

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

08.03.2025 | How Long, O Lord? | Habakkuk 1:1-4 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to the book of Habakkuk chapter 1. It's a small little book towards the end of the Old Testament, it's not always that easy to find I can tell you if you use the Bible in the pew or the chair in front of you, it's on page 785. Hope over the course of this month, it will be a familiar place for you in the Bible and be easy for you to turn there. As Pastor Clark kind of already alluded to in just mentioning this series at the beginning of our service today There's many ways you could pronounce Habakkuk's name. I've heard scholars and other people who know a lot more than me pronounce it in many different ways So I don't know if it's just because I'm from South Louisiana or this is the right Hebrew way, but I say Habakkuk If somebody tells you that's wrong, tell them they don't know what they're talking about There's lots of different ways to pronounce the name of Habakkuk There's a lot of questions about some of the etymology of his name That's how we're going to go with it throughout this series.

I just want to say I'm thankful for the time to be able to have on sabbatical in the month of July Really thankful for a church family that cares about me, cares about my family, allows that space for time away To be able to have rest and refreshment with friends and family Thankful for a church staff and for volunteers and for a whole congregation that is supportive of that I just want to say really thankful for the time but also just very excited to be back with you And the chance to be able to walk through this book together over the month of August We're just coming off a series, Pastor Clark mentioned this as well But we've looked at the mission of the church For really most of the month of June and in July we were looking at what has God called us to as his people How have we as God's people been invited to and called into the mission of God?

As we come to the book of Habakkuk I think it will help to offer kind of a different perspective as we study God's word Because what we've been really considering is what are we called to do out in the world as God's people But the book of Habakkuk really helps us to consider what do we see when we look out into the world. The book of Habakkuk is very honest because so often when we look out into the world. What we see doesn't seem to match up with the mission of God So often when we look out into the world and we see what's going on Or maybe it's not even just out in the world but it's in our own lives What we're experiencing in the world doesn't seem to match up with the character of God. We know God is just but we see so much injustice in. We know God is loving but we don't necessarily see his love at certain times We don't always feel his love during certain moments of our lives. The book of Habakkuk is helpful in these ways It's a very honest book it brings these questions Habakkuk does Right to God in a very honest way but it's also a very helpful book because it doesn't just give us questions But it gives us answers, it gives us responses from God that he gives not just to this prophet But to his people in those moments but we'll find to us still today

So it's a pretty short book that we'll spend five weeks in Today we're just going to consider the first few verses which is the first time Habakkuk comes to God with his questions Habakkuk chapter 1 verses 1 through 4 It says the oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw "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"

I was talking earlier to the kids about asking questions And I just have to tell you as a kid, as a student, I wasn't one to always ask a lot of questions I don't know if you've ever been in the class, it happens sometimes I feel like in meetings at work and other places too But especially like in the classroom, what will often happen is a teacher will get done teaching And they'll say, "Now are there any questions?" And I don't know about you, but I was never the student to really raise my hand in those moments I don't know if it was a fear of looking dumb in front of other classmates I don't know if I just wanted this class to be over and I didn't want to prolong it with any questions Whatever my motivation was, I wasn't the one to raise my hand and ask questions in those moments Now often being a teacher on the other side of it these days, I recognize how ridiculous that is I mean a teacher is there to answer your questions The teacher wants you to ask those questions, they don't want those things to go unanswered But as a student, I would often not ask the question But I'll tell you what, I often did have questions And I was often very thankful for the brave soul that would raise his or her hand and ask the question that I was thinking Because then I didn't have to put myself out there, but I got my question answered

In many ways, Habakkuk is like that brave soul Who comes to God and who asks the questions that everyone else is thinking.

Habakkuk is quite different from many of the other prophetic books Many people point to its kind of unique structure Most of the time a prophetic book is God giving a message to a prophet And that prophet speaking the message to God's people Often times the prophetic books are quite monologues in the sense that it is a revelation given to a prophet And then spoken to the people of God But what you'll find is that God does reveal himself to the prophet Habakkuk and to the people of God But it comes not through a monologue but through a dialogue. It begins not with God revealing himself but with Habakkuk coming to God and asking these questions. In fact, one commentator put it Most prophets speak to the people on behalf of God But Habakkuk speaks to God on behalf of the people

Habakkuk comes to God asking these questions Voicing his doubts and his complaints, if you will And God does reveal himself. God does speak to him and it's not just an answer to Habakkuk It is an answer to the people of God Habakkuk is kind of the messenger to God, voicing these questions on behalf of the people And God's answer is for the people of God The book begins by saying this is the oracle that Habakkuk saw That word oracle is used in different prophetic books to be the message or the revelation that a prophet would receive It literally means a burden, a responsibility given to the prophet to share with those around him And we see that Habakkuk receives a revelation of who God is Answers to his questions that he brings to God And they are answers that are not just for the people of God in Habakkuk's day, although they certainly were but we'll see that they are answers for us even still today.

