

THOSE WEIRD LITTLE BOOKS | HABAKKUK

Nau mai ke ti whare Karakia (welcome to church)

Kia ora, ko Jude takou ingoa

30yr ago – proposal – ring buying

Looking down on a sat avo – no ring – searching – unit, Bush Inn

Sunday morning – worship leading at Hornby –
Scripture in Song – Habakkuk 3.17-18

"Though the fig tree does not blossom 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 Saviour."

How do I lead these words when I've lost something so precious?

And I know that most of us will have also lost someone/something precious.

How do we rejoice and be joyful in the face of that loss?

Let us look at what led Habakkuk (another one of the minor prophets) to write the words that we find in another one of 'those weird little books'.

Habakkuk differs from the other minor prophets in that he doesn't speak on behalf of God, and he doesn't accuse Israel of sin. This book is a poem of questions and of lament.

Lamenting and questioning are God's gift to believers.

A lament is a faithful protest to God – Psalms – where 1/3 is prayers/songs of lament, Job and Lamentations – the whole books are expressing the pain and confusion of unbearable suffering by the faithful, and even Jesus – lamented faithfully to his Father from the cross – My God, my God why have you forsaken me? ..he models how it is to be honest with God thru our lament.

Faithful protest says - God – how could you allow.....?

Unfaithful protest says -How could God allow.....?

Habakkuk's protest is done out of the conviction that God is good all the time.

This is a conversation between Habakkuk and God – with Habakkuk telling God of his struggle.

And this is his struggle: Is God good when there is so much evil and wrong in the world?

Look God – there is injustice and suffering – Do something.

Chapters 1 and 2 - Habakkuk lists out his complaints:

Life is horrible.

The Torah is neglected.

There is violence and injustice.

The leadership is corrupt and allowing the violence to occur.

Why won't You listen??

God replies: Look –I am very aware of that and I'm using the terrifying empire of Babylon to bring punishment and justice on my wicked people. (this is similar to the book of Micah and Isaiah).

Habakkuk replies: WHAT!!! Babylon is even worse than Israel!! How can you a good and holy God use such corrupt nations as your instruments in history??

He demands an answer and explanation from God and depicts himself standing as a watchman on the city walls waiting for Gods answer.

God replies: Get out some tablets and write down a vision of a time in the future which may seem slow in coming but it will eventually come- 2.4 *the righteous will live by their faith* in this hope and vision.

God promises that he will bring down Babylon – even though this may take some time and there will be cycles of rise and fall of corrupt nations – it doesn't mean that God endorses what they do because He holds all nations accountable to His justice.

Habakkuk prays -he pleads with God to act now -like He has in the past- bringing down corrupt nations. He says that God will defeat evil, bring justice, rescue the oppressed. But even if the world is falling apart, he will choose to trust.

He trusts that God loves this world more than he does and that He will one day deal with its evil.

Chapter 3 creates and maintains hope in the face of a bleak future and gives a resource for survival following the destruction of Babylon's attack.



How are they to have hope in this situation - look back and look up.

Habakkuk looks back and lists God's victories and remembers all that God has done – their rescue from Egypt, miracles and provision in the desert, the Promised land, victories over nations that attacked them – he confesses the historic deeds of God.

Habakkuk looks up and around at God's creation – which is a witness to God's glory – the sun and moon, the rivers and seas, vast mountains – the awe that is inspired by God's majesty in acts of creation.

And he is able to write these words:

¹⁷ *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 Saviour.*

¹⁹ *The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.*

How do we do this??

Habakkuk is like Job – “shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

Lamentations is full of gritty expressions of faith in a loving God despite immediate evidence to the contrary.

*I will remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.*

²¹ *Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:*

²² *Because of the LORD's great love we are not
consumed,
for his compassions never fail.*

²³ *They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

²⁴ *I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him.”*

Resolving to rejoice in God in all circumstances

William Brown said - only by plumbing the depths of our deepest pain and disillusionments and lifting them up in conversations with God can this type of joy be known

Habakkuk had every reason NOT to rejoice – he knows that even though he is a righteous man, he and lots of others are going to suffer hardship and even death – you can't get worse than that – but he knows that despite circumstances, life is good, God is good and God is the source of hope and joy. And that happens because God is present to him – speaks to him, listens to his questions, and gives him a vision of His presence and a song to write about it

Experiencing the gifts of confidence and hope from God

The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.

We can have sure feet in difficult times and places – and that is to be celebrated. God gives the gift of faith to us when we need and ask for it

Our daily prayer, worship, reading and remembering His word give strength. We celebrate the resurrection as a cosmic victory over death. Death and chaos are defeated by God

For the original readers -living by faith meant believing God's words given thru Habakkuk.

Faith meant claiming the radical faith of 3.17-19 as their own even when they were in exile far, far away from their homes without a temple.

Faith meant waiting for over 70 years to be able to return to their whenua – their land.

Faith meant trust and even joy, during pain and struggle.

I have lost a father-in-law (Pete's Dad at 54 – 4 months after we got married), 2 Aunts, 2 uncles, and 2 cousins to cancer. It was my cousin Jane that I struggled with the most – she had a wonderful husband and a beautiful wee boy. So much prayer and faith surrounded her, and I believed right up to the end that God was going to do a miracle, but He didn't, and I was gutted.

It is alright to question and rage at God and I faithfully protested– God how could you allow this to happen?

Though kids are not walking with God, and family relationships are strained;

Though work is unrewarding and thankless, and workplaces are toxic;



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Though finances are at breaking point, and there is no way out;

yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.

Though health issues are causing fear and worry, and the future is looking dark;

Though loneliness is a constant companion and isolation makes everything a struggle;

Though Covid has wrecked plans and shattered dreams and lifestyles;

yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.

Though the weather is awful, and a lot of stock hasn't made it;

Though house prices are soaring and the dream of owning or even renting seems impossible;

Though anxiety and depression mean that it feels like you are walking through treacle;

yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.

And like the original readers - for us, living by faith means believing Gods words given thru Habakkuk.

Faith means trust and even joy, during pain and struggle.

REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. How do you cope or handle life when hard things happen?
2. What's your strategy? When did you last rage at God?
3. Look back. Look around. How might this work for you?
4. Is God really good to you?

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