

Habakkuk 3, starting in verse 17, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines. . ." Now let me just stop because I want to paint a very clear picture of what he's painting here, because it's not pleasant. A fig tree, when it produces fruit, will produce right next to that fruit a blossom. So he's saying, "Not only are there no figs on this, but there are no blossoms on it either." Just so you can feel the weight of what's being communicated here, he's saying, "Today stinks and tomorrow doesn't look any better." So we are such a silver bullet, quick fix culture that it's important to note that Habakkuk has no visions of this sorrow that he's walking in being over anytime soon. And if you don't like that part of his poem, it just gets worse.

"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls. . ." Now I just want to stop again. I want you to feel the weight of this text. Let's go back to Biology 101. If there aren't any crops in the field this year, then that means there are no seeds for there to be crops in the field next year. If the sheep don't like one another, we have no more sheep coming. If there's not a lot of love and affection in the barn, you don't have any more cattle coming. So Habakkuk is really painting this bleak picture that not only is difficult today, but looking at the situation, it doesn't look like anytime soon things are going to get better. You see, one of the things about the Bible that is so amazing is that it's honest. Now people will sometimes take the Bible and be dishonest, but the Bible itself paints the picture of the reality of a fallen, broken world. Sometimes today is dark, and trying to look through the darkness of today into tomorrow only seems darker. And the issue will not be solved overnight and will not be solved with any real quickness. And if you cannot say "amen" to that in a part of your soul, then you're young or God has either protected you or judged you by giving you a life of ease in ways that would keep you from understanding this.

Now look at Habakkuk's response, because the turn here is something that is spectacular compared to chapters 1 and 2. Let's pick it up at verse 17 again. "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments." Do you remember how I told you at the beginning of chapter 3 that this is a song. They are literally singing this. Habakkuk wrote this song in response to all that God had unpacked to him in chapters 1 and 2. I have assigned Bleecker to take this whole chapter and make it a song, so we'll see what he can come up with.

When a friend first encouraged me to take us as the Village Church through the book of Habakkuk, I was honestly a bit hesitant. First of all, because it's Habakkuk. Secondly because it's a very, very heavy book primarily about God's wrath and discipline. It also can bog down and get really confusing in some of its parts. So I had to spend a lot of time praying and studying for it. I even thought it would be a good idea to go through this book. But here we are the last week we'll discuss it, and I think the Lord has used it powerfully. I think what's happening here at the end of this verse is that we're getting a glimpse of what Christian maturity looks like.

I know some of you are going, "Well, Christian maturity is an easy thing." But I would contend it's not an easy thing. In fact, it's unbelievably muddy and confusing, which is why so few of us are actually headed in that direction. So let me try to unpack for you what I mean when I say that. Most of us want this simplistic answer to what it means to be mature

in Christ. I'll give you some popular ones in the Bible Belt. "What it means to be mature in Christ is that you know the Word of God." Now, that is absolutely true and absolutely not true. Let me explain that. If you understand what the Bible is, then this can be true. If you don't, then it won't be true. So if you understand that the Scriptures are pointing to someone, then this is true. If you think the Scriptures terminate on themselves, all your memorization has been an exercise of vanity.

I know some of you are looking at me like I don't know what I'm talking about, so let's go to John 5:39-40. Jesus says to the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." What Scriptures is Jesus talking about? He's not referencing the Gospel of Matthew here. He's not going, "Hey, you read about Me, didn't you? The Gospel of Matthew. I'm Jesus. I'm the One." No, that's not what He's doing. Remember how I constantly bring you back to the Old Testament and go, "Do you know what this temple is about? The temple is about Jesus. Do you know what David and Goliath is about? David and Goliath is about Jesus. Do you know what Melchizedek is about? Melchizedek is about Jesus. Do you know where I got that? Jesus. I'm not pulling these things out of nowhere. Jesus says, "The Scriptures have testified about Me." Look at what He goes on to say. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" Translation: if you are solo Scriptura, if you think the whole point of this is to know the Bible, then you are practicing futility. If you are sola Scriptura in that you understand that the Scriptures point you to Jesus Christ and further your relationship with Jesus Christ, now you've got a shot at maturity. So do the Scriptures make a man mature in Christ? Absolutely they do and absolutely they don't. The water is dirty. You can't make it all clean. You just know the Bible. Everyone in this room knows people who know the Bible but would not trust with your kids. Have you met that brother who knows the words defending the truth but just has a hard heart and loves to club people, with no grace, no mercy, no life, no love, no vitality but simply truth? Now does truth need to be defended? Absolutely. But is there a way you defend truth when you know Jesus Christ deeply that is different than the way you defend truth when you don't know Him deeply? Absolutely. So is Christian maturity understanding the Bible? But is Christian maturity knowing the Bible? No?

