

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

Habakkuk | Sovereign God, Unshakeable Happiness

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INTRO

- When I was about 12 years old, my dad took me to an event called **Promised Keepers**, and I had the opportunity of listening to **Billy Graham** preach. I doubt I'll ever forget that experience.
- I also remember the first time I heard **John Piper** preach live. It was absolutely powerful.
- God has blessed this country with many **powerful preachers** (e.g., Tony Evans, Francis Chan, David Platt, John Piper, John MacArthur, J.D. Greer, Stan Weese). And it is quite an experience to hear them preach and to listen to them pray. But have you ever wondered what it would be like to hear them pray in private?
 - These men pray with power and boldness and conviction from the pulpit. But what do they sound like when they are praying behind closed doors?
 - We might be tempted to think that it's a picture of heaven every time they pray.
 - The clouds part. The sunbeams fall across their body. Angels are singing. Their face begins to glow like the sun. And they leave their time of prayer with supernatural wisdom and strength and boldness and clarity.

One of the things that makes the book of Habakkuk so special is that it takes us behind the curtain, and we get to hear what it sounds like when a prophet prays in private.

- When the gathering is over. When the crowds are gone. When it's just a man and his God.
 - What does it sound like when this prophet prays?
 - More specifically, what does it sound like when he prays in the midst of hard times?

PRAY

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw.

~ Hab. 1:1

This is all we know about the prophet Habakkuk – his name!

- So right away, we are reminded that God loves to use the ordinary, unknown people in the world to share His Word with those who need to hear it.
 - Amos was a farmer
 - Micah was probably a gardener
 - Daniel was an exiled foreigner
 - Jonah was scared to death
 - Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk are almost entirely unknown...
- If you feel unqualified or unworthy or too ordinary to be used by God – you are exactly the kind of person that God loves to use.

In 1:2–4, we hear Habakkuk pray to God about this burden that he sees.

I. **Habakkuk's First Prayer**

READ Hab. 1:2–4

Habakkuk looks across a nation that is covered in sin:

- He sees iniquity, plundering, strife, contention
- The law seems powerless
- Justice never seems happens
- And he is surrounded by wicked people.

And it doesn't feel to him like God cares at all.

- It feels like God is
- It feels like God doesn't care
- It feels like God's plan isn't working (i.e., "the law is powerless")

Habakkuk is looking at the world around him, and what he sees weighs heavy on his heart. And so, he turns to God in prayer and says...

"I don't understand." | "This doesn't make sense."
"Where are you?" | "Why do you feel so distant?"

Q. How often do we have these same kinds of thoughts?

Two things stick out to me as I listen to Habakkuk's private conversation with God:

1. *His Humanity:*

- a. This prophet doesn't have all the answers.
- b. In this moment, he is struggling to trust that God is in control
- c. He's struggling to believe that God is good.

2. *His Honesty:*

- a. As he prays, Habakkuk isn't just repeating words that he's heard other pray; he isn't just parroting the Christian company line; he isn't saying things that he thinks God wants to hear...
- b. He's taking his doubts and his frustrations and his emotions, and he is honestly giving them to God.

➤ **GOD'S RESONSE:** God responds to Habakkuk's prayer in 1:5–11.

READ Hab. 1:5–11

Q. How does God respond to Habakkuk's accusations that God isn't doing anything about the wickedness all around him?

A. He says, "I am doing something. I'm raising up the Chaldeans (i.e., Babylon) to discipline My people.

ILL. Dad using a giant wooden spoon as the instrument of my discipline 😊

Babylon was “*the wooden spoon*” that God was going to use to discipline His wicked, rebellious people.

- Where was God when His people were destroying the land with their sin?
 - He was raising up the Babylonian empire to discipline His people.

We could replay this question & answer throughout the entire Bible.

- Where was God when the sinfulness of mankind had covered the world in the OT?
 - He was with Noah as he nailed wooden beams together to build an ark that would save God’s people as He unleashed a global flood to destroy the rest of humanity.
- Where was God when the sinfulness of mankind had covered the world in the NT?
 - He was carrying a cross up a hill outside Jerusalem where He was nailed to wooden beams in order to save God’s people from the sin that would have destroyed them for eternity.

