

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

07.10.2023 | A Work That You Won't Believe | Habakkuk 1:5-11 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I wanna invite you to turn with me to Habakkuk chapter one. We're spending the month of August in this short book of Habakkuk. We began this study last week, and we saw that while this book is very old, about 2,600 years old or so, it's very relevant to today. Habakkuk is a book that deals with common experience of human life. Certain times in our lives, we will experience difficult times, we will look out at the world and see injustice, we will see problems in the world, and we'll bring about questions in our mind. Oftentimes questions as to, why would God allow this to be happening to me? Why would God allow this to be happening in our world? Where is God in the midst of all this? The book of Habakkuk's very relevant because Habakkuk asks those questions of God. We saw last week that Habakkuk came to God, basically said, "God, are You listening to me? "God, do You hear me when I pray? "Why are You sitting by idly "when all of this injustice, all of this sin is going out?"

We saw last week, as Pastor Clark even mentioned in our prayer time, that God welcomes those doubts and those questions. He knows that we are asking them, we are wondering them, and He invites us to bring them to Him. So we're calling this series Living by Faith, and what we saw last week is that living by faith means coming to God. Even with our doubts and with our questions, we come to God, as Habakkuk did. What we see today is that God responded to Habakkuk. Now, just a bit of a spoiler alert, God did not give Habakkuk the response that he was hoping for. So many times when we come to God with our doubts and with our questions, God will not give us maybe the answer that we were hoping for. Maybe it will be an answer that seems incomplete to us.

Maybe it will be an answer that is different from what we were hoping it would be. Because we're gonna see today, God's ways are not like our ways. His thoughts are not like our thoughts, and what I hope that you'll see today is that is good news. It is good that God's ways are above our ways, and His thoughts are above our thoughts. It's good news that we can't always know and see what God is doing in our lives and in the world. I pray that we would be able to see that and learn a little bit more about how to live by faith. Let's read God's response to Habakkuk.

In Habakkuk chapter one, I'm gonna read verses five through 11. God tells Habakkuk, "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. "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation "who marched the breadth of the earth "to seize dwellings not their own. "They are dreaded and fearsome, "their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. "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. "They all come for violence, all their faces forward. "They gather captives like sand. "Kings they scoff and at rulers they laugh. "They laugh at every fortress, "for they pile up earth and take it. "Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, "guilty men whose own might is their God."

You know, last week as we were beginning this series, I was talking to the kids even before we had the sermon, we were just thinking about the sermon ahead of time with the kids and I was talking about how sometimes, maybe as a kid, you get in trouble for asking too many questions. I confess that as a father, sometimes I tell my boys asking too many questions. I just need the questions to stop for a little bit. But I mentioned to them that thankfully, God is far more patient than I am. He's far more gracious than I am. He can always handle our questions. He always wants us to bring him our questions and doubts. And I think that idea of God being a father and us being his children is a good picture for us to have as we think about this book of Habakkuk.

I pray that as we saw last week, that we would see ourselves as children of God and that we would boldly come before our father. We would recognize that he is a loving and patient and gracious father, ready to welcome us with our doubts and our questions and our complaints. But I pray also that as we see ourselves as children of God, it would not only lead us to come to him boldly, but also humbly. Pray that as we consider this picture of us being God's children, we'd recognize that we aren't God's peers. That when we come to him with our doubts and our questions, it should not be with the posture of telling him what to do or giving him advice as if he needs it from us. But rather, thinking of ourselves as children who are coming to a loving father, who's the only one who is able to hear their questions, but is also the only one who is able to answer their questions. The only one who is able to give guidance in the midst of the hardest times.

The only one who is able to understand what's really going on. You just think of the analogy of a parent and child and how humbling it would be to think of yourself as the child.

You've ever been a parent or maybe you just ever raised or watched kids or looked after kids, you'll know that sometimes you know things that the child doesn't know. And you have to act on what you know, even if the child doesn't agree with you. So I think about like taking my sons to the doctor, and I think about it as a way to get a shot. You ever tried to talk to a two or a three year old about the fact that the pain that they are about to experience is actually good, it's for a purpose, there's a reason behind it? It's not always easy to try to reason with them in those moments. But you know what, I press forward. Even when my two year old, my three year old, doesn't want to get the shot, we still bring them to the doctor and we still do it because we recognize that there's a gap in the understanding. That our children understand one thing and as parents we understand at least a little bit more.

