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Thinking Theologically Habakkuk 1:12

Last week we began a study of the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. My goal as we begin a new year is to grow in the area of trusting God. We glorify God by growing in our confidence in Him by reflecting on His ways revealed in His Word.

William Cowper was a man in church history who had to work at trusting God. His life has been described as “one long accumulation of pain,” especially mental pain. Cowper was born in 1731 in Berkhamsted, England. His mother died when he was only 6 years old, leaving him to be raised by his father. His father didn’t treat him all that well. The mental pain Cowper struggled with was primarily depression. He had four major battles with it through his life, leading him to attempt suicide on several occasions. He was never successful, however, and God would preserve his life until death by dropsy in 1800, when he was 69.

Cowper has an interesting conversion story. He apparently became a believer in Christ in 1764 while he was in residence at St. Albans Insane Asylum. He took a walk outside and he noticed a Bible sitting on a bench in the garden, and he opened it and began reading and God eventually used John 11 and Romans 3:25 to open his eyes to the goodness of Jesus and the sufficiency of his atoning work. I love those kind of stories because they remind us that God does His work through His Word. The Word does the work.

The same thing happened to another man named Augustine. Augustine lived a profligate life until he heard the sound of a boy saying, “Take up and read” and he was handing out Paul’s letter to the Romans. Augustine took up and read Romans and he got to Romans 13:13-14, “Let us behave properly in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust.” The Spirit worked

through those verses and Augustine did what they said. He turned from his sin to put on the Lord Jesus and he was never the same. The Word of God does the work of God.

Back to William Cowper. In 1767 Cowper moved to Olney, England to sit under the ministry of John Newton. They became good friends. Newton tried to help Cowper through his depression by having him write hymns which forced him to think through his theology in practical ways. They would actually take walks together and talk theology and they would discuss how Scripture addresses life in the real world. One of the hymns that Cowper wrote is called “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” It is a combination of assertions about God’s goodness, sovereignty and wisdom along with commands to take courage and trust in him. The hymn is a beautiful expression of the kind of faith that sustained Cowper through long periods of darkness and despair.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

**Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence**

He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

William Cowper is a great example of a man who worked through his problems in life the right way by working through his problems theologically. He worked through bouts of depression by reminding Himself that God is in control and God is always working out His sovereign plan and he challenged himself to trust the Lord. Jeremiah 17:7, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord.”

The title for this lesson is Thinking Theologically. Theology is a word that just means the study of God - who He is biblically. Last week I said that our goal together as we start a new year in foundations is to grow in trusting God. How does that work? **You trust God more fully when you learn to evaluate your problems in light of God’s ways revealed in God’s Word.** The real challenge is to reorient your entire way of thinking. What do I mean? You don’t start with your problems and then reason your way to God. You try and do the opposite. You start with God as He reveals Himself in Scripture and then reason your way back down from heaven to earth. That’s the way Jesus taught His disciples to handle the problem of anxiety in Matthew 6:25-34.

I also pointed you to a quote by Jerry Bridges that reminded us that in this life it is sometimes easier to obey God than it is to trust God. Bridges writes in a book called *Trusting God*, “**Obeying God is worked out within well-defined boundaries of God’s revealed will. Trusting God is worked out in an arena that has no**

boundaries. We do not know the extent, the duration, or the frequency of the painful, adverse circumstances in which we must frequently trust God. We are always coping with the unknown. Yet it is just as important to trust God as it is to obey Him. When we disobey God we defy His authority and despise His holiness. But when we fail to trust God we doubt His sovereignty and question His goodness.”

The difference between trusting God and obeying God is that one has boundaries and one doesn't. Obeying God has boundaries (Genesis to Revelation) but trusting God has no boundaries. Obeying God comes down to knowing and doing His will revealed in the boundaries of Genesis to Revelation but trusting God has no boundaries. We do not know what a day may bring forth so we have to learn to trust the Lord one day at a time.

It is just as important to trust God as it is to obey God. Bridges goes on to write, “God views our distrust of Him as seriously as He views our disobedience. When the people of Israel were hungry, “they spoke against God, saying, ‘Can God spread a table in the desert? ... Can he supply meat for his people?’” The next two verses tell us, “When the Lord heard them, he was very angry ... for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.” The people of Israel questioned whether or not God was powerful enough to take care of them and God took Israel's distrust of Him just as serious as He took their disobedience to His Word. Their unbelief made the Lord very angry. They say His power and yet they asked, “Can _____?” God didn't like that.

