

So, here we are at the end of Habakkuk. He has made his complaints to God and got an answer he didn't expect, and didn't like. This chapter is apparently a song – nobody knows what the word *shigionoth* really means, but it is taken with the last two lines as musical instruction. Chapter 3 is Habakkuk's response to the answer given by God in the previous chapter. Habakkuk knows that judgement is coming on Judah because of their disobedience, so he asks for mercy. That's not the focus today though.

Today, I want to look again at the amazing words of vs 17-18:

*Habakkuk 3:17 Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.*

Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in a situation like the prophet Habakkuk? If you haven't been there yet you will be. If you haven't been there yet just keep on living.

The truth is; life comes with problems built in. So you might as (nobody said it was easy picture) well understand, you're not going to Get through this life without trouble, without hardships, without pain, without getting your heart broken at least once or twice. Without being lied to, persecuted, and despised. Then throw in some betrayal and deception into the pot, because that's life.

All you have to do is look in the Bible and you will see what I'm talking about. Even those we consider great heroes of the faith were not immune. David, called by God, 'a man after my own heart', king of Israel, giant slayer and worship leader - even he was not exempt from pain.

Then look at Job: He was a righteous man, but he endured more grief and pain than would seem humanly possible.

Sometimes you're in the pit and sometimes you're in the fire.
Sometimes you're on the Mountain calling fire down from heaven,
and sometimes you're in the cave hoping Jezebel doesn't find you.

There are just some things that happen to us all, just because we're in the world. Then there are things that are demonic in nature, attacks straight out of hell.

Jn 10:10 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;*

I said all of this to get to this point: There will be times in your life when praise makes no sense.

When we talk about making sense of something, we mean that it is understandable, logical and reasonable.

But this man of God was doing something that just doesn't make sense. He was standing in the midst of chaos, of loss, of emptiness, confusion and disappointment and he did something that sent shock waves through hell and celebration through heaven – YET, I will rejoice in the Lord!

He said: even though – I choose to rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful God of my saviour.

Basically what he said was: I have decided, I'm going to praise God even when it makes no sense.

You may be going through a season of sickness, or you may be grieving over the loss of a loved one. You may be walking through the fire of family turmoil, or you may be crying yourself to sleep at night over your prodigals. Whatever the difficult circumstance you face, what are you man of God, woman of God, what are you going to do?

I tell you what you shouldn't do. You shouldn't let your feelings and emotions take over. You shouldn't run to the fridge and try to bury your sorrow in food. You shouldn't turn to drink to take away the pain. You shouldn't get angry at God and accuse him of not loving you, and not caring about you.

You should do what David did: encourage yourself in the Lord. Then begin to praise God. In that circumstance, I'm going with Isaiah

*Isaiah 61:3 to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendour.*

to claim a crown of beauty instead of ashes,

the oil of joy in place of mourning and

to put on the garment of praise for the spirit of despair. I'm going to open my mouth and praise God. I'm going to give him the praise that's due his name.

Isaiah knew what he was talking about – Isaiah 43:1-5

*But now, this is what the Lord says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
2 When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
3 For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your stead.
4 Since you are precious and honoured in my sight,
and because I love you,*

*I will give people in exchange for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
⁵ Do not be afraid, for I am with you;*

I read an article this week that talked about Pretty Praise and Ugly Praise – I think I should confirm that it's the praise that's ugly, not the people! Pretty Praisers - People that will praise God when everything's 'pretty'. When the weather's nice, when the bills are paid, when they feel good and when they have money in the bank, they're quick to give God that nice pretty praise. And they like things to be 'just so' in church.

But I'm going to tell you something that might surprise you: God would rather have your honest, heartfelt, Ugly Praise than your Pretty Praise.

It doesn't take much confidence, and it doesn't take much faith in God, and it doesn't take much effort to praise God when everything is going well in your life. Of course, we definitely should praise during those times.

But what really gets the attention of heaven, and paralyzes Hell is ugly praise.

That praise that makes no sense: the praise causes your face to scrunch up, the praise where it's hard to tell if it's praise or a groan, the praise that runs down your face, the praise that you had to reach down deep into your heart for. It's not pretty, it's ugly.

The Dictionary defines Ugly as: very unattractive, offensive to the sense of beauty, displeasing in appearance, messy, objectionable.

Pretty praisers get uncomfortable around ugly praisers, because ugly praisers don't worry about what they look like, they're just trying to hang on, and get closer to God. That kind of ugly praise is always real because it's from the depths of the heart in response to God.

