Living by Faith

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Scripture: Habakkuk 2:2-5

2 And the LORD answered me:
"Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so he may run who reads it.
3 For still the vision awaits its appointed time;
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.
If it seems slow, wait for it;
it will surely come; it will not delay.

4 "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.

5 "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."

Introduction

Habakkuk is a puzzled prophet, but he's been praying. He's wrestling and struggling with certain things that are happening amongst his own people. He's struggling, wrestling with the sin that he sees amongst the people of God and perhaps even in his own life. He made that application and yet things don't seem to match up with what's happening and what God is doing by seeming to allow the sin, but also his chosen instrument in dealing with the sin doesn't seem to match up for Habakkuk. He knows something about God's character, and those things don't seem to add up. And how how can these things be? And so, Habakkuk waits.

He's waiting for the answer concerning his complaint in verse one of chapter 2. And it is certainly the posture of faith, what it looks like, to to wait upon God - to be looking to him and the Lord is teaching Habakkuk and us what it looks like to live when times are dark, when God's timing feels slow. And isn't that often the way things work maybe in your own life? I suppose it happens for all of us. We we sometimes think about problems out there and we maybe tell someone our problems or how we think things are going in this world and things don't seem right and there's problems.

And the Lord deals with Habakkuk himself and sometimes we don't like that when the answer is for us, the answer is not simply to to make our problems go away - the problems that we see out in the world go away.

But the Lord often deals with his people. He he addresses the faith of Habakkuk. He doesn't really clear away all his fears and concerns, but he addresses his faith. And that's what he does for us. He tells us what faith is, what it looks like. It's verse four, verses four and five, maybe our hinge verses that set up the rest of the vision there in verses 6 through 20. But it's really the heart of the whole book, the heart of the passage, but the heart of the book. And you might realize that verse four is very significant in the Bible. In fact, the apostle Paul quotes it twice. The author of Hebrews uses it.

One author even suggests that the apostle Paul in Romans writes the whole epistle, the whole letter to the Romans wrapped around Habakkuk 2:4. Thinking about that, that it simply permeates all the letter. What a remarkable thing. It is clearly a pivotal passage, a well-known monk in the 1500s, this passage was pivotal for him.

Martin Luther was a monk, an Augustinian monk and very troubled about his sin and God's holiness and he prayed and he fasted and did all the performance of penance and all those things seeking peace with God and he wrestled for a long time and a superior encouraged him directed him to go study scripture more. Maybe that was from that man's perspective a bad idea. For Luther, it was wonderful.

It led him to Habakkuk 2:4 and he wrestled. The light bulb didn't come on immediately and he wrestled with it. And yet it would be what later Luther's son would describe for his father as a very pivotal passage in his own life. He was going through all of the routine of penance and confession and all of those kinds of works and the Lord brought, according to Martin Luther's son, the Lord brought this passage to his mind while he was on his knees crawling up some stairs saying prayers and he got up from his knees and went back to Wittenberg and it was through that he continued to wrestle and he came to Romans 1:17.

And it was there that you might say the rest is history. He discovered something of how it is that a holy God can dwell with sinners. How a sinful man can stand before a holy God. It is righteousness given to him by faith. And that alone, that little word alone meant everything. It's what unlocked it for him. And you might say, Habakkuk is struggling with the same things. He's struggling with how can the wicked, he's already said in chapter 1, how can the the wicked in verse 13, swallow up the man more righteous than he? And the answer is the same. It's verse four. The righteous shall live by his faith.

That's the answer to our problems, to our complaints, to our struggles in this world, with our own sin, with life in this fallen world and all of the darkness and the evil. It's faith. The righteous one shall live by his faith. It's always the answer. Well, what is the nature of that faith? What does it look like? Well, Habakkuk shows us four things really.

