

Habakkuk | God Is in Control

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Habakkuk 1

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In our crazy world today with all of the wars and suffering and disease and loss, I often ask this question, "How long, O Lord? How long will you put up with us? How long will you allow people to suffer? How long until you come back and make things right again? How long must we endure this fallen world in which we find ourselves?"

As with many generations past, many people feel that we are nearing the end of time because it's hard to imagine things getting much worse than they are today. And so we cry out for repentance. We long for revival. We long for a change. We long for God to do something. And like most presidential elections we respond with, really, is this the best you can come up with?

God, is this the best that you can do in our world? Why is God holding back his punishment on evil? Why are evil people allowed to rule in our world today? When is God going to step in and make things right? What is he waiting for? Is there something that we are supposed to be doing? You may or may not be surprised that we are not the first generation, the first group of people to ask these types of questions.

For the next few weeks, we are going to spend time in the minor prophet book in the Old Testament of Habakkuk. He is a minor prophet. We don't know a lot about him. Some people pronounce it Habakkuk, Habakkuk, whatever you say is fine. I don't know the right way, okay? I'm just going to say Habakkuk. He's a minor prophet. He lived around the year 605 BC, so about 2,600 years ago. We know that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah.

That name might be more familiar with you. He's a major prophet. We only call him a major prophet because his book is a lot longer in the Old Testament. So he's considered a major prophet. So Jeremiah and Habakkuk would have been around the same time. And we know that Habakkuk was a man with deeply rooted faith. As for the time period and what's going on in the world, you need to know that the northern kingdom of Israel has already been conquered by a people group known as the Assyrians.

They were the world power for the last about 150 years. And as they were conquered, many of the Jewish people have been dispersed to other regions around the world. They were taken from this land and spread around. And the southern kingdom of Judah is only holding on by a string in 605 BC. They've survived many corrupt leaders, but their time might be coming to an end because there's a relatively new nation and group of people that is coming on the scene and is going to take the world by surprise.

This people group is expanding their territory and their rule in the known world at an amazing rate. This people group is known because of the fear that they inflict on anybody who knows them. They're known for the evil that they do to their enemies, and this nation is known as the Babylonians. At this point in the story, it looks like Babylon is going to conquer the known world, and Judah is probably going to be the next nation to fall because it seems that no one can stand against them.

They are ruthless. And so we arrive in the Book of Habakkuk, where he is going to start out by saying, "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen." This is how he begins his book. He is losing hope.

Habakkuk is losing faith. He's losing trust in God. So how will God respond to Habakkuk? Will he offer hope? Will God answer his questions, his difficult questions?

Is God finally going to come back because of this prophet crying out and make things right again? And what about in our time today? How is God going to respond to us when we cry out to Him nearly 2,600 years later with a similar lament? Can we learn something from Habakkuk to help us in our season of need in the crazy world in which we live? I think the answer is yes.

So I ask you to join me for the next three weeks as we work through the prophet of Habakkuk. If you want to open your Bibles, you can with me. And I will give a prize to the first person that gets there. I'm just kidding. I don't have any prizes to give you. But it's near the end of the Old Testament. It's only three chapters long, so it's really small. If you can't find it, of course, the Scripture will be on the screen behind me. If you use the YouVersion app, all of the scriptures are already in there as well. And of course, if you're using your phone, you have a nice little search feature so you can find it real quickly.

Habakkuk, all right? Let me pray, and then we will jump in. Heavenly Father, we come before you today, living in a world that seems to be crumbling around us as we hear of wars and disease and evil just taking place. And many of us cry out with the same language that Habakkuk did 2,600 years ago.

How long, O Lord, how long until you come back and make things right? And so, Father, my prayer is that our trust and our faith would be deepened, that You would show us You are good. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. As you're going to see in this minor prophet, he is going to start out with a section that has been labeled Habakkuk's complaint. And I believe that we all should be able to relate very well with this because as a people, we've gotten really good at complaining.

So we should relate with Habakkuk, chapter 1 verses 1 through 4, the prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received. How long, 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 wrongdoing? For destruction and violence are before me.

There is strife and conflict abounds. It's everywhere. Therefore, the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted." This sounds eerily familiar, doesn't it? Can you believe that this was written 2,600 years ago? Many people over the course of history have uttered words similar to these. They're not new with us.

They're not new in our time or in our generation. And some people have even used this argument as a reason to justify that God does not exist. This is how that plays itself out. Many of you have heard this. If there is a God, why does He allow evil to reign? If there is a God who is good, why does He allow evil to reign? Now, there is an interesting underlying presupposition to this statement.

The person who makes that statement, why does a good God allow evil to happen presumes to know the difference between good and evil. The person that makes that statement is presuming, "I know what's good. I know what's evil. Why does God allow evil?" That person, he or she, also presumes to know what would fix the problem. In essence, when you ask that question, "God, why are you allowing this evil to take place?" You are saying, "God, why are you letting this happen?"

