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Willing To Wait On God
Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

Please take your Bible and join me back in the book of Habakkuk. One of the things I encouraged you to do along with this study of Habakkuk is to read through a book by Jerry Bridges called Trusting God. That book along with the study of Habakkuk can help all of us glorify God by trusting Him better. In the book Jerry writes about something that happened in his life when he was 14. He was living in Tyler, Texas at the time. Jerry's mom died suddenly. He walked into her bedroom to see her breathe her last breathe. Jerry talks about how difficult that time was for him. His older brother was away at college and his dad was too grief stricken to help his son walk through the loss of his mom.

Jerry writes about the hardest thing being the fact that he was alone in his adversity and he didn't know how to trust God. "Worst of all, I did not know how to turn to God in times of trouble. I was alone in my adversity." I wonder if there might be anyone in here this morning who can identify with that problem. You know God exists. You have a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. You have the Spirit of God and the word of God and you belong to a healthy local church that loves people in the truth. You have everything you need to trust God, but you still struggle to do it.

You and I have everything we need to grow in glorifying God by trusting God. We're set up for success. But if we are being honest we know there are areas of our lives we have a hard time letting go of. There are areas we want to hold on to and try and improve on our own, instead of giving

every area of our lives over to the Lord. We rely on our own wisdom or our own power more than we care to admit.

We all still struggle to really do what we read in Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

I want this study of Habakkuk to help all of us grow in glorifying God by trusting Him more fully. Habakkuk should provide all of us with hope because Habakkuk shows us that it is possible to live in a world that is spiraling out of control spiritually and stay sane. It is possible to live in a world where violence and injustice prevails and do more than just survive. It is possible to live through hard times and thrive in the Christian life. Habakkuk was a man like us who learned to trust God through trying circumstances.

How many of you have heard of a man named Charles Blondin? Charles Blondin was a French acrobat and tightrope walker. He toured the United States in the 1800's. He did something no one had ever done before. He tightroped across niagara falls. He did it a number of times and he did it in different ways. He tightroped across Niagara Falls blindfolded, in a sack, trundling a wheelbarrow, on stilts, carrying his manager on his back, sitting down midway while he cooked and ate an omelette, and standing on a chair with only one of its legs balanced on the rope. Charles Blondin was a tightrope trailblazer. What do you think has happened since then? Since he did it others have done it. Charles Blondin paved the way and others followed in his footsteps.

I want Habakkuk to encourage us because he shows us that we can take all of our concerns to the Lord. We can take God our why questions. As

we work through our why questions with humble dependence on the Lord we can grow in confidence in the Lord and in our worship of Him. But let's be honest - when pain enters some people's lives or life doesn't turn out the way they expected it to, not all professing believers work through their problems biblically.

A pastor named James Montgomery Boice pastored for many years and he made the following observation about how people in the church handle problems. "When things go wrong, some people tend to withdraw. They drop out of Christian activities, stop going to church, pull back into their spiritual corner, and pout. Others repudiate their past. They conclude that they must have been wrong about God and renounce all belief in him. I have counseled people in each category. Both are wrong ways to deal with such problems."

Problems are an inevitable part of life, especially for the Christian life. We are promised pain and persecution. Life is doubly hard for Christ followers. Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. I'm not up here trying to scare you. Believers in Christ are sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. I am saying that if we are going to navigate this broken world for the glory of God trusting God is not an option.

What we see in Habakkuk 1 and the first verse in chapter 2 is something that made the prophet Habakkuk unique. Habakkuk does more than just relay the word of God to the people of God. He does relay the word of God to the people of God but before He passes on the message he works it through for himself. **Habakkuk is a conversation between Habakkuk and a holy God**. Habakkuk has some valid concerns about the spiritual condition of the people around him and he voices those concerns to the Lord. God answers his questions with a surprising plan and Habakkuk has

more questions and God has more answers. The way Habakkuk works through the challenges of his day leads to greater confidence in God and deeper worship.

This is what Habakkuk wrestled with 2500 or so years ago.

Richard Patterson, “Habakkuk wrestled with the perennial problem of the operation of God’s holiness and justice in a world of spiritual and moral decay. Unable to resolve his problem apart from divine instruction, he came to God with hard questions. Habakkuk learned what every believer must come to realize: that Israel’s Redeemer is in control of earth’s history and does have a plan for its people; that God’s high ethical standards are normative for all persons; and that mature believers will live their lives in total faith and trust in God, who alone is sufficient guide and resource for life’s changing fortunes.”

