

Lesson 27 Lecture

Habakkuk 1-3

Well, we are down to just two lessons for this section of Scripture. Before I get into the lesson and back by popular demand, I have assembled a “verse for the day” for each day we are not in session starting with next Friday and ending the day before we reconvene in September on the 19th. This year’s verses have a theme. I did a search on the phrases “God is...” or “the Lord is....”. What I hope you will find is an amazing character presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ. I would encourage you to make a list of all the things the Lord God “is” from these verses, and I’m certain you will be richly blessed and hopeful that your faith will grow if you choose to believe them. Hard copies are at each of the entrances, and you can find the list on my website by going to dictationsfromthespirit.com and clicking on “Summer 2019 verses.”

For each human being, he or she must come to a decision in his or her life as to whether or not they are going to place their faith in his/her self or in someone or something else. For those of us who have concluded that there is a God, and that God is the God of the Bible, that is really only the first answer of many that should come in one’s faith journey. God encourages sincere questions – it is not sinful to ask God legitimate questions. The only time Jesus ever really brushed off questions was when He knew they were being asked to trip Him up – to catch Him in inconsistency to God’s Word. What are some of the more popular theological questions Christians (and non-Christians) do, or should, ask God? Have you thought of any of these?

- Why does God allow suffering to His children?
- Why does God allow/permit evil?
- Why do seemingly bad people prosper while “good” people suffer and struggle?

We find in today’s reading in this prophecy of Habakkuk a prophet whose name means “embracer” or “wrestler”. I like how Jon Courson outlined this book:

- Chapter 1 – Habakkuk is wondering and wrestling; he begins in the valley
- Chapter 2 – he is watching and waiting; he climbs into the tower
- Chapter 3 – he is worshipping and witnessing; he ascends to the mountain

The book begins with this man struggling with his understanding of God and how He conducts His affairs with humanity. Have you ever wondered what God is up to

in this time of history? Isn't it difficult to see how evil and immoral behavior is seemingly becoming not only acceptable, but also encouraged? If we're paying even the slightest attention at all to the times we live in and compare them to our general understanding of God's supposed love for His creation, how can we not end up asking God, '*Where are You?*' As I said, this is where we find this man Habakkuk – he doesn't understand why God is not doing something about the nation's tragic decision to forego all of Josiah's reforms and return to the evil ways most furthered by Manasseh.

Here in his book, we are approaching the period of history where the Northern Kingdom has already been taken over by the Assyrians, and the Southern Kingdom, or Judah, is close to being taken into captivity by the Babylonians. The estimated period of time covered in this prophecy is **625B.C. to 606B.C.**, which would cover the reigns of Josiah and Jehoiakim. He was believed to be a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zephaniah. We don't really know too much about Habakkuk. This book begins in gloom, but praise God that is not where it ends. Based on his Psalm in chapter 3, some scholars believe he was from a priestly line and led worship in the temple.

Habakkuk was observing the decline of Judah, and instead of going on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter to air his feelings, he went to the right place – he went to God to inquire of Him and His plans. What we have in this wonderful small book of Habakkuk is a story of one man's faith journey – to demonstrate that we are not just faith-fueled believing robots. Christianity is not a religion – it is a relationship. Relationships involve getting to know each other, and how do we get to know each other? - By spending time with each other, asking sincere questions, and giving honest answers.

Habakkuk wastes no time in his inquiring of the Lord regarding his views of the nation and God's seeming indifference to them beginning in Chapter 1, verses 2 & 3, "*How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? 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.*" The translation does not do justice to the passion that is in Habakkuk's voice. The Hebrew word for "cry" really means to "scream". This prophet is so offended at the sin of the people and of the nation, he cannot comprehend why a holy and righteous God isn't doing something about it. Does that sound familiar in our world today?

Habakkuk, as most of us also do after asking a question, attempts to justify his question by outlining his observance of the conditions of Judah in verse 3, "*Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.*" What's his real concern in this verse? God is either indifferent to what is going on, or the forces of hell are overtaking Him.

