

Genuine Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 October 2022

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0 : 00] Abacu chapter 3, if you would stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together, verses 17 through 19.

! For 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. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? Weddings are momentous events.

A lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of money is spent when a man and a woman come together before their friends and their family to be united in a one-flesh relationship as husband and wife.

[1 : 28] I believe the most important part of a wedding ceremony is when the man and the woman exchange their vows. As they enter then into that covenant of marriage with one another.

They promise to be faithful for better or worse, for richer or poorer in sickness and in health until death do they part.

They promise to love one another. They promise to love one another, to be faithful to one another, even when circumstances make it hard to do so. And you know, it's easy to make those vows, to offer those promises and pledge your faithfulness in that kind of a setting.

Typically, the couple getting married is young. They're in good health. And they look good. And they have the reception and the honeymoon to look forward to.

It's all good. And I believe that the couple making those vows, when they make them have good intentions. But in reality, the vows they exchange, their pledges of faithfulness to one another can only truly be proven in the context of their marriage.

[2 : 46] In the years they spend together, after the wedding, after the honeymoon is over, when the excitement of the newness of being married wears off, when their marriage is forced to endure the external and the internal stresses of life that threaten to pull the man and the woman apart.

It's those moments that reveal the genuineness of the vows that they exchange to one another on the day of their wedding. And those moments prove how committed each one is to be faithful to keep the promises they made to the other.

Did you know that divorce rates in our country are actually declining? Are you surprised to hear that?

Well, I think the reason for that is that fewer and fewer people are getting married today.

Young people are choosing to cohabitate with one another instead of getting married. And so we ask the question, why? And I think the answer is it comes down to commitment.

[4 : 03] They desire the gifts that come with marriage. Without the lifelong commitment of marriage. When beauty fades, when hard times come, when better options seem to be attainable, when better prospects arise, they have a way out.

And so instead of buying, they rent. Instead of committing, they consume. And when the honeymoon is over, they move on.

Now you might be asking yourself, what does any of that have to do with Habakkuk 3 verses 17 through 19? Well, bear with me, you'll see in a moment. In the Bible, marriage is a symbol that describes Jesus Christ's relationship to his church.

He is the groom and the church is his bride, which is comprised of all those who have genuinely trusted in him as their Lord and Savior. For a time during his earthly ministry, Jesus was extremely popular.

People were eager at first to commit to him. Large crowds followed him. They even called themselves his disciples. But over the course of his ministry, their numbers significantly diminished. [5 : 30] When Jesus' teachings became too hard for them to stomach, when they realized what the true cost of following, of committing themselves to him required, they backed out.

They backed away. And eventually they turned on him altogether. Case in point, John chapter 6. If you remember, Jesus has miraculously fed 20,000 people who were following him, who were calling themselves his disciples.

He took a small sack lunch from a boy consisting of two fish and five barley loaves, and he multiplied it to fill everyone's stomach with plenty left over.

In John 6, 2, we are given the reason why Jesus was so popular with so many, these large crowds. It says therein' a large crowd was following him because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick.

And so in John 6, Jesus feeds the crowd of about 2,000 people, and then afterward he began to preach to them. His miracle of the loaves and the fish was an object lesson to his being the bread of life, sent down from heaven to feed and nourish malnourished souls.

[6 : 47] He began to reveal to them that he was the Son of God who would sacrifice his life and give his blood to save sinners. But as Jesus was revealing these things to these people, John records that the crowd began to grumble.

They began to complain. Finally, many in the crowd had determined that they had had enough. And so in John 6, verses 60 through 66, we read this.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it? But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, Do you take offense at this?

Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? Therefore, it is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe and who it was that would betray him. And he said, This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

[7 : 55] After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So here's what's going on.

As long as Jesus dazzled them and entertained them with his miracles, as long as he kept their stomachs full, basically as long as he kept giving them material gifts, they were with him. They called themselves his disciples. But once those gifts stopped flowing, once they realized that he was going to do things his way and not their way, once they realized that to follow him meant obeying his word and conforming their lives to it instead of the other way around, they left. Their commitment to him was superficial. Their faith in him had limits. And they divorced themselves from him when they realized the cost that would be associated with truly following him. And the large crowd deserted him. Then Jesus turned to his 12 disciples in John 6, 67 through 69. And he said to them, do you want to go away as well?

[9 : 13] And Simon Peter answered to him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

The crowds wanted the gifts Jesus gave, but they didn't realize, as Peter did, that the true gift was Jesus Christ himself. And the 12 disciples remained, though it says there Jesus knew that Judas would later betray him.

