

Series: "Corona...Corona (Habakkuk)"

Sermon: "Feelings and Foundations for Faith"

Text: Habakkuk 3: 16-17

RGJR/FBCCS/8-16-20 UNEDITED

- I've spent this week sorting through feelings. I should say, "**attempting**" to sort through feelings. For some time, I have been thinking about "relational cancers" that attack churches from the inside. I've been preparing a presentation on two of them, "*passive aggressive*" behaviors and "*triangulation*" in relationships.
- It turned out to be one of those weeks I had to be a sissy and stop reading almost all emails and texts for the last couple of days in order to be in the frame of mind I need to finalize what I will say on a Sunday. My feelings were **discombobulated** by what I was reading in these messages.
- BTW: I am surprised, but I was glad, to discover "*discombobulated*" is a real word. It means "*confused and disconcerted.*" I like "*discombobulated*" better than "*flummoxed*" —a synonym. I needed this exact word this week. I have **felt** confused and disconcerted for much of the week.
- As I considered talking to some folks about the dangers of passive aggressive behaviors (probably the #1 relational killer of a church's ability to display the reality of their unity) AND then "*triangulation*" (which, along with flat out gossip but maybe even more so is a major block to speaking truth in love) as I considered these while discombobulated in my own feelings, I had to consider that maybe it was just a problem with **my feelings**.
- That produced even greater discombobulation! Maybe I was "*projecting*" passive aggressive behaviors and triangulating relationships on to others because of my own *feelings*.
- While all this was happening I was already asking, **can we trust our feelings?** I think you will see why I was asking this in just a moment when I finish with the psychobabble introduction to today's sermon.

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- For the fun of it I googled the question "*Can we trust our feelings?*" One result was a recent article by a psychologist in the Magazine "Psychology Today." The title of the article was appropriately, at least for the search result, "Can We Trust Our Feelings?"
- This expert provided a number of "rules of thumb" to decide. I got to the second one that read: "*A second rule of thumb is 'know thyself.' Feelings provide us with signals for what is going on in the world. When these signals are accurate, we can trust our feeling; when feelings are not proper signals we cannot trust them.*"
- I wasted not one more second of my time on the article. Sure! When my feelings are correct I can trust them. When they are not I shouldn't trust them. ANNNNNNNND, how do I know when they are correct?
- To be as open with you as I want to be, very often—maybe most often—my first feelings in many cases are probably not "correct" feelings—not accurate symbols. I am a firm believer that in my flesh still dwells something of the human heart that can be "*deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,*" as the Prophet Jeremiah put it.
- I read something this week that prioritized a "heavenly nudge"—a feeling in a decision making process. The nudge was first, prayer second and finally came Scripture. The latter two were used as sources to confirm the nudge.
- It truly begs the question—that is, it assumes the conclusion it seeks in the question by asking if "**heavenly**" nudges—"heavenly" feelings can be trusted. Who wouldn't trust a "**heavenly** feeling?" However, who knows absolutely for sure if a **feeling** is indeed "**heavenly**?"
- What did the Prophet Habakkuk **feel** at the beginning of the *Book of Habakkuk*? Do you remember? One nice thing about this book is we

don't have to read too far into it to know what feeling is producing the words of the prophet. Look at Habakkuk 1:1-4 again please.

READ Habakkuk 1:1-4

- What was he feeling? He felt God wasn't listening. He felt for some unknown *negative* reason, God wasn't helping when the righteous—helping him—he should have been doing something. He felt God was tolerating sin, unrighteousness and injustice contrary to his proclaimed character as the Holy God of Israel. He felt the unrighteous were winning and the righteous of God losing.
- Were these human *feelings* "**heavenly** nudges?" "*Of course not!*" you say. Now, try to think of the real reason—the ultimate reason you can be certain they were not. Is that reason just a feeling you have about what God ought to be like? If so, that is the same set of feelings that put the prophet off track of truth.
- Hmmmm? This could be discombobulating if we were to delve very deeply into it. It could be like one of those halls of infinitely receding mirrors. One seeming solution could just be the next layer of feelings down from the feelings it is trying to validate or invalidate.
- How in this world—in time and space—will us humans who have circumstantial feelings know what is true about these feelings. *It can't be just what we feel about our feelings, can it?*
- Maybe we are not supposed to think this deeply. Maybe we are not supposed to care about this. Maybe the spiritual life is meant to be so mystical that we hinder God when we think about such things.
- But, then there are those pesky verses that speak of "truth" as the means of "freedom." And those that tell us to "renew our minds"—that must have something to do with thinking—renew our minds with God's revealed truth so that we don't follow the living patterns of this world.

