

WELCOME 5th January 2025 – 2 Christmas '25 C

Exodus 33:12-14 & Habakkuk 3:1-2 & 16-19

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link will be on website...Tuesday...Wednesday...restart 17th January

As we move into this week Why? I don't have any statistics or science to back me up on this one...but I'd bet that's the most asked question in the English language; maybe **ANY** language? Especially when things go wrong...life gets pear-shaped. Unexpected illness. Sudden injury. Unforeseen \$\$ crisis/expenditure. Family member goes off...That moment when you just can't...could ^b/₄ but now you can't.

Why now? **Why** this? **Why** them? **Why** me? Why? Just "Why?" I'd also wager more than a few of us asked that question often last year...**But** what do you do if 2025 is more of the same? More illness, infirmity, family turmoil, distress or uncertainty in your work...\$\$\$ get tighter not more plentiful ...decline become persistent...? What do you do **if...**

Moses looks across the wilderness toward the land God has promised & knows his people aren't going there willingly, obediently or faithfully. The winds of change are blowing for God's people & he feels smaller than the task to which he is called.

Habakkuk looks at a nation where there is no doubt...it's going to get worse. Idolatry & rebellion will be punished & the people God brought into this land will be driven out by the nation God has chosen as his instrument of judgment. The winds of change will be a whirlwind of devastation.

In those moments, Moses receives a promise & Habakkuk leans into the Promiser:

"I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest
— everything will be fine for you."

...yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!

Whatever you see in the year ahead...**The** promise still holds & the Promiser still holds you. God is still w/ us. Christ is still work w/_{in} us. The Spirit still speaks to us & is powerful through us. **You** are God's people. His presence goes with you & he will give you rest.

Let's pray...and then explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious and loving God, source of all wholeness, forgiveness, and mercy; send your Spirit today heal those who are torn, mend those who are broken, & protect those who are fragile. Enable us, O God, through the gift of your steadfast love to go to those who are far from you to point the way home into your arms. Give us boldness w/ compassion & courage w/ kindness to love as you have loved & give as generously as we have received... In the name of your beloved Son Jesus who names us your beloved sons & daughters...we pray. Amen.

Let's sing & then hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

- 1 What's the biggest change you foresee in your life in 2025?
- 2 What's the biggest change you think could happen in the world in 2025?

Now...

*Think about each of those somehow demonstrates God's sovereignty in all things.
How does that effect your thoughts about each of them?*

2 CHRISTMAS '25 C – WINDS OF CHANGE: REST IN THE FATHER

A few weeks back I mentioned on our website the new “buzzword” in leadership circles & particularly among cutting edge church leadership/development consultants... **VUCA**. It's an acronym that highlights our current climate of **V**olatility (*things happen quickly & the shifts are huge*) **U**ncertainty (*predictions, polling & modelling are often inaccurate*) **C**omplexity (*there are no quick fixes or easy answers*) **A**mbiguity (*it's hard to tell diff b/w good guys/bad guys – trust/don't trust*). You don't have to have been to any conferences lately, you know this from your own life experience. (*explain/example*) Today when we look at **M**oses & **H**abbakkuk...what we see is that while their circumstances are different...the threats & challenges were every bit as real. We're familiar w/ the narrative...

Exodus opens w/ God's people as slaves in Egypt... God calls Moses to be their leader/deliverer under God's command/authority to take them out of Egypt into the land God has chosen for them. We know...Moses says “*Let my people go!*” Pharaoh says “*No way Jose!*” 10 plagues later...death of the 1st-born of Egypt...blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts & out the Israelites go. Across the Red Sea while Pharaoh's army sinks beneath the waves. Great rejoicing...much singing...Ex 19 God gives this word to Moses: “*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings & brought you to myself. Now if you will obey me & keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. You will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.*” This is the message you must give to the people of Israel.” So Moses returned from the mountain, called together the elders of the people, & told them everything the Lord had commanded him. All the people responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has commanded.”

Sounds great! If only...God leads Moses up Mt Sinai & for 40 days God spells out the terms of the covenant...how life as God's people is to be lived. We know the 10Cs but Moses also receives detailed worship instructions including the design of the Tabernacle...moving tent of meeting/worship. For 40 days God lays out the specifics how a relationship w/ him as his people will be lived as a blessing in their lives for the world. It's a high watermark in human history. Never before has God acted so visibly & powerfully on behalf of his people. If there was ever a time you'd expect people to grab the good laid in their laps & cherish it, it would be this.

But that's not what happened. As Moses met w/ God, the people got frightened in his absence & called upon Aaron to make an **idol** to save them & perhaps lead them back to Egypt. Ex 32 says they “*sat down to eat & drink & got up to indulge in revelry*” (it was an **orgy**). “*Moses saw the people were running wild because Aaron let them get out of control & become a laughingstock to their enemies*” – Ex 32:25. This should have been a

high point, not just in Israel's history but in all history...instead it became one of the most spectacular human failures ever. Things were so bad God wanted to get rid of them all & start over again...or failing that send them on their way w/o him. Chap 33 begins w/ God saying just that:

The Lord said to Moses, “*Get going, you & the people you brought up from the land of Egypt. Go up to the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob. I told them, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ I will send an angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, & Jebusites. Go up to this land that flows with milk & honey. But I will not travel among you, for you are a stubborn & rebellious people. If I did, I would surely destroy you along the way.*” This is about as bad as it gets. This is bleak. God says “*I can't stomach being around you. If I had to be near you I'd have to kill you.*” Just let that sit in your heart for a bit...I'll send an angel...but you're going **w/o ME**.

