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Sermon Notes

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The Past is Prophecy

Habakkuk 3:3-15

I. Our Historical Faith

Joseph Ton: Romanian pastor... converted in youth; grew in college' devastated in seminary by Leslie Weatherhead's *A Plain Man Looks at the Cross*; Biblical doctrines and historical accounts **metaphors**; professor couldn't refute, Ton lost his faith

Joseph Ton later wrote: "At that moment, I saw my faith, like scaffolding in my insides, going down in pieces. Everything in me was demolished. I went to my room and said, 'It is risky to preach the gospel here (in Romania). **I was ready to risk my life for the truth, but for metaphors I will risk nothing!**'"

James Montgomery Boice: Christianity is fact. The first issue any inquirer needs to settle is whether it is truly fact or only fiction. Is the biblical faith only a collection of beautiful and inspiring stories? Of did God actually deliver the Jewish people from Egypt by miracles at the time of the Exodus? Did He actually bring plagues upon Egypt? Did He divide the waters at the Red Sea and later the waters of the Jordan? Did He stop the sun and moon in the days of Joshua at Gibeon? Above all, did He really send His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of His people—His death for their death—and then rise again triumphantly from the dead? If these things are true, we have a great God in whom we can indeed rejoice. We can rejoice even in the worst of times, as Habakkuk did."

A. Christianity Utterly Unique... Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam do not rely on history

1 Corinthians 15:14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

B. God's Truth Based on God's Acts

Boice: "The religion of the [Bible] is not essentially a religion of ideas, though it does contain many great ideas. It is essentially a religion of acts—God's mighty acts..."

1. Much of the Bible is HISTORY... even the poetry!!
2. God acts, then interprets

C. God's Immutability: Present and Future Comfort to His People

1. God's actions in the past reveal His character
2. God's character NEVER changes
3. God's history a present comfort to the suffering
4. God's history also a FUTURE comfort as well

History is Prophecy... what God has done foretells what He will do!!

II. Habakkuk's Poetical Prayer: Moving Him from Fear to Faith

A. Habakkuk's Journey:

1. Distress over Jewish sin
2. God's reply: The Babylonians Are Coming
3. Habakkuk's anguish greatly intensified
4. God's Four-fold answer
 - a. The Babylonians will get theirs in due time
 - b. one nation after another will rise and be judged in succession
 - c. the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord
 - d. individuals can enter that glorious kingdom simply by faith
5. Habakkuk still in agony... but now begins his journey from fear to faith

B. Hoping for an Encore

1. Habakkuk looked back

vs. 2 LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.

[People of Jerusalem to Jeremiah] Jeremiah 21:1 "Inquire now of the LORD for us because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking us. Perhaps the LORD will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us."

Referring to God's miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah... 185,00 Assyrian troops killed in one night by one angel

Today: We'll see Habakkuk meditating on God's mighty acts in history in behalf of His people Israel

2. Habakkuk's Present Hope

Psalm 77:10-15 *Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." 11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. 12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. 13 Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God? 14 You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. 15 With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.*

C. Yet: "Allowing God to be God"

vs. 17-18 *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

In the end, God is enough... we'll discuss that more next week!!

By the time Habakkuk finishes His meditation, he has moved powerfully "from fear to faith"

III. Looking Back: God's Mighty Deliverances

A. Timeless Principle: God's Actions Reveal His Character, and His Character NEVER CHANGES

vs. 6 *"His ways are eternal..."*

B. Recounting God's Powerful Acts for Israel (vs. 3-15)

1. Perhaps the Exodus
2. Perhaps God's deliverance of David

Psalm 18: God mounts His chariots of wrath and flies down to rout David's enemies

3. Perhaps Hezekiah... 185,000 Assyrian soldiers
4. Basic concept: God has delivered His people in the past... He will do it again in the future in His own good time and His own good way

C. Meditating on God's Power Line by Line

1. Delivering Israel from Pharaoh

vs. 3 *God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.*

This recounts the area where Mt. Sinai was... refers to God coming out from Mt. Sinai to fight Egypt for Israel!!

God is coming to defeat Israel's enemies!!

Deuteronomy 33:2 He said: "The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones from the south, from his mountain slopes.

