God, Are You There?

Habakkuk 3:1-15

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*There was a couple walked past their son’s bedroom one evening and heard him talking out loud. They peeked through the crack in his door and saw him standing on his bed with his head lifted up towards the ceiling. He was saying, “God, are you there? God? God, are you listening? God? God, are you there?” The parents went in and asked him what he was doing. He said he wanted to talk to God, but he couldn’t see God, and he was just wondering if God was there.*

This morning & evening we’re going to go walking along with Habakkuk on his journey from *doubt to faith*. Habakkuk was a prophet, and yet he still had some questions for God: “Does God care? Is God fair? Is God there?” But instead of running away from God with his questions, Habakkuk brought his questions to God, and he hammered them out in prayer. And God answered Habakkuk every time. It was not always the answer that Habakkuk expected or even wanted, but God answered his questions and led him steadily along the journey from doubt to faith.

Today we look at Habakkuk’s third question: “Is God there?” Chapter 3 records Habakkuk’s closing prayer in his journey. The implied complaint behind this prayer is that God is not there, but unlike the 2 previous questions where he asked God to answer his complaint, Habakkuk answers this one himself as he reflects on God’s works and wonders for Israel over the centuries. It is through this time of prayer and reflection that Habakkuk finally comes to a place of hope and confidence in God that allows him to praise God with rejoicing even as he anticipates the most difficult of circumstances.

Have you ever felt if God was even there or paying attention to you and your situations? Maybe you’re there today and you’re asking yourself “Is God even there?” This is perhaps the most basic of all questions that people ask about God. It is also the most basic level of faith. Hebrews 11:6 tells us: *“...it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*

And yet there is another way we ask the question, “Is God there?” that goes beyond the question of God’s existence. Habakkuk didn’t doubt God’s existence. He wondered about God’s presence. “God, are you there? Do you know what I am going through? Are you there to help me through this time of difficulty? I desperately need your presence. God, are you there?”

That’s what Habakkuk was struggling with. Maybe you are to this morning. What we’ll see here in chapter 3, we find a remarkable prayer where Habakkuk basically answers his own question and finally emerges at a place of faith and confidence rather than doubt and fear. How can you be assured of God’s presence today? Let’s look at chapter 3 together and see what we can learn from Habakkuk’s prayer.

**I. Approach God in an attitude of worship (verses 1-2)**

The first thing we need to learn to do is approach God in an attitude of worship. Not of “entitlement”. This is exactly what Habakkuk does in this chapter. Verse 1 provides the title for the whole chapter: “This prayer was “sung” by the prophet Habakkuk. *(Some translations in the Hebrew adds according to shigionoth, probably indicating the musical setting for the prayer.)*

So, chapter 3 records a prayer for us, from Habakkuk to God. Now when I talk to God in prayer, I usually just talk to him. I don’t craft my words. I don’t plan out any long speeches, any more than when I am talking with a friend or a neighbor. But Habakkuk’s prayer here is a little different.

Chapter 3 closes with instructions for the director of music and mentions stringed instruments. And so, Habakkuk 3 is not only a prayer, but also a psalm. It is a hymn or a worship song. It is a musical prayer. And musical prayers are different from our regular prayers when we talk to God on a day-to-day basis.

* **First,** a musical prayer is a written prayer. It is not just spoken. The author of a written prayer thinks about what he wants to say and then writes it out. It takes time to do that. You may go through several drafts, crossing things out, trying to get your words just right. Most of us aren’t used to writing out our prayers, but it is another valid way that we can communicate with God, sort of like writing God a letter. We write emails to each other, not only when we are far away, but sometimes because we feel we can communicate better through writing than just a conversation. Writing out a prayer can be a valuable way to communicate with God also.
* **Secondly**, a musical prayer is not only a written prayer but also a poem. Poetry uses condensed and heightened language. It requires composition. The writer chooses the words carefully, not only for their content, but also for their imagery, rhythm and rhyme. Not all of us are gifted with poetic language, but if you are gifted in this way, you may want to consider writing out some prayers to God in poetic form.
* **And then thirdly**, a musical prayer is not only a written prayer and a poem. It is also a song. Music adds an additional element to prayer because it engages our emotions in a different way. Also, songs are meant to be sung over and over again. Worship songs are not just one-time prayers, but prayers that can be presented to the Lord repeatedly. And then, another neat thing about worship songs is that songs can be shared, so that a wide range of people can use the words and music of the song to approach God in worship.

I love the worship songs that we sing in church. I thank God for Alyssa who has the ability with words and music to lead & help me in my own worship. And I particularly thank God for the various songs that are recorded for us in the Bible. Because when you read or sing a psalm from Scripture, you have the added dimension that this is also God’s inspired Word. You have the confidence that these words about God are completely true. They have been given to you by God through the writer of the psalm specifically to help you in your worship. This chapter is one of those songs.

