

There Is Still a Song

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon encourages believers to trust and rejoice in God despite life's challenges and uncertainties.

Duration: 29:10

Scripture: Exodus 3:8, Job 13:15, Psalm 50:10, Isaiah 55:8-9, Habakkuk 3:17-18, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28

Topics: "Hope"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the prophet Habakkuk and his cry to God about the evil and oppression he sees in the world. Habakkuk questions why God allows such injustice to happen. The preacher emphasizes that true faith is demonstrated when we trust God even when we don't understand His ways, just like Job did. The sermon concludes with Habakkuk's declaration of rejoicing in the Lord, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Transcript

Let's go over just something to introduce these remarks, which I think are important. When Solomon succeeded David, his father, as king, he reigned over Israel from Jerusalem, and toward the end of his life, he started to drift away. He didn't have a few wives.

He had a few hundred wives. What was he thinking? And then he left a very kind of questionable legacy for his son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam became king, and immediately there was a civil war, and the kingdom of Israel was divided.

It was divided because Rehoboam wanted to continue the heavy taxation that Solomon had put upon the people to build all of his temples for his wives, and because Rehoboam had no wisdom, he treated the people harshly, and they rebelled. So now there were two kingdoms in the Bible, and when you read through Kings and Chronicles, if you don't understand this, you'll be totally at a loss. The northern kingdom was called Israel.

It was made up of 10 tribes, and basically you could say the capital was in Samaria, which was the middle of the land of Israel. The other kingdom was called Judah. So there was the kingdom of Israel, 10 tribes, a lot more people, a lot bigger army.

The southern kingdom was called Judah, and the capital was Jerusalem, and in that, that was the advantage they had, because all the people knew if you want to worship God, what city do you go to? Why do you go to Jerusalem? Because that's the only place in the world where there's the temple of God. Solomon's temple was there, and in Solomon's temple, there was the only place where God said, you can offer blood sacrifices and other sacrifices to me. You can't offer it on a mountain.

You can't go over here, there in your neighborhood. You got to come to Jerusalem to the temple. Well, the northern kingdom started their own religion because they were afraid that people would keep going to Jerusalem, and then the ties would be knit with that southern kingdom.

So basically, as you read through the Bible, you have two lines of kings, the kings of Israel, the northern kingdom. There wasn't one good one in the whole lot, starting with Jeroboam, the first king, going all the way until the end of that kingdom. In the south, it was a mixed bag.

They had some great kings like Jehoshaphat, King Uzziah. There was a number of good kings, King Asa, and then there were some nasty kings who departed from the ways of God. Now, in both places, there was a turning away from God.

It just so happens that it seems to be the human condition that we need revivals and preachers and stirrings from God because left to ourselves, we don't draw nearer to God. Left to ourselves, we drift away from God. That's the history of the Christian church.

That's just the way it is. To try to call the people back to God, God had a certain ministry type, ministry grouping called prophets. Although Moses is called a prophet, and Abraham, I think, is even one place called a prophet, really the prophets began formally with Samuel, who developed something called the School of the Prophets, where these men would meet together and pray.

There were women prophets as his too. So what would the prophet do? God raised up these people, some we know very little about, some we know more about. They would appear throughout the history of the northern kingdom, men like Hosea, in the southern kingdom, people like Isaiah.

They would speak the word of the Lord. They would warn the people or encourage the people or talk about future events as the spirit enabled them to do it, and that was the ministry of the prophet. The priesthood had become corrupt at most times, and the kings were a mixed bag.

So the one who walked with God and brought the word of God back in those days was the prophet of God. He couldn't speak his own opinion. He could only speak what he heard or what he saw.

In fact, the first name of a prophet in the Bible was not a prophet but a seer, S-E-E-R, because what prophets did was they saw things. They saw visions. They saw things in the spirit, and then they would take what they saw, put it in human words, and then that would be their message.

They were called seers. They were a brave bunch because they never thought once what the people want to hear. You couldn't be a prophet if you wanted to be popular.

