

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Worshiping in the Wilderness

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Series: When in Doubt
Habakkuk 3

**BIG IDEA – TODAY HABAKKUK SHOWS US HOW TO WORSHIP IN
THE WILDERNESS**

Guys, if you're joining us, if you're new, we are in a little book about a big God. It's the book of Habakkuk. It's interesting. I'm about a year ahead in sermon planning, so I always know what series and books of the Bible I'm going to preach on about 12 months out, but I never know what God is going to do in a series.

I had this series planned before we lost our friend, my friend, and one of our elders this year, Andy Jump, and before Adam passed away, as you saw last week. I never know what God is going to do through a series. God is always doing hundreds or thousands of things in a series that I don't even understand, but this is certainly a series, as many of you have told, that's a series for you right now.

For all of us, it's a series for us someday. It's that moment... This series, this book (and books like it, like Job and other places), is for moments when you have more questions than you have answers. You'd be surprised (or maybe you wouldn't) how quickly that can happen.

You find out one thing about your spouse that you didn't want to know and wish wasn't true, and all of a sudden, you have more questions than answers. Your boss calls you in, and you think you're getting a raise, and you're getting let go. All of a sudden, you have more questions than you have answers. It's one doctor's appointment. It's one car accident. It's one phone call.

You heard there three common things we just showed you. Those are real people in our church, struggling with infertility, struggling with job loss, struggling with chronic illness. Here's what we're going to do in this series. We are trusting God together. In

week one, we gave you a little card. Some of you, hopefully, still have that. Last week, we asked some of you... And that was really powerful. Donovan led us in a time of prayer.

I just want to tell you...I want to prepare you for this...at the end of this service (we just did this last service; it was so powerful), I'm going to give you a chance... If you're like, "I've been waiting on God. I'm wrestling with God in some area of my life," we're going to have you come forward at the end. We've already taken... You can see. You're like, "It feels a little different in here today." We took the first row of chairs out, so we're going to be able to pray for you guys. I'm really excited about that.

Before we get into Habakkuk, just two quick things. First, I just want to remind you about Lee Strobel. He's coming next week. We're in a series where we're asking a lot of questions. He, for a living, answers difficult questions. He just wrote a brand-new book *Is God Real?* He's going to be here next week.

In fact, I'm going to have the opportunity afterward (this is a week from today in the afternoon) to interview him on our podcast and hopefully go deeper into some of the themes and topics of his sermon. That'll be great. Then the week after that, it'll be Easter (that's two weeks from today), and we're going to be celebrating the resurrection. We gave you cards when you got in here.

Basically, guys, we live in a world full of bad news. The gospel, Jesus Christ, what he did in his life, death, and resurrection, is all about good news. So, we gave you that card. If there's somebody in your life who you're like, "They need some good news," I want to encourage you to invite them to our Easter services. With that said, we're going to pray one more time, and then we are going to dive into the book of Habakkuk.

Lord, would you bless the reading and teaching of your Word? You often will give us some great teachings in some obscure places in Scripture. We're about to study a book that most Christians in America can't pronounce, have never read, and don't know how to find, yet in this book we are learning some incredible lessons, Lord.

I pray that you would get us ready... We're not masochists. We don't want to suffer, but I pray that you would get us ready to suffer, because it's coming. It's happening, Lord. I pray that we would not be superficial saints but we would know how to walk with you in suffering and help others walk with you in suffering. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right, guys. We are in the last sermon in a series called *When in Doubt*. It's in the book of Habakkuk. That's what we've been doing. We didn't call this series "If in

Doubt," and there's a real reason for that. What I'm trying to do, without going too far, is I'm trying to normalize doubt, not as the opposite of faith but as an element of faith.

You're going to doubt. It's going to happen. Okay? You live long enough, you love enough people, you suffer, you go through the ups and downs of life, and you're going to doubt. Then you're going to have to ask yourself this question: "Okay. What am I going to do with my doubt? What direction am I going to head in with my doubt?" Would you have the courage to doubt your doubts?

This is helpful. I didn't share this in the first week, because there's just so much I never get to share. When you think about doubt (we'll get to Habakkuk in just a second, because he's a guy who's struggling with doubt), there are two types of doubt. This is really helpful to know, because people struggle with different types of doubt.

There's *intellectual doubt* and there's *emotional doubt*. If you go to the college campus, to Winston-Salem State University or Wake Forest or UNC School of the Arts, and meet some atheist or some agnostic, he wants to talk to you about intellectual doubt. Right? "How do you know the total truthfulness of Scripture?"

It's like, "I want to talk about facts. I want to talk about arguments. I want to talk about reasons. Talk to me about creation versus evolution. Talk to me about the historicity of the resurrection." Great. By the way, all that is intellectual doubt. We like that. We can kind of sound smart and study it from a distance.