Another difference I would say between trusting God and obeying God is that trusting God precedes obedience. **Obedience follows faith.** In Romans 1:5, Paul is describing his role as an apostle, and he writes that his role is to “bring about the **obedience of faith** among all the Gentiles for His Name's sake.” Paul's goal was to preach the gospel clearly so that people who believe in Christ would follow their faith with obedience. In Galatians 5-6 we learned how we obey in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This morning we come to another principle we need to nail down if we're going to grow in trusting God - **In order to trust God, we must always view our circumstances through the eyes of faith, not of sense.** There are going to be many times in our lives when we look at the world around us and it doesn't add up. There was a book written years ago titled, “If God loves me, then why can't I get my locker open?” Those if/then questions

can really plague us throughout our lives. If this is true about God then why did this happen or why is this happening to me? Sometimes life isn't going to add up or even go our way.

Last week we began a new study in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. In Habakkuk we find a man trying to make sense of the circumstances of his life from a divine perspective. We find in Habakkuk a man who is perplexed because when he looks around in Judah in the early 600's B.C., a little over 600 years before the coming of Christ, it looks from his perspective like sin is winning and God is sleeping. It looks like sin is winning and it looks from Habakkuk's limited perspective like God doesn't know and God doesn't care. **“The central focus of Habakkuk's prophecy is on the relation of a sovereign and holy God to a sinful world, where society is permeated by godlessness and injustice.”**

Remember Habakkuk lived during the reign of a good king named Josiah and a bad king named Jehoiakim. Under good king Josiah God brought revival to His people which lasted for one generation. But when Josiah died in battle in 609 B.C. the people in Judah returned to their old sinful ways under king Jehoiakim. It was during this transition that Habakkuk had to grow in his ability to trust the Lord by learning to see his adverse circumstances through the eyes of faith and not of sense.

Habakkuk is an interesting prophet. **You'll remember that the role of the prophet was to represent God to the people.** Most every Prophet was confrontational because most of the time Israel as a nation was living in sin and had to be confronted. What makes Habakkuk an interesting prophet is that he is not confronting people. **Habakkuk is actually confronting the Lord.** In the first 4 verses Habakkuk confronts God along two lines when it came to what was happening in Judah in his day - Do you not know and do you not care? Habakkuk challenges God in the area of His omniscience - God's knowledge of all things and His providence - His care over His creation.

Then God answers Habakkuk's complaint in Habakkuk 1:5-11 by really putting Habakkuk in his place. He tells Habakkuk that He is doing something astonishing, something that was beyond Habakkuk's ability to fathom. God is omniscient and His

invisible hand was working behind the scenes to raise up another nation to discipline the sins of His people. This is something Habakkuk's little brain couldn't fathom.

Let's read these verses as a quick review from last week:

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Hab 1:1 The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

2 How long, O Lord, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, "Violence!"
Yet You do not save.

3 Why do You make me see iniquity,
And cause *me* to look on wickedness?
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;
Strife exists and contention arises.

4 Therefore the law is ignored
And justice is never upheld.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore justice comes out perverted.

5 "Look among the nations! Observe!
Be astonished! Wonder!
Because *I am* doing something in your days—
You would not believe if you were told.

6 "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
That fierce and impetuous people
Who march throughout the earth
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.

7 "They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.

8 "Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening.
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping *down* to devour.

9 "All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces *moves* forward.
They collect captives like sand.

10 "They mock at kings
And rulers are a laughing matter to them.
They laugh at every fortress

And heap up rubble to capture it.

11 “Then they will sweep through *like* the wind and pass on.
But they will be held guilty,
They whose strength is their god.”

From verse 1 we understand that this is an oracle. That word has the idea of a load or a burden. Oracles were one of the ways God revealed Himself in the Old Testament. It usually had to do with a message from God to a pagan nation. **An oracle was a word placed upon Habakkuk’s heart by God that he must accurately convey to others.** The point is that Habakkuk assures his readers that what he was about to relate was not born of his own ingenuity (He wasn’t making this up) but this is what God had revealed to him.

Peter reminded his readers in 2 Peter 1:21 that men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. What we get to work on as we study Habakkuk is eavesdropping. Let’s be honest - some people are better at eavesdropping than others. God actually wants all of us to eavesdrop on this 3 chapter dialogue because through it we follow a man going from fear to faith, moving from instability to stability. Romans 15:4 talks about the benefit of the Old Testament this side of the cross. Romans 15:4, “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Habakkuk was written to give us hope this side of the cross.

