

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

08.17.2025 | The Righteous Shall Live by Faith | Habakkuk 1:12-2:4 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible, I want to invite you to turn with me to Habakkuk chapter 1. We're going through the book of Habakkuk in the month of August. This is our third week of five weeks of being in this book. They were coming to the end of chapter 1 and starting into chapter 2. And what we've been considering is really this idea of what does it look like to live by faith. The book of Habakkuk is really helpful in this because it's a very honest book. We saw from the very beginning that Habakkuk had questions for God. He had complaints against what God was doing. He had some doubts about what he was seeing in the world, and he came to God with those questions and those doubts and those complaints.

And what we saw is that the first step in living by faith is coming to God. That even when you have doubts, even when you have questions, even if it's just to complain, the fact that you are coming to God is an expression of your faith. So Habakkuk comes to God at the beginning of chapter 1 to express these things in faith. And then last week, the second part of chapter 1, we saw God's response to Habakkuk. God told Habakkuk, "I'm doing something that you would not be able to understand even if I told you. My ways are greater than your ways.

Even if I explained it to you, you would not be able to comprehend because in some ways my ways are mysterious." God told Habakkuk that he was doing something about all the injustice that was happening in his land. The people of Israel, the people in Judah were not honoring God in their lives. They were not treating each other right. And God said he had seen this and now he was raising up the Chaldeans, otherwise known as the Babylonians, to come and bring judgment of God upon them. Now this, as you could guess, was not what Habakkuk was hoping to hear.

So today we will see Habakkuk's second time coming to God, expressing his faith in coming to God, but still expressing his doubts and his questions. And we will see the beginning of God's second response to Habakkuk. And in God's response, particularly in our last verse that we'll read today, chapter 2 verse 4, God says that the righteous shall live by faith. And I want you to really consider that phrase because I believe that phrase is at the heart of this whole book of Habakkuk. But even more than that, I think this phrase is really at the heart of the whole Bible and the heart of the Christian faith.

So let's read our text for this morning, which is Habakkuk chapter 1, starting in verse 12. And we'll continue into chapter 2, going through verse 4. Habakkuk says, "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. 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? You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. 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 in his glad. Therefore, he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet. For by them he lives in luxury and his food is rich. See then, to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?"

And then to chapter 2, verse 1, "I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and I will look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint. And the Lord answered me, "Write the vision. Make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time. It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him. But the righteous shall live by his faith."

Now, what I'd like to do is just keep verse 4 of chapter 2 up on the screen, even as we begin. We'll just start with where we ended our reading. In verse 4, God begins to respond to Habakkuk, and he says that there is a certain type of person whose pride causes them to be puffed up. He's been describing them already in chapter 1, and he'll go on to speak to this type of person. In fact, it is true, really, of all of us in some way that we in our sin are puffed up and prideful against God. But, he says, the difference between that person and the person who is righteous is that the righteous shall live by his faith. Now, I said just earlier, I think that this phrase is not just at the heart of the book of Habakkuk, but it's really at the heart of the Bible and of the Christian faith. You know, Martin Luther was a pivotal figure in the Reformation. About 500 years ago, Martin Luther, along with other reformers, was used to bring about a Reformation to the church.

And Martin Luther said that this phrase, sometimes translated the "just shall live by faith" or the "righteous shall live by faith," was a pivotal phrase for him. And most likely, Martin Luther wasn't studying this in the book of Habakkuk, it was probably as much as he was in the places where it is quoted in the New Testament.

You see, in the New Testament, New Testament authors, Paul and the author of Hebrews, quotes this phrase, "The righteous shall live by his faith" three times. One of the central ones is at the beginning of the book of Romans. In Romans chapter 1, Paul is laying forth his explanation of the whole Christian faith, kind of giving his thesis statement. And this is what he says in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith, for faith, as it is written," he quotes Habakkuk 2 for, "The righteous shall live by faith." What is the Apostle Paul saying here as he begins the book of Romans? He is saying that there is a righteousness, a right standing before God, that comes through faith in Jesus Christ and the good news, the gospel message. He says, "I am not ashamed of this good news of Jesus, because it provides salvation to all of those who believe, to all of those who have faith, that righteousness is not found in your ability to keep the law, to be a good person, to be a very religious person. You will not be made right with God through those things, but you will be made righteous through your faith."

