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Cornerstone Bible Church
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God's Unexpected Providence
Habakkuk 1:5-11

Please take your Bible and join me in Habakkuk 1. I'm thankful you're here this morning and I am thankful to have my two older daughters in class this morning and my parents are here this morning visiting from Texas. I'm very thankful for parents who love and live for the Lord. I didn't come to know the Lord until I moved out of my home in Texas. My mom never stopped praying for me growing up and eventually the Lord saved me in 1995. I hope that encourages you to keep praying for people you love. Mom, don't stop praying now. Keep up the good work. My dad really is the greatest man I know. My dad models Christ-likeness for me like no one else I've ever met. He's a true servant of everyone he meets. My dad is the man I admire the most in life. I'm grateful for a godly legacy.

I remember one time my parents came to visit me in California when I was in college. I was living in a three bedroom apartment with 4 other guys. I had a roommate with a Boa-Constrictor snake and one day the snake happened to go missing. It was somewhere in the apartment but no one knew where it was. It was lost for a while.

My mom and dad were visiting and my mom was helping clean some of my portion of the apartment. She was cleaning some things in my closet and she picked up a piece of clothing in the back of my closet. I was watching football in the other room and by my moms response I could tell the missing snake was no longer missing.

I also remember one of my messier roommates named Jared Kira had an interesting thing he would often tell us. He would often announce the following message to the rest of the apartment, "Men, there are two kinds of people in the world. There are problem makers and there are problem solvers. Then he would ask us, "Which kind will you be today?" The interesting thing is that he usually made this announcement in the middle of his room that required his immediate attention.

Let's spend just a minute remembering the historical setting for the prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk ministered between two important events in the Old Testament. The Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and the Babylonian invasion of the Southern Kingdom which began in 605 BC and ended in 586 BC. Habakkuk grew up under a good king named Josiah who was used to bring spiritual reform to the people but when Josiah died a wicked king named Jehoikim took over and he was a very wicked king and under his leadership things began to spiral out of control.

These problems were way too much for Habakkuk. Habakkuk couldn't solve the spiritual problems in Judah but he knew who could. Habakkuk took his concerns to the Lord and he cried out to God to intervene. Habakkuk kept crying out for a long time and he got no answer. Habakkuk kept crying out and eventually the Lord answered his prayers.

The way God answers Habakkuk's prayers are a reminder to us that God moves in mysterious ways. We can't put God in a box. We can't make God do anything. He does what He wills as He wills. Psalm 115:3, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." Ephesians 1:11 says, "God works all things according to the counsel of His will."

When I served at the church in Kansas we built a new education building. It had a large room for students to meet. The youth pastor at the time put up quotes all around the room. They were large quotes by men from church history like Martin Luther and JC Ryle and Charles Spurgeon. Then there was a large sign that said, "You cannot make God do anything no matter how much faith you have." This particular quote was not connected to any man from church history. We never knew where the quote came from, but we thought it might have been an original thought from the youth pastor. I probably should have asked him.

It is true. We cannot make the Lord do anything no matter how much faith we have. That might sound discouraging but the truth

is that God's plans are infinitely better than any plan you and I might have. We might think we know best, but we don't. Our perspective is very limited. We forget where we park on Sunday mornings. God can be trusted no matter what because God is holy and His ways are perfect. Psalm 145:3, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable."

The title for this lesson is God's Unexpected Providence. This morning we are going to consider God's solution to the sin problem in Judah. As we consider Habakkuk 1:1-11 I want us to read these verses and then consider two ways we can grow in trusting God in trying times.

Hab 1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

Habakkuk's Complaint

2 O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?
Or cry to you "Violence!"
and you will not save?
3 Why do you make me see iniquity,
and why do you idly look at wrong?
Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.
4 So the law is paralyzed,
and justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
so justice goes forth perverted.

