

**“GOD THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH”:
FINDING OUR CONTENTMENT AND HAPPINESS IN GOD**

YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD
(HABAKKUK 3:17-18)

I. Godly Joy and Contentment—the Need of This Hour

- A. Joy is one of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). It is one of the indicators that we are one of God’s children.
- B. A common theme in our secular modern societies is unhappiness and discontentment.
- C. This general trend of unhappiness has many possible reasons—as many reasons as there are people.
- D. Two obvious causes of our modern unhappiness and discontentment are as follows:
 - 1. Our secular modern world has its strange way of dehumanizing us.
 - 2. Our secular modern world encourages discontentment in us by inculcating a “consumerist” mindset.
 - a. Specifically, this mindset is the deeply-cherished assumption that earthly goods are the highest goods; and that the more of these goods we can acquire, the more physically, psychologically, and emotionally secure, empowered, and fulfilled we will be.
 - b. There are other discontending (and disconcerting?) spin-offs from the consumerist mindset
 - i. A culture of decision-making
 - (A). The consumeristic mindset can in turn generate what Edward Welch calls a “culture of decision,” where each decision is so overly-weighted with importance that we fear making mistakes (*Depression*, 115).
 - (B) Obviously, we cannot buy every product that we see.
 - (C) Thus, with limited resources, our choices become all-important.
 - (D) Suddenly, choice of schools, careers, and extracurricular activities are so important that we start worrying over these things.
 - ii. A culture of pleasure, entertainment, and boredom (*Depression*, 120).
 - (A) The consumerist mindset, combined with our modern Technological culture of efficiency, creates a culture of delayed gratification—good (i.e. pleasurable) things must come now.
 - (B) We fear boredom and the ordinary. We must be pleased and excited as often as possible.
 - (C) This can lead to various forms of sinful addictions in our pressure-cooker society.

- E. If discontentment is not checked and resisted, it could very well grow into larger and more destructive sins. Depending on whom they infect, discontentment could lead to...
- anger
 - marital unfaithfulness
 - fraud of various kinds
- F. In the end, the most serious problem with our discontentment is that it dishonors God—it is a form of idolatry.
- G. Herein lies the importance of joy.
1. The joy that comes from the Holy Spirit stands in opposition to the discontentment that the world breeds.
 2. The joy of the Holy Spirit—along with it the deep satisfaction in God which is surely a component of that joy—is one gift that the Christian can offer to the world.
- H. How can Christians recover joy of the Lord? How can we recover and nurture the joy that both commends the Christian faith to the world; as well as strengthens the Christian for life in this world?
1. To recover joy; and along with it the virtue of godly happiness and contentment, we need the work of the Holy Spirit.
 2. The Holy Spirit uses Scripture to form holy joy and contentment in us.
 3. Scripture offers us three very important blocks of teaching that we must take to heart if enduring joy and contentment is what we want.
 - a. First: Our gracious adoption by God through Jesus Christ.
 - b. Second: The great doctrine of contentment in God itself.
 - i. This teaching is a steady and recurring theme that we see in Scripture.
 - ii. If we dip into the history of the Church, we will see that all throughout the Church’s history, there have been people who have longed for a deeper experience of satisfaction with God.
 - (A) Those who pursued monastic life
 - (B) The Puritans and their heirs
 - iii. Even if contentment with God is not a topic you will find in textbook on systematic theology, it is a definitely a truly biblical and catholic doctrine—“catholic” in the sense that Christians of every age have felt its deep importance.
 - c. Third: The pleasures of God himself (to use John Piper’s language)
 - i. To enter more deeply into the experience of contentment with God, it is not enough to talk about why contentment in God is not only possible but necessary.
 - ii. But we would also have to begin practicing contentment with God.
 - iii. We do this by identifying more and more with what God delights in.
- I. For our introductory set of sermons, we will begin by looking at one of a classic passage that deals with contentment—Habakkuk 3:17-19.

II. A Brief Survey of Habakkuk

- A. Habakkuk lived and ministered in Judah during the period when Babylonian empire was about to supersede the empire of Assyria (Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, 176).
- B. Habakkuk warns of Judah's impending judgment through the instrumentation of Babylon.
- C. One of the key features is Habakkuk's own questions to the Lord. The prophet dares to ask the Lord why it is that evil people prosper.
 1. The book itself begins with a question:

*O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?
Or cry to you "Violence!"
and you will not save?
³ Why do you make me see iniquity,
and why do you idly look at wrong?*

—The iniquities that Habakkuk has in mind are, of course, the iniquities of his own society.

2. God answers Habakkuk's question by saying that his judgment is on the way, and will take the form of the Chaldean invasion (1:6-8).
- D. Habakkuk's second question has to do with why God would use an even more evil nation to punish his own people (1:12-13).
 - E. In response, God reveals that after he has finished his chastising work through Babylon, God himself will punish Babylon for its wickedness (2:2-20).