If I were God in your place, I would run things quite different." If I were God, things would be more fair. I remember when I first came to this realization in my own life, and I had had many times where I would look at God and say, "Why are you allowing this to happen?" And I had to immediately repent. I came to the conclusion that the world should be happy that I am not God because things would be a lot more difficult than they are.

They'd be a lot more messed up. Someone once asked Billy Graham, "If Christianity is valid, why is there so much evil in the world?" To this, the famous preacher replied, "With so much soap, why are there so many

dirty people in the world? Christianity like soap must be personally applied if it is to make a difference in our lives." That is good. Don't you wish you could respond like that? You should memorize this one, all right?

Because it's a good answer to the question, "Why is there evil in the world if there is a good God?" So how is God going to respond to this complaint? How is God going to respond to Habakkuk? Well, in verses 5 through 6, God says, "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, that ruthless and impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings, not their own. To which I am sure Habakkuk said, "What? The Babylonians? Are you crazy? Didn't you hear what I just said? They're worse than who is in charge right now. You can't possibly be serious, God. The Babylonians, I know that we are bad as the Israelite people of the southern kingdom, but we're not as bad as them.

Why would you use that group to judge us? And if we are honest, there have been plenty of times in our own lives that we thought God was crazy. What he was going to do, what he was doing, didn't make any sense. There have actually been probably more times that you have even been angry with God because of what he was allowing to happen in your life. It's interesting as we will go on that God isn't blinded to who the Babylonians are.

He knows everything about them. He doesn't think that this is a righteous and good group of people. We're going to hear how God describes the Babylonians. And I want you to tell me, would you choose this nation to judge a different nation because of their rebellion? Look at how God describes the Babylonians, starting in verse 7. He says, "They are a feared and dreaded people. They are a law to themselves. And they promote their own honor.

Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong. Their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour. They all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and they gather prisoners like sand. They mock kings and they scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities.

By building earthen ramps, they capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and they go on, guilty people whose own strength is their God. Why would God ever allow a people group like this to reign over the known world? I can hardly imagine all of the pain and suffering that entered the world and was caused by the Babylonians.

And yet God was telling Habakkuk, "This is the nation that I am going to use to bring judgment upon the Israelites." As Habakkuk will respond and as you and I will respond, we find out that we are very good at pointing out others' faults and failures. We are good at saying, "You know what, God, I am not perfect, but I'm not as bad as fill in the blank." How will Habakkuk respond to God?

He is going to answer in the exact same way that you and I would if God said, "I'm going to use this corrupt and wicked nation to judge you for your disobedience to me." Look at this, verse 12, "Lord," Habakkuk says, "Are you not from everlasting? My God, my holy one? You will never die. For you, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment you, my rock, have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil.

You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? You have made people like the fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler, for the wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks. He catches them in his net. He gathers them in his drag net. And so he rejoices and is glad.

Therefore, these wicked people sacrifice to their nets and they burn incense to his dragnet. For by his net, he lives in luxury and he enjoys the choicest food. Is he to keep on emptying his nets God and destroying

nations without mercy? Habakkuk says, "Why are you silent, God while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" You see, in our human minds, and we are all just as guilty of this as Habakkuk is, we put everything on a scale of fairness.

What is fair? We believe it's not fair when the scales are imbalanced. We spend a lot of time and energy trying to balance the scale, and it's amazing how young this starts in our lives, and no one needs to teach this to us. Anyone who has children understands what I am saying. It doesn't matter if you're cutting a sandwich into two pieces to share or adding up the value of Christmas gifts received, it has to be even, right?

It has to be right down the middle. Kids will argue about who got to watch TV longer or whose turn it is to sit in the good seat in the living room. And I don't even know why it's the good seat. I don't think it's any better than any other seat. I know this frustrates most parents, or at least I hope it does so that I'm more normal, but we do the same thing as adults. It's just a little more sophisticated for us.

It's not fighting about who gets the bigger piece of sandwich or who gets to sit where. Listen to these complaints. Why did she get the job promotion? I am better at my job than she is. Why does he get paid that much? I work harder than he ever could. Why does their life seem so easy? They don't even go to church and they party all weekend long. We all have things that we have said or thought.

If we're a good Christian, we don't let it come out of our mouth, but it's still in our minds. Why do you allow this to happen, God? You see, Habakkuk feels that God is blessing those who are more wicked than the Israelites have ever been. And so Habakkuk's fairness meter is going off. He even tried to justify why this is such a bad idea. He is going to teach God something. Listen, if you are going to let these unrighteous people prosper, then they're going to think what they're doing is right because it's working.