Now think about the gap between you and an infinite all knowing eternal God. If you're to think of yourself as a child in that analogy, how humbling is that? I just think about myself. If the gap between me and Malachi, my almost three year old is, let's just say about the same as our height, which is about like this, then the gap between me and God has to be from like here to Salesforce Tower. Like the gap is so much farther between me and God than me and my son. I have to recognize that there are things that he is going to know and understand that I never will. That's good, just as it is good for my son to have a father who knows more than he does, it is good for us to have a heavenly father who knows far more than we do.

Let us live by faith by coming to God boldly with our questions and doubts as we saw from Habakkuk last week, but let us also live by faith by coming to God humbly. This is basically what I think God tells Habakkuk in this response. He tells him, be astounded. Wonder as you look around. That my ways are not like your ways. My thoughts go a little bit higher than your thoughts. We learned something about the ways of God. Three truths actually about the ways of God I think in this passage. And the first one is right there where I'm beginning. That God's ways are not like our ways. What I would say is God's ways are mysterious.

The first truth that I think we gather from this passage about the ways of God, but what it looks like to live by faith in the midst of difficult and trying times is we have to know that God's ways are mysterious. There's something about the nature of God, of who he is and who we are, that means he is going to be incomprehensible to us. The fact that he is infinite and we are finite. The fact that he is the creator and we are the creation means that we cannot possibly know everything about him or what he is doing. Now God is gracious to reveal himself to us. He is gracious to reveal so many of his ways to us, but even with all that revelation, there is still so much of God and of his ways and his works that is going to be a mystery to us. Listen to how God responds in his beginning of his response to Habakkuk. He says in verse five, "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."

God's response to Habakkuk is basically look around and have your mind blown. Like widen your perspective just for a moment, Habakkuk. Don't just look at what's right in front of you or what you see in your own nation and the problems there, but if you would just step back and see what's going on around the world, which is probably hard for Habakkuk to do, but he could hear things. He knew of reports of what was going on the nations. He said, "If you would look around, "you would be astounded. "You would wonder, your mind would be blown." Because there's so much going on that you can't understand. In fact, he says, "Even if I told you what I was up to, "you would not believe me "because it is so mysterious to you. "It is so above your comprehension."

You know, we see this in even like maybe a more plain way in the gospel accounts. You know, there's times in the gospel accounts when Jesus looks at his disciples and he tells them, "I'm about to die." And the gospel authors are honest with us to say, and the disciples did not understand what he was saying. And you read that and you think, "How hard is that to understand? "He says he's going to Jerusalem to die. "How could you not grasp that?" But the whole idea of the one they thought to be the Messiah dying was incomprehensible to them. The whole idea of the way God was working in that whole circumstance in Jesus' life was a mystery to them. God even tells Habakkuk, as we'll see here, what he is up to, and we'll see next week in Habakkuk's response is he did not believe it. And the reason is is because God's ways are so far above our ways that they really are so often mysterious to us.

You think about our lives, history, what's going on around the world as a movie. Basically what you and I see is one second of the movie. And from that we are attempting to make judgments upon the whole plot and all the characters and the director and how the movie is going from just the one perspective. And I know we've got lots of information these days. I know we've got artificial intelligence and news outlets and we think we know a lot, but still from all of that we see one second of the movie. Trying to grasp what is going on in our world, what God is doing in our world is incomprehensible to us. It is mysterious to us. Her one pastor say God is always doing 10,000 things in your life and you might be aware of three of them. You multiply that by eight billion people in the world. What is God up to? It is certainly a mystery to us. And I would just say isn't that good news? Like how disappointing would it be if we had a God that we could predict his next action? How devastating would it be if the best plan God could come up with was one that we came up with? I mean what kind of God would he be? I mean aren't we thankful for a God who can astound us? Who can make us wonder?

One of my favorite directors is Christopher Nolan. I'm not a film critic by any means, but I love a good movie. I love Christopher Nolan's movies because he just has this way of weaving a story together, bringing about all sorts of twists and turns and kind of surprising you, especially often maybe with a surprising ending. I remember going to see the movie Inception at its midnight premiere. I hadn't heard anything about it. There were no spoilers. I didn't know what I was getting myself into. Just kind of a brief spoiler here as we talk about it. But I was taken on this journey through dreams and dreams within dreams. You know when it comes to the end of the movie and the top is just spinning on that table. And here we all sat, the midnight premiere, knowing nothing about this movie. And the top spinning on the table and all of a sudden screen cuts to black. There's just a gasp all around the theater. We were astounded at what we had just seen in this movie. Somebody had put together a story that we didn't see coming. It was like a mystery to us. I mean, how much greater is what God is doing in our lives and in the world?

