

A Major Point From A Minor Prophet

1 Samuel 9:1-10:16

By [Dr. John Blanchard](#)

I've had the privilege over the years of preaching in considerably over five hundred churches on this side of the pond but there is none which I hold in greater esteem or to which I count it a greater privilege to return than here at First Presbyterian in Jackson, Mississippi, and especially in this year of all years, celebrating the 175th anniversary of the founding of the church. So it really is for you a milestone year. As it happens and by another lovely coincidence, this has been, still is, a milestone year for me. Just a couple of months ago my publishers held a dinner in my honor in London which marks fifty years in the fulltime preaching ministry. That was a very special occasion. It also happened to be the 25th anniversary, virtually to the day, since the first publication of *Ultimate Questions*, a booklet that I know you've used many thousands of copies here at First Pres. over the years. And if the Lord spares me for about another eighty-five days, it will also be another milestone in that I will celebrate, or whatever you do with it, my eightieth birthday! Oh, they're looking shocked! I know I don't look quite as young as that, but anyway, eighty is what it will be and so it is a milestone year for me too.

A number of years ago a friend of mine stood up to preach and began, startled the congregation by saying, "Please turn with me to the clean pages in your Bible." For a moment they didn't have a notion what he was talking about until he said, "I mean the Minor Prophets." I think that was a very clever introduction because I'm going to guess that for the majority of Christians that portion of Scripture, the Minor Prophets, the last twelve books in the Old Testament, are those that are least read and least studied, and are for that reason, the cleanest pages in their Bibles. And we're going to look at one of those tonight. For several years my wife had urged me to write a book on the Minor Prophets. I resisted simply because there always seemed to be a more urgent need to be writing another of the evangelistic booklets in which I've been involved over the years: *Why Believe the Bible? Why On Earth Did Jesus Come? Jesus - Dead or Alive? Why the Cross? Can We Be Good Without God? Is Anyone Out There? Where Is God When Things Go Wrong?* and so on. But eventually, last year, I gave some protracted attention to it and the book was published just a few weeks ago and as you've heard, there are some copies available in the bookstore and others can now be had because they have reached across the Atlantic and are now here in the United States.

Just to give you the briefest of timeframe here, although your women I've taught in this church know this already, the Minor Prophets flourished roughly from the year 800 B.C. to the year 400 B.C. when the last of them, Malachi wrote, some prophesied to the nation of Israel before its exile to Assyria, others to Judah before its exile to Babylon, and some, the last three to Judah after its return from captivity in Babylon. So that gives us the background. I should also say this. That although they are called the Minor Prophets, I think it was Augustine who first came up with the title, it doesn't mean that their message is less important than what we call the Major Prophets because God doesn't do small talk. And the message He gave through the Minor Prophets is just as important as the message He gave through what we call the Major Prophet's life — Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so on. So we must bear that in mind. These are not just unimportant and conspicuous parts of God's Word. They are just as important as the bits with which we are more familiar.

So we are going to turn to one of those tonight. I've been asked several times which one it's going to be. I can tell you it's, well, it's the one that in England we call Habakkuk. I understand that on this side of the Atlantic you call it Habakkuk. I'm not about to take lessons on pronunciation from a country that parks its cars on the driveway and drives them on the parkway, and so Habakkuk it is! But then again I may generously slip into the wrong pronunciation of it as we go along just for your benefit. So if you can find it, please, we'll proceed with our study this evening.

This prophet is something of a mystery man. We know nothing about his background, his hometown, his tribe, his family, or his occupation. But if we have problems with him, they are nothing to the problems that he had with God. Now you haven't misheard me. He had problems with God. Look at verse 2 of chapter 1:

How long, O LORD, must I cry for help but You do not listen? Or cry out to You "Violence!" but You do not save? Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted.

Who said that the Bible was out of date? You'll be able to read that in tomorrow's newspaper. You'll hear that kind of thing on tonight's television newscast. It is hugely up to date because that is exactly the kind of situation that we have today. Habakkuk ministered to Judah and it was in a spiritual and moral tailspin at that time. But his problem, Habakkuk's problem was not with man's actions but with God's inaction. Look again at verse 2. "How long, O LORD, must I cry for help but You do not listen?" And the word, listen, means "Why don't You reply by doing something?" We're all familiar with the phrase, and may have used it many

times, "Prayer changes things." Please don't try to find it in the Bible because you won't. Those words don't appear in the Bible. I understand what people mean by saying them. Things seem to be going a certain way and then we pray about it and then sometime later things seem to move in a better, more hopeful, more positive direction, and we say, "Prayer changes things." I don't much like the phrase because I think it's must inferior to the phrase, "God changes things," and sometimes does so in response to our prayers. It would have been no good saying, "Prayer changes things," to this prophet because his problem was that it seemed to change nothing. And verse 2, to just look at it one more time, is one of the most honest verses in the Bible. "How long, O LORD, must I cry for help and You do not listen?" Which means, as I say, "You do nothing. You are not hearing our prayers in the sense of hearing them and then doing something in response to them."

