

Finding God in Our Pain

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- [0 : 00] Well, when the chaos descends and the dreaded news arrives, you get that phone call that you haven't wanted, you get the news that you didn't expect, and your life changes.
- ! And when the bad things happen in our lives, we often think, how on earth can I ever find joy again?
- You know, we can be tempted to think that some Christians just have it, others just don't, some of us struggle with it. Two Christians that we might be tempted to think that are full of rejoicing just because they've got this special sort of dispensation from God are Johnny Erickson Tada and Nick Vujicic.
- You might know them from, well, Johnny Erickson Tada is very well known, Nick Vujicic as well from his YouTube videos. Johnny was a paraplegic from the age of 17. Nick Vujicic has been born without any arms or legs.
- But when you see their videos, and if you haven't seen them, just go onto YouTube, just Google them on YouTube and you'll see what I'm talking about. You will see people who are so full of joy in spite of their circumstances, and you wonder, how did they get that?
- [1 : 24] And whatever their secret is, can I get some as well? Well, Habakkuk shows us how to handle suffering in a way that goes from questioning God, which we saw in chapter 1, to trusting in God in chapter 2, and he ends up in chapter 3, praising God.
- Those famous last verses of chapter 3 shows us Habakkuk rejoicing in God. But how did he move from lament to trust to praise?
- And are we able to get to ourselves when our own lives are filled with hardship and evil? Well, Habakkuk chapter 3 shows us how.
- And the first thing that it shows us is that God moves towards us in our pain. God moves towards us in our pain.
- When we're struggling with something in our lives that's causing us problems, we're so tempted to feel that God is so far away. It's not even that we're tempted to feel like that. We do feel like that.
- [2 : 37] God feels far away. But Habakkuk tells us that not only is God not far away, He's so moved by our plight that He will move heaven and earth to get to us.
- He's not a God that stays away. He's a God who draws near. He goes to where the pain and the suffering is happening in order to deal with it better for His people.
- And so you've got verse 3 as Habakkuk is given this vision of God. Verse 3 in chapter 3, God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran.
- His glory covers the heavens. His praise fills the earth. God is arriving. Verse 5, God is coming. Verse 5, Plagues went before Him. Pestilence follows behind Him.
- As He walks, the earth is shaking. In verse 6, The mountains crumble and collapse. Verse 7, The peoples look on in terror. Verse 12, In wrath, You strode through the earth.
- [3 : 45] Or you march through the earth. And verse 13, You went out. You came out to deliver your people.

It's a fantastic vision of the creator God of the universe coming down to where His people are suffering. And charging straight towards Him.

Because He knows they're in trouble. And they need to be saved. This image in verse 3 from Teman and Paran and various other images there are all from Mount Sinai, From the Mount Sinai experience that the Jews went through when they got saved out of Egypt.

Those are the areas that God has seen to move from, to go into Egypt, sort out the Pharaoh, and then yank His people to safety. And save them and bring them into the promised land.

When God acts to save, He always draws near to those being inflicted. He doesn't stay far away. He goes to where His people are hurting.

[4 : 50] And there's a huge comfort in that. But what is God going to do with all this powerful presence? When He draws near, what is He going to do?

Well, Habakkuk tells us that He is the warrior God who comes to save His people by defeating their enemies. And so there's this glorious vision of God as our knight in shining armor.

The God of the Bible is a God of war. Who will rip apart the heavens to get to His people to save them from everything that is out to harm or hurt them in any way.

Just look at how it describes God and what He does to anything that gets in His way. From verse 8. Were you angry with the rivers, O Lord?

Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariot? Again, that's echoes of Exodus as God split open the Red Sea and turned the Nile into blood.

[6 : 07] Behind all the things that people saw is the God of the universe riding in His war chariot. And in verse 9. He uncovers His war bow and has this quiver full of arrows.

Verse 9. You uncovered your bow. You called for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you in writhe.

Torrents of water swept by. The deep roared and lifted its waves on high. That's images from perhaps the flood in Genesis chapter 9 with Noah.

But also the sea standing upright as God walked His people through. That's Him taking His bow and shooting it and making sure His people are safe.

And then in verse 11. He's got this glittering spear that's going to kill the person or people who are hurting His own people.

[7 : 11] Verse 11. Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear.

We don't often get this picture of the God of the universe as this warrior God, as this knight in shining armor coming to save His people.

And when the creator God of the universe arrives in this full panoply of His war garments, His chariots, His bow, His arrows, His spear.

You need to know that His people's enemies don't stand a chance. Have a look at verse 13. You came out to deliver your people.

To save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness. Laying him bare from thigh to neck.

[8 : 15] Isn't that amazing? The description of what God does to come and save His people. Well, this is not just Old Testament stuff.

This actually is exactly what God does for us in Jesus. Drawing near and defeating our enemies. Did you notice the promise of the Messiah in verse 13?

You came out to deliver your people and to save your anointed one. Some translations have to save with your anointed one. The older King James has it like that.

You came out to save your people. To save them with your anointed one. Your anointed one is the Hebrew word Messiah. That's translated into Greek as Christ.