And the reason Paul quotes from the Old Testament is to show this is not a new idea, that from the very beginning this has been the call of the people of God, that those who receive the righteousness of God do so by faith in God. This has been true throughout the whole Bible and he is making it now clear in the gospel of Jesus. And Martin Luther said that when he really understood this, as he read Romans 1, 16 and 17, he understood that the just person, the person who was justified before God, the righteous person who is made right with God, the person who is forgiven of all their sins, is not the person who keeps the law the best, or is the best Christian, or is the best person. The person who is just before God is the one who has faith. He said that is when he was born again and it was like the doors of paradise swung open. It brought him so much relief to know that this righteousness was not found in and of himself in his own works, but it was found in faith in Jesus Christ. What the New Testament authors want us to see is this has actually always been the case.

Starting back at the beginning and even in the book of Habakkuk, the truth is there. The righteous live by faith. Now what I think happens is when we read the Old Testament, we get glimpses of these great truths and then the New Testament is helping us to see that in the coming of Jesus, we see the clearest expression of these truths. That what was there in somewhat of a seed form in the Old Testament bears its full fruit when Jesus comes and the gospel is made clear. And so what I want to do this morning is I want to go to Habakkuk chapter 1 and 2. I want us to look in that text and I want us to see how is it described in this text that the righteous live by faith. What does it mean for the righteous person, the person that is right with God to live by faith? What do we see specifically in these verses? But then how does that find its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ and what he has done?

So let's go back to Habakkuk and let's consider what does it mean that the righteous shall live by faith. And I think in this text we see three aspects of us living by faith. If you like to follow along in your bulletin or if you're a kid who picked up the sermon notes, you like to follow along, here's our kind of our outline for us this morning is how do we live by faith? The first aspect of living by faith is that we trust in the character of God. How do we live by faith? If the heart of the message, the whole book of Habakkuk is that the righteous shall live by faith, what does that mean? Well it means that we trust in the character of God. And we've already seen this. If you've been with us in these first couple of weeks, we've already talked a good bit about the character of God.

We saw from the beginning if you're going to approach God the way Habakkuk did, you must believe that God is both just to do something about all this injustice, but you also must believe that God is gracious to welcome you as a sinner, even with your doubts and your questions. Last week we saw that God, while we can't always understand his ways, he is good and moral in all that he does. He's also merciful towards us in all that he does. We've already considered the character of God, but we see it really clearly here in Habakkuk's second coming to God. In verse 12, this is what Habakkuk says, "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."

Do you see here how Habakkuk is speaking about the character of God? He speaks about God's greatness. He says, "Aren't you from everlasting? Aren't you eternal? Aren't you infinite? Aren't you all-knowing and all-powerful? Aren't you sovereign over all things, God?" He recognizes that God is great and sovereign over all as we were just singing. That God is even over the godless nations. He's over the Chaldeans, the Babylonians. He's over all things, but yet he also sees that God is good. Notice he says, "You're not just from everlasting." He calls God my Holy One. God's holiness is certainly connected to his greatness, but it is also an expression of his goodness. That God is not sinful. God is not going to make mistakes. He's not going to mess up that all of his plans, all that he is overseeing is good. He is holy and good and right in all that he does.

And even in the most trying moment of his life, Habakkuk is still believing these things and expressing these things. Habakkuk is coming to God and declaring what he believes about God. Hear me this morning. What you believe about God is foundational to your life. Your theology, what you believe about God is important in every aspect of your life and probably maybe most important in the difficult moments of life. When life begins to try you, when the world is unjust and broken, what you believe about God will surely come out. This is why it is so important for us to have a clear understanding of who God is because it is what is going to be expressed in these moments.

I can remember when I was young in ministry, I was interviewing to be a youth pastor at a church. A land and I went and visited this church and we were meeting with a senior pastor and he was just telling me a little bit about his philosophy of ministry and preaching. He said when he preaches, he said he really tries to keep in mind that people really need things that are irrelevant topics to their everyday life. You know, they need stuff that's going to help them out on Monday morning. So he said he would focus on things like work and marriage and parenting and these kind of real topics. And he said to me, he said people don't really need a lot of theology. They need a lot of things that are relevant to their everyday life.