I The Foundation of Faith | Habakkuk 2:2-3

There's a foundation that you see first of all about this faith. The foundation of faith, it rests upon something. It's not blind as some people might suggest. The Lord answered him. We could stop and I suppose ponder the wonders of that - the Lord does hear his people's prayers, and he responds, he answers and what he has said. Well faith he drives down to it by first establishing this fact of the word of God that that's where faith rests. Write the vision he says, make it plain on tablets. It needs to be committed to writing on stone tablets. Other portions of God's word were things committed on stones. You think of the ten commandments and them being written down in that way to be to

be read, to be permanent, to be very clearly preserved. That's where he's headed here. Write the vision, make it plain on tablets that there might be nothing uncertain.

Now the imagery there and it's always debated as what exactly does it mean? So he may run. Who reads it? Perhaps a reference to the prophet himself running there. Sometimes in certain passages there's a reference to prophets running with the vision they're given with the prophecy. Perhaps it's a comment to Habakkuk himself and maybe others who might run with these tablets so that others might read it. Perhaps it is a comment that maybe while people are running they can read it, maybe fleeing destruction, something like that. It's a little bit difficult to translate even. I think the idea though is clear. It needs to be clear. It needs to be written down so that even if someone's running, they can read it and understand and know. It was to be understood and certainly proclaimed. But it's certainly a reminder that faith needs something outside of itself, you might say, upon which to rest. We need something outside of ourselves. Our faith doesn't rest upon our feelings, our interpretation of circumstances, our ability to understand and know and predict the future. Our confidence that even things will turn out the way we want. No, faith rests upon what God has revealed.

Believing what God has said about what he will do. It's what he's saying here. This idea of the vision. Write the vision twice. For still the vision awaits the appointed time. It will not delay. And there's a sense in which we need to remind ourselves over and over again that faith rests upon that firm foundation of the word of God.

People often struggle I suppose with assurance of salvation. And often times it's because we look to our own selves, our own actions, even the strength of our own faith. And that's not where assurance comes from. That's not where it rests. Our assurance of salvation rests upon God's word and God's word alone. Jesus would say that often, Jesus would teach his own disciples that notion of trusting, resting upon the word of God.

We often might find ourselves struggling with those things and we have to go back to what has Jesus said? What does the Bible say? Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Sin will not have dominion over you. There are promises there. Jesus makes it clear. Those who trust in him are gripped by Him and his Father. Double grip of Father and Son.

Never to be let go. Never to be snatched out. And my salvation, your salvation, and the assurance of it. Rest upon him, upon what he has done, upon what he has said. And if I doubt, if I wrestle, if I struggle and look out in this world and look at my own heart and look at sin in the world and in the church, where do I land? Where do I need to go to? What does faith look like? It's this.

It's resting upon what God has said and that alone. And there's a sense of certainty about it that the Lord wants to drive home for Habakkuk and for us. And verse three, for still the vision awaits its appointed time. It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay. Do you see how he presses on in one verse? It will. It will. It will not. It will not.

And over and over again, the word of God is true. You can stand upon it. You can lean upon it with all your weight. It will never fail. It will never fall. It will never falter. Won't lie. We use big words, I suppose, about the inherent and infallible word of God. This is a passage where it makes that certainly clear to us. There's a certainty about God's word, a reliability to it. And so our our faith is not confidence in our faith, but in God's word.

It's the foundation of it. You have need only to to wait for it. It will come to pass. And there's an appointed time for it. Isn't that the language that's used of the Lord Jesus Christ when he came? It was at the right time – while we were still weak. It was at the right time. We're told that Christ came, by Paul, it was at the appointed time that the Lord Jesus Christ came, as Paul would say in

Galatians 4, the when the fullness of time had come. And so there's a need to wait. There's a certainty to it.

And that's what we see is the first thing, the foundation of our faith is the the word of God. What he says, he will surely do it. And that's where faith rests. That's where faith trusts.

II The Patience of Faith | Habakkuk 2:3

There's also a second thing we see here, the patience of faith. We've already said it, but highlight it again and press it home a little further in the second part of verse three. There's a clear admonition there. If it seems slow, wait for it. Our lives seem to be marked by that.

