

*Introduction:* Pg. 785 - Habakkuk. Everyone turn to the table of contents (no shame in that) and look for the book of Habakkuk.

On Tuesday America will vote for our next President. I don't know many people who are thrilled with our options. The commentary and controversy and spin has been disproportionate, if not alarming, in comparison to other election years! As with every election, we not only consider the direction for the next four years, but how our leaders will make decisions that will impact the lives of our children.

Here are a few quick thoughts **for Tuesday** and beyond.

- **Politics is not the hope of the world.** They are very important, but no President or political party is the ultimate solution for the brokenness of our world. Kingdoms rise and fall, so we do not hope in slogans or promised policies. We hope in God.
- We should recognize that **good people**, including good Christians **will disagree** on a host of important political issues, including their decision on Tuesday's vote.
- **Vote your conscience...** whether that is Trump, Hillary, a Third Party Candidate, or you abstain from voting.
- **Remember** that **God is sovereign over all things, including elections.** That means we don't have to panic, but we can continue going about our lives, seeking to be difference makers where God has placed us.

At the end of the day, our country may not be in the prettiest situation, but it pales in comparison to the story we are going to look at today.

600 years before the birth of Jesus, Israel was in a despicable state. The moral and political corruption reached a feverish pitch and they were about to be overtaken by the rise of the Babylonians. There was no hope for destruction to be averted.

This led one of God's prophets, one of his spokesmen, named Habakkuk to go to God in prayer and bring his questions. We are going to consider his story and the times in our lives where we find ourselves...

### **"Questioning God" Habakkuk 1:1-2:1**

Decide now how you will handle injustice. When pressed with the storms of life, you will either turn from God or to God.

**The Point: Bring your questions to God in the midst of your brokenness.**

Let me give you three principles for prayer we can learn from Habakkuk.

#### **I. Bring your burdens before God in prayer.**

- Prayer often begins with a burden.
  - Look at verse 1: "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw."
  - The Hebrew word for oracle can also be translated as "burden."
- Like a city under siege, Habakkuk was surrounded by injustice and it burdened him.

For starters, injustice was rampant in Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel), where the people of God should have been living for justice.

- Verse 2 sets the tone for the entire chapter.
  - “Violence” was unrestrained.
  - The word “violence” is used six times in Habakkuk, the third most of any book, trailing only Proverbs & Psalms (which in 150 chapters using the word 14 times, Habakkuk is three chapters, six times).
  - Violence summarized the scene in Judah. People were injuring other people, not just physically, but physically, nonetheless.
- Then Verse 3.
  - Look at these words. INIQUITY (injustice) & Wrong. Destruction and Violence (which are usually associated with the “unjust oppression of the weaker members within a community). Strife and Contention.
  - In the words of Eugene Peterson, Habakkuk is saying: “God, how long do I have to cry out for help before you listen? How many times do I have to yell, . . . before you come to the rescue? Anarchy and violence break out . . . Law and order fall to pieces. Justice is a joke.”
- Verse 4... summarizes the state of things: “*The law is paralyzed.*”
  - This phrase reveals the gravity of the situation. God’s instructions for his people were set aside. The political and religious systems were so corrupt the people were no longer directed by God’s kind intentions contained in the law.
  - It was though the law was frozen, paralyzed, numb, lifeless, useless, no one seemed to care about God’s heart for them. They scorned him by the way they lived. May that not be true of us.
  - [Is the word alive or absent in you? Is the word frozen to you or is it just flowing all up in your biz?
  - You show me someone full of God, and I’ll show you someone that loves his law. Period. IF you are lifeless, there is probably a correlation with your attitude toward and application of what God has told us in the Bible.]

God answers comes in verse 5, but it is not what Habakkuk or anyone would have expected.

- Verse 5: “Look among the nations and see... You will be amazed (“confounded”).
- This sounds awesome!! People use this as a proof text for mission... as if this were a positive word or an encouraging word. It is anything but that for Habakkuk.
- Verse 6: “For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans...