This is a "theophany"... God swooping down from heaven to defeat the enemies of His people

Exodus 14:19-25 Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, 20 coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. 23 The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. 24 During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. 25 He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

- Habakkuk then recites the incredible glory and power of God... probably a reference to the lightning and thunder associated with God's wrath in the plagues on Egypt

vs. 4 His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden.

Exodus 9:23-26 When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. 25 Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields-- both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. 26 The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.

BUT GOD also displayed this same power to His own people Israel at Mount Sinai:

Exodus 19:16-18 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently,

God's mighty power, His "hidden" power is revealed, first in His actions, then in the words of His prophets. His audience is the whole earth, both Jew and Gentile alike!!!

- Then Habakkuk turns to God's use of plague and pestilence

5 Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps.

God used plague and pestilence to destroy Egypt... the plague on the firstborn

God also used plague to destroy Assyria in one night... 185,000 soldiers died in front of Jerusalem's gates from what Isaiah 10:16 called a "wasting disease"

At the end of the world, God will send severe plagues on all nations... as described in gruesome detail in the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 15:1 I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues-- last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

- Now the effect of God's awesome power is felt world-wide

6 He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

Going back to the days of the Exodus, God's mighty dealings with Pharaoh and Egypt gained Him a worldwide reputation for awesome power... that reputation made the nations tremble—and it saved Rahab the prostitute, as we mentioned last time

It also made all nations [Cushan and Midian] tremble in fear for His wrath and power

Illus. Why does God want nations to tremble at the greatness of His name?? So that they may call on that name and be saved!!! Mirrors at the Grand Canyon???

John Piper: God makes much of His name out of love for the lost!!

- At this point, Habakkuk turns directly to God's power over the seas and rivers... this refers to the awesome display at the Red Sea, and also in crossing the Jordan

8 Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? 9 You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers; 10 the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.

God's wrath is like the waters of Noah's Flood... covering the earth with judgment... God's power is also over the nations themselves, controlling their military power with His might

Isaiah 17:12-14 Oh, the raging of many nations-- they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples-- they roar like the roaring of great waters! 13 Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. 14 In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Habakkuk here rejoices in God's mighty power over the unruly nations... when He speaks, the churning nations flee in terror!!

- God's prepares His arrows of wrath... and not just a few

vs. 9 You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows.

Soon, those arrows are flying through the air against God's enemies:

vs. 11 Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. 12 In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations.

Many modern Christians have a great deal of difficulty understanding that our God is a God of wrath... He hates wickedness and will not tolerate it. We are glad about that, but some dislike speaking about God's wrath. Habakkuk does not shrink from this at all

D. The Point of it All: Deliverance for His People

13 You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. Selah 14 With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding. 15 You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters.

God's great power is all for a purpose: to deliver His people from their enemies

David had a similar vision in Psalm 18... mighty God, filled with wrath descending in a chariot of fire with lightning bolts to rescue him from His enemies

Here Habakkuk applies all this meditation on God's past acts of saving power in a clear way: God does it all to save His people!!!

1. BUT who are "His people"??
2. Righteous among the Jewish nation, yes...
3. BUT ALSO anyone who trusts in Him... from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles

2:4 The righteous will live by faith

IV. Looking Ahead: Past is Prophecy

A. God Has Delivered Israel in the Past

1. In Reciting History, Habakkuk is really looking ahead
2. "Past is Prologue"... in this case, "Past is Prophecy"
3. The Babylonians, and all other Gentile oppressors will someday be destroyed
4. The humble people of faith will survive by their faith... in the end, they will be vindicated
5. God's past dealings with Israel shows His COVENANT FAITHFULNESS... God will never forsake His people

B. God Will Deliver Israel Again in the Future

1. Exile to Babylon will last 70 years
2. Babylon will be destroyed by the Medes and Persians
3. God's people will return to their land and continue

C. Visions of Restoration (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Romans, Second Coming)

Romans 11:22 "...and so, all Israel will be saved"

V. God's Ultimate Deliverance: Salvation in Christ

A. All History (Especially Jewish) Leads to Christ

1. Jewish Nation: the Context for the Christ

Christ to Samaritan woman: “*Salvation is from the Jews...*” (John 4:22)

