

Pastor Jim Lloyd

Date: November 29, 2015

Title: "In The Darkest Of Days Give Him Praise"

Text: Habakkuk 3:17-18

2 James 1:1-5 says, "On the eve following the tenth moon, children throughout the villages dressed in a variety of strange attire depicting both good and evil. Most of the children were accompanied by parents or older siblings as they walked from one dwelling place to another, each carrying a sack or container. As the children made their presence known at the village dwelling places, they were often presented with sweet goods wrapped in shiny and colorful packaging. As the hour grew late and the children tired, they returned to their own dwelling places to enjoy some of the many small treasures received. During the night following the tenth moon, the earthly father and/or mother finished off the many small treasures received by the little ones. The morning brought with it great disappointment as children throughout the villages learned that their new treasures had disappeared." (Here a video was shown depicting children's responses to their parents telling them that they [the parents] had eaten all of their [the children] Trick or Treat candy.) By the way - 2 James isn't in the Bible should anyone have looked. I'm James the second.

Lessons from the Video: 1. Not everyone responds the same way to similar circumstances. 2. For some, the smallest loss ruins the day. 3. For others, the loss was no big deal - there will be a next year. 4. For some, their happiness seems based on what they have. 5. For others, their happiness is not based on their haves and have nots. 6. Some were very self-centered and others were not. A few found delight in their parent's happiness. I love the line - "That's alright. I just want YOU to be happy." Wouldn't it be grand if we, Christians, could always find pleasure in making our Heavenly Father happy?

If you were given the opportunity to pick your own children or grandchildren from the video, would you find it easy or hard to make your choices? Which kids have the most to learn? Which kids might be more likely to be better adjusted adults? Do you suppose that some of those kids have more friends than others? Which kids brought the greatest pleasure to their father or mother? Did you know that most of life's goodies don't last forever. Perhaps it would be a good thing if our candy never ran out. It's a nice thought anyway.

What a nice thought to have EVERYTHING go your way and never have anything get in the way of your happiness. Perhaps you can think of someone who seems to live that way all the time. Every stock they choose goes up. Every team they root for wins the championship. They always shoot under par. When they drop a piece of bread, it always lands butter-side-up. Their kids come home every time with straight A's. Their boss just called them out of the blue to give them a raise. Have you ever known anyone like that? Just checking - Have I described you? - Life for you is GRAND and EASY ALL OF THE TIME? Although I've never done this before - if that does describe you - I'm giving you the day off BECAUSE today's message is for the rest of us. You can collect your things and go home, because today's message is for those who know all too well what it means to have a dark day or two or three - to live life under the gun or out of the zone. This morning I'm talking to the people who don't have a perfect track record in picking stocks. Your team didn't win the championship; in fact, your coach just got fired. Your child didn't come home with straight A's; in fact, he came home with detention. And your boss didn't offer to give you a raise. When you showed up for work he said, "Don't bother taking your coat off." This is what it's like to be out of the zone.

I admit that I have experience in this area. I know what it's like when more things go wrong than go right. I could tell some stories. There have been times when I thought my life could be described by the old "Hee Haw" song - Gloom, despair and agony on end. "If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all." In the movie "Wall Street", Michael Douglas' character, Gordon Gekko, has this to say about an unlucky businessman: "If this guy owned a funeral parlor, no one would die." Have you ever felt that it was just your bad luck, and your lot in life, to constantly live in lack, to constantly underachieve, to always get the bad break, that failure would follow you around forever? Now, I've approached this subject with some levity, but there's nothing funny about failure, or disappointments, or under achievements, or failed expectations. It's not fun to go through the fire. There's nothing funny about feeling beat down by life. Some have gone months without closing a deal or weeks without making a sale or days on end without any kind of positive feedback. Perhaps you lost your job for doing the right thing. We know what it's like to wonder if our best days are behind us for good, that God no longer has need of us, and perhaps He's forgotten who we are or where we live.