Notice how Habakkuk begins his prayer in verse 2: *“I have heard all about you, Lord. I am filled with awe by your amazing works. In this time of our deep need, help us again as you did in years gone by. And in your anger, remember your mercy.”*

He begins with worship.

* Too often we just rush right into prayer with all our requests. If you look in earlier prayers of Habakkuk, they were all complaints to God. Now we know that there is nothing wrong with bringing your questions and complaints to God as we know God wants you to talk honestly with him, but if you want to know God’s presence, you must begin with worship. Worship “ushers” in His presence.

Just a note...Habakkuk closes out chapter 2 by saying: *“But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”* Habakkuk now applies that truth to himself by applying his own heart to worship, in silence...In so much that maybe we should learn to do that sometimes too. “Be Still and Know He is God”

So, how do you worship God?

**A. Adore God for WHO HE IS**

First of all, adore God for who he is, not what He has done or blessed you with, but who He is! Habakkuk prays in verse 2: *“Lord, I have heard all about you (your fame).”* In other words, God is “the famous One.”

* Exodus 15:11 “*Who is like you among the gods, O Lord—glorious in holiness, awesome in splendor, performing great wonders?”*
* Nehemiah 1:5 – *“Then I said, “O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of unfailing love with those who love him and obey his commands.”*

There’s a worship song “Famous One” by Chris Tomlin which goes: “*You are the Lord, the famous one, great is your name in all the earth; the heavens declare you’re glorious, great is your fame beyond the earth.”*

God is awesome. He is magnificent. He is beautiful. He is all-powerful, all-loving, all-righteous, all-wise. He is: “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, to whom be honor and glory for ever and ever.” (1 Timothy 1:17)

* Start learning to focus your heart and your mind on who God is alone and just adore Him. Worship him in the beauty of his holiness. Speak to him; lift up your hands to him; fall down before him. This truly is the 1st step in worshiping God...adoring Him for WHO HE IS!

**B. Praise God for WHAT HE HAS DONE**

After you’ve spent time in just adoration and wonder of who God is then you can praise Him for what he has done for you, for you family, ways that He’s blessed you, kept you and moved on your behalf!

Habakkuk continues praying in verse 2: “*I am filled with awe by your amazing works. (I stand in awe of all your deeds).”*

* Deut. 10:21 “*He alone is your God, the only one who is worthy of your praise, the one who has done these mighty miracles that you have seen with your own eye.”*

Praise him for what he has done not only in your own life, but in all of life. Praise him for his wonderful works in creation. Praise him for his awesome deeds in history. Praise him for calling out a people for his very own. Praise him for sending his Son into the world to accomplish our salvation.

It’s interesting, after adoring God for who he is, Chris Tomlin’s song “The Famous One” continues with a verse praising God for his deeds: “*And for all you’ve done and yet to do, with every breath I’m praising you.”*

How do you worship God? Adore him for who he is and praise him for what he has done.

There’s an acronym to help us understand the 4 basic parts of prayer - ACTS

* **A - stands for adoration,**
* **C - for confession,**
* **T - for thanksgiving,**
* **S - for supplication or making requests.**

These are the four basic ways of approaching God in prayer, and it’s a great way to remember them. But it is also a good order to remember to use in prayer. Begin with adoration and praise, then confess your sins to God, then thank him for his goodness, and then present your requests.

Closing:

Do you want to be assured of God’s presence and know God is there? Stop whining and begin with worship. Learnt to “Be Still and know He is God, and is always there, yet responds to worship. Worship is one of the key rest stops that you make again and again on the journey from doubt to faith. Worship sets your heart back where is should always stay...” Focused on a God who is ALWAYS there! “

**Pt. 2**

**II. Remember God’s mighty deeds of the past (verses 3-15)**

After learning to approach God with an attitude of Worship, to be assured of God’s presence, we need to remember God’s mighty deeds of the past. This is what takes up the bulk of Habakkuk’s’ prayer in chapter 3. At its heart Habakkuk’s psalm is a song that describes God’s awesome presence and deeds.

Verses 3-15 describe what we call a the-OFF-any. The word theophany literally means “an appearance of God.” Of course, no one can actually see God. God is too great; he is too powerful, too majestic, too holy to be seen with human eyes.

* 1 Timothy 6:16 tells us: “...and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will.”
* God told Moses in Exodus “No one may see me and live.”

So, in a theophany people do not actually see God. Rather, they see visible markers of his presence.