Habakkuk was a man just like us who had to learn to trust God. Habakkuk had some challenges in his life and he took his concerns to the Lord and through the book of Habakkuk we have the privilege of watching a man go from being perplexed over his situation in life to praising God. He moves from instability in his faith to stability in his faith as he works through some deep questions and receives some profound answers from the Lord.

Habakkuk is an example of a man who worked through his problems with the Lord in His Word and prayer. What were his problems? His problems were more than just personal problems. They were national problems. He lived in a special nation. Habakkuk was part of the covenant community of God. He was part of a nation of Israel who was specially chosen by God. Habakkuk’s God was the one true God who chose Israel and redeemed Israel from bondage in Egypt and entered into a covenant with Israel and

promised to bless His people's obedience and punish their disobedience. Habakkuk preferred God's blessings and not God's punishment. He preferred to live in a nation where God was both feared and followed. But that's not the way it was.

Between the time of a good King named Josiah and a bad King named Jehoikim Habakkuk witnessed the rise and fall of Judah. Reform under Josiah was replaced by rebellion under Jehoikim. Under a wicked King the nation spiraled out of control. Habakkuk took his concerns about the nation to the Lord and he kept crying out to God about sin in the land. That's what we see in Habakkuk 1:2-4 - Habakkuk's complaint about the spiritual condition in Judah and why the Lord wasn't doing anything about it.

Last week we considered God's solution to the sin problem in Judah. God finally answers Habakkuk's cries. God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint about the sin problem in Judah is shown to us in Habakkuk 1:5-11.

Habakkuk 1:5-11 is how God is going to deal with the sin problem in Judah. God tells Habakkuk He is doing something Habakkuk's little Hebrew brain can't fathom.

Instead of sending a revival to change the spiritual condition in Judah God is sending a rebellious nation called the Chaldeans, also known as the Babylonians. God is going to punish His people by raising up a notoriously wicked nation to come in and destroy Judah with Jerusalem as its capital. **The temple will be destroyed and the majority of God's people will be decimated.** It's already bad for Habakkuk but it's about to be awful from a human perspective. His life on earth will get a lot harder. His life on earth will never be the same.

Habakkuk has just learned that God is raising up a notoriously wicked nation to come in to Judah as God's method of dealing with the sin problem in Judah. That's what Habakkuk knows. God was listening to his prayers after all. God was working behind the scenes. **But the way God was working meant that Habakkuk has even more problems to work through.** This is our focus the rest of the morning. How Habakkuk responds to God doing something his little Hebrew brain couldn't fathom is a great model for us to follow when something happens we don't like or we don't understand.

This morning we are going to see three ways Habakkuk responds to God's surprising plan that can help all of us grow in glorifying God when we realize God's plan is not what we expected or even thought was best:

1. Habakkuk's Confidence in the Character of God - Habakkuk 1:12

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

12 Are you not from everlasting,
O Lord my God, my Holy One?
We shall not die.

O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment,
and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.

I really think Habakkuk's spiritual maturity shines through in this verse. How? What are the first two words in Habakkuk 1:12? "Are you." Habakkuk has just received a life changing message from God. His life on earth is going to get a lot harder. And who does Habakkuk start with? Does Habakkuk start with himself? No. Habakkuk starts with what we know to be true about the character of God.

When you and I walk through a problem or something we don't like or understand we usually start with ourselves. We start with numero uno and we ask, "How is this new thing going to affect me?" What difference is this going to make in my life?" When our oldest daughter was diagnosed with celiac disease I didn't want to believe it. So I took her for a second opinion. We got a new doctor in Cincinnati to look at the information and see what he thought. Finally, this doctor looked at me and said, "She has celiac disease." The tone was sort of like - She has it, deal with it.

I didn't want to deal with it. I didn't want someone I loved to eat gluten free for the rest of her life. This was all the way back in 2008 or 2009 when gluten free tasted like juicy fruit after you've been chewing on it for a few minutes. Gluten free was awful back then and I didn't want to have to go through the hassle of washing my hands every time I touched wheat so I didn't cross contaminate her food.

