

Rejecting, Religious or Righteous?

Habakkuk 1:12-2:20

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Turn in your Bible this evening to Habakkuk, chapter 1, verse 12.

You know we always talk about God being in the good. We thank him for our blessings. We thank him for healing. We thank him for friends. But we don't normally thank God when bad things happen.

I had a cousin who attempted to commit suicide by taking a bunch of pills. And what they do in the emergency room, standard practice at the time as I understand it, is that they can do one of two things.

1. They can stick a tube up your nose and all the way down into your stomach and try and pump your stomach out.
2. Or they can make you drink activated charcoal. Let me tell you what this does. There is something in the active charcoal that keeps the poison, keeps the pills from being absorbed into your bloodstream.

Can you imagine drinking charcoal? Can you imagine going to a BBQ and pulling nasty old charcoal out of the grill and drinking it?

You have to introduce something totally foreign into your system that, in my mind is gross, and horrible, and disgusting. And you must do this to try and save your life.

And that is what God is trying to do in the book of Habakkuk. These people have been overdosing on themselves, they have been overdosing on religion, and they have been overdosing on idols.

So God must do something so uncomfortable, he sends the charcoal called the Babylonians into their midst to save them.

Let's review what has happened so far in Habakkuk:

- Habakkuk is perplexed. How long will I cry out to you for help God, but you don't answer.
 - People who claim you do not obey you.
 - People who love you are outnumbered by those who don't care.
- God does answer with, "Things are going to get worse before they get better." In fact, you are not going to believe how I answer your prayer.
- God tells Habakkuk he is going to send the Chaldeans to sweep in and take Israel captive. he is going to use the most horrible people to judge the people of God.

Let's move ahead now. Verse 13-17.

13 You who are of purer eyes than to see evil
and cannot look at wrong,
why do you idly look at traitors

and remain silent when the wicked swallows up
the man more righteous than he?
14 You make mankind like the fish of the sea,
like crawling things that have no ruler.
15 He[a] brings all of them up with a hook;
he drags them out with his net;
he gathers them in his dragnet;
so he rejoices and is glad.
16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net
and makes offerings to his dragnet;
for by them he lives in luxury,[b]
and his food is rich.
17 Is he then to keep on emptying his net
and mercilessly killing nations forever

WHOA – STOP THE PRESSES! WE CANNOT READ ON JUST YET.

Really Habakkuk? Did you really just say that? Are you really inferring that Israel is righteous?
Have you forgotten Psalm 14, repeated in Romans 3:

10 “What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that
all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:
“None is righteous, no, not one;
11 no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.”
13 “Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.”
“The venom of asps is under their lips.”
14 “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”

Habakkuk, though, is asking a most basic question in how God is to effect redemption among fallen
humanity. Yet in less than 700 years God is going to do this very thing again. Except this time the
scale is much grander and the condemnation much more personal. Our Lord Jesus Christ will be
“swallowed” up by a perverse and wicked generation as he is sent to the cross. Evil men putting to
death the only true righteous one.

And then in verses 14-17 Habakkuk reminds God of the pure evil of the Chaldeans. We will not take
time to look at that in great detail tonight, although it is a fascinating study in brutality.

Habakkuk 2:1-3

I will take my stand at my watchpost
and station myself on the tower,
and look out to see what he will say to me,
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.
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.

This is important and we are going to spend a couple minutes here. I want you to see Habakkuk’s “posture.”

Habakkuk starts his prophecy by standing and by looking at Israel in 1:1-5, then goes up to the tower in 2:1.

What do you do in the tower? Look for something coming; look for what is happening all around you. When you are a watchman in the tower you are expectant. You expect something to happen. You are anxiously awaiting something to happen. There is a difference between being expectant and having expectations, however.

Expectations = premeditated disappointment.

A good example of this is gift giving. We often selfishly give gifts. We won’t give them for the edification of the receiver. We often give them with the expectation of how we will feel when the receiver opens the gift. You know this is true if you have ever gotten your children or your spouse something you are convinced they really want, only to be disappointed by their reaction when they opened it.