2. Promise to the World through Abraham

***Genesis 12:3 ...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*”**

3. The Jewish Nation HAD TO Continue

B. God’s “Anointed One”

Habakkuk 3:13-14 You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. With his own spear you pierced his head

1. The House and Lineage of David Had to Continue
2. God kept the spark alive... the remnant that went into exile had Christ’s ancestor
3. By saving David’s lineage, He saved the world... for the Christ came from that lineage

C. Snatching Satan’s Most Powerful Weapon : “With his own spear you pierced his head”

Habakkuk 3:13-14 You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. With his own spear you pierced his head

1. Immediate context:

Babylonians conquer and destroy... in the same way Babylonians WILL BE conquered and destroyed

The nation that does it... the Medes and Persians... will allow Israel to return to the Promised Land and continue Jewish history!!

Thus, with the Babylonians’ own spear (military invasion and conquest) God crushed the Babylonian empire

2. Ultimate fulfillment: Christ and Death

The number one enemy of God’s people is sin and death... no other deliverance means anything if we are still doomed to eternity in hell under the wrath of God

- a. Satan held the power of death

- b. Satan sought to kill Christ MANY TIMES
- c. BUT IN THE END, God used Christ's death to destroy the devil!!

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil--15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

vs. 14 "With his own spear you pierced his head"

Christ came to turn Satan's most powerful weapon, death, back against himself... Christ death on the cross for our sins crushes Satan's kingdom... it strips him from head to foot as Christ rescues poor souls who were cowering lost in Satan's kingdom

D. Poetic Celebration of Salvation

1. This is Exactly why Habakkuk ends with celebration
2. A poem to God His Savior!!

vs. 17-19 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

VI. Application: This Means You!!

A. Lessons from History: Looking Back to Look Ahead

vs. 6 "His ways are eternal..."

Application #1: When you are facing severe trials, even terminal illness, our greatest comfort is in looking to a God who has acted powerfully in history to save His people... God's ways are eternal, and He still moves powerfully today!!

B. Greatest Spiritual Danger: Self-righteousness

1. "Those sinners out there"
2. Overlooking own wickedness
3. Habakkuk's attitude in chapter 3: humble submission to the will of a mighty God
4. Understanding what these mighty events mean

Application #2: Understand that God sees all of us apart from Christ as sinners deserving His wrath. Just as Habakkuk ended up by looking inward to his own sinfulness, so must we. Even in the worst trial, we must still see ourselves as sinners in need of grace from a righteous, holy, perfect Judge!!

C. Message of the Babylonian Invasion: God's Power at Work to Judge Sinners

1. God's unchanging character

Habakkuk 1:13 "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong."

2. The Babylonians are coming to judge God's own people and destroy God's own house... and they're coming at HIS command
3. Lesson is clear: God's wrath against sin applies universally

Jeremiah 25:29 See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the LORD Almighty.'

No one is safe from the wrath of God who hasn't found safety in Christ

4. Speaking directly to the church

God is most zealous for the holiness of His own people

1 Peter 4:17-18 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

Romans 11:19-22 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. 22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Application #3: The Church today can be lulled into a false security that our religion makes us safe from God's judgment if we live in rebellion against His commands. We cannot miss the message of Habakkuk... God does not tolerate any sin, especially not sin in His own house!! Therefore all sinners need to find refuge from God's wrath... such refuge is found only in one place—repentance and faith in Christ!

D. Message of Christ: God's Power at Work to Save Sinners

1. God's ultimate goal: worldwide extension of His kingdom

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

2. God's mighty power accomplishes this goal

vs. 3 *"His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth."*

God moving out in power to judge sinners results in the whole earth being filled with His praise

3. All sinners deserve the wrath of God... but Habakkuk sings the Praises of God His savior

vs. 18 *I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

4. The Savior is the MESSIAH... the Christ, who died for us

Habakkuk 3:13 *You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot.*

Christ stripped Satan totally through the cross and resurrection! The ultimate deliverance of God is deliverance from sin... it's penalty of wrath, its power to corrupt!

Application #4: Flee to Christ for total salvation from sin... delivered from your enemy the devil; delivered from death, delivered from judgment, delivered ultimately from sin itself!!

Celebrate Christ's total victory!! More on that next week!!