The point is when my daughter was diagnosed with something that would negatively affect my life I started with pastor Blake and how it would affect me. I didn't start with God. I didn't start by rehearsing his attributes. Habakkuk starts with God. This is first base for handling problems biblically. This is foundational. Our circumstances change but God doesn't change. Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."

Habakkuk starts working through this new problem reminding himself of the character of God. **That's the only way he knows how to make sense of God's plan.** Habakkuk's question in verse 12 is really not a question. It's a way of stating a fact. It's kind of like when a man walks out of the closet fully dressed on a Sunday morning and his spouse surveys the scene and asks, "Are you wearing those pants with those shoes?" What do men know

intuitively about that question? That's not a question. That's a statement of fact. It means you are not wearing those pants with those shoes.

In verse 12 Habakkuk is asking a question to God that he already knows to be true. He knew Israel's God is eternal. He knew that. Moses wrote in Psalm 90:1-2, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." James Montgomery Boice, "Even if Habakkuk could not understand all that God did, he would have found comfort in knowing that he served the everlasting God."

God isn't only everlasting, He's holy. This is the most important attribute of God. Why do I say that? It's the attribute of God in the Bible that is stressed more than any other attribute. **It's the only thrice repeated attribute.** We see the angels crying out in Isaiah 6 and in Revelation 4, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" "Holy Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come." God is holy means that God only does what is right. He is wholly other. He is in a category all to Himself. God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. A holy God never makes mistakes.

God is eternal and God is holy. Habakkuk doesn't stop there. He knew God is sovereign. The middle of verse 12, look at it again with me, "O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof." God controls history. God's sovereignty extends beyond the borders of the promise land. He is sovereign over every nation. The Babylonians did not simply rise up on their own. **God raised them up.** God's control of history is precise. He raised this other pagan nation up *when* he wanted and *where* He wanted.

Well, those attributes are really important? God is eternal and holy and sovereign. But God is also faithful. Back up to the middle of verse 12, “We will not die.” I like this part. Notice the connection. Are you not...we will not. That's an important connection right there. Because of what Habakkuk knows about God he knows something about the people of God. Habakkuk knows prior revelation. He knows God has promised to bless His people and that God will not completely wipe Israel off the planet.

Habakkuk's hope for the future of the nation is based on the faithfulness of God. Habakkuk refers to God as a Rock. A rock provides firm footing. It is a foundation on which a person can build a secure dwelling. It is often a fortress to which a soldier can run and be safe. God is all these things to His people.

Notice also how Habakkuk says, “O LORD, my Gd, my holy one.” My God was personal for Habakkuk. He knew the Lord personally. Jerry Bridges ends the first chapter with the starting point to trusting God:

"In order to trust God we must know Him in an intimate, personal way. David said in Psalm 9:10, “Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.” To know God's name is to know Him in an intimate, personal way. It is more than just knowing facts about God. It is coming into a deeper personal relationship with Him as a result of seeking Him in the midst of our personal pain and discovering Him to be trustworthy. It is only as we know God in this personal way that we come to trust Him...pray that the Holy Spirit of God will enable you to get beyond the facts about God so that you will come to know Him better, and so be able to trust Him more completely."

Guys, let me slow down and make a simple point. No one trusts God who is outside of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to trust God if you don't know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. A life of trusting God begins with conversion. *You don't trust God without the Spirit of God.* The Spirit of God doesn't automatically come into the lives of people who go to church. The Spirit of God comes into the lives of people who understand how sinful they are and go to the cross. The Spirit's ministry is a ministry of conviction of sin and conversion to Christ. This is what Jesus said the Spirit would do.

If things aren't working out in your life and you are trying to fix it apart from a saving relationship with Christ repent and believe first. The starting point for a life of faith is turning from sin and trusting in Christ alone to save you. That's when the Spirit comes into your life and when you have the Spirit and the Word you have everything you need to grow in trusting God. You can trust the Lord. You can be like Habakkuk when hard news enters your life.

Most of us went to church and listened to preaching for many years before we repented and believed in Christ. We knew about God and we could maybe even quote Scripture or tell other people about the death and resurrection of Jesus. But we couldn't honestly say that the God of the Bible was my Lord and my God. Our hearts were not changed by the gospel. Only the gospel can transform disloyal hearts to God into loyal hearts to God. Only God can change our hearts through faith in Christ and the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit so we can say, "God is my Lord and my God." I hope you can all say that this morning. Jesus is my Lord and my whole life belongs to Him.