But the one who is expectant knows God is going to do something and wants to be prepared to see and experience it. And look what Habakkuk is watching for: an answer that will reprove him. Reading from the Unauthorized Tim Nixon Paraphrased Version, he's saying, "God, I'm going to stand here and I'm going to wait for your answer and then God, I'm going to try to think of something to say when you tell me how dumb I was not to trust you.

Habakkuk says:

- I will (and we need to) ***stand*** at my watch. I am going to put myself in a position where I can get a wide view of what is and will take place. Our **stand** affects our view (Psalm 1). I have stood in a watchtower of a fort in Bermuda and a fort in Puerto Rico. The view is incredible compared to the view on the ground. Habakkuk’s **stand** is key to the discovery he is about to make.
- I will (and we need to) ***look***. God told him to look in 1:5. Habakkuk is looking to see God’s response.
- I will (and we need to) ***wait*** (2:3). Wait on the Lord. The Psalmists write this repeatedly:
 - **Wait** for the **LORD**; be strong, and let your heart take courage; **wait** for the **LORD**! (27:14)
 - Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who **wait** for the **LORD**! (31:24)
 - Our soul **waits** for the **LORD**; he is our help and our shield. (33:20)

- Be still before the **LORD** and **wait** patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! (37:7)
- 12 times in the Psalms, 9 times in Isaiah, 38 times at least in the Bible we are told to wait.

God's answer is so important he wants Habakkuk to write it down, make it plain, and get the word out (2:2).

And then God speaks again and the rest of chapter 2 tells us that God is going to judge the Chaldeans (Psalm 1 – the wicked will not stand in the judgment). But it also talks about the fact that God is going to judge sin no matter who is involved.

Habakkuk 2:4

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

But there is salvation in this chapter in verse 4.

Verse 4 taken in its context here could say, *“Wicked men trust themselves alone as these Chaldeans do and fail; but the righteous man trusts in me and lives”*.

In verse 4 you see there are only two possible attitudes in this life: faith or unbelief.

- You either believe God or you don't believe Him.
- You either have faith in Him or you don't have faith in Him.

And this is so central that this scripture is repeated three (3) times in the New Testament.

1. Galatians 3
2. Hebrews 10
3. And Romans 1

This verse is the theme of the entire book of Habakkuk. It shows that God's salvation will ultimately include Gentiles.

This verse is also the theme of Romans.

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

So what happens when we don't live by faith?

- When we don't live by faith, we fixate on the moment.
- When we don't live by faith, we don't see the big picture.

The concept of righteousness is bound to the idea of judicial standing, but makes its home in the law of God. And we must have a clear understanding of justification and faith in order to fully understand the importance of this verse as the key to the book of Habakkuk.

By nature man is a sinner and a criminal.

In regeneration man receives a new life and a new nature; in justification, a new standing.

Justification may be defined as that act of God whereby the righteous judge declares righteous he who believes in Christ even though that man is sinful. He is viewed by God as righteous because in Christ he has come into a righteous relationship with God. Justification is a declarative act. It is not something you or I “become”. It does not make you or me upright or righteous, but declares us righteous.

But there is more to it than just setting us right before law. The sinner must not only be *pardoned* for his past sins, but also supplied with a positive righteousness before he can have fellowship with God. This need is supplied in the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer, sometimes referred to as “reckoned to us”. The justified person has had his sins pardoned and the penalty of those sins forgiven; he has also been restored to God’s favor by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. He is not yet righteous in himself but is righteous in the legal sense.

Justification is the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls, and ultimately, the doctrine upon which you and I stand or fall.

Justification is not accomplished by a **profession** of faith. It is the **possession** of faith, not the **profession** of it, which saves.

We are a people who need to be rescued from shortsightedness. Like Habakkuk, we need the God-sightedness that sees beyond the fire – beyond the circumstance.

And what is the focus of faith? Sometimes we think that the faith itself is the focus. I remember having this understanding as a young believer. Faith was power to do stuff for God, and the world was my laboratory. But faith isn’t some mysterious, detached, force-like power. Faith starts with God and focuses on God. Our faith doesn’t create prosperity, healing, and breakthroughs. Our faith focuses fervently on God.