Injustice was their present reality, but it would soon be compounded exponentially by injustice coming their way. (Verses 5-11)

- The Chaldeans is another name for the Babylonians. They were a nasty people, with devastating militaristic power.
- Look at verse 8... Their horses (before there were F-16s), there were horses were fast and furious. They devoured their enemies and gathered captives like sand (a poetic way of saying
  - They would take their victims into captivity to control them and to demoralize them.
  - There are few things worse than being, not just away from home, but unable to return home.
  - They scoff at kings & laugh at any opposition standing in their way.
- Verse 11 says they had no need of help from any god, because they trusted in their own strength to deliver them, provide for them, and bring them fulfillment. They were humanists to the core.

In light of all that, can you feel his burden?

- I want you to track with me here... Where does a burden come from? Burdens are born when we see the disconnect between God's design and the brokenness of our world. That's when we will feel a burden. This is the way God wants it. It's not that way. That bothers me!
- Burdens are not bad when they are born out of love. This is what moved him to prayer, to go to God and CRY OUT!
- And this reminds us so much of Jesus.
  - Jesus is described (in Isaiah 53) as a man of sorrows.
  - Jesus wept (*real tears*) over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-42; **"And when he drew near and SAW the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!"**)
  - Shalom. What is shalom? Flourishing. The way things ought to be.
  - Are you following this?
    - Jesus wept because he saw the gap between the way things are and the way things ought to be, and it crushed him.
    - What about us? **Does brokenness bother us?** Are you broken over the injustice around you?
    - If it does and when it does, we will, like Jesus and Habakkuk be moved to action.
    - **Burdens spark boldness.** If something really bothers you, you'll do something about it.
  - GOSPEL: Jesus was so burdened by our brokenness that he took the burden of our sin and rebellion against God on himself, that we might be freed from our burden and brought into the shalom of God through him. That's the cross. That's the empty tomb. That's what's up and you can get in on that!!!
  - Burdens spark boldness. Just consider our More than Me last month...
    - You won't be moved unless you see the disconnect between the way things are and the way things ought to be.
    - You won't give more with your abilities, be generous with your meals, talk to others about Jesus or adjust your financial giving unless you see that disconnect.
    - But when you do and you feel the burden, you'll move.
- Life is full of burdens and brokenness. The question is not if we will experience them, but how will we respond when we do.

T: God, invites us to bring our burdens to him in prayer. When we do, we should also..

## II. Bring your unfiltered questions before God in prayer.

- As Habakkuk, whose name can mean "to wrestle," finds himself wrestling with God in the midst of the storm. This is also what the name Israel means.
- As **Jacques Ellul** said: **"Israel, God's combatant, or he who wrestled with God—such is the name which everyone who prays should bear, for prayer is a striving with God."**
- Look at the words of this burdened man:
  - Verse 2: How LONG? Shall I CRY... and you not listen? How LONG will I bring injustice to your attention but you won't deliver?

- Verse 3: Why do I have to look at all of this wrong and how can you look at it and not do anything?
  - Verses 12-13: "Why do you look idly?" You seem indifferent God!
    - "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong." (Which doesn't mean that God is too holy to see our sin - he sees it, which is why he sent Jesus to the cross to deal with it, but it means that he cannot look at it with an ounce of approval.)
    - How can you sit back and allow an evil people to swallow up a less evil people? What is going on?
  - We all ask questions in the midst of the storm. God is big enough for our questions. After all, he already knows we are asking them!
- I don't know what storm you face or the severity of your storm, but I know we all wrestle with the absence of shalom.
    - How long will I have to deal with dissatisfaction in my job?
    - How long will I battle depression?
    - How long will I be disrespected and oppressed by the people around me?
    - How long will kids be abandoned and human beings be trafficked like commodities?
    - When will all of these immigration issues get ironed out?
    - Why does the fallout from the fractured relationships of my past hurt so much?
    - Why is the person I love the most suffering with chronic pain?
    - Why do those who don't give a rip about God seem to prosper, while I'm struggle to make ends meet each month?
    - Why!?!?
  - For Habakkuk, and perhaps for you today, it feels like God does not care about your situation. He seems indifferent about matters you know he is not indifferent about.