Habakkuk showed us that already, but here it's made rather explicit. We wait and we wait and we wait. We wait on lots of things, but ultimately our lives are characterized by waiting, a waiting upon the Lord to fulfill his promise. And the Lord seems to know our struggles, doesn't he? If it seems slow, the way it seems often, we wait. They, the people of God, have always been a waiting people - sometimes, sadly trying to take matters into their own hands to to speed it up. Abraham had promises made to him and he tried to circumvent. He tried to make it happen on his own.

Faith looks like this. It looks like waiting upon God's timing. The Lord will do what he said. I might not always see it, but I trust his word and I must wait. That's the way that the saints have always lived. In Hebrews 11, that's what the author of Hebrews is telling us about - that hall of faith and all the people of God. They've always been waiting on the promise. And they still are waiting, as the author of Hebrews says, waiting upon the return of Christ.

And we wait. We wait with them. We wait until Christ comes. There's a future promise as was set before Habakkuk and the people of God. the the Babylonians are coming and I'm going to deal with them too and you must wait. You must wait in faith and trust the Lord. God's delay is not denial. He waits. And then the way that Peter puts it, it may it may seem like God is being slow. Why won't he make it happen? Why not now?

Well, God is being patient. His gospel is going forth. He's bringing sinners home. He's sending it forth mightily. He is at work. He is always at work. We need wisdom from above to see it and patience, patience of the Holy Spirit. The Lord is working. He's always working. Always sending forth his promise at the right time, exactly when he means to send it.

It will surely come. And so we sing of these kinds of things all the time, don't we? Behind the frowning providence, there's a smiling face. We trace the rainbow through the rain. We we see it. We have to trace it. We look at it and rest upon the promise of God when everything else seems to contradict it - our own bodies, our health, the way the world is going, and all of the problems inside of us, outside of us.

God's promise is never late, is never delayed. It's always on time. And he says, "Trust, wait for it." That's why the author of Hebrews would press that idea home. You have need of endurance. And what does he say at the end? Keep your eyes fixed upon the author and finisher of your faith.

Keep looking to Jesus, eagerly waiting upon him. That's what he's saying. Well, patience is required. That's what faith looks like. The foundation rests of it is the word of God. Our faith rests upon the word of God, and we must wait for his promise to come to fruition.

III The Contrast of Faith | Habakkuk 2:4-5

But there's a contrast here that we see also. Thirdly, contrast of faith. And look at verses four and five.

He describes what would be considered the restless man, you might say, turning his attention to the Babylonian man. And he uses singulars here. Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not right within him. And the righteous man, it's a singular again, shall live by his faith. And he goes on to describe again in verse 5 what this restless man is like.

And that's a good description of the person who doesn't know God, who is without God and without hope. He's a restless person. And what that looks like is certainly that his soul is puffed up. There's pride that marks him. His confidence is ultimately in himself. There's self-sufficiency. He doesn't wait for God, is not dependent upon him. There's something wrong fundamentally in his soul. He says his soul is not upright. It is a heart problem, no doubt. He trusts in his own strength and his wisdom, his authority, his power, his ability to secure his own future. And yet he's described as a restless man.

In verse five, his greed as wide as Sheol like death. He never has enough, always gathering, always collecting. It's never enough for him. More possessions, more power, more nations, more security, more glory, yet restless. Isn't that the way that Augustine would describe people before they come to rest in God? That our hearts are “restless until they find their rest in you.” It's the way he described his own life until resting in God through Christ.

That's the Babylonian here. He's giving us a picture of this restless soul trying to find security and satisfaction apart from God and he will never find it. And I wonder if that describes you, maybe you here this morning, not trusting in Christ. It would be a call as you see this contrast played out before you to call upon the Lord and you'll be saved, to believe in the Lord Jesus that your soul might find rest. Rest in God. But notice this contrast between the the restless man and the righteous man as he calls him in verse four.