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The reason is these animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life in which fear traps us.

Biblical faith asks God to act according to his word and then accepts the answer. Our faith stands on the unchanging character of God.

Continuing in verse 5:

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.”

6 Shall not all these take up their taunt 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!"
- 7 Will not your debtors suddenly arise,
and those awake who will make you tremble?
Then you will be spoil for them.
- 8 Because you have plundered many nations,
all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who dwell in them.
- 9 "Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house,
to set his nest on high,
to be safe from the reach of harm!
- 10 You have devised shame for your house
by cutting off many peoples;
you have forfeited your life.
- 11 For the stone will cry out from the wall,
and the beam from the woodwork respond.
- 12 "Woe to him who builds a town with blood
and founds a city on iniquity!
- 13 Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts
that peoples labor merely for fire,
and nations weary 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 makes his neighbors drink—
you pour out your wrath and make them drunk,
in order to gaze at their nakedness!
- 16 You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.
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!
- 17 The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them,
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who dwell in them.
- 18 "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!
- 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.

God is saying this: "My moral judgment will fall whether it's on Israel or Chaldeans or anybody

else that sins. It doesn't matter who." God always punishes sin. God has a moral order going on in the world. The only issue is when he does it and how he does it. And then through the chapter God lists the sins of the Chaldeans, for which He's going to punish them. And they are all typical sins of Israel and they are all typical sins of people today.

Let's quickly run through them:

1. Pride and Greed (v 5)
2. Covetousness and Aggression (6-8)
3. Injustice (9-11)
4. Violence (12-14)
5. Inhumanity to man (15-17)
6. Idolatry (18-20)

But then we come to verse 20 as the contrast to the idolatry in verses 18-19

20 But the Lord is in his holy temple;
let all the earth keep silence before him."

Here Habakkuk contrasts the vitality of God with the deadness and silence of our idols.

The temple, from its time of dedication by Solomon was established as the source from which divine instruction and help would go forth.

Even if God would chasten a disobedient people, the consecrated temple would remain a place where God would hear, forgive, and teach his people. (1 Kings 8)

From our current perspective, the equivalent concept is applied to:

- the body of Christ in John 2:19 when Jesus declared himself the Temple
- the believer in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
- the church in Ephesians 2:21
- In Revelation 21 where we see the absence of a physical temple because of the ever presence of the Lord Jesus that so permeates the city that there is no need for a physical building.

Appropriately then, all the earth is told to be silent before the Lord.

So, tonight we have now seen three groups of people. And I am convinced that everyone fits into one of these three groups.

1. **Rejecting.** Those who blatantly reject Jesus Christ. The Chaldeans certainly fit that category, but so do those in Jesus' day. Paul writes about them in Romans 1:18-32 .

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,[a] in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the

glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

It is significant that Paul describes these rejecters immediately after he repeats Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17.

2. **Religious.** Those who outwardly identify themselves with Christ. But are not true believers. Jesus speaks of these in Matthew 7 21 "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*"
3. **Righteous.** Those elect, called by God, justified by faith (declared righteous). These people are not only saved by faith, but live by faith.

The righteous shall live by faith.

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.

Habakkuk had begun his discussion in an effort to understand the mysterious ways of a holy God with sinful people. Now he stands in the presence of the Lord's holy temple, hushed in reverential awe.

He may not have fully understood God's responses to his questions and their divine implications. Yet he stands assured of the:

- Abiding Lordship of God
- His justice in bringing judgment
- And his infinite mercy in granting life to all who will trust in him and the provisions he has promised for the sinner.

Habakkuk couldn't see ahead to how God would preserve both his holy hatred for sin and his merciful forgiveness of sinners who trust him. But God had revealed it and so Habakkuk proclaimed it.

Habakkuk taught us that when judgment comes the just shall live by his faith. And when that seed comes to full flower in the New Testament we see that the reason the just live by faith is that the just are justified by faith.

And it is not simply our faith. It is the faithfulness of God through his grace to us.

Lamentations 3:22-23 remind us:

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”