fire
3. Answer #3: God is building a world-wide empire for His own glory
4. Answer #4: Individual sinners enter that glorious kingdom by simple faith

C. Chapter 3: Habakkuk's Faith-filled Response

1. Prayer for God to move in wrath and mercy (1-2)
2. Description of God's terrifying judgments on behalf of His people (3-15)
3. Habakkuk's declaration of absolute trust in God despite the grievous trials (16-19)

II. Approaching God Properly: Humility

2:20 *"The Lord is in His holy temple: Let all the earth be silent before Him."*

A. Silent Before God

1. Silence of awe
2. Silence of recognition of sinfulness
3. Silence of total submission to His will

B. The Change in Habakkuk

1. Began by Questioning God

Habakkuk 1:3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?

1:13 Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

1:17 Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?

Four times he questioned God

2. Not Disrespectful... Just Troubled
3. Similar to Job: Transformed by the Holiness of God

Job 42:5-6 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

C. Eyes on God's Holiness, Not Our Situation

1. The "Evil Out There"

1:13 Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

- a. wicked fellow Jews... abusing the poor by controlling the system
- b. wicked Babylonians: idolators, conquering the world for their own glory
- c. deep perplexity: How could you let *those evil people* do all this??!!

BUT: such a view pushes us to a bad situation before God... self-righteous indignation at the sins of others while forgetting our own deep-stained sinfulness

2. The "Evil In Here"
 - a. how easy it is to forget who we are!!

Romans 3:9-18 *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." 13 "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." 14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and misery mark their ways, 17 and the way of peace they do not know." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

- b. how easy to forget there's little or no difference between US and THEM
- c. how easy to see ourselves as God's "buddy", familiar friend... why O Lord won't you whip up on the evil OUT THERE?? We lament!

D. The Danger and Prevalence of Self-Righteousness

1. Righteous Ladder-climbing: There's always someone below us

Illus. Street person who maintained his righteousness because he wasn't as bad as a man he met on another street who abused his wife!!

2. Dangerous position before God!!

- a. never come to God and brag about your righteousness

Luke 18:10-12 *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-- robbers, evildoers, adulterers-- or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

- b. God absolutely detests that attitude!!

James 4:6 *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

- c. we should remember who we are and who God is

Isaiah 40:22-26 *He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. 23 He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. 24 No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. 25 "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. 26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created*

all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

d. instead, we should remember the humble prayer of the tax collector

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

E. The Danger and Prevalence of Self-Pity

1. How Quick We Are to Charge God with Injustice
2. How Quick We Are to Forget What We Truly Deserve

People going through trials lament God's "fairness", wondering why God's doing this to me?? They seem to think that the difficulty is worse than they deserve, and thus they secretly charge God with injustice. This was Habakkuk's temptation as well, until God brought about a radical change in his outlook

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: How was it that Habakkuk was brought to such a position? It would seem that it was when he stopped thinking of his own nation, or of the Chaldeans, and contemplated only the holiness and justice of God against the dark background of sin in the world. Our troubles can nearly all be traced to our persistence in looking at the immediate problems themselves, instead of looking at them in the light of God. So long as Habakkuk was looking at Israel and the Babylonians, he was troubled. Now he has forgotten Israel as such, and the Babylonians, and his eyes are on God. He has returned to the realm of spiritual truth—the holiness of God, sin in man and in the world—and so he is able to see things in an entirely new light. He is now concerned for the glory of God and nothing else. He had to stop thinking in terms of the fact that the Babylonians were worse sinners than the Jews and that yet God was going to use them, perplexing as that problem was. That attitude made him forget the sin of his own nation through concentrating on the sin of others which happened to be greater. As long as he persisted in this attitude, he remained in perplexity, unhappy in heart and mind. But the prophet came to the place where he was lifted entirely out of that state, to see only the wonderful vision of the Lord in His holy temple, with sinful mankind and the universe beneath him. The distinction between the Israelites and the Babylonians became relatively unimportant when things were seen like that. It was no longer possible to be exalted either as an individual or as a nation.... The holiness of God and the sin of man are the only things that matter." *From Fear to Faith*

We must see our need of humiliation before God!!!

III. Adoring God Properly: Worship

vs. 2 *Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord!*

A. Holy Fear

NIV Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe [KJV: with reverence and godly fear]

Psalm 2:11 Worship the LORD with reverence, And rejoice with trembling.

1. A Sense of the majesty of God
2. Not the fear of slavery or of wrath
3. Amazement at who God is
4. Amazement at what God has accomplished

B. God's Fame Means Salvation for the Humble

1. God makes much of the glory of His name
2. God wants His reputation spread from shore to shore
3. When God makes much of His name, people call on His name for salvation

Joshua 2:8-13 Before the spies lay down for the night, [Rahab] went up on the roof 9 and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. 11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. 12 Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign 13 that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death."

John Piper: [God's passion for His own glory...]

C. Word-Based Worship

“I have heard of your fame, I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord!”