That's the way that God has always saved His people. With His King that He raises up to take care of their enemies. And notice in verse 13 how God's victory is described there.

[9 : 26] Crushing the head of the evil one. Echoes of Genesis chapter 3. Where the whole story of sin and pain and evil begins.

And God says to Eve and He makes His promise to Adam and Eve. One day I'm going to raise up someone from your own line. Who's going to crush the head of the serpent.

So this is a gospel verse tucked away here in the Old Testament. Telling us about who Jesus is and what He's going to do. And so that's one way of looking at the work of Jesus on the cross.

When He's coming to save His people. In the incarnation, as Jesus comes into time and space. It's God ripping open time and space.

To get where His people are being oppressed. And to meet them at their most vulnerable. And in the cross and in His resurrection. He rips apart the evil spiritual forces.

[10 : 32] That hold people bondage to their sin and fear and doubts. What is the point of all this language of defeating enemies.

And of lightning and fire and chariots and swords. Well it's to get our attention. And to let us know that we've got a Savior.

Who's going to save us. And He's going to defeat every evil thing that is plaguing us in our lives. It's to get our attention.

To focus on what God has done. And on who Jesus is. And not to focus on the evil that is causing your problems. So let me ask us.

Has God got your attention? Has this vision of God got your attention? It should. Think back to we've done a series on Exodus a while back.

[11 : 39] If you're an Israelite standing in the desert. After you'd come to the Red Sea. You'd pitched up at the Mount Sinai. What would you have seen and heard and felt?

This roaring flame. A whole mountain going up in smoke and fire. A huge earthquake. Huge amounts of sound. Too scared to even approach.

It would have got your attention. And just days earlier. All you could focus on. Were the whips and the chains.

And the scariness of the Pharaoh and of his henchmen. And now you've got this God. Setting mountains on fire. What does that do for your fear.

Of the Pharaoh. And the whips. And his bullies. They disappear. In a puff of smoke. Well actually they disappeared in a. I don't know what water does.

[12 : 40] A drowning of water. Has God got your attention? Or does your pain.

Your loss. Or the bad things you're facing. Have more of your attention? Are you focused on what you don't have? Are you focused on what has been taken away?

Are you focused on your fears. And on your grief? If they have your attention. More than God. More than Jesus. Then you're saying.

Perhaps without realizing it. Or intending to say it. But in effect. What you're saying. Is that those things. Are more powerful. And worthy. Than the God of the Bible. For your attention.

So where's the focus of your life? If it's focused on those things. That are causing you trouble. More than the God who saves you. Then you need to remind yourself. Of who Jesus is.

[13 : 35] And what he's done. That's why we read that passage. From Revelation chapter 19. It's a glorious picture. Of who Jesus is. And what he's going to do. To the enemies of his people.

I'm going to read it again for us. You might want to turn there. Revelation 19. I saw heaven standing open. And there before me. Was a white horse.

Whose rider is called. Faithful and true. With justice he judges. And makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire.

And on his head are many crowns. He has his name written on him. That no one knows. But he himself. He's dressed in a robe. Dipped in blood. And his name is the word of God.

The armies of heaven. Were following him. Riding on white horses. And dressed in fine linen. White and clean. And out of his mouth. Comes a sharp sword.

[14 : 33] With which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress. Of the fury of the wrath of God almighty. On his robe and on his thigh.

He has this name written. King of kings. And lord of lords. When Jesus pitches up to save.

Nothing and no one. Can stand up to him. At the end of Revelation 19 there. We see what happens to the enemies.

Of God and of Jesus. And of his people. That's what he's come to do. To come and save his people. I'm just reading from halfway through verse 20.

In chapter 19. Well let me read from verse 20. But the beast was captured. And with him the false prophet.

[15 : 34] Who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those. Who had received the mark of the beast. And worshipped his image. The two of them. The two of them. Were thrown alive in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

The rest of them were killed with a sword. That came out of the mouth. Of the rider on the horse. And all the birds. Gorged themselves. On their flesh. Friends.

This is a wonderful promise for Christians. This warrior king is not your enemy. But your friend. He's not fighting you.

But he's fighting for you. Against your enemies. Not necessarily physical enemies. But the evil that causes us to doubt and fear God's love.

The real enemy is not the physical thing threatening us directly. Although that's a problem in and of itself. And God will take care of all of that. But the thing that really gets to us is the doubt and the fear.

[16 : 42] That creeps into our heart and mind. That says. Ah you see. God doesn't love you. God isn't really able to save you. God doesn't really care.

God isn't really here. God isn't really in control. God doesn't really care. And so that image of God in Habakkuk 3.

With the Jesus of Revelation 19. The Jesus of the New Testament. It's a promise. That whatever is causing pain or hurt. Or diminishing your enjoyment of God. Is going to be totally and utterly defeated.

By God. And by his king. And it's this vision of God. And of his Messiah. That helps move Habakkuk.

From worry and despair. As we saw in chapter 1. To praise and worship. But it's praise and worship. Not apart from pain and loss. But in spite of it.