I'll give you one more, and then I'll get to my point in Habakkuk. This second one is very popular in the Bible Belt. We like to pretend that Christian maturity is behavioral modification. So we go, "Well, I used to cuss like this, and now I don't. I only cuss like this. I used to be a hip-hop artist. Now I'm just a sailor. See? That's growth. That's maturity. . . Well, I used to get drunk all the time, but I haven't been drunk in a long time. I just like four or five beers when I get home from work. That's growth. . . Well, I used to be real aggressive and angry towards my wife, and now I only blow up when she doesn't listen." So what we do is set the bar way down here and then we get it slightly higher up to here and we're like, "Look at that. I'm tearing this thing up. It's only a matter of time before I've made it to the A team." In the end, we have this perception that maturity is behavioral modification. Christian maturity is absolutely behavioral modification, and it is absolutely not behavioral modification. You see, the water is dirty. It's muddy. It's not as clear as we want to make it.

I'll show you this. Galatians 2:21, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." So we'll take behavioral modification and go, "Now that I'm living right, I'm maturing." Now that could be true, but it is just as true that you can change the way you behave and that have nothing to do with Jesus Christ and a knowledge of God. People do it all the time. In fact, one of my pet peeves before I was converted is that Christianity, at least in how I was hearing it, had a stranglehold on life transformation. I was like, "Man, I can watch an infomercial at 1:00 in the morning and see life transformation. That guy got abs like that by opening his refrigerator door." You can do life transformation with a good deal of willpower, but it doesn't mean you're free. It just means you have modified your behavior. So the point in Galatians 2:21 is that rightness with God can't be purchased with obedience to the law, because if it could, then Christ wouldn't have needed to die. But He did need to die, which lets us know that you can't get righteousness through behavioral modification. It has to be imputed to you in Christ.

So is Christian maturity knowing the Word? Yes and no. Is Christian maturity having your behavior modified? Yes and no. So now I want us to look back at this text in Habakkuk, and I think what you're getting is a picture of maturity. There are two things in particular that I want us to look at so we can answer this question. Are we immature but maturing, are we mature or are we stuck in immaturity? So you're going to have to answer that question for you hopefully by the end. So let's read through Habakkuk 3:17-19 and talk about the two pieces I see here that I think mark Christian maturity. "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." Here's the first real sign of Christian maturity. If we think back on Habakkuk 1 and parts of Habakkuk 2, what you see Habakkuk doing is he has this goal, this thing that he wants more than he wants to know God, worship God, follow God and love God. So early on, you begin to see that he wants justice to be done in Judah. So he is frustrated that justice isn't being done, so he complains to God that he wants justice done. God answers his prayer and says, "I will execute justice in Judah." And then Habakkuk's complaint is now against God exercising that justice and discipline against Judah. You see, Habakkuk is wanting to use and utilize God for some other goal. The mature man doesn't use God like he's Aladdin holding a lamp. God is the foundation of his deepest joy. God is the pursuit of his joy. And that's a mark of Christian maturity.

As one of the many pastors who pastors this church, I can't tell you how common it is for men and women to be exposed as using God to some other means, to some other end. So people will go, "Yeah, I'll take God if God will help me with my marriage. . . Yeah, I'll love God if God will help me with my finances. . . Yeah, I'll take God if He'll help me satanic kid. . . Yeah, I'll take God if He'll rectify this situation. . ." And then when that doesn't happen, all of a sudden God has betrayed them because God didn't give to them what He didn't promise to give them to begin with. So the end goal wasn't God but rather what God could bring. Now that's not sinful if that's salvation. It is sinful in every other category. If that's you, you have put yourself in an unbelievably dangerous situation. I'll tell you why. Because the only joy in the universe that cannot be taken from you is joy in Christ. Every other joy can be taken from you. No matter how much you lock it down, no matter how much you defend it, no matter how much you try to protect it, it's like trying to hold oil in your hand. You can't. So three weeks ago we buried a twenty-five year old, two weeks ago, we buried a twenty-one year old and last night we prayed with a family who buried their six-year-old son. In my nine years here, I've done dozens and dozens of funerals. One has been for someone over the age of thirty. Dozens have been for someone under the age of ten. The rest are between ten and thirty. Now, when tragedy strikes like that, when you lose your health, when you lose a loved one, when the bank account dries up, when you get fired from your job, when your business tanks, when you are rejected, when all that you have built your worth on and all you have stocked your joy in is stripped from you, then you're in a lot of trouble. Because your very identity is lost. So if your greatest joy is in your spouse, what happens when they die, get hurt or get weak and can't do for you the things that make you feel like they're your deepest joy? Well now your life is wrecked. If your deepest joy is your children, what happens when something happens to one of them? So even that thought for some of us is too much. But I believe that my job before the Lord is to speak truth to you in love, and sometimes truth is hard to hear.