*Because you have plundered many nations,
all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who dwell in them. (2:8)*

*The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them,
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who dwell in them. (2:17)*

- F. Following the threats of punishment, we find Habakkuk's prayer in chapter 3, where the prophet asks the Lord to remember mercy even in wrath.
 1. In this prayer, Habakkuk recites the Lord's acts of judgment in verses 3-12.
 2. But he also declares that salvation will come from God for his people. In verse 13, he states:

*You went out for the salvation of your people,
for the salvation of your anointed.
You crushed the head of the house of the wicked,
laying him bare from thigh to neck.*

3. Habakkuk says that he would wait “quietly for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us” (v 16).

III. Yet I will Rejoice in the Lord (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

- A. Habakkuk is a man who prays and praises God with eyes wide open.
- B. A massive day of judgment is coming upon Israel for all their sins. The entire Judean economy would be brought to a standstill.
- C. Yet, in the face of all that difficulty, Habakkuk chooses the unthinkable: “yet I will rejoice in the LORD,” he says.
 1. Rejoicing here speaks of much more than just a “toughing it out” or “hanging in there” attitude (Barker and Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 376).
 2. Rejoicing is also much, much more than just choosing not to complain so much.
 3. “Rejoice” really means to take joy and to exude joy even in the face of all that is going to happen!
 4. The prophet’s intentionality is striking. Habakkuk actually resolves, even vows, to rejoice! (Barker and Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 376).
- D. Contentment in God is a choice we can and must make.

IV. The God of My Salvation

- A. Why can anyone who is a believer rejoice in the Lord? It is because we know who the Lord is and what the Lord would eventually do for us.
- B. First: God is “the LORD.”
 1. The word “LORD” translates the sacred name of God, “YHWH.”
 2. YHWH was the Name that God revealed to Moses before he delivered Israel from Egypt. Exodus 3:13-15:

¹³ Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ ¹⁴ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

3. YHWH is not just any generic supreme being. He is the God who entered into an unconditional, unbreakable covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
4. If YHWH will always be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this means that those who trust in him and belong to the house of Abraham cannot be ultimately destroyed. While they may be severely chastised for their sins, they can never be lost, because God has made a promise.
5. The name “YHWH,” which is related to the phrase, “I Am Who I Am,” is a name of great power.
 - a. “I Am Who I Am” is mysterious and very hard to define.

- b. One of the ideas behind this name is that God will always be the “I Am.” He will always exist. He is the unchangeable, self-existent, self-sustaining One.
- c. This has prompted theologians like Herman Bavinck to say that eternal and infinite life may well be God’s most fundamental quality.

God is the real, the true essence, the fullness of essence, the sum-total of all reality and perfection, the totality of essence, to which all other essence owes its origin, an ocean of essence, unbounded and immensurable, the absolute Being, the only Being who has the ground of his existence in himself. This description of the being of God is to be preferred above that of love, personality, fatherhood, etc., because in it all God’s attributes are included, and by it they are all ascribed to God in an absolute sense; i.e., by this description God is recognized as God in all his perfections. (Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 126).

- d. For God to be YHWH, the great I Am, is for him to be Life in all power and vigor. God is the Life that is the basis of all life.
- e. This infinite Life, which is the basis of all existence, cannot be destroyed.
- f. The God of Israel is not just any God. He is truly the Lord of Life *for his* people.

C. Second: “The God of my salvation”

- 1. As the Lord of Life who is bound to his people forever, the Lord is more than able and willing to save them even from death itself.
- 2. Thus, the prophet says, “I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”
- 3. We can rejoice because God has chosen to give himself to us as the God of our salvation. And when we hear this, we have hope, because we know that after judgment has done its work there will be restoration. There will be a resurrection.
- 4. Psalm 30:5 reads:

*For his anger is but for a moment,
and his favor is for a lifetime.
Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.*

- a. As far as God’s people are concerned, God’s salvation will come as surely as the day.
- b. For this reason, we must not allow ourselves to be overcome by grief. We must not grieve for anything like the unbelievers do, like people who have no hope (cf. 1 Thess 4:13). Instead, we grieve with hope, because the Lord is our God, and our God is our salvation.

V. Choose the Joy of the Lord

The root cause of our ungodly discontentedness lies in ourselves. Unless we see this, we will always be complaining only about external factors. We will always be treating

others as scapegoats. We will always be blaming impersonal forces and all kinds of “-isms” for our problems. We will always only be blaming others for our sins. The heart of ungodly discontentment lies in ourselves—in our self-centeredness, our idolatrous refusal to bow to God, our idolatrous rejection of God as God. Repentance begins by choosing to obediently acknowledge that the Lord our God is ultimately the One we need most; that the Lord our God has given himself to us, through Jesus Christ, to be our life and joy. If we desire the joy that cannot be destroyed, then we must find it in the One who cannot be destroyed. We must find our happiness in the Lord. We must make the first and final reason for our happiness the Lord God himself. In this way, we fulfil the happy command: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Phil 4:4).