Well, the Lord's answer to the prophet comes in verse 5. "Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed." Now at this point I just want to take what God says to the prophet, very slowly, just one phrase at a time. Firstly, "I am going to do something." So there is a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. So God has heard the prayers of the prophet and others with him. And God says, "I am going to do something." Indeed, in some translations it says, "I am doing something." Either way, there was a first rising of the heartbeat, of the pulse rate, of the prophet as he hears God say, "I am doing something," or at least, "I am going to do something." And then it gets even better. "I am going to do something in your days." And you can just imagine him getting more excited when he hears that. And surely we would feel the same in similar circumstances, whether we are praying for revival in our nation — and your nation and mine both need that — or in our state or city or area or neighborhood or church or in our family. We pray for God to intervene, to work, to move in our family, in our church, in our city, in our state, in our nation. And if we were in some way to hear from God that He was going to do something, we would begin to get very excited. God was going to do something. "I am going to do something."

But how much more excited would we be if God told us, in some way, "It's going to happen in your days, while you are still alive"? Now it would be one thing if God were to tell you, "I am going to do something. Your prayers have not fallen on deaf ears. And I am going to do something. I'm going to act in that very situation that concerns you but I'm going to do it after you've died." Well, we would rejoice in that, in some sense, that would be a win-win situation. God was going to do something and we'd be in heaven anyway so it was win-win. But if God were to say to you, "And it's going to happen while you are still alive," you can imagine how our excitement would grow and so of course did that of Habakkuk.

And then He went even further than that. "I'm going to do something that you would not believe even if you were told." So what God, if I may dare to paraphrase, was saying is, "I'm going to do something so stupendous, so

immense, I'm not just going to give a slap on the wrist to disobedient Judah; I am going to do something so immense that if anybody else told you I was going to act like this you simply wouldn't believe it." Well I think my now the prophet was hyperventilating at the prospect of what might happen.

And then comes the crunch. "I am raising up the Babylonians." If Habakkuk had been a tennis player and his name was John McEnroe he would have said, "You cannot be serious," because that must have been his feeling. "Look, I am going to do something in your days you would not believe even if you were told." Verse 6 — "I am raising up the Babylonians." And we're not left in any doubt as to, "Well, what does that mean? Are these people good, bad, or indifferent? Are they going to bring great blessing to our nation?" Look what follows:

"That ruthless and impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people. They are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like a vulture swooping to devour. They all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. They deride kings and scoff at rulers; they laugh at all fortified cities. They build earthen ramps and capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own strength is their god!"

Was the prophet hearing right? In answer to the prayers of a godly remnant in disobedient, backsliding Judah, God said, "This is what I'm going to do. In answer to your prayers I'm going to send you the Babylonians. The terrific, powerful, violent, ruthless people." Now do you see where the prophet had the problem? And in a nutshell, his problem was this. How could God deal with His covenant people by punishing them at the hands of a people with whom He'd never even established the covenant, a pagan people? He was going to unleash them and set them onto Judah. So God's answer to the first problem raised an even bigger problem in its place. And listen to why it was such a massive problem for Habakkuk. It was for this reason. That the prophet knew so much about the character, the essence if you will, the nature of God. You and I are glad to belong to a confessional church, and over the years, over the centuries we have cause to be grateful for creedal statements that have crystallized fundamental truth in Scripture. Whether we think of the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, and so forth. Hugely important creedal statements that settle and make clear for us the nature of God.