The book of Habakkuk, although it is thousands of years old, is very relevant for us today and what I want us to do is begin by considering what it looks like to live by faith In the midst of questions, in the midst of doubts, in the midst of difficult times By beginning where Habakkuk begins by seeing how he approaches the Lord, and I just want to ask a few questions of the text this morning I have three questions that I just want us to consider that I hope would help us to understand What Habakkuk is doing here, and how it gives us an example of what it looks like to live by faith Even in the most trying times

The first question I want to ask of the text this morning that will help us to understand what Habakkuk is doing Is first we need to ask, well what was Habakkuk experiencing? What was going on in Habakkuk's world? What was going on in his life, in the nation of Israel at this time? What was he seeing? What was he experiencing? What is the context that would lead him to approach God in this way? We see some details in these few verses, we'll just start with looking at verse 3 Habakkuk comes to God and he says, "Why do you make me see iniquity?" Word for iniquity is really a word for wickedness or evil And he says to God, "Why do you idly look at wrong?" Destruction and violence are before me, strife and contention arise So what Habakkuk is saying is that he looks around and all he sees is wickedness All he sees is injustice, he sees violence, he sees destruction, he sees strife, contention, fighting So just to give you a little bit of context of where Habakkuk is and what he's dealing with in this time, what he's experiencing Habakkuk was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah So you might know that after David and then Solomon, the nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms The northern kingdom was called Israel, the southern kingdom was called Judah Habakkuk lives about 600 years before Jesus was born That timeline puts it to where the northern kingdom of Israel has already fallen and been taken into captivity.

One of the reasons the northern kingdom of Israel went before the southern kingdom of Judah was because all of the kings All of the leaders of the northern kingdom of Israel were evil and wicked So the judgment to that northern kingdom came quicker The southern kingdom of Judah had many evil leaders, but it also had some good kings One of the good kings of Judah was a king named Josiah Josiah came to the position of being king, he stepped on the throne at the ripe old age of 8 years old. As an 8 year old he began to bring reforms and changes to the nation of Judah A nation that had been living wickedly, but he brought societal changes He brought spiritual renewal The law of God was rediscovered during his time and they began to live by the law of God They began to tear down idols and worship God alone

By the time Habakkuk comes into ministry it is shortly after Josiah has died And now one of his sons, Jehoiakim, is the king of Judah And he is reversing all the good that his dad has done He's not walking in the ways of his good king father, he is leading out in evil ways And he is known for being especially violent and wicked. Listen to just a couple of verses of how the reign of Jehoiakim is described in the Old Testament In 2 Kings chapter 24 verse 4 talking about Jehoiakim and

his leadership It says. Here's a king that takes the nation of God, the city of God, and he's filling it with innocent blood Innocent people being oppressed, being mistreated, even being. In fact, as best as we can tell, out of the whole nation in the time of Judah Jehoiakim is the only king to put a prophet to death This is what Jeremiah writes about in Jeremiah chapter 26 verse 23 It says And they brought him to King Jehoiakim who struck him down with the sword and dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

Habakkuk lives at a time where there is a wicked evil king Who is violent, who is promoting injustice And what we know from reading the Bible, and what you know if you just pay attention at all to history As at any time there is wickedness in leadership, it certainly is going to flow down to the rest of society That when there are those who are in charge of leading the people, those who are in authority Have given themselves over to evilness and wickedness and injustice It's going to happen all throughout the nation God has designed governments and leaders to promote good and to punish evil And when they get those things backwards, it affects everybody