I was in Chicago this past week preaching at the Gospel Coalition. The Gospel Coalition is about five-thousand pastors. It's a level of theological nerdism that most of you would be uncomfortable with. Literally there was an hour and a half lecture on Melchizedek. Some of you don't even know who that is right now. That's the kind of thing it was, but my task in front of those men was to preach out of Ecclesiastes 11 and 12 and show Christ in that text. So my topic was youth, so I preached out of that text. In the beginning of that, I talked about how I could feel that text because of things that have happened at the Village and because of my own history with my health. I can feel the weight of that text. And I said to that crowd, "Listen some of you will not be here the next time we do this in 2013, and it's not because you won't be able to afford it. It will be because your race is finished." From there Lauren and I, as we were boarding the plane Friday morning, found out that a thirty-four-year-old pastor from Grand Rapids, Michigan left that conference, got on a plane,

flew home, was asleep on his couch when a fire started in the basement and killed him and his six-year-old son. His wife and two daughters were at her mother's house visiting her mother when they got the news. Now I know some of you are like, "Chandler, what's the deal with death lately?" Follow me. If her greatest joy is her husband and her son, how does she rebuild? She has lost the very foundation of what makes her human in her heart. Without Christ, she can rebuild. Once again, I don't want to make things too narrow. Without Christ, she can rebuild, but it will be rickety and she will be nervous the rest of her life that her joy might be stolen from her again. And yet if you build on Christ, if you trust in Christ, if He is your greatest joy, then joy can be taken from you, but your greatest joy serves as the firm foundation that can be rebuilt upon and trust can be reestablished. Why? Because God is sovereign over all. Unless you feel the weight too much of Daniel's death, he is not mourning right now. We look at that and feel like it's tragic. I've got history with this. Did he want to see his daughters grown up, walk them down the aisle and maybe even do their wedding? Yes. Would he have liked to grow old with his wife? Will I want to grow old with my wife and see how hot Lauren is when she's eighty? Yes. In the face of Jesus Christ in His glory, does all of that fade away? Yes it does. It just doesn't look as important once you're full on in the presence of Jesus Christ.

And that's what we've missed out on. Because He's not our greatest joy, we don't view loss correctly and we don't view suffering correctly. Because Paul looked at it this way. "Since Jesus is my greatest treasure, anything, whether it's good or difficult, that gets me close to my treasure gets rejoiced in." So remember when we covered his thorn in the flesh a few weeks ago. What was he doing? He was rejoicing in difficulty. Now think about how often that doesn't occur with us. We want out. We're gathering a bunch of people around us to pray. We're putting weird oil on ourselves going, "Get this off of me. Change this circumstance." And Paul, our dear brother, is going, "This got me more Jesus. This is a good thing. I have learned to be content in all circumstances. So when I've got money, praise His name. When I'm broke, praise His name. When I preach the gospel and everybody responded, praise His name. When I preached the gospel and they hated it and tried to kill me, praise His name. When I got on a ship and the ship got to port safely, praise His name. When I was shipwrecked in the open sea twice, praise His name. One time after I was shipwrecked in the open sea and finally crawled up on land and tried to preach and a snake bit me, praise His name." Have you ever read that story? If anybody ever had a chance to go, "Come on, man!" it had to be Paul where he's going to preach the gospel, he gets shipwrecked, lands on an island, starts to preach the gospel and he gets attacked by a snake while he's preaching the gospel. He has a clear understanding of God's sovereignty. I would be like, "Ow! Seriously?" So you've got Paul rejoicing in stuff that you and I do not rejoice in. Why? Because Christ isn't our treasure. So you will see people with cancer rejoice in their cancer. Why? Because it gets them closer to their treasure. You will see people with financial hardships rejoice in Jesus Christ. They'll do it if Christ is their treasure.