But the other 11 stayed because their faith in Jesus was genuine. Habakkuk had been taken on quite a journey with God in this text.

He goes from questioning God and expressing his doubts regarding God's will to now worshiping God and revealing in these last verses that his faith was genuine.

And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is this, that genuine faith endures. Genuine faith endures. Just as trials in marriage determine whether the vows exchanged by the man and the woman in the wedding ceremony were genuine, so trials in life determine whether a person's profession of faith in Christ and the promises of God are genuine.

[10 : 36] In Matthew chapter 13, Jesus taught this lesson through a parable, the parable of the sower and the soils, in Matthew 13, 18 through 23. Hear then the parable of the sower, Jesus says.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while.

And when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful.

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another 60, and in another 30.

[11 : 40] And so I ask you this morning, based upon Jesus' explanation of that parable, what kind of soil are you? Does your faith depend on your circumstances?

And if so, maybe that's the case because you don't truly know God. You don't truly value who he is. So how can you know if your faith is genuine?

And why does that matter? Well, it matters for salvation. The people who called themselves Jesus' disciples in John 6, along with Judas, who had everyone fooled into believing that they truly followed Christ.

And that reveals to us that you can say that you have faith in Jesus. You can even call yourself a disciple of Jesus, but that doesn't prove that your faith in him is genuine.

Faith is proved to be genuine when it is tried, when it is forced to endure suffering. Jesus said in Matthew 7, that many will speak to him on the day of his return, as if they knew him, when in reality he says they never did.

[12 : 58] They are like the shallow soil, those who heard the gospel, but they have no root in Christ. They are the vine branches that are trimmed away from the vine because there is no evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit living within them, which is a product of genuine faith.

So this text is important because maybe you or others have fooled you into believing that you are truly saved, when the reality is your confession and faith in Christ shrivels and withers in hardship. Your devotion to God is dependent upon your circumstances. In good times, you say God is good. In bad times, you think God is bad.

So this text may reveal to you a truth you need to hear about the state of your own eternal soul. And my hope and my prayer for you is that God will be gracious to reveal that truth to you and that you would receive faith, a genuine faith which endures.

Now, if you are pretty confident that your faith is genuine, genuine than wonderful. And what you need to hear from this text is that our world needs you to be a committed follower of Christ.

[14 : 25] Because you know what? It's going to get much harder to be a Christian in this society. It's going to get a lot more uncomfortable for us who have genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Your faith in the days ahead is going to be tested.

And it must endure. Otherwise, how will people hear the good news of Jesus Christ if we don't speak it, if we don't endure, if we don't live our lives for him?

Habakkuk 3 verses 17 through 19 gives us three principles about genuine faith which endures. They are principles that reveal what genuine faith looks like.

And so here's our first principle from verse 17. Genuine faith endures suffering. Genuine faith endures suffering. What is the most difficult experience that you have had to go through in life? What event challenged you the most physically and emotionally and spiritually? For some, that might be the death of a spouse.

[15 : 44] Or the death of a child. Or the death of a parent. For others, it might be a traumatic experience where you suffered abuse at the hands of another.

For others, it may be a moment where you felt unloved by someone who should have loved you. Or put you down. Or betrayed. Maybe you were betrayed by someone whom you should have been able to trust.

For others, it might be a difficult situation which resulted from the consequence of your own sin. Whatever the case might be, I ask you, what were your thoughts about God during that time?

Did you pray? How did you pray? With tears? In anger? With a broken heart?

Maybe a combination of all three? If so, you have a lot in common with Habakkuk. And these verses contain a lot of hope that I believe will not only reveal the genuineness of your faith in God, but will also help to heal you.

[16 : 59] And so we first need to understand the suffering Habakkuk experienced, which proved the genuineness of his faith.

If you remember, Babylon is coming, and they're coming to destroy Habakkuk's home. His friends and his family will either die or be enslaved as a result.

Habakkuk himself may have even died in the slaughter that was coming. We're not sure. But we do know from Jeremiah that when Babylon arrived to destroy Judah about 18 to 20 years after Habakkuk wrote this book, that they inflicted a tremendous amount of suffering on his people. For two years, Babylon besieged Jerusalem. Their army encircled the city, and they starved the people inside into submission.

Now think about how much food you have in your house right now. Do you have enough food in your cupboards, in your pantries, to maybe last, hopefully more than a day, a few days, a week, a month, a couple of months?

[18 : 11] Some of you are prepared for the apocalypse, and so you've got food prepared for at least a year or more. But you have to understand, this is Old Testament times.