In Habakkuk 1:12 we see Habakkuk's confidence in the character of God.

Then in Habakkuk 1:13-17 we see

2. Habakkuk's Concern - Habakkuk 1:13-17

After stopping to consider the character of God Habakkuk has more concerns. He expressed his concerns back to God in Habakkuk 1:13-17:

Habakkuk 1:13-17

13 You who are of purer eyes than to see evil
and cannot look at wrong,
why do you idly look at traitors
and remain silent when the wicked swallows up
the man more righteous than he?

14 You make mankind like the fish of the sea,
like crawling things that have no ruler.

15 He brings all of them up with a hook;
he drags them out with his net;
he gathers them in his dragnet;
so he rejoices and is glad.

16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net
and makes offerings to his dragnet;
for by them he lives in luxury,
and his food is rich.

17 Is he then to keep on emptying his net
and mercilessly killing nations forever?

What is Habakkuk's concern in this section? His concern is that God's plan seems out of character for a holy God. It doesn't make sense to Habakkuk that a God who hates sin is going to use a nation more wicked than Judah to punish His people. Habakkuk isn't alone in these concerns. Habakkuk takes his place beside many others, such as Job (Job 7:16–21; 9:21–24;

12:4–6; 21:1–16; 24:1–16, 21–25; 27:1–12), the psalmist Asaph (Ps. 73), Jeremiah (Jer. 11:18–19; 12:1–4; 15:15–18; 17:15–18; 20:7–18), and Malachi (Mal. 2:17), who questioned God as to His fairness in handling the problems of evil.

It's hard for us to draw a parallel between Habakkuk's day and our day that would help us make sense of Habakkuk's questions here. But James Montgomery Boice offers this way of thinking about it:

"It would be like crying out to God about the state of the visible church in America and hearing that God is going to destroy it by a Communist invasion. At first we would have been quite critical of the failures of God's people. We would have pointed to lax theological standards and even open heresy in some places, to lack of discipline and open immorality. We would have been asking for a renewing movement of God's Spirit and would have been distressed that our prayers had gone unanswered for such a long time. But then, after God had replied that he was going to destroy the church by an invasion of utter unbelievers, we would find ourselves protesting. The church may be in a deplorable state, we would argue, but surely it is not as bad as all that. Even if it were, it would not seem right that it should be destroyed by an utterly godless nation. We might ask at this point, as Habakkuk does: "Why ... do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Hab. 1:13)."

Here's the problem. Habakkuk is not omniscient. He knows part of God's plan but Habakkuk doesn't know the whole plan. Again, what chapter are we in? We are still in chapter 1. The conversation continues through chapter 2. We are still in the third quarter of Habakkuk. The game isn't over. It's still being played out. There are things Habakkuk knew and

things he didn't know. He knew God was raising up a notoriously wicked nation to punish his people. He didn't know how long it would last. He didn't know what was going to happen to the Babylonians after they came in and wiped out Judah? He didn't know how it ends.

In verses 14-15 he is working through the problem of injustice - How could a holy God who does not look on wickedness with favor appear to favor a wicked people? In verses 16-17 another problem surfaces - Why would God excuse an idolatrous people? **The first divine dilemma has to do with injustice and the second one has to do with idolatry.** Habakkuk knows that God does not endorse injustice or idolatry and yet if the Chaldeans come in and do what God just said they would do, then it will appear that God looks favorably on what He does not favor.

What does Habakkuk not know? He doesn't know God's future plan for the Babylonians other than they are the people God is raising up to punish the sin in Judah. He knows part of the plan but he doesn't know the whole plan and so what does he do?

Look at Habakkuk 2:1:

3. Habakkuk's Commitment - Habakkuk 2:1

Habakkuk 2:1

2:1 I will take my stand at my watchpost
and station myself on the tower,
and look out to see what he will say to me,
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

Habakkuk makes a commitment. He is going to watch and he is going to wait on the Lord. The picture here is of a watchman. “Habakkuk would assume the role of a prophetic watchman, taking his post on the ramparts to watch for the Lord’s reply. The word “watch” suggests an active, earnest waiting for the Lord’s message.”