It's not like preachers today who do studies on what people want to hear and what generation X and this generation and millennials and all of this stuff, what do they want to hear, and let's tell them what they want to hear. The prophet never knew anything about that. Prophet just waited before God.

God gave him a message, and the warning from God was, you better tell the people all the words that I give you. A lot of prophets were killed because they said things that the king didn't like, and the kings would then order them to be executed or jailed. Jeremiah was in the slammer for a season, and other prophets just appeared and disappeared.

We know very little about some of them. Just so you know your Old Testament Jewish history a little bit better, the northern kingdom was more morally bankrupt than the southern kingdom of Judah and Benjamin. Those were the two tribes.

The 10 northern tribes, they went to idolatry like a fish goes to water. They were worshiping all the gods of the Canaanite people that they had replaced. In other words, the gods of the land, they embraced instead of hanging on to the true God.

The prophets would warn them and tell them, thus saith the Lord, if you turn your back on me, it will not be good for you. For what a person sows, they're also going to reap, and so on and so forth. And they would predict with accuracy what God was about to do.

The northern kingdom was warned and warned and warned, and then God started to warn them specifically and say, I'm going to raise up someone to punish you. In this case, I'm going to raise up the Assyrian empire. And sure enough, after a couple hundred years of kings, the Assyrian empire came, attacked Samaria, wiped out everything, killed the kings, wiped out the leadership, and they did an interesting thing.

They took the people who lived in those 10 tribes, and they scattered them all over the Assyrian empire. They had this great thought that if you divide them and spread them out, that will weaken them. They won't cluster together and get strong.

There's strength in numbers. And then what they did was they took people from the Assyrian empire and put them in where the 10 tribes were, so that Israel was now inhabited by people who weren't Jewish. They were from all over the Assyrian empire.

And then they mixed and intermarried with Jewish people, and then it really got crazy. And it was a foreign religion, and God was forgotten. You would think that the southern kingdom watching this would have said, wow, we better get back to God.

We better serve God. It pays to serve God. The wisest thing we could do is honor God and worship God.

No, they didn't learn that. For a while they did, but they started to not listen to the prophets who God was sending to them. So God began to say through these prophets, now listen, see what happened to your cousins in the northern kingdom? It's going to happen to you because I'm going to raise up the Babylonians, and I'm going to come, and they're going to conquer you.

And you're so proud of your temple, they're going to knock the temple to the ground. You're so proud of Jerusalem, they're going to tear the walls of Jerusalem down. You boast in your name and in your Jewishness, but I don't care about your Jewishness.

I care about your heart. What good is it to be Jewish if your heart isn't right with God? How many say amen? What good does it do to come to the Brooklyn Tabernacle if your heart's not right with God? So on and so forth, this was the story of the prophets. And a couple hundred years after the northern kingdom

went under, sure enough, Jerusalem was conquered, and the people went away to what is called the 70-year captivity, which was foretold by one of the prophets that God would send them and disperse them into the Babylonian empire, same kind of thing, except the Babylonians didn't come to live in Jerusalem.

They didn't want to know about it. But the Jewish people were scattered, men like, oh, do you ever hear of a guy named Daniel? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These were the guys that were yanked out of the land of Israel and spread throughout the Babylonian empire.

One of the prophets who we know the least about, almost, was a prophet toward the end of the history of the southern kingdom, Judah, Jerusalem, which lasted longer than the northern kingdom, as I just mentioned. He was a contemporary of Isaiah, and his name was Habakkuk. Everybody say Habakkuk.

Habakkuk just appears, and he's got a problem. His prophecy is only about three chapters long, and here's Habakkuk's problem. He's all out for God, but as he's living in the land of God's people, he sees wickedness everywhere.

He sees the wicked prospering over the godly. He sees the godly getting mangled and the ungodly going, you can't do anything. He sees people getting ripped off, poor people, children.

He sees all of this evil, and in the beginning of his prophecy, he begins to cry out to God, and he says, God, every place I look, I see evil. Every place I see oppression, every place I turn, my heart can't take it, and you're holier than I am. So God, a very short little statement of five, six verses, seven verses, he just says, God, what's going down here? I can't take this.

Well, then God answers back to him, and the answer makes him even more messed up in his mind, because God says to him, I see everything you see, and I'm going to raise up a people called the Babylonians, and I'm going to bring them. They're going to come like an army, like locusts. They're going to come like a million horses stampeding.

They're going to come. They're going to come. In other words, these people are going to learn it's better to serve God than to turn your back on God, because now God wants to get their attention, and he's bringing punishment, which he promised, and they'll have no mercy, and they'll give no quarter, and they are going to wipe out the people, and there's going to be a lot of bloodshed, and the walls are going to come down, and the temple will be debased.

So this sets Habakkuk off even more. At first, he just saw the evil of God's people, but now he says this, so God, you're holy. You can't look at evil, and these Babylonians are more wicked than the people you're sending them to punish.

We Jews are bad enough, but the Babylonians have no mercy. They're idolaters. How can you, a holy God, use an ungodly people like the Babylonians to bring punishment on your own covenant people? How can that happen? He's perplexed, and he ends up saying at the end of this little appeal to God, this lament, he says, all I can do is this.

I'm going to go up into my tower, and I'm going to see what God will say to me. Notice, I will see what God will say to me. You would think he would say, I would listen to what God will say to me, but prophets didn't think that way, because many times what God shows us comes in the form of a vision, but it's translated quickly into words in our mind and our heart.

I'm going to wait on my tower until I see what God will say to me, because I can't figure this out. First of all, the land is full of wickedness, and now the people that God is sending, they're more wicked than the people who are wicked. What in the world is God doing? That's a great lesson for us.

When you don't know what's happening, you got to get up on a tower and wait to see what God will say to you, because life, many times, as we're going to learn now, does not make sense. Whatever formula you heard from the preacher, and whatever little slogans you've heard, there's times in life when it overruns every little formula and verse you think you've ever learned. Am I right or wrong? Yeah.

This is what happened to Habakkuk. By the way, right in the time when he's saying, I'll go into a tower and see what God will say, God says right before that, but the wicked are going to do this, and I'm in control, but the just shall live by faith. That's what Paul quotes when he's going to give us the meaning of the new covenant of what it means to be a Christian.

You don't earn salvation from God. The just shall live by faith, what God's looking for is trust. So what Habakkuk learns is you have to trust God when you don't understand God.

You have to trust him when everything around you does not make sense. Faith comes into its fullest bloom and is most pleasing to God when you don't know why whatever's happening is happening, but you say, like Job said, though God slay me, yet I will trust him. I do not understand what's going on.

So he's learning that. Well, then the book ends this way. It's a short book.

The prophecy ends by Habakkuk crying out to God in the midst of the years, remember mercy, revive your people is what he says. Revive your people. And he says, God, judge the wicked, and he laments and he makes this cry to God.

And then to end the book, he says something which has been very helpful to me at different times in my life. And what he says is this, 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.

What a phenomenal, yeah, let's put our hands together for the word of God. So what do we learn from all of this? He not only learned to trust God when you don't understand what's happening, he learned to go beyond trust. He learned to rejoice and praise God when he had nothing in this world to look at and say, wow, look what God has done.

Anybody can praise God when the cattle are in the barn, when the fig tree is overflowing with fruit, when God is just richly blessing you. Who can praise God? I know people don't even love God. They can thank God for certain things.

The test of faith and the test of rejoicing and praise is when the bottom falls out, when everything goes sideways, when your heart is broken and someone sticks a knife in your back and turns it once or twice and you have no logical reason, nothing you can grab ahold of and say, thank you, God, for this. It's just, let's read it again. Let's read it again.

It bears repeating. Let's look at that passage. Read it with me out loud.

