

Holding On - Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

Main Idea: Faith does not let go of what it knows about God; it reminds itself of his truths, brings honest questions from a posture of humility, and waits actively for God to speak again.

I. The Anchor | Habakkuk 1:12

Habakkuk has just been told that the Babylonians, a violent and idolatrous empire, is coming to judge them. And yet the prophet's first words back to God are not a question or an objection. His first words are a statement of who God is. This pattern is not unique to Habakkuk. Job, before he opens his mouth in lament, falls down and worships. Asaph, in Psalm 73, almost loses his footing watching the wicked prosper, and what restores him is going into the sanctuary and remembering who God is. We tend to bring our questions to God first and our theology second, if we get to the theology at all. Habakkuk reverses that order, and the rest of the chapter rests on the fact that he did. **The instinct of biblical faith, when shaken, is not to reason its way to a conclusion but to rehearse what it already knows.**

In a single verse Habakkuk anchors himself in five attributes of God: eternity, covenant relationship, holiness, sovereignty, and faithfulness. Three of those (eternal, holy, sovereign) describe God in himself, without any reference to us. Two (covenant and faithfulness) describe how he relates to his people. Habakkuk starts with the relational attributes; he begins with the ones that are about God himself. The reason God is a refuge in trouble is precisely because he is not like us, not bound by our limits. **If we begin our anchoring with the attributes most relating to us, we tend to shrink God down to the size of the relationship we have with him.**

In the middle of this, Habakkuk says, "We shall not die." The prophet is fully aware that many in Judah will physically die when Babylon comes. He is clinging to a promise of God. God promised that the line from Abraham and David would not be cut off, and that lineage finds its fulfillment in Christ. Whatever Babylon would bring, it could not undo God's promises. **Habakkuk's trust in God's promises give him biblical confidence, which is fundamentally different from optimism.** Optimism expects circumstances to improve and collapses when they do not. Faith expects God to keep his word even when circumstances get much worse, because faith was never grounded in the circumstances to begin with. Habakkuk is not saying things will turn out the way he hoped. He is saying that whatever happens, God will be faithful to what he has spoken, and that is enough.

The word he reaches for in the second half of the verse is also deliberate. "O Rock." The image comes from Deuteronomy 32:4, "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice." Moses sang that song right before his own death, looking out over a people he knew would soon break the covenant. The word he reached for was Rock...Something that does not move. The empire on Habakkuk's horizon is the most powerful force in the known earth, and in the middle of all that the prophet names God as the unmoving point. **Christians shouldn't deny that things are difficult around them, but should ground themselves in the Lord while it happens.**

To Ponder:

1. Habakkuk anchors in five attributes of God before he says anything else. Three of those attributes (eternity, holiness, sovereignty) describe who God is in himself, apart from us. Two (covenant and faithfulness) describe how he relates to his people. Why is it important that Habakkuk does not begin with the relational attributes, but with the ones that are entirely about God? What are the dangers of only focusing on God's relational attributes?
2. Where in your own habits of processing hard things does running to God tend to come last instead of first, and what needs to change in order to reverse the order?

II. The Reasoning | Habakkuk 1:13-17

Anchoring does not silence every question. Habakkuk has just rehearsed five truths about God, and his next words are a complaint. **Standing on those truths did not make the tension disappear; it gave him stable footing from which to wrestle with it.** We sometimes treat spiritual maturity as the absence of questions, as though a believer who really trusted God would have no doubts left. The Bible does not present faith that way. Job had questions. Jeremiah had questions. The Psalms are saturated with them. **The mark of mature faith is not the absence of hard questions but the posture from which they are asked.**

Habakkuk's second complaint is more direct than the first. In verse 2 he asked why God was silent about evil in Judah; now he asks how a holy God can use an evil greater than Judah's to discipline her. He frames it by citing the very anchor he just expressed. "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong." The metaphor in verses 14 through 17 is haunting. The people of God, created in Genesis 1:26 to have dominion over the fish of the sea, are pictured as fish themselves, hooked, netted, dragged onto the deck. The created order is being inverted. And worse, the captors are not somber about it; they sacrifice to their nets, worshiping the instruments of their conquest. The horror of the picture is not just the violence; it is the worship of the violence. Babylon's sin in this picture is not only what they do to other people; it is what they have done with their own success. **The things we used to get where we are become the things we cannot imagine living without, and our trust shifts from the God who provided to the means he used to provide.**

Is Habakkuk allowed to talk to God like this? Is any of us? The wilderness generation grumbled, and Numbers 14 and 1 Corinthians 10:10 hold that grumbling up as serious sin, the kind that fell under judgment. Yet Job complains for thirty-five chapters, the Psalmists lament openly, Jeremiah weeps in the streets, Habakkuk reasons with God in this very book, and Scripture presents all of it as faithful. What separates them is the posture of the heart. Grumbling treats God as the problem; lament treats him as the only one big enough to resolve it. **That is why bringing a hard question to God, even an accusing one, can be an act of faith rather than a failure of it.**

To Ponder:

3. Habakkuk's question assumes that a holy God using a wicked nation should be theologically problematic. How does Scripture reconcile God's holiness with his use of evil instruments without compromising either, and what biblical examples help us hold both truths together?

III. The Waiting | Habakkuk 2:1

Now Habakkuk positions himself to wait for God's response. The image Habakkuk uses is the watchman on the wall, who scanned the horizon for two things: enemies and messengers. He did not know when something would arrive, or what, or from which direction. His job was to be at his post, awake, ready. The watchman is a recurring biblical figure; seen in passages like Ezekiel 33. **The point is that watching is never passive. Habakkuk is taking up an active posture, not collapsing into despair.**

Much of what believers call waiting on the Lord is not actually waiting; it is idleness with a spiritual label on it. We say we are waiting while we are not in the Word, not in prayer, not in the company of God's people, not anywhere near the means God has appointed for speaking. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." The drawing near is on us. Habakkuk is also clear about what he expects to hear. He does not say, "I will see what I will figure out," but "what he will say to me." When silence seems long, the temptation is to fill it with our own voice, labeling our own conclusions as the leading of the Spirit. We have an advantage he did not have on this side of the cross. 2 Peter 1:19 calls Scripture "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." **Our waiting is not waiting for God to start speaking; it is waiting for the Word he has already given to do its work in us as we sit under it.**

The last phrase of 2:1 is the one most easily passed over but of extreme importance. "And what I will answer concerning my complaint." Some translations render the noun as reproof or rebuke, which is closer to the underlying word. **Habakkuk is ready to be corrected by God's reply, not just comforted by it. Most of us, when we wait, are waiting for justification.** Habakkuk shows us a different way: he brings his question and prepares to discover the question itself may have been wrong. **If you arrive at the watchtower already certain you are right, you will not actually hear God's answer; you will hear only the echo of your own voice waiting for permission to speak.**

To Ponder:

4. The cultural posture is that the self is the final authority. We come to most situations expecting to be justified, and not willing to be corrected. How has that posture shaped how Christians come to God in prayer, and what damage does it do over time?
5. Sometimes what we call waiting on God is actually hiding from him. Where in your own life might you be claiming to be waiting on the Lord, but you aren't doing the work of drawing near to him?