Well, look at verses 12 and 13. Here is the prophet's creedal statement. Notice the things that he says about God. He speaks about His eternity - "Are You not from everlasting?" He speaks about His holiness - "My God, My holy one." He mentions His faithfulness - "We will not die." His sovereignty - "O LORD, You

have appointed them to execute judgment.” His justice — “It is to execute judgment that You have done this.” Your justice again — “Our sins will be punished.” And then His faithfulness — “But we will not die.” And then His purity — “You are too pure to look on evil.” Now that is good, sound, solid doctrine but it didn't solve the prophet's problem. The fact that his doctrine was so clear and so full and so accurately reflective of the nature of God, didn't make his problem go away, there's a sense in which it made it worse or at least it caused him to think seriously about what was being said. The fact that he got his doctrine right was not the end of his problem.

Biblical doctrine is not like a jigsaw. We all have known times when we've loved doing jigsaws. In the early years of our marriage and indeed well beyond that and when we were raising the family, we loved doing jigsaws. And in a sense, the bigger and the more difficult they were, the better. You know, thirteen ghosts in a snowstorm. That was a great jigsaw to do; that kind of thing. Joyce, in fact, at one point belonged to a jigsaw club or society so we would get these jigsaws coming through the mail. And you know how you do them. You get the straight edges first or the corner bits first and then they're filled in and gradually you go on and on until the magical moment arrives, weeks, months, and sometimes years later, you say, “It's finished.” That is all solved. We've solved all the problems. All the pieces are in place. Now we can fold our arms and say, “That's great. No more problem.”

Doctrine is not like that. It's only the person whose doctrine, whose understanding of the nature of God is Biblical that has problems in this kind of situation. Let me be as dramatic as I can about this. For the person who doesn't believe in God, 9-11 was nothing more than a spectacular arrangement of atoms and molecules. Did you hear that? You see, the atheist's creed, he has a creed, and his creed is, “We began as a fluke, we live as a farce, and we end as fertilizer.” That's atheism's creed. “We were not created by God. Life really doesn't have any ultimate purpose. We're here for a little while and then, in Bertrand Russell's words, ‘When I die I shall rot.’ And we're not going anywhere anyway. So 9-11 was a spectacular rearrangement of atoms and molecules but nothing that should concern us about the meaning of life and the dignity of man and all the rest of it.”

But once we believe in God, a God who is our Creator, and Sustainer, and once we read in Scripture and have a good handle on the truths that God is sovereign, that all things are accomplished in accordance with His will and that He is a God of love, don't you see that suddenly we have questions to answer when this kind of thing happens on God's watch. There are answers. There is a way of applying Biblical truth to that situation. But I hope you can see that the person with no idea of God can't complain that something is beyond understanding because how can a God who is loving and all powerful allow that to happen. That, in a nutshell, is the kind of problem this prophet had. We must begin to tackle that kind of situation by saying something that has become a mantra of mine over the last ten

or eleven years of doing, what I call, popular Christian apologetics, and it's this. The Bible does not tell us everything we want to know, but it does tell us everything we need to know. I think to bear that in mind is to help a great deal.

Well, God's response at the beginning of verse 2 comes to us and the key phrase is, "It will happen at the appointed time." Look at verse 3. God is never in a hurry. He's never caught on the hot. He's never up against a tight schedule. Whenever God does something it is never a moment too soon or a moment too late. And this was the message to Habakkuk. But what should he and other believers do in the in between time? Yes, God was going to act, He was going to answer prayer, He was going to deliver His people, even though it was in this most extraordinary and unexpected and violent way. But that was apparently of some time in the future. What should they do in the meantime?

Well, that brings us to what God says about the matter. And what He says is this. Look at verse 4 of chapter 2:

"See, he is puffed up." This is Babylonian. "He is puffed up; his desires are not upright, but the righteous will live by his faith."

That's it. That's the, if you've been waiting for it, that's the major point from this minor prophet. "The righteous will live by his faith." I believe this verse has a claim to be the greatest verse in the entire Bible. I don't think that's the kind of discussion that needs to be carried on very long because it can never ultimately be proven popular but surely there's a case for it. It's so important that it's quoted three times in the New Testament — once in Romans, once in Galatians, and once in Hebrews. The Romans and Galatians are virtually identical, so what I'm going to do now is to concentrate, draw your attention first to where it occurs in Romans and then in Hebrews and then we'll come back to where it occurred in Habakkuk as we close.