Now I can understand what he was getting at in some ways. Sometimes as a young preacher at a seminary, it would be tempting to just kind of turn the sermon into a commentary, just try to show people all that you had learned and know about the Bible. You do want to make sure that when you teach the Bible you're showing its application. But I would have to disagree with him in saying people don't need theology. What shapes the way that you work? What shapes the way that you conduct your relationships? What shapes the way you parent? Is it not what you believe about God? Our theology is foundational to all that we do and is especially foundational in the most trying times. What you believe about God will certainly be expressed when you get that diagnosis. What you believe about God will certainly be expressed whenever you look out and see the problems in our world.

For Habakkuk, he's expressing his faith because he believes something about the character of God, that God is great, that God is good, that God is his rock, he calls him. He says you are the rock of your people, we shall not die. Now some translations will say you shall not die, talking about maybe God's eternal nature. The Hebrew is a little hard to translate. Hebrew scholars that are smarter than me kind of disagree some. You'll see our translation says we shall not die. If that's a right translation, what Habakkuk is saying is because you are a God who is great and good, I know that even in your judgment you are going to be merciful. I know that even when we're taken into captivity, you're not just going to wipe us out. We shall not die. There will be a remnant over us.

Habakkuk believes this about God, he's expressing it about God, but he's not a perfect person and that he has no questions or doubts. It's his coming to God that expresses his faith, but he still has even what he calls here a complaint. What he basically says is how can a good God allow such evil to happen, not just amongst his own people, but now even in the world. Look at what he says in verse 13. He says, "You who are of pure eyes and 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?" Habakkuk has heard God's answer that God is going to bring judgment on the people of Israel by raising up the Babylonians. And Habakkuk's response is, "That's your answer?"

I mean, that's your solution? How can you who are holy, how can you who cannot look at sin or wrong allow this to happen? How can you stand by idly as all this injustice? How can we as your people who have been living sinfully get judged by people who are worse sinners than us?" This is Habakkuk's whole struggle, but notice it's an expression of his faith. He's coming to God because he believes these things about God's character. So he describes this whole situation.

We're not going to get into it too much, but the end of chapter one is Habakkuk kind of using a metaphor to talk about what's about to happen. He says, "God, you've basically left us alone as creatures, as fish, to be dragged out by somebody else." He's talking about the power of the Babylonians, to drag them out basically as helpless fish, and to be able to just take all the spoils and mercilessly kill them. He says, "These people, they just worship themselves, and they're false gods. They don't worship you. They don't honor you. So how can you allow all this to happen?" And he says, "How can Habakkuk be someone who is trusting in the character of God?" Well, you see, this is exactly why Habakkuk keeps coming to God. Because he trusts in the character of God. He believes that God is holy, that he is great, that he is good, that he is a rock. So he's wondering, "What are you doing in this moment?"

I'll tell you why I also don't think that Habakkuk has lost his faith. It's not just the fact that he is expressing something about the character of God, but he's also continuing to obey the call of God. This is our second aspect of what does it look like for us to live by faith. It is to trust in the character of God, and it is to obey the call of God. So Habakkuk brings this complaint to God. He says, "How can you allow these terrible, wicked people to come in and judge us? Sure, we're bad, but they seem worse." But this is what Habakkuk says in chapter 2, verse 1. He says, "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 says, "I'm going to do something. I'm going to go stand at my watchpost, and I am going to wait on the Lord and his answer."

How do you know Habakkuk has faith? Because he's waiting on the Lord. You want to know if you have a real relationship with God? The question would be, "Do you wait on the Lord?" Do you wait on the Lord when he's not doing what you would like him to do? Isn't that what we do for people that we love? Sure, there are certain types of relationships that when someone's not doing what they're supposed to do, we just cut it off. Business relationships, people we have contracts with. If they're not holding up their end of the deal, then we're not going to keep waiting on them. But what about somebody that you love? What about somebody you have a real relationship with? Wouldn't you wait for them, even in the midst of them not doing what you would want them to do or expect them to do?

Habakkuk's not walking away from God. He is waiting on God, and this is an expression of his faith. In particular, he's doing something. He's not just idly waiting. Do you notice he says, "I'm going to go to my tower. I'm going to go to my watchpost." What he is saying here is that he is going to be a watchman. You know, a watchman in a city was the person who went up on the tower so they could see way far off in the distance. They would be able to see if trouble was coming on the horizon, and they'd be able to come down and warn the people of the city. And you know in the Old Testament, there are times when the prophet of Israel is described as a spiritual watchman for the people. The prophet of God is meant to be one who is looking off and listening, hearing from God, and then coming and warning and expressing it to the people. We see this really clearly, a call of Ezekiel in Ezekiel chapter 3. God says to Ezekiel, "Son of man," as in verse 17, "I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me." See, similar language in the book of Hosea, that the prophets were spiritual watchmen for the people of Israel.