One commentator writes, “Watchman expresses the spiritual preparation of the prophet’s soul for hearing the word of God within, i.e. the collecting of his mind by quietly entering into himself, and meditating upon the word and testimonies of God.”

Habakkuk is not walking away from the faith. He is not deconstructing. He is not taking his scroll and burning it. No. He commits to wait on the Lord. There are things He knows and there are things he doesn’t know so he commits to watch and wait to see how God fills in the picture of what he doesn’t understand.

A few weeks ago I quoted Martyn Lloyd Jones. He preached through Habakkuk in England during world war 2. Before he became a pastor Dr. Lloyd Jones worked as a physician. He was a highly educated, highly trained doctor who learned from one of the most well known doctors in England. Dr. Hoarder trained Dr. Lloyd Jones on how to help people medically.

Dr. Lloyd Jones applied some of those things to how he shepherded people. When people came to Dr. Lloyd Jones with their problems he gave them the following four step plan:

First, *stop to think*. Most of us have a tendency to talk first and think afterward, if we think at all. But James tells us, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak” (James 1:19). When we speak first, we often

muddle ourselves by fanning the flames of our own unbelief or muddying the water of our ignorance. When we shut up and think, we begin to sort things out and allow the light of God to shine into our situation.

Second, *restate basic principles*. Lloyd-Jones says, “When you start to think you must not begin with your immediate problem. Begin further back. Apply the strategy of the indirect approach.... Such an approach is sometimes of vital importance in the spiritual life.” This is the principle of finding sound footing.

Were you ever on a sidewalk in the winter when the snow was cleared off but there were still treacherous icy spots? How did you walk? If you are like most people, you kept your eyes down and placed your feet carefully on safe ground. You must do the same thing spiritually. Your problem is a slippery spot, but surely not all your experience with God is like that. Get onto the parts that are firm. Remind yourself of things you know. Then you will find that the problem begins to fall into proper perspective and principles for solving it emerge.

Third, *apply the principles to the problem*. “The fact of the matter is that all problems are capable of solution only if they are put into the right context. The way to interpret a difficult text of Scripture is to consider its context. We often mistake the meaning of a phrase because we take it out of its context; but when you put your problem text into its context, the context will generally interpret the text for you. The same is also true of the particular problem that is causing you concern.”

Fourth, *if still in doubt, commit the problem to God in faith*. This is the most important point of all. Suppose you have stopped to think. Suppose you have gone back to basic principles. Suppose you have tried to apply these to the specific problem that is confronting you. What should you do if you

are still as puzzled as you were at the beginning? Should you give up? Should you go back to withdrawing or repudiating what you had professed before? Not at all!

At this point you must leave the matter with God. In other words, you must say, "Lord, I have done everything I know to do with this problem. I have faced it on the basis of everything I know, and I still don't understand it. From here on it's your problem, not mine anymore." That is what God wants you to do. He wants you to make your problems his problems, because he knows that then you will grow in faith and your knowledge of him will deepen. In time God will give you a proper answer to the problem you are facing.

So here are the four points:

- (1) stop to think
- (2) restate basic principles
- (3) apply the principles to the problem
- (4) if still in doubt, commit the problem to God in faith.

I would add 1 point to those four points. The final point I would add is that God is always loving you. Everything God is doing in your life flows out of His perfect love for you and that includes hard things. We live in a Fathered world. Nothing in our lives happens by chance. God micromanages our lives for His glory and our good, to make us more like Jesus Christ. If you are in Christ God is never not loving you.

Romans 8 was written to persecuted Christians. They were being killed all day long for their faith. They never knew when someone was going to show up at their home and arrest them and kill them for their faith in Christ. What did they need to know? Let's finish by reading Romans 8:26-39 together:

Romans 8:26-39 is Paul's counsel to persecuted Christians. These verses show us how to interpret pain in the Christian life:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

- 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
- 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.
- 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
- 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?
- 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
- 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.
- 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
- 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
- 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
- 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
- 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,

39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Friends, whatever you are going through this morning is not accident. God put it there because He loves you and because He wants to reveal more of Himself to you and through you. Your problems are part of His plan to mature your faith. Will you learn from Habakkuk and take your problems to God in prayer and praise your way through the pain? Let's pray.