The Lord's Answer

5 "Look among the nations, and see;

wonder and be astounded.
For I am doing a work in your days
that you would not believe if told.
6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
that bitter and hasty nation,
who march through the breadth of the earth,
to seize dwellings not their own.
7 They are dreaded and fearsome;
their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.
8 Their horses are swifter than leopards,
more fierce than the evening wolves;
their horsemen press proudly on.
Their horsemen come from afar;
they fly like an eagle swift to devour.
9 They all come for violence,
all their faces forward.
They gather captives like sand.
10 At kings they scoff,
and at rulers they laugh.
They laugh at every fortress,
for they pile up earth and take it.
11 Then they sweep by like the wind and go on,
guilty men, whose own might is their god!"

This morning we want to consider two ways Habakkuk 1:11 can help us grow in trusting God in trying times. Both have to do with prayer. The first principle we learn from verses 1-4 is:

1. Keep Praying until God Answers Your Prayers - Habakkuk 1:1-4

This is what we see Habakkuk doing in Habakkuk 1:1-4. Habakkuk is a godly man who is deeply concerned about the spiritual condition of God's people. The covenant community of God is not keeping their part of the covenant. God and Israel made a covenant all the way back in Exodus 19. The covenant was made and stipulations were given. The people knew who God was and they knew His will. And most of them rejected it. They worshipped the other gods of the other nations and they rejected the worship of the one true God. This led to major problems in Judah that Habakkuk couldn't solve.

We considered these first four verses last week. They are an example of a godly man crying out to God. In Habakkuk 1:1-4 we see the prophets sharing the concerns of his heart with the Lord. In verses 2-4, Habakkuk really lays before the Lord what is bothering him. He backs up the truck and dumps his concerns on the Lord. This is a good thing. He obeyed Psalm 62:8, "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah." Habakkuk goes to the Lord and pours out his heart to the Lord. He didn't bottle it up. He didn't murmur and complain to his Hebrew friends over some hummus. No. Habakkuk committed to work through his problems with the Lord.

Habakkuk 1:2-4, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and

contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.”

When Habakkuk looked around, what did he see in Judah? He saw 4 things - violence, iniquity, oppression and destruction. The society had become corrupt both spiritually and morally. Because sin abounded, injustice was the norm. God’s Law was not governing the people, helping people make wise decisions. One author writes, “Because the society itself had become godless, wicked men could so hem in the attempts and actions of the righteous that whatever justice existed was so twisted that the resultant decision was one of utter perversity.” This was the day in which Habakkuk lived. The society he lived in was corrupt and justice was perverted.”

Under King Jehoiakim the judicial system was corrupt. The wicked hemmed in the righteous so that justice was perverted. “The courts were acting in such a way that their judgments did not check wrong-doing, but rather encouraged it. The ‘wicked’ were those who had broken the law and the ‘righteous’ those who had a legitimate claim to pursue for redress. But no matter how valid their case, their efforts to procure justice proved ineffective because they were blocked at every turn by the scheming of the wicked.”

What really bothered Habakkuk was that he continually took his concerns to the Lord, knowing the Lord is mighty to save, but God seemed indifferent. How can a holy sovereign God sit back while wickedness increases and justice is perverted? From Habakkuk's perspective it looked like God didn't care about what was happening. It was like the Lord was taking a Sunday afternoon nap. Habakkuk was knocking on heaven's door and it appeared as if no one was home.

Habakkuk didn't know what the Lord was doing. Habakkuk didn't know that God was already working behind the scenes to answer Habakkuk's complaint. This is an important truth to keep in mind if you know Christ - God always hears the prayers of His people and God always answers our prayers in His own perfect timing.

John Piper once wrote an article called God is always doing 10,000 things in your life. He wrote, "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them." Then Dr. Piper provides some examples of God working in Scripture when it didn't look like He was working.

