

How Then Shall We Live in Evil Days?

A Sermon on Habakkuk 1:12-2:20

by

Grayson Gilbert

1. Introduction

2. The faithful person lives by faith in the truth of who God is (1:12-2:1)

a. *Is this not contrary to Your Nature (v. 12-17)?*

- i. The prophet identifies several things that he knows proves his case beyond a shadow of a doubt.

- 1. He knows that God is eternal and faithful to His promises.

- a. Habakkuk is going all the way back to the promise God made with Abraham in the book of Genesis.

- i. The Lord swore to Abraham, “I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you” (Gen. 17:7).

- ii. The prophet knows that God’s own eternal nature is the guarantee of His covenant.

- b. Yet notice the next section of the text here: “You, Lord, have appointed them (meaning the Babylonians) to deliver judgment, and you, o Rock, have destined them to punish.”

- i. On the surface it seems like the prophet has resolved himself to the judgment that is to come, but he’s saying God’s actions are utterly inconsistent with His promises.

- ii. In the first half of v. 12 you have the prophet reminding God of His promise to Abraham because he knows impending doom is a direct assault on those promises.
- 2. Habakkuk knows that God's eyes are too pure to look upon evil and maintain an indifferent attitude towards it (v. 13).
 - a. Yet the prophet sees nothing but God's cold indifference towards the evil of the Babylonians.
 - i. This is the same issue the prophet raises in the first section of chapter one.
 - ii. Notice now though it is not a mere indifference that Habakkuk charges God with: he says in v. 13 that God looks *favorably* upon the wickedness of Babylon.
 - b. Habakkuk doesn't understand how God can say one thing and deliver another.
 - i. He doesn't understand how God can maintain His eternal covenant and let Babylon wipe everything out.
 - ii. He doesn't take stock in the fact that God just said He will hold Babylon accountable for their wickedness.
- ii. Habakkuk makes another complaint that God using the Babylonians for judgment on Judah is contrary to His justice (vv. 14-17).
 - 1. This is the same problem Habakkuk had with Israel in the first couple of verses, but now he has it with the Babylonians.
 - a. The Babylonians are characterized by the same lawlessness, corruption, violence, and injustice as Israel.
 - b. They simply do what they desire and seemingly run rampant without any checks in place even from God Himself.

2. Notice how in v. 14 the prophet asks why God has made people like the fish of the sea who have no ruler.
 - a. This is perhaps the most severe accusation Habakkuk makes against God.
 - b. The prophet recognizes God's authority and sovereignty behind all things and basically says, in essence, "God, if you're in control of everything and things are the way they are, it's because of you. It's your fault."
- b.** *I will wait upon the Lord for an answer (2:1).*
- i. "I will stand at my guard post and station myself on the watchtower; and I will keep watch to see what He (meaning God) will say to me, and how I may reply when I am reprimanded."
 1. The prophet really doesn't like the answers God has given him thus far:
 - a. His timing is not our timing
 - b. His answers are not our answers
 - c. His ways are not our ways
 - d. His judgments are final.
 2. The prophet responds to this by claiming this is contrary to God's nature and promises
 - a. He now stands in further opposition to the Lord by saying he will simply rebuke the Lord once again after His reply.
 - b. Suffice it to say, his response is not a good example for you to follow, but it does serve to show us by way of a negative example what quality a faithful Christian is to embrace.
 - ii. The first quality of the faithful person is to accept by faith who God has revealed Himself to be.

1. If you want to be found faithful, you're going to have to live by faith in the truth of who God is.
 - a. This is where you simply take a step back from whatever the issue actually is and go back to solid ground.
 - b. You stop reeling in your emotions, the what-ifs, and everything else, and simply ask: who has God said He is?
2. As you answer this question, it can become to you an ever-growing, ever-deepening source of comfort and strength.
 - a. The one constant you can bank all of your hope on is God.
 - b. The faithful one can endure through anything and everything because he knows that God truly is who He says He is.

3. The faithful person orders his life in faithfulness to God (2:2-4).

a. The Lord responds to the prophet's complaints.

