



gracefellowship

Series: Summer Shorts
Date: July 9, 2023

Title: Complaining to God
Passage: Habakkuk 1-3

Scripture: Habakkuk 3

Over the next couple weeks we are going to explore some of the smaller books of the Bible as we do a series called “Summer Shorts: Small Books with Big Messages.” Today we are going to start with Habakkuk- a book probably half of us have never read before! Or know how to find! So, if you are familiar with the book of Jonah, go there and turn right- Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk...and you’re there! In my Bible it’s on page 935, which probably doesn’t help you at all!

Have you ever brought up a complaint to God? You’re probably far too spiritual for that! Or someone told you that you aren’t allowed to talk to God that way. But I have to tell you that I’ve been frustrated with God before...actually, I’ve been frustrated with some things recently in my personal life. We can look around at world and recognize that things are not good. There is so much injustice in the world. So much hurt. And in times when we recognize the brutality and suffering of our fellow man, something stirs inside of us to ask God where He is and what He’s doing about it. Or better yet, why He doesn’t seem to be doing anything about it!

In the 7th Century BC, a prophet named Habakkuk wrote his prophecy- but interestingly it’s not a message he received from God to give to the people. Habakkuk wrote to God with a complaint. Typically God would come to a prophet and have a word to give to His people. In this instance, Habakkuk almost seems to write on behalf of the people to call God into question. The topic of Habakkuk’s complaint is the violence and injustice he sees all around him.

Most likely Habakkuk’s life spanned from the time of King Josiah, who implemented reforms in Israel after years of wicked kings ruling. King Josiah helped lead a revival in Israel and reinstated Temple worship. But following Josiah more wicked kings came to power and Habakkuk witnessed the fall of Israel once again into a state of rebellion and idol worship. And as the people of God rebelled and the kings and leaders became more wicked and corrupt,

Habakkuk cries out to God asking why He doesn't intervene. Let's pick up the text and see what Habakkuk has to say.

:: Habakkuk 1:1-4

1 The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

**2 How long, Lord, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?**

**Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?**

**3 Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?**

**Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.**

**4 Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.**

**The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted**

Have you ever asked similar questions to God? Why, God, if you're so good and so powerful, do you let violence and injustice and corruption abound? David was pretty famous for asking, "Why do you let the wicked succeed?" That refrain is found throughout the Psalms.

Injustice isn't a new thing in our world. It has existed in every generation, in every nation, in every life to some degree. So, there is a natural inclination for us to go to the One who we believe is over all the earth and say, "Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?"

Here's what we want...or what we think we want:

- Immediate retribution for evil acts.
- Swift punishment for everyone who harms others or takes advantage of others, abusing their power and position.

In a few minutes I'm going to tell you why you think you want that, but you don't really want that! For now, Habakkuk is asking the question we probably all have asked at one point or another.

And here's God's response:

:: Habakkuk 1:5-6

**5 "Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.**

**For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told.**

**⁶ I am raising up the Babylonians,
that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth
to seize dwellings not their own.**

This is one of those places in Scripture I've heard people completely use out of context. They will take verse 5 and make it sound like God is about to do something incredible and so good that we won't even be able to believe it! But they never get to verse 6...

God's answer to the question, "Why do you allow wrongdoing and injustice," is, "I'm raising up the Babylonians!"

I bet you didn't see that coming! Habakkuk's complaint is that violence and injustice are everywhere he looks, and God's answer is: "You haven't seen the half of it! I'm about to send Babylon in to conquer you."

Then God describes Babylon's military machine to Habakkuk, just in case he wasn't aware of what was coming.

:: Habakkuk 1:7-11

**⁷ They are a feared and dreaded people;
they are a law to themselves
and promote their own honor.**

**⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards,
fiercer than wolves at dusk.**

**Their cavalry gallops headlong;
their horsemen come from afar.**

They fly like an eagle swooping to devour;

⁹ they all come intent on violence.