They didn't have refrigerators. They didn't have preservatives in their food. If you've seen pictures of POWs or of the Jews in the Nazi concentration camps, how emaciated they looked from being starved, then you've seen, you know, the ugly picture that Habakkuk and others would have seen every day during that two-year time period.

People. Children. Babies. starving to death. In Lamentations chapter 2, verses 11 through 12, Jeremiah, who is a contemporary of Habakkuk's, describes the scene.

It's a scene that makes him sick to behold. My eyes are spent with weeping. My stomach churns. My bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. Because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city. They cry out to their mothers, where is bread and wine? Where is something to eat?

[19 : 36] Where is something to drink? As they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city. As their life is poured out on their mother's bosom. Habakkuk has foreseen this event that Jeremiah described.

Destruction. Starvation. Desperation. And he writes in verse 17. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olives fail, and the fields yield no food. The flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. The economy of ancient Judea was based almost exclusively on agriculture and livestock.

Figs, grapes, and olives, those were the permanent crops. Those were the crops that you planted into the ground, and as soon as they grew, you knew you could count on them to produce year after year after year.

The fields were the annual crops. They provided the staple foods for the people, the wheat and the barley, the things that the people needed to make their bread, which they ate with almost every meal.

[20 : 50] In fact, many times, bread was the meal itself. The livestock was obviously the source of their meat and their dairy. When all those things fail to produce, you are left with nothing to eat, and you are left with no way to make money.

And so Habakkuk paints a putrid picture of the loss of all things that one needs to survive. Now, for us today, the picture might look like this.

When I'm laid off from my job and the unemployment insurance runs out, when my bank account is empty and my savings have been spent, when the mortgage payment comes due, when the electricity and the water is shut off, when there is no income and no money in the checking account, when the house is foreclosed on, when the car is repossessed, when I have to file for bankruptcy, I have nothing.

Think of the picture of the man with his pockets turned inside out. And you know, even if that was to be the case for you, which I hope that it never is, your situation would still be better than Habakkuk's situation was, because Judea had no kind of social service agencies.

There were no homeless shelters for them to go to. There were no food banks. There were no food pantries or soup kitchens. You're left on your own.

[22 : 21] That's what Habakkuk faced. What would he do? Well, we see in verse 18 that his genuine faith endured suffering because of the second principle.

Genuine faith endures because it doesn't depend on God's gifts. Genuine faith endures because it doesn't depend on God's gifts. Habakkuk's point in verse 17 is that if everything that could go wrong does go wrong, if the absolute worst case scenario becomes his reality, if all of God's gifts are taken away from him, he says in verse 18, yet I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

Is that how you would respond? Is that how you have responded in the past during times of suffering? How could Habakkuk find reason to rejoice in God despite the suffering he'd endure with his people?

His faith in God wasn't dependent upon God's gifts. Like we saw last week, he turned to God and he trusted in God, remembering God's past faithfulness and that God would deliver him and his people in the future.

And he rejoices. You know, Habakkuk didn't have any more of God than we have. He didn't have any more knowledge of God that isn't available to us, to you today.

[23 : 53] In fact, we have the full revelation of God. We live on the other side of the cross. We know that in Christ all of God's promises have been fulfilled.

As 2 Corinthians 1.20 says, for all the promises of God find their yes in him, that is why it is through him that we utter our amen to God for his glory. Going back to the illustration of marriage, I'm sure that all of you know what a gold digger is.

I'm talking about the store over here. Many of you are that kind of gold digger. I'm talking about the kind of gold digger that marries someone because of what they have.

They marry someone because they want their money. They marry someone because they want to possess some of their power. And their love for that person depends upon the gifts.

And if the gifts stop coming and the cash stops flowing, then they're gone. they're out of the marriage. And you know, those who preach and attach themselves to the prosperity gospel are just a bunch of gold diggers.

[25 : 12] Their devotion, their faith, their worship of God depends on receiving worldly treasures from him. And Jesus said that if you spend your life that way, then you're wasting your life.

Matthew 16, 19 through 21. Jesus says, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. You see, Habakkuk's faith in God wasn't dependent upon God's making every day seem like a Friday for him.

His faith in God wasn't dependent upon his experience experiencing his best life now. He didn't have the power to change his circumstances through positive thinking. His love and his devotion, his faith in God did not depend upon material gifts.

So what did it depend upon? The third principle of genuine faith. Genuine faith endures because those who have it truly know God. Habakkuk not only foresees the possibility that he could lose everything, he knows with certainty that he will lose everything.