- You may find yourself in prison, and God may be advancing the gospel among the guards, and making the free brothers bold. (Philippians 1:12–14)
- You may find yourself with a painful thorn, and God may be making the power of Christ more beautiful in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:7–9)

- You may find yourself with a dead brother that Jesus could have healed, and God may be preparing to show his glory. (John 11:1–44)
- You may find yourself sold into slavery, accused falsely of sexual abuse, and forgotten in a prison cell, and God may be preparing you to rule a nation. (Genesis 37–50)
- You may wonder why a loved one is left in unbelief so long, and find that God is preparing a picture of his patience and a powerful missionary. (Galatians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:12–16)
- You may live in all purity and humility and truth only to end rejected and killed, and God may be making a parable of his Son and an extension of his merciful sufferings in yours. (Isaiah 53:3; Mark 8:31; Colossians 1:24)
- You may walk through famine, be driven from your homeland, lose husband and sons, and be left desolate with one foreign daughter-in-law, and God may be making you an ancestor of a King. (Ruth 1–4)
- You may find the best counselor you've ever known giving foolish advice, and God may be preparing the destruction of your enemy. (2 Samuel 17:14)
- You may be a sexually pure single person and yet accused of immorality, and God may be preparing you as a virgin blessing in ways no one can dream. (Luke 1:35)
- You may not be able to sleep and look in a random book, and God may be preparing to shame your arrogant enemy and rescue a condemned people. (Esther 6:1–13)
- You may be shamed and hurt, and God may be confirming your standing as his child and purifying you for the highest inheritance. (Hebrews 12:5–11)

What's the point? When we have problems in life and we pray through our problems we need to have confidence that the Lord

hears our prayers and He is working. **God is never not working.** He's always working.

Friend, whatever problem you have in your life take it to the Lord in prayer and keep praying. It makes me think about the parable Jesus told about the need to remain fervent in prayer in Luke 18:1-8, “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 “There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ 4 “For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’ ” 6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

If we're going to grow in trusting God it begins with a conscious devotion to take whatever concerns us first and foremost to the Lord and pray fervently.

There is something Habakkuk knew that informed his prayers:

1. Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." No matter how wicked a king is or someone in a position of leadership, that person has limited authority. Delegated authority. God controls the hearts of men. John Kitchen, "God is able to make even the evil intentions of a man's heart promote His glorious purposes." Habakkuk knew that and so he prayed.

Jerry Bridges, "Prayer is the most tangible expression of trust in God. If we would trust God for our persecuted brothers and sisters in other countries, we must be diligent in prayer for their rulers. If we would trust God when decisions of government in our own country go against our best interests, we must pray for His working in the hearts of those officials and legislators who make those decisions. The truth that the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord is meant to be a stimulus to prayer, not a stimulus to a fatalistic attitude."

We are currently living under a president who doesn't fear or follow the Lord. I hope we are praying for him and for his salvation. 1 Timothy 2:1-4, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Pray for our president and people who are making decisions and passing laws that go against the truths of God's Word. Pray for God to raise up leaders who fear and follow the Lord. We cannot always bring the changes we want to see, but God can. Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."

Here's what I think - I think Habakkuk was confident the Lord heard his prayers and it was only a matter of time before the Lord answered his prayers. But here's what I think - Habakkuk had his own ideas about what God should do. **Habakkuk wanted the Lord to send revival.** A spiritual reform leading to a moral reform like he had seen under King Josiah. He knew the Lord could do it and he wanted to see him do it again.

What we see in Habakkuk 1:5-11 is that God answers Habakkuk's prayers with unexpected providence. Habakkuk was persistent in prayer and God finally answers his prayer in Habakkuk 1:5-11. In these 6 verses we find God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint.

Here's the second principle we learn about learning to trust God from Habakkuk 1:5-11:

2. Keep praying When God Answers Your Prayers in ways you did not expect or think is best - Habakkuk 1:5-11

Habakkuk 1:5-11

5 “Look among the nations, and see;
wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days
that you would not believe if told.