If we would take a moment to not always judge God by what we can see, but to be astounded by him, to wonder. Maybe today you would just take a moment and be astounded by what God is up to. You just take a moment and wonder at all the sovereignty, all the providence, God using his sovereignty to accomplish his good purposes of God in our world. Maybe in your life. I mean, can you think of a time in which you did not know what God was up to? You could not see his hand working in that moment, but looking back, maybe months, maybe years later, and you could see that God was working in the mysterious. Maybe today as you reflect on that, it will astound you. Maybe it'll make you wonder. Maybe it'll help you to trust God no matter what you're going through.

We talked about it a little bit last week, like Habakkuk, you might be looking around our world at the violence, at the injustice, and you might wonder why God seems to be idle in so many of these situations. Maybe you don't have to look around the world, but you just have to look in your own life. Maybe you've been praying for God to move in a certain area. He just doesn't seem to be responding like you want. If you wonder, where is God in the midst of this season of your life? Could you today maybe recognize the fact that God might be doing 10,000 things, and you might be aware of three of them? Could you today maybe be astounded for a moment at the mystery of God and His ways? Would that humble you a little bit to trust Him, even when you can't know what He's up to? God's ways are mysterious. We can't comprehend them, but at the same time, because God has revealed Himself in His ways to us, there are some things we can know about His ways.

There are some things that we can trust, even when His ways seem like a mystery. The second truth that I think we see about God's ways in this passage is that God's ways are moral. God's ways are mysterious. So often, we can't understand them. So often, we can't comprehend them. But yet, one thing that we do know is that God's ways are moral. I mentioned last week part of living by faith is trusting that God is just. That's what Habakkuk believed. Habakkuk came to God with his doubts and with his questions not because he didn't think God didn't exist or was evil or didn't care, but rather it's because he believed God was just. And the ways in the law of God was just that He came to Him when He saw injustice. So it should be for us. We believe God is just so we cry out to Him in injustice when we see that happening in our world. The similar way, we should believe that God is moral, that He is good in all that He does.

One of the things we see in this passage, I believe, is that God is good, is right. Everything that He does, the Bible tells us, is right. He is righteous and holy in all that He does. All of His ways are moral and good. We have to look at it a little bit, I

think deeply in this passage, but I do think we see it. So notice what he says in verse six. He says, "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation who marched "through the breadth of the earth "to seize dwellings, not their own." The rest of the passage is really God describing these Chaldeans, who they are, how violent they are, how unjust they are, how they are a conquering people. And you look at that and you say, "God's raising up these people. "How does that make God moral in what He's doing?" This is a violent, unjust people. Well, you have to go back and you have to think about what was Habakkuk's complaint to God. You go back to last week, Habakkuk comes to God and he says, "There is so much injustice in this land. "Justice never goes forth, it is always perverted, "it is always bent. "The righteous are always being oppressed by the wicked." And here's God saying, "Yeah, I know that Habakkuk."

Habakkuk is saying, "Do you see the injustice "of your people here in Judah?" And God says, "Yes, and I am bringing judgment upon them." You see, God had entered into a covenant with the people of Israel. It wasn't a covenant that they initiated, he initiated it. You got it all the way back to Abraham when he calls him, but specifically with the nation of Israel, as God brings them out of slavery in Egypt, provides for them in the wilderness, brings them into the Promised Land. He says, "I am your God, be my people. "I've driven out these other nations, "I've given you this Promised Land, "I'm gonna protect you from your enemies, "I'm gonna provide for your every need. "Just worship me, love me, obey me, "be a light into the nations." And don't you know that time and time again, people of Israel broke that covenant with God. God was faithful to them, he was, created this covenant that he was holding up, but they were breaking their covenant with God over and over again.

In fact, if you read most of the prophets, that's what the message is. The prophets are often just retelling the law and the covenant, the people were in with God saying, "Don't you see that we are not living by this? "Don't you know that God's judgment "is going to then come upon us?" God looks at Habakkuk and he says, "Habakkuk, I see the very things that you see. "You talk about injustice, I see all the injustice "that you see plus a lot more. "You've taken my city of Jerusalem "and it's filled with innocent blood. "You don't live by my laws, you mistreat each other, "the powerful oppress the weak. "Justice never goes forth, and so now my judgment is coming." God's hedge of protection, his hand of providing for his people in Israel was being removed.

