

Habakkuk – Finding joy in little

Pre reading –Deuteronomy 26:1-11 needs to be read in advance of this bible study.

Groups – The sheet at the end of this pack could be given to smaller groups of 3-4 people.

Introduction

Money is a big issue in our lives and lots revolves around it: where we live, where we work, where we holiday. How should we steward the resources we have when we have lots, but also when we have little? It takes Kingdom Courage to break from the world's dependence on material possessions. This session is primarily meant to discuss how we use our wealth, but the principles could be applied to our gifts and our time.

Starter questions (5 mins)

- (1) What percentage of our income should we give to God's work?
- (2) Who do you talk to about the amount you give?

Habakkuk – Setting the scene

Habakkuk was a prophet who lived in Jerusalem. There is not much known about him, but he is thought to have lived in the time before the Babylonian invasion. He cried out to God in a real way in his letter, *Hab 1:3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?*

Habakkuk lived in a bad time politically and for the land. Things were going wrong for Israel, God was no longer with them and there was less and less prosperity.

Read Habakkuk 3:17-19

*17 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,
18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

*19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.*

Habakkuk was describing a time in his nation when things were getting worse and worse and they were facing an economic disaster.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) In an economy made up of almost entirely farmers. What does 'field produce no food' mean for the nation?
- (2) A sheep would give a continuous source of food, so what is the modern day equivalent?
- (3) What does Habakkuk have to give?

Firstfruits

Habakkuk shows how to give in the most extreme of conditions of poverty. We can go back now and look at Deuteronomy, where the ancient law was laid down for the people of Israel. We will see why this was Habakkuk's response.

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-4

When you have entered the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, 2 take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name 3 and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." 4 The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) Who gives, and what do they give, in verse 1?
- (2) Thinking of your income and possessions, is it easy to say they were given to you by God?
- (3) What does giving the 'first fruits' teach us about the timing and size of our giving?
- (4) What is the difference between giving out of the surplus and giving as a sacrifice?

Deuteronomy teaches that we should give sacrificially, as all we have has been given by God. Since it is a gift from God, the first thing we should do is give back. Before we have added up what we need, we give. We don't just give the leftovers, we give our first fruits.

Habakkuk would have grown up always giving the first fruits away of each harvest. Every year he would have gone to the temple with his basket of first fruits. He would hand it to the priest, but then he would do something else.

Thanksgiving

Read Deuteronomy 26:5-11

5 Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. 6 But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. 7 Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. 8 So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. 9 He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; 10 and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me." Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. 11 Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.

The Levites and foreigners received the offering, as the Levites dedicated their time to God's work, and the foreigners would have been the those without a family set up to support them. This is a good model for us when thinking of who to give to.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What 2 things did the Lord do for the people in verse 8 and 9? (One material, one eternal)
- (2) What would giving thanksgiving, remind the giver of?
- (3) In Habakkuk's case, what could he still rejoice in, even though the field produced no food?
- (4) How did regular giving make this easier for Habakkuk?

As well as being a sacrificial giver, we are called to be an eternal thanks giver. We are joyful, as all we have is a gift that has come from God, and we thank him for it.

Habakkuk is an example of a thanks giver. Even though the crop failed, and the sheep have gone, he still can rejoice in the same way. Whether the crop was big or small, he rejoices in 'God his saviour'. Habakkuk had been trained to link the material gifts of God to the eternal gift of salvation.

Looking to the eternal

Habakkuk shows that even in the hardest times we can be joyful when you are trained to look to the eternal, and he mirrors teaching from Jesus in Matthew.

Read Matthew 6:19-21

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) Where was Habakkuk's heart?
- (2) Where is your heart?
- (3) How can we change our hearts?

If you love something, you want to spend money on it. Think how easy it is to spend money on your favourite food or hobby. You have to stop yourself from spending too much in this area. In the same way, if your heart is in the work of heaven you'll have to control yourself to not spend too much on it.

Nothing left

What if there is nothing? All this sounds like a good idea. But what if you are in a situation where you have nothing? Reading wider in Habakkuk, God has brought disaster on the land. This is a reality of a fallen world. Many Christian people live with little, lose their jobs, are evicted from homes, are declared bankrupt, and are even on the point of starvation. How does this teaching help us when we reach this point?

The great prophet Habakkuk can rejoice in God in these circumstances, but this is so hard to relate to. This prophet looked back at the historic event of Israel being brought out of Egypt. This is an event he can always look back to and praise God for.

Read Mark 15:27-31

27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!" 31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Questions (5 mins)

- (1) What earthly possessions did Jesus have by the point of his death?
- (2) How did Jesus give sacrificially?

(3) What did Jesus cry out for at the end of his life?

(4) Where was Jesus' heart?

Jesus had everything taken from him, no money, no clothes, with insults heaped on him. But He says, my God, my God, pointing to who sustains Him, sustained Habakkuk and will sustain us. As Jesus gave the ultimate gift, His eyes were focused on God.

Habakkuk joyfully gave all because he believed in a God, who sustained him in the everyday and in the eternal. We now have the benefit of knowing Jesus, and the gift He gave us.

Conclusion

We need to give sacrificially out of joy for all God has put in our lives on this earth, but even more we need to give out of gratitude for what God did through Jesus on the Cross, winning our eternal salvation.

So let's train our hearts to give the first fruits of all we have, and in our giving, model our Saviour on the cross, giving all while looking for all He needed to God.

Questions (5 mins)

(1) Do you find giving helps you focus more on God?

(2) In what area of life do you want to be more sacrificial?

Response (15 minutes)

Pray for each member of the group.

You may consider praying into:

- Pride around what we have
- For joy to be part of giving.
- Full revelation of Jesus, and what he gave for us.

Habakkuk: Finding joy in little – Group Handout

Questions

Starter questions (5 minutes)

- (1) What percentage of our income should we give to God's work?
- (2) Who do you talk to about the amount you give?

Habakkuk – Setting the scene (Habakkuk 3:17-19) (5 minutes)

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Firstfruits (Deuteronomy 26:1-4) (5 minutes)

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Thanksgiving (Deuteronomy 26:5-11) (5 minutes)

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Looking to the eternal (Matthew 6:19-21) (5 minutes)

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Nothing left (Mark 15:27-31) (5 minutes)

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- (2) How did Jesus give sacrificially?
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Conclusion (5 minutes)

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Response (15 minutes)

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Bible passages

Habakkuk 3:17-19

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