[26 : 30] Yet his faith endures because he truly, genuinely knows God. Notice to this point what Habakkuk has not done. First of all, he hasn't heard all of these things and he hasn't cursed God.

He hasn't threatened to take his business away from God and go elsewhere. He hasn't said anything like, well God, if you aren't going to give me the things or that I want or do things my way, then I'll find another God who will.

I'll find another religion that will. Habakkuk also hasn't turned his eyes away from reality. He hasn't closed his eyes and mentally retreated to some kind of a fantasy world.

Thinking, doing so will make his problems just go away. And he doesn't say something like this either. Well God, you know what? Who needs you anyway?

I'll maintain a stiff upper lip. I'll endure myself. I'll have the eye of the tiger. Just a man in his will to survive.

[27 : 40] Rising up to the challenge of my rivals. Habakkuk's faith proves genuine because he knows God. and he knows that what he needs to endure is not a strength that he has but a strength that comes from God.

God's strength. So in the beginning of verse 19 he says, God the Lord is my strength. He hopes in God because he knows who God is.

He knows that God is a savior. He knows that God is a deliverer and he knows that God has proven himself to him time and time again.

And so he says that his feet, his faith will not slip. As we continue on in verse 19, he makes my feet like the deer's. He makes me tread on my high places.

You know, a deer or a gazelle or a mountain goat are able to move swiftly and gracefully on rocky cliffs without stumbling or falling. A deer can place its back feet in exactly the same place where its front feet just were, finding solid ground as it scampers up vertical cliffs.

[28 : 58] Have you ever seen a deer or goat climb up a vertical cliff? It's amazing. And because of the way its hooves are made and shaped, sharp rocks do not cause it injury, doesn't cause it to fall.

And so there's a couple of applications there for us to take away from. First of all, genuine faith lives above circumstances.

God gives us the grace, the courage, the strength we need to press on to attain new heights. Like a deer's confidence as it traverses hard terrain, so he gives us the strength and the hope we need to not live our lives in fear when we suffer, but to step boldly out into whatever God has called us to do or to live through.

And here's the other thing. I know some of you like to go hiking. I don't. I know some of you like to go mountain climbing.

I don't. And if that, and that being the case for me, I would have fit in much better with this culture than you would have. These people, their work often required them to exercise.

[30 : 22] You know, so if you're farming, if you're, if you're attending the herds, you're on your feet all day long making food.

There's no drive-thru for you to go through to get some McDonald's on your way home, right? You worked hard for whatever you got. It was physical labor. And so when, when they had time off, they didn't think, you know what?

Let's go exercise. They rested. And the other thing is they had sandals for their feet.

They didn't have the hiking boots that you can get today. They didn't have the harnesses and all of the resources that we have to make mountain climbing and hiking easier.

It was dangerous for them. They did not want to go to these high places if they didn't have to. So the high places were not places that Habakkuk and his people would have wanted to go.

[31 : 30] I don't want to go there. It's dangerous. That's hard terrain. I could stumble. I could fall. I could get hurt. So I think it's interesting to note that Habakkuk says he makes me.

He makes me tread on these high places. He makes me go to these places where I would rather not go. what are your high places?

To what high places has God led you to in the past? To what high places is God leading you to in the present? Whatever your high places are or have been rest in who God has revealed himself to you to be.

and the promises that he gives you in his word. He says that you can run the race that he has set before you with endurance. As Hebrews 12 1 says in promises you can press on toward the goal of the prize of the upward calling of God in Jesus Christ as Philippians 3 12-14 promises.

And you can trust that the good work he began in you when he saved you will reach its completion as Philippians 1-6 promises. You can walk by faith and not by sight as 2 Corinthians 5-7 promises.

[32 : 54] And you can tread on high places not because of who you are but because of who God has revealed himself to you to be. And the faith he has given you through believing the gospel of his son Jesus Christ and the strengthening you receive from the indwelling of his spirit.

Jesus Christ was made to go and willingly went to the ultimate high place. He hung suspended on a cross between heaven and earth.

He who knew no sin suffered for our sins. no one suffered more.

No one endured more. No one gave up more than him for you. And he is the solid rock upon which we can stand at all times whether we suffer or not.

and he's told us the flood waters of despair will flow. The rains of discouragement will come.

[34 : 19] The winds of tribulation will blow against you. They will beat on you but he promises that they can never destroy you because of the faith that is founded on Christ the rock the redeemer our savior the true treasure like Habakkuk then people of God today must have faith that looks outside of themselves and looks to another a dependence on God based upon who he is and his faithfulness which transforms their existence in this world filling their lives with joy in the certainty that our God has given us a faith that will endure that he will enable you to rejoice like Habakkuk when all seems lost.

