

**LIVES THAT REMIND US ABOUT GOD - Meeting Yourself In The Sacred Text Part fourteen - Sunday, May 12th, 2024
Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

HABAKKUK - How to handle difficult questions of faith (Habakkuk 1:1-17)

- 1) **SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION** - Habakkuk was a prophet to the *Southern Kingdom of Judah*. He ministered from **612 to about 589 B.C.** He was a contemporary of *Daniel* and *Ezekiel*. Habakkuk warned about the coming judgement from the *Babylonians* (Chaldeans) who finally took Judah captive in 586 B.C. (about three years after Habakkuk's ministry).

- 2) **THE CONFUSION OF HABAKKUK - 1:1-11** - Habakkuk is deeply distressed about the wickedness of the people of Judah. They have become careless about the things of God. They have stooped to worshipping idols. They are abusing the poor. They are sexually immoral. ***This poses two related questions in the mind of Habakkuk:***
 - a) ***First, he wonders why God has been so silent about all of this iniquity among His own people - 1:1-4 - "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.[2] O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?[3] 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.[4] So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted."***

Habakkuk boldly pours out his heart here. There's probably a bit of a personal pride issue as well. Habakkuk has been ***told*** to warn of the coming judgment. He faithfully did so for years. Yet no judgment came. The people were mocking him and his message and his God. His basic complaint is he has been crying out to God for nothing. God seems to be ignoring the people's sin. ***God doesn't seem to be hearing his prayers.***

Perhaps Christians too pray, as commanded by Jesus, "Thy Kingdom come." And yet it doesn't seem to come in any sin-shattering, rebellion squelching way. God seems to ignore our kingdom pleas.

- b) ***Second, when God does respond, Habakkuk doesn't like what He says - 1:13-17 - "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and are silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he? [14] You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.[15] He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad.[16] Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; [Do you ever marvel at the prosperity of false religion in a world created by our God?] for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich. [17] Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?"***

I think we can all understand what Habakkuk is going through. Have you ever prayed about something, and when God finally began to move in, found yourself saying, **"God, that's not quite what I had in mind!"** Perhaps Habakkuk was planning on a great ***national revival***. God had certainly done that before.

See 1:5-11 - "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. [6] For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.[7] They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.[8] Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour.[9] They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand.[10] At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. [11] Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!"

It is interesting to notice that in His response, God anticipates that ***even the Godly people (like the prophet himself) won't be ready for what He is about to do*** (see especially **verse 5**). Then, as now, it seemed impossible that God would judge ***His own*** people. No one was ready for this. It certainly points out the need for God's people to be spiritually alert and discerning if they are to be in touch with God's activities in a fallen world.

- 3) **HABAKKUK'S APPROACH TO DIFFICULT QUESTIONS - 1:12-17, 2:1** - “Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. [13] You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and are silent *when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?* [Note the faith-testing problem of unsolved inequities] [14] You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. [15] He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad. [16] Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.[17] Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?....2:1....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.”

- a) ***Get still before the Lord - 2:1- “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.”***

Don't let your emