

Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4. The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. ² How long, O 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 wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.

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

The righteous will live by faith

What can you tell me about the prophet Habakkuk? First of all, is it Habackkuk or Haba-kuk? I have heard it said both ways, but I can't tell you for certain which one is the correct or even preferred way to say it, and I challenge you to spell his name without looking. Is it one b or two? Two k's or three? The point is we don't know much about Habakkuk nor is the typical Christian that familiar with him or this book of the Bible. After all, we don't spend a whole lot of time in this book as we do with prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah or even Ezekiel, and it is such a short book we might just pass over it as we are paging through the Scriptures. But what he has to say here, might sound hauntingly familiar. ***² How long, O 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 wrong?*** This is the age-old question that confounds many people, in this age, in the previous age, and it will be an issue for people until the end of time. In recent times it has become the custom that those who are critical of the Bible will use the presence of evil in this world to try to discredit God and deny that he exists. They pose this question with a skeptic's animosity toward God, *Surely, a God of grace does not exist if there is such evil in this world? Why won't he answer?*

It is a rather common critique that is used by those who would try to discredit the Lord. So why would God's prophet come with a question like this? It seems a bit odd that Habakkuk, a man of God, who was given an oracle and utterance of God himself, would be allowed to speak such words. Why would God ever let him record these objections in scripture for all to read?

Well, the important thing to remember is that God wants us to come to Him with our prayers, our calls, our cries of concern. We read it in the Psalms believers coming to God with their cries, laments, with words of hurt and feeling and pain and doubt. God wants us to call upon Him in the day of trouble even with groans that words cannot fully express and He promises to hear us. He wants us to cry out to Him in faith and that is what Habakkuk is doing. The prophet comes in faith. He comes on behalf of God's people and he teaches those who believe to turn to God and to trust in God knowing that the LORD will keep His promises and He cares for his people. The reality was that the people were hurting, the people were crying out under the weight of difficulty and suffering, and so Habakkuk would cry out to God with the trust that God would console and care for his people. God would hear and Habakkuk would bring God's answer to God's people.

That was the role of the prophet in Old Testament times to bring God's word to God's people, as the prophets would serve as this go-between, between God and the people. The prophet would bring God's Word to the people and often the message would be centered on a specific call for the people to repent. The prophet frequently would also be given a message revealing what was to come and would deliver a message of promise. Habakkuk would certainly fulfill those roles in his service to God and the people, but he would also serve in at least two more important roles as prophet. He would bring the concerns of the faithful up to God, and he would go forth and would lead the people in living out God's call to faith. In these words of our lesson today, we have a revealing insight, even a bit of case study, on the main theme of Habakkuk's book and ministry. The righteous will live by faith. They would trust in God to Guide them. They would reflect the righteousness given to them until God delivered them. Thus, it is in a trusting faith that Habakkuk comes before the Lord and he laments the condition of the world around him as he brings his concerns and the concerns of the people before the Lord. The violence, the injustice, the amount of crime, how this ungodliness was dragging out among the people, it was exhausting. It was difficult to watch and tough to stomach. On behalf of the people Habakkuk calls out, he cries out in pain, and in sorrow. He laments but he does not accuse. He looks to God in faith, trusting the Lord who is abounding in patience and love and goodness. He calls out to God wanting God to comfort the people with some answer. He calls upon God to give him some relief. ***"Violence!" but you do not save? ³ Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.***

The second chapter of Habakkuk deals with God's answer and it begins with a striking picture of the prophet waiting for the answer that God had promise. ***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.*** The prophet wants to hear the voice of God breathe some words of comfort or understanding, some words of wisdom that he can take to the people and personally hold on to. He comes in faith on behalf of a people who are hurting and after a chapter and a few verses of asking, of lamenting, of crying out to God, and pouring out his soul, his hurt, and the concerns of the faithful before the feet of the Father and the Father gives an answer. And it is an answer that is given for the consolation of his people for all time.

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The context is fascinating. Habakkuk is likely writing in a time when Judah is facing their demise. The common people are suffering. Violence and injustice, flow from a prevalent lawlessness which itself stems from godlessness and it is all a plague on the people; and because of this great ungodliness judgment will come. God would raise up the Babylonians to bring judgment on the unfaithfulness of the king and the people of Judah. The people would be sent out into exile under this brutal foreign nation, but this one who would come puffed up with pride to overtake the kingdom of Judah, this kingdom too would eventually be brought low. The exile would come and it would be difficult and horrible and it would bring its own kind of suffering, but this too would end.

But even then, as the people would eventually be restored - Babylon would conquer and be conquered - still violence, and injustice would linger, as it still obviously remains today. But in God's answer, we have a prophetic view of time where we are enabled to see through the ages all

the way to the end. By faith God's people hold on to the unchanging promise of eternal salvation, for God in his love would send one who would bring peace on earth and goodwill to men, and he would bring life and immortality to light through the gospel. When the time would fully come, God would send his Son, born of a woman, born into this world of violence and suffering, and he would live in this filth, to cleanse us from our sin. He would be the face of goodness and compassion showing love to the other, the outcast, the sinner, and calling to repentance those who were confident in their own righteousness. How he must have stood out in this evil world as the one who was good in everything he did! He would be the face of goodness in our world and he came face to face with evil and injustice to bring us peace and harmony with God. The Son of Man would come to this place of violence and he would suffer the world's cruelest of deaths so that we might have eternal and glorious life with him in heaven. He came to forgive wicked and sinful creatures and so he died in our place of punishment, and to give us a living hope, to give us light in a world stumbling in darkness and sin and death he rose again and now rules over all things. Our risen Lord promises that he will come again to bring us to perfect bliss of heaven. To all those who believe in him, he promises that the evil of this world will one day end and an endless day of peace and goodness will come.