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 stall, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God, my Savior. Now, I'd like to tell you from the study of my own life, the Bible, talking to countless numbers of people over the years and a vast amount of reading in the biographies and autobiographies of great men and women of God, everyone I have ever studied and come across and been blessed by have come to points in life where you say, where in the world is God in this situation? It doesn't make sense because you can't put God in a box.

And yeah, there are verses that we stand on and we have our little mental boxes of doctrinal positions, but how many have found life gets messy sometimes? And how many have ever come to a situation where you have no idea what's going on? Just lift your hand if you've ever had some of that. Like, what is God doing? I prayed, I've been sincere, I did this, I did that, and everything went sideways. The child I raised is rebelling and away from God.

Did I do wrong? Just heartache, disappointment, the bottom comes out because we forget that God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. And listen, we have these little mental formulas and things, this is the way God works. You do this and that's going to come.

It doesn't always happen that way. Remember our reading from this week, Paul and Silas and Philippi, are they anointed? Did God send them there? Did God use them? Did people get converted? And where were they at midnight? In the slammer, in the prison, and got beat before that midnight came. And the beatings then weren't like this, they opened up their backs.

And yet at midnight, they were praying and worshiping God. How in the world can you worship God when God sends you someplace and you end up in a prison and get a beating for doing nothing? And he shouldn't have got a beating because we later learn he was a Roman citizen and they should have never touched him, right? Because that's the thing about faith and praising God. If you're in a situation now that's very difficult, God permitted it so that you can learn to trust him.

If you're in a situation that's a heartache to you, look at me, I've known some heartache in my life and you have too. I don't want you to cry over me, I'm not going to cry over you. We both know that life can deal some heavy blows, can't they? But to be able in the midst of it.

Well, where's all your cattle? God promised a cattle on a thousand hills. There's no cattle in the stall, yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Well, wait a minute, where's the fruit of the vine? God said when you go to the land, it's flowing with milk and honey and there'll be all kinds of just ruby red grapes and dates and pomegranates and all of that.

Where? I see nothing. I know I don't see anything either, but I'm still going to rejoice in God, my savior, my salvation. Where are those horses that you went ahead? Where's the cattle? Where's everything that God promised? I don't see it right now.

I know I don't get it either, but you know what? God's ways are not my ways, so I'm going to praise him anyhow. I don't know what's going on. Everybody lift up your hands and just begin to praise God out loud right now.

Just praise God for whatever you're going through. We praise you, God. We honor you, God.

We bless you, God. We rejoice in you, God. We rejoice in you, God.

Though we don't understand, though we don't see, we're going to run in our tower and see what you're going to say, but while we're waiting, we will rejoice in the God of our salvation. We're going to have no shallow theology that quits when things don't go well, but we're going to rejoice in you. We're going to rejoice in you.

I want to share one little blessing with you, and then we'll end by just spending time just praising God and rejoicing in God. If you walk out of here sad, the ushers have been instructed to stop you at the door and send you back in here until you're happy in the Lord. How many say amen? For the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Therefore, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation, though the fig tree doesn't yield anything. See, that's real to me. Little simple platitudes, and you pray.

I know so many people have been like yo-yos all my life. When things are going good, they're close to God, praising God. Things go south, they don't even know God.

They don't mention God, take his name in vain, wouldn't open the Bible. Why? I'm mad at God it didn't work out. You ever hear people say that? I get scared when I hear people say that.

I always think lightning and thunder is going to come, and I might get caught up in the whole thing. My daughter was away from us and from God for about a year and a half, year and three quarters, and we're praying and fasting and praying, and she wasn't getting better. She's getting worse.

She's getting harder, harder, and then I feel the Lord impressed me. Stop talking to her, just talk to me about it, and she's going to wreck and ruin her life. So one Saturday night, I'm preparing to preach to you.

Meanwhile, I was just asking God also, please give me the strength to get to church and not collapse in front of the people, because if they knew everything I was feeling inside, they would stop the meeting and just all run up and lay hands on me, but I want to minister to them. It's about 1.30 in the morning, and I'm sitting in a chair in the living room in the house I lived in in Queens when I lived in Queens, and I'm just calling on God, and tears are coming, and I can't make sense of anything. The more I pray, the worse she gets.