- [17 : 43] And what we see back in Habakkuk 3. So I'm going to go back. Let's come with me back to Habakkuk 3 now. We'll see that this whole chapter 3. Is actually framed. As a psalm.
- As a psalm. Now. And so what Habakkuk is doing. Is singing. In the pain. He's singing in the pain.
- Now. That phrase. Singing in the pain. It's a. You know. It's a pun. On singing in the rain. But I got this heading. From a sermon title. By Alistair Begg. On his dealings with. On his sermon.
- In Habakkuk 3. But I thought it was so appropriate. So I thought I'd use it as well. Singing in the pain. God wants us. Not only to trust him. With our pain. But to rejoice. In him. Because he is with us.
- And because he will defeat. Every bad thing. That can separate us. From enjoying his blessings. That's what Habakkuk can sing. So confidently. In verse 17.
- [18 : 42] To verse 19. Though the fig tree. Does not bud. And there are no grapes. On the vines. Or the olive crop fails. And the fields produce no food. That 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.
- We want the pain. To go away. God wants us. To sing. In the pain.
- Trusting in his great plan. Of salvation. That one day. All these things. Are going to disappear. This last chapter. Is a psalm. It's a hymn. It's meant to be used.
- As part of worship. But how do we rejoice in God. When there's no food. When there's just loss. And scarcity. And pain. And fear.
- [19 : 37] Well. What one typically does. When we see threats. To our security. And comfort. We run around. In a futile attempt. At trying to fix. The fig tree.
- And the vines. When we say. Oh. There's nothing on the vines. There's nothing growing there. Whoa. We better. Put something on the vine. We need food.
- Food. No one else is around. It's just me. And just this empty vine. We don't know what to do. And so we focus on getting the stuff we think will make us safe and secure.
- In the ups and downs of life. But nothing. In life. Is secure certain. Except for God. Except for his salvation.
- Except for his promises. And that's why the New Testament consistently says. We must look to God. And his future promises of blessing. And restoration.
- [20 : 34] In order to have peace. And joy. Now. 1 Peter 1 for example. I think I've got it on the screen. He says. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- In his great mercy. Has given us new birth. Into a living hope. Through the resurrection. Of Jesus Christ. From the dead. And into an inheritance.
- That can never perish. Spoil. Or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you. Who through faith are shielded by God's power.
- Until the coming of the salvation. That is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this. You greatly rejoice.
- Though now. For a little while. You may have had to suffer grief. In all kinds of trials. In Habakkuk.
- [21 : 33] God is saying. Stop. Running around. Trying to fix the things. You have no real control over. Let. God. Fix it.
- Go to him. For rest. And sustenance. Go to him. For life. Find your joy in him. And so.

What is your ultimate source of joy? What is your ultimate source of happiness? What is your ultimate source of contentment? If it's entirely contingent on the things that happen in this world.

If it's entirely dependent on what you can get out of life. You're never going to get true lasting joy. Because things always change.

They never last. No matter how hard you try and hold on to them. They have a way of just slipping through your fingers. Teenagers. Take relationships.

[22 : 30] If like most you're going to have your heart swept up in love. You're also going to have it broken a few times. Don't pull all your hopes and feelings into that one boy or that one girl.

You're just going to hurt yourself. But adults aren't immune either. Many want to have the perfect looking house. The perfect looking marriage.

The perfect looking family. And then when those things are taken away. Because we base our joy in those things.

We just don't know what to do when they're taken away from us. If the things in this world are already looking for to provide you joy.

You're going to find yourself more unhappy than happy. More anxious than at peace. More easily upset by small things.

[23 : 30] And very upset by the larger things. And not knowing what to do. And not settled. And God doesn't want that for you. He wants you to be happy. He wants you to be at peace.

He wants you to be settled. But you can only have those things. As a general characteristic in your life. If you're finding your source of joy. In God.

And in his promises. And in his salvation. In conclusion. The answers that Habakkuk leave us with.

Are both a solution. But also a challenge. What will you do. With the evil in the world. That causes pain. In your life. Will you take your troubles to him.

As we saw Habakkuk did in chapter 1. Will you take your troubles to God. In lament. Or will you try and deal with them. On your own. Will you trust in God's plans.

[24 : 30] And judgments on evil. As we saw Habakkuk do. In chapter 2. Or try and work it out. Or try and work this whole thing out by yourself. Will you base your joy.

In the God of limitless power. Who has come to rescue you from all evil. Or will you try and manufacture your own version of blessing and happiness.

With the limited resources. Of your own life. It is much better. To rejoice in God.

To trust in the God who draws near. And to trust in the God that is ready to make a war. To save you from all evil. Jesus says I have come to give life.

And give it to the full. You can trust in your mighty king. To deliver on every one of his promises. Let me pray to God for us.

[25 : 28] Let me pray to God for you. Lord Jesus. We read in your word.

That you are the mighty God. Who comes to save your people. That you are the king of kings. And lord of lords. And at the cross you paid for all our sins. You defeated all our enemies.

Lord. And even though our lives are upside down. We know we can trust you. And we can rejoice in the God of our salvation.

Amen. Amen.

Thank you.