Christians across their lives tend not to struggle as much (this is good to know) with intellectual doubt. You're like, "I love the Lord. I'm committed to the Bible." What we tend to struggle with is emotional doubt. Follow this. *Intellectual doubt* says, "Is it true?" *Emotional doubt* says, "Is it good? Is it helpful? Is it working?"

Here's what I hate to tell you about you and me. You are not on a truth-seeking journey. You've never met somebody on a truth-seeking journey. If you did, you'd think they were strange. You are on a happiness journey, and you are a social creature. Because you really want to be happy and really want to get along with everybody else, sometimes your doubts are, "Well, I don't know. Is the New Testament sexual ethic really the best thing? I know the Bible says it, but is it good?"

Or you're like, "I haven't changed any of my beliefs about the Bible, but I'm just suffering, and nothing is happening, and I'm getting very emotional about it." So, today, I want us to look at Habakkuk, because Habakkuk is in stage 3 of a three-stage process. We said last week you wrestle, you wait, and this week you worship.

Let's pick up in Habakkuk, chapter 3, with a perplexed prophet who's struggling with doubt.

01 HABAKKUK'S PROCESS & BURDENS (WRESTLE, WAIT, WORSHIP)

Look here. "*A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet...*" You have a problem when the prophet is perplexed. You have a problem when the spiritual leader is the one who's struggling. But that's what's happening here. Look at this. You've never heard this word before. "*...according to Shigionoth.*" You're like, "Is that a dance move? What is that?" That is actually... It's only found one other place in Scripture.

It's found in Psalms, chapter 7. Basically, it's a term for music or liturgy. Chapter 3, the rest of the book, is a song. Now, let me tell you what happened here. Think about this with me. This book starts out as a burden. Remember? He says, "The oracle..." I told you the oracle was a burden, that he was overwhelmed by something he saw in his life. That's obviously going to happen to *you* at some point.

So then, how does he go from having a burden in chapter 1 to singing a song in chapter 3? Well, we talked about it. Just to review, he was wrestling with God. He's beeping the horn at God, which we all do at some point. "God, are you listening? Are you moving? I'm stuck in spiritual traffic here. Nothing is happening."

Then last week we saw he had to wait. That's really hard, because you don't know how long you're going to wait. We talked about how to wait well and who we can become while we wait and who we can wait with and all that. This week, we're going to see him worship.

Here's what I want you to know. Here's the big idea today: Habakkuk is an example of how to worship in the wilderness. The wilderness is a real place, and you will be there one day. Some of you are there today. It's where you get stuck. It's where you're in the same place, but the same things aren't happening. It's where chaos overtakes your life.

He's going to say you can worship in the wilderness. Here's what we know: it's easy to worship when things are going well; it's hard to worship in the wilderness. When you get pregnant, it's super easy to worship. When you're in the infertility clinic for three years, and it feels like you have non-terminal cancer, it's very hard to worship.

When you get the promotion and the corner office, or whatever that looks like today, it's easy to worship the Lord. When you lose your job, like we just heard there, it's

hard to worship the Lord. It's easy to worship the Lord when you're healthy; it's hard to worship the Lord when you have the lump and find out it's stage 4 cancer of some horrible, hideous kind.

Here's the interesting thing the Bible tells us, though. Sometimes the deepest worship happens when we don't feel it and still do it. Some people think, "Well, if I do something and I don't feel it, that's hypocrisy." No, that's maturity. I want to say that again. "Well, if I worship the Lord, but I don't feel it, that's hypocrisy." No, that's maturity. That's the definition of being an adult. I do the right thing even when I don't feel like it.

So, what did Habakkuk do? There are a couple of things I want you to see. First, he kept praying. Second, he started singing. We're going to talk about each of those. You're going to need to do them both. If you're in the wilderness or somebody else is, here's what you're going to say:

"Look. Here's what I'm going to do with you. I'm going to keep praying. I'm going to pray more than you. I'm going to pray longer than you. I'm going to pray for you. I'm going to pray with you. When I see you next time, I'm going to tell you I was praying for you."

Here's the thing. Habakkuk... We have to give it to this guy. He has a lot of problems, like we all do. He had his doubts, like we all will, but we're in chapter 3 and he's still praying. Remember in chapter 1 he gets unanswered prayer and he still prays? Remember in chapter 2 he gets answered prayer that he didn't ask for?

Remember God is like, "Yeah, that's right. I'm going to take care of it by destroying you guys by the Babylonians." He's like, "Well, I went from unanswered prayer to unasked-for prayer that was answered. I don't like either of those." Let me ask you... What has to happen in your life for you to stop praying about something? A couple days? A couple months? I'm not saying it's easy, but we too often give up and give in.

