

Christ in Prophecy
Special 29: Tough Faith of Habakkuk

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: How are you coping with the pandemic crisis? Are you filled with anxiety and fear? Do you have a deep sense of dread? Are you afraid for your life or for your livelihood? I want to encourage you to practice what I call, “tough faith.” Stay tuned for the details.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope, and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. As we face the medical and economic impact of the virus pandemic we are caught up in, there are several biblical attitudes that we as Christians should be manifesting: such as compassion, love and hope. But the attitude I want to discuss with you today is one of the most needed. It is what I call, “tough faith.”

Folks, it is so easy to walk in faith when the circumstances of life are all very positive. It is when the circumstances go sour that our faith is tested. It happens when the doctor looks you in the eye and says, “I’m sorry, but it’s cancer.” Or when the police call to tell you that your son or daughter has been arrested and is high on drugs. Or maybe it’s a note from a spouse that says, “I no longer love you. I’ve decided to leave.” Perhaps it will be the loss of a job, or the death of a family member.

In these end times, a new factor is likely to be persecution for your faith, the loss of a job or a promotion simply because you are a Christian. Or perhaps ridicule and harassment at school or on the job because of your Christian convictions. Is your faith ready for the test? Do you have the kind of resilient faith that is necessary to survive this pandemic without resorting to wallowing in self-pity and despair?

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: There are so many examples of tough faith in the Bible. And one of the best is found in the Minor Prophets. Yes, I said, the Minor Prophets! Sadly, I have discovered over the years that most Christians are unfamiliar with the Minor Prophets. In fact, I think it would be safe to say that most have never even read them.

That certainly was my situation as I was growing up in the Church. I attended church faithfully for 30 years and never once ever heard a sermon based on one of the Minor Prophets. I always thought that the Minor Prophets were called that because their messages were unimportant. I did not realize that the name only indicated that their books were shorter in length than those of the Major Prophets.

I did not discover the Minor Prophets until I was 30 years old, at the time when I began to study Bible prophecy in general. I was greatly surprised at what I discovered. It quickly became evident to me that the messages of the Minor Prophets were very important and were as relevant today as if they had been written yesterday. And the reason, of course, is that even those these brief books were written over 2,500 years ago, Mankind has not change any at all. We were sinners then; we are still sinners today. We are still people who desperately need to hear from God.

Let me give you a quick example of how relevant the Minor Prophets are. In the book of Habakkuk, chapter one, verse 5, we find these words of God directed at the prophet, God said, "Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days you would not believe if you were told."

Isn't that exactly what we are seeing in the world all around us today? Let me give you a vivid example: Consider, for example what happened in the four years between 1989 and 1993: The Liberation of Eastern Europe. The Destruction of the Berlin Wall. The Reunification of Germany. The Gulf War. The Collapse of the Soviet Union. The Resurgence of Islam. The Creation of the European Union. And this incredible handshake at the White House in 1993.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: Now, one of the reasons I picked a passage from Habakkuk to illustrate the relevance of the Minor Prophets is because I consider the prophet, Habakkuk, to be a perfect example of the kind of tough faith that we so desperately need today as we face the medical and economic ramifications of the coronavirus pandemic.

Habakkuk was a prophet whom God raised up to speak to Judah during its final years preceding that nation's destruction in 586 BC. He was a contemporary with the prophet Jeremiah. Like the rest of God's prophets, his call for repentance and his threat of impending doom were messages the Jewish people simply did not want to hear. They mocked him, they scoffed at him, and they claimed that he was full of wind.

Finally, in a moment of self-pity, Habakkuk cried out to God, asking the Lord to vindicate him. Tell you what, I'll paraphrase his message in my own words. Here's what he said: "Lord, You have given me sensitive eyes, eyes to see violence, immorality and lawlessness, and I have preached my heart out against these things. Again, and again, Lord, I have warned the people that if they do not repent, You are going to pour out Your wrath upon them. But, Lord, no one is paying any attention to me. They keep scoffing at me, saying 'Where is the wrath that you keep talking about?' They say I am just a radical old windbag. Well, Lord, when are You going to back up my message with some action? When are You going to validate me as a prophet by sending some judgment?"

Well, the Lord's answer was not what Habakkuk wanted to hear. How many times has that happened to you? The Lord told him that He was going to do something so astonishing that no one would believe if they were told in advance. "You see, Habakkuk," the Lord said, "I am raising up the most savage warriors on planet earth, the Chaldeans. And they are going to sweep through your nation like a fire and destroy your nation and your temple. And I'm going to use the Chaldeans as a sword of my judgment."

