

Good Things, Little Packages: Habakkuk, 7/9/17

We have a saying, “Good things come in little packages.” This is certainly true when it comes to the Bible. There are some short books of the Bible that we may never heard preached, know very little about or maybe have trouble finding, that we may think are insignificant. But they pack a powerful message for us in a little package. That’s what our summer preaching series is all about. We are going to do a survey of several short books in the Old Testament to see the powerful message they contained for its original hearers and then talk about how they are equally powerful for our lives today. This Sunday we are going to look at the book of Habakkuk.

Do you ever feel like God is indifferent to injustice? Do you ever worry about whether God is in control or whether he is good when you look around at evil? How should we respond when things seem out of control or falling apart in our lives? If so, this is a little book you need to become well acquainted with because it is written to address these questions we all have and experience.

Author and Dating: Habakkuk, a Jewish prophet, living around the same time as Jeremiah, during King Jehoiakim’s reign (605-598 B.C.) right before Judah is conquered by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Audience: This book was written for the Jewish people during one of their darkest hours...preparing for and living in exile as a conquered, disciplined people.

Uniqueness in Scripture:

Habakkuk is a unique prophetic book because it records a private back and forth dialogue between the prophet and God that starts with this question:

Habakkuk’s 1st Question: “God, why does it seem you are indifferent to injustice around me?”

Habakkuk 1:2-3

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?

This was a spiritually dark time for people of Judah, from the top down there was widespread abandonment of God. There was lawlessness, immorality, breaking the greatest of the commandments loving God and loving people. This is especially devastating for Habbakuk because just a couple decades previously there was revival under King Josiah, all of that has been undone. Habakkuk was one of the few that were still remaining faithful to the covenant. And it’s really hard to live faithfully when you feel like no one else is, and God doesn’t seem to care.

Do you ever feel this way? Can you relate to Habakkuk’s questions? Do you ever feel that God is either silent or maybe indifferent to injustice around you? Maybe you are

being slandered or accused of something that's just not true. Or others are excelling at work because they are cutting corners while you try to do what's right and falling behind?

I think we can all relate to this question in a number of ways. The right thing to do when we feel this way is exactly what Habakkuk did- He cried out to God in his confusion, hurt and frustration. He exposes the honesty of his soul to God. He does not attempt to hide it and go on with fake religious duty, just going through the motions. Nor does he turn away from God in unbelief and bitterness. He goes directly to him with his junk, I've got some stuff I'm wrestling through God and I need you. This is an important aspect of Biblical faith- a faith that asks questions. I believe, help me with my unbelief. And what we are going to see is that God response to Habakkuk's questions and God wants you to seek Him in those moments as well.

God's 1st Response (Habakkuk 1:5-11)

"Justice is coming but in a way you won't like."

Habakkuk 1:5-6

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. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.

Habakkuk 1:11

Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—guilty people, whose own strength is their god.

In other words, God responds- I'm going to use the wicked, violent, idolatrous, guilty Babylonians as a tool of discipline against my wicked, violent, idolatrous, guilty people, Judah. We need to understand how this must have hit Habakkuk. This would be like God answering our prayers for justice against sin in America by saying, "I'm sending North Korea to come wipe you out."

And Habakkuk's 2nd Question: Habakkuk's question back is the same way you and I would likely respond to that- "Are you serious?" (Habakkuk 1:12-2:1)

Habakkuk 1:13

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

"Wait a minute. I don't like how you answered my question. Because they're more wicked than we are. Now we're wicked. I already said that earlier on, but they're more wicked. And You're so pure in Your eyes and You're so everlasting, how could this possibly be?"

Now if we could be real honest here, if you live long enough there is going to be a time where you are lost as to what God is doing in his responses to our concerns, our prayers, our questions. It doesn't make any sense, you're not going to be able to see well and it's going to hurt. Just live long enough and you'll get there. How will God respond?

God's 2nd response: "I'm in control. I am the Judge. Trust me and live." (Habakkuk 2:2-20)

I'm in control.

Habakkuk 2:3

For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

Have you ever opened up the oven while a cake is baking? Doesn't look too appetizing and it's not going to taste good. But the cake is only half baked... you have to wait until the cake is fully baked. Some of us maybe trying to eat half-baked cake because God's character and our circumstances and prayers don't seem to be compatible. But God hasn't finished yet and it's still awaiting its appointed time.

Habakkuk 2:13b-14

Has not the Lord Almighty determine that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

"If you are questioning whether I'm in control, remember who I am. Remember that I am God and you are not." God is saying all the striving to make themselves powerful, all the energy exerted in conquering...all they are doing is turning themselves into coal for a divine furnace. God's glory and power and control is not diminished by the Babylonians it is fueled!

I will judge all injustice (v.6-19): 5 Woes, warnings. Don't think anyone is getting away with anything. I see all of it and I will act.

Trust me and live.

Habakkuk 2:4

See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by faith.

God tells Habakkuk the ultimate secret to life when everything around you is dying, everything seems to be falling apart and in chaos. Faith. Trust in the God who is in control, is for us, and is good. If we trust ourselves like the Babylonians, we will never survive the judgment of God. And in the final chapter we get a living example of what faith looks like in Habakkuk's closing prayer.