* For example, on Mount Sinai when God gave the Ten Commandments, there was thunder, lightning, fire, thick smoke, along with a great earthquake and the sound of a trumpet that grew louder and louder and louder. The people of Israel did not see God that day, but I guarantee you no one was asking, “Is God there?” God was clearly present among them.

Habakkuk 3 presents a similar theophany, but this time in the form of a vision. Unlike God’s appearance at Sinai, Habakkuk uses the language of theophany to proclaim to the people of Israel that God is indeed there. And Habakkuk does this by remembering God’s mighty deeds of the past.

A.

**Word of warning: God conquers all enemies in his path (3-15)**

He begins with a word of warning that God conquers all enemies in his path. Let’s walk you through these verses and unpack some of the imagery together.

**Habakkuk describes God’s awesome appearance (3-7)**

First, Habakkuk describes God’s awesome appearance. God’s visible appearance is pictured first as a great thunderstorm.

* If you have ever been in a powerful storm, you know that it is a meaningful picture of God’s awesome power and majesty. When I was driving back to Tennessee years ago, we were just getting into Texas and there were these ominous black clouds that produced the most intense thunder and lightning I had seen in years! The whole experience left me reflecting on God’s awesome power. Going through the storm was a terrifying experience, and yet it was only a small glimpse of God’s great majesty and power.

In verses 3-4 we read: *“I see God moving across the deserts from Edom, the Holy One coming from Mount Paran. His brilliant splendor fills the heavens, and the earth is filled with his praise. 4 His coming is as brilliant as the sunrise. Rays of light flash from his hands, where his awesome power is hidden.”*

* Teman was south of Israel in the country of Edom. Mount Paran was in the wilderness between Edom and Mount Sinai. And so, God’s coming is pictured a thunderstorm approaching Israel from the south. His brightness lights up the sky. Rays of lightning flash from his hands, yet the full extent of God’s power remains hidden.

Then in verses 5-6 we read: *“Pestilence marches before him; plague follows close behind. 6 When he stops, the earth shakes. When he looks, the nation’s tremble. He shatters the everlasting mountains and levels the eternal hills. He is the Eternal One!”*

* Plague and pestilence are both signs of God’s judgment. Verse 5 can also be translated as “flames went forth from his feet.” It is a picture of God’s awesome power and holiness as he walks through the land judging the earth for its sins. The nations tremble before him; the mountains and hills crumble and collapse in his presence. The word “collapse” in verse 6 literally means “to bow down.” And so, there is the sense of God’s creation bowing down in worship before him. The mountains may be ancient; the hills may have stood since ages-old, but God’s ways are eternal, and so they all fall down before him.

We read in verse 7: “*I see the people of Cushan in distress, and the nation of Midian trembling in terror*.

* Habakkuk sees the nomadic tent-dwellers of Cushan and Midian trembling as God passes them in the wilderness.

And so, in these verses Habakkuk remembers God’s mighty deeds. He describes God’s awesome appearance in these verses.

**2) Habakkuk describes God’s conquest of all his enemies (8-15)**

In verses 8-9 Habakkuk describes God’s conquest over the rivers and the sea: 8 *“Was it in anger, Lord, that you struck the rivers and parted the sea? Were you displeased with them? No, you were sending your chariots of salvation! 9 You brandished your bow and your quiver of arrows.*

There are three different words for anger in these verses: anger, wrath, and rage.

* The word for anger means “hot or burning”.
* the word for wrath means “breath or nostrils”.
* the word for rage means “to pour out or overflow.”

Taken together they speak of God’s burning anger, the fierce blast of breath from his nostrils, his overflowing judgment poured out on his enemies because of their sin.

Verses 9-12 continue: *“9b You split open the earth with flowing rivers. 10 The mountains watched and trembled. Onward swept the raging waters. The mighty deep cried out, lifting its hands in submission. 11 The sun and moon stood still in the sky as your brilliant arrows flew and your glittering spear flashed. 12 You marched across the land in anger and trampled the nations in your fury.*

The fierce wind and earthquake are followed by a downpour. Water floods the earth as in the days of Noah, splitting the earth with rivers. The sea lifts its waves on high, literally, “lifts its hands on high.” This is flood imagery but could also be a sign of submission and praise to the Lord. Even the sun and the moon stand still in fear of God’s awesome power.

The flying arrows and flashing spear are more poetic references to lightning. God striding through the earth is perhaps another reference to thunder. And so, all the forces of nature – the mountains, the rivers and streams, the sea, the sun and the moon – all acknowledge God as he strides through the earth and threshes the nations in judgment.