The first thing we said last week from Habakkuk 1:1-4 is that God’s ways are not our ways. Habakkuk didn’t understand why God was allowing all the violence and iniquity and oppression in his day and the fact that wickedness was on the rise so that justice came out perverted. He looked around and he didn’t like what he saw. God wasn’t doing what he thought God should be doing. So, he took his concerns to the Lord in persistent prayer and God answered his prayer.

The second thing we said last week from Habakkuk 1:5-11 is that God is always working. From Habakkuk’s perspective it looked like God was hibernating - It looked like He didn’t know and He didn’t care about all that was happening in Judah. In Habakkuk 1:5-11 God answers Habakkuk’s complaint with a reminder that He does know and He does care and God is always working. He that keepeth Israel (The one

verse I have memorized in the King James) shall neither slumber nor sleep. What was true of them is really true of us.

John Piper writes, “God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.” God was doing something in Habakkuk’s day that Habakkuk couldn’t even fathom. That’s why I said that God’s ways are not our ways and that God is always working because that’s what we see in these first 11 verses. From Habakkuk’s earthly perspective it looked like God was taking a siesta but He wasn’t. God is always working out His sovereign plan. His invisible hand is always working out His sovereign will and nothing can stop Him. Isaiah 46:9-10, “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”

Do you remember what God was going to do in order to deal with the sin problem in Judah? In verses 5-11 God answers Habakkuk’s complaint by telling him that He is raising up the Chaldeans, that wicked nation, to correct the sin problem in Judah. Now Habakkuk is really confused. He finally got an answer from the Lord but the Lord’s answer throws Habakkuk into another theological tailspin. He wanted the Lord to send revival like he saw in King Josiah’s day but God is sending something else - God is raising up the Chaldeans, that notoriously wicked people, to come in and deal with the sin problem in Judah.

That’s where we turn now in the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk’s next concern is this - **How can a holy God use a nation more wicked than Judah to punish the sins of Judah?** Do you understand the divine dilemma? God, how can you use a more wicked nation to punish a less wicked nation? I know we’re bad, but those dudes are really really bad. That creates a divine dilemma for the prophet Habakkuk.

Let me try and draw this out for us - Imagine living each day knowing there was a day coming in the near future when North Korea was going to invade America and take over our nation. Imagine there was a day coming when another nation known for its godlessness was going to come in and take over our country and there was nothing we could do about it. Where would you go mentally if you knew people were going to come

in and kick you out of your house and maybe even kill you and there was nothing you could do?

I want you to look with me at Habakkuk 1:12 because this is Habakkuk's initial response to what he now understands. This is a good example of someone working through his problems through the eyes of faith and not of sense. Habakkuk 1:12 has been described as the prophet's **confession of faith** describing the characteristics of God. When Habakkuk receives Word that the Chaldeans are coming he immediately turns his mind back to what he knows to be true about God.

Habakkuk 1:12-13

Are You not from everlasting,
O Lord, my God, my Holy One?
We will not die.
You, O Lord, have appointed them to judge;
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.

I just want to remind you of something we can all learn from Habakkuk - Habakkuk seems to always take his concerns in life directly to the Lord. He was a man of prayer. He didn't bottle everything up in his heart. He was always laying his heart bare before the Lord. He got everything out in private prayer instead of bottling everything up.

What happens when you bottle up your problems? Have you ever taken a soda and shaken it up and then had someone else open it? What happened? It spewed soda all over the place. When you bottle all your problems up inside they end up spewing out and really making a mess in your relationships. No one likes to be around someone who is always complaining about their problems. I Peter 5:6-7, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." True believers are to humble themselves by taking their all their anxieties to the LORD first and foremost.

These verses both deal with questions Habakkuk had over the nature of God. These really aren't questions, are they? They're more like assertions. Again, it's kind of like when your getting dressed and you wife says, "Are you really wearing those shoes with

those pants?” Guys, we all know that is not a question, right? She's not asking. She is telling you that she wants you to change. Habakkuk is going back to what he knows to be true about God and working it down to his new problem. Where does Habakkuk start?

Habakkuk begins with the covenant name for God. “Are you not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my holy One?” This is I AM WHO I AM (Ex 3:14). Capital LORD. Eternal existence, eternal presence. As God has been in the past, He will be in the future. He is the same yesterday, today and forever and He’s not going anywhere. He’ll always be with His people.

