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 SERMON TITLE: **Becoming Courageous Through Faith**
 SCRIPTURE: **Habakkuk 3:17-19**
 DATE: **September 5, 2021**
 View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also *Philippians 2:5-11*

Habakkuk is a message for the nation. We began this study with Habakkuk's concern for his nation. Are you concerned for our nation? Then you can understand this man. Let's remember how things looked:

Israel had turned away from God. They began following the gods of the pagan nations around them. Politics, rather than God, became important. The society was unstable. Violence, abuse of the law, oppression of the righteous was rampant. People were straying away from God's standard. They were going it alone.

Habakkuk was praying, "Are you going to do anything about this, God? There's violence and destruction and strife and contention in our nation. Righteousness is not valued. People are perverted in their judgment of things."

And God was silent, or so it seemed.

So Habakkuk went to his watchtower to seek an answer:

How long, Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen! I'm telling you, "Violence is everywhere!" but you do not come to save. Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. The law has become paralyzed, and there is no justice in the courts.

His approach in prayer is very specific. You can hear the anxiety in his words.

We remember how God rose up an appalling enemy. But then God would teach: *these arrogant people will not prevail*. In the meantime—*The righteous live by their faith*.

That directive informs us about bravely living in the tension by faith in God.

What is the meaning of faith?

Having faith means:

- (1) Recognizing the power of God even in the dark places;
- (2) Having your heart changed by Jesus so that you can live above hard circumstances.

To learn to live by faith is God's plan. It has to happen for this to happen:

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The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14)

It is Christians, you see, who share the knowledge of God—the awareness of the power of God—with others all over the world.

What do we gain by believing in God? How does faith help us to cling to God whether good times or bad? This truth is important on a personal level and on a national level.

Israel as a nation gained a lot from God and God's willingness to act in power.

They were freed from slavery; saved through the waters of the Red Sea; given the Law of God; they conquered cities, gained the land, and established their nation because of faith in God which gave them courage.

We do the very same thing when we approach life through faith in God. We often find that tragedy does not have the last word. Something special comes out of it. But, we have to fight to keep the faith: to understand what it means to walk by faith. The temptation is to get stuck in the tragedy. But righteousness is gained through faith. You cannot have faith and bitterness at the same time. *The righteous live by their faith*. In order to do that, you must humbly release the bad circumstance to God's wisdom.

Habakkuk reviewed the faith of God towards Israel and Israel's faith in God. They were a people who followed God step-by-step (released from Egyptian slavery, getting the Law at Sinai, until they finally formed a nation when they had land). Think of how America formed out of the Reformation, exploring and settling the land, forming a system of government, and uniting as a nation under God.

But Israel split after 120 years over governmental power struggles. They had power struggles within, and began losing their faith in God. They looked to others—comingling with the pagan religions around them. Within 300 years Israel fell. Habakkuk saw the coming fall of the southern kingdom.

He personally had to live by faith through it, and help others—call others to live by faith in those hard times. He knew that by faith, and not bitterness or seeking our own solutions, we can and will survive and even thrive. He wrote this as his conclusion:

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

Ease and no troubles in life is not the sign of success, though we think it is. Success in life is actually relying on God's presence, God's power, and holding God's ways close to you through faith that makes you strong and resilient.

Living with God is to become courageous by faith.

We do this together as the church.

Israel would fall but would God's plans fail? NO! That's the power of faith. Six hundred years later Jesus would be quietly and humbly born.

You heard how humble the whole process was:

- ✓ He gave up his divine privileges
- ✓ Took the position of a slave and was born as a human
- ✓ He practiced obedience to God
- ✓ Died on a cross

Jesus had to live by faith, all the way to the cross. It looked like failure. It didn't look productive.

Jesus didn't look like he was in charge.

But, he had to live by faith in order to teach us to live by faith.

Jesus is often defined as weak, meek, and mild. I assure you he was none of these things. He had completely mastered the lifestyle of faith and that's what he taught.

Habakkuk described it like this:

Even when nothing looks promising and life looks barren and dead, I have joy, salvation, surefootedness, and strength.

He became courageous through faith.

Do you want to be courageous and surefooted? Or weak and fearful, battered around by life?

While the humility of Jesus may be seen as "uninformed and unintelligent," Jesus took another route and rose to the highest honor before God. The whole world has been changed by his actions and those of his disciples, people like you and me.

Becoming courageous through faith—that's our opportunity when times are dark. Do so, and you will be elevated too. You will become "as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights."

What Habakkuk is saying is that "He will make me able to walk upon my high places"—that is, the high places of my country that were currently occupied by the enemy.

Think of it like this. When our country was attacked on 9-11 and our buildings were knocked down, someone had a claim on those buildings.

In fact, his name was Larry Silverstein, who had signed a \$3.2 billion 99-year lease on the World Trade Center six weeks before, in 2001. He said 9-11 "was probably the worst day of my life."

He recalls the actions of people:

"Thousands of New Yorkers decided to come down to the site. . . . They simply volunteered to put themselves in terrible danger . . . and endeavor to rescue people. It was New York at its finest. . . . I was so proud to know that these people were coming down to help the best they could."

Mr. Silverstein immediately decided to rebuild after the 9/11 attacks. It wasn't easy. It took courage and faith to fight legal battles with seven insurance companies. But they finally developed a plan that was acceptable to everyone. The disaster zone became "a business center with three skyscrapers, a transportation hub, a museum and a memorial."

Silverstein began the project when he was 70. Recently he said, "We're still not finished. But since I'm only 90, no rush. I have plenty of time."¹

That sounds like a courageous, joyful man with a purpose. What more could you want?

AMEN

P.S.

Mr. Silverman was actually saved by a miracle that day. He had a meeting scheduled in one of the towers that morning. But his wife stopped him before he left and told him he couldn't go. He said, "Why not?" She said, "Because I made an appointment for you with a dermatologist, and that's something you canceled last month and you cannot cancel again." He said, "When you are married for 45 years to the same woman and she gets upset, you can't let that happen." As a result, his life was saved.²

¹ Reuters, "The man behind the rebuilding of 9/11's Ground Zero," at <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/man-behind-rebuilding-911s-ground-zero-2021-09-01/>, accessed September 2, 2021.

²Michael Bachner, "Larry Silverstein: I decided to rebuild World Trade Center just 2 days post-9/11," The Times of Israel, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/larry-silverstein-i-decided-to-rebuild-world-trade-center-just-2-days-post-9-11/amp/>, accessed September 2, 2021.