6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
that bitter and hasty nation,
who march through the breadth of the earth,
to seize dwellings not their own.

7 They are dreaded and fearsome;
their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.

8 Their horses are swifter than leopards,
more fierce than the evening wolves;
their horsemen press proudly on.

Their horsemen come from afar;
they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

9 They all come for violence,
all their faces forward.
They gather captives like sand.

10 At kings they scoff,
and at rulers they laugh.
They laugh at every fortress,
for they pile up earth and take it.

11 Then they sweep by like the wind and go on,
guilty men, whose own might is their god!”

There's some good news and some bad news about how God answers Habakkuk's prayers. The good news is that God was not sleeping after all. The God of Israel neither slumbereth or sleepeth (Psalm 121:4). God was listening to Habakkuk. The

invisible hand was ready working. God was actually orchestrating the events of the world in such a way that He was raising to power another nation to come in and take care of the sin problem in Judah.

The bad news, at least from Habakkuk's perspective, is that God is not bringing revival. Instead, God is bringing in a rebellious nation. Habakkuk's life on earth will never be the same. He is going to have to live through one of the hardest times in the Old Testament for the people of God as a notoriously wicked nation comes in and destroys Judah and Jerusalem where he lives. This isn't what Habakkuk wanted or expected God to do. God wanted Habakkuk to feel this, to really understand that He was doing something that would have broken Habakkuk's little brain.

That's hard. That's an unexpected providence right there. That's a tough pill to swallow for Habakkuk. God answered his prayers in a way that is actually going to make his life a lot harder. God is not only raising up the Chaldeans as his instrument of discipline on the nation, God provides Habakkuk with a short course in the ways of the Chaldeans (Habakkuk 1:6-11).

God reminds Habakkuk how wicked the nation is. *This wicked nation makes Judah look like a together for the gospel conference.* The Chaldeans, otherwise known as the Babylonians was a nation known for its absolute cruelty and violence. They were the wickedest nation on the block.

But, again, this is an encouraging reminder that God is sovereign over every nation. Kenneth Barker, “God’s actions to rouse up the Chaldeans to punish Judah emphasize other truths beyond those raised by the prophet. God is not confined to the nation Judah. Many people in the ancient Near East assumed that each nation had its gods. People who moved to Judah came under the sway of the God of Judah. God’s raising the Chaldeans showed that he is sovereign over the whole earth. He is not confined to one nation or one people.”

Does God raising up a wicked nation to punish His people mean that God is the author of evil? God is not the author of evil, but He uses it to accomplish His sovereign will. Clearly evil already resided in the hearts of the Chaldeans. They would just be acting out of their own sinful hearts in expanding their territory to include Judah and Jerusalem. But God was in control and God wanted Habakkuk to know that what was about to happen in Judah was on accident. This was all part of His sovereign plan.

Lamentations, which Jeremiah wrote after the destruction God is telling Habakkuk will come to pass, looked back on the destruction and wrote in Lamentations 3:37-38, “Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?” Isaiah 45:7, “The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.” The Prophets continually make it clear that God is sovereign over everything - The good and the bad. By telling

Habakkuk of the Chaldeans' future prominence, the Lord reassures him of His sovereign control of the details of history.

Shortly after World War II, the great Welsh preacher Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached a series of sermons from England on Habakkuk in response to the anguish arising from the war. Looking back on the devastating effects of World War II and thinking through these first verses in Habakkuk here is how Lloyd Jones helped his people put things in perspective. He helped them think through God's relationship to the history of the world:

First, history (regardless of how it seems to us) is under God's control. Lloyd-Jones writes: "Every nation on earth is under the hand of God, for there is no power in this world that is not ultimately controlled by him. Things are not what they appear to be. It seemed to be the astute military prowess of the Chaldeans that had brought them into the ascendancy. But it was not so at all, for God had raised them up. God is the Lord of history. He is seated in the heavens, and the nations to him are 'as grasshoppers, as a drop in a bucket, or as the small dust of the balance.' The Bible asserts that God is over all. He started the historical process, he is controlling it, and he is going to end it. We must never lose sight of this crucial fact."

