

From Worry to Worship **Habakkuk**

Intro: It is easy to worry in a Covid world. Then again, it is easy to worry every day, regardless of Covid-19. We wonder why God doesn't do something about evil. We wonder why our families can't get along. We wonder why our bodies suffer such illness. Habakkuk's story is our story.

Habakkuk lived in the final decades of the Southern Kingdom/Judah's existence before the Babylonian invasion when injustice and idolatry filled the land.

Most prophets talked to the people about God. God speaks to God about the people. He couldn't understand why God allowed injustice to flourish in Israel.

Habakkuk doesn't accuse Israel. Instead, he accuses God of:

- a) Indifference
- b) Inactivity

Habakkuk is almost a book of lament, crying out to God.

Chs 1-2 – A back-and-forth conversation between Habakkuk and God
Ch 3 – Habakkuk's prayer and praise

First: Habakkuk's First Complaint: Wow! 1:1-3

Deacon in business meeting about the suggestion to pray. "Has it come to that?"

Habakkuk sets a good example for us.

It's often difficult for us to pray because prayer admits something is beyond our control. We don't pray because we have all the answers but because we don't have all the answers. We don't pray because we have everything figured out but because we don't have everything figured out.

This is unnatural for us. We, like Adam and Eve, all want to be super-people. It may be natural for us to depend on ourselves but it is not healthy and in the end, not helpful.

Habakkuk's first complaint is that God's law is broken, violence and injustice reign and Judah's leadership is complicit

Second: God's First Response: Watch! 1:5-11

God is not insensitive to Israel's sin. They may not reap in the same year they sowed, but they will reap the results of their sin.

V 5 – Just like with other prophets, God declares that he is going to use the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, to punish Israel (which Habakkuk, nor Israel can believe, especially in light of God's description of them).

Second: Habakkuk's Second Complaint & Response: What? 1:12-17 & 2:1

a) His Complaint

V 12-13 – How can a Holy God use an unholy people to judge his people?

V 14-15 – Humanity is like rulerless/leaderless people who...

V16 – Worship idols

- They have deified their military
- They treat humans like animals
- They destroy nations for their own profit

Babylon is far worse than Israel

V 17 – Can you just sit idly by and watch this?

b) His Response. 2:1

Once again, Habakkuk presents a good model for us to follow

He pictures himself standing on Jerusalem's walls and instead of looking for the Babylonians to destroy Israel, he is looking for God to answer him.

God has refocused Habakkuk from Judah to himself. We all need this re-orientation. It's much like repentance where we are making daily life corrections. We also need to make mental and emotional corrections, taking our eyes off of what ails us and on God.

The health of the eye demands a horizon

- Henry David Thoreau

The object of our affection determines the excellency of our soul

- Henry Scougal

We might summarize this as: Pray (ch 1) and Wait (ch 2)

Third: God's Second Response. Write! 2:2-20

2:2 - God instructs Habakkuk to get out his chisel and stone and write a vision about the future

2:4 – This will require the righteous to live by faith

2:6-19 – God will destroy Babylon.

Both Babylonian and Persian historians state that Babylon was taken without a battle.

Daniel 5:30 - *That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. ³¹ And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.*

When God uses an evil nation, it does not mean that he endorses their ethics. Instead, he holds every person and all nations accountable to his justice. This is why Babylon will fall.

1&2 - Unjust economies

3. - Slave labor

4. - The abuse of alcohol of poor leaders

5. - Idolatry

None of this is unique to Babylon. God's message to Habakkuk is for any people who live anywhere and in any time in any world ruled by a Babylon

Fourth: Habakkuk's Prayer: Work! 3

Habakkuk asks God to 'act now,' to 'revive his work' (2) as he has in the past.

a) God is awe-fully powerful.

This is a picture of God from Exodus 19-20, echoed by Micah 1 and Nahum 1.

When God shows up, everyone will know and pay attention

V 3 – Teman and Paran are the geographical borders of Israel's exodus.

"Selah" means, stop and think about what God in the wilderness. The exodus of the past is the image God uses to describe the future exodus

V 4-15 - In this picture, God uses Pharaoh as the symbol of evil people and nations. Just as God split the Red Sea and saved Israel, he will one day separate the lambs from the goats, the wheat from the tares, etc.,

V 13 – And yet...in the midst of this judgement, God will save his people. This is an interesting point. The whole OT is about salvation through judgement. God's judgement for the world is salvation for his people. This means, our fear of God and the world's fear of God are different. The world fears God because he will judge them. We fear God because he has saved us.

- 13a – Our salvation is
- 13b – The world's judgement

- It is sanctifying to us
- It is destructive to the world

- It is hopeful to us
- It is hopeless to the world

God is going to bring this world to an end. He will defeat all the Pharaohs and Babylons of this world. And if you read the book of Revelation, it will be awe-ful. But it will be our salvation.

Fifth: Habakkuk's Praise: Worship! 3:17-19

This book really is about how Habakkuk gets from worry to worship.

- What is your 'fig tree'?
- What is your 'olive'?
- What is your 'field'?"
- What is your 'flock'?"
- What is your 'herd'?

Is it Covid? Is it national unrest? Is it the election? Is it a mask? Is it your health? Is it not getting your way in all of this?

This is how the righteous live by faith. By choosing to focus on and believe God in the face of evil and wrong.

Conclusion:

Friends,

- a) Our faith is strengthened, not weakened by difficulty
- b) Our faith sees God and not the world

c) Our faith believes forever wins over the temporal

Of course, Jesus is the perfect model of this kind of faith in a single sentence in Gethsemane -

Matthew 26:42 - *My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*

Community Groups:

1 – How are you doing?

2 – What are your trials?

3 – What are your joys?

4 – What ministry opportunities has God given you this week?

5 – Can you summarize Habakkuk's message?

6 – What present circumstances make you say, "How long...?"

7 – What is God's first answer to Habakkuk?

8 – What is Habakkuk's second concern?

9 – Does God's use of Babylon justify their ethics?

10 – How does God demonstrate that he does not condone their ethics?

11 – What point in history does God ask Habakkuk to remember?

12 – How does God judge and save at the same time?

13 – How is the world's judgement, our salvation?

14 – What is your fig tree, olive, field, flock or herd?

15 – How can you exercise faith in the midst of this Covid world?