**Their hordes advance like a desert wind
and gather prisoners like sand.**

**¹⁰ They mock kings
and scoff at rulers.**

**They laugh at all fortified cities;
by building earthen ramps they capture them.**

**¹¹ Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—
guilty people, whose own strength is their god."**

This is near the beginning of the Babylonian Empire as it is rising to power, but they already have a reputation for being ruthless and destructive. God has chosen this vessel to come against Israel and bring judgment to them.

And that leads us to Habakkuk's second complaint!

:: Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

Lord, are you not from everlasting?

My God, my Holy One, you will never die.

**You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment;
you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish.**

**¹³ Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.**

Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?

**Why are you silent while the wicked
swallow up those more righteous than themselves?**

**¹⁴ You have made people like the fish in the sea,
like the sea creatures that have no ruler.**

**¹⁵ The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks,
he catches them in his net,
he gathers them up in his dragnet;
and so he rejoices and is glad.**

**¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net
and burns incense to his dragnet,
for by his net he lives in luxury
and enjoys the choicest food.**

**¹⁷ Is he to keep on emptying his net,
destroying nations without mercy?**

1 I will stand at my watch

and station myself on the ramparts;

I will look to see what he will say to me,

and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

Habakkuk recognizes what God is doing; he says, "You have appointed them to execute judgment; you have ordained them to punish." He knows that Israel has strayed from God, but he still appeals to God's holiness and purity and says, "Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

Then at the end of his complaint, Habakkuk really digs his heels into the ground as he demands God to answer him.

He basically says, "I'm going to climb a watchtower and station myself on a fortified stand and I'm not moving until God comes and gives me an answer to this complaint."

Habakkuk didn't like the first answer he received from God, so he doubled down! Here he is talking about violence and injustice and God's answer is I'm going to send more violence and injustice your way! That leads Habakkuk to complain again: how can you let these things happen? You tolerate treachery

and you're silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves.

Habakkuk views the Babylonians as being wicked and Israel being righteous. And this is probably where most of us find ourselves when we look at the injustice going on in the world.

- Everyone else is wrong- I'm right.
- They are bad- I'm good.

For a second time God is going to answer Habakkuk. He doesn't have to, but He graciously replies to the complaints Habakkuk is launching towards Him.

:: Habakkuk 2:2-5

² Then the Lord replied:

**“Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.**

**³ For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end
and will not prove false.**

**Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come
and will not delay.**

**⁴ “See, the enemy is puffed up;
his desires are not upright—
but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness—**

**⁵ indeed, wine betrays him;
he is arrogant and never at rest.**

**Because he is as greedy as the grave
and like death is never satisfied,
he gathers to himself all the nations
and takes captive all the peoples.**

God tells Habakkuk that the things He is doing are still off in the distance and the motivation of the wickedness in the world is pride- “See, the enemy is puffed up.” So God tells Habakkuk that the answer for all who follow Him and desire to be righteous is to live by faith. We are called to be people of faith, but are we really living in a way that is faithful to God's calling on our lives?

Here's where God really starts to turn the story and make things more uncomfortable- just when Habakkuk thought that wasn't possible! We are going to read a lengthy section of Scripture here and then I'll try to make sense of it for us.

:: Habakkuk 2:6-20

6 “Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying,

**“Woe to him who piles up stolen goods
and makes himself wealthy by extortion!
How long must this go on?’**

7 Will not your creditors suddenly arise?

**Will they not wake up and make you tremble?
Then you will become their prey.**

**8 Because you have plundered many nations,
the peoples who are left will plunder you.**

For you have shed human blood;

you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

**9 “Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain,
setting his nest on high
to escape the clutches of ruin!**

**10 You have plotted the ruin of many peoples,
shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.**

**11 The stones of the wall will cry out,
and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.**

**12 “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed
and establishes a town by injustice!**

**13 Has not the Lord Almighty determined
that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire,
that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?**

**14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.**

**15 “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors,
pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk,
so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!**

16 You will be filled with shame instead of glory.

Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed!

