

# Habakkuk:

## The Righteous Shall Live by Faith



We have all probably seen or heard the story of a violent crime taking place where someone who witnessed it stood idly by and did nothing. Someone did something that shouldn't be done, to someone who shouldn't have ever had it done to them in the first place. Instead of doing something, the only person who witnessed this did nothing. Have you ever heard those stories? Have you ever watched the video clips like that on the news? If you are like me, you always have this thought. How could someone who could do something, not do something, to stop what was happening to someone.

As we exit off Route 66 into the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, we are going to discover that question. That thought is going to be asked by the prophet. But he is not asking it about somebody in Israel; he is asking it of the God of Israel. How can You do nothing? How can You stand idly by and watch what is going on and not act? How long am I going to have to keep praying and You not hear me? Why don't You do something?

I would dare say there are a few of us that have been in a situation before where we have had a similar thought about God. We thought it in our mind, but never said it. We never acted upon in. We never got counsel

because we were afraid to ask. You see, Habakkuk is not a book like that of the other prophets where God had a complaint about Israel, so he raised a prophet to share with Israel what his complaint was. Habakkuk was a prophet who had a complaint about the God he served.

Many of us have not done much studying of some of these Minor Prophets, so we are going to be in for an interesting study as we take exit 35. Habakkuk is quoted three times in the New Testament, which quotes what I believe is the key verse in the book, "The righteous shall live by faith." When this sermon ends, I pray that we will understand why Habakkuk's story fits into the big story of what the Bible is ultimately teaching us about what God did for us in Jesus Christ. Our Scripture will be several different verses.

## **Scripture**

**(Chapter 1:1-4)**

***"The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.***

***O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not hear?***

***Or cry to you "Violence!"  
and you will not save?***

***Why do you make me see iniquity,  
and why do you idly look at wrong?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.***

***So the law is paralyzed,  
and justice never goes forth.***

***For the wicked surround the righteous;  
so justice goes forth perverted."***

**(Chapter 1:13)**

***"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?"***

These are some big time questions. Some of you are thinking God should have struck him dead. No, God knows not only these kind of questions are in the heart of the prophet but He understands they are also in the heart of His people. So, He has placed a whole book in the Bible to help us understand what we are supposed to do when things seem to be going the way we don't want them to go.

**(Chapter 2:1-4)**

***"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.  
The Lord answered me.***

***"Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.  
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.***

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

(Chapter 3:18-19)

***"...yet I will rejoice in the Lord;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.  
God, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer's;  
he makes me tread on my high places."***

## **Habakkuk's Complaint Against God**

I struggled with Habakkuk. I think I struggled because I had to be sure Habakkuk is saying what I think he is saying. To use his own words, he has a complaint against God. In most every prophetic book we have read, God had a complaint about Israel, so he raised up a prophet to share the complaint with His people so they would correct their ways. In this book, God is not complaining about His people.

- **How Long Will God Not Hear His Cry?**

His prophet, Habakkuk, on behalf of God's people, is taking a complaint to God. Now, I want you to note that in the complaint, Habakkuk does not talk about God. He talks to God. Do you see the difference? This is not giving us permission to complain to others about God. That is not what Habakkuk is doing. Habakkuk, in a prayer, takes his complaint to God. He gets right to the point. There is no 'Dear Father,' nor is there a flowery introduction: *How long must I keep crying out for help? You don't even hear what I am saying!* (Notice that he didn't say You will not answer, but You don't even hear.) *How long am I going to pray to You, needing help, and You not even hear me? How long do I have to keep waving my arms and saying violence, violence, violence, here, there, everywhere and You refuse to save? How long are You going to keep letting this go on?*

- **Why Does God Look Idly at Wrong?**

Then, Habakkuk asks why: *Why Lord? You called me to be a prophet. You put me on the watch tower. I have been faithful to observe what is going on. I see it and can't do anything about it. Why would You burden my eyes to see all of this, and You just look idly at all the wrongs that are taking place?* Whoa!! Again, many of us have been there before God. Listen, you don't have to run to someone else to ask; you can run to the Bible and take comfort from a person who has already been where you have been, whether it was personal or whether it was on behalf of others. Habakkuk is doing it on behalf of a nation. He basically said God, You have given us this law, and the law is not working. Justice is being perverted. The wicked are overrunning the righteous. This is not how it is supposed to be!

