

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
MINOCQUA, WI  
SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 20-21, 2022**

*The threatening oracle which the prophet Habakkuk saw.*

<sup>2</sup> *How long, Lord, must I cry for help, but you do not listen?*

*I call out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save!*

<sup>3</sup> *Why do you cause me to see injustice?*

*Why do you overlook misery?*

*Devastation and violence confront me.*

*There is strife, and tensions rise...*

*I will stand at my watch post and station myself on the city wall. I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer he will give to my complaint.*

<sup>2</sup> *Then the Lord answered me. He said:*

*Record the vision and write it plainly on tablets so that a herald may run with it.*

<sup>3</sup> *Indeed, the vision is waiting for the appointed time. It longs for fulfillment and will not prove false. If it seems slow in coming, wait for it, because it will certainly come and will not be delayed.*

<sup>4</sup> *Look, his soul is puffed up and is not righteous within him—but the righteous one will live by his faith.*

(Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4 EHV)

Here's a typical exchange between parent and child: "How many people in the world, Dad?" "I don't know Son." "How many stars in the sky?" "I don't know, Son." "How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb?" "Don't know, Son." How could Al Gore win a Nobel Peace Prize when Ronald Reagan never did?" "Don't know, Son." "Dad, you don't mind me asking you all these questions, do you?" "No, Son. How are you going to learn if you don't ask questions?"

Maybe you've been that sort of parent. But it's not much different than the brush-off we seem to get from God. Have you ever asked God question after question and got nothing more than a shrug of the shoulders from heaven – if that? Habakkuk is a prophet with a lot of questions. And they are exactly the questions we ask. Let's dig in and listen for the Lord's answer.

We don't know much about Habakkuk other than that he lived in Judah around 600 BC, during the rising threat of Babylonian dominance. But we know what he had to say...and ask: ***The threatening oracle which the prophet Habakkuk saw. How long, Lord, must I cry for help, but you do not listen? I call out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save! Why do you cause me to see injustice? Why do you overlook misery? Devastation and violence confront me. There is strife, and tensions rise.*** (1:1-3)

He didn't like what he saw. The legal system was a mess. The wicked were prospering. The righteous were suffering. And Habakkuk was frustrated. Lord, don't you see? Don't you care? Aren't you listening? And if you are, why don't you do something about all of this?

Sound familiar? The same questions come out of our mouths in the 21<sup>st</sup> century AD. We can relate to Habakkuk. The word for "oracle" in the very first verse also means, "burden," as in "the threatening burden that Habakkuk the prophet received. His burden is our burden. How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? At least you don't seem to be listening. Why, Lord? Why the injustice, the crime, corruption, cancer? Why war and school shootings and child abuse? Why do the wicked prosper? Why must the innocent suffer? Why do the guilty go free? Do something, Lord. Do something to let us know that you're listening, that you still care.

God did listen to Habakkuk and gave him an answer: ***"Look at the nations and pay attention! Be completely dumbfounded, because I will do something in your lifetime that you will not believe, even though you are warned ahead of time. Watch, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that savage, reckless nation.***

***They will sweep across the whole width of the earth, seizing lands and homes that do not belong to them. They are frightening and terrifying. They invent their own standard of justice and their own values. Their horses are quicker than leopards and fiercer than wolves that prowl at night. Their war horses come galloping. Their war horses come from far away. They fly like vultures swooping down to devour.*** (1:5-9)

OK...not the answer Habakkuk was looking for. Yes, the chosen people had chosen to disobey God time and again. And yes, they deserved to be punished. But the Chaldeans, also known as the Babylonians – these were really bad guys, worse than God’s own people. This solution of God’s may in fact be worse than the original problem, so he responds, ***Are you not from ancient times, O Lord? My God, my Holy One, you will not die. Lord, you have made them your instrument of judgment. You, our Rock, have established them as your instrument of discipline. You whose eyes are too pure to tolerate evil, you who are not able to condone wrongdoing, why do you put up with treacherous people? Why do you keep silent when the wicked swallow up those who are more righteous than they are?...***

***I will stand at my watch post and station myself on the city wall. I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer he will give to my complaint.*** (1:12,13, 2:1)