Pretty praisers sometimes have a problem with that kind of praise because real praise often gets loud, and isn't easily managed.

It's time to stop worrying about trying to pretty it up, and just give it up. God loves our ugly praise!!

Let me introduce you to a couple of ugly praisers in the Bible.

First there was Job:

Job 1:1 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

In ten verses, Job lost everything. The Sabeans took his oxen and donkeys and killed all his servants there but one, then fire fell from the sky and burned up his sheep and all the servants there but one, the Chaldeans took his camels and killed his servants, all except one.

Then all of his sons and daughters were at the oldest brother's house, and a great wind, demolished the house and all his children were killed.

All of this news hit Jobs life in a matter of 10 Verses.

What did Job do?? He gave God some UGLY PRAISE... He got up, tore his clothes, shaved his head and fell down upon the ground and worshipped.

*Job 19:25-27 I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.*

*²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;*

*²⁷ I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!*

Then, 1 Sa 30:1-7 David and his men had returned from a military campaign, and found their city Ziklag burned, and their wives, sons and daughters taken captive.

Then David and the people that were with him, lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.

And then it says: I Sam 30:6 *David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.*

This is where David gave God ugly praise.

They had been weeping and crying until they had no more power to weep. No doubt David was physically exhausted, he didn't look like a great warrior or a great worshipper, His eyes were most likely swollen and bloodshot. But what he did next turned everything around.

Right there in the middle of that pain: He gave God praise that made no sense.... He gave God ugly Praise.

And God gave him a supernatural turnaround, and he recovered every single thing the devil had stolen.

What if somebody here today is one moment of ugly praise away from a miracle. One moment of ugly praise away from a supernatural breakthrough, a supernatural turnaround. One moment of ugly praise away from your prodigals coming home. One moment of ugly praise away from turning that sense of lack into abundance. One moment of ugly praise away from a brand new anointing. One moment of ugly praise away from a healing that has been a long time coming.

There are two more people who gave God ugly praise: You may know them as Paul and Silas.

We find them in Acts Chapter 16 being followed around by a 'fortune teller' or medium. Finally Paul became so annoyed with her that he commanded evil spirits to leave her.

Her owners, realising their source of income had gone, caused a commotion and Paul and Silas were beaten, and put into jail.

Then we see our two Ugly Praisers there in the darkness, at midnight, humiliated, backs beaten black and blue, their clothes ripped off their bodies. About midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praise to God, and the prisoners heard them.

They gave God ugly praise: Praise that made no sense.

Right there in the midst of the darkness, and the pain, when most people would have been crying, and moaning and groaning and complaining and deciding whether the ministry was worth it or not.

Right there they gave God ugly praise.

Acts 16:26-28 *Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*

And the Jailor and his whole family were born into the Kingdom that night. Because of two men who were not ashamed to praise God when it didn't make sense.

2 Samuel 6- David is bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem, and he begins to be overwhelmed with thanksgiving. He starts to dance and rejoice, 2 Samuel 6:14 *Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, danced with great abandon.*

This is ugly praise because he doesn't care what anyone else thinks of him. 2 Samuel 6:20 *When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"*

And David could have said: You're right dear, that was a shameful thing for me to do, and it certainly was no way for a king to act. I should have composed myself, I should have behaved myself better. I'm sorry that I embarrassed you.

He could have said that; But he didn't.

²¹ David said to Michal, “It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord’s people Israel—I will celebrate before the Lord.²² I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour.”

What David said was; I wasn't dancing for you, and I wasn't dancing for the servants or the hand maidens, I was dancing for the Lord.

And then David said: If you thought that praise was over the top, if that was offensive and distasteful to you, if you thought that my last praise was ugly, you haven't seen anything yet.

I'm going to tell you the truth: I don't really understand it all, but I know its true: there's something powerful in Ugly Praise.

I think it goes back to the last verse of Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 2 of chapter 3:

*The Lord is in his holy temple;
let all the earth be silent before him.
Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy.*

That deep, ugly, “I don’t care who sees me” praise comes from the knowledge that God is in his holy Temple. He rules the nations as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It comes from time spent standing in awe in his presence. It comes when Holy Spirit within us causes us to cry out for more of his presence, more of his power, more of his love, more of his grace, more of his compassion, more of his mercy, more of Jesus.

Praising God in the good times is good. Praising God in the hard days, or without concern for what other people might think about you, is better. What kind of praise are you giving God?