

CHOOSING A LIFE THAT MATTERS  
“WORSHIP GOD, NOT YOUR COMFORT”  
Habakkuk 3:17-19, Romans 12:1-2, John 4:19-24  
October 13 & 14, 2018

I'd like you to hear the Old Testament lesson of Habakkuk 3:17-19 today. Listen to these words, please. (**READ Habakkuk 3:17-19**). These words are a part of a prayer that Habakkuk makes to the Lord during the reign of the Babylonians over all of the Middle East. Great acts of violence are being done by those in power, and the people of the Lord are being oppressed horribly. They have lost everything because they have turned away from the Lord and sought out idols to be their gods. So God Almighty allowed Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Israel.

Once the people lived with plenty, with great provisions from the Lord, security from their enemies, and abundance in the harvests so that they might worship God and present offerings of thanks and praise back to Him. But once the people had turned away from the Lord God, they lost all the things they had lived with, and there was a great cry for the Lord to intercede.

It's not very much unlike what we are facing today here in the United States. We have been provided with great abundance and we have so much under our control, having been blessed by God. Yet, having all these things, we have taken God for granted; we have turned away from following His laws and commands, and we have begun searching for other “gods” to serve in His place. One such god is that of materialism and comfort.

Consider this – when you go home today, you're looking forward to settling down to watch either the Brewers game or the Packers game on your flat-screen TV and spend time with your friends, eating goodies right off the stove or out of the refrigerator, relishing that you don't have to be outside on a chilly day. But when you get in your driveway and hit the garage door opener, nothing happens. Ok, maybe the battery is dead in your opener. So you park in the driveway and go into your house and hit the light switch, only to have nothing happen again.

Maybe the light is burned out. So you call out to Alexa or Cirri to start up the TV while you hunt for a new battery and light bulb, but there is no response. You repeat yourself, only louder, but with the same result. Everything is still dingy with no light, and as you make your way to the drawer that has the spare batteries, you notice that it's a little cool in the house. Well, it was cold last night, maybe the furnace hasn't kicked on lately. Having trouble seeing into the drawer that the batteries are supposed to be in, you reach over and hit the light switch – again, nothing. Suddenly you begin looking around and notice that the microwave time is not on, the clock on the stove has stopped, and the coffee maker isn't working, and the refrigerator isn't humming like it always does.

Ok, so maybe it's a fuse in the basement. You whip out your cell phone, press the flashlight app and head down the stairs to find everything down there is off, too. You make your way to the fuse box, open it up and notice nothing is out of order – no switches popped, no fuses burned out, nothing to indicate a problem.

Making your way back upstairs, you maneuver your cell phone again to the phone option and highlight your neighbor's number, press the connect button and all you hear is static. What's going on? Soon you discover that the electric supply to your **whole town** is out and there's no hope for relief any time soon. What do you do?

“Aha!, the gas powered emergency generator in the garage!” You go to get it all hooked up with cords running all over to plug in the important devices, you pull the cord to get the generator started and the cord breaks on the first pull without the engine starting. Now What!? Life has just turned upside down.

You see, like most folks, we expect lights to come on, and heat to warm the house, and a multitude of other on-demand comforts. We've even come to expect them, and rely upon them, so when everything turns off, we get anxious because it's like we're up a creek without a paddle. We've come to expect our comforts, even demand them, and when they don't work, our life is

ruined.

“The problem with comfort is the more of it we have the more of it we want. We’ll arrange our lives around being comfortable – which is very much like the lifestyle of idolatry. We’ll overspend our days and our dollars in the pursuit of more and more comfort. In the process, we risk functionally dethroning God as He becomes low priority and a lesser pursuit.

It’s time to sound the alarm.”<sup>1</sup> We are treating God the same way the people of Israel did when God allowed them to be conquered by the Babylonians. We need to stop pursuing after our comforts and begin to worship God, over everything else.

You see, God created us to worship Him. We have what Blaise Pascal phrased it as a “God-shaped vacuum” in us that can only be filled by God, manifested in Jesus Christ. We can spend our whole life searching for something to fill that vacuum, yet nothing will satisfy it until we find God and worship Him above all things.