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- One clearly established pattern of this world is to chase, willy-nilly after what "**feels**" good to us in the moment!" How does that work out most often? Does it usually produce LIFE or death?
- Habakkuk felt deserted, mistreated, unheard, defeated, maybe tricked by God. He felt God didn't care, wouldn't care or couldn't care. None of these *feelings* was truth! So what can he trust? Where is the end of the infinite regression of feelings to prove feelings? Where is a foundation upon which a believer in God, then and now, can securely build life out on **truth**?
- Move forward to today's text in Habakkuk 3:16 and begin with just the first half of that verse and ask, yourself what changed?
- **READ Habakkuk 3:16 (a)**
- Are there feelings here? Yes there are! Very strong feelings. Feelings so strong in the prophet that his heart is pounding in his chest. His lips are quivering. His legs are shaking so that they might not hold him up. Very strong feelings.
- Did these *nearly* overwhelming feelings result from feeling something different about his earlier feelings? If, I'm not careful, that could become a trick question. No!
- These feelings resulted from **hearing God!** They resulted from getting the truth straight, perfect and un-shaped by the *flesh*, from God.
- I know before I say this that some of you will strongly disagree with it. However, I can say nothing less. ***The only source I know to go to with absolute assurance that I am hearing unadulterated God truth is God's Word—and by that, I do mean Scripture—the Bible.***
- One can raise all manner of questions about how I hear God from Scripture. I get that and am willing to concede that the process of hearing is not always easy and not always straightforward. However,

again, if this process doesn't start with what we believe God has directly revealed to us in His Word, we cannot hope to escape the infinite regression of trying to prove what we feel about God and his will for us by what we feel about how we feel.

- Look at the order please. Habakkuk feels untruth about God. Now Habakkuk feels truth about God—it makes him literally shake the feelings are so strong. But, these strong feelings were the result of hearing God not the source of hearing God. That is critical even if that thought *discombobulates* you!
- How difficult is it to hear God through the truth he gives us in Scripture? Plenty difficult! In fact, the realities of us living thousands of years later, not speaking the same language as Habakkuk, the transmission and preservation of the text and modern Hebrew having changed radically from the days in which this was recorded—these realities all make even the Hebrew translated by the very next word difficult to understand. Look at verse 16 again please—all of it.
- **READ Habakkuk 3:16**
- The NIV translates what seems to be a Hebrew relative pronoun as the English word "yet." If you are an English major, you know "yet" is not an English relative pronoun. So, can we know the truth God said or not? I am right now involved in a discussion of what this means to the church—to FBC. Some of it touches on how Ephesians 4 suggests God intended to deal with such things through apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers so the church would have His truth as a foundation upon which to be built up into the fullness of Christ.
- But what about this morning and the little word "**yet**?" As I study in all the ways I know how that God has provided, I cannot tell you for certain that God intended "**yet**" to be another English relative pronoun. BUT, do I need to be able to do that to tell you the truth?