Well, to say the least, Habakkuk was astounded by the Lord's answer. He had wanted some judgment for his people in order to get their attention and to validate his message. But he certainly did not want to see them destroyed. And at the hands of the Chaldeans? How could this be? They were the most evil and violent people in the world.

So, Habakkuk cried out to the Lord again with a sense of desperation. He said, "Surely, O Lord, You do not intend our destruction! Surely, You want to just provide us with some correction. After all, aren't You the Holy One? If so, then I ask You, how can you as a Holy God work through those who are unholy? Let me put it to You another way, Lord. And folks, this is where he came to his fundamental question. To paraphrase it he said, "Lord, how can You punish those who are evil with those who are more evil?"

Well, folks, it was a profound question. But it was met with stony silence, which is always the case when Man questions God. For, as God told Job, "Who are you to question your Creator?" God's silence made Habakkuk angry. And so, he got his stubborn up. He climbed up on top of a tower and announced he was going to sit there and pout until the Lord answered his question!

Finally, in the Lord's timing, the answer came. The Lord said, "Habakkuk, the answer I'm going to give you is so important that I want you to write it in big letters on a tablet so that a person running by can read it at a glance." The Lord then gave him the answer. Now, keep in mind the question: "How can You punish those who are evil with those who are more evil?" And the Lord's answer was very profound: "The righteous shall live by faith." Folks, it was a tough answer to a tough question. It was an answer that was difficult for Habakkuk to swallow. The righteous shall live by faith? What in the world did that mean?

Well, as Habakkuk contemplated God's response, the Lord in His mercy began to assist the prophet in understanding and accepting His answer. He proceeded to point out to Habakkuk that He was fully aware of the greed, the treachery, the cruelty, the immorality and the idolatry of the Chaldeans. There was nothing Habakkuk could tell God about the Chaldeans that He didn't already know.

The Lord then promised a series of woes upon the Chaldeans, indicating that a day of reckoning for their sins would come in due time. The Lord concluded this speech with these words, "The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him." Those are words that Christians sing all the time without knowing their context. Out of context, they sound so beautiful, but in context, they are very pointed.

For you see, what God was really saying to Habakkuk was this, "I am on My throne. I am in control. I am sovereign. You have no right to question Me as to My motives and My actions. Your responsibility is not to question Me but to trust Me. So, shut your mouth up and start trusting!"

Part 4

Dr. Reagan: Well, needless to say the Lord's command to Habakkuk was a tough one that called for tough faith. And to show you how tough it was, I want to do a little role playing here for a moment. I am going to put myself in the position of Habakkuk for a moment. And I want to assume that I am a modern day prophet crying out to God concerning the United States of America.

O God, You have given me a sensitive heart to see iniquity and injustice. And everywhere I look today in America I see both of these evils multiplying. Why do You allow the sins of our nation to go unpunished? We are rotten to the core, Lord. We claim to be a Christian nation, while delighting in the sins of alcoholism, drug addiction, abortion, lawlessness, sexual immorality and every other abomination known to Man. Even worse, we are intent on exporting our sinfulness to other nations through our immoral and violent movies and television programs.

How long, O Lord, are You going to close Your eyes to the violence of the Mafia in New York and New Jersey? How long are You going to tolerate the swinging lifestyle of California and the crass materialism of Texas? When are You going to do something about the gambling in Nevada, the tobacco and whiskey in Kentucky, and the New Age voodooism in the state of Washington?

When, O Lord, are You going to pour out Your judgment on our nation for our insufferable pride and our promotion of the Sexual Perversion Movement? And when, O Lord, when, are You going to avenge the blood of the more than 60 million babies who have slaughtered in the wombs of their mothers since 1973? Are you there, Lord? Are you paying any attention? Do You know what is going on? Do You care?

Lord, I have warned the people of America over, and over, that if they do not repent and return to You and to Your Word, You are going to pour out Your wrath upon this nation. When are you going to validate my message with some action?

And the Lord answers: "Calm down. Relax. Cool it. I've got it all under control. You see, the Russians are coming. I have roused them up to invade Israel, and as they do so, they are going to launch an all-out nuclear attack against your country that will leave you devastated.