- i. He gives Habakkuk a command: write down the vision and inscribe it clearly on tablets, so that one who reads it may run.
 1. The idea is not that they would run in fear, but that they would bring this message clearly and swiftly to everyone else.
 2. It was to be this perpetual motion prophecy delivered to the whole of Judah.
 - a. Imagine it, if you will, like passing on the baton from one runner to the next.
 - b. V. 3—for the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hurries toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it delays, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay long.
 - i. The day of Judah's judgment was at hand and the instrument of their judgment was standing by, ready to attack at God's command.

ii. The Babylonians, that fierce and impetuous people, will come. Go and tell and do it quickly!

ii. The Lord indeed answers the prophet, and to put it bluntly, this is now the second time the prophet receives an answer that he will not like.

1. Notice that God doesn't relent. He doesn't back off, in fact, He leans in all the harder.
2. The prophet didn't change God's mind, which ultimately means that the prophet was wrong in his charges against God.

a. Yet when we get to chapter 3 of Habakkuk, the prophet's attitude shifts entirely and he accepts the Lord's answer.

b. Something happens here that changes the prophet's mind in v. 4.

b. *"Behold, as for the impudent one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous one will live by his faith."*

i. The first thing I want to draw your attention to is the clear contrast between the unrighteous and the righteous.

1. The one whose life is defined by arrogance, pride, and rebellion will die.

a. Whether Judah or Babylon, those in rebellion to God will die and justice will be served.

b. The man or woman who is proud at heart is the one who places faith and trust in something other than God Himself.

i. They trust in sinful men and a fallen world, which by design is supposed to fail them.

ii. They never learn the lesson that their hopes are dashed every time they place them wrongly in the creation rather than the Creator.

- c. Verse five picks up this same idea of the one who is proud at heart and expounds upon the idea even more.
 - i. Babylon is the personification of the impudent one, or the proud one, that God identifies here.
 - ii. The Babylonians are never satisfied with how drunk they can get, how much land they can seize, nor how many people they can steal and make slaves.

2. The proud one is contrasted with the faithful one whose life is defined by faithfulness.
 - a. The one who lives in faithfulness to God has a sure promise of life.
 - b. The one who lives in faithfulness to God has a sure promise that they will be spared of God’s judgment to come.

- ii. The idea of the righteous one living by his faith is better understood as living in *faithfulness* to God.
 1. This has been much debated simply because Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament, yet they are each used in slightly different ways.
 - a. In Romans 1:17 the apostle Paul quotes this verse and uses it to emphasize the righteousness produced in Christians as a result of genuine faith in Christ.
 - b. In Galatians 3:11 Paul uses it to stress that those who live by faith are those who trust only in the grace of Christ for their salvation.
 - c. In Hebrews 10:38, the writer urges them to continue to walk by faith in the midst of fiery persecution. It speaks of perseverance in obedience.

2. In Habakkuk, it is not speaking towards the idea of maintaining belief, but rather, of a believing obedience.
 - a. God is not simply calling Judah to take God at His word and believe it by faith, but to a faith that acts.
 - b. Most importantly, God is calling them to obey in spite of their circumstances.

4. The faithful one trusts in God's judgments (2:6-19).

a. The five oracles of woe against the great whore, Babylon.

- i. Before we get into the specifics of these five woes on Babylon, I want to take a little time to draw out what the word "woe" actually means.

1. The word is used in different ways at different times, yet when it is used in the context of judgment, it is always describing unparalleled destruction that is to come.
 - a. It is a pronouncement of divine judgment against great evil and sin.
 - b. The pronouncement of woe is never a light judgment either. It means a total undoing of everything that is.
2. If you were to try and translate it literally, it would be close to our word "ah!"
 - a. It's an exclamation—it's a shock, but never in a good way.
 - b. Every fiber of your being is consumed with dread.
 - i. And for the Babylonians, it is this, but five times over. It is woe after woe after woe after woe after woe.
 - ii. Destruction upon destruction, calamity upon calamity, dread upon dread, terror upon terror.

ii. Notice that the pronouncement of these woes upon Babylon are a reflection of every single one of the wicked things they delighted themselves in.