This is the promise that the LORD in his goodness would etch into an enduring word that would be carried far and wide. This is the promise that has reached our ears and gives us hope in our evil time. This is the blessed answer that the Lord gives to a prophet eager to share some word of comfort with the people. Evil will linger, but it will end. Wait and the promised one of God will come and relief and peace and joy and light will come with him.

The people of this world will watch as things go through this cycle of bad to worse back to bad again, and even though suffering and sin would linger it will end. God promises it will end, and in the meantime, we have been called by an ever-faithful God to believe and trust in Him. The Word of the prophets, the Word of God has been given to us through which the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith in the Faithful One who saves us. For it was certainly not because of our own righteous acts that God would spare any of us, instead, we only add to the violence and the evil of this world, with our words of hate, with regrettable actions, and thoughts we cannot shake. But sinners who are called to faith in the faithful God are saved by his promises. The Savior who cleanses and forgives us will one day cleanse the earth and bring an end to the evil and violence that we know so well, and he will bring his people to a place of unknown tranquility and complete peace.

This is the answer God gives and it satisfies and brings peace. God would not forget his promises to his people and though suffering would linger, God would bring deliverance, to his people, in time and for all eternity. And thus, the righteous will live by faith. God's people would be given the peace and security of his promises so that they could live as his light in the darkness of this world. In this world of evil there will be those who reflect God's goodness, who encourage one another as they together trust in the promises of God. Standing on his faithfulness God's people would stand out in faith. Think of that time of exile that Judah was facing and consider how God brought forth examples of faithful believers evil in the darkness of that time. Think of Daniel, and Shadrach, and Meshach and Abednego, and others who stood out in exile as those made righteous through God's gift of faith in the coming Messiah. Think of those who were made righteous by faith and lived faithful lives even as there were surrounded by the evil and the violence of the world around them.

Trusting in our faithful God we too can live lives that stand firm on his promises and stand out in a world so full of evil. God has called us out of this darkness into his wonderful light. He has taken hearts that are inclined toward evil all the time, and he has made us new. He has cleansed and redeemed us in the blood of the promised Messiah, set free and bought us to be his own. He called us from death and the deeds of death, evil and wickedness, to live in the light and life that he so graciously gives through Jesus Christ.

In chapter 3 of Habakkuk, the prophet actually reveals himself to be a talented musician as this third chapter appears to be a psalm-like piece of music. And in artistic form this piece of poetry puts into perspective the life of faith. The prophet knew that God would not be mocked. The Almighty LORD would send judgment and yet he would also remember his promise of mercy. Habakkuk writes of his trust in God. ***You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters. I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the field 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.*** For the director of music. On my stringed instruments. And that is how the book ends.

Simply put the righteous will live by faith, trusting in the Lord to deliver. The Lord is our strength. He lifts us up so that we may live and move for him and even be joyful in difficult times. We sang of this same theme in our hymn for today. *If you but trust in God to guide you and place your confidence in him. He'll give you strength and stand beside you when days are dreary, dark, and dim, for those who trust his changeless love build on the rock that does not move.* The righteous will live by faith as we are built on the faithful One who will keep his promise to deliver us.

So dear friends, let us call upon God for he will deliver us. Violence still occurs. There are so many examples of atrocities that we could point at each and every day. Each day, or at least every month, seems to mark an anniversary of a horrible act of violence in our land. War, violence, injustice, murder, neglect, and abuse of little ones - immorality of all kinds abound in our world every day, in every age. This is not the error of a perfect God, but these are signs that point out the deep and deplorable depravity of man. It is against this ugly backdrop that the tremendous beauty of God's grace shines so brightly. That he would show such patience and love to creatures so depraved can only happen by grace! In his incredible goodness, he does not wipe us all away, but he cleanses us and sets us aside as his people to shine with the brilliance of his kindness and love until he comes again. What faithful love he shows to us as he forgives our daily sins and enables us to forgive as he has forgiven us, as he equips us to love and care for others as he has cared for us. And in his goodness and love, he promises that one day the evil of this world will be over. Though evil linger still, it will end. This is God's gracious promise in response to our lament, the end will come. He will come and our Lord will bring us to a peace that has no end.

We might not know much about Habakkuk, but we know that God instructed him to write it down, so that it would be known: though suffering and sin and its rancid effects may linger, one day it will come to end. Until that day the righteous will not die as our sins deserve, but instead, we will live by faith. Standing out in an evil world as we stand firmly in the faithfulness of our God. *He'll give you strength and stand beside you when days are dreary, dark, and dim, for those who trust his changeless love build on the rock that does not move.* Thanks be to God! Amen.