So Moses prays...When the road ahead looks worse than the journey you've made so far...When you've got no back-up, plan B, net to catch you...This prayer: **Moses** said to the Lord, “*You have been telling me, ‘Take these people up to the Promised Land.’ But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. You have told me, ‘I know you by name, & I look favourably on you.’ If it is true that you look favourably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully & continue to enjoy your favour. Remember this nation is your very own people.*”

Moses looks across the wilderness toward the land God has promised & knows his people aren't going there willingly, obediently or faithfully. The winds of change are blowing for God's people & he feels smaller than the task to which he is called. But he also knows God has called **HIM**...& no one else **AND** Ex 33:11- **Inside** the Tent of Meeting, the LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. So Moses clings to the only thing he **can**: God's friendship Look again: let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully...Moses isn't asking for his head – for theological intellectual comprehension...He wants God to unite their hearts & lives in lockstep. He seeks perpetual fellowship – unbroken friendship - uninterrupted companionship...w/o that Moses knows he's sunk.

He wants to know what God intends for Israel, how he intends to act, & how he will provide for his people. Moses wants to know God — purpose, character, desire... what will bring God joy & how his life can reflect all of that in his leadership under God's command/authority. It is no different from what Jesus describes: **Now** this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, & Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. – Jn 17:3 Preacher/Bible scholar JI Packer said (loose quote) “Once you get it that your main business here is to know God...everything else begins to fall into place.” Or as God spoke through Jeremiah...**This** is what the Lord says: “*Don't let the wise boast in*

their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: *that they truly know me & understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love & who brings justice & righteousness to the earth, & that I delight in these things.* – Jer 9:23-24 Moses wants to know God — purpose, character, desire...what will bring God joy & how his life can reflect all of that in his leadership under God's command/authority.

Moses seeks God's friendship but in reply God grants more...he commits **to** Moses God's presence... *"I will personally go with you, Moses, & I will give you rest — everything will be fine for you."* When someone makes a promise, I guess you want to make sure you heard correctly...look what comes next: **Then** Moses said, *"If you don't personally go with us, don't make us leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favourably on me—on me & on your people—if you don't go with us? For your presence among us sets your people & me apart from all other people on the earth."* The Lord replied to Moses, *"I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favourably on you, & I know you by name."* – Ex 33:15-17 I hope in that you the first stirring of this assurance... **My** sheep hear my voice; I know them, & they follow me. I give them eternal life, & they will never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand." – Jn 10:27-28

I'll say it again...we know the story. Moses then Joshua then Judges then kings & the cycle repeats itself. The same unfaith & idolatry from the wilderness captures the hearts of God's people until the nation is divided & the separately conquered as punishment...just as God declared would happen. Habakkuk sees both the reason & the result. **How** long, O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen! *"Violence is everywhere!"* I cry, but you do not come to save. Must I forever see these evil deeds? Why must I watch all this misery? Wherever I look, I see destruction & violence. I am surrounded by people who love to argue & fight. The law has become paralyzed, & there is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous, so that justice has become perverted. – Hab 1:1-4 But when God raises pagan armies as instruments of judgment... **O** Lord my God, my Holy One, you who are eternal—surely you do not plan to wipe us out? O Lord, our Rock, you have sent these Babylonians to correct us, to punish us for our many sins. But you are pure & cannot stand the sight of evil. Will you wink at their treachery? Should you be silent while the wicked swallow up people more righteous than they? Are we only fish to be caught & killed? – Hab 1:12-14

Habakkuk sees both the reason for God's wrath & the result. Habakkuk looks at a nation where there is no doubt...it's going to get worse. Idolatry & rebellion will be punished & the people God brought into this land will be driven out by the nation God has chosen as his instrument of judgment. The winds of change will be a whirlwind of devastation. So Habakkuk pleads ^{w/} God for understanding...to know God's heart in all this. He understands the punishment but he seeks that place

where human sin & God's steadfast love & abundant mercy collide: **Then** the Lord said to me, *"Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others...If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed. "Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, & their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by faith."* – Hab 2:1-4 In these moments, Moses receives a promise & Habakkuk leans into the Promiser: **I** will wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike the people who invade us. *Even though* the fig trees have no blossoms, & there are no grapes on the vines; *even though* the olive crop fails, & the fields lie empty & barren; *even though* the flocks die in the fields, & the cattle barns are empty, **YET** I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

No prospects for the future, my current efforts are withering & no reserves to draw on... **YET...** Paul would write to the Xns in Philippi & Thessalonika: *Don't worry (anxious) about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, & thank him for all he has done. Then God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand, will guard your hearts & minds as you live in Christ Jesus.* – Php 4:6-7 — *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* – 1 Th 5:16-18

Whatever you see in the year ahead... **The** promise still holds & the Promiser still holds you. God is still ^{w/} us. Christ is still at work ^{w/in} us. The Spirit still speaks to us & is powerful through us. **You** are God's people. His presence goes with you & he will give you rest. Moses' final sermon included this assurance:

The eternal God is your refuge,
and his everlasting arms are under you.

TAKE IT HOME – As you leave today, be specific & share ^{w/} your neighbour...

What difference would it make in your life if every day you affirmed...

*"...yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!
The Sovereign Lord is my strength!
He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights."*

...and then actually lived as if that was true?

Let's pray with that in mind... *Heavenly Father we will kneel in the darkness until we see your light emerge. We will wait ^{w/} hope filled hearts until Christ's image grows ^{w/in} us & creates abundant life for all. We will listen to him speaking to us so that as his word creates love deep inside us & opens our hearts to be his home; he can then unseal our lips to share his salvation ^{w/} those who do not yet know.*

Father in this year ahead, even if we do not see a bright moment or receive the answer we desire, or our words fall fruitless in the ears of those who reject you, yet we will rejoice in you & be joyful to rest in your presence...In the name of your beloved Son Jesus we pray. Amen