Habakkuk was putting on display back then what you and I do today. We attempt to link our understanding of Who God is with the current injustices in our lives. Our flesh is attempting to understand the activities in the spiritual world. That is literally trying to understand a foreign language. One of the reasons God gives us the Holy Spirit upon our confession of faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior is to give us, for the lack of better words, a spiritual interpreter to those things in the spiritual realm. Jesus said in John 4:24 that God is spirit, so to get to know God, you must be able to speak and understand His Word. That is part of the Holy Spirit's job - to translate the things of the spirit to the new creation we become at the moment of our confession of faith.

Habakkuk asks a sincere question, and lookie, lookie – God answers beginning in verse 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.*” Habakkuk thinks God is just sitting on His throne sipping a Latte’ and reading a good book, but we learn He is absolutely at work – He’s about to do something that Habakkuk won’t believe. For those of you who are in the middle of a storm, and you don’t feel/see/sense God is being the fortress His Word promises He is, I feel your pain – I’ve been there. Your pain and suffering is picking on your flesh, and your flesh is crying out for help.

For me, the hardest thing to do as a follower of Jesus Christ is to wait on Him. Isaiah 40:31 is a popular verse to those who need encouragement to wait on the Lord, “*but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*” This is a wonderful verse, but look closely at it. Do you see anywhere in it the promise of the elimination of the painful circumstances? No, what I read is, by faith, the Lord will lift you up above the circumstances and give you a new perspective of His faithfulness to give you the strength within the circumstances. It’s been said, “*Faith is the daring of the soul to go farther than it can see.*” 1 Corinthians 1:9 assures us that “*God is faithful.*” The concept of faith is the theme of the book of Habakkuk, but we’re finding it sometimes isn’t easy. Does that sound familiar? We’ll get more into the topic of “faith” shortly.

In verses 6-11 of Chapter 1, God outlines this plan He as to deal with the wickedness of Judah. Notice how He begins His plan, “I am raising up the Babylonians ...” God is actively promoting this “ruthless and impetuous” people to exact His judgment on Judah. A lot of Christians have a real problem with God initiating acts of judgment – which easily can be seen in the flesh as evil - on His children. This is especially relevant to those of us who believe that Jesus took the judgment for our sins. That sounds like another theological question, doesn’t it? ‘*Why would a good and holy God initiate acts of pain and suffering on His own children?*’ The Lord proceeded to provide details of the Babylonians and their evil

ways. After hearing this, Habakkuk has got to be wondering if there is a “Plan B”? The Lord concludes this description of the Babylonians with an important indictment that will ultimately be their undoing in verse 11, “*Then they sweep past like the wind and go on - guilty people, whose own strength is their god.*” The Babylonians think that it is their strength that is getting them all the victories. The truth of the matter is it is **only** because **God is allowing** them these victories.

God’s answer to Habakkuk’s first questions only led to a second round of questions. He recites the things he understands about God’s character in the Scriptures, but then he asks the question that seems to put in doubt what He believes in verse 13b, “*Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*” What’s his point? He doesn’t understand why God would use a more unrighteous people to exact judgment on a less unrighteous people. Habakkuk is being faced with one of the more difficult components of the faith journey outlined in Isaiah 55:8-9, “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*” declares the LORD. “*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*” Once again, Habakkuk’s flesh is unable to comprehend the things of the spirit. Oh, how blessed we are to have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us to interpret and guide us into the things of the spirit.

In verses 14-17, Habakkuk compares the Babylonian treatment of people to that of fishermen. “The wicked foe pulls them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet.” Habakkuk sees the evil conquering God’s children in the image of helpless fish being caught for redemption. This isn’t the only time we hear of the imagery of humanity as fish, though, is it? What did Jesus say to the fisherman Peter, Andrew, James, and John? “Follow me, and I’ll make you fishers of men.” There was a big difference, though, in this imagery. The evil Babylonians were fishers of men for consumption. Jesus’ fishers of men were for redemption.