Do you know him? do you truly know him? There's a huge difference between loving God for what he gives and loving God because of who he is.

It's the difference between life and death. Genuine faith endures because it knows and has experienced the love of God who endured on the cross to save us and give us life.

And you know when you suffer as a believer it's like the world puts a spotlight on you.

And people are watching. People are taking note. This man this woman this boy this girl this teenager they say that they're a follower of Jesus Christ.

[36 : 18] And I know that they're going through something really really hard. and they're watching and they're waiting to see how you will respond in that moment.

And in those moments you have a wonderful opportunity to show to the world my faith in God does not depend upon my circumstances Jesus because I know what he took so that I can be saved through him.

So our main point of application this morning is this endure well for the glory of your Savior who endured the cross for you.

Endure well! for the glory of your Savior who endured the cross for you. Now again it was Peter in John 6 who told Jesus that they had nowhere else to turn.

If you recall later Peter for a time did turn momentarily temporarily from Jesus as he was led to the cross but then was forgiven and reinstated by Jesus after his resurrection.

[37 : 31] When Jesus reinstated Peter he also gave him an inkling of what awaited him. In John 21 verses 18 through 19 Truly truly I say to you when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go take you to one of those high places that you do not want to go and this he said to show by what kind glorify God and after saying this he said to him follow me imagine you're Peter and you hear that Jesus says there's going to be a time of suffering for you you will die in a way that glorifies me and then at the end Jesus says follow me how would you respond if you were

Peter in that situation follow you you just told me what I'm going to have to go through follow you Peter follows him and he served him well in life and in death Fox's book of the martyrs when it talks about Peter's death it has this statement that I thought is really good profound it's not where we go and what happens to us that matters all that much what does matter is how we respond when Jesus comes to us and says follow me there is never a time for those who genuinely know Christ to be without hope if hope seems lost to you then it may be that you don't truly know him or it may mean that you aren't following him well follow him follow him brother follow him sister follow him young man follow him young woman follow him rejoice in the opportunities that he gives you to prove the genuineness of your faith follow him to the high places go with him there and know that you can trust him that he will make your feet like the deers that you will overcome because he has overcome for you he will not leave you he will not fail you he will never let you down he has overcome and because he has overcome he has permitted you he has given you the right the opportunity to overcome and enjoy his victory with him forever so

I know for me and I hope it can be said for you as well to whom else shall I go no one has loved me more given me more endured more for me Jesus Christ is the way the truth and the life in him there is life abundantly I read this quote this morning and I thought it was fitting to end the sermon before we go into our application questions it's from Thomas Shepard three three questions three questions of application for you to look at today later this week question number one what are some of the high places the

Lord has brought you to what lessons did he teach you during those times question number two does your faith in God change based on your circumstances what does that reveal about the genuineness of your faith if it does and then finally read 2nd Corinthians 4 8 through 12 how did Paul's sufferings impact his faith in Jesus Christ did it weaken it or did it strengthen it let's pray Lord God we thank you for your word Lord we thank you for your word and its truth that challenges us at times that the more we reflect upon it feeds and nourishes our hearts and our minds and encourages us

God we thank you that we don't go through this life in times of suffering alone Father we're thankful ultimately for your son Jesus Christ who endured the suffering of the cross to give us life and who's called us to follow him Lord forgive us that so often we ignore his words about the cost of following him what it will mean for us Lord we desire comfort and we desire ease we want an easy life without

any kind of difficulty without any kind of suffering but Lord you've never promised us that you told us that true true and everlasting joy heaven true treasure is found in your son it's in heaven that's where our life is that's where our hope is and so God we pray that we would not avoid going to the places that you've called us to go but that we would go

[43 : 53] Lord knowing that you're not going to make us go through it alone but you're there waiting for us and you'll see us through it and we will come out the other side not because of who you are but because of who Christ is God I'm sure that in this room right now listening to this sermon even online that there are people who are suffering and they're hurting and they're enduring and it's hard Lord I pray that today your word working in conjunction with your spirit would uplift their faces their hearts their eyes to you that they like we all would be reminded that we have reason to hope because Christ has come Christ has died he has risen he has ascended and he's coming again and so Lord may we not forget the confession we made on the day that you saved us that Jesus Christ is

Lord despite my circumstances and that we would live our lives for you in ways that glorify you that when you say follow me we go in Jesus name we pray amen Thank you.