#### Marsha's Experience

- Timeline -
  - We get a call in the Spring of 2009 from Marsha's family. He had some abnormal twitching on his side, which led him to go in for a neurological exam and MRI.
  - The scan showed a mass on the outside his brain, but they believed it would be benign. We made plans to go down to be with our family, and 45 minutes before we boarded the plane, we get a call that the tumor was cancerous.
  - The next two years were filled with doctors' visits, trips to GA, Mr. & Mrs. Harris coming to Tisch Center at Duke University (some of the best care in the world). The same surgeon who operated on Ted Kennedy, removed the tumor in Mr. Harris' brain.
  - There was a season after that where the reports were stable and the cancer was even shown to be shrinking. Hopes went high, and then the bottom fell out.
  - The cancer spread. Came back stronger, and Mr. Harris went downhill very quickly.
  - I can't tell you how many times we prayed for God to heal him. I can't tell you how many times, Marsha prayed in anguish: God would you heal? God, why won't you heal? God, how long will he have to suffer?

Bringing God our unfiltered prayer means bringing him our unfiltered emotion.

- This is why I would commend a steady diet of the Psalms to you. They cover the full range of human emotion and experience.

- Some are songs of praise, some are characterized by gratitude, but there are others that are known as psalms of lament.
- Listen to the desperation and raw emotion of **Psalm 13:1-3**

**How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?**

**How long must I take counsel in my soul  
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?**

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- **Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;**

- **light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,**

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- As a side note, I would highly recommend this little devotional book called: ***Songs of Jesus* by Tim Keller (PIC)**

The storms of life are possibly the number one reason why people walk away from the faith or refuse to explore it in the first place. When storms hit, people typically respond by drawing near to God or fleeing from God.

- I believe part of what precipitates people fleeing from God is that they do not bring their questions to God. It's like an unhealthy relationship. You can turn a cold shoulder and grow hard-hearted, or you can talk about your concerns and work them out.
- BUT, the other part of why people flee from God is that they bring their questions in pride, not humility and with skepticism, lacking faith.
  - Carl Amerding says: "the hard issues of God's goodness are set in a context, not of philosophical speculation or cynical debate, but of reverent worship and communion."
  - In other words, Habakkuk is not an immature child trying to scold his Father. He is still less a vindictive victim of his circumstance. He is a worshiper of God, seeking God with faith and confidence even in the midst of a situation that to him, did not compute.

T: Finally, when we pray, bringing our burdens and questions to God, we should also...

### **III. Bring an attitude of faith and wait for God's answer.**

- How will Habakkuk respond, in light of his intense questioning and wrestling with God? The first verse of chapter two tells us. In a vivid picture of his intention, he says, "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 best cities in those days were fortified. They had watchtowers at strategic locations on the walls of the cities to watch out for oncoming enemies. Habakkuk believes God will respond, so he waits for the answer. This is the posture of faith.
- God, I know you hear and I know you will answer!
- The prophets were the watchmen of the people. They were to see God's purposes and plans and communicate accordingly.
- If you were responsible for spotting the enemy, imagine the intensity, the conscientious persistence to keep your eyes peeled for any potential threat. You would have to be alert, focused and always ready.
- This is the kind of watching and waiting Habakkuk is talking about.

## Habakkuk 1.1-2.1. Questioning God

- This is faith. Not passive. Active. Not complaining, just to complain some more, but laying our questions and requests before God and expecting him to respond because he hears and cares and loves us.
- Habakkuk expects God to act based on God's character, and he is bold enough to remind God who he is!
- Remember God's character (remind God).
  - This God, my God, is everlasting. (13)
  - He is holy.
  - God, the situation is so dire, only you can fix it. God, my faith is stretched beyond limits, but I believe you will come through, whether it is how I expect or not.
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### *Conclusion:*

When we are in the midst of the storm, God invites us to come to him. That is the first step to navigating these moments and finding hope on the other side of brokenness. What more appropriate way to conclude our time, then by going to God with our questions, bringing him our burdens, and waiting in faith because he is good and he will respond.