This is an old saying. I don't know who first said this. We need to pray until we *can* pray and then pray until we *have* prayed. You go, "What does that mean?" You won't know until you pray. I can't explain it to you. It's an experience. If your only prayer is before and after dinner and before and after bed, if you do zipper prayers, you begin and end things in prayer, and you have no idea what it's like to intercede...

When you are suffering, you're going to have to learn intercession. I've had to do this. Sometimes it takes me 5 or 10 minutes. I'm like, "Finally, I'm praying. My mind was drifting. My heart was drifting. I'm praying!" Then you'll have that moment where

you're like, "I prayed." It's weird. It's like, "I have prayed." He prays, and in the prayers he's first selfish, and by the end he's praying for revival and for the kingdom to come.

I just want to encourage us. If you're suffering, or just in general in life, your prayers are always going to start out selfish. Deal with it. You're going to have to pray through the selfishness. Even if somebody else is suffering, you might pray about how much it's costing you to take care of them. That happens all the time. One friend or one spouse is secretly bitter at the other person because of how much their suffering is making *them* suffer.

Here's what you do. You go, "Okay. I have to start with myself, because I'm the most needy and most selfish person I know. Then I'm going to pray about these things, and then I'm going to move from that to something else." Here's how I do it. I like to add a "so that" on my prayers to make them biblical. So many people (I'm not thinking of any one person) ask for prayers, and there's no deep purpose for it. There's nothing higher than their own immediate need.

Let me give you an example. What's the most common prayer in any church? To pray for somebody's grandmother's or great-grandmother's body part. Am I right? Sally's stomach, Tommy's tummy, and Amy's arm. That's what we're doing. Fine. What I do... Now you're going to notice this if you ever ask me to pray for you. I add a "so that" onto it. "Will you pray for Grandma? Grandma has hip surgery."

"I'll pray for Grandma. We pray that you would heal Grandma so that she could be an incredible grandmother and teach her grandkids about Christ." What I just did is I took a prayer that was fine... It was about an immediate need. Everybody wants to be healed, obviously. I'm asking God for something bigger with it. By the way, Charles Spurgeon said when you pray to God you should talk to God like a lawyer.

He was a famous preacher, the first megachurch pastor ever. He literally said that. He said when you talk to God, you argue with him like a lawyer, like, "God, look at Wake Forest University. You look so small there. Are you going to let that happen forever? Are you going to let people think you're optional or are you going to do something?" If you ever pray with someone who prays like that, you're like, "Where am I? I'm in a different century here."

Okay. Keep praying. Start singing. Notice he's singing. You can't see this because none of us can read Hebrew. The rest of chapter 3 is a song/poem. Here's what he's doing. He's inviting other people in on his suffering. We haven't talked about this enough. We talked a little bit about who you can wait with, but the purpose of singing is to do with other people.

I know you sing in the shower. It's okay. I know you sing in the car. That's fine. But the reason we sing together... Think about this. It's very theological, although we do a bunch of things we never think about. Why do we sing together? I know some of you think it's the warm-up before the sermon starts. It's not. Some of you think it gives you extra time to check on your kids. That's not the purpose of it.

Theologically, what's happening is we are singing the same songs at the same time to the same God. Probably the clearest expression of the unity of the church is in song. Communion would probably be right up there with it as well. We love to sing together so much. We love to sing together so much we go to musicals. Right? The first time my wife took me to Broadway, I thought it was one show.

If you've never been, it's streets and streets and streets of shows that are eight times a week. People will fly to New York and pay an enormous amount of money to sing a song with other people. We love to sing so much we're at a baseball game, and in the seventh inning stretch we're like, "Guys, I love being here. 'Take me out to the ball...'" We all sing it together. We love to sing.

Now, singing is good for the soul. It's healing. Basically, whenever you sing songs, depending on when you come in here... Sometimes you're going to sing what you believe. Sometimes you're going to sing what you wish you believed right now but don't believe.

By the way, that's why we don't have all chipper songs here. We don't have, like, "Everything is going well all the time." There was an article years ago where a seminary professor/pastor wrote, "Are there any songs in churches sad Christians can sing?" This is a sad song he's going to sing as he worships in the wilderness.

02 HABAKKUK IS GETTING TO KNOW GOD BETTER

Look at the first thing he says. Look with me at verse 2. This is really interesting. Here's the beginning of his song. "*O LORD, I have heard the report of you...*" "I've heard other people talk about you, God. My parents talked about you. My youth pastor talked about you." "*...and your work, O LORD, do I fear.*" Translation: "I heard others talk about you, but now I'm personally experiencing you."

Hopefully you know this. This is always the hard thing about kids growing up in churches. It's very easy to know about God and not know God. There's a big difference between knowing about God, which can be done by a skeptic, a seeker, a religiously lost person... A professor can know about God and not know God.

This is interesting. He says, "God, I know you. I'm seeing your work." Then he says this. We don't feel comfortable with this in America today. He goes, "And I'm fearful." Every time I hear people talk about the fear of the Lord, they want to say something like, "You know, the fear of the Lord means respect." Well, kind of. It also means "I'm terrified of you."

Here's what he's saying. This is so helpful to know. I can remember the first time this happened to me. He's saying, "God, I'm getting to know you, and it's scary. You're giving me the gift of disorientation." If every time you learn something about God you're like, "That's exactly what I thought," you're probably not getting to know God.

If you think, "This is amazing. I read the whole Bible, and God is a bigger, smarter version of me who agrees with me about everything," then you're not really reading the Bible. Okay. I can remember this. Some of you will know who this is. Others of you won't. That's okay.

So, I am brand new in the Lord. I became a Christian at 16. I go to college at 18. I'm still wearing (I thought it was cool back then) my "WWJD?" bracelet and all that kind of stuff. I'm a fully committed Christian. I'm new in the Lord. I don't know much Bible at all. A guy starts discipling me, and he asks, "Have you ever heard of John Piper?"

I was like, "I've never heard of this guy." They were like, "Well, he pastors in Minneapolis, Minnesota. [Blah, blah, blah.]" They said, "Right now he's preaching through Romans." I remember where I was when I started to listen to John Piper. He's a retired pastor now, still doing other ministry stuff in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

This won't mean a lot to some of you, but he was preaching through Romans 8, Romans 9, Romans 10, and Romans 11, which have to do with the sovereignty of God and salvation. It has to do with the Jewish people. I mean, it is so unbelievably deep. I remember I would read it, and I'd listen to his sermon, and I'd want to crawl under my bed. Basically, you should have this moment where you're like, "God, you are so much bigger than I thought you were."

Think about this with me. God only reveals himself explicitly in the book of Exodus twice. This is kind of an interesting thing to think about. We all know the burning bush. Remember? He's like, "Moses, I need you to go and tell people about me," and obviously, Moses is not very excited about that (you wouldn't be either). He's like, "I don't really want to go to Pharaoh."

Then he asks, "Who should I say sent me?" Do you remember this? God says, "I Am Who I Am." Okay. Let me translate. God says, "I will define myself. Nobody else will. I

am the self-defining, self-existing God. You cannot put me in a box. I will tell you who I am. You don't tell me who I am." It's like, "Okay."

The second thing he says is even scarier. In Exodus 33, Moses has this moment. "I've got to lead these people, God. I need more of you." Anyway, he cries out to God. He says, "God, just show me more of your glory." It's an amazing prayer. "Show me your glory." It's kind of confusing and strange, but God says, "Go hide in this rock, and I'll pass by you."

So, God passes by him and says, "I will declare my name," which basically means, "My character, who I am." Then God says this. This is old, guys. This is ancient. This is Exodus, chapter 33. God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." If you've never struggled with God's unbelievably free choice to do whatever he wants to do, then I don't know if you know God.

You can be in different camps. You already know this. You didn't determine when you'd be born. You didn't determine who your parents would be. You didn't determine your genetics. You didn't determine that you'd be born in America. You didn't determine that you'd be born during this century. You didn't determine how high your IQ would be, and all of that has determined what your life has come to be.

This is so humbling if you get it. So, he basically says, "God, this is freaking me out, because I'm realizing that you're really big and I'm really small." That's a good place to be. That's what he's saying. Sometimes suffering does that. You realize you're not the main character in the story. You realize life will go on without you. It's humbling.

Anyway, look at what he says next. He keeps praying. ***"In the midst of the years..."*** That means "In the meantime." That means "While I'm waiting." He repeats that. ***"In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy."*** Here's how you know you're desperate. You pray a prayer for God to revive things.

He's basically saying, "God, everything you're doing seems old and hidden. I need you to bring it to light and make it new." What's the root word of *revival*? *Revive*. He's praying for revival. How often do we pray for revival? Revival is amazing. I have a friend who is a revival chaser. He would call himself that. If he hears there's a revival in some part of the world, he gets on an airplane. He has to go see it.

Guys, there was a revival, the Second Great Awakening, in our country. At the time of the Second Great Awakening, there were 30 million Americans. The churches back then kept really good records. Thirty million Americans during the Second Great

Awakening. (That's Whitefield and Wesley and all them.) They said that during the Second Great Awakening, of 30 million Americans, there were one million recorded conversions to Christ. That's one in 30 people. That wasn't like waking up sleepy Christians.