Stunned, you respond, "But Lord, how could You do such a thing? Those Russians are worse than we are! Their leaders are nothing but a bunch of barbaric God-haters. We're bad, but we aren't nearly as evil as they are. How can you punish an evil nation with one that is more evil?" And the Lord simply says, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Part 5

Dr. Reagan: Well, do you see how tough the Lord's answer is? How would you respond? Would you shuck your faith? Wallow in despair? Retreat into self-pity? Let's look at how Habakkuk responded.

The very first thing Habakkuk did is what any person of faith does in a crisis. He went to his knees in prayer, and in that prayer, he cried out, "O Lord, in Your wrath remember mercy!" It was a very human prayer, and thus a very pitiful one. Can you imagine the prophet's audacity in reminding God to show mercy? After all, he was speaking to the One who is the source of all grace and mercy, the God of lovingkindness.

God never has to be reminded to show mercy. That is His heart and His character. Even when He pours out His wrath, His fundamental purpose is to bring people to repentance so that they might be saved. For example, in Isaiah 26:9 we find these words: "...when the earth experiences Your judgments, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness."

Even as Habakkuk was begging for mercy for his nation, God showed him personal mercy. As Habakkuk wrestled for the words to speak, the Lord suddenly interrupted his prayer with a glorious vision that was designed to give him hope. It was a vision of the Second Coming of the Messiah when He will come to earth to reign over all the nations.

The vision is vivid, it is almost terrifying. Habakkuk sees the Messiah coming in glory with “rays flashing from His hands” representing His great power. He comes in wrath, with pestilence going before Him and plague following behind Him. He marches across the earth in indignation, trampling the nations in anger.

And in this vision, the Lord is saying to Habakkuk, “A day of reckoning is coming when I will deal with all the nations of the world in holy judgment. Each one will receive what it deserves. You may never see justice and righteousness, Habakkuk, in your lifetime, but be assured they are coming, for the day is near when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

By giving him a vision of the climax of history, God is calling Habakkuk to live with an eternal perspective. He is calling him to believe, as the Apostle Paul put it, “all things work together for good for those who love the Lord.”

With his eternal perspective restored, Habakkuk meditates for a moment on the vision, trembling over the realization that God is serious about pouring out His wrath on Judah. Then, suddenly, Habakkuk breaks forth with a song that surely must go down in history as one of the greatest expressions of tough faith that a poet has ever penned. He concludes his book in chapter 3 with these words: “Though the fig tree should not blossom, And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail, And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”

Pause for a moment and consider what the prophet is saying here. He proclaims that even if all the crops and animals of Judah are destroyed, leaving the agricultural nation devastated, he will still praise God’s Holy Name!

Why? Because he has decided to submit himself and his nation to God’s will, believing that God will do what is best for them although it means their immediate destruction. In short, he has decided to stop whining and start trusting. It has taken a lot of encouragement from the Lord and a major leap of faith on the part of the prophet. Habakkuk is now practicing tough faith.

And look what happened. The Chaldeans came. The city of Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed. The land was devastated, and the surviving Jews were taken into captivity. But 2,700 years later, where are the Chaldeans? In the dust bin of history. Where are the Jews? Regathered to their land, awaiting the appearance of their Messiah.

Only God has the long term perspective. Only He knows how He will orchestrate history to the triumph of all His purposes. As we await the working out of His will, He calls us to walk in tough faith, with our eyes on Him rather than our fickle circumstances.

Part 6

Dr. Reagan: The life of Habakkuk reveals to us the meaning of true faith. It is the kind of faith that continues to believe and trust even when everything seems to be going wrong. It is a faith that is not dependent upon external circumstances. Nor is it dependent upon feelings.

What is the key to developing this kind of faith that is so desperately needed in these difficult times we face today? Well, the Apostle Paul gives us the answer. It is contained in a letter he wrote to the church at Philippi when he was imprisoned in a dark, dank dungeon. Despite his harsh circumstances, he declared triumphantly: "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

And what was the secret Paul had discovered? He reveals it in the very next sentence: "I can do all things through Him, Jesus, who strengthens me." The secret is to trust God, remain focused on Jesus, and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says if we will do that, then "God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." What more could we ask for?

Now I want you to notice something, notice that the promise is to meet our needs, not to provide every materialistic delight that may enter our imagination. In that regard, we in America are soon going to learn the difference in needs and luxuries. As God judges our economy, we will learn that we can live without a lot of the electronic toys that we consider to be so essential today.

