

Living By Faith

^{1:1} The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received. ² How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? ³ 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. ... ^{2:1} 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. ² Then the LORD replied: “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. 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. ⁴ “See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness

Children are very inquisitive. They always ask why. “Why do I have to go to school? Why do I have to eat my beans? Why does it rain? Why ... why ... why?” Children are filled with endless curiosity about things around them. Many times they catch us off guard. We don’t know what to say. “Go ask your mother... You’ll understand when you get older,” are some responses we may have.

We adults are just as inquisitive, only our questions tend to be deeper. Why do bad things happen to good people? Why is this happening to me? Where is God? Habakkuk, in our text today, had some questions. Give him credit. He knew where to go for the answer—to God our Father. Sometimes God does give us an answer to our questions, other times he doesn’t. What do we do then? May we do what Habakkuk learned to do, to live by faith, trusting God knows what is best and is doing what is best for us.

We know very little about Habakkuk. We do know that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah. He seems to be more of a “praying” prophet than a “preaching” prophet. His book includes three prayers spoken to God with three deep questions. Habakkuk was in tune with all that was going on. And it disturbed him. **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.** How violent was it? In his lifetime King Manasseh sacrificed his sons in a fire to Baal. Manasseh murdered so many innocent people, their bodies could fill a valley. All of society was crumbling. Church attendance had dropped dramatically. Folks abandoned God and turned to sorcery and witchcraft. There was violence all around. And this is from the same people God chose to be his own and whose sole existence was to be a living testimonial to a good and gracious God. God concluded that they were worse than the nations who occupied Canaan before them. And those nations were so bad God couldn’t wait for judgement day. He destroyed them early on earth.

You remember studying the three uses of God’s Law in Catechism class? One use is as a mirror to show us we are sinners. Another is a guide so believers can honor God with their lives as they avoid sin and live as holy ones. We tend to forget the third use, the curb use of Law. God left a semblance of his Law in the hearts of all people. Even unbelievers understand the main points of the Ten Commandment, at least four through ten. And this knowledge keeps sinful actions within some sort of bounds. So there are only 50 murders instead of five thousand, and there is some general respect for others property and so on. It got so bad in Habakkuk’s day that folks stopped being curbed. They were so calloused they knew no boundaries.

These things bothered Habakkuk. Apparently he had called upon God repeatedly to intervene, to restore justice and stop the violence. Yet it seemed God did not listen. So in his opening prayer he cries out in near frustration, **How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?** Habakkuk was not praying like other people. He didn’t ask God for a better home or a good crop or a higher paying job. He wasn’t selfish in his prayer. His eyes burned to see such rampant violence. His heart ached for all those who were being hurt. I have seen bumper stickers which say, “Prayer changes things.” But what do you do when you pray and nothing changes? **How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?** We get desperate. Do something, Lord, anything.

Then God broke the silence. In the rest of chapter one, not included in our reading, God gave Habakkuk an answer. It wasn’t the answer he was expecting. God told him that he was not sitting by idly. He had been working on this the whole time. God was busy raising up a new empire called Babylon. Babylon is described as a ruthless, blood thirsty nation who will crush all. In other words, God will deal with the violence of Judah by raising up a violent nation who will come and violently overthrow them. Live by the sword, die by the sword.

Habakkuk must have felt ashamed that he dared to say God wasn’t listening. God was paying attention. God was doing something about it. But another question came to mind. What about the Babylonians? In some ways they were worse, more blood thirsty, being more violent than Judah. Will God let their violence go unpunished? So in chapter two, Habakkuk prays to God with this question. But you will notice that it is very different from his first. His first prayer was filled with frustration. He accused God of not caring, not listening, not doing something. This prayer is different. He gets it. He now knows that God does care. He knows God hears. He knows God is taking action. So, he doesn’t demand that God do something. He promises he will sit back to wait and see what God will do.

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The righteous will live by his faithfulness. Actually, I prefer to older translation, the righteous will live by faith. Habakkuk is getting it. Habakkuk is now learning what it means to live by faith. Instead of questioning God, he is trusting God whether he gives him an answer or not. He is trusting God and will patiently wait for the Lord to act whether in his lifetime or after. He learned how to live by faith. He will wait to see what the Lord will do.

Only the just or believers can live by faith like this. Just and righteous are the same word. Job was called righteous or just, not because he lived a perfect life, but because he trusted in the Lord. Abraham is called righteous, not because he lived a holier life than you or me. He believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. You see, we believers are just, we are righteous, because God credits or puts on our account his righteousness. When Adam and Eve sinned, God pointed out their sin, but then promised that one descendent of the woman will come and undo all the death and destruction sin has caused. So the world waited. Literally thousands of years passed before this chosen one, this Savior, would come. He was born of the virgin Mary. And we did not expect the way God would deal with sin. He will counter the violence of sin with violence. God would crush his own Son on the cross instead of us. What happened to Jesus was violent. No, not the nails. The violence came when he looked around and did not see God. "Why have you forsaken me?" he cried out. He was experiencing the violence of hell for us at that moment. Because he did, Jesus reconciled us with God. He brought peace. He made things right.

And God takes that righteousness, that peace and good standing, and gives it to us through faith. That is how the Bible gets away calling us just, righteous, holy. And what happens? The righteous live by faith. We simply trust God whether we see or understand what he is up to.

Oh, we have questions, too, many questions. It pains us to see how sinful people treat and hurt others. Our eyes burn when we see all the violence, fraud, and evil in the world. Our hearts ach for all who are suffering. Why does God let violence go unchecked? Why isn't he doing something? Learn from Habakkuk. God is doing something. He is listening to our prayers. And like Habakkuk, wait patiently on your Lord. Habakkuk didn't know about the Babylonians. In fact, no one had. They were just a puny, upstart little city state that all figured would amount to nothing. But God was raising them to be his servant to punish Judah. God is still just as active today. Most of the time we do not see it. He is governing the entire universe for the sake of his Church. He is very active making things work out for our good. He will come again. He will raise all the dead, the resisters to shame and everlasting judgment, but believers to live everlasting. Even if we don't see all God is doing in our lifetime, we know, we trust him and his promises.

The world is resisting him. Ever try to give a cat a bath? That cat will bite and claw you every second until your arms are full of scratches. The world is clawing against God. Sadly, so many will never let him save them. God says to wait. The Day is coming when he will deal with them. But he will still make sure his Word is preached despite the clawing, and slowly, almost invisibly, he will continue to convert and save folks as he brings them to faith. Trust him.

Want to see what a blessing living by faith is? Go to the final chapter of this book. Listen to Habakkuk's confidence in the Lord. ¹⁷ **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,** ¹⁸ **yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.** ¹⁹ **The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.** It will be quite a few years before the Babylonians will come, but they will come. Habakkuk sees the destruction they will bring. Everything will be in ruins. But Habakkuk sees more than ruined fields and empty barns. He has a reason to rejoice in the Lord because his Lord is his Savior. We don't know the short term future. In fact, the short term future may appear bleak. But we know the long term future. This Savior God will rescue us from this world of violence and this body of death when he comes back for us on the Last Day.

You are just and righteous in Christ. Live by faith. Trust God even if he doesn't tell you all he is doing. Then you find strength to run like a deer or to tread thousand foot crevices with sure feet. Trust him. Amen.