Here's what revival is. There are usually three components to revival that you see. The first component is a palpable sense of the presence of God. I've read stories of revival that would make your hair stand up on the back of your neck. You'd be like, "Did this really happen? It feels like I'm reading something right out of the Bible."

There was a revival somewhere in Europe. This revival was breaking out, and they said that when sailors would pull their boat into the dock, they would come under conviction. Can you imagine? All of a sudden, they were like, "I think something is wrong with me."

The second thing they said is when revival happens, there's a deep desire for people to get right with God. Christians go, "Oh, man. I've been playing with that sin way too long." Here's what they say. In normal times, the evangelist seeks the sinner. During revival, the sinner seeks the evangelist.

Guys, this happened in the 60s in our nation, the Jesus Movement. At the height of the Jesus Movement there was a guy named Chuck Smith. You've probably never heard of him. He was more influential than Billy Graham, I promise. He started the Calvary Chapel movement. He was on the front cover of *TIME* magazine. That would be like being interviewed by Joe Rogan. That's what that would translate to be back then.

They interviewed him. *TIME* magazine came down, because they were like, "What is going on?" This was in California in the 60s with all of these hippies. They didn't believe it, like *you* wouldn't believe it. They came up, and they asked, "How many people are you baptizing?" He said, "Right now, about 1,000 a week." Guys, God has blessed our church. In seven and a half years, we have not baptized 1,000 people. Baptizing 1,000 people every week.

The third thing about revival is there's an intense interest in the things of God. It's strange. All of a sudden, middle schoolers want to get together and pray and high schoolers are inviting their friends to youth ministry and couples are spending the time at night not watching TV but reading the Bible together. It's like an obsession, in the best sense of the word, with the things of God.

He basically says, "God, would you please revive your work?" Then he says, "***...in wrath remember mercy.***" Now, we don't even have categories for this in America

today...wrath and mercy. We have a characteristic of God. He only has one attribute. You know what it is, right? Love. The only problem with that is if God is loving and you really understand love...

We think love means "He'll make me feel good and do whatever I want to do," but a biblical idea of love actually says if God is loving, then he also has to be wrathful. What is wrath? Wrath is an element of love, because it defends whatever is attacked that it loves. Every person who's loving will have an element of wrath if what they love is threatened. God's wrath is his settled disposition toward sin and sinners.

The interesting thing is it's not very hard to defend the wrath of God from Scripture or just look around the world and go... If there's no wrath of God... Unfortunately, we live in an unjust world. The wrath of God is actually a judicial term. It's the judge's commitment to make sure justice happens. Wrath is how one feels when justice is being avoided.

So, he says, "*...in wrath remember mercy.*" Basically, he's just crying out to God. "God, please be merciful to us even though all we deserve is your wrath." Now, theologians for a long time were wondering... There's literally this thing in the Old Testament called the *riddle of the Old Testament*. You'll find it in a lot of different books, and it says some version of, "God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in grace and mercy."

It says that. Then it will say (some of you will recognize this as I say it) right after that, "Punishing the sins of the father to the third and fourth generation." You're like, "Okay. Is God schizophrenic bipolar? It just said 'mercy and grace.' Then it said 'judging to the third and fourth generations.'" It was called the *riddle of the Old Testament*. It makes sense. Right? How does that work? How can God be just and gracious? How can God be wrathful and merciful?

Habakkuk's prayer is answered in Jesus Christ. It is at the cross of Christ that, people have said, mercy and wrath kiss. It's that they come together in some mysterious way. This is the heart of our faith, the hope of our faith. Jesus Christ experiences the wrath of God so you and I can experience the mercy of God.

What he's basically asking is for God's mercy. Sometimes you're going to be in such a situation, and you're not even going to know what to do, and you're just going to have to say, "God, be merciful." Do you remember that strange...? I know I'm giving you guys a lot of background stories this morning. I don't normally do that.

There's this strange story in 1 Chronicles 21. You can look this up with your Community Group. Basically, King David messes up. He messes up a couple times in

his life. In 1 Chronicles 21, he does a census. He counts his military and his people when he shouldn't do it, and God gets really mad. God comes to him. It's this weird thing. Imagine God doing this.

God says, "There are three options." He gives him three horrible options. "Do you want three years of *this*, do you want three months of *this*, or do you want three days of *this*?" You have to go read the account. I can't do it justice. David basically says, "I want to fall into the hands of God, and please be merciful to me." God still gives him something, but it's merciful. Sometimes that's all you can say. "God, be merciful."

