

Singing A Capella

Habakkuk

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I graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Music Education. I want you to know that I am living, breathing, undeniable proof that there is a God in heaven and that he is good and gracious. Because if there was not I would probably still be wandering the halls and practice rooms of the Foster Music building on EKU's campus.

Music Theory, the study of the "nuts and bolts", how music is put together was a huge challenge for me. I was clueless then and still am today. One of the elements of music theory is sight reading and chord and interval identification. The professor would play one note and then another and then ask us to identify the interval between them or a series of chords and we would have identify the progressions. He would give us a line of music and a starting note and then say, "sing it" and we would have to sing it by ourselves and without the piano. Now to do any of these things a person has to have some concept of pitch, I no concept of pitch, I have a leather ear.

Then there was the guy who sat next to me, he had perfect pitch. He could identify the pitch at which the fluorescent light hummed. He blew the curve for the whole class. I was and still am terrified to sing a capella, I've gotta have some music to support me, I've gotta have music to lean on.

Living life when it isn't any fun, living life through the hard times is like singing a capella. It seems like there is no support, nothing there to hold on to. In times like this our faith can get shaky and we start to ask questions like: "Can I do this?", "What good is my faith if it doesn't help", and "Where is God?"

Our text this morning comes from Habakkuk which is a book of only 3 chapters. There are only a few verses that are quoted with any regularity; "the just shall live by his faith" and "the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." But the entire book is wonderful and reflects many of the feelings and emotions of present day Christians. Habakkuk, the prophet of God cries out and registers a complaint with God and poses these questions to God. "God, why? Why, if you are the God of righteousness do you allow and permit those who are wrong to prosper while your children suffer? Why God are your children treated so unfairly? Why is there such a gap between fact and faith?" In essence, Habakkuk in the first two chapters asks God, "How long must I sing a capella? Why does life have to be so hard and disappointing? When will life be joyful and fun again?"

In chapters 1 & 2 Habakkuk expresses all of these feelings and emotions to God. Then he writes chapter 3 as a song to be sung, and he didn't mean for it to be sung a capella. In the last verse of the book Habakkuk says, "to the director of music on stringed instruments." He wants this song to be full of joy and happiness. The end of verses 18 & 19 he says, "I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength." Habakkuk had gone from doubt and despair in chapters 1 & 2 to faith and trust in the Lord in chapter 3. From singing a capella to singing with a full orchestra.

I want to go back for a moment to the idea of life "being fun." Who said that life was supposed to be fun? Is that even in the Bible? Jesus talked about abundant life in John 10:10 when he said, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly." Granted the word abundant does not mean full of fun, but what Jesus means is he wants us to live life to its fullest. I don't believe that Jesus wants us to live lives that are dominated by fear, grief, pain, heartache and disappointment. While we may experience these things in our lives from time to time he doesn't want us to remain in the grips of these feelings and emotions. So life should be fun.

I believe that there are some things we can learn from Habakkuk. The first thing is:

1. Sooner or later we must face life without music.

That is where Habakkuk was, remember from our scripture reading, his situation and his attitude were bad. He had a broken heart and he was crying out to God about how unfair life circumstances were. How many times have we felt the same way, our situation or circumstances were terrible and we faced life without music.

Several years ago there was a book out called, *“ Holding on to Your Faith Even When God Doesn’t Make Sense.”* In that book the author included a section of questions that had been asked of him over the many years of ministry. One question was:

The Lord answered prayer miraculously for my son when he was 8 yrs. old. He had open heart surgery and survived without permanent problems. But my husband was diagnosed with cancer 3 yrs. ago, and people prayed for him day and night. Nevertheless, he died last winter. I can’t understand why God heard the prayers for our son but allowed my husband to die. Is God there or isn’t he?

Another situation was:

A couple had tried for years to have a child but could not. Then came a miracle as the wife became pregnant and they were so excited as they welcomed their baby boy into the world. At the age of 3 the child was diagnosed with cancer and despite all the doctor’s efforts and endless prayers, the child died.

The situations are many, unexpected and seem unfair – the loss of a job, the choices that our children make that is detrimental, watching a parent’s health decline, the break up of a marriage and family. Someone might be here today who is waiting to hear back from medical tests, or has a doctor’s appointment this week. We stand at the graveside of a friend or family member and we realize that we are singing a capella, and all the joy and fun in our lives is gone. We are full of brokenness, heartache, pain, fear, despair and disappointment.

I’m not telling you something new; we all have been there. I remember when my son Josh was in elementary school I would pick him up everyday after school. It was a great time for us to talk about his day. I remember one day in particular when he was eight he climbed into the truck and I said, “Hey Josh, how was your day?” His head was down and in the most pitiful, heart felt voice I had ever heard he said, “Dad, this is the worst day of my life.” He meant it. Everyone here today, regardless of age, in some degree knows what I am talking about. We all know the pain of heartache and brokenness, and we all have had to sing a capella.

2. The question is, “When we have to sing a capella what are we supposed to do?”

Back in I Kings another prophet was out and about doing just what God wanted him to do. Elijah challenged 400 priests of Baal to a showdown on Mt. Carmel. The deal was that both Elijah and the priests would offer a sacrifice to their God and which ever God accepted the sacrifice was the one true God. The people of Israel (the majority of which were worshipping Baal at the time) heard about the showdown and came to watch. When Baal did not accept the priests sacrifice and God did accept Elijah’s, Elijah commanded the people to kill all 400 priests of Baal. The problem was that Queen Jezebel worshipped Baal and when she heard what Elijah had done she sent word to Elijah that when she caught him she was going to kill him.

