

**“I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD”**  
**Thanksgiving Eve/Day – November 23 & 24, 2016 (s713.doc)**  
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*I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.*

*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, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

*The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.*

–Habakkuk 3:16-19 (NIV84)

Back in October, we had a sermon series based on a book—the daily devotional journal **364 Days of Thanksgiving** by Andrew Schroer. At that time, we explained how the book got its title from a comment once made by Charles Dickens, who said that as Americans we have things backwards. Instead of having just one day for Thanksgiving each year, we should have 364. “Use that **one day** for complaining and griping,” he said. “Use **the other 364** to thank God for the blessings he has showered upon you.”

For three weeks, in our worship services and in our growth groups, we talked about the blessings we have from God. And for many of us, Dickens’ point was a point well-taken. **Why should we complain? We really do have a lot to be thankful for.** But that’s easy to lose sight of.

About that same time, I had a bad day. I don’t remember what it was, but there were a number of things on my mind and I felt I needed to let off a little steam. So I walked into Pastor Henzi’s office, and as I turned to close the door—ready to let it all out—he looked at me, sat back, and said, “Tom, you’re not going to **complain**, are you?”

It helps to put it all into perspective...364 Days of **Thanksgiving**.

**“Use that one day for complaining and griping,”** Dickens said. “Use the other 364 to thank God for the blessings he has showered upon you.” So I’ve been saving it up. 364 days for thanking God, and one day for griping and complaining, right? So this must be the day for griping and complaining. Are you ready?

- We just came off a contentious election...and it’s clear that **people are very much divided** about politics in our country.
- **The world is violent and in turmoil**...and nobody knows what the future holds in store.
- My car needs **an oil change**...and right now, **my favorite football team** isn’t playing so well.
- It’s **dark outside**—and it’s cold. You get up in the morning and it’s dark. You get done with work, and it’s dark.
- I had to **mow the lawn** last week—in November...for the **second time**. And it won’t be long and we’ll be **blowing snow**.

The more I go down the list, the more petty and trivial it all seems.

It might be good for us to take a look today at someone who seems to have had a complaint—I mean, a **real** complaint—to take to God. His name is Habakkuk, and he’s the author of the Old Testament book that bears his name. This faithful prophet pours out his heart in complaint to the Lord...and when it’s all done, he says:

**“I Will Rejoice in the Lord.”**

On this Thanksgiving Day, it will be good for us to look a little more closely at what brought the prophet Habakkuk to feel as he did.

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He begins, “How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?” (Habakkuk 1:2,3).

You read that, and you wonder, was Habakkuk saying this 2,500 years ago or was it just last week? When the prophet looked out his front window, he saw **violence**. He saw **injustice**. The bad guys did whatever they wanted to do. The **poor**, the **weak**, those **faithful to the Lord** suffered. And everybody else seemed to be okay with it.

“How can you let this happen, Lord?” Habakkuk complains. “Why aren’t you doing something? Are you powerless to do anything about it...or do you just not care? How can you **do** this, Lord?”

- People abuse their authority to take advantage of others.
- People disobey the law to hurt others.
- People are quick to accuse and take advantage of a system that is filled with corruption.

And no one seems to be too concerned about the people who are really getting hurt.

It sounds a lot like today, doesn’t it? We wonder: Why doesn’t God punish those who do wrong? Why does he seem to tolerate all the violence and injustice we see in this world? Why doesn't he bring an end to all the bitterness and trouble? Can’t he bring peace to a strife-torn world?

God answers Habakkuk’s prayer. But he also makes it clear that he’ll do it in his own time and in his own way: *“Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the **Babylonians**...”* (Habakkuk 1:5,6).

“Don’t worry, Habakkuk, I’ve got it covered. In the not-too-distant future, I’ll bring in the Babylonians to take care of the all violence and injustice you’re seeing. They’ll be ruthless. They’ll sweep through the land and destroy it. And rest assured, those wicked countrymen of yours will no longer be flying so high.”

Habakkuk can’t believe what he hears. “The **Babylonians**!?! If anything, **they’re worse!** How can you let **them** come in here? They’ll devastate the land. And the good people will suffer...**again**. How can you do **that**, Lord? How can you do **that**?” And the Lord responds, *“Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.... Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.... The righteous will live by his faith”* (Habakkuk 2:2-4).

In other words, “Trust me, Habakkuk. You’re still in good hands.”

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“Trust me.” The Lord is speaking those words to us today, too. It’s just that sometimes we find it hard to believe that he’s really taking care of us. But he’s not some heartless deity who only cares about those who earn his favor. No. He is **the Lord**—the God of free and faithful love. He is **eternal**. He is **changeless**. He is **true to his Word**. And he **will not leave us** or forsake us.

- When we are alone we can **lean** on him.
- When we are troubled, we can **trust** in him.
- When we are desperate we can **depend** on him.

No matter how bad things are or may seem to be, he’s still God. He’s in control. He knows what is best and does what it right.

This is the God who in his power and might created this world; and he is the God who through apparent defeat and weakness redeemed it. He knows injustice...

On a cross outside Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, God’s son suffered injustice in our place. All the violence and evil and wrong of this world—he took it on himself. And there on that cross he suffered the punishment this world deserved. Because of what he has done, we can approach God without fear. Because of him, God will welcome us into his home.

We may not always know what he is doing. We might not understand. But he **is** taking care of us in the way that is best. And with that confidence, God enables us to rise up above the circumstances of our lives. He gives us the strength to go on.

Habakkuk says, “*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, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior*” (Habakkuk 3:17,18). ***If I have nothing at all, I still have my God...***and I have every reason to rejoice.

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So what does all this have to do with Thanksgiving? In the year 1620, 102 Pilgrims arrived in Massachusetts. By 1621, due to starvation, disease, and a harsh winter, more than half of them died. The 50 survivors, with about 90 native Americans, celebrated what we now think of as the “First Thanksgiving.” Life was hard. They had little to their names. But these early Americans felt compelled to ***give thanks to God.***

So who am I to complain?

- Maybe our political landscape is ***divided***...but we do live in a land that allows elections to take place and we have many other freedoms besides.
- And maybe the future is ***unsure***...but we know that the Lord is still in control, and that the future of his church rests securely in his hands.
- I still have a ***car***...and I still have a ***team*** to cheer for...and I still wake up in the morning and head off to work.
- And maybe I did have to ***mow*** too much in November and now it’s time to get the ***snow-blower*** ready. But the Lord has a way of blessing us with the beauty of his creation in every season of the year.

***Who am I to complain?*** I don’t need everything to be ***perfect*** in order to be blessed. ***I have my God and Savior. And that’s all I need.***

Come to think of it...Charles Dickens was only ***half*** right. Yes, we have 364 days to thank God for the blessings he has showered upon us. But we have one day—***not*** for grumbling and complaining—but to ***give extra thanks to the Lord.*** Let your Thanksgiving be that day!

AMEN.