03 HABAKKUK REMEMBERS WHAT GOD HAS DONE IN THE PAST

He says that, and then what he does in verses... Turn with me to verse 3. Here's what he does. In verses 3-15, he recalls the works of God. Look. ***"God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah." "His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise."***

He's going to remember the past as a way to praise God. The past is what prompts praise when you're in pain. Think about it. This just makes sense. I'm trying to give us practical tools for when that horrible day comes. Here's one of the things. When you're really suffering, the present is too painful and the future is too fuzzy to think about. The only thing some of us have is the past. That's okay. Faith looks back.

For us, we look back to the cross of Christ. It is the central event that tells us God can bring the best things out of the worst situations. It is the central event that tells us God took care of our greatest problems even if he's not taking care of our current problem the way we'd like it to be taken care of.

If you're in the New Testament (which we are), if you're under the grace (which we are), the central event you talk about is the cross, but if you're in the Old Testament, the central event you talk about is the exodus. So, that's what he does. Look here. ***"His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power. Before him went pestilence, and plague..."*** He's talking about the exodus.

"...followed at his heels. He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble."

Then look at what he does in verse 8. He recalls what God did, and then in verse 8 he questions what it means. ***"Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD? Was your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation?"***

He's having a conversation with himself and with God. "God, why did you do the exodus again?" He's kind of joking. Like, "You weren't mad at the water, were you? That's not why you split the sea." It's like, "No. That's not why I did that." Here's what he's doing. He's looking at the Word of God, and he's looking for God to help him interpret it.

What we have in the Bible, what makes the Bible so special, is we get the historical events of God's involvement in the world *and* the divine interpretation of those events. That is a central key to understanding Scripture. What makes Scripture so valuable? We get the event as well as its explanation and interpretation from God.

If you're like me, you might think sometimes, "Man! I wish I was there when the Red Sea split." Nobody understood what it meant. Some of us are like, "Man, if I could have been there at the cross of Christ when Jesus was crucified for sinners..." Nobody understood it. *Nobody* did. There was one centurion who went, "That's truly the Son of God." Everyone else was like, "What is going on here?"

This is amazing. What we have in the New Testament is everything we need. We have the event and the interpretation. Guys, this is why we don't just get... This will help you understand your New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the events of Jesus. There's not a lot of interpretation in the Gospels.

It's like, "Okay. His birth. What does that mean? Why did he have to be born of a virgin? Okay. He lives a sinless life. What is that all about? Okay. Why is he dying on the cross? Okay. There's an empty tomb and everyone is afraid. He ascends into heaven. What does all this mean?"

Well, the reason you have the Epistles after the Gospels... Why do we have all of Paul's letters and all of Peter's letters and all of John's letters? Why do we have the book of Hebrews? It is helping us have the divine interpretation of the events of the life of Christ. That's the point of all of the Epistles.

He's saying, basically, "God, I'm looking back, and I'm interpreting the Word of God," and he says this. Verse 13: ***"You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed."*** He's like, "God, in the past, you worked everything together for the salvation of your people, and I'm believing you're going to do that again, because that's how you work."

04 THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF BEING OVERWHELMED

But it doesn't make everything feel good. In fact, look at verse 16. I wish I could encourage you some more, but we're almost at the end of this book, and I want you to see how Habakkuk is doing. He's still not doing super well, guys, and that's okay. Sometimes you need to be okay that you're not doing okay.

Look here. *"I hear, and my body trembles..."* Literally, it's this graphic language that they try to make nicer in the English. His bowels are trembling. He's basically saying, "I feel like I ate Taco Bell for three days in a row." It's actually very similar to that. I'm dead serious. It's like, "I think I'm going to [you know what]." That's what he's saying, literally.

"...my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me." Basically, he has accepted... This is a hard place to get to. Again, God told him nothing is changing. We don't know what God is going to do in each of our lives, but God basically told him. What's hard about Habakkuk is God is like, "Hey, listen. They're coming. You're going to be here. They're going to kill you."

Habakkuk somehow... This is God's Word. He gets to the place where he's like, "I'm terrified of this, but I accept this." He says, *"Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us."* The verses I just read to you may be describing a panic attack. What you'll find sometimes...

Have you ever gotten a text from somebody with some negative news, or something like that, or someone tells you some bad news? You will feel it before you can articulate it. That's very common. If somebody ever jumps... Maybe they're just fooling around, but they jump out and try to scare you. My kids do this to me all the time. I don't like to be scared.

My kids will jump out and scare me, and I'll get that sensation over my whole body. It's involuntary. You're like, "I feel these things in my body even before I'm able to articulate 'Oh, it's not even a threat. It's fine.'" We need to walk with one another, because, by the way, there are going to be a lot of things that are going to happen in our bodies.