There was this people, the Chaldeans, he calls them here, really they're the Babylonians that we would think of in world history. They're this rising power. He says that they are a powerful people and if I was still your God, you are still my people in this covenant, I would protect you from them, but because you have broken this covenant, judgment is coming. I've removed my protection and they will come and they will overtake your land and they will take you captive. So God is saying is he is moral in this judgment. Habakkuk is complaining about injustice and God sees it too. He's allowing this judgment to come to them because of their sin.

You think about it, we spent just a moment earlier confessing our sin, recognizing the ways that we sin against God. Anytime God allows us to experience the consequence of our sin, he is morally right in doing so. God is just in all that he does and he is just in allowing these people to experience the consequences of their sin. Now his ways are a mystery and Habakkuk is gonna ask him about it because you read this and you recognize that the people of the Chaldeans, they were not just people. And guess what? God's not hiding that fact. I mean he already has talked about them being hasty and bitter but notice what he goes on to say. In verse seven, they are dreaded and fearsome. Their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. In other words, they don't live out God's justice either. They live by their own justice. Says in verse 11, they sweep by like the wind and go on. Guilty men whose own might is their God.

What's God saying? The Chaldeans don't worship me either. It's not that God is approving of what the Chaldeans do but he's saying that they're coming in to take the people of Israel captive is a consequence for the sin that was there. God is morally right in bringing this judgment. It doesn't mean that God is approving everything that happens in the process. It doesn't mean that God's moral ways are being carried out in every aspect of this. We see throughout the Bible that God actually works not just in spite of our sin but actually even through our sin to accomplish his good moral ways, to accomplish his good purposes in the world. You think about what we remember today as we take communion. Jesus, the only truly innocent person to ever live on this earth was nailed to a cross as a criminal. His body was broken, his blood was shed. Carried out by sinful people. The worst wrongdoing you could imagine. Immoral in every way to kill Jesus. But yet God worked through that for good.

God is moral in all of his ways. Yes, it's a bit mysterious at times. That's why we begin there. We can't understand all that God is doing but yet we recognize throughout history God works even in the midst of immoral people, even in the midst of injustice, in moral ways, in good ways, in right ways to accomplish his good purposes. Do you believe that in your life? That what God is doing in your life, he is good and right in. Maybe you can't always see it, maybe you can't understand it at the moment but all of his ways are moral. His judgment on Israel is right and good in these moments but thankfully that's not where I want us to end. Maybe it would be enough to say that God is moral in all that he does. He is holy, he is righteous. We also know about the character of God that he is compassionate, he is gracious.

And so I would say his ways are not only moral but his ways are merciful. The last truth that I want us just to consider about the ways of God from this passage is that his ways are merciful. Again, I mentioned last week, I think it's important. We are living by faith in the midst of difficult times to believe that God is just, to trust that he is going to right every wrong. He is going to judge every sin. Justice will be done in the end. It's important to believe that he is moral in all of his ways but I also mentioned last week we've got to believe that he is gracious enough to accept us in our doubts and in our questions if we're gonna come to him. And the same way along with believing that his ways are moral, we need to believe that his ways are merciful. He doesn't always give us what we deserve. That anytime he would allow us to experience the consequences of our sin, he would be moral to do so but how many times? Does God keep us from the consequences of our sin?

Because his ways are merciful. See, one of the things that we see in terms of God's ways being merciful even in a passage like this is we see God's patience. One of the ways that we see God being merciful is we see his patience because I mentioned earlier the fact that the people of Israel had broken the covenant with God. So God was going to allow this judgment to come upon them. That breaking of the covenant was not something that had just recently happened. It wasn't like the people sinned against God and he was quick to allow a judgment to come upon them. Again, he had sent his word, he had sent prophets, he had sent messengers to call the people back from their sin, to call them to repent that they might know him as the Lord and receive his salvation. It had been years and decades of no repentance, of disobedience before God gave them over to this judgment.

We see that God even in his ways is merciful, he is patient, he's been patient with you. You know, you don't always respond obediently when God calls you. I know I don't know you that well but I'm just gonna venture to say that. You don't always do exactly what God wants you to do the first time that he tells you or maybe the 10th time that he tells you. God's very patient with us. His ways are merciful because he is patient to not always give us what we deserve. We don't often immediately experience the consequences of our sin. But even as God has allowed his patience to come to a place where he is going to take this power that's being raised up in these Babylonians, these Chaldeans and bring judgment, he's gonna do so in a way that I think even still shows his providence.