Habakkuk is seeing this in his day in verse 4 He says. The word for perverted there really means bent What he says is what should be straight justice has been turned, it's been bent. The law that Josiah had rediscovered during his time and they began to live by was now paralyzed He's saying it has no power over the people Because we've got a king who is not just, now all of society is unjust Now those who seek to live in the ways of God, follow the commands of God, those who are righteous, they are surrounded They are oppressed, they are mistreated by those who are wicked. This is what Habakkuk is experiencing This is akin to William Wilberforce in England as he sees the atrocity of the slave trade He's crying out to God This is akin to Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany As he is seeing the genocide of millions of people He's wondering how could this be happening in our land It's akin to Martin Luther King Jr. As he lives in the Jim Crow South, seeing people mistreated. Treated as less than human because of the color of their skin He's crying out to God, how could this be in our time. Habakkuk is seeing the brokenness, the evil, the injustice of the world.

That's leading him to wrestle with the question that I think for the most part we will all wrestle with at some point in our lives. It's a question that's often referred to as the problem of evil. Basically the problem of evil often is put like this. That if there is a God who is in control of all things, who is sovereign We're just saying he's over all creatures, he's over all creation If he's really a God that's over all those things, if he's really that great And if he's a God who is really that good He loves people, he made them in his image, he cares for them. If that God really exists, then there would not be so much suffering and pain Sure, certain people would be experiencing the consequences of their action But children, innocent people, surely would not be suffering in the way that they are So since there is so much suffering and pain and hurting in our world Then that God must not exist

This is often referred to as the problem of evil And it's a question that has been around since the beginning of time really Habakkuk is really wrestling with it in his own day But Habakkuk is recognizing something, I think, even in the midst of this I think Habakkuk recognizes that the existence of evil in our world Actually shows the existence of God because to so many people today, they take the question of the problem of evil And they say if there is so much suffering and injustice, oppression, evil in our world Then God certainly can't exist But actually Habakkuk says that all of that is actually a sign that there really is a God I mean, notice what he says in verse 4 again He says, "The law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth" What Habakkuk recognizes is that there is a way that things are supposed to be In other words, he says there is a justice There is a right way for the world to be and right now it is perverted It is bent

In other words, there is a way that the world is supposed to be And it's because there is a God who designed it that way Habakkuk looks out the world and he sees that things are not right And it lets him know that there is one who has created the world to be in a right way The fact of the matter is, if there is no God, if there is no creator over you and I But we have really just kind of come out of happenstance and chance and evolutionary processes Then the world is really just as it should be in some ways I mean, if there is no God who has created things to be a certain way and this is just how things are Then this is just how things are. In fact, it's the fact that we look out at the world and recognize that things aren't right Actually point us to the existence. The fact that there is one who has created things to be right. We recognize in our world that there is right and wrong There is what we would call a moral law That implies that there is a moral law giver One who has created justice One who has created the world to be in a certain way And as we recognize and see that it is not in that way It actually points to the existence of the one who has originally created it In a good and

straight way, but it has become bent, it has become changed Which really means, and this is something that we talked about in the series of the mission of the church.

But it really means that we who do believe in that God that has created the world in a just way We who really believe that God has created the world to be designed to exist in a certain way Who really believe that all people are made in his image That we should be the most passionate about seeing justice in our world So often we as Christians, we are just like the rest of the world And we only care about injustice when it affects us. We care about wrongs that are happening to us But often if it's just people in another part of our city. People in the East Bay and not San Francisco People in another part of our country, people in another part of the world We don't care about it as much What Habakkuk is showing us is that actually Injustice in the world actually shows us that there is a true just way that things are supposed to be Because God created them that way and he's saying we should care about them We should not be apathetic to the injustice of the world But we should care about it and we should therefore respond.

That's the second question I want us to ask So we get this idea of what Habakkuk is experiencing in what he's wrestling with and now we have to ask the question Well then how does Habakkuk respond? That's the second thing I want us to consider of the text is How does Habakkuk respond when he sees the evil, when he sees the injustice When he sees the oppression of his day. Well as I've already mentioned Habakkuk is the prophet who comes to God and asks questions. He's a prophet who comes to God and voices his questions, his doubts, his complaints even. Let's go back and let's read verses 2 and 3 again Habakkuk says, "Oh Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?" "Or cry to you violence and you will not save" He's saying that God has been deaf to his prayers for salvation God's not listening to him is what he feels like Verse 3, "Why do you make me see iniquity? Why do you idly look at wrong?"