**The cup from the Lord’s right hand is coming around to you,
and disgrace will cover your glory.**

**17 The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
and your destruction of animals will terrify you.**

For you have shed human blood;

you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

**18 “Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman?
Or an image that teaches lies?**

**For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation;
he makes idols that cannot speak.**

**19 Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’
Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’**

Can it give guidance?

**It is covered with gold and silver;
there is no breath in it.”**

**²⁰ The Lord is in his holy temple;
let all the earth be silent before him.**

As we read this and as Habakkuk hears God talking about these atrocities, who is he thinking about? Babylon, right? That's who we've been focused on. But then there is a second way to look at this: all the evils and injustices God focuses on here are the same accusations He's made against Israel through the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Habakkuk comes to see that Israel isn't more righteous than Babylon. They have their own violence and injustices to deal with. They have their own sin that deserves punishment. The same idolatry and empirical ways of Babylon are present in Israel.

Earlier this morning I said that we think we want God to act in the world with immediate justice and retribution, but we don't really want that. And here's why:

We are always quick to point out the injustice of others without recognizing the injustice in our own lives.

So, do we really want God to judge injustice immediately and harshly? Or just the injustice we see in others? It's good that God is the judge of all the earth and we are not! God is patient where we would not be. God does things in ways we would not.

This is one of the hardest things about being a Christian, honestly- when we are questioned about these things and when the world asks us the same questions Habakkuk is asking, often our best answer is often, "God is in control and He will make it right in His timing." That sounds so lame, doesn't it? It sounds like a cop-out.

- "Why doesn't your God do something about all the evil and suffering and injustice in the world?"
 - o "He will! He's just waiting for the right time!"

And while it may sound like a lame reason to the non-believer, there is good reason for God to be so patient and to let things play out. Look at what Peter says in the New Testament:

:: 2 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

¹⁰ This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority.

2 Peter 3:3-15

³ Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

⁴ They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed.

⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives

¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

On the day of judgment God will act in a way that will bring all injustice and all violence and all wickedness and all evil to an end. He is patient in the hopes that more people might turn away from these sinful ways and embrace His salvation. Our responsibility in the meantime is to live holy and godly lives as we wait for the Day of the Lord's return. Leave justice up to God in His perfect time.

Where there is pain and violence and injustice and suffering, God is not indifferent or insensitive. He is not idol. He is working specific plans to restore the world.

God isn't bent on destruction- He is focused on salvation. This is where Habakkuk lands. The last time we heard from him he was digging his heels in and demanding God give him an answer for all the evil he saw around him. Now that God has spoken Habakkuk has a new perspective. We aren't going to read all of chapter 3 since we heard it read to us this morning, but I do want to focus in on a few aspects of the chapter.

:: Habakkuk 3:2

**² Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy.**

I hope we get to the same place with God that Habakkuk did- once He speaks, it settles the matter and we back off our complaints in order to embrace His plan. Habakkuk knows that Babylon is coming and there is nothing he can do about it. So he just asks God in the wrath to come to remember to be merciful.

As Christians, we throw ourselves on the mercy seat of Jesus daily. We receive mercy from God because Jesus took the wrath of God we deserve. You and I will not be punished for our own sin and injustice and wickedness and evil because Jesus took our place. Mercy has stepped in and made a way for us to escape God's judgment!

The last passage of the book is one of the most beautiful poems or songs in all of Scripture. Some of us have leaned on these ideas in times past in our lives. Some of us need the power of these words right now. Others of us will need this at some point in the near future!

Knowing that Babylon is coming with a vengeance, Habakkuk writes:

:: Habakkuk 3:17-19

**¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
¹⁹ The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.**

For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

No matter what pain, hardship, injustice, violence, bullying or hate you are faced with in life you can rejoice in the Lord and be joyful in God because He has saved us and will save us! He is our strength to endure whatever comes our way. It's alright to raise your complaints to God; but make sure you ultimately land in a place of trusting His sovereignty as you wait on Him to make all things right in His perfect timing.