The Hebrew term for “everlasting” focuses particularly on God’s past acts in Israel’s salvation history. This leads us to our second principle for trusting God - **In order to trust God you must go back and think through all that God reveals about Himself to His people.** Doug Bookman, “Wherever you are in the Bible bring with you all that God has already revealed about Himself.” Habakkuk had a lot of revelation about God in the reservoir. He had a lot of truth to go back to for his time of need. Habakkuk, at this time had close to 4,000 years of history, of God’s revelation to His people beginning with what God revealed to Moses beginning with creation.

Habakkuk knew that God eternally existed. He knew that God chose to reveal Himself to Israel as their God and that the LORD is the one true God and there are no others. He also knew that God’s essential nature is holy. Are you not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, **my holy One?**” The adjective *Holy* stresses the essential being of God. **It is the quality of sinlessness which separates him from sinful humanity and from other gods.** This is so important. This is the attribute of God I did not understand growing up. God’s holiness is associated with his transcendent sovereignty and power, manifested in the past redemption of his people.

Because of what Habakkuk brings with him, what can he conclude about the situation in Judah? Look in the middle of verse 12 - “We will not die.” Lord, you have made covenant promises to your people, you are God and there is no one else holy like you, Lord, in light of that you will use the Chaldean’s to correct the problem in Judah but we will not die. **Kenneth Barker, “Habakkuk’s confidence of survival (“we will not die”) reflects his knowledge of God’s future commitment to his people in**

salvation history.” What is Habakkuk doing with his problems? He is starting with what he knows to be true about God first and foremost. Habakkuk is thinking theologically about his problems in life.

What would be wrong if God used the Chaldeans to completely wipe out His people? If God completely wiped out His people then he would be a liar. Hebrews 6:18 says that God cannot lie. He is holy. He is without sin. He promised all the way back in Genesis 3:15 that sin won't win and if the Chaldeans win then sin wins. God will use the Chaldeans to correct the sin problem in Judah, but he will not totally wipe out His people because of His promises.

He promised all that way back in Genesis 3:15 that sin won't win - He promised that the seed of the woman will crush Satan's head. God promised that this descendant who would reverse the curse of sin would come through Abraham. He would be a descendant of Abraham. So, if God wipes out all of Abraham's descendants then Christ can't come and reverse the curse of sin. Are you tracking with me? All that God revealed about Himself up to this point means that God will use the Chaldean's to correct His people but they cannot completely wipe out His people or God is a liar and we know that's not true because God is holy, He is without sin.

Do you see what Habakkuk is doing? He is starting with the character of God and reasoning theologically. He is starting with what he knows to be true about God's relationship to His people and he is working back down to the information he now has about what God is doing with the Chaldeans. Habakkuk knows the Lord. Psalm 9:10, “And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you.”

Is this what you do? Do you always begin with God and work your way back down to your problems bringing with you all that God has revealed in Scripture? I don't always do this. I don't always start with God every morning and then bring everything back to Him throughout the day. This is something I am trying to work on.

I'd like to close with a personal example from this past week. I told this to my Wednesday night class so if you came on Wednesday night please bear with me. On Wednesday morning I meant to get up at 5 am to do a little more studying but we have a very warm blanket on our bed right now and I stayed in bed. I got up just before I had to shower to be at the Hutch Clinic for them to draw some blood for a doctors appointment. As I was walking into the Hutch Clinic I was feeling guilty - Guilty that I had slept in and missed my time in the Word.

And then it dawned on me - **My disappointment in myself does not change what the Bible says about the Lord or about my relationship with Him in any way.** My subjective feelings in that moment do not change the objective truths of Scripture. That's not to say that our sin doesn't grieve the Spirit of God - it does. But what I remembered was that God's truth is not dependent on my feelings. I can't let my feelings control what God's Word says about me. I have to let the truths of God's Word control and guide my feelings. Encouragement comes from applying what is objective to what is subjective and letting the objective truth of Scripture control our emotions. The Bible says that Jesus is my righteousness and that I am forgiven because of His death on the cross. **The Bible doesn't say I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus unless I sleep in and miss my time in the Word.** Those are the truths I needed to remind myself to get some stability in those moments when I am tempted to let my subjective feelings take over my Christian life.

Martin Lloyd Jones, "Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, "Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you."

Habakkuk is a great example. Instead of listening to himself and focusing on his problems he spoke truth in his own heart. He went back and rehearsed the ways God has revealed Himself to His people and he looked at his problem by starting with the truth.

When you anchor your heart to the objective truths of Scripture your emotions will be reliable because they will be anchored to truth.