When Elijah heard this he started running and didn’t stop for 40 days and nights and ended up at Mt. Horeb. Elijah was down and out, he felt all alone and all that he had worked for in the name of God was gone. He might have even looked back and seen a life wasted.

When Elijah was forced to sing a capella he ran. When times like this hits us our first instinct is like Elijah's, give up and run. Pull the covers over our head and not get out of bed in the mornings. The pain and fear can push us to the point to where we are paralyzed and we cannot function. So what can we do?

3. Habakkuk tells us that the only thing to do is to wait for the music to start again.

In verse 3:16 he says, "I must wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us." He believed that God, even though he seemed far away would make things right, but all he could do till then was wait.

Bruce Larson, a Christian author tells the story of how he nearly drowned in the Gulf of Mexico. He was out swimming and he was trying to get back to his boat that had begun to drift. He says that he got into the situation through his own stupidity, but nevertheless he was there. He can remember telling himself, "Well this is it, this is where and how I am going to die." The waves were getting to be 7 – 8 feet high, the sky was beginning to fill with dark storm clouds, and his boat was getting further away and so was the shore. He decided that he would swim for the shore and as he frantically began to swim the word of the Lord came to him. A peace came over him as he felt God's presence and God speaking to him, "Bruce, your not coming home as soon as you think, tread water." He said that it never occurred to him to tread water. If he had kept swimming for shore he would have become so exhausted that he would have drown. By waiting, treading water, he was rescued.

St. John of the Cross describes a spiritual condition he called the "Dark Night of the Soul." During this indefinite period a person's personal and spiritual life becomes surrounded in what seems to be a dense cloud that seems to shut God out. He seems to be miles away; there is a spiritual dryness. We pray but feel that our prayers bounce off the ceiling never to reach God. It is like God himself has turned his back on us. St. John of the Cross in his writings tells us that when we enter periods such as this the only thing we can do is wait. There is no use in fighting it, all we can do is become still and wait.

Faith sometimes means waiting and most of us are not good waiters. Waiting is hard to do in our fast paced, impatient world. Patience is no longer considered a virtue. If we do not take action right now and be assertive, take the bull by the horns we may be viewed by others as weak, indecisive, people may think we are struggling and that a situation may be beyond our ability or control.

Habakkuk's situation was beyond his control, the situation that Elijah found himself in was beyond his control, and some of the situations we find ourselves in are beyond our control. But while they may be beyond our control they are not beyond the reach, power and control of our God.

A number of years ago Scott Wesley Brown wrote a song called "He Will Carry You."

There is no problem too big God cannot solve it.

There is no mountain too tall God cannot move it.

There is no storm too dark God cannot calm it.

There is no sorrow too deep He cannot soothe it.

If he carried the weight of the world upon His shoulder,

I know my friend that he will carry you.

He said come unto me all who are weary and I will give you rest.

Elijah found a cave and waited and God came to him and told him that he needed to return to Israel, that He was taking care of Jezebel, and that he was not alone there were 7000 faithful in Israel. But most of all God wanted Elijah to know that He was with him.

What are we suppose to do? Wait, rely on our faith and allow our faithful God to come to us and give us rest, peace, comfort and healing.

4. Habakkuk also tells us that faith involves remembering the tune even when we can't hear the music. Right now the sanctuary is quiet, close your eyes for a minute and think of a song you like and enjoy. Concentrate for a minute, can you hear that music, can you hear that tune in your mind? Sure you can!

Habakkuk remembered what God had done in the past. He remembered how God had demonstrated His power, how He took care of His children, all the wonderful things He had done. In spite of the present silence that Habakkuk heard and felt he remembered the faithful tune of God.

Habakkuk was not the first and not would he be the last Biblical person to remember God in a time of heartache, pain, fear and discouragement. We already mentioned Elijah, but think about David, many of the Psalms that he wrote came at times such as these. It is believed that the 23rd Psalm was written while he was in hiding so his son Absalom would not kill him. David remembering God's goodness and provision wrote, "Though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for thou are with me." Listen to the song that Paul wrote in II Timothy while in prison and awaiting trial, "for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

Our Lord has known heartache, loneliness and despair. His disciples had abandoned him, and He hung on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth. The balance for the debt of sin was on His shoulders and He felt that even God had turned His back on Him. Yes, our Lord knows the depth of our hurt, pain and brokenness. Even He had to wait, 3 days in the tomb and then on that 3rd morning music began and it was glorious and triumphant as he arose from the grave.

Late in life Beethoven went completely deaf. Yet he still kept composing music. How can someone write music when they are deaf? He remembered, in his memory he could still hear the music.

Today you may be here and literally facing the challenge of your life; you may be in the midst of your Dark Night of the Soul, possibly you feel like your life is upside down and that you are out there all alone singing a capella. You may be here and are in the waiting period and you feel all alone...let me tell you, you are not alone. Whatever your situation please know that there are people here that love you and want to support you. As we sing our hymn of commitment if you would like me to pray with you or if you would like to join Hampton Baptist Church or make a profession of faith I invite you come forward as we sing.