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- What If I told you what is certain is that there is a *disconnect* here for Habakkuk—where one thing maybe doesn't *feel* to him like it should lead to the next but it does! Imagine that when a human realizes they are dealing in truth from God! 😊 Of course it doesn't all immediately make sense. Of course, it doesn't all immediately align his feelings as he might expect them to be. This is God's truth! I'm surprised it doesn't just blow all his human thinking circuits!
- He is shaking to the core YET he now has assurance from a trustworthy source—hearing God—that he can wait patiently for God to bring about the deserved judgement of the unrighteous Babylonians.
- With quivering lips and knocking knees he can say to God, "*I will live by your truth and not my feelings as the foundation even if it takes some time for my feelings to catch up with your truth.*"
- And that is not all that results from relying on what God says instead of what the prophet feels. The ultimate test will be if the prophet will continue to trust God's Word instead of his own feelings even if he never sees any progress or no humanly expected results. Look at verse 17 please. **READ Habakkuk 3:17**
- If you were reading along, you probably realized verse 17 ends with a comma not a period. I have broken the prophet's thought at least as it is translated here.
- Why? There is another human disconnected coming. The first we just saw was that Habakkuk will trust what God has said instead of what he feels even as that requires *patience* over a long time.
- Here Habakkuk says he will trust what God has said over what he feel even if he sees none of the *outcomes* he expects to see.
- We'll come back to that disconnect, Lord willing, next Sunday and probably finish the *Book of Habakkuk* one week after that. Next

week we will need to ask what can strengthen Habakkuk in this faith? What will carry him along? Will it be just because he now has the correct, factual information from God? That doesn't always empower me to trust God.

- No, it will be "*the joy of the LORD*" that sustains him. But, wait a second Raleigh, isn't that a ***feeling***? Ahh! That's why we must think about what the truth of God is in his word for "Joy of the LORD," next week.
- For now, we encounter a potential destroyer of faith in most of us—***our expected outcomes***.
- Fig trees are not ornamental in the ANE. They were grown to produce a beloved fruit for the people to eat. Waiting for this enjoyable outcome of eating the figs they loved, people could anticipate what was coming as they saw the process progress in terms they understood.
- The tree is here, the leaves are greening, the buds that will become the fruit we desire and expect and hope for will indicate we are going to get what we want—our expected outcome.
- But Habakkuk's fig tree may never even bud and this must be OK if he will trust what God says instead of what he feels and especially what he feels about failed expected outcomes.
- You get this right? Why all the mess with Abraham and Hagar? Because Abraham and Sarah had an expected outcome and the feeling God was failing when that outcome didn't happen to prove God faithful to His promise.
- I think we allow our expected outcomes to and the feelings produced when we don't see them to destroy our faith more often than we realize.

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- I think we often allow our expected outcomes and the feelings they produce to guide us in our choices and we call it "God's nudging." We are essentially validating what we want. It may be what God wants but it may not.
- I think we often pray our expected outcomes rather than God's will and we are sometimes disappointed when he carries out his plan rather than ours. It makes us feel so, well, **invalidated** as personal kingdom builders when.
- What if God's plan, instead of my desired outcome—God's plan working itself out over my entire lifetime never shows me any fruit that proves it is working? It could be as discouraging as a year when not a single grape grows on the grapevines. No grapes! No wine!
- I love ripe olives. If salvation was by works, I think the person who invented the olive pitting machine deserves a heavenly reward. Olives were not a side offering or a condiment in Habakkuk's days. They and their oil were staples of a flourishing life. What if my plans and hard efforts intended to produce a bumper crop of olives and they all just fail? No olives at all from that smart hard work that should have resulted in olives! What if all my crops fail when I don't think they should?
- What happens when I believe I am working smart and right for God's glory and end the end it seems like failure by my metrics of success? What will I feel then? What will I believe as the truth about that?
- Or what if my life ends up so lean that there are never any sheep or cattle to speak of? The pen is empty and the stalls as well. The emptiness looks like failure. It probably feels like failure. What is the truth? What did God say?
- Habakkuk's feelings about God would have never sustained his faith. They didn't when the righteous were suffering. They wouldn't when

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his expected outcomes never happened. They wouldn't when everything he tried to do for God turned out to look like empty failure.

- Feelings will not sustain faith and certainly will not in these difficult circumstances of waiting on God's plan in God's time.
- It is only trusting what God has said about himself, in his Word of truth that will sustain our faith in the midst of discombobulation.
- As I leave you with that last thought this last thought that faith based on feelings will not sustain—faith based on God's truth will, I don't want you to get the wrong idea of what sort of life that produces in relationship with God.
- If you peek ahead and read verses 18 and 19 you will see that it is not a stark life. It isn't a life without feelings. It isn't a meek and frightened life. It is a confident life of great and lasting joy in Him because it is built upon the reality of God's eternal truth rather than our fickle human feelings.