And we come to a place like this with the intention to worship, but few of us have been trained and prepared to really know what worship is and how we can be active in it. Sitting in the pews, singing a few songs, listening to someone talk is what most think of as being “in worship.” But worship is defined as “an expression of reverence and adoration for God.” Unless our hearts are prepared for encountering God in our midst **as we sing, and pray, and meditate** on His Word, we really just go through the motions, passing time, giving God lip service while all the while following our own hearts toward comfort and ease, in danger of losing it all.

“William Temple noted, ‘Worship is the nourishment of the mind upon God’s truth... the quickening of the conscience by God’s holiness...the cleansing of the imagination by God’s beauty...the response of my life to God’s plan.’ Worship is not something we can delegate to another person or relegate to a certain time. As Christians, a worshiper is **who we are** and worshiping is **what we do**. I’ve become convinced that we don’t do worship very well. It’s not

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<sup>1</sup> (Dennis Rainey, *Choosing A Life That Matters*, [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2017] pg. 99-100)

something we are naturally gifted to do. We need some training and encouraging when it comes to becoming an effective worshiper.”<sup>2</sup>

So how can we become an effective worshiper of God? The last two Scripture lessons today help us to begin the process and as we discover the trail that God has laid out for us to follow so that we can worship Him. These give us two important landmarks that we can use to guide our own journey into worshipping God.

**Landmark #1: The Truth About God.** In John 4 we have the interesting encounter that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman. As we read the chapter, we see that this woman was not very popular in her town of Sychar, in fact she was rather ostracized. While the other women came to the well early in the morning to get their supply of water for the day, this woman waited until there would be no one else around so that she would not have to endure their jeering and criticism and snide remarks. That day, Jesus happened to be there, but there was a problem – Jews didn’t normally speak to Samaritans, and it was improper for men to talk to women directly. But Jesus asks for her to give Him something to drink, lets her know that He knows why she is there at that hour, and then leads the conversation to worship. Listen to how it unfolds. (READ John 4:19-24).

We can relate to her a bit, because we are also misinformed about the proper place to worship God. While the Samaritans thought that the mountain in Sychar was the place for real worship to happen, and many of the Jews thought that it was Jerusalem, Jesus lets her know that location was not the important part of worship. Worship is not about a place (a church, a chapel, a golf course, or a lake), it’s about a personal encounter with God through Jesus Christ! Since she didn’t know who Jesus was, this didn’t make much sense to her.

But Jesus leads her to know more about how to worship. He says, “*God is Spirit, and only by the power of His Spirit can people worship Him (in truth) as He really is*” (Jn. 4:24).

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<sup>2</sup> (Ibid., pg. 101)

“God is spirit, and worshiping Him demands that our heart, our spirit, be anchored in truth. There can be no true worship of God without believing the truth about Him. This is why the Bible, the Word of God, is so important to us as believers. The Bible explains the truth about God – His character, His acts, His promises, and what He expects of us.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus revealed many things about the truth of who God is, and as we consider them, we find ourselves led to worship Him for Who He is. Things like: His eternal, self-existent nature, He is the Creator of the world who is perfect and holy, He is all powerful and sovereign, He is just, unchanging and loving, and that He is always present with us, knowing everything about us and this world. True worship of who God is moves us from where we are to become actively engaged with Him as we ponder the truth about Him.

Romans 12:1-2 opens our eyes to the second landmark. (READ Romans 12:1-2)

**Landmark #2: The great surrender.** To really worship God, we must totally surrender ourselves to Him. It’s not about us: It’s all about God. It’s about trusting that God knows what He is doing. It’s obeying His commands, even when they don’t make sense to us at the time. It’s about sacrificing ourselves, and everything we hold dear, to Him to be His servants.

We see that in the life of Abraham when God called him to give up Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham trusted God completely, even if he didn’t know why God would finally give him a son in his old age, only to take him away. Abraham trusted that if God could provide him a son, even when both he and Sarah were beyond child-bearing years, He could do it again. Abraham trusted in God’s promise that He would make Abraham into a great nation. So as hard as it was, Abraham prepared to give God Isaac as a sacrifice. And God saw his faith and provided the ram instead.