So turn with me please to Romans chapter 1 and verse 17. Romans chapter 1 and verse 17. In the 16th century the continent of Europe was in desperate spiritual darkness, dominated by the Roman Catholic Church with horrendous unbiblical practices, including of course the scandal of indulgences whereby people could pay money and visit relics in order to shorten their time in purgatory and alleviate the punishment of those they believed were already there. In Germany at that time there was a young monk who'd been wrestling for years with the problem of how to get right with God. He was so desperate about it that he joined the hermits of Saint Augustine, one of the most strict order in the whole of the Roman Catholic Church. He poured himself into study and prayer and meditation and rituals and sacrifices and ceremonies. He said, and I quote, "I was a good monk and I kept the rule of my order to strictly that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I."

He fasted for days on end. He slept with virtually no bedclothes at night, even in

the depths of winter, and almost froze to death. He had an overwhelming sense first, of God's holiness, and then of his own sinfulness. And he knew that if he was ever to get right with God his sin would need to be forgiven. But if these sins were to be forgiven they would need to be confessed. But if they were to be confessed they would need to be remembered. But what if he didn't remember them all and some of them slipped through the net? Surely that would find him condemned. And so he spent endless hours going to a confessor, sometimes up to six hours at a time. He drove his confessor crazy. The confessor said to him, "For goodness sake, go away and do something worth confessing!" He said, in his torment of guilt and fear and despair, and I quote, "I was more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated Him!"

And believe it or not, when he was in that position, the Roman Catholic Church appointed him as lecturer in the Bible at the local university. And now for the first time he seriously had to read the Bible. And two years later he came across Romans chapter 1 and verse 17: "For in the Gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. And those words crushed him because what he took them to mean was this. This Gospel, about which of course he had no idea, what is this Gospel doing? It is revealing — this was his thinking — the righteousness of God. It is a description, it is a picture, it is a lens into the righteousness of God. And he took that to mean that the Gospel was putting into capital letters what he already knew in lowercase - the righteousness, the holiness, the purity of God, the very thing that lay at the heart of his guilt and despair. And so his situation got even worse. It crushed him even further. He was in a dreadful state of fear and despair. He believed that the Gospel wrote his death sentence in even larger letters and that drove him to even deeper despair.

And then one day, the truth of these words broke in on him and he saw that the righteousness of God was not a description of God, it was the righteousness *from* God - God's righteousness, the way of righteousness, the way of being right with God, that God had provided, and that he had done so himself in the person of Jesus Christ - that the righteousness of God was a gift from God granted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ who had fulfilled every requirement of the Law and so was without sin and then having lived a sinless life He offered Himself in death on the cross and fulfilled the requirements of the Law in that regard too. And he said this, "When I saw the difference that the Law is one thing and the Gospel another, I broke through. I felt myself to have gone through doors into paradise!" The monk's name was Martin Luther, and the rest, as we all know, is history.

This is the key of salvation. Jesus has fulfilled all the demands of God's Law in His life and in His death and the one who puts his or her trust in Jesus Christ and doesn't put his or her trust in themselves, the person who trusts in Him is declared right with God, not on the basis of his or her own merits but on the basis of Jesus Christ. So that Edward Mote, the English hymn writer can say these words, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I

dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." It's the key to salvation and I dare not before going a moment further in this service tonight, I dare not fail to ask whether each and every one of you here tonight is clear about this. Not only clear about it intellectually and seeing, "Yes, this is the key to salvation. The righteous, the person who is right with God, is right with God by faith, by faith in Jesus Christ, by trusting Him and knowing Him as one's own personal Savior." Let me ask you then, as if you were the only other person in the room tonight, are you trusting Jesus Christ as your own personal Savior? When you look back to the cross and can you say, "Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place, my place, condemned He stood. Sealed my pardon with His blood"? Can you say that? Do you know that, not only in your head, "Yes, I know that Jesus died on the cross for sinners, rose again from the dead," but can you say, "He stood there in my place. He bore my sins. I know that I am forgiven. I know that I have eternal life because my trust is solely, only, totally in Him"? If you can, you've discovered the key to salvation.

But secondly, it's the key to perseverance. So go on further into the New Testament please to the book of Hebrews and to chapter 10. Now what we call Hebrews was written to converted Jews, possibly living at Rome, and they were caught between a rock and a hard place. They were hated by the Jews, you'll find that all over the book of Acts and Romans, and they were hated also by the Romans. And so they endured a great deal of suffering. Look at verse 32:

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publically exposed to insult and persecution, at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

So this was the situation they were in. It was a very difficult situation. They were, as I say, between a rock and a hard place. So what were they to do? Well, the writer tells them in modern-street language to "hang in there." Look what he says in verse 35: "So do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere." That's it, hang in there. "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God" — and now there are two promises; notice them. "You will receive what He has promised" — there's the first. And the second is - "In just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay." So he says to them, "I know the going is tough, I know there are things you can't understand, but here are two things I want you to cling on to. Don't let them go, whatever happens. You will receive what was promised; you will, at the end of this life, whatever it may hold for you, you will receive the fullness of salvation in heaven. Here's the second promise — Hang onto it. 'He who is coming will come.'" So they were to hold on to these two great promises.

