

## SERMON TRANSCRIPT

08.24.2025 | Woe to Babylon | Habakkuk 2:5-20 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

You may be seated and if you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to the book of Habakkuk, chapter 2. Pastor Clark mentioned we've been going through this book of Habakkuk, considering what it teaches us to live by faith. It's a small book in the Old Testament, one that can be easy for us just to pass over, but hopefully you've seen, if you've been with us as we've studied this book, it's very relevant to our lives today. It's a book that teaches us how to live by faith. In fact, last week we left off in Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 4, and that was the statement that God made, that the righteous shall live by faith.

One of the reasons that Habakkuk is such a helpful book in teaching us to live by faith is because it's a very honest book. Throughout the book, we see some of the struggles or the difficulties of living by faith. Sometimes it can be really hard to live by faith because we don't see what God is doing in the world. We don't understand how he's working in our lives or in other places. We look out and all we see is problems and sin and injustice and oppression. What we experience in our own lives doesn't maybe always feel like God's loving kindness towards us, and so, like Habakkuk, we might have questions. We might have doubts. We might have complaints. Habakkuk is showing us that it looks like to live by faith is to keep coming to God in the midst of all those things, and God responds to Habakkuk. One of the things that we see throughout the book is that God's response to Habakkuk is not just for him or for the people of his day, but it's for God's people in all times and all places. I think we'll see that especially today.

This is God's second response to Habakkuk. He already responded to Habakkuk once back in chapter 1. We saw that a couple of weeks ago. And that was more of an immediate answer. God was saying, "Here's what is going on with my people in Israel, Judah, and here is what is going to happen next." And while that was applicable, the answer was a little bit more immediate to its context. What I think we'll find here is that God's answer is a bit more of the ultimate answer. It's a bit of a broader, more general answer, which means I think it is even more applicable for us today. It's an answer that teaches us a lot about what is going on in the world, why our world is the way that it is, the way that the world works, but it also gives us a glimpse of how God is working in the world. It's a passage that gives us guidance for how we live in a sinful and broken world by faith. It's also a passage that gives us comfort and hope as we live in this world.

So we left off last week in Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 4, in which God is describing those who are proud and contrasting them with the righteous who live by faith. We'll pick up in verse 5 where God continues to speak about these prideful, arrogant people. He's primarily describing the Chaldeans. Today we'll refer to them as the Babylonians, that's their other name. And as he's describing the Chaldeans or the Babylonians, he begins by talking about this arrogance that he began with last week in chapter 2, verse 4, but he continues to describe it.

So let's pick up Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 5, and we'll read through the end of the chapter. God says, "Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as sheol. Like death, he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples. Shall not all these take up their taunts against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, 'Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own.' For how long? And loads himself with pledges. 'Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the people shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities, and all who dwell in them. Woe to him who gets an evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm. You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples. You have forfeited your life. The stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond. Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity. Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing? The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink. You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision. The cup is in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory. The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beast that terrified them, the blood of man, the violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless

idols. Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, awake, to a silent stone, arise. Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver. There is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him.

There's a lot of poetic imagery in this passage that can be a bit confusing at times, but overall when you read the passage it seems to be pretty clear. This is a word of judgment, a word of warning, of coming judgment against the nation of Babylon. One of the things that's really important, I think, when you study this passage, to try to understand it and apply it to our lives, is that because of the role that Babylon played in redemptive history, in the Bible Babylon often doesn't just represent that nation of thousands of years ago, but it represents the kingdoms of this world. It represents the systems and structures of our world that oppose God's kingdom and go against God's design. So if you read the book of Revelation, it probably becomes the most clear, the book of Revelation, Babylon is used as this image for not just an old nation, an old kingdom, but for all the kingdoms of the world. So much so that in Revelation chapter 18, right before there's this great feast celebrating Jesus and his church coming together in the perfect, united marriage, right before that there is this celebration that Babylon has fallen. This proclamation goes forth that Babylon has fallen and there's great rejoicing in heaven and on earth. And the rejoicing is not because this nation from thousands of years ago or one particular kingdom has fallen, it's because Babylon has come to represent something more. See Babylon in redemptive history would come to the nation of Judah. They would destroy the city of God, Jerusalem. They would destroy the temple of God. They would take away the people of God into captivity and therefore they became known not just as one particular nation, but a representative of the kingdoms of this world, of the ways that the earthly systems oppose God and his kingdom. When you read this passage, don't just hear it as a prophecy for one particular nation. It was. The things that are prophesied in this passage came to be.