And they're going to begin to celebrate the work of their hands. They're going to praise their dragnets and their own strength, and you won't receive any praise. Here, God, let me help you. You look a little confused. That's what he's saying. I don't think you quite understand, God, what's going on. You know this whole thing boils down to trust. Do you really believe that God has your best interest in mind?

Do you really believe that God knows what He is doing? Can you admit that God's ways are beyond your ways? His thoughts are higher than your thoughts. Can you trust in the Lord your God with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding? You see, these are difficult questions that we are asking today, difficult questions that Habakkuk is answering about the Babylonians and the Israelites, and why would God do this?

It doesn't make any sense. I can only share with you that I've gotten to the point in my life that I don't need to understand everything that is happening. I don't need to have an answer for all of my questions. I don't need to know the whys. I want to know them. I'll be honest. I still would like to know them, but I don't need to know them. I don't need to be able to explain and comprehend everything about God.

I do my best, but I've come to the conclusion that he is unexplainable. I can't explain everything about God. This one's even harder to say, but I have gotten to the point that I don't even need to know the whens to my questions. I am just glad that God is in control. I'm glad that I can trust him. I'm glad that he has a perfect track record.

When I look through the history of Scripture in mankind, I can find that God is good. I'm even glad that I can't fully explain Him because if I could, it would take away some of the mystery. Why should I, as a human being, be able to explain a holy God perfectly? I can't. I will openly admit to you here today as your pastor, as a fellow brother and sister in Christ, that there will be things that happen in our world that I don't have a good answer for.

I can't answer your questions. Things that I still struggle with that boil down to an issue of trust. I can't tell you why children have to suffer in our world. I don't know. I can't tell you why certain people rise to power, people that are evil and are going to do horrendous things. I can't tell you why we have to go through so many personal trials that are difficult and hard.

Some of you will come to me and say, "Pastor, why am I experiencing this? Am I being punished for something I did?" I don't have the answer. What I can tell you is that I believe God is good and that in the end, it will all work out. I can only tell you that I believe what Scripture says that God is good, and in the end, it will all work out. And with that belief comes a peace that surpasses understanding.

Others don't understand. How can you have peace in this moment? How can you have peace with everything that's going on? This is a peace that can't be taken away no matter what happens around us, what wars take place, who is in charge. You simply say, "I don't know, but I know God is good, and I'm going to trust Him." And so Habakkuk will need to trust God. He will need to admit, just like every one of us, I am not God.

I may never understand his purpose, his timing, or why he does what he does because there is a level of faith that is necessary. So what about you? Where are you at? Have you put your trust in God? Are you willing to submit to Him even when things don't make sense to say, "God, I don't understand, but I'm going to trust you?"

Or are you like many people in our world today that think you could do a better job?" I know it sounds funny, but there's probably a moment that every single one of us felt like we could do a better job than God. We complain about things that are happening. We think we have it all figured out. And maybe today we would be reminded God's ways are so far beyond mine. I simply need to trust and submit to Him.

Maybe God's asking you to have faith. I often get in conversations with people about faith and about God and whether He exists or doesn't exist. And I've always been a person that loves pointing to archeology and to history books and say, "There is so much proof that our God exists." You guys know I jokingly say at Easter, if there is a guy who predicted his own death and resurrection and then pulls it off, I'm going with him, right?

I'm going to believe what he says. I think there's a lot of proof. I don't think that our faith is a blind faith, yet at the same time, no matter what discussion I get in with people who are struggling with faith, I have to tell them. I have to concede. There is a level of faith and trust that is necessary to believe what I believe. It's not blind, but Scripture says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God because you must believe he exists." And so there's a level of faith.

You and I weren't there at the crucifixion and the resurrection. There's a level of faith to believe that those things happened. Yes, there's historical documents. Yes, there's archaeology. Yes, there's all of these things, but there's a level of faith that is necessary. You go back all the way into the book of Genesis at the very beginning when Adam and Eve were in the garden. How were they first tempted by the serpent?

Did God really say, "Isn't this an issue of trust? Do you trust Him? Will you submit to Him?" Maybe now is your time to say, "You know what? I don't have it all figured out, but God, I'm going to put my trust in you." As always, the altars are open. If you want to come and pray, you can do that. No one will bother you. If you want prayer, there will be people on both sides of the sanctuary up front.

You can come and receive prayer and go back to your seat before anybody even notices. If you want prayer, it's available. It doesn't have to be even about this topic. It can be about anything. But I just encourage you to do your business with God. We're living in a time where it's very easy to say, "God, why? Why? Why?" And I believe that he's just calling us to have trust and to have faith, that He has our best interest in mind. Let me close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, help us to have faith. Help us to trust in You. We submit ourselves to You. Father, we proclaim You as Lord. There are things going on in the world that we don't always understand, and it gives me a peace to know that none of this takes you by surprise, that you are in control, and that you will work things out.

And so may we learn to put our trust and our faith in you. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.