Instead of sending a lightning bolt and striking Habakkuk dead, which is what many of us think is exactly what would happen if we were to say something like that to God, God answers him. To summarize God's answer in verses 5-11, God basically said Habakkuk; I am doing something. In answer to your prayer, no, I am already doing something and when I do and you understand what I am doing, you are not going to believe it. Habakkuk is complaining that he is a prophet of Israel, and inside the nation of Israel, the godly are being persecuted by the godless. It is going horribly for the righteous and great for the unrighteous. When you look at life in Israel, a people who are supposed to be holy people, their rights are being trampled on, and the ungodly have just got it made. And God says yes, I hear you. I want you to know I am already doing a work. When the work is revealed and you come to grips with what I am doing, it is going to blow your mind. What God is doing is raising up the Chaldeans of Babylonia, a horrible people, and He is going to bring them into the land of Israel. He is going to use the Babylonians and their vast army, and their vast deportation foreign policy to judge sin in Israel. Whoa!! The answer to his prayer is on its way, but it is not going to be wrapped like he thinks it is going to be wrapped. It is going to be wrapped in the form of a Babylonia army.

- **Why Does God Idly Remain Silent?**

In verses 12 through the rest of chapter 1, Habakkuk is going to contemplate what God just said to him, and now he has another 'why' question. If you will notice, he appeals to the name of God, he appeals to the nature of God, and he appeals to the justice of God in these verses. But when he summarized it, he says in verse 13 that it just doesn't seem right that God would idly sit back and watch a sinful nation like the Babylonians destroy a nation more righteous than them. In judging Israel's sin, God is going to raise up a nation more violent and wicked, and use them as an instrument of His judgment. He is going to use a sinful people to judge His people. Habakkuk is saying that doesn't seem fair, because it is one thing for God to let the unrighteous in their land overrun the righteous, but it doesn't seem right at all for God to let the unrighteous in another nation overrun their country and God stand idly by and watch it happen.

Does anyone believe it is possible that God, who was sovereign in the Old Testament over nations, is still sovereign over nations today? Could we even begin to wrap our minds around the possibility that perhaps some of the evil that is going on today is actually under the sovereignty of God, and that He might be using a pagan godless society and nation to judge? I didn't say that is what He is doing; I just asked.

## **God Answers**

Habakkuk continues His complaints to God, and then says he is going to go back to work, back to his watch tower, and watch and see what God says. Then the Lord God answers him. He talks about a vision that Habakkuk sees. It is a vision of the end, a vision of how God is going to use the Babylonians to judge His people. Then in the last chapter, just as the Babylonian army steps into the life of Israel, God shows Habakkuk that He and His army, He, in all of His holiness, is going to step into the life of the Babylonians and judge them. God said, I will use the Babylonians, who are

godless, to judge My people, but in judging My people, I will also judge the Babylonians for their sins.

## **The Righteous Shall Live by Faith**

The book of Habakkuk is saying judgment is on its way. It is coming. What do you do in the meantime if you are righteous? In human history, every time God steps in and judges a people for their sins, the righteous suffer along with the unrighteous. You do realize this, right? Whoever came up with this thought that the righteous are going to be exempt from suffering, I think missed it. The Bible says when God is doing what we can't see He is doing, what do you do? How do you live in the meantime? God told Habakkuk, it is coming in your lifetime. You will see it happen, but it is not here yet. It is coming; judgment is coming. So what do we do in the meantime? We live by faith.

The time we are living in right now is a time that reveals that there are two kinds of people, according to Habakkuk 2:4. There are people who are not upright, not right with God; they are crooked. It is hard to define crooked. If I say something is crooked, you have no idea what shape of crooked that is. But if I say he is straight, we all have a definition of straight. We all know what rightness is. We can define rightness, but crookedness takes various forms. Habakkuk says that when the soul is puffed up, it is because he is not right on the inside; he is crooked. That is going to manifest itself in different ways. But the righteous, the ones who are straight, the ones who are right with God, by faith, he shall live.

I have been saying for years; and I believe it to be true that when life doesn't make sense to us, when things look all out of whack, when things aren't going the way we think they ought to be going, when God isn't doing what we think He should be doing, it is a prime example for the righteous to be seen. The reason is because in the meantime, the righteous never just exist; they live life the way life is intended to be lived. They lived by faith. Wow!! We don't live by law; we live by faith. I read where someone said that Moses revealed there were six hundred and

thirteen laws of God. In Psalm 15, David reduces that number to eleven. By the time Micah comes along, the laws are reduced to three. By the time of Isaiah, the reduction is to two. In Habakkuk, they are reduced to one. That one law is the righteous shall live by faith. Wow!! When things don't go the way we think they should, we don't quit living. It is during these times that we seize the moment, and we, who are right with God, continue a life that started by faith, with faith. We never doubt our God. We never mistrust Him; we completely trust Him. That is what faith means.

Paul seizes on this two times. In Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, he quotes Habakkuk 2:4. Paul made that famous statement, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." He was not ashamed to preach the gospel because it is the power of God unto the salvation to the ones who believe, to the Jew first, then to the Gentile. Then he goes on to say, for in it (the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ) the righteousness of God is revealed. When the gospel is preached, when the gospel is heard and we understand it, we begin to see how God makes a man right with Him. God makes a man right with Him by putting His Son on a cross in our place, taking our sin, crucified Him, and judged Him instead of us. Wow!! You are brought into a right relationship with God the moment you trust what God did in Christ. A new life starts, and it started by faith. The dominant principle of your life after faith is faith!!