Babylon, although it was a powerful nation, conquering the whole known world at the time, eventually fell just as God is predicting in this passage. But beyond that, see what God is saying, not just about Babylon, but about the many Babylon's. See what he's saying, not just about one particular kingdom, but the kingdoms of the world. I've titled this message "Woe to Babylon" and it's not just about one particular country. It's actually about all of us. It's about the world that we live in. That's why I say I think this passage is really helpful. It gives us guidance for how you live in the midst of Babylon. Whatever kingdom of the world you find yourself in, this is a passage that offers you guidance for understanding how the world works. It's also a passage that gives you a warning about where Babylon and all the kingdoms of the earth will eventually end up.

But in the midst of that, it doesn't just give you guidance and a warning. It gives you comfort and hope. It's meant to give the people of God, back in the back of today and even still today, comfort and hope as we live in the midst of Babylon, as we live in the midst of a fallen and broken world. So I'm going to be able to walk through every verse, but I just want to show you how this passage offers us this guidance, this warning, this comfort and this hope. Let's begin with how this passage guides us. One of the things I think it's important to take away from this passage and the guidance that it offers is that it really speaks to the sinfulness of all people.

If you like to follow along in your notes, fill in blanks, that's the first one for you. The main thing that I want us to consider today is that in this passage, it's not just describing a judgment that is coming upon a kingdom from thousands of years ago. It's not just describing the problems of that particular nation. It is describing the sinfulness of all people. So when you read this passage, you'll notice that there's this repeated word of woe. Five times in this passage, there are woes to Babylon, woes to this people who are arrogant, who are prideful, who worship idols. And they describe some of the injustices and problems and wickedness and sinfulness of this country. So we won't go through all the woes, but let's just look at a couple to kind of get an idea of what God is speaking of here.

In verse 9, for example, God says, "Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm." God gives a warning of coming judgment to people, and he says it's for people who have evil gain. What he's saying is these aren't people who have accumulated money or possessions through good hard work. He is saying through oppression, through taking advantage of others, these people have built up a wealth for themselves, and now they use that wealth not to serve others or to love their neighbor, but to simply preserve themselves, take care of themselves, build up their own fortress, put their nest on high to protect themselves from all sorts of harm. He gives a similar woe in verse 12. He says, "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity." Here's not just about a particular person, you know, building up his own kind of house and nest, but it's about building a society, a

whole city is founded on iniquity and justice. There's violence. Blood is being used to build up the city. God's saying this is a warning against people who live like this. And you can read the other woes, and they have kind of similar fields. There's ideas of injustice and oppression, taking advantage of others. Even it gets into the misuse of the land. When he talks about destroying Lebanon, it's destroying the land, killing the animals that are there. It's really all about this use of places, of people, of all of creation, for one's own benefit. And it could be easy to be like Habakkuk and say, "Yeah, God, these are terrible people." I mean, isn't that what Habakkuk said? He said, "You're going to judge us with a more wicked people that come from Babylon?" You could read this passage and you could just think, "Man, these were terrible people who did terrible things back then." But in reality, when you start to think about these verses, they really describe many cultures, many societies, many kingdoms throughout history.

This summer we were in Louisiana visiting family, and while we were in New Orleans, we went to the World War II Museum. It's a really great museum. They've done a great job. It gives you just a really, I think, in-depth look at what was going on in the world at that time. You know, if you walk through the World War II Museum, you just kind of saw what was happening, it would be easy to think of these verses and think, "Well, that's Germany. That's Japan." I mean, these are nations who are killing people, who are stealing land, who are doing all sorts of injustice around the world. And you could think, "Wow, we were in America. We did some good stuff. We stopped all that evil in the world." But you could go to some other museums that would probably paint a different picture. Some museums that might remind you that, "Oh, you know, when we were building out our nation, we stole land from Native Americans and built cities on their blood." We were starting our country. We took people from Africa, made them slaves so that we could build up unjust wealth for ourselves. That's not to hate on our own country. I mean, just look around throughout history, throughout every kingdom, every society, you'll see these types of problems.

