

Defiant Joy

Opening Prayer:

*Our Father and our God, thank You for the sweetness of gathering before You this day, and thank you for the grace in which we stand because of Jesus our Lord. Help us now to **grow** in grace and knowledge as we trust Your Holy Spirit to lead us in to all truth. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.*

This morning's devotion is entitled **Defiant Joy**. So please open your Bibles to the book of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

- I. A quick overview of the short 3 chapter book of Habakkuk.
 - a. This book is a back and forth dialogue between the prophet and God about the unpunished wickedness, destruction, and seeming lack of justice going on in Judah. And which is then ultimately followed by the prayer of reflection and remembrance we just heard – which is a culmination of Habakkuk's rejoicing because he's come to trust not in circumstances, but in the Lord **Himself** who is his strength.
 - b. So, in the first two chapters the prophet's faith is troubled, but in chapter 3 his faith is triumphant.
 - c. By the end of the book, Habakkuk is a changed person – he has learned to wait and trust in God, who works out all things for His glory (ESV).

- II. Which means the story ends well for the prophet. But we also have to see that this book tells us, as the Bible often does, that God's people do suffer.
 - a. In the OT, as in this case, afflictions were often a form of judgment. In the NT, we're told that sometimes that's still true – in the form of painful consequences for sin. But suffering also tells us these important things...
 - 1) It tells us that this is not how it was meant to be in the beginning. God's original design for us was garden walks with Him in the cool of the day (Gen 3).
 - 2) It also tell us that painful experiences are not the **end** of all things. They can't be, for we're passing through, on our way to the Celestial City.

- 3) Which means that our present aches are a **contrast** that points us to something different, something other than...to when things ARE how they were meant to be and that IS the end of all things.
- 4) But in the meantime, in these moments in between the now and not yet, we are called upon to remember and not forget...as Moses was fond of saying to the Israelites in Deuteronomy, “remember, don’t forget.”
- 5) What do we remember? That the God of both our present and future hope is greater than our present hardships; and that this very fact infuses our experiences with meaning.
- 6) Which is to say, we don’t minimize the hardship, we simply place it up against something brighter.
- 7) We still have to contend with the messy and painful; but at the same time, we look to the brighter thing, the contrasting thing, and because of that, lay hold of Defiant Joy.

- III.** We lay hold of a Defiant Joy that says my present circumstances – good, bad, or indifferent – are not the final word.
- a. Of joy that is just a *little louder* than the competing voices of life.
 - b. Of joy that is the *chorus* of our songs, even our songs of lament.
 - c. Of joy that beats its drum in time *with difficulty*, giving it a different cadence.
 - d. Of joy that allows us to sing at all. Did you notice that the final line of Habakkuk’s book said: “To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.” This prayer and its conclusion of determined rejoicing was meant to be sung.
 - e. Defiant joy like that says there is something else, *Someone* else who speaks a better word.
 - f. It is a joy that says, “But God...”
- IV.** When I was a little girl there was a park down the street from my house, Oeste Park, where someone worked every day – back when that was a thing. I remember being at the park one morning, I was maybe 8 or 9, and this woman came out of her little office area to say hi. We got to talking and she sweetly turned the conversation to the Lord. Not evangelizing... At one point she turned her face upward and said, “Thank you Lord. Oh how I love You Jesus.”
- a. I cannot tell you the impact that moment had on me. Not her words, necessarily, though they were important. But her manner and countenance. Her face shone as if having beheld the glory of the Lord. And let me tell you, something in my spirit quickened.
 - b. It’s clear to me now that because Jesus had captured her affections, this woman manifested a joy unspeakable and I knew then, I wanted that.
 - c. I didn’t know what the joy of the Lord was at 8, but I knew she had something I wanted.
- V.** Fast forward a decade and more to when I would come to understand that it is the glory of God’s presence that is our fullness of joy.

- a. What the Psalmist tells us ***Psalms 16:11...in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.***
- b. In **Acts 2:28** Peter attributes those words to Jesus, who indeed is seated at the right hand of God.
- c. And in the mystery of union with Christ, we are seated in heavenly realms, blessed with every spiritual blessing. Paul tells us that twice in Ephesians: ***Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,***
Ephesians 2:4-6 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

VI. So the fullness of this joy is found in the Lord's presence. But what is Joy, and what is it not?

- a. It isn't happiness – a good, but garden variety emotion.
- b. It isn't peace – that's shalom and an entirely different experience.
- c. In **1 Thess 5:16-18** it's something that's commanded (even as a PAP...keep on rejoicing), so it's not exactly an emotion; but rather a state of being...much like contentment is a state, not an emotion.
- d. Well, literally, it can be defined two ways: leaping and spinning, which is why rejoicing and joy are quite alike, even interchangeable. I think of rejoicing as active joy.
- e. Or it can be defined as calm delight: gladness...(Strong's)
- f. These are helpful definitions because they also tell us that joy can look different at different times.
- g. I think that's why Paul can include rejoicing in his experience in 2 Corinthians 6, in a long list of seemingly contradictory facts: ***unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; (9) as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; (10)***

VII. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Active joy amidst sorrow.