Sometimes if you're deeply suffering, it'll affect your immune system, basically. I'm not a doctor, but what I've read about this and what I've heard others talk about is when you're under an enormous amount of stress, your body grabs a bunch of resources from the future and brings them into the present.

So, being under an enormous amount of stress and aging are the exact same thing. This is why if you ever look at any picture of any president at the beginning of their term and at the end of the term, they look 30 years older. That's the price of being under stress for eight years. You age unbelievably fast.

Some people can't sleep. This has happened to me before. When my friend passed away, I didn't sleep for a week. You can't fall asleep. You can't stay asleep. You have nightmares and fantasies and dreams, and it's all so strange. You wake up in the middle of the night, and you're sweating. Your blood pressure... We are embodied souls, and there's sometimes an involuntary effect on our bodies from the suffering we're going through. He's describing it here.

05 TRUSTING GOD WHEN NOTHING IS CHANGING

Then he ends with this, and this is it. This is the amazing thing. This is what was read in the black and white videos. Let me read it, and we'll talk about it for a few minutes. ***"Though the fig tree should not blossom..."*** Translation: though there's no food in the grocery store. ***"...nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail..."***

I've been to Israel, and I know the olive tree is essential. It's their soaps. They cook with it. They sell it. It's an essential part of business and commerce. He says, basically, "Here's what's going to happen. There are going to be no figs. There's going to be no fruit. There are going to be no olives."

Then he says, ***"...and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls..."*** He's basically saying, "If the worst circumstances in my life befall me..." He's going to say in a minute, "I'm still going to trust you." What's so hard about him is this is true, and all this hits him at once.

Someone once told me one of the best feelings in the world is to find out you've been worrying about something you don't need to worry about anymore. You're like, "What is this lump?" You go to the doctor. He's like, "It's nothing. It'll be gone in three days." You're like, "Oh, thank God! It feels so good to not worry about something I was worrying about. I no longer worry about it."

Here, he's basically saying, "All of the worst things that I thought were going to happen are going to happen to me." It's this weird... You know, his present is terrible, so his future is terrible. When you don't have any herds and you don't have any fruit on the vine and you don't have any olive oil, that means you have no present, and you also have no future.

So, how will he respond? This is interesting. You need to know this. There are not that many different ways people respond in suffering. Some people respond in nihilism. It actually depends in part how sensitive you are to negative emotion. Some people will respond in nihilism. "This is horrible. Nothing is going to happen. Life has no point."

Some people respond in cynicism. They question Christianity. They question God. They question the truth of everything. Some people try to respond in stoicism. "Put my chin up. Stick my chest out. Act like I'm not scared about this surgery or it going sideways. Act like I'm not afraid to face death."

Let me show you what he says. You know this. You heard it read. It's really amazing. **"...yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation."** It's interesting that often when people talk about rejoicing in God... Most times when that's mentioned in Scripture it's repeated twice. It's almost like they need to remind themselves of it while they're saying it.

You've probably heard this before. I'm not the first to say this, obviously. Joy is different than happiness. Happiness seems to be connected with what's happening in your life. Some people are really happy, and good for them. The older you get, the more people you love, the less likely you're going to find happiness coming upon you.

In fact, here's what I would say to you. If at your next birthday everybody is there who you want to be there and everybody is healthy and everybody is getting along...those three things... Everybody is still there...no one has gone to heaven yet...everybody is healthy, and everybody is getting along. You should thank God so much, because this is so unique. Most people don't get to experience this, and we will not always get to experience this.

So, when happiness comes upon you, you just say, "Thank God for it. I don't take it for granted. A lot of things are going well. I'm thankful to God for that." Joy is a decision and an act of the will. I don't know how else to understand things where the apostle Paul, while he's in prison, writes to the church in Philippi and says, "Rejoice in the Lord always," and then he repeats himself. "And again I say, rejoice."

Sometimes the only thing we can do... We can't rejoice in our circumstances, but we can rejoice in God. This is the heart of true worship. This is easy to say (and you'll get this); this is hard to live. True worship basically says, "I want God, and that's the goal of my worship: to get God."

Here's the truth for a lot of us. We struggle with idolatry. We all do. I don't mean idolatry like you're worshiping money. That is a different struggle. I'm talking about

the idolatry that happens when we say we want to worship God, but we're really worshiping God so he'll give us something else.

That might be, "I want to worship the Lord so he'll bring me a great husband or wife" or "I'm going to worship the Lord so he'll give me kids." We would never say this out loud. We don't know how we're thinking about these things until we don't get them, and then we basically tell God, "Well, God, I was doing *this*, and you were supposed to do *that*."

He says, "I will worship the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." Then here's his final word. It ends on a somewhat positive note. He says, "***GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.***" He mentions a mountain at the end.