You see, it's so easy to look at other people, other political parties, other nations, and see the problem. But what this passage is helping us to consider is it's really a problem with all of us. It's really that the problem is not in any one society. It's in the human heart. It's the sinfulness of all people, and you really see it at the bookends of the passage. So you go to the middle of the passage, and it's these woes that describe the injustice that's happening. But if you look at the beginning of the passage, it's all about this pride and this arrogance and this selfishness. We saw it already in verse 4 last week, but just look at verse 5 one more time. He says, "Wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as sheol. Like death, he never has enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

I don't think God is just talking about the dangers of wine or alcohol here. He's actually describing people who are drunk on their own pride, people who are so self-focused that they do all these unjust things to gain for themselves. Isn't that true of each one of us in some way? Sure, I know you've never gone and stolen land from people. You've never probably built a city on injustice, but don't we so often build up wealth for ourselves to accumulate, to protect ourselves? Rather than first kind of thinking about what our neighbor needs, what our community needs. Are we so often okay sometimes with maybe unethical practices as long as they keep our costs down or benefit us? Are we so often willing to use people, whether it's in business or in other relationships, for our own benefit?

This pride, this greed, this desire for just ourselves, it permeates all of us. And the reason is, is because at the end of the passage, God starts by talking about this pride and this greed and this selfishness and he flushes out the way that it looks in Babylon, all these injustices, but he ends by speaking about idolatry. He talks about how these people are forming these idols that they are worshipping. Verse 18, he's talking about the way that they build these idols to worship themselves. He says in verse 19, "Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, awake to a silent stone, arise." Can this teach? "Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver and there is no breath at all in it." So all these people, they're worshipping these idols. You say, "Well, I don't worship a wooden idol. I've never formed something out of gold, so this isn't me."

But really idolatry is when we treat something other than God as ultimate. And it's the reason that we carry out the injustices that we do. Why do we oppress people, take advantage of people? Because we idolize money. We idolize power. Why do we build up for ourselves and not share with our neighbor or our community? Because we idolize comfort. You see, what this passage is describing, it's not just the problems in Babylon, it's the problems with all of us.

That's why it's really helpful guidance for living in this world because it shows you just a little bit how the kingdoms of this world, the true Babylon, of all this earth really operates, how it operates in your own heart. It's important to not just see this guidance, but to heed this warning. Because God is describing these things that are happening in Babylon, but He's also telling them what is going to come. Of these people who are pursuing their own greed, their own gain, He says it will only end in their shame. So here's the warning for us to consider, the shameful end of pride.

God says this is a proud people, arrogant, drunk on their own pride, accumulating more for themselves, conquering lands, taking over peoples. What's so interesting is that the more they're pursuing power, the more sure it is that they are going to end up as powerless. The more that they are pursuing their own glory, the more it seems that they are going to end up in shame. It happened historically in the nation of Babylon. God prophesies about it here. Just look at verses 7 and 8. He says, "Won't your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the people shall plunder you. For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities, and all who dwell in them." He says, "Yeah, you're powerful right now, Babylon. You've conquered nations. You're going to come and conquer the people in Judah. But just know others are going to raise up in power, and they are going to conquer you."

This happens. God prophesies it in the book of Daniel. It happens. This period of history, abalonea, Babylon raises in power, and then it falls, and the Medes and the Persians, they fall, and then Greece falls, and then Rome falls. All of these powerful nations, accumulating wealth, property, through unjust means, experiencing really great things in this world, and seemingly, pursuing glory in many ways, but it all ending in destruction and shame. And these cycles throughout history of these nations rising and falling is just a picture of the way that our sinfulness, our pursuit of our own pride and greed, always just ends in our own shame. This is what God says is going to happen. It's not just about another nation coming in and being more powerful. He actually says this is a judgment from him. That's the way he describes it in verse 16. He says, "You will have your fill of shame instead of glory." You're pursuing power, you're pursuing glory, but it's going to end in shame. "Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory."