Moving from the valley in his wondering and wrestling, Habakkuk ascends to watching and waiting as he climbs into the watchtower in chapter 2. No – not **that** watch tower. He said in verse 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.*” We get some insight into Habakkuk’s faith journey in this verse. Notice the three steps he takes after the questions asked and answered in chapter 1:

1. **His determination:** “*I will stand at my watch*”. Despite the challenges to comprehend God’s answers to his questions, instead of surrendering to his fears, he was determined to stand. This is an important component of the Christian faith – to be determined to stand with God regardless of the circumstances.

2. **His individuality**: “*and station myself on the ramparts*”. There is typically strength in numbers, but sometimes the herd mentality leads to destruction. Each of us is accountable for our own faith journey, so we each, as individuals, need to make our mind up and commit to God what we are going to do – even if that sets us apart from the herd.
3. **His expectation**: - “*I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint*. How many of you when you hear a sermon or lecture that offers a promise from Scripture sincerely set your hearts expecting God to do what He promises? I’m convinced that God has not done things for me not because He didn’t want to but because I didn’t have the faith to believe His promises. Habakkuk is expecting to see what answer God is going to give to his complaint.

His expectancy paid off and God hands him the key verse of this book in verse 2:4 (I like the NKJV better), “*Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.*” There are two types of individuals outlined in this verse – the proud and the just. C.S. Lewis calls pride the great sin. Pride is basically man thinking he is smarter and wiser than God – that his ways are better than God’s ways. Proverbs 14:12 offers this indictment of the proud, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*” Proverbs 16:18 adds, “*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*” I can honestly say that when I look back on my life and recall the worst things I’ve done, every one of them was rooted in my stupid pride.

The second group of people in verse 4 is the just. The just means those who are righteous. But there’s a problem, Romans 3:10 clearly points out that there is none that are righteous – no not one. How can there be a just or righteous people if the Bible says there are any? I give you our beautiful Savior, Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 gloriously proclaims, “*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” The guilty verdict all of humanity is under is not a permanent verdict. If you choose, by faith or belief, in the finished redemptive work of Christ crucified, your guilty verdict is overturned, and you are declared innocent! Our righteousness is really only because of God’s grace to have His only begotten Son’s holy and righteous blood cover all our unrighteousness. God looks upon the believer through the pure blood of His Son and sees us a clean and redeemed. We are fully reconciled to God through our faith in the sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord!

The concept of righteousness by faith was not new to Habakkuk. Way back in the book of Genesis, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, because God told him to do it. God stopped Abraham from doing this and saw that Abraham

was willing to act on his faith. Genesis 15:6 tells us, “*And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*” It’s been said, “*A person’s faith is not judged by what he says about it, but by what he does about it.*” The books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews all speak to the just living by faith.

What does this faith get you? Peace with God. **Romans 5:1 promises,** “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” I don’t know about you, but I am so grateful that I am at peace with God. It’s a beautiful thing. John Lennon wrote a popular song, *Give Peace a Chance*. The peace John was telling us to take a chance on was a fleeting one. There is only one real peace, and that is the one Jesus brings. I wrote a devotional a few years back and inserted the word “His” into Lennon’s title – *Give His Peace a Chance*. That’s a peace that is only available to the just who live by faith.

In verses 5 through 19 of chapter 2, God lays out five woes on the Babylonians – all indictments of their behavior:

1. 2:6-8 – seizing by force that which is not theirs
2. 2:9-11 – covetousness and self-aggrandizement
3. 2:12-14 – murder and pillage, slaughter and violence
4. 2:15-17 – drunkenness which leads to immorality and violence
5. 2:18-19 – idolatry

Chapter 2 verse 20 concludes with our incredible memory verse, “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.” Imagine what this statement must have meant to Habakkuk. He had difficult questions, and he received theologically challenging answers. It is my belief that this verse was what allowed him to advance up the mountain of faith and commence in chapter 3 with worshipping and witnessing. Habakkuk had both faith and fear sail into the harbor of his mind, but he only allowed faith to anchor.