But as with the verse in Habakkuk itself, that was in some time in the future. In some time in the future they would find themselves by the grace of God in heaven and at some time in the known, unknown, Jesus is going to return. But what should they do in the meantime when the going was so tough and they were suffering so greatly. Well look at exactly what the writer says to them in verse 38. Well he quotes Habakkuk. "But My righteous one will live by faith." Now what a word for us today because we have the same two great promises of which the writer reminded the Hebrews. We have the promise of the fullness of eternal life in heaven; we have that promise. And we have the promise that Jesus will return. It's mentioned three hundred times in the New Testament, once in every thirteen verses from Matthew to Revelation. We have that promise. And we must cling onto those two promises but we are in the in between time, between the giving of the promises and the fulfillment of them. We don't see heaven with the eye of the flesh, we don't see the Lord Jesus returning with the eye of the flesh, but we are to see them both with the eye of faith. The righteous one shall live by faith.

That is exactly what the writer tells the Hebrews and it is precisely the same for us today. It's a foundational principle of the Christian life. Brilliantly summarized by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:7 — "We live by faith, not by sight." You see, we simply don't know how the swirling circumstances of life that so trouble us at times perplex us, confuse us, throw us off balance at times — we don't know how those fit into God's plan and we don't need to know. In some Christian circles today there's a craving for signs and wonders and words of wisdom and extra Biblical revelation and sudden and dramatic solution to our problems and so forth. But that kind of emphasis is unhelpful and it's eccentric because it dismantles the principle of faith. Think about our trials and tribulations and traumas and pains. Now the only answer that makes natural sense is to get rid of them, have them solved, and the sooner the better, in fact immediately. And there are practitioners on so-called Christian television who would in fact say that, "All we have to do is name it and claim it. God is a loving and powerful heavenly Father. If we have a situation like that, a financial problem, a health problem, a relationship problem, all we have to do is claim deliverance from it and it will be given. Oh, and by the way, here's the address to which to send your check," which is very helpful of them.

But again, that dismantles the principle of faith. You see, faith has another option. Think of Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni Eareckson as she was at the time when she dived into that river, that water, and came up out of the water quadriplegic. She went through a tough time after that. There was a time when she nearly let her faith go, but read her whole story and read these words from her later: "When we learn to lean back to God's sovereignty, fixing and settling our thoughts on that unshakable, unmovable reality, we can experience great inner peace." Now hear me carefully, or rather hear her carefully. "Our troubles may not change, our pain may not diminish, our loss may not be restored, our problems may not fade with

the new dawn, but the power of those things to harm us is broken as we rest in the fact that God is in control.”

So what should we do when we feel at times that we're between that rock and hard place, when we can't understand what's going on? Well, we're given three times, as we've discovered in Scripture, in fact quoted three times in the New Testament from Habakkuk's statement in the Old, “My righteous one will live by faith.” We are called upon throughout Scripture to trust God even when we cannot trace Him. And I'll confess, it is difficult at times to trace God. It's not easy to reconcile the dreadful thing that may suddenly or gradually happen to us. It's not easy, it's not simple, it's not the snapping of the finger to reconcile that with a powerful and loving God but we're to work through it in prayer and the study of God's Word until more and more we learn to trust God even when we cannot trace Him.

So the righteous will live by faith is the key to salvation as we saw in Romans, it's the key to perseverance as we have just seen in Hebrews. Now turn back to Habakkuk himself and to chapter 2 and verse 4 and see with me that it's the key to understanding history. Now you remember the situation. God is about to execute judgment on a nation that's dishonored His covenant and He's going to do so by the violent means of a nation with which He's never established a covenant in the first place. A bunch of pagans are going to be unleashed on them. The Babylonians, which incidentally in modern geography would be the Iraqis, which is not a political statement but just a matter of geographic fact. And it sounded preposterous. What was a believer in God meant to do in that kind of situation and what should believers do if God insisted on going through with this preposterous plan as it must have first flush to have seen? The answer is, live by faith.