This cup that God is talking about is his judgment against sin, his wrath against sin. What he is saying here is, yes, these things will happen throughout history, but it's all just a picture of the way that our pursuit of our own glory always ends in. The reason is, is because that's not what we were created to do, pursuing our own glory. That's not who we were created to be. You know, you were made in God's image with a purpose to bear God's image, and so give him glory. But the heart of pride, this arrogance that we see throughout this passage and throughout our lives, is this desire to not just be made in God's image, but to be God himself. We don't want to give God glory in our lives. We want to have glory for ourselves. And because this is not the way we were created to be, because we rebel against God's design, it's always going to end up in the same place. While we pursue glory, it all ends in shame.

God says, "This is the end of all sinfulness. This is the end of all people," which is a word of warning. But in some ways, it's also a word of comfort. When you think about what Habakkuk's whole problem with all this was, all this injustice is in the world, all these people are wicked, and they're all just getting away with it. God, what are you going to do about it? God's making it clear here, all the wrongs will one day be righted. All the people who build up for themselves unjust ways, who accumulate for their own glory, will one day end in shame. It's a word of comfort. But ultimately, the comfort is not just in what we hear about what is going to happen to a particular nation, but what we know is true about the world, and that is, even when we can't see it, God is still in control. So this word of comfort, so if you're going to live in the midst of Babylon, you kind of have to understand the way Babylon works. You have to understand the pride and the greed, the idolatry that pushes all these things forward. You have to see it in your own life. You have to heed the warning that all that's just going to end in shame, but you really don't just need that guidance. You need a word of comfort as you live in the midst of Babylon. And it's the comfort that God is still sovereign.

The sovereignty of God is clear throughout the book of Habakkuk, but it's especially true in this passage, and it's important for us to consider. In the midst of living in a broken world, we need to be reminded that God is still on the throne. That even when other nations, other kingdoms come into power, there is one true king who reigns over all. God speaks about this idolatry, and he contrasts himself with the idols that the people have formed. So go back to verse 19, we just read a few minutes ago about He says, "Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, awake, to a silent stone,

arise. Can this teach? The old is overlaid with gold and silver. There's no breath in it." He's saying, "These things you've created, they're dead. They can't speak to you. They can't teach you. They can't do anything for you. You've created them." But he contrasts that with himself. Verse 20, "But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him."

You see the contrast there? The idols that we create are silent. They're not living. But here's the one true living God who is not silent. And as he speaks, he commands us all to be silent before him. See, every other thing that you treat as ultimate, every other idol you have in your life besides God, will only ever demand more of you. You treat money as your idol. You'll never have enough money. Power, comfort, you'll always be pursuing those things. Why? Because these things have been created by us. They cannot give us anything. They only demand more of us. You see, God created each one of us. He created this whole world. Therefore, he doesn't need anything from us. God's actually the one thing that you could worship that would not demand more of you. Not asking you to bring him something because he already has it all.

Actually, what the whole book of Habakkuk is trying to show us is that all that he calls us to do is live by faith. He's not calling us to bring him anything except to humbly come to him and confess our dependence upon him. He says, "I'm in contrast with all these other idols you'll see in the world. I'm in my holy temple." That's kind of ironic language here. God's talking about the Babylonians that will come. It took a couple of decades or so probably after this prophecy came about, but eventually the Babylonians did come. And as they came into Jerusalem, they destroyed the temple, the dwelling place of God with his people at that time. But God says, even in the midst of that, "I still dwell in my holy temple." I think what God is trying to help the people of Israel, of Judah, to see in these moments is, even when the temple is destroyed, know that I am still reigning as king. Even when my physical presence with you is no longer there, know that I am still here and I am still with you wherever you go. He's saying, "I am still sovereign overall, even the times when it may be hardest for you to believe it."