The Lord answers again, but he doesn’t explain himself. He doesn’t need to – he is God, after all, holy, eternal – but what he does offer are precious words of promise that God’s people cling to still today: ***Record the vision and write it plainly on tablets so that a herald may run with it. Indeed, the vision is waiting for the appointed time. It longs for fulfillment and will not prove false. If it seems slow in coming, wait for it, because it will certainly come and will not be delayed. Look, his soul is puffed up and is not righteous within him—but the righteous one will live by his faith.*** (2:2-4)

The answer to hatred, crime, corruption, injustice, cancer, sickness, death, and injustice isn’t why/what/when, but Who. And the Lord says, Wait for my Word. It will come true. I am always with you. Live by faith. The Lord is the answer, with his mighty power, with his gift of eternal life, with his gift of faith. Paul quotes this twice and the writer to the Hebrews once – the righteous, God’s people, live by faith.

So God doesn’t directly address Habakkuk’s – or our – questions. But he does give answer to a far more important question. If Habakkuk wanted to know if God still loved him, the answer was Yes!. If Habakkuk wanted to know if God had a plan for his life, the answer was Yes! If Habakkuk wanted to know if he had hope of eternal life, the answer was Yes! As it is for you and me in every case!

Don’t worry about Babylon, Habakkuk, they’ll get what’s coming to them. Don’t worry about the wicked or fret over injustice, my people in the year 2022, I will repay. They’ll get what’s coming to them. If you’re going through pain and suffering, I hear you. I’ve got you. My Word will come true. You, live by faith. The righteous will live by faith.

Here’s the best news, the most important news of all. You will not get what’s coming to you. The Lord says to Habakkuk and to us, I know all. I see all. I see into your hearts. And I see that sometimes you question me. Sometimes you think you know better than me. Sometimes you think life isn’t fair. Sometimes you think I’m not fair. But you’re wrong. If I were truly fair, if I treated you as you deserved, heaven would be a very empty place and you would be headed for hell because you would have to pay for your sins. You would have to die for your sins of doubt and fear and lack of trust in you. You would have to pay the price for your sins of pride/impatience/greed/lust and ingratitude.

It isn’t fair that I sent my Son to take your place. It isn’t fair that he shed his blood and gave up his life so you could live forever with me in heaven. It isn’t fair that he rose from the dead to assure you beyond any doubt that your sins are forgiven. It isn’t fair, but it’s right and just because I wanted it this way. I want you to be with me – now and forever.

In the meantime, Habakkuk offers this blueprint on how to live in the midst of trouble. Let’s summarize: 1) Acknowledge the reality of evil; 2) take your complaints to God; 3) Listen, even when God’s answers seem unsatisfying; 4) hang on through faithfulness. The righteous will live by faith.

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for an answer to his prayer, but nothing appeared. Eventually he managed to build a hut from driftwood he gathered on the beach. At least he had some shelter from the elements and could store the few possessions he had salvaged.

But one day after scavenging for food around the island, he returned to find his hut in flames with a huge column of smoke filling the sky. He was devastated, filled with grief and anger. Everything was lost. He said to God, "How could you do this to me?" Early the next day, he was awakened by the sound of an approaching ship. It had come to rescue him. "How did you know where I was?" he asked. "We saw your smoke signal," the rescuers replied. It's easy to get discouraged when things aren't going well. But God is at work even in the midst of pain and suffering. While your little hut burns, the smoke signal summons the grace of God.

In the final chapter of this little book, Habakkuk responds with words of praise. And the way the Scripture is laid out, it seems that this praise-filled prayer of his is something that was spoken by all the people, probably used in worship services. Habakkuk's words of faith expressed even in the most difficult of times are our words:

***O Lord, I have heard the report about you,  
and I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.  
In the midst of our years revive those deeds.  
In the midst of our years reveal them again.  
In your rage, remember to have mercy...  
The fig tree may have no buds.  
The vines may have no grapes.  
The olive tree may fail to produce.  
The fields may yield no food.  
The sheep may be cut off from their flock,  
and there may be no cattle in the barns,  
but I will delight in the Lord  
and rejoice in God who saves me.  
The Lord God is my strength. (3:2,17-19a)***



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