This is a tragic story of a nation.

- It began with God offering a permanent covenant to Abraham because Abraham simply did one thing – believe the promises of God. Genesis 15:6

confirmed this, “And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness.”

- Abraham confirmed His trust in the Lord when he was prepared to obey God’s commandment to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Isaac proved his faith by his willingness to be sacrificed. He proved what James said in chapter 2, verse 17 of his book, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”
- Isaac’s son, Jacob, found his faith in the surrendering repentance of wrestling against God’s will. Hosea 12:4a filled in this key point of Jacob’s faith journey, “He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor.”
- Jacob’s son, Joseph, after being betrayed by his 11 brothers and became a slave in Egypt as a result of their betrayal demonstrated his faith by after being reunited with his ashamed brothers told them in Genesis 45:8a, “So now it was not you who sent me here, but God.”
- Moses and Joshua would once again lead the rescue of this nation out of Egypt via their faith in God’s promises such as Joshua 1:9, “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”
- King David, a man described by the Lord as a “man after God’s own heart” because of his faith would hear the covenant originally given to Abraham confirmed to continue through him in Psalm 89:4, “Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.” This seed would be our great and awesome Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

None of these men were perfect – they were all flawed like you and me. What was the common denominator in their favor with God? They believed – they had faith. Where we are in today’s reading is a far place from these amazing men of faith. Our founding fathers and brave men of faith such as Abraham Lincoln chose to trust God, and God blessed our country. To see where we are today in terms of a nation and its progressively dismissing God from its conscience, how can we not expect any different conclusion than what happened to the Nation of Israel? I confess how easy it is to throw up our hands and say it is too late and just hope that Jesus will soon rapture the church.

However, I choose to believe that is not what God wants. As we saw this year, He sent prophet after prophet to the Northern and Southern Kingdoms to warn them of their impending doom. But in their warnings, they offered hope to those who would repent and return to God. I firmly believe had the people done this, the course of the Nation of Israel would have been dramatically different. God’s desire was back then, and it remains today that He is not willing that any

should perish but that all should come to repentance. Scripture confirms that God does not change.

The church was in a very dark place in its history when one man read Habakkuk 2:4 that professed the just live by faith, and he changed the course of history with by believing God's promise of righteousness only through faith. That man was Martin Luther. God honored Martin Luther's faith, so why wouldn't He honor such a demonstration of faith today? Therefore, I choose to trust God that if just one child of faith truly chooses to believe God's promises, God will once again demonstrate His faithfulness. I hear of calls for a revival, and there's nothing wrong with that. However, I believe we need a reformation. We've become a soft body of Christ watering down God's Word into seeker friendly sound bites and more interested in investing in the size of our church buildings to comfort the inhabitants than investing in and comforting the hurting, deceived, and lost. Is someone ready to stand up and proclaim that Biblical sin is the truth in the face of a Satan-led society that denies absolute truth and judgment on immoral behavior? Are these scary challenges? Only if you don't believe God won't have your back – that He won't be faithful.

The just shall live by faith. As a follower of Christ, we have been justified through faith in His sacrifice and resurrection. Faith is not a one-way concept. Faith is a relationship, and God initiated the possibility of such a faith-based relationship that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 2 Thessalonians 3:3 proclaims, "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." We are living in perilous times, but they are only hopeless if you choose to not believe He is in you is greater than he who is in the world. Habakkuk and all the other prophets chose to believe in the hope of God and His love for His creation and took a stand. God has always been looking for people to believe in Him and His promises. Is that you? Let's stand and sing the Doxology.

"We are sometimes so interested in creating the machinery of the church that we let the fire go out in the boiler."