So what is Habakkuk saying? I don't think Habakkuk is saying, "I'm going to go off to my tower and pout until God gives me the answer that I want." He says, "I'm going to wait on the Lord," but he specifically says, "I'm going to wait as I watch. I'm going to wait and I'm going to listen. I'm going to take my post as this watchman, and I'm going to see what God has to say so that I can bring it back to the people of God." What is Habakkuk doing? He is obeying the call that was already placed on his life. He says, "I don't understand what God's up to, but I know what he has called me to do. He's called me to be a watchman over these people, and I'm going to be obedient to that call."

This is what happens when you trust the character of God. Sometimes you can't understand what God's doing, but because you believe who he is, you still obey him, even when you don't understand why. Sometimes you can't see the hand of God at work, but you know his heart, you trust his character, and so you're still obedient to him. I want to encourage you, if you're in a season of waiting, if you're in a season where you don't quite understand what God is up to in this world or in your life, continue to do what God has called you to do. Continue to be obedient to him. Even if you can't understand where his plans are taking you, just do the next right thing.

I don't know if you've ever seen the movie Frozen 2. I referenced Frozen some while back, and now because I've made a second reference, people will just assume probably I'm a huge Frozen fan, which maybe I am. Maybe some of our new first graders have seen Frozen 2. In Frozen 2, I won't try to spoil anything, but there's this time when Anna is going through a really trying moment. Olaf is melting, her sister Elsa is gone, and she doesn't know what's happening to her, and she can't really see how everything is going to work out. But she knows just what she needs to do next, and so she just commits to doing the next right thing.

That's what Habakkuk is doing here. Basically it says, "God, I don't understand what you're doing. I don't see how it matches up with the character that I believe about you, but I know what you've called me to do. So I'm just going to do the next right thing. I'm going to wait for you. I'm going to take my post so that I can hear from you and deliver your word to the people." That's exactly what happens. God answers Habakkuk. He tells him, "I'm going to give you this word so that you can give it to the people, and so that they too might believe my word."

This is the last step in what it looks like to live by faith here in Habakkuk 1 and 2. It is to believe the word of God. To believe the word of God. Sorry, I couldn't come up with a third C word to match there. We trust the character of God. We obey the call of God, but we believe the word of God. God answers Habakkuk. He gives him this revelation. It's clear that this revelation, this word, is not just for Habakkuk to have, so that he might understand what's happening, but it's for him to be able to share. This is what God says, "Lord, answer me. Write the vision. Make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it." God says, "I'm going to give you this vision, this revelation, and I want you to make it plain on tablets, so that he may run who reads it." We don't know exactly what that means. It might mean that the messenger of God who is running from town to town would be able to clearly read the message. It might mean that the person who is just kind of going by quickly would be able to read and understand this. So maybe he's written really big on tablets, almost like it's on a bulletin board for all people to read. But the message is, "Make it plain. Make it clear, so my people might hear and believe my word."

Don't you know this is not just true of the book of Habakkuk or what he's going to write on these tablets. This is true of all of God's word. The Bible says of itself that it is given to the people of God that we might know him. The Bible, though it can be tough to understand sometimes because we're so far removed from when it was written. There's lots of cultural language differences. It is clear. It is meant for us to know God, to be able to respond to him. It is made plain for us that we might trust. So many times it's not so difficult to understand the word of God. It's really difficult to believe the word of God, to trust the word of God. God speaks to this in verse 3. He says, "For still the vision awaits its appointed time. It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay."

God's about to give this vision. We'll see it next week as we get in farther to chapter 2. But before we even get to the vision, he just says there's going to be a time when it seems like maybe what I'm about to tell you is not going to happen. You're going to look around and you're going to wonder, "Why is God taking so long?" It's going to seem like there is some delay. But you have to believe that my word is true. You have to believe that my promises are sure. This is a third aspect, but it's really just a fleshing out of the other two.