It's interesting, because sometimes when you think of a mountain... We tend to think mountains in the Bible are good things. Like, "It's bad to be in the valley, and it's great to be on the mountain." Sometimes a mountain is something that is so big ahead of me I don't know how I'm ever going to get up it. He basically ends by saying, "Here's my great hope: whatever I face, God will be with me in it and help me get through it."

I've told you before. There was a guy in our church, and he had this type of cancer. Details aren't that important. He had to go in for his first radiation, and I remember him saying, "I was so scared to get in that room. Then when I walked into that room..." He's not necessarily a super-spiritual, super-eccentric person, but he said, "When I got into that room, I'll just tell you, Kyle, Jesus was there with me."

I had a mentor who said, "Kyle, I've been Job twice in my life. The two times I was Job, the moment I became Job I realized the grace of God was there to meet me." He said, "One time, my wife got cancer." He said, "If you had told me my wife was going to get stage 4 cancer and I was going to be okay, I would have said, 'No, I'm not.'" He said, "Then I got there, and the grace of God was there." We cannot think about our lives apart from the grace of God.

Here's what we want to do, guys. We want to transfer the burden to God in prayer today with you. We want to close together by praying. We did this last service. It was so powerful. Here's what we're going to do. In just a few minutes, the elders of our church are going to come and stand up here, and I want you to come. If you need prayer, I want you to just come.

By the way, something happens. I don't know how it works. There are a lot of things I don't know how they work. There's something that happens when you get up and walk down the aisle and say to somebody else, "Can you please pray for me?" Why do

we call the elders? Well, I'm not a faith healer, but I'm a Bible teacher, and there is something unique about the elders of the church. They uniquely represent the church, and they're uniquely responsible for the church.

So, there's something that happens when they focus and pray. I'm not trying to over-promise here today, but we have seen people come down here before. We've seen couples say, "We're struggling with infertility," and we've prayed, and by the next elder prayer they were pregnant. I'm not saying it's because of us or we have some magic potion up here. I'm just saying we believe that prayer works.

So, here's what we're going to do. We're going to lament together as a church. We've never done this in this exact way. We're going to lament. Technically, the book of Habakkuk is a lament. I know a little bit about lamenting. Lamenting always has four parts. Follow this. This is what we're going to do as we close. The band is going to come up here in a minute, and we're going to do this.

We're going to *turn*, we're going to *confess*, we're going to *ask*, and we're going to *trust*. That's all you do in lamenting. So, here's what I'm going to do. I'm asking you to turn, and I'm asking you, if you need to, to come down here. Here's what you do. You turn away from trusting in yourself. You turn away from thinking about this wrongly.

You turn away from cynicism and fatalism and nihilism and stoicism, and you just say, "I'm turning away from all of those things. I'm turning away from Googling this more than talking to God about this. I'm turning away from trying to self-medicate it or act like it didn't happen." We're going to ask you to turn.

Secondly, we're going to ask you to confess. That may be a sin you confess, but most people... Do you know what you do? I prayed with people this last service. They basically come down and say something like, "I don't know what to do about this." I had one lady come up to me this last service. "Hey, I have a genetic disease that my kids now have and I'm worried my grandkids are going to have."

"All right. Thanks for telling me. We'll pray about that together." She said, "I don't know. Do I pray for healing?" Okay. Sometimes you just confess, "I don't know what to do about this. I've tried everything. I'm really struggling to believe God," and then you ask. We're going to do big asking.

We texted the elders. We said, "If you're going to pray small prayers, don't come up here." We're going to pray like charismatics up here. We're not just saying, "Lord, help them deal with it. Give them peace." No. We're going to pray for healing. If you're coming down here saying, "I'm sick," we're going to pray for you to get healed. We're going to pray for God to do miracles. Why not? That's what he says he loves to do.

Then we're going to trust. Sometimes you come forward and say, "Could you trust God with me?" But there are a few of you who are going to come forward (this happened last service) and say, "Would you trust God because I can't? Would you trust God for me?"

With that said, why don't you bow your heads. When I'm done praying, you'll stand and we'll sing, but I want you to come. We are going to trust God together. We are going to transfer the burden to God in prayer, and then we are going to walk with God, and we are going to say, "Even if this doesn't happen, still I will rejoice in the Lord."

We want to pray a Daniel prayer. We want to pray a Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego prayer this morning. It's *this* prayer. They were about to be thrown into the fiery furnace, and they said, "Our God can deliver us, but even if he doesn't, we're going to still worship him."

Lord, we're praying for deliverance. We're praying for reconciliation. We're praying for addictions broken. We're praying for salvation seen, Lord. Would you do it as we sing and seek you together? In Jesus' name, amen.