He's saying God is seeing all the same injustices that he is and yet is doing nothing about it This is some pretty bold words from Habakkuk. You know it would be one thing if this was the only type of prayer that we had in the Bible like this It would be one thing if you could just look at this and say, "Well that's Habakkuk, he's the doubting prophet He's the one who complains to God" But actually the Bible is filled with these types of prayers Quite a few of our Psalms are filled with this type of language In fact many people have drawn connections between Habakkuk 1 and Psalm 13 Listen to just the first verse of Psalm 13 and you'll see the connection Psalm 13 verse 1, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" These are the words of David, godly king of Israel, man after God's own heart

He's expressing the same prayer that Habakkuk is expressing How long are you going to ignore all this? How long are you going to ignore my prayers? How can you just be idle while all this is happening? The reality is God has preserved these prayers for us in scripture. God has kept these prayers in the Psalms, He's kept this prayer from Habakkuk for a reason. I think one of the reasons is He wants us to come to Him with our doubts and our questions. I think God in some ways wants us to pray these types of prayers. The reality is people have always wrestled with the problem of evil Whether it's looking out at the injustices of the world or experiencing something that just doesn't feel fair in your own life. Wondering why God is not answering your prayers We're going to have these questions, we're going to have these doubtsh, It could be influential in someone's life

Steve Jobs in his biography talked about how he was raised in the Christian church But about the age of 13 he really started to notice the sufferings and the evil in the world. He began to wrestle with this question of how could a loving God really be over all of this and allow this to happen. He calls it a pivotal moment of him kind of changing his views or walking away from this Christian faith that he was raised in This question is going to confront us all at certain times How are we going to respond? You see there's two often responses that I found One is you might call the religious response There's certain people who say listen when you come to those doubts and you come to those questions You got to just kind of have more faith. When you experience those kind of questions in your life You kind of just need to move past them, push them down and just have more faith in God Have faith that God is in charge and that he's good and that he loves you. That's not what Habakkuk is doing though That's not what David is modeling for us in the Psalms He's not just suppressing those doubts and questions, he is bringing them to God. Maybe this was the answer that Steve Jobs heard from the church, from a pastor at some point when he was wrestling with this Is we just need to trust God and move on.

But the other response that I think happens so often is kind of the opposite of the religious response. It's what you might call the secular response. This is the idea that if there is so much evil, if there is so much suffering in the world that I can't make sense of a God who is in charge and who is loving, then that God must not exist. Or if he does exist, I don't want to believe in him and I'm just simply going to walk away. That's not what Habakkuk is modeling for us either. I mean at no point throughout this book as Habakkuk is bringing these bold doubts and questions and complaints to God. Do you get any sense that he's about to walk away from God? At no point do you get any sense that he's not going to trust God or obey God or have faith in God. See David and Habakkuk in scripture is pointing us to a better way. That you don't have to have just some superficial shallow faith that ignores the questions and the doubts. But you also don't have to just walk away from faith altogether. There's actually an expression of faith that is wrestling with God.

This is bringing the hard experiences and questions of life to God. Bringing them to him in prayer. And what I hope is that that would not just be something that you experience in your own private prayer life of bringing these things to God. But I hope that we as a church would be conducive to this type of way. I hope that our community groups would be places where you could ask difficult questions. Maybe they don't always have an answer right then but it could just be prayed about, discussed. I pray that our discipleship groups would be places where you could express your doubts and not be shamed for not being a good enough Christian or not having enough faith. I pray that it would be encouraged that you would keep bringing those doubts and those questions to God.

I'm not saying we should always live with doubts and questions. I'm not saying that at some level living by faith doesn't mean we're going to have some questions unanswered because it will. But I mean when we have doubts and questions we should bring them to God. This is what God is telling us throughout his word, especially here in the book of Habakkuk. He's inviting us to bring us, bring him our questions and our doubts. Because coming to God even in those moments is an expression of faith. You see so many times we think it only, we only have faith when we don't have questions and doubts. But what the Bible is saying is coming to God with your questions and doubts is an expression of faith. I think that's why Habakkuk is responding the way that he does. And that's just the last question I want us to consider this morning. So we see what Habakkuk is seeing, what he's experiencing, we see how he responds.

