

We continue with the series of the speaker's favourite verses or passages.

Words that mean something to us.

This, as you can imagine, is extremely tricky.

I expect you have passages and verses that are special...for a period of time.

For a season.

This is one of mine..

**Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation! The Lord God is my strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk (not to stand still in terror, but to walk) and make (spiritual) progress upon my high places (of trouble, suffering, or responsibility)!"**

These last verses of Habakkuk are precious to me.

They remind me that I am not alone.

In 2016 my mum became very ill. The following year she died.

I called for the Strength of the Lord many times, reading out these verses, and claiming them.

God is faithful and I hope to share with you the love and encouragement that they can bring.

Our leader has asked us to choose 2 scripture readings when we do this, so that is why we have 2 Habakkuk ones today.

There are many verses that talk of the strength of the Lord but I thought it would be more helpful, and applicable to give an overview of this book.

The present mess this world is in, is echoed in Habakkuk's words as he cries out to God who he feels is silent.

Habakkuk lived in the final decades of Israel's Southern Kingdom (tribes of Judah and Benjamin). Hard times because there was a rise of injustice and idolatry. The righteous were suffering and the wicked prospering.

The world was dying and God was silent.

Why was this happening and how long would it go on?

Is God good when there is so much evil in the world?

Questions we are asking about many conflicts, wars, injustices and violence that we hear and see on the news today.

Habakkuk goes directly to God and cries out for answers.

He doesn't accuse God or speak on his behalf.

The first two chapters are the dialogue between God and Habakkuk.

They are poems of lament. Similar to the book of Psalms.

Habakkuk lays it out clearly..Israel is awful and the Torah is being neglected. There is violence and injustice and corrupt leadership.

Shockingly God's answer is horrifying to him.

He will use the Babylonians, a 'worse than Israel' empire, to invade, pillage and ransack them.

It would all be gone.

Habakkuk is devastated. How can this be ?

God's answer to this in chapter 2 v4, is

"The righteous shall live by faith."

The rest of the chapter is God explaining that he will use the corrupt nation of Babylon but he does not endorse them and their neverending cycle of revenge  
ALL nations are accountable to His justice.

This is reassuring to us but still leaves most of us throwing our hands in the air for judgement to come...now!

We could hold onto the fact that God does not miss a trick. He sees it all. But it isn't easy.

This book is so very relevant. It is answering Habakkuk and also future generations.

Habakkuk praises God for answering his questions and responds in the form of a prayer or most probably a song, indicated by the first verse of chapter 3 and the presence of Selah at the end of verses 3,9, and 13; which meant the song was intended to be sung with a triumphal tone.

It starts with a picture of God's power.... Similar to passages in Micah, Nahum. and Exodus  
Cloud and fire and earthquake  
God will bring his judgement down.  
He will confront human evil. And defeat it. He will save his people. He will rescue the oppressed and the innocent.

This hope enables Habakkuk to conclude the book with hopeful praise. Even if the world is falling apart with food shortages, drought and war.  
He will choose trust and joy in the covenant promises of God.  
By the end of this book Habakkuk becomes a shining example of how the righteous live by faith.  
He recognises how dark and chaotic the world can become and invites us into a journey of faith, of trusting that God loves this world more than we do and that He will one day deal with its evil.

It also confirms the verse from Nehemiah (8v10), 'The joy of the Lord is my strength.'

**The Lord God is my strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk (not to stand still in terror, but to walk) and make (spiritual) progress upon my high places (of trouble, suffering, or responsibility)!"**

The word used for strength here in the Hebrew signifies military strength;  
When we call for His strength, He comes as our invincible army  
He is a troop, by himself. We can be brave because we have Him. An army of God.  
We are the majority.

With God, we can navigate rough and dangerous terrain with the confident sure footedness of a deer. To make progress and not stand frozen in shock or dismay.

The reference to responsibility was so relevant to me. Trouble and suffering is self explanatory but the responsibility aspect was my overwhelming experience.  
It is a lonely and isolating place to be, and it can feel utterly smothering and paralysing.  
Research, decisions and action. No space for anything else. It feels as if you are drenched and weighed down, swamped.

But, I am reminded that God can make my feet like hinds feet, I will not lose step or fall.  
The deer running about on the high hills dance and leap, full of life and joy.  
A great challenge when things are tough.

When nothing makes sense and troubles overwhelm us we need to remember that God gives us strength. He will give us sure footed confidence through difficult times.

Habakkuk saw his own limitations in contrast with God's unlimited control of the world and its events.

Habakkuk didn't just practice positive thinking and shut out the idea of the barren fig tree and the empty cattle stalls. Instead, he saw those problems for what they were and remembered that God was greater than them all. His strength was *not* in fig trees or vines or fields or flocks, but only in the **LORD God**.

We demonstrate that the **LORD God** is our **strength** when we praise Him.

Charles Swindoll said The book of Habakkuk reminds us that no place is too dark and no wall too thick for God's grace to penetrate in a powerful and life-affirming way.

***Amen***