Sacrifices in the Old Testament not only signified the elimination of sin for the people, but it also signified the desire for the people to come back into the holy presence of God. Sin

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<sup>3</sup> (Dennis Rainey, *Choosing A Life That Matters*, pg. 103)

demanded a price to be paid so that it could be wiped away. But as the people recognized that sin separated them from God, the sacrifice satisfied the price needed to redeem them from that sin.

So Paul brings it to each of us when he says, *“Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to His service and pleasing to Him. This is the true worship that you should offer”* (Rom. 12:1). It is *“because of God’s great mercy to us”* that we are to recognize for ourselves how great and how high and how powerful and how loving and how awesome God is, and that He desires that we be close to Him so that He might bless us and guide us. But we can’t do that if we are so focused on making ourselves comfortable with all the things of this world.

The latest gadget won’t make us happy. The savings account and the retirement account and the stocks and bonds will not provide for us. The high-power position at the company or in government will not deliver us. The kids and grandkids are not what makes a living legacy. It’s not about making ourselves comfortable that brings us the filling of that “God-sized vacuum” in our hearts. It is God alone through Jesus Christ who brings us back into a relationship with Him. It’s been a difficult lesson for me to learn, but none of the stuff I have can ever take God’s place.

So Paul tells us to become that Living Sacrifice that pleases God so that we might worship Him and please Him. And he says, *“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God – what is good and is pleasing to Him and is perfect”* (Rom. 12:2).

God does not promise an easy life. His way is perfect, but it demands that we trust Him through it all. So when that hurricane blows your house and belongs away, you may become uncomfortable once more, but it may bring you back into a dependence upon Him for your life. When the fire burns up everything and all you have are memories of what that place was like, don’t give up and become bitter, but let God provide for you. In all things, worship the Lord so that He knows you are His servant and that He is your #1. Sacrifice may be tremendously

difficult, but a wasted life in pursuit of worldly comfort is even scarier.

I like the poem “My Master.” I think it puts things into proper perspective for us. Listen to these words.

“I had walked life’s path with an easy tread, Had followed where comfort and pleasure led;  
And then by chance in a quiet place, I met my Master, face-to-face.

With station and rank and wealth for a goal, Much thought for body but none for soul,  
I had entered to win this life’s mad race, When I met my Master, face-to-face.

I had built my castles and reared them high, Till their towers had pierced the blue of the sky.  
I had sworn to rule with iron mace, When I met my Master, face-to-face.

I met Him and knew Him and blushed to see, That His eyes, full of sorrows, were fixed on me;  
And I faltered and fell at His feet that day, While my castles vanished and melted away.

Melted and vanished, and in their place I saw naught else but my Master’s face;  
And I cried aloud: “O, make me meet, To follow the marks of Thy wounded feet!”

My thought is now for the souls of men. I have lost my life to find it again,  
E’er since alone in that holy place My Master and I stood face-to-face.” (Author unknown)

When we are surrounded by all of the stuff of this world, it can be easy for us to lose perspective and make our lives all about things rather than all about God through Jesus. I encourage you to sign over the ownership of all that is in your life to God so that He might use you in a mighty way. Then this life will become an adventure for you as you follow Jesus.

You see, as Pastor Tim Keller says, “Worship is seeing what God is worth and giving Him what He’s worth. True worship is grasping a truth about God and then allowing that truth to strike you in the center of your being.”

“True worship is highly relational and deeply responsive to God’s goodness and grace toward us. Worship transforms us,”<sup>4</sup> renews us and conforms us to God’s ways through Jesus. It is then that we can echo Habakkuk’s words of prayer when the bottom drops out of our comfort

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<sup>4</sup> (Dennis Rainey, *Choosing A Life That Matters*, pg. 108)

and we are left with little to nothing, *“I will still be joyful and glad, because the Lord God is my savior. The Sovereign Lord gives me strength. He makes me sure-footed as a deer and keeps me safe on the mountains”* (Hab. 3:18-19). Then, in worship we will be able to seek God and find Him, we will fear God and be in awe of Him, we will love God and know Him, we will obey God and understand more of Him, we will believe God and find that we have pleased Him, and we will serve God and make Him known to all those around us.

As God for the courage to worship Him alone. Seek Him with all your heart. Knock at the door of God’s heart and He will give you the strength and determination and endurance you need to live a life that matters, for the glory of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.