- 1. When We Find Ourselves Facing Some Dark Days (Out Of The Zone).** Should you feel this way today, I want you to know that you're not the first person to have these feelings. You're not even the first believer to have these

feelings. King David was described as being a *"man after God's own heart"* - with a special anointing and calling on his life. Yet, he wrote OFTEN about the valleys. Many times in the Psalms you will hear him say, *"How long, O Lord?"* *"How long must this go on?"* *"How long until you hear my cry?"* He knew what it was like to suddenly, inexplicably find himself under the gun. Listen to what he wrote in Psalm 44:15-18 - *"My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge. All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path."* David is saying, "We're passing through this difficult season - and we did nothing to deserve it. WHY is this happening? This time we've been good." A contrasting example can be found in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk is one of the minor prophets. His book is very short - three chapters - and we don't know much about him, except he wrote around the year 600 B.C. He talks about a season of judgment that Israel endured. It was a season in which they experienced trouble, failure, oppression and lack. As you read Habakkuk, you see that this was a judgment they brought on themselves through open rebellion to the ways of God - that THEIR BEHAVIOR reaped the inevitable consequences.

2. **Correction or Preparation?** The first thing we need to do whenever we pass through a season "in the fire" or a season of dark days is to ask: What was my role in what I'm experiencing today? Did I truly get blindsided? Or did I set myself up for failure through my own sinful behavior? Sometimes - NOT EVERY TIME - the reason our lives come unraveled is because we have allowed SINFUL behavior to take root in our thoughts, words, and deeds. I'm NOT saying that sin is the cause of ALL of your problems ALL the time. But IT IS SOMETIMES! When we get too friendly with sin, God allows our actions to run their course, so that maybe through the consequences He can get our attention. When you find yourself "in the fire" - when nothing seems to be going right and God seems to be silent - it's time to do a reality check. ASK the HOLY SPIRIT to show you WHERE YOU HAVE GRIEVED HIM. I used the word judgment a moment earlier. CORRECTION is likely a better word. It's not that God is getting even, it's that He is doing what you need for Him to do in order for Him to get you back on the right track of doing what's best for your life. When I feel like I've been thrown into the fire - and it has happened - the first question I would do well to ask myself is: "God, are You correcting me? Show me what I need to do." Sometimes life's most difficult seasons are the result of correction. And sometimes, as David mentioned in Psalm 44, they're NOT the result of correction. "This happened even though we did nothing to cause it." During these seasons, God is NOT correcting us. What I have learned is that He is PREPARING us. He is preparing us for the next thing - maybe the next BIG thing - He wants to do in our lives. Do you remember the story of Jesus' friend Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha? Lazarus became sick and his family sent word to Jesus to come, and Jesus waited and waited and waited. When He finally showed up, Lazarus had been in the grave for four days. This WASN'T God's judgment on Lazarus or his family. It WASN'T God's correction. God was preparing Lazarus and Mary and Martha and the entire community of Bethany for something SPECTACULAR! They were about to see the power of God come alive in their presence. Sometimes life's most difficult seasons aren't correction - they're preparation. And here's the amazing thing about how God works in our lives - we'll see this spelled out for us in the book of Habakkuk in just a moment. **With REPENTANCE, CORRECTION becomes PREPARATION.** Sometimes it's necessary for God to pull back and allow us to reap the spiritual consequences of our behavior. When that happens, we have the option - We can resist God's correction, and continue living in the darkest of days, and continue to live in the flesh, OR we can SURRENDER to what God's Spirit is telling us to do. We can turn to Him in repentance, and receive His correction. And what happens next? He begins to prepare us for something bigger and better in our Christian life. I want you to understand that even though at times it is necessary for God to correct us, our relationship with Him is not really about judgment, and it's not really about punishment. It's about TRANSFORMATION! *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved"* (John 3:17). God uses these unpleasant events and difficult seasons to correct us AND prepare us. And, in my experience, it's usually a little bit of both. C.S. Lewis said, "Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Sometimes that's what it takes to get our attention. These into-the-fire seasons are God's wake up call to stir us from our spiritual slumber. Bill Gates once said, "Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose." Someone was heard to say that "When we succeed, we tend to party; when we fail, we tend to ponder." We learn more or should I say we LEARN BETTER through our LOSSES than through our wins.
3. **Getting Back Into The Zone.** For the rest of the time remaining I want to talk to you about what to do when you feel like you're living your life out of the zone, when everything seems to be ten times more difficult than it

should be, when God's blessing seems just beyond your reach. The preliminary step, as I've already mentioned, is to do a self-check, to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and to convict you of the sin that stands in the way of you being able to experience the fullness of God's blessing. Earlier I mentioned the book of Habakkuk. This book closes with some of the most poignant and powerful words in all of Scripture. These words apply to you if you're going through a difficult season right now. They teach a principle that will help you move - from the desert to the oasis, from the fire to a life of freedom and victory, from living in darkness to walking in the Light.

