



Some Things Are Just Rough

What Is Your Response When It Gets Rough?

The other day I was following a baseball game on Yahoo Sports which presents neither audio nor video of the game. I was only tracking the bare written details coming over the internet. The score 0-0. The batter struck out the previous at bat. The count was a ball and a strike. Immediately I sensed the call to pray for a hit. More than that, to pray for a home run. Now was my life going to change at all if Matt Olson hit a homerun or struck out or walked? Not a bit. I though sensed the call to pray he hit a homerun. The very next pitch the batter did hit a homerun and I sat amazed by what had just happened. Was it a coincidence? Did I have a sixth sense or did God intrude on my thinking and show me what was to come? Some would argue that if God does exist, He would not care about baseball games or who wins or loses. Now, I am sure God does not bet on games and is not a fan of one team or another. I do believe what He cares about is people and sometimes He makes it clear to us that He is here, and He is God.

I am intrigued by the prophet Habakkuk. He was like many, waiting for disaster to strike. I have a number of friends with cancer. I know of someone who is taking a test and afraid of failing. I have been told of loved ones who are facing terrible legal problems, divorce, and unemployment. There are plenty of people we know who are at the edge of catastrophe and do not know if God exists, if He cares about their adversity, if He will do anything about what they face. Habakkuk believed in God, was certain of Him and yet was not sure what He would do. The Babylonian army was approaching Jerusalem and the Babylonians were known for their cruelty and destructive way of conquest. Habakkuk was bitter about what was coming and wanted an answer from God over the unfairness of the situation. After complaining to God about what seemed inevitable, he waited for an answer. **I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.** (Habakkuk 2:1 NIV)

Perhaps right now you are like Habakkuk, facing a problem, a crisis too big for you. The Jews were not going to stop the onslaught of the Babylonians. They did not have an army that could fight them off. You may know someone in a similar situation. In fact, you love this person and feel powerless to help and yet you want to do something. Perhaps you have scrambled for some way to fix the problem. Tried to figure out what you could do to turn things around. Maybe like Sarah, the wife of Abraham, you have an idea that you think might work. She and her husband were childless, and Sarah came up with the plan to solve everything. She told her husband he should sleep with her servant and have a child with her. Abraham followed her advice and did father a child with Hagar the servant, but it turned out to be a disaster in many different ways. If she had just waited and trusted the LORD a bit longer, she would have had Isaac with much less turmoil in her home.

God promised Rebekah that her son Jacob would have preeminence over her other son Esau, but she could not wait for God to work it out. She had to come up with a plan to make it happen and so she got Jacob to trick his blind father Isaac into giving the blessing Isaac intended for Esau to Jacob instead. She effectively broke up her family by it. The plan worked but at what cost. When Jacob had to flee Esau's wrath for stealing the blessing, Rebekah ended up dying before Jacob finally returned home more than twenty years later. We know about Samson who was unwilling to wait for God to bring him the perfect wife and King Saul who disobeyed God because of the threat of a Philistine invasion would not wait for Samuel to offer the sacrifice

to God. Samson ended up being betrayed by Delilah and Saul lost his perfect peace with God. Perhaps you know someone who would not wait for God but came up with a way to get things done without Him. It always seems smart at the time, a great plan, but when you run off without the Lord in what you are doing, you can cause much harm in the end.

It would seem like Habakkuk was just avoiding the problem. Rather than trying to rally the troops, work on strengthening the wall around Jerusalem or developing a strategy for defeating the Babylonians, he waited. God though gave Habakkuk the plan. Pray. Keep an eye out for what God would do. Encourage anyone who asked about what to do, to pray and trust God. It is nerve-wracking to wait for God. It feels like a waste of time. Pressure builds as you wait. Questions about God can arise. Doubts about His love and goodness come to mind. It takes real strength to pray and wait. It is not for the faint of heart to trust in God when it seems like disaster has come to you or to someone you love.

We have some friends who adopted a child, and it has not gone well. In fact it seems like a mistake. And yet they love their child and prayed fervently about the decision to adopt. Many joined them in prayer. So where is God now when it is so rough? It is hard for this couple to wait and pray. I know of someone who is battling cancer and the pain is terrible at times. It is tough to pray and wait. Maybe you are like the woman who suffered for twelve years with bleeding and the doctors who tried to help just made it worse. All this long time she prayed. Finally her time came for deliverance. One day she entered a crowd where Jesus was. **When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.** (Mark 5:27-29 NIV) Jesus, noticing what had happened, addressed the woman. **He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."** (Mark 5: 34 NIV)

Notice what we are told there. Jesus acknowledged that the woman had suffered. She went through terrible misery. There is no debating that. In all her praying and waiting, it was agony. We cannot say why some things just take a long time when we are praying. Abraham and Sarah waited many decades before their son together was born. David waited more than a decade before he saw his prayers about King Saul answered and it was horrible many days as he waited. Waiting is not easy, and prayer is sometimes very hard also. We prayed and waited eight years before we had our first child. It was not fun at all. Your faith in God gets stretched when you pray and wait. Your strength gets tested. And the truth is, unless the Lord tells us what to expect, we do not know exactly what will happen.

I have a long list of people who have asked me to pray for them, over 400 requests and I do each and every day. I have had one hundred and seventy-eight times prayers on this list granted to me by God. Four times people went to be with the Lord. One person I prayed for healing of his kidneys for twenty years and just a couple years ago the friend told me the kidney stones were gone. No one wants to wait twenty years for prayers to be answered and many give up on God long before then. How many hundreds of years did faithful Jews pray for the coming of the Messiah? I love the account of Simeon, who is described by Luke as a righteous man. He had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he physically saw the Messiah, the Christ. **It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."** (Luke 2:26-32 NIV)

Where are the faithful men and women, boys and girls of today who despite disappointment and suffering, will keep praying like that, keep hoping in God like that. If the Holy Spirit somehow lets you know that you will see your prayer answered, then keep praying and do not quit. If you have not gotten a word from the Lord on

it, then keep praying anyway. God will make clear to you what He is doing, and it will make all the difference in the world if you have stayed faithful and waited for Him to work in your life or the lives of those you love.