What Habakkuk didn’t realize (or what he had forgotten) is that from the very first moment that sin entered into our world, God has always been at work to punish the sin & to save His people.

Though Habakkuk couldn’t see what God was doing, God tells him to keep watching (v. 5).

- You *will* see.
- And when you see it, you’re going to be “utterly astounded” (v. 5).

II. **Habakkuk’s Second Prayer**

Instead of satisfying his questions, God’s answer only creates more questions for Habakkuk.

As hard as it was to understand why God didn’t appear to be doing anything about the sinfulness of His people, it was even harder for Habakkuk to understand why God would use BABYLON to punish His people. Babylon was even WORSE than God’s people – at least as far as Habakkuk was concerned.

Read Hab. 1:12–13

“This doesn’t seem right.” | “This doesn’t make any sense.”
“God, I don’t get it.” | “It’s not fair.”

He is working through what he knows to be true about God:

- He is from everlasting. He is holy. He is pure
- He has appointed the wicked for judgment.

And he can’t figure out how a God like this could use a pagan nation to discipline His children. It doesn’t seem fair. It doesn’t seem right. It doesn’t feel compatible with His character.

How often do we have similar thoughts when we look at the world around us...or when we look at our own life?

- Once again, Habakkuk gives us a glimpse of what it means to come before God in our fallen humanity and to be honest with Him in prayer.
- And, once again, God answers Habakkuk's prayer. We read God's answer in **chapter 2**.

But before we hear how God answers Habakkuk, we read this really comical verse about Habakkuk's listening skills in **2:1**.

Read **Hab. 2:1**

"I know God is going to respond to my accusations."

"And so I need to think about what I'm going to say back to God after He responds to me."

Have any of you ever been in a conversation like that? 😊

- Maybe you are having an argument with one of your friends, but you have this sense like they aren't really listening to you when it's your turn to talk. Instead, it feels like they're just using that to think about what they are going to say when you're done talking?
- **Maybe you find yourself in the kitchen with your spouse, and you're having a disagreement about something...**and it's a disagreement that you really want to win. And so give the best argument you've got, and then while she is responding (instead of listening to what she has to say) all you're really thinking about (while she is talking) is how you can make your argument stronger and what you're going to say as soon as she's done talking.
- Maybe your parent is calling you out on something you've done wrong, but while they are talking to you about it, all you are really thinking about is what excuses you are going to give.

Habakkuk has some growing to do when it comes to listening to what God has to say.

- And he does grow!
- **GOD'S RESPONSE:** I will punish Babylon for her sins, and (even in the midst of massive destruction) I will save My people.

In **chapter two**, God responds to Habakkuk's questions by saying that, yes, He knows how wicked Babylon is. He also knows how wicked Judah is. And God will not let anybody go unpunished when they stand in rebellion against Him.

God gives 5 woes (5 judgments) to those who choose their sin instead of Almighty God.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| i. Greed & aggression | (2:5–8) |
| ii. Exploitation and extortion | (2:9–11) |
| iii. Violence | (2:12–14) |
| iv. Immorality | (2:15–17) |
| v. Idolatry | (2:18–20) |

God says, “I **see** ALL OF IT, and I’m going to **deal** with ALL OF IT.”

- I’m going to use Babylon to deal with the sins of Judah.
- But then I will also judge Babylon for her sins.

But, in the midst of God’s judgment for sin, He makes a way for His people to be saved.

Read Hab. 2:4

This verse is the seed of what will eventually become one of the biggest trees in Christian theology: *justification by faith*.

- **Justification by faith** is the Biblical teaching that we aren’t declared just (or righteous) by God because of anything we have done. Our hearts are wicked and deceitful (**Jer. 17:9**), and (on our own) the most righteous thing we have ever done is nothing more than a filthy rag when compared with God’s holiness (**Isa. 64:6**). We will never experience life with God if we try to earn it through our good works.
- Rather, we are declared to be just (or righteous) by God when we come to Him in faith, trusting in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of our sins and the source of our righteousness.