Second, history follows a divine plan. The events of history are not accidental, though they may appear so to us. They follow God's plan. Lloyd Jones, "There is a purpose in history, and what is now happening in this twentieth century is not accidental.

Remembering that the church is at the center of God's plan, let us never forget the pride and arrogance of the church in the nineteenth century. Behold her sitting back in self-satisfaction, enjoying her so-called cultured sermons and learned ministry, feeling just a little ashamed to mention such things as conversion and the work of the Holy Spirit. Observe the prosperous Victorian comfortably enjoying his worship. Note his faith in science and his readiness to substitute philosophy for revelation. How constantly he denied the very spirit of the New Testament! Yes, the church needed chastisement, and it is not at all difficult to understand this twentieth century when we consider the story of the nineteenth."

Third, history follows a divine timetable. This comes out at several places in Habakkuk's prophecy. In chapter 1 God says, "I am going to do something in your days," that is, not before or after but precisely when he wanted it to happen. In chapter 2 the point is made even stronger: "The revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay" (v. 3). So, history follows a divine timetable.

Fourth, history is bound up with the divine kingdom. Lloyd Jones, "Let us not therefore be stumbled when we see surprising things happening in the world. Rather let us ask, 'What is the relevance of this event to the kingdom of God?' Or, if strange things are happening to you personally, don't complain, but say, 'What is God teaching me through this? What is there in me that needs to be corrected? Where have I gone wrong and why is God allowing

these things?’ There is a meaning in them if only we can see it. We need not become bewildered and doubt the love or the justice of God. If God were unkind enough to answer some of our prayers at once, and in our way, we should be very impoverished Christians. Fortunately, God sometimes delays his answers in order to deal with selfishness or things in our lives that should not be there. He is concerned about us, and intends to fit us for a fuller place in his kingdom. We should therefore judge every event in the light of God’s great, eternal and glorious purpose.”

If you and I are going to learn to trust God we must persist in prayer - taking all of our concerns directly to the Lord and we must understand that nothing in this world happens by accident. God is sovereign over all, the good and the bad. He is always at work behind the scenes accomplishing His good, pleasing and perfect will. Isaiah 46:9-10, “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.” Ephesians 1:11, in the context of salvation and God’s eternal plan to bring salvation to His people, says, “also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”

Here is something I want you to see as we begin to land the plane. Habakkuk doesn't end in Habakkuk 1:11. We still have 2.5 chapters left. Habakkuk doesn't end with God's answer about the

Chaldeans. Habakkuk has more questions and God has more answers. I would encourage you to spend some time reading through the rest of Habakkuk on your own time. You can read ahead. Read and see how God's answer leads to more questions and Habakkuk's questions lead to more answers. Habakkuk ends with worship because he works through His problems with the Lord in the word and in prayer.

Maybe you are here and you're discouraged. What do you need to get encouraged? Keep praying through your problems because God knows and God cares. When God answers your prayers in ways you do not expect keep praying. Keep praying and never lose heart. Our king is on the throne and He is building His church and He is coming back soon.

John 14 were the words Jesus spoke to the disciples in the upper room the night before the cross. Their lives were about to get a lot harder from a human perspective. Their hearts were troubled and they needed help. I close with this reminder:

John 14:1-14

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

- 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
- 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.
- 4 And you know the way to where I am going.”

- 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"
- 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
- 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."
- 8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."
- 9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"
- 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.
- 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.
- 12 "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.
- 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
- 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

These words were given to help cure troubled hearts. If your heart is troubled you know where to go. Go to Christ. Trust Him. Pray it through. Remember who Jesus is and remember what Jesus has done and what Jesus is doing and believe that He will hear and He will answer your prayers in a way that brings Him the most glory.