Habakkuk's awe came from a faith-filled hearing of the word of God

Hearing of God's mighty deeds of the past gave him the most valuable thing in the world: saving faith

“The righteous will live by faith.”

1. “I have heard...”
2. Habakkuk's source: God's past track record BASED ON SCRIPTURE
3. Our source too!! God is the same

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

4. Read and stand amazed
 - God spoke the universe into existence and it was so!!
 - God created man from the dust of the earth and breathed life into his nostrils
 - God condemned man for His sin and cursed all man's labors
 - God brought a worldwide flood on that wicked generation and wiped it out, but saved a single family in an ark of wood
 - God called a single man, Abraham, and promised him descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky
 - God rescued the Jews from the hand of Pharaoh, the most powerful man on the face of the earth, and destroyed the most powerful army on the face of the earth with a wall of water he had split by an all-night wind
 - God fed over 2 million people with bread from heaven for over 40 years
 - God toppled the mighty wall of Jericho at the moment the Jews called out for victory
 - God swept seven nations more powerful than the Jews before them and gave them the Promised Land

- God sent a chariot of fire to take Elijah to heaven, and a whole host of chariots of fire to rescue Elishah
- God destroyed 185,000 mighty and arrogant Assyrian troops in one night with one angel

We must approach God with trembling... with a sense of His mighty power and majesty; we must humbly accept the word planted in us which can save us.

Lloyd-Jones: "We must learn to see God in His holy temple above the flux of history, and above the changing scenes of time. In God's presence the one thing that stands out is the holy nature of God and our own sin. We humble ourselves and with reverence adore Him."

Do you stand in awe at the past deeds of God?

IV. Addressing God Properly: Intercession

Vs. 2 "Renew them in our day; in our time make them known. In wrath remember mercy."

A. Silent Before God, Yet Bold to Intercede!

1. Three elements of true prayer

Three constant elements of true prayer: humiliation, adoration, intercession

2. God's command: Come boldly to the throne
 - a. Habakkuk bold despite Old Covenant restrictions
 - b. we should be even bolder in Christ

Ephesians 2:18 For through [Christ] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

God wants us to make intercession:

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

We approach with humility, with adoration... with total reliance on Christ's blood... BUT WE DO APPROACH! Why? We have a passionate request to make!!

B. What Habakkuk Doesn't Pray For

1. For Babylon's Destruction
2. For Judah's Escape from Deserved Judgment
3. For His Own Deliverance
4. Most of all: A Change in God's Plans

C. One Passion: God's Purposes

1. One holy passion fills Habakkuk's frame: God's glory

Habakkuk 2:14 The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

2. Habakkuk just wants God work to be done

Habakkuk wants to see the plan of God make progress

Lloyd-Jones: "The prophet's one burden now was a concern for God's cause, God's work, and God's purpose in His own nation and in the entire world. His one desire was that things should be right. He had come to the position in which, in effect, he said "Whatever my countrymen have to suffer is of no concern as long as Your work is revived and kept pure."

D. Prayer for Revival... of God's Power

RENEW them in our time = REVIVE them in our time

Make them live again

1. Prayer for revival frequently focuses on God's people

Revive US O Lord... Revive your people, make us come alive again

Fine... but here, Habakkuk prays for a revival of the acts of God

"I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds... renew THEM in our day, in our time make them known..."

Habakkuk wants to see God's mighty power at work again... not to deliver His people from the Babylonians, but to rescue a remnant and continue His plan of worldwide glory

2. Urgency: I want to see it NOW... in my generation!!

“I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds... renew them IN OUR DAY, IN OUR TIME make them known...”

3. He wants a BIG DISPLAY of God’s mighty power... Why? So that God’s glory will be displayed in all the earth!!

E. Prayer for Mercy... from God’s Wrath

“In wrath remember mercy.”

1. Tremendous, simple petition
2. Total humility before God... no demand made; just a plea for mercy

Habakkuk acknowledges that sin deserves wrath... no plea that wrath not come... just a plea that God remember mercy in the midst of his wrath

3. Sinners in the hands of a holy God can only beg for mercy... God gives it to the humble, faith-filled spiritual beggar
4. Prayer for the remnant of His people... with world-wide implications

V. Application: Wrath and Mercy in The Cross

Romans 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God

- A. Proper Prayer: Humiliation, Adoration, Intercession
- B. Perfect “Sinner’s Prayer”

“In wrath, remember mercy”

1. Sinners can only demand one thing from God... what they truly deserve
2. Wrath is our rightful portion
3. Mercy is our only hope

C. Wrath and Mercy Meet in the Cross

Romans 11:22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God

1. God met Habakkuk’s plea for mercy by saving a remnant of his people

2. From that remnant, God raised up a true Savior... His own Son, Jesus Christ

John 4:22 “Salvation is from the Jews...”

Romans 9:5 [From the Jews] is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen

3. God remembered both wrath and mercy at the cross of Jesus Christ