The Apostle Paul gives one of the greatest explanations of this doctrine in the book of Romans, and he begins by pointing to this verse in Habakkuk. He writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,
for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,
for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;
As it is written, “*The just shall live by faith.*”
~ **Romans 1:16–17**

Church, God’s response to Habakkuk’s prayer is:

1. That He sees every single sin, and not one sin will go unpunished. This means that if you have some secret sin in your life that you think God doesn’t see – or that God doesn’t care about...and you think you’re getting away with it... **you’re wrong**. God will deal with your sin.¹
2. God has made a way of salvation for His people. Your life will never be good enough to save you from God’s wrath for sin, but the good news is that Jesus Christ has already taken God’s wrath for you. His life was good enough, and then He offered His life as a sacrifice on your behalf. The result of Jesus’ perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection is that whoever puts their faith in Jesus (whoever believes in Him; whoever trusts in Him alone) is declared righteous, forgiven, perfect...they are declared “just” in God’s eyes.

The wicked die by their sin, but the just live by faith.

¹ It’s not a question of if. It’s a question of when and how.

The point of these first two chapters is to say that, regardless of what the world looks like from our vantage point, God is still in control of everything. Even in the darkest days of Judah's history, God was working out His plan for judgment and for the everlasting redemption of His people.

Even when it felt to Habakkuk like God was lost somewhere in outer space, the truth (that Habakkuk would come to learn & to love) is that God was still working all things together for good – for His glory and for the good of those who are called according to His purpose.²

III. **Habakkuk's Final Prayer**

And so the book ends with a final prayer where Habakkuk comes, not only to trust in God's sovereignty, but to rejoice in it...no matter the circumstances.

Read Hab. 3:17–18

God brought Habakkuk to a place where his happiness was no longer determined by the circumstances in his life.

Blaise Pascal once wrote that every single one of us is looking for happiness. Everybody has this longing deep in their soul to be happy, and so every single one of us is looking for happiness. We just look for it in all kinds of different places.

*All men seek happiness. This is without exception.
Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.*

...

This is the motive of every action of every man.

~ **Blaise Pascal** ~

Enneagram: some look for happiness...

- In meaningful relationships (2)
- In their success (3)
- By being unique (4)
- In their intellect (5)
- By creating a sense of security (6)
- Through unrestricted pleasure (7)
- Through being independent (8)
- By seeking peace and harmony (9)
- By trying to make the world a better place. (1) **Habakkuk** wanted to see justice, and in his first prayer his happiness was totally destroyed by the fact that there seemed to be no justice in the world. In his second prayer, his happiness was destroyed because things didn't seem to be fair.

² Romans 8:28.

The problem with trying to find our happiness in the world around us is that this world is broken.

- People are sinners
- Health & success is temporary
- Security is an illusion
- Pleasure doesn't satisfy
- Loved ones die
- And our circumstances are always changing

So, as we look for happiness in the world around us, you will always struggle to be happy.

Q. So, what happened with Habakkuk?

How does he go from these feelings of frustration, confusion, anger, and hopelessness in the first two chapters...to joy and rejoicing at the end of the book – when none of the circumstances around him had changed.

A1. God helped Habakkuk to see (like, really see) that God is always in control of everything that happens at every moment in history. There has never been a moment where the circumstances in our lives have been outside of God's control. He has all power and all authority over all things at all times. The word for this is "Sovereign." As Habakkuk prays his final prayer in chapter 3, we hear him reflecting on the sovereignty of God over all things.

A2. God helped Habakkuk to see that, no matter what it may look like from our perspective, not only is God always at work in every situation...but all that He does is good.

A3. God helped Habakkuk to see that God is for His people.

The Lord is my strength...
~ **Hab. 3:19**

God is sovereign – over all the earth, in every circumstance, at every moment.
God is good – in all His ways: in all that He thinks, in all that He feels, in all that He does.
God is for you. If you are a child of God (through faith in Jesus Christ), God is for you.

If you are a child of God, then you can look at the circumstances in your life and say with the Apostle Paul,

I know that God is working all things together for good
For me...
Because I love Him
And because He has called me
(with my personality, my strengths & weaknesses, my failures & flaws, my fears...)
He has called me for His purpose.
~ **Romans 8:28**

If God gives you the grace to grab ahold of these three truths in your heart and in your mind, then you will learn (as Habakkuk did) what it means to become an unshakably happy Christian.