- a. Sounds a little strange, but haven't we all experienced an odd paradox like that at some point.
- b. The morning my dad died, and many of you know what a monumental loss that was for me, my whole family was gathered around my dad's bedside. We had kept watch through a very long, grueling night. And when he had passed, we said our goodbyes and reckoned with a future without him. But also, interestingly, after I kissed my cherished dad for the last time, I walked out into the backyard of my childhood home, looked up at the sky, knelt down and began to sing...with true joy in my heart.

- c. I wasn't celebrating the fact that my dad was with the Lord. I wasn't relieved that his suffering was done. I wasn't thinking that the years of caregiving were over. I wasn't thinking of any of those things, I was crushed.
- d. Yet there I knelt, singing with my hands raised to heaven. Moved to do so, not by discipline or obligation, but something else, something better.
- e. I was simply moved by the Spirit – in the Spirit – to go to the Lord, and I was able to do so with mysterious joy. Not the leaping kind, but the calm, quiet kind.
- f. So there I was,...singing. Now, I wasn't singing a hymn, I wasn't a Presbyterian yet :-) It was a contemporary Christian song that filled my mind as I sang these words:

You are beautiful my sweet, sweet song
 You are beautiful my sweet, sweet song

You are so good to me, You heal my broken heart
 You are my Father in Heaven
 You are so good to me, You heal my broken heart
 You are my Father in Heaven

You are beautiful my sweet, sweet song
 You are beautiful my sweet, sweet song
 And I will sing again

- g. Out of the overflow of the heart, my mouth was declaring both present and future grace. And I believe all I brought to that moment was the awareness of my position in the family of God, and a surrender to my heavenly Father's love. Neither of which I rehearsing, they're just there, by the Spirit.
- h. It's helpful to note here that the declaration in Psalm 16...*in the presence of the Lord is fullness of joy...*is actually preceded by a conscious reflection on God's overarching care and goodness; that's what's in the verses just before.
- i. Which suggests to me that it's as we do nothing more than keep before us the lovingkindness of the Lord that the JOY of the Lord then ushers forth.
- j. Because there I was with a joy upon me that defied understanding and circumstance. I didn't summons or stir it up – if it was that simple, my unbelieving siblings would have done the same. Inexplicably, it was joy **from** the Lord, plain and simple.
- k. If weeping lasts for a night, but joy comes in the morning – it certainly does not emanate from ourselves. **Joy that is defiant, is joy that is provided.**
- l. And this defiant joy ensures that we will sing again, a new song.
- m. In Christ, this joy is provided to us.
 - i. In John 15, after speaking of abiding in Him, **Jesus says, in verse 11, *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*** (Also John 16:24; 17:13)

- ii. “These things” He’s talking about, are the results that come from abiding, or dwelling in the conscious presence of Christ. The *results* are that Christ’s joy may be in us and that joy be FULL...
What does that sound like? *“In the presence of the Lord is the fullness of joy”!!!*
- iii. Maybe that’s why, in part, C.S. Lewis famously remarked that “Joy is the serious business of heaven.” (C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. San Diego: Harvest, 1964, 92-93.)
- n. There are so many circumstances we go through when it’s normal to be consumed with pain, and yet, I just want to give this reminder:
 - i. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing
 - ii. A reminder that somehow, supernaturally, there is a joy that defies the rest.
 - iii. Joy that comes from His presence, and is offered. Whether we call to remembrance Jesus’ words in:
 - 1. John 15
 - 2. Or any number of Psalms that pivot on, *“But you O Lord”...* and thereby bring us back in to the presence of our God and King.

VIII. To Close:

- a. In Jesus’ parables in Luke 15 we read of...
 - i. a shepherd rescuing his lost lamb, laying it across his shoulder, and rejoicing
 - ii. a woman finding her lost coin and calling her friends to rejoice with her
 - iii. and of a lost son returned home to the rejoicing of his Father
- b. So much joy and gladness in these tales of heaven – which all the parables are.
- c. Rev. David Owen Filson wrote this of these parables in Luke 15 in *TableTalk* magazine last year (February 2017, Pg. 19)

All this is grounded in our Lord’s cross, endured for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:1-2). In B.B. Warfield’s “The Emotional Life of Our Lord,” Jesus comes “as a conqueror with the gladness of the imminent victory in His heart.” The word for “joy” in Hebrews 12:1-2 is “a strong one, conveying the idea of exuberant gladness – a gladness which fills the heart.”

But, what could have been joyful in view of the humiliating horrors of the looming cross? If only the page you are reading could turn into a mirror and your reflection appear, you would see the joy set before Him. For you and I are the rescued lamb laid across His shoulders, the lost coin found, the Prodigal Son embraced. You made His heart rejoice then. You make His heart rejoice now. You will make His heart, and He yours, rejoice for all eternity.”

d. **That** is a life changing truth!

IX. May you hold fast to it, thanking the Lord for His mysterious work in your life, asking Him to make His joy complete in you, asking Him to make His joy your strength, and asking Him to make His joy your song, even when it defies explanation.

a. For a life faithfully, gratefully, and joyfully lived is the currency of heaven.

b. And He who calls you is faithful, in whose presence the fullness of joy is found.

X. Amen.