But why does he respond in the way that he does? The third question I want us to consider, why does Habakkuk do what he does in this book? Why does he come to God with such bold prayers? Why does he voice his complaints, his questions, his doubts to God in this type of way? Well it's because he actually believes that God is who he says he is. Because he actually has faith that God not only exists but is the God that is described in scripture. He's wrestling with the fact that what God has said about himself and revealed about himself isn't matching up with what he is seeing at the current moment. So it's in faith that he comes to God. We'll see this a little bit more clearly in a couple of weeks. As we see the second time that Habakkuk comes to God. He calls him the Holy One, he calls him the Rock. But even here in this passage I think we see a couple of things about what he believes about God. Go back to verse 4 with me one more time. He says, "The law is paralyzed, justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted".

Habakkuk is a man who wants to see the law of God lived out. He's a man who believes that the ways of God are truly just. Habakkuk is a man who loves the Lord and loves his ways. And wants to see the ways the Lord lived out in this world. I think if Habakkuk were to believe that God was evil, that God was non-existent, that God was apathetic and didn't care. He wouldn't be coming to him in this way. Habakkuk is a child who has seen that his father is present. Seen that his father loves him. And in these moments he can't see that until he's coming and he's crying out for help. It's in Habakkuk's crying out that we see that he truly believes in God. He truly believes that God is there to hear him and to answer his prayer.

I've heard that in the nursery of an orphanage. The worst sound that you can hear is silence. They say that in the nursery of an orphanage it is silent when the babies, the young children, have learned that nobody is coming for them. And so they just stop crying out. Habakkuk is not silent. He's not stopped crying out because he believes that God is there and that he is present. He believes God is just. He's appealing to God's justice when he sees so much injustice in the world. But along with believing that God is just, he must also believe that God is gracious. I mean, I've not studied all the other religions of the world, but I know enough to say that many religions, you don't speak to a God this way.

In many religions, you don't come to God voicing these types of complaints and doubts. On some level, Habakkuk must have read David's prayers in the Psalms. He must have studied other parts of scripture. He must have known that God describes himself as patient and kind, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. For him to approach God in this way.

You see, he comes to God because he knows God is just. But also he's willing to come to God and speak in this way because I think he believes that God is gracious enough to handle his doubts and his questions and his bold prayers. I think this is why God keeps these passages in the Bible for us to believe these same things about God. When we look around our world, when we experience in our lives hurt and brokenness and injustice, we need to believe that God is just. We also need to believe that God is gracious. He's ready to receive our questions and our doubts. He's ready to receive us even when our faith isn't perfect. God keeps these passages in the Bible to remind us he did not remain faithful to his people because they were always perfectly faithful to him.

He's saying, "I'm not their Lord because they always put on a brave face and never had any questions. Because they always mustered up the courage and the faith in the hard times. He says, "I'm remaining their God because I am gracious and merciful. Because my covenant relationship with them is built on unconditional love. They have done nothing to earn this relationship. And so they will not lose it when they bring their doubts and questions to me. You have to believe that God is just and that he is gracious. If we're going to respond in the same way Habakkuk did.

And I just needed you to know this morning I think we have even more reason to believe that God is just and gracious than even Habakkuk did. That even King David did. Because the reality is, David and Habakkuk and those in the Old Testament, they had faith in God. But it was a faith that was longing for something. Longing for the anointed one, the Messiah, to come. Longing for the Savior to appear. But we live on this side of Jesus and his cross. We don't just long to see it happen. We have seen that Jesus has come. At the cross of Jesus Christ, we see God's justice and grace perfectly and fully displayed. At the cross, we see that God is truly just. That no sin will go unpunished. That no injustice will go unanswered. We also see that God is more gracious than we could have imagined. God's not only gracious enough to welcome in doubts and questions and complaints. But he is gracious enough to welcome in sinful people. All by the atoning work of Jesus. This would be a theme that we come to throughout this book.

But when you find yourself in a position like Habakkuk. Whether it's looking around our country, looking around our world and seeing injustice. Or feeling just the brokenness and the evil of this world in your own life. You've got to remember that God is both just and gracious. And you'll do so when you look to the cross. And you remind yourself of the gospel. And those words that we sang before coming to the word. That all I have is Christ is still true. And then when you believe that, it's not that it removes all the questions and doubts. But it gives you the place to come to him. This is living by faith. Habakkuk is showing not having the faith to never have doubts and questions. But in faith, coming to God in the midst of our doubts and questions. Believing that even when we can't see it. He is just, he is gracious. He is ready to welcome us.