4. **The Power Of One Word.** Habakkuk 3:17-18 - *"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though 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."* God wants to speak to us through the words of this ancient prophet. Particularly ONE WORD. That word is "yet." This word can also be translated "nevertheless" or "even still." The success of the Christian life turns on this word: YET. The ability to live as an overcomer turns on this word: YET. "No matter what happens in my life - even when I pass through seasons of drought, when there's no buds on the fig tree, no grapes on the vine, the olive crop has failed, the fields produce no food, there's no sheep in the pen or cattle in the stalls - YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD. When life doesn't seem to be going your way, when someone eats ALL of your candy, you need to do something that isn't easy or doesn't come naturally. You need to say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior." This is a conscious decision that IS NOT driven by circumstances or emotions. It's driven by surrender.
5. **Strength In Surrender.** During these times, you need to turn your eyes away from the disappointment of your setbacks, away from the empty candy wrappers and containers, away from the discouragement that comes with a lack of results, and away from the disenchantment that often follows failed expectations, and make the deliberate choice to TURN YOUR EYES TOWARD JESUS, so that YOUR JOY is placed in Him. Rita Springer once said that "You'll never know that God is all you need until you come to a place where God is all you have." In His mercy He allows us to come to that place, not to beat us down, but to PREPARE US - sometimes for greatness. Life is full of paradoxes, and living in the fire is one of them. God has promised us a life full of joy and peace and fulfillment and contentment and happiness and meaning - but we don't achieve this kind of life by grasping for it. We experience the abundant life that Jesus promised not by fighting for it, but through a life of surrender to the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus said, *"Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it"* (Matthew 10:39). Let me read a quote to you from Watchman Nee. It's from his book, *The Normal Christian Life*. "God's means of delivering us from sin is not by making us stronger and stronger, but by making us weaker and weaker. This is surely rather a peculiar way of victory, you say; but it is the divine way. God sets us free from the dominion of sin, not by strengthening our old man, but by crucifying him; not by helping him to do anything, but by removing him from the scene of action. Even though Habakkuk was an Old Testament prophet, this is the principle he is talking about: the crucified life. The surrendered life. The attitude that say, 'Things may not be the way I want them to be in my life right now, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.'" It is at this moment of surrender, this moment of yieldedness, that God is able to life you up and fill you with His power. Look at what Habakkuk says next - *"The Sovereign LORD is my strength..."* (vs. 19a). I know what it's like to feel powerless and helpless and hopeless. I even know what it's like to feel like I've got nothing left to give. I think I can say with a measure of certainty that every time that I arrived at that moment of surrender and said in the midst of the hurt, fear, pain and regret, "YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD" - every time, without fail, God has met me and filled me with His strength. He will do the same for you. No matter how desperate or disappointed you may feel today, when you turn your eyes AWAY FROM your circumstances and turn your eyes TO JESUS and make a deliberate decision to be joyful in Him, He will meet you right there, and He will be your strength. SURRENDER leads to joy. JOY leads to Strength. Do you know what happens next? You're back in the zone! *"...he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights"* (vs. 19b). Do you know what Habakkuk is saying? He's saying, "When God is my strength, life is better. When God is my strength, I don't wander into sin. When God is my strength, I don't explode in anger like I used to. When God is my strength, I treat others better. When God is my strength, I'm not always tempted to give up. When God is my strength, my life works.
6. **Conclusion.** There is no joy in defeat. There is no joy in failure. There is no joy in broken dreams and failed expectations. There is no joy in giving all you've got and getting nothing in return. These things do nothing but drain the life out of you. But there IS joy in Jesus! When you make the deliberate choice to say *"Yet I will rejoice IN HIM,"* the life that seemed to be seeping will suddenly be filled to overflowing. Life turns on this one phrase:

YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD. Our tendency is to want to say, "God, when You turn things around, I'll be full of joy and THEN I'll be sure to say thanks. Until then, let me wallow in my misery." And God says, "That's not the way it works." Forget about the fire, forget about your circumstances, forget about the difficulties, forget about the dark days. Turn your eyes away from all that's wrong in your life and turn your eyes to Jesus. Make the deliberate choice to be JOYFUL IN HIM, and HE will be your joy. Not only will He be your joy, He will be your strength. He'll give you the speed of a deer and He will take you to the heights. And you'll find yourself once again walking in the Light as He is in the light.