How do we know the character of God? How do we know who he is, what he is like? Yeah, we can see it somewhat in creation, but it's revealed most clearly in his word. We know and trust the character of God when we believe the word of God. How do we know what it looks like to obey the calling of God? By reading his word, we know what he calls us to. We know what obedience looks like when we read his word and we believe his word. So this call to believe his word is an expression of our faith, is an outworking of the other two. Really, it is all the same message. That the righteous shall live by faith. But the Bible wants us to see, what I think the New Testament is helping us to understand, is that faith is not just an expression of the righteous person, but rather by faith, righteousness is received.

You could read this message in Habakkuk, you could see what it looks like to have faith in God, trust in his character, obey his calling, believe his word, and you could say, "Okay, if I'm a righteous person, then I will do those things, then I will have that faith." But what Paul comes along, the New Testament authors come along, they help us to see that our faith is not an expression of our righteousness, but rather it is by faith that we receive righteousness from God. All the way back from the beginning, Abraham believed and was counted to him as righteousness. For these people in the book of Habakkuk, it is when you have faith in God that you'll be counted righteous, when you trust in the character of God. We

talked about this a couple of weeks ago, but we see the character of God most clearly at the cross of Jesus Christ. You look at the cross, you know that God is just.

Yeah, you could look around the world and you could see all sorts of injustice and you could wonder how God allows all that to happen, but when you look at the cross, you have to know that God takes sin very seriously, because Jesus died for sin. You look at the cross, there's no way that you could feel within yourself that you are righteous in your own actions, to see that it was your sin who caused Jesus to die. But yet, at the same time, when you look at the cross of Jesus Christ, you see how gracious God is, how merciful he is. You see that not only does he judge sin, but he took the judgment of sin upon himself so that you might be saved. The New Testament authors are helping you to see this righteousness is what you receive from God when you believe the character of God, that he is just and he is gracious.

We obey the calling of God. When you trust in God, you would obey his calling on your life. Now that might look different for each one of us in different ways. God might call you to do certain things in your life based on where you are, where he's placed you, what relationships you have. But the Bible also makes it really clear that the calling for all of us is really the same, to confess our sin and to confess our faith in Jesus Christ, to recognize that judgment is coming, just like it was in Habakkuk's day, and that we are worthy to be judged. We should be counted among the sinful people.

To confess that, but to also trust that there is a salvation from this judgment, is not found in us keeping the law better or us expressing our faith more deeply or more truly in our lives, but it comes because Jesus has taken our place on the cross. We obey the calling of God by confessing our sin and trusting in Jesus. This is what it looks like to live by faith on a daily basis, for you to regularly confess your sin, recognize ways that you stray from God, ways that you rebel against him, and turn from that and trust that what Jesus has done has made you righteous before God, that your faith in the completed work of Jesus gives you right standing before God. Not just because you have enough faith that you're made righteous, but because of what Jesus has done, you receive righteousness through faith.

That empowers us to believe the word of God. Of course, we talk about believing the word of God, it means all aspects of it, including what has already come to be, including this good news of Jesus Christ. Let's just think about this word that is given to Habakkuk that you have to wait on. It's not yet come about, you're going to have to wait for this to come to fulfillment. Is that not where we still find ourselves as the people of God waiting for Jesus' return? To believe that the promises of God are always going to be upheld. They find their yes and amen in Jesus in what he has done, but also what he is going to do. To look around our world and to see that yes, there is injustice and there is sin and there is brokenness, but one day Jesus is going to return and he is going to right every wrong. And he's going to wipe away every tear from our eyes. To believe in the word of God is to wait for him to bring about the fulfillment of his word, to bring about the answer, the yes to all of his promises.

See, all this comes as an expression of our faith. And as we have this faith in God, this is how we receive the righteousness of God. It's not just that we are righteous people who live by faith, but we by faith have been made righteous. To trust God's character, to obey his calling, to believe his word even as we wait for his return. So this week I want us to consider what does it mean for me to live by faith? We've been considering up until this point the ways that we come to God with our doubts and questions, the ways that we trust God even when we can't understand. But as we come to the heart of this book, to recognize it as all of faith, we ask yourself, am I living by faith? Am I trusting in what God has done in Jesus for my righteousness? Am I walking in that daily?

Next week we'll see what the contrast of that is, but today we see the call to live by faith.