Christians will suffer along with the rest of society. But for those who know how to walk in tough faith, there will be a difference. They will suffer in confident hope. God never promises that His people will be immune to His judgments. He only promises that they will never taste the wrath that He will pour out during the great Tribulation.

But with regard to His judgments, God does make a significant promise. He says in His Word that He will walk through those judgments with His children, constantly encouraging them, giving them hope, providing their basic needs. I want you to inscribe these words from Isaiah upon your heart, and do not forget them. Isaiah wrote, "But now, thus says the Lord, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! And when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. And when you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.'"

Affirming the Lord's protection, King David wrote: "I have been young, and now I am old; and yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread." And King Solomon put it this way: "The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger."

Many years ago, a lady named Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote a poem after her husband observed from the deck of their cruise ship that one sailing ship could travel west and another travel east in the same wind. She wrote this poem: One ship drives east and another west, With the selfsame winds that blow. 'Tis the set of the sails and not the gales, Which tells us the way to go. Like the winds of the sea are the ways of fate, As we voyage along through life: 'Tis the set of a soul, That decides its goal, And not the calm or the strife.

Most people seem to have decided that the only way they can go in life is the way the wind is blowing. In our nation today, that wind is blowing toward immorality and violence, toward a disrespect toward the sanctity of life. It is propelling people to call evil good, and good evil.

Unfortunately, there are many Christians, even Christian leaders, who have decided to set their sails to go with the wind and not against it.

Observing this phenomenon, Don Wildmon, the founder of the American Family Association wrote: "Jesus went against the wind, and it meant that He ended up on a cross. I think that is what we are afraid of today, we are afraid of a cross. No one likes to be crucified. So, we set our sails the easy way. Many people have decided that they want Christ but not the cross. It is a contradiction. It can never be. The cross is at the very heart of Christianity. Remove it and there is no Christianity at all."

Tough faith calls us to set our sails against the wind. We do that by setting our souls on Jesus. And thus, we have this instruction in Hebrews 12: "Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

My friends, the message is clear: Keep your eyes on Jesus, and not yourself.

Part 7

Dr. Reagan: Before I conclude this study about tough faith, let's take a quick look at one more example of tough faith from the Hebrew Scriptures. After the Babylonians had completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple, the prophet Jeremiah did not rejoice that his warnings had finally come true. No, not at all. What he did instead was to walk through the destruction and pronounce a funeral lament that constitutes the book of Lamentations. That's why it is considered to be one of the saddest books of the Bible.

As the prophet surveyed the horrible destruction that he himself had so accurately prophesied, he personifies the city as a woman crying out to God. He wrote: "Zion stretches out her hands; there is no one to comfort her."

He observes that the Lord "has poured out His wrath like fire." The scene overwhelms Jeremiah. His heart is broken for his people and his nation. And he totters on the brink of despair as he cries out, "My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So, I say, 'My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the Lord.'"

But, at that precise moment, by a monumental act of will, Jeremiah decided he would not give in to his emotions. Rather than curse God, he decides to praise God in a magnificent statement of tough faith. He cried out: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I still have hope, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him."

The clouds of despair dissipated as Jeremiah reminds himself of God's lovingkindness in the past. The sunshine of God's grace broke through to his heart. His hope was restored.

Jeremiah knows his nation has gotten what it deserved. But he also knows he is dealing with a God who never changes. Just as God has been merciful in the past, Jeremiah is confident that the Lord will show mercy in the future. And so, he proclaims: "The Lord is good to those who

wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. The Lord will not reject us forever, for if He causes grief, then He will have compassion according to His abundant lovingkindness.”

Part 8

Dr. Reagan: What principles can we draw from the lives of Habakkuk and Jeremiah concerning the practice of tough faith? Well, one is to keep your eyes on Jesus. Another is to remember the blessings and faithfulness of God in the past. And a third is to live with an eternal perspective. And in that regard, there are two statements by the Apostle Paul I would like to leave you with. The first is found in Romans 8:18: “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is yet to be revealed to us.” Paul phrased the same idea in different words in 1 Corinthians 2:9 when he wrote: “No eye has seen, No ear has heard, Nor had the mind of Man conceived, What God has prepared for those who love Him.” Wow! All I can say in response is Hallelujah!

Well, folks, that’s our program for this week. I hope it has been a blessing to you. And I hope, the Lord willing, that you will be back with us next week. Until then, this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries, saying, “Look up, be watchful, for your Redemption is drawing near!”

End of Program