1. Woe one: a woe of theft, bloodshed, and violence is pronounced on them because they enriched themselves through theft, bloodshed, and violence (vv. 6-8).
2. Woe two: a woe of destruction has come upon them because they destroyed other nations and prided themselves in their own security and strength (vv. 9-11).
3. Woe three: They cobbled together their empire through the blood, sweat, and tears of the oppressed (vv. 12-14).
4. Woe four: They brought shame, nakedness, and dishonor upon the people they oppressed, yet the cup of God's wrath will come upon them and expose them as an utter disgrace before the nations (vv. 15-17).
5. Woe five: They made dumb idols of wood and precious metals. They worshipped that which cannot speak, which cannot teach, and which cannot live (vv. 18-20).

b. *In the midst of this incredible series of woes upon Babylon, you have a clarion call to salvation (v.14).*

i. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

1. This brings to light two aspects of what it means to trust in God's judgments.
 - a. On the one hand, you trust in God's promise of judgment that results in punishing the wicked.
 - b. On the other hand, you trust in God's promise of judgment that results in rewarding the righteous.
 - c. These acts of judgment are one in the same, meaning that it is one act of judgment that simply has two vastly different results.

ii. Both forms of judgment will rebound to the praise and glory of God throughout the whole earth.

1. God tells the prophet that though Babylon seeks to make their glory known, it is only a knowledge of God's glory that will fill all the earth.
 - a. This is a clear reference to the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ.
 - b. The Lord declares that all of His judgments will culminate in the grand purpose of revealing the Messiah to the nations and they will know the Lord.
2. This is a direct answer to the prophet's complaints found at the end of chapter one.
 - a. Remember, the prophet accuses God of letting the whole earth be aimless and without any real purpose, except for them to be slaughtered and abused by people like the Babylonians?
 - b. Well here you find the answer to the prophet: all the earth will be filled with the knowledge of my glory.
 - i. It is not simply that the glory of God will go forth unabated, but that the *knowledge* of God's glory will cover the earth.
 - ii. That, my friends, is a thing of incredible hope and comfort.

5. The faithful one embraces God's sovereignty (2:20).

a. *"But—here's that contrast shown once again—but Yahweh is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him. Let all the earth be silent before Him...even you, Habakkuk."*

- i. The last verse is a fitting conclusion, not only against the nation of Babylon who fools themselves into thinking that they are glorious, but it is even a fitting final word to the complaining prophet.

1. The man who stood waiting in his watchtower for the response of Yahweh, contemplating what his word of rebuke against the living God would be, is given a scathing rebuke.
 - a. The Hebrew word God uses here actually sounds like the English word, “hush.”
 - b. There is the sense of resignation and submission that the prophet must come to in order to actually find comfort in the sovereignty of His God.
2. He must admit that he is just the prophet and that God is the One who rules in Heaven, and as the Scriptures say, does all that He pleases.
 - a. The true God, the living God, the God who is not crafted by the hands of wicked men, sits enthroned above all things and sees all things and works all things according to council of His Divine will.
 - b. There is not a single thing that has been left unseen, untouched, or even gone forth without His decree.
- ii. The implication here is simply that all Habakkuk’s accusations fall resoundingly flat. Not one of them is true.
 1. God is enthroned in His heavenly temple, which ultimately means that the Lord will deal with Babylon, and He deal with them decisively.
 2. What that means is that even though everything seems out of control to prophet—God is on His throne.
- b. *The only fitting response to this truth is an awed silence before the rightful, just, and good King of all the earth.*
 - i. With a word, He commands all the earth to be silent before Him and the one who can accept this can come to find comfort in the embrace of the Sovereign One.

- ii. Habakkuk gives answers that tend to rub us the wrong way and often create more questions for us than answers.
 - 1. We want all the answers to our problems, yet the problem is not that we don't have answer to these things, but much like the prophet, we just don't like them.
 - 2. When tragedy hits you find out what you really believe about God.
 - a. Your reaction in the midst of suffering and trials reveals what you truly believe about God.
 - b. This is why I argue that is not simply the resignation of your will, but the loving embrace of God's sovereignty which embodies faithfulness.

6. Conclusion

Community Group Questions

1. What are practical ways you can embody the four qualities of a faithful Christian in evil days?
2. What is the difference between resigning yourself to the sovereignty of God and embracing it? How does this affect how you deal with things going on in our country (election, riots, personal pains)?
3. What does it mean to live by faith, in the context of Habakkuk?
3. Where do you find yourself currently struggling to be found faithful and how can you grow in this within the next six months? CG Leaders: follow up.