This next section in verses 13-15 “*You went out to rescue your chosen people, to save your anointed ones. You crushed the heads of the wicked and stripped their bones from head to toe. 14 With his own weapons, you destroyed the chief of those who rushed out like a whirlwind, thinking Israel would be easy prey. 15 You trampled the sea with your horses, and the mighty waters piled high.”*

“From head to toe” in verse 13 is literally “from neck to tail,” picturing God’s conquest of the great dragon Leviathan. Of course, Satan is also called a dragon in Scripture, and so this is also a picture of God’s final conquest of Satan and his forces.

Finally, verse 15 says that God tramples the sea. In the Bible the sea is a symbol of all the evil forces in the world that stand opposed to God.

And so, verses 3-15 are first of all, a word of warning that - God conquers all enemies in his path. But at the same time, they are also words of comfort - that God delivers his people.

On one level Habakkuk’s song gives us this dramatic picture of God coming up from the south and completely destroying all enemies in his path. But on another level, his song is also a dramatic re-telling of God’s deliverance of his people.

So, let’s take a quick trip back through verses 3-15, but this time looking at the song from the perspective of Israel’s history.

* Teman and Paran remind us of God’s presence in the wilderness, where he first revealed himself to Israel.
* The thunderstorm and earthquake remind us of God giving his people the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.
* The plague and pestilence remind us of the ten plagues when God delivered his people from Egypt.
* The victory over the rivers and the sea reminds us of Israel crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan River.
* The sun and moon standing still remind us of Joshua’s victory over the Amorites.
* Piercing the head of the enemy with his own spear reminds us of David cutting off the head of Goliath with his own sword.

In verse 13 Habakkuk speaks of God coming to deliver his people and to save his anointed one. The “anointed one” in the Hebrew language is literally “the Messiah,” the son of David who would come to deliver God’s people for good!

And so, throughout the poem Habakkuk expertly uses imagery that not only describes the defeat of God’s enemies but also recalls God’s great saving acts for his people – their deliverance from Egypt; the Exodus; the crossing of the Red Sea; the giving of the Ten Commandments; their wandering in the wilderness; the conquest of the promised land; David, the anointed king, and the coming Messiah who would bring salvation for his people.

When you are wondering, “Is God there?” how can you be assured of God’s presence? Remember God’s mighty deeds of the past. God conquers all enemies in his path. God comes to deliver his people.

Closing:

But don’t stop there...don’t just remember God’s deeds from the past. Ask God to renew his deeds in the present. That’s what Habakkuk did back in verse 2, remember? He prayed: “I have heard all about you, Lord. I am filled with awe by your amazing works. In this time of our deep need, help us again as you did in years gone by. And in your anger, remember your mercy.”

Habakkuk demonstrates two ways we can ask God to renew his deeds in the present.

* Pray for personal and corporate revival!
  + First of all, pray for both personal and corporate revival. Pray for revival in your own heart first. Pray that God would give you an ever-increasing faith in him and love for him. Pray that God would give you a burning desire for holiness, to see God glorified in all areas of your life. Pray for revival in the church and in the community. I have been praying every week for revival to come to this city and the surrounding communities. God has brought revival in the past. God can bring revival again. Pray that God would renew his deeds in the present.
* Pray for God in his wrath, to remember mercy!
  + And then, as you pray for revival, pray also for God in his wrath to remember mercy. You see, when you ask God to renew his deeds in the present, you are also asking him to bring judgment on the world for its sins. God cannot be active in a world of sin without judging that sin. And so, when you ask God to renew his deeds, also ask him in his wrath to remember mercy.

Now please realize that you don’t have to convince God to do this. You don’t have to somehow persuade God to be merciful. It is God’s nature to show mercy. But when you pray this prayer, you are praying according to God’s will, and so you know it will be answered.

The greatest example of God in wrath remembering mercy took place at the cross. There God poured out his wrath against sin upon his own Son in order that he might show mercy to sinners like you and me who would put their faith in Christ.

Once again, some of you may be struggling with the same questions as Habakkuk: “Does God care? Is God fair? Is God there?” If so, you need to capture Habakkuk’s vision of the God who has done great things for his people in the past and will do them again in the present.

Yes, God is there. He is the famous one! He has never left you, nor will He ever forsake you. He knows what you’re going through and is watching over you this very moment with a perfect way THROUGH to victory! He’s always been there... in the happy moments, in the sad moments, in the light, in the dark, when you’ve been down, and when you’ve been up.

Starting today, rather than allowing the enemy to make you think God’s not there and doesn’t care, try something you’ve maybe never done before...Approach him in an attitude of worship; Know that He always defeat his enemies and always...always...always delivers his people. Then ask God to renew his deeds in the present! Doing this will help you leave doubt behind and begin to journey with the hope and certainty that even in the times it doesn’t seem like He is there...You’ll WALK IN FAITH, knowing, He is always there!