- **Evidence of Faith**

When Paul writes to the Galatian church, they are struggling with the law. I will never forget when I first came to this church that an elderly man asked me why the plan of salvation is by law in the Old Testament, and by faith in the New Testament. I can't imagine being a Baptist in a Baptist church and believing man was ever saved by law. But there are still people who believe in the Old Testament method of salvation, where people are saved by keeping the Law of Moses. Guys, that is wrong. Paul writes to the church at Galatia and says no one was ever justified by the law! As a matter of fact, the Bible says the purpose of the law was to reveal to us



that we were sinners and we needed a Savior. Then in Galatians 3:11, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to say even the Old Testament itself says the just shall live by faith. It is a reference to Habakkuk, which is basing his reference on Genesis 15:6, where God said to Abraham to look up into the sky and count the stars, and that is how many kids you are going to have. Abraham believed, and the Bible says it was accounted to him for righteousness. Please understand this, the moment God steps into your life with the truth of what He has done for you and you believe that, you commit your life to that, you trust in that, you are brought into a right relationship with God and you are right! The evidence of your rightness is that you continue to live your life by faith. Not only when everything is going good, but when life gets tough and your world gets turned upside down, and you question why this is happening to you and how God could sit idly by, we keep living by faith in Him! That is evidence of faith!

The writer of Hebrews was a young preacher who was preaching to a Jewish house church where they are being persecuted. It would be so easy for them to go back into Judaism so they wouldn't be persecuted, and to believe that you are saved by the blood of a bull or a goat. In chapter 10, the writer warns them not to go back. He quotes the Old Testament to say that He who is coming is coming and He will not delay; the just live by faith and my soul takes no pleasure in him who shrinks back, or turns back. Then he makes this footnote. I think better of you. I think you are those who are really of faith and will continue to the end, and you will not turn back to perdition. Wow!!

## **In the Meantime**

In the meantime, what do we do in the meantime? What do we do right now? I think Habakkuk teaches two things about this life that lives by faith. Before God ultimately judges the world at the second coming of Jesus, if we are justified, if we are right, we live by faith. What does that life look like? We wait. We wait. We wait. We wait. It is coming. God told Habakkuk to get a tablet, and write the vision on the tablet that the judgment is

coming. Write it so they who run may see it. Write it so they who see it may run. Don't get the picture of Habakkuk getting a little tablet. According to the scholars, the best way to translate this into our culture is to write it on a billboard! It is a picture of being in a classroom and writing it on a blackboard. Rent a sign and say, "Judgment is coming," so that those who see it may run. The picture is not of them running away from the judgment. Run is used many times in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to be a description of the Christian life, or the godly life. We refer to it as a walk, but many times, Paul describes it as being a race where you are running. In the Old Testament, that same metaphor is used. This is saying that if you realize judgment is coming, it will affect the way you live. In the meantime, you wait.

Chapter 3 talks about how God is going to step in, because he gives five 'whoas' to the Babylonians in chapter 2, and they are bad. In chapter 3, God's army is getting ready to step in to the Babylonians and judge them. Habakkuk ends his word by saying I am going to go to the tree and there will not be any fruit. I am not going to have any of this and I am not going to have any of that; I am going to lose everything I have. The one thing I am going to do in the midst of this is to rejoice in the God of my salvation.

I think some of us Christians have been misled to believing we should rejoice in the salvation of our God. Therefore, we only rejoice in those salvation moments, when we are rescued, when everything is going good, and when it is going according to our plans. When that is not happening, we cannot rejoice. The Bible says rejoice in the God of your salvation. Don't rejoice in you salvation, only rejoice in the God of your salvation.

### **1. Wait for God's Judgment**

So while we, the righteous, are living by faith, there should be two characteristics about our life. We are waiting for God to bring His judgment. It is coming. I promise you, at the second coming of Jesus, Christ every wrong will be made right. The reason you and I are right with Him is because our sins have already been judged in Christ at the cross.

## **2. Rejoice in the God of Your Salvation**

In the meantime, between the cross and the second coming, you live by faith. Don't ever take matters into your own hands. Don't let what is happening around you cause you to just exist and just survive. You live by faith! While you are living by faith, the characteristic of our life should be rejoicing in the God of our salvation.

Let us contemplate on waiting on God and rejoicing in the God of our salvation. When you live by faith, you will stay faithful. No matter what might be going on around you, you will not let whatever is going on cause you to ever be not be right; you will do the right thing. As life gets worse, the light of God will shine more brightly in the darkness if we are the light God wants us to be.