It's really only in the Hebrew three little words. The righteous shall live by his faith. And he’s putting almost in the middle, sandwiching in between the first half of verse four and then verse five, three little words about the righteous man. It's a a picture of of the contrast. It's a picture of what life is like for those who are righteous and what it looks like to live by faith. Always sandwiched in between, you might say.

Maybe describing faith as somewhat lonely. We find ourselves out of place, out of sorts in this world. There's a fundamental contrast of those who are in Christ as the Lord will say there we are in the world but not of it. We belong to another kingdom. We belong to some someone else, something else. Faith can be lonely that way, can't it? As you see all around those who are puffed up and living in pride, pursuing strength and ambition, independence, accumulation, self-determination is the world around us. And sadly, that's what the world prizes.

The way of faith can seem very foolish and strange and even lonely. All the people that we, I suppose, admire in the faith, Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli, all the reformers, the Puritans, even those who proclaim these sorts of things, that proclaim this kind of faith. Well, they had to live through hard times. troubling times, difficult times, and it's the way for us as well. Living by faith through opposition, uncertainty, suffering, hardship. Faith is what carries us through hard times, living in the midst of it. And that's where Habakkuk shows us this great contrast of what it means to live by faith when there are those around us who are living in pride. And you know, this would remind us as the Apostle Paul would pick up, what does it mean to be righteous?

Who are these? Who is this righteous person? And Habakkuk's struggling with these things. The righteous person is one who's been declared to be righteous. There's no no righteousness inherently, internally, no goodness that you're just born with. No, someone is righteous only by grace through faith in Christ. Jesus alone is our righteousness, we are told.

And that's what makes someone righteous. Not not their good works. Not because you're a good person or born a good person, but because God has declared you to be so by his grace and through faith in Christ alone.

IV The Endurance of Faith | Habakkuk 2:4

Well, notice with me lastly, the endurance of faith. This is what also characterizes Habakkuk's faith. It's endurance in verse four, circling back around to that. This is both a promise and a precept, but it's not merely “this is how you ought to live”, though it does carry that. There's a promise embedded in it.

It's a reminder as he says, "Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." It's a reminder that God's word is final. What God declares to be so is so. The righteous are those who trust God rather than themselves, looking to Christ, justified by faith. All of that John Calvin would describe in these little words what what faith is, what it looks like. It's that which strips us of all arrogance and leads us naked and needy to God that we may seek salvation from him alone which would otherwise be far removed from us. That's where Habakkuk lands. But based upon that, there's an endurance about faith. And it's not inherently in us. It's not because of us. It's because of God and what he's promised. There's an enduring nature to this. The righteous shall live. It's a promise.

We'll go on living. It will endure. You will endure. Why? Not because you're so great and mighty and strong and powerful, but because who your faith is in, but because of him who promised. It's a promise. You will go on living what might seem like dark days and never-ending pain and sorrow and struggle and suffering. You will go on living. Isn't this the way that Jesus said it? Those who believe in me, they will live. Though they die, they will live forever. It's a great eternal promise, isn't it? That no matter what we walk through, no matter what we go through, no matter the struggles and the pain and the sorrow and the sin and the problems, the righteous, those who are declared righteous by God by grace and through faith, a righteousness not of our own, but that that is imputed to us, given to us, credited to us on account of Christ.

Those people who are believing in Jesus, they will live. They will live forever.

Conclusion

And he would point us to continue to believe to trust in that great promise, persevering by faith. That's how the author of Hebrews would apply this very passage. Hebrews 10:35 to 39. For you have need of endurance for yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay.

There's even the same kind of language from Habakkuk. But my righteous one shall live by faith. It's what life looks like for those who are in Christ - to keep on living by faith. Trusting in Christ, trusting in him forever. That's our hope. That's where we land is waiting, trusting, relying upon him who made that great promise.

We may get that great promise that that he is coming. We only have to wait. It's a little while. It's an appointed time, but it he is coming. And the righteous shall live by his faith, looking to him who is the author and finisher of our faith. May God help us to do so.