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Sermon Notes

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From Fear to Faith

Habakkuk 3:16-19

I. An Age of Fear

A. September 11th: A New Era in American History?

1. Wars fought abroad
 - a. WWI left Europe looking like a lunar landscape
 - b. WWII left vast parts of the entire inhabited world devastated
 - c. only part of America it touched was Pearl Harbor and Aleutian Islands
 - d. Americans unfamiliar with devastation of war
2. Cold War: constant fear of nuclear destruction
 - a. Russia's A-bomb & H-Bomb capabilities
 - b. Sputnik... Russia's technological edge
 - c. Cuban Missile crisis
 - d. decade of students doing missile drills under their desks
 - e. BUT no shot ever fired in this "Cold War"... fears never realized
3. New Era: Media brings images right into our living rooms
 - a. Viet Nam: first war fought live on the evening news
 - b. modern media technology even faster... CNN, C-SPAN are slow... now Internet fastest way to get immediate news & images of conflicts
 - c. wars fought around the world are also fought in our minds through news images

4. September 11th changed all that:
 - a. destruction brought right into our biggest city
 - b. Americans died
 - c. American property destroyed

B. Fear: A Devastating Psychological Force

1. Bible mentions “fear” 260 times in NIV
2. Some fear is good

Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

All sinners start at complacency... over-confident of their own righteousness, unafraid of Judgment Day

God uses the conviction of the Law to bring sinners to fear for their souls

John Newton: ‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved”

Proverbs 16:6 Through the fear of the LORD a man avoids evil.

Luke 12:4-5 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

3. Much fear is from the devil
4. One of God’s greatest gifts is freedom from fear

Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 27:1-3 The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. 3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

C. The Message of Habakkuk: A Journey from Fear to Faith

1. Habakkuk's first complaint: Wicked Oppressors of Judah (1:2-4)

"Why does God not respond to the wrong and injustice of the wicked in Judah?"
 Problem: God's supposed silence and inactivity

2. God's First Answer: The Babylonians Are Coming!! (1:5-11)

God is about to respond by hurling the Babylonians at Judah as a judgment

3. Habakkuk's Second Complaint: The Babylonians Are Godless Arrogant Tyrants

"Why does God use wicked people to judge those more righteous than themselves?"
 Problem: God's overwhelming actions

4. God's Second Answer: Habakkuk 2

a. The Babylonians will get theirs in turn

"What goes around comes around"... or... "The Law of the Boomerang"

b. The Empire that crushes the Babylonians will themselves be crushed in turn

c. God is building a world-wide Kingdom of people who know and rejoice in His glory

d. Individual people will be saved by simple faith

5. John Newton's Journey of Salvation

John Newton: 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved"

Before the terrors of God's judgment come alive in a human heart, we are confident and at ease in sin... God uses law to crush that complacency and bring us to fear

God then moves us along from fear to faith

Therefore, the most significant thing a person can do is move from complacency to fear, and from fear to faith... this is the journey of salvation!!!

II. Fear and the Heroes of the Faith

Psalm 103:13-14 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust.

A. Biblical Heroes

1. Abraham in Gerar

Abraham lied and said Sarah was his sister to Abimelech in Gerar... God prepared to judge Abimelech for taking Sarah

Genesis 20:10-11 And Abimelech asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?" Abraham replied, "I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.'

2. Isaac in Gerar

Genesis 26:6-7 So Isaac stayed in Gerar. When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful."

3. Job overwhelmed with fear

Job 13:20-21 "Only grant me these two things, O God, and then I will not hide from you: Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me with your terrors.

4. Moses was afraid of being discovered as a murderer, afraid of being stoned by his people, afraid of God Himself many times

5. David terrified frequently

1 Samuel 21:10-13 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: "'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?" 12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. 13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

Psalm 55:4-5 My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.

6. Mighty prophet Elijah, after taking on the 450 prophets of Baal, was afraid for his life at the hands of Jezebel

1 Kings 19:1-4 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." 3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

7. Isaiah trembled at his prophecy

Isaiah 21:3-4 At this my body is racked with pain, pangs seize me, like those of a woman in labor; I am staggered by what I hear, I am bewildered by what I see. My heart falters, fear makes me tremble; the twilight I longed for has become a horror to me.

8. Jeremiah terrified because of his prophecies

Jeremiah 4:19 Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry.