And nothing could be more relevant to us today because again, we live in the in between times — between the giving of the two great promises in Hebrews, “We shall receive eternal life,” and “The Lord Jesus is going to return.” We live in that in between time and the in between time is tough. It's tough on an international, global level if you think. Many of us have lived through all or part of WWII and the Cold War that followed it and the Cultural Revolution in China, the murderous escapades of Pol Pot in Cambodia, the apartheid upheaval in South Africa, the turmoil in many of the African countries, the thirty years of the troubles in Northern Ireland with thousands killed, the crushing of human rights in one country after another, the persecution of Christians in many parts of the world, the martyrdom of Christians — Christians suffering to the point of death for their faith and more in the 20th century than in all the previous nineteen put together. The era of martyrs within the Christian church was not in the 1st century but in the 20th. And almost everywhere, moral standards seem to be in free fall. The spiritual temperature seems to be dropping. And then there are all the heartaches and disappointments and difficulties. Yes, and failures that we endure at a personal level. What are we to make of all of that and how are we to live in

the light of all of that?

And it would not be unusual for people to say, "What's happening? What's happening in the world? What's happening in my family? What's happening in my life? I just don't understand how all of this fits in. What's happening? What's going on?" Here's the answer to the question. The answer is that God is working out His eternal and unchangeable purposes to the glory of His name and the eternal good of His people.

My father was a laborer and his hobby was repairing watches. And I mean real watches. And he took the back off and it was full of sprockets and wheels and coils going this way and that, big ones and little ones, some appearing in total conflict with each other. It all just looked an incomprehensible and pointless mess. But when you turned over to the other side, now you were able to see that all of those conflicts and little wheels and big wheels and levers and sprockets going in this and that direction, they were all contributing to those hands moving in one clear, sure way. And there are times in our life when things seem to conflict and to baffle us, puzzle us, disappoint us, throw us down, but when we get to the other side we will see that every single one of them was part of God's perfect plan to achieve His perfect purposes for all of His perfected people.

And we know Paul says that, "In all things, in all things," — oh and he's just been writing about everything collapsing. If you read the early part of Romans 8 it's the second law of thermo dynamics put in theological language. The whole creation is groaning like a woman in travail, of childbirth, and it's following that that Paul said, "And we know that in all things, yet including all the things I've just mentioned," says Paul, "God is working for the good, that is the eternal good, of those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose." Yes, and even when there is the temptation and sometimes the successful temptation to feel that the devil is doing this; the devil has got into this situation. Oh, that's one of the old things. The puritan William Gurnall once said, "God puts His eggs under the devil for him to hatch."

And you know, the prophet Habakkuk eventually got the message. Turn over to the end of the book, chapter 3, the last verses. Don't you think that verse 16 is wonderfully honest? Look. "I heard." Now you know what the message was. "I am going to send the Babylonians. They're going to tear you apart." "I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled." He would never have gotten a program on Christian television.

The olive crop fails, the fields produce no food, there are no sheep in the field, no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will be joyful in the God of my salvation." How can he do such a thing? How can he react in that way to that kind of situation? Well, the answer's in the next verse, the final verse. "The sovereign LORD is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He

enables me to go on the heights.” So the prophet is saying, “Things are beyond my understanding but my trust is in God and it is His faithfulness that is enabling me to have unshaken faith in Him.”

William Cowper was a great friend of John Newton, the English minister, best known at a popular level these days for writing his hymn, “Amazing Grace.” William Cowper had terrible sessions of depression and on one occasion he decided to end his life. So he called for a coachman and he got on board the coach at night and asked him to drive to the banks of the River Uz and his intention was to get out of the coach, throw himself in the river, and drown. And the coachman got lost and asked Cowper what he should do. And Cowper said, “Well, see if you can find a light somewhere out there and make for that light and then we’ll see where we are.” So they made for the light and found that they were back home. And some time later Cowper wrote these words:

“God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread, are big with mercy and will break with blessing on your head. His purposes will ripen fast unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower.”

The righteous live by faith. Let's pray together.

Our sovereign God and Father, we thank You for giving us these precious moments of quiet, withdrawn from the business and busyness of a confusing, conflicting world. We seek now, with the Spirit's help, to lay ourselves before You and to pray that we might have the faith that conquers, the faith that trusts You, even when we cannot trace You. Lord, enable each one of us to live in the good of Your Word, for Jesus' sake, amen.

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