Habakkuk's Prayer of Faith (Habakkuk 3)

He remembers who God is and what He has done (3:2-15)

-He remembers God's character- v. 3 Holy One, Glory that fills the earth, v.4 His splendor and his power. v. 6 eternity of God, v.13 deliverer and savior

-He remembers God's actions- he reflects poetically on God's mighty act on delivering his people. Who delivered the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt through the plagues? God did. Who parted Red sea and crushed the Egyptian army? God did. (2-10), Who drove the Canaanite giants out of the promised land? God did. Who made the sun stand still under Joshua so they could defeat the enemy? God did (11). So Habakkuk is point is, "You did that. We didn't do that." All this threshing the nations and churning the waters, this is an illustration, this is pointing back to God's faithfulness to His nation in some of the darkest times in their history. It's building a confidence in God's faithfulness.

He resolves to wait and rejoice in the Lord (3:16-19)

On the Evangelical conscience, there is this idea that when things really fall apart, we should just be glad about that. It comes of as trite and fake and "Oh, isn't God grand." And I want you to watch Habakkuk here, because he's going to be straight with us.

Habakkuk 3:16

I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled.

You hear the distress, the sorrow, and the fear. This is not putting on some fake smile when you receive tragic news or a dreaded diagnosis. But look at this next line. It's so key.

Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.

So Habakkuk here is saying, "Do what You're going to do. I know You are for us. I know You love us. I know You're leading us to what we ultimately need and that in the end justice will prevail." And he rests in that, despite the fact that the fierce storm, the dark cloud is on the horizon. Not only does He wait on God's ultimate timing and plans but he is able to resolve to rejoice in the Lord despite the circumstances.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls

yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.

This is a faith that says, "I'm trusting in the promises of God. God said that the righteous will live by faith, even through the bleakest of circumstances and I'm going to trust Him that He will do it." I love the word picture- HE will make my feet like the gazelle on the rocky cliffs. Circumstances stink... but God is bigger than my circumstance. Habakkuk places his salvation, his security, his joy directly in the Lord alone.

And Habakkuk's prayer as we see in v.19 became a song of faith for the remnant of Judah that would go into captivity. Do you think this song of faith in the midst of circumstances gave hope to Daniel who resolved not to defile himself with the King's food or continue to pray to God even if that meant death? Or Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego not to bow down even if that meant death? Or Esther to reveal her heritage and Haman's plans to the king even if that meant death? Absolutely...so what is God trying to tell us thousands of years later.

The righteous will live by faith in the Lord.

1) Whose strength are you trusting in for your salvation- your own or God's?

The theme of Habakkuk is this: Proud people, whose own strength is their god will come to a woeful end, even though they may enjoy prosperity for a season either as God's chosen ones in Judah, or as the victors over Judah. All the proud, whether Jew or Gentile, will perish in the judgment. But Habakkuk stresses the positive side of his main point, namely, "the righteous shall live by his faith." God states this as a promise in 2:4, and then Habakkuk banks all of his hope on it in chapter 3.

For us today, the relationship between trusting God and standing righteous before him is that God looks at our faith in Jesus and counts us righteous. The reason God can do that for us sinners is that Christ took the punishment for our sins on himself. Already in **Isaiah 53:11** this is plain: *"By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities."*

The judgment of God came upon Babylon and Judah but this is just a foreshadowing of final judgment at the end of time. What is it that will bring life instead of death in the judgment? If this is not your question, let me say in the most loving way I can, you are in a dream world. You are living in a fool's paradise of unreality if you do not ask with all your heart, "How can I stand in the judgment of God which is coming?" **Hebrews 9:27** "It is appointed for me to die once, and after that comes judgment."

What will you be trusting at that judgment? Nobody stands on that little glass bridge that stands out across the Grand Canyon and boasts on what a good year they had. You feel really small and fragile. Even the bravest of us are humbled by that. Take that times a billion... you will not be able to stand before the vast, almighty, spotless God of the universe and point to your feeble pile of "good works" or strength...Are you standing on your own strength as your god? Your good works? Your

achievements? Your family heritage? Your intellect? Or like Habakkuk, are you standing God's strength? What God has achieved for you in Jesus Christ?

2) What are you trusting in to bring ultimate joy? Christ or Other

So I've been here long enough to know that, out here today, there are those of you who are doing great. You are loving the Lord right now, walking in community well. You are content in your singleness, For some of you, your marriage is great and you're in a good spot right now. And then there are others of you who are not in a good spot. You're not handling your singleness well, you don't have your eyes where they need to be, you've got some sort of functional savior in a man or woman that you think is the answer. Maybe your kids are crazy, or your marriage is on the rocks or your priorities in life are all out of wack, you lost your job. So whether everything is well, or life is hard right now. What are you banking on for joy? Because life has a way bringing cycles of mountain tops and valleys...

The only joy in the universe that cannot be taken from you is joy in Christ. Every other joy can be taken from you. No matter how much you lock it down, no matter how much you defend it, no matter how much you try to protect it, it's like trying to hold oil in your hand. You can't. Now when tragedy strikes like it did for Habakkuk, when you lose your health, when you lose a loved one, when the bank account dries up, when you get fired from your job, when your business tanks, when you are rejected, when all that you have built your worth on and all you have stocked your joy in is stripped from you, then you're in a lot of trouble if joy is in these things. Because your very identity is lost. So if your greatest joy is in your spouse, what happens when they die, get hurt or get weak and can't do for you the things that make you feel like they're your deepest joy? Well now your life is wrecked. If your deepest joy is your children, what happens when something happens to one of them or they don't turn out like you thought or they move away?

So the pattern that is established in Habakkuk that has implications for all of us. And the gospel rhythm that you and I need to find our lives in tune with is really that rhythm of remembering who God is, what God has done, what He has accomplished on our behalf and then rejoicing in that because he makes our feet like the gazelle. And you will find that a firm foundation regardless of circumstance.