9. Nehemiah VERY afraid before the King of Persia (Neh. 2:2)

B. Historical Heroes

1. Athanasius “Against the World”
2. Luther: Needed a day to give his answer at the Diet of Worms
3. Thomas Cranmer, in a moment of weakness, signed a retraction
4. Susannah Spurgeon @ a big revival

C. Fear a Constant Foe of Faith

III. Worldly Strategies for Overcoming Fear

A. Determinism

Boice: “If this is going to happen to me, I suppose there is nothing that can be done about it. Everybody suffers. Everybody dies. I might as well be resigned to it.”

B. Detachment

Boice: "I don't want to think about such things. Every time I think about them, I get depressed—when I think about my own personal future, when I think about the future of the country. The stock market depresses me. International news depresses me. The best solution is not to think about these things at all."

C. Distraction

Seeking escape through distraction

1. Entertainment
2. Shopping
3. Sports
4. Games
5. Vacations
6. Alcohol/Drugs

D. Determination

"Pull yourselves together. Don't let it get you down!! Face the future with courage!! Believe in yourself!!"

Illus. British "Stiff upper-lip"

None of these worldly strategies work in the end

IV. Habakkuk's Example: From Fear to Faith

A. Habakkuk's Fear

1. Distress over Jewish sin
2. God's reply: The Babylonians Are Coming

1:5-6 *Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. 6 I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.*

3. Habakkuk's anguish greatly intensified

1:12 O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.

4. God's Four-fold answer

- a. The Babylonians will get theirs in due time
- b. one nation after another will rise and be judged in succession
- c. the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea
- d. individuals can enter that glorious kingdom simply by faith

5. Habakkuk still in agony... but now begins his journey from fear to faith

3:16 I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled.

Habakkuk is terrified at the impending doom that will destroy his people... the personal viciousness of the Babylonians will leave him breathless; his body was wracked with pain and agony... he is covered with fear and can barely stand up

B. Habakkuk's Strategy

1. Prayer

- a. Habakkuk was a man of faith-filled prayer... the whole book is written that way
- b. Habakkuk 3 is a prayer
- c. this is the secret source of Habakkuk's journey from fear to faith

2. Worship

- a. vs. 1 & vs. 19 show... this is meant to be a Psalm to be sung
- b. worship renews the heart and lifts the spirits
- c. Habakkuk sings this prayer to God

3. Bible Meditation: God's Past Actions

- a. Biblical truth is the foundation of Habakkuk's worship

- b. Biblical truth is the fuel for Habakkuk's journey from fear to faith
 - c. all of Habakkuk 3 is a poetical meditation on God's past actions in saving His people... God never changes, so why should these events change my joy in Him??
 - d. deep meditation produces deeply rooted, unshakable joy
4. Patient Submission
- a. so much strife and anxiety come from refusing to accept God's will
 - b. God answers, and we refuse to accept the answer
 - c. Habakkuk accepts God's decrees and His timetable
5. Choosing Joy by Faith
6. Relying on God for Constantly Renewed Strength
- C. Habakkuk's Majestic Hymn of Joy

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 go on the heights.

1. A Joy that Originates in God Himself

"I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be joyful in God my Savior"

God never changes!

If He deserved to be worshipped when the harvest is plush, when the figs are ripe, when the sun is shining, when everyone you love loves you and is in good health... yet He also deserves to be praised when everything is against you

2. A Joy that Transcends Even Extreme Circumstances
3. A Joy that Focuses on Salvation
4. A Joy that Scales the Heights

V. Application: The Daily Triumph of Faith Over Fear

- A. Some Things We Should NOT Fear

1. Circumstances
 2. Frowning people
 3. Future evil (anxiety)
- B. Some Things We Should Fear
1. Non-Christian: Wrath of God your Judge... eternal hell
 2. Christian: Displeasing God your Father
- C. From Complacency to Fear... the first step in salvation!!
1. Understand the Law of God
 2. Understand the Holy Justice of God
 3. Understand the Perfect Wrath of God
 4. Accept Your Position Before God...as a Sinner
- D. From Fear to Faith
1. Trusting Christ alone for salvation
 2. Believing His word is true
 3. Ultimate fear—condemnation—is gone forever!!
- E. The Daily Triumph of Faith
1. Prayer in faith
 2. Worship by faith
 3. Biblical meditation by faith
 4. Patient submission by faith
 5. Choosing joy by faith
 6. Relying on God to renew you by faith