Now, let me be very clear. I am not talking about some fake, false smile, spirit sprinkled ridiculousness. When we had the Golic's stand up last night at the 7:15 service here, this whole room wept with them, thinking about the loss of their six-year-old son. We get more of Jesus in this moment. We were hurting and wounded at that loss. As a father, it is one that I can't fathom and just have to trust that, if that day ever comes for me, the Spirit will provide all that I need like He has for them, as they have testified. But if Christ is your greatest joy, all circumstances push us towards Him. If He's not your greatest treasure, then whatever you are ultimately treasuring is at risk of being removed from you. Christ is what can't be taken from you; everything else can. You can't name anything right now that can't be taken from you in an instant, but not Christ. They are unbelievably secure in Him. The first mark of maturity is that their joy is set fully in Christ. He is their treasure.

Now, look at this last verse, because here's the second mark of maturity. "GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places." He's saying, "I can't do it. God can do it. I'm going to get out of this valley, I'm going to get into the high places and I'm going to get there not of my own strength but by the strength given to me by God. God gives me deer's feet. God gets me to the high places. God gets me out of this valley and up to the hills." Another reason a lot of us lack in maturity is that we're just way too confident in ourselves. For those of you who God loves deeply, He will eventually expose your confidence in you so that you may place confidence where it is

owed in Him. But my fear for us in Western culture where a lot is easy and a lot just works well for us is that some of us are not going to hit that spot where we realize that. I told you several weeks ago that the ones I'm most concerned about are the ones who stuff comes easiest to. Because you get seduced into believing that your strength is adequate, and it simply is not. How do I know this is true? I know it's true because we don't pray well. I know it's true because we don't run to the Scriptures to get fresh perspective on who Jesus is so that our hearts might be stirred up by the Holy Spirit to worship Him more fully. I know because I watch us walk through suffering and we feel betrayed when circumstances don't go our way. We feel betrayed when our single young men and women go, "Yes, I love the Lord. Yes, I want to follow Him. Yes, I want my life to be caught up in Him, but I'm lonely right now, and so I'm going to date and marry someone who doesn't love Him, doesn't worship Him and isn't prone to follow Him and submit to Him because I'm lonely right now." And in that, they are making an unbelievably dark exchange, trading one sense of loneliness for loneliness on a monumental scale once you've entered that covenant relationship. I know it's true as I watch men lose their jobs, to see their money evaporate, to see their sense of self disappear and the weight of that make them frustrated and angry at how God governs. Losing your job, losing resources, having a hard time providing financially for your family creates weight in a man's soul. God has wired us to protect and provide. It's how we've been built according to Genesis 1 before the Fall. So I'm not saying don't be frustrated or hurt by that, but I think there is a way of walking through that where we put our trust in the Lord, we work hard and ask the Lord to be our strength. Where we stop in that Western sense of things, pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and begin to develop a prayer mantra before the Lord that says, "I don't have to carry this. I cannot carry this. You will provide. These circumstances have sovereignly been placed by You to get me to more of You. So carry me today, even though there are no figs on the vine and there are no blossoms either. Though there are no cattle in the stall and it doesn't look like there's going to be any come spring either, be my strength. Walk me through this." And we throw our confidence on Him and off of us, and it just lightens up hard times. But it's when you believe that you've got to fix it and make it happen that you take all the weight that you are not meant to bear and heap it upon your shoulders and in so doing begin to crush you and those around you. So Habakkuk has gone from a man who says, "Do this for me. . .do this for me. . .do this for me" to a man who says, "Do what You will and I will rejoice and love You regardless." He has gone from a man who would say, "Surely You would not do this. . .surely You would not do this. . .surely you would not do this" to "If You do this in your omnipotence and omniscience, then You will also be the strength I need to walk through this season and into high ground. And the mature and redeemed will think this way and be headed in this direction. We might not be there today, but we should be heading in that direction.

So you've got to answer for you. Are you immature? What's the foundation of your joy? What are you really after? Where is your strength? How confident are you in you vs. Him? I think if you answer those questions, you'll see where you are in regards to Habakkuk 1 to Habakkuk 3 if we're just looking at that on a scale of immaturity into maturity. It's taken us eleven weeks to go through this book. It's a process.

So let's pray. "Holy Spirit, move deeply in our midst. I pray that, where we need to confess and repent, we would do so with great contrition. I pray that, where we are weary, we would be reminded that our strength is found in You. May we be stretched and moved towards You today. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."