Maybe I should stop praying. She'll get better. How many have ever prayed for something and it gets worse? Come on.

Come on. Let's be real. Sometimes it's got to get worse before it gets better.

So the Lord just speaks to me, I feel, and says, do you believe I'm going to do this? You believe I'll bring her back? I know you will. I know you will, God. I know you will.

When I bring her back, I want you to tell about it wherever I send you around the world. That was as real as this speaker. I want you to tell about it.

I will, God, just through tears. So you know I'm going to bring her back. Yes, God.

She was at her worst. Then stand up and praise me. No, but God, when she comes back, I'll praise you.

No, I want you to praise me before she comes back, when the stall is empty, and there's no fruit on the vine, and there's no cattle, and there ain't nothing. You praise me then, because the just shall live by faith.

The just shall live by a faith that's so real, it can praise God when there's nothing visible to praise God for.

Every eye closed. If you're here today going through no fruit on the vine, no cattle in the stall, no sheep in the pen, things have gone sideways, bottom come out. You don't know what's going on.

There's some pain in your heart, hurt. Get up out of your seat and come up here. You're going to lead the way in praising God.

Of course, your praise is more valuable than the person who's just doing fine tonight. They should be praising God, and their praise is valuable, but when you have nothing, nothing to praise God visibly for, and yet you're still going to praise him by faith? You're going to be like Habakkuk. You're going to wait on your tower and say, I'm going to praise God though I see nothing.

I feel nothing. There's not an encouragement or a crutch I can lean on, but you know what? I will still rejoice in the God of my salvation. That's how sure I am he loves me.

Anybody else? Come down from the balcony. We're going to just worship God. You that are sitting, you can stay seated.

You can stand. You can do whatever you want. I do not want anyone to ask God for anything for the next five, 10 minutes.

How many will obey that and be with me? Say amen. I do not want you to ask God. He already knows what you need.

He already knows what you need. He knows what I need. He knows what you need.

He knows your heart is broken. He knows there's no fruit on the vine. He knows there's nothing in the stall.

He knows that. He knows you did the right thing, and now you've been beat up, and you're in prison. He's going to see if you're going to sing at midnight or whether you're going to complain and get bitter.

Let's lift our hands and just praise him out loud. Just praise him out loud. Just say, thank you, Jesus.

Thank you, Jesus. We praise you. God, we're going to praise you through tears.

God, teach us to trust you. Make us a church filled with faith. Make our men filled with faith.

Let our women be filled with faith that doesn't waver like a leaf in the wind, doesn't go by what it sees, but rather goes by who you are, that hangs on to your promises, though there's no cattle in the barn, sheep in the pen. The trees are bare. We see nothing.

Understand very little. Give us the faith that says, yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. In his perfect time, he will come through.

He will answer. He will respond. His name will be glorified in my life.

His ways are past finding out. Deepen our roots into you, God, so that no matter what happens in the earth, in our lives, we are rock solid with you. We know who you are.

We're able to say with the apostle Paul, I know in whom I have believed, and I'm persuaded he's able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day. You can do anything but fail. Remind us of that every day.

You can do everything but fail. One thing you cannot do is you cannot fail. And we praise you today.

We're going to walk out of this building into the cold, God. We're going to praise you. We're going to be rejoicing.

There will not be one downcast soul. There will be not one sad face. There'll be nobody in depression.

We're going to be rejoicing in you because we don't understand a lot of things. I don't understand ISIS and everything going on, but I know that you are God, and you are awesome, and you love us, and you gave your son for us. We love you, Jesus, and we worship you in spirit and in truth.

Let your spirit come upon us. Quicken any fainting heart, any downcast soul. Lift it up in the name of Jesus.

Remind them how much you love them. If you gave us your son, how much more will you give us everything else that we need? Turn around right now and tell someone you love them with the love of the Lord. God bless you.

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