I think we see God's ways being merciful in his patience but also in his providence. So again, I kind of have to get us to look at the text and see what it's pointing to but just go down to verses nine and 10 with me. He says, "They all come for violence, "all their faces forward. "They gather captives like sand. "At kings they scoff and at rulers they laugh. "They laugh at every fortress for they pile up earth "and take it." What God is doing here is he's speaking about the Chaldeans and he's really foreshadowing what's going to happen. The fact that they pile up earth and take it and they take people captive, that was going to happen in Jerusalem. That was gonna happen in the land of Judah. The Babylonians came in and they ransacked the whole country. They tore down Jerusalem, they tore down the temple that was there. They took people off in captivity.

See Pastor Ben, I thought you were talking about God's ways being merciful. Well I am. You have to see that when God allowed his people to be taken off into captivity, he did not end the story there. I mean it could have been that the Chaldeans came in, the Babylonians came in and just wiped the people out completely but God had it to where they were taken into captivity for a reason. People of Israel remained in captivity in Babylon for about 70 years until God raised up a new world power, the Medes and the Persians came through, overthrew Babylon and God put it on the heart of their king to allow the people of Israel to return to Jerusalem. And they came back to Jerusalem and they rebuilt the city and they rebuilt the temple. And that line of Abraham and David continued. About 500 years later, Jesus would ride a donkey into that city of Jerusalem that was rebuilt. Jesus would stand in that temple that was rebuilt and he would turn over tables and he would declare at his father's house a house of prayer for all people.

All that happens because of God's providence. God working in this moment to not just wipe out his people because they've broken his covenant but to allow them to go into captivity and return and be in Jerusalem, be in the temple so that when Jesus comes, he would be able to reveal himself as the Messiah. But even in that moment when he stands in the temple and declares himself as the Messiah, those religious leaders of the Jewish nation were back to their unjust ways. And there was a new world superpower who lived by their own justice called Rome. And they together nailed Jesus to a cross. And God did that because he is merciful in all of his ways. God worked all of that together so that by Jesus's death, you might have life.

When you come to the table this morning, this is what you recognize, that God has been weaving every moment of history together for good purposes, for his plan of redemption, that we might know eternal life with him. Even though we can't see it, we believe that his ways are merciful. But I'm not done quite yet. When the people of Israel were taken into captivity, there were many that returned to Jerusalem. But there are actually many who never returned to Jerusalem. Many never returned to the Promised Land. They stayed where they were, or they actually began to be dispersed into different places. And they actually began to set up synagogues in different places of the known world. And over the years at those synagogues, they would proclaim the name of Yahweh. And because of that, there were synagogues all over the known world. And there were also many Gentiles, non-Jewish people who trusted in the God of Israel. And when Jesus came and when he died and rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, the Spirit came and the church was born and the gospel began to go forth, people were sent out to share this gospel.

One that we know the best in the Bible is Paul. And as Paul went from city to city to share the gospel, where do you think the first place he went in every city was? Always the synagogues. Read the stories. Paul's always going to the synagogues first. How were there synagogues in every city around the known world? Oh, because hundreds of years before, God had allowed his people to be taken into captivity and then they were dispersed. And there was then a vehicle for Paul to go to and missionaries to go to and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. In fact, in Acts chapter 13, we read of Paul in Pisidia. He stands in the synagogue of that city. And he actually quotes from Habakkuk chapter one, as he presents the gospel. Listen to Paul's words in Acts chapter 13. He says, "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man, Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. And by him, everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what is said in the prophets should come about, look you scoffers, be astounded and perish. For I'm doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe even if one tells you."

Paul looks at the people and he says, "God's mysterious ways are still at work. His merciful ways are still at work to provide salvation to you. Don't be like the people of Habakkuk's day who heard the word and did not believe, but believe in the mercy of God today." And guess what? Luke tells us in Acts 13 that actually many of the Jewish people there did not believe, but many of those God-fearing Gentiles did. Luke writes just a few verses later, "And when the Gentiles heard this," verse 48, "they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many were appointed to eternal life believed." The word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. Why is the gospel going forth in this region? Why are there Gentiles in a synagogue ready to hear this message? All by the providence of God. All because his ways are merciful.

How does the gospel reach people in San Francisco? It's by the power of the Spirit for sure, but God is using the Spirit in his providence to accomplish his merciful ways. Why are you here this morning? Because God is merciful. God wants you here this morning to hear his word. He wants you to hear a word that you would believe. That even when you can't see him, and even when you can't understand him, even when he seems mysterious, he is good and moral in what he is doing, but even more, he is merciful and gracious towards you. Would you believe that and live by faith in him today?