"Feed your faith and doubt will starve to death."

"A person's faith is not judged by what he says about it, but by what he does about it."

"The greatest act of faith takes place when a man finally decides that he is not God."

"Genuine faith is assuring, insuring, and enduring."

“The greatness of our fears shows us the littleness of our faith.”

“Faith keeps the man who keeps his faith.”

“Faith gives us the courage to face the present with confidence, and the future with expectancy.”

“Faith builds a bridge from this world to the next.”

“When you become wrinkled with care and worry, it’s time to have your faith lifted.”

“Both faith and fear sail into the harbor of your mind, but only faith should be allowed to anchor.”

“Faith with works is a force. Faith without works is a farce.”

“Faith helps us walk fearlessly, run confidently, and live victoriously.”

“Fear falls before the fortress of faith.”

Halley’s

Habakkuk’s complaint to God is that while he knows his nation is wicked, why is God granting victory over it by an even more wicked Babylon? Where is the justice in that?

God responds that the Babylonians will be judged for their wickedness and God’s people will eventually fill the earth.

“Faith is the ability to feel so sure of God that, no matter how dark the day, there is no doubt as to the outcome.”

Swindoll

Your faith out to get you in trouble at times. If everybody thinks you are nuts, you may be. It’s ok if some think you are. You’re probably in trouble if no one thinks you are.

McGee

Speaking to the comparative size of this prophecy, “Importance is not determined by how much you say but what you say.”

The final chapter is actually a song of psalm of praise and adoration to God.

This little book opens up in gloom and closes in glory.

Satan started the theological questioning with Eve. In his temptations, he was basically challenging, “I can’t believe that a good God would forbid you from eating of that tree.” He was destroying her confidence in the goodness of God. That is always where the enemy starts. God’s goodness would never have been challenged if there were no evil. However, the deeper depth of God’s goodness would not be discovered unless it was set against the shallower depth of evil.

Babylon was the head of gold, and it is the lion of Daniel’s visions.

The book of Daniel tells us Nebuchadnezzar suffered from a form of insanity, egomania, called hysteria by modern psychiatry. It was sort of a manic-depressive psychosis.

What was happening to Judah was a fulfillment of Galatians 6:7

Isaiah 10:5 tells us the Assyrian is called the rod of God’s anger.

Verse 1:12 “We shall not die.” is a testimony to the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as Moses, Joshua, and David. God said he would never let the nation perish.

“Loving Him will work out your problems. Loving Him will enable you to walk in the Spirit; and walking in the Spirit, you will be filled with the Spirit, and you will have joy in your heart.”

Hebrews 11:6

5 woes:

6. 2:6-8 – seizing by force that which is not theirs
7. 2:9-11 – covetousness and self-aggrandizement
8. 2:12-14 – murder and pillage, slaughter and violence
9. 2:15-17 – drunkenness which leads to immorality and violence
10. 2:18-20 – idolatry – the downfall of a nation begins with idolatry; it begins in turning away from the living and true God.

Chapter 3

1. The prayer of the prophet 1-2
2. The program of God 3-17
3. The position of the prophet 18-19

“Shigionoth” is a word having to do with music

3:2 – Habakkuk shows his heart – remember mercy

In program of God, we see Abraham (3-6); Moses (7-10); and Joshua (11-15)

3:8 – a reference to the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan River

Courson

Chapter 1 – Habakkuk is wondering and wrestling; he begins in the valley

Chapter 2 – he is watching and waiting; he climbs into the tower

Chapter 3 – he is worshipping and witnessing; he ascends to the mountain

1:2 – the Hebrew word for cry actually means scream

Verse 2:1 – three components

- Determination
- Isolation
- Expectation

2:4a – look at Proverbs 16:18

“Faith is the currency of eternity, and He wants us to be rich people.”

Verses 3-15 – does this speak of the coming of Christ; or the OT movement of God and His people? Both