I don't know what the temple being destroyed would be like in your life. You know what I mean when I say that? Like for the people of that day, for the temple to be destroyed, they really probably felt like God had abandoned them. They really probably felt like God wasn't in control of all things because these other nations were more powerful, able to destroy the dwelling place of God. But God's reminding them that even in those moments, he's still in control. For you, maybe the temple being destroyed is losing your job. Maybe it is receiving a diagnosis about your health. Maybe it is just looking out at the brokenness of our world. Maybe it's something very close to you, like a relationship. Maybe there might be moments, as we've just been talking about throughout the book of Habakkuk, where you have real doubts and questions about whether or not God is still in control. God gives us this word to end this response to Habakkuk to let us know, even in the times when it may not seem like it, "I am still dwelling in my holy temple. I am still reigning over all things. I'm not silent. In fact, I call for all to be silent before me."

God's reminding us of his sovereignty, and that gives us comfort. That even when you can't see what he's doing, you know that he's there. You said before, even when you can't see his hand, you know his heart, you know his character, you know that he's in control. And you know that he's working all things together for a purpose. This is the last word that I want to give us today, which is this hope that we need. It's a comfort to know that God is still in control, even when you're living in the midst of Babylon. But it's also good to know that all of history is headed somewhere. And God says it is all coming to a place where he brings salvation to the whole creation. All things are made new. And so the last word of hope for us is the salvation from God. Even as we live in the midst of a broken world, we experience the sinfulness of our own lives and the people around us. We know God's in control, but we also long to see a day which the world does not like this anymore.

And God gives us a promise of this in this passage. He says, yes, what's going to happen to the nation of Babylon is they're going to rise up in power, but then they're going to fall. And that's actually going to happen throughout human history. That's just the way the world works. That's the way pride works. It always ends in shame. But these just cycles of nations falling are all just a glimpse that one day, the true Babylon, one day, all the kingdoms of the earth will come to the end and there will only be one kingdom that remains. And that is the kingdom of God promises this in this passage, particularly in verse 14. He says, there will be a day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. One day, it will not be blood that fills the streets. It will be the glory of God that runs

through the streets. It will not be oppression and injustice all throughout the world. It will be God's righteousness and justice all throughout the earth.

God is saying one day he will answer that prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. One day his kingdom will come. One day his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Glory of the Lord will be all over the world as all things are made new. The question is, what does that mean for us as sinful people? I mean, yes, it's great that God's kingdom is glory is going to be all around the world, but what about us who pursue our own glory? What about us who find ourselves not just in Babylon, but living as the people of Babylon so often? Worshiping other things, pursuing our own self-centered desires. The hope is not that we will get to be in God's kingdom if we just are good enough, or if we stand against Babylon strong enough, or if we do enough right things in this world. The hope is that there is a salvation that comes from God our King that has been given by Jesus Christ our King, because he took the opposite path that we all take.

This passage is describing the path of sin, which is really a pursuit of our own glory that ends in shame. But don't you know when Jesus provided salvation for us, he took just the opposite path? Jesus was fully glorious. God the Son, eternal, in heaven. But yet, he left heaven, leaving the glory of heaven to come down to earth, to take on flesh and to dwell among us, to live as we live. But not just to live, but to die, and particularly to die a shameful death. You see, we all pursue glory that ends in shame. Jesus left glory, pursuing shame on our behalf. And in doing so, he conquered sin and death and all that plagues us as people in our societies. He rose again and now reigns as King, and he welcomes all into his kingdom those who had trusted him by faith, as we've been talking about in this book.

But all those who worship him as King are clothed in his glory. Jesus drank that cup, the wrath of God that is described in this passage, so that we, who partake of the cup of his blood and the new covenant, we will be with him for all of eternity. We will get to share in his glory. This is the salvation that we already have. As you live in Babylon, as we live in the kingdoms of this world, we belong, if you trust in Jesus as your King, to a new kingdom. You begin to live like it, and you begin to have hope that the one who came to establish his kingdom, the one who laid down his life to welcome us into his kingdom, will one day return. He will consummate his kingdom. He will bring Babylon and all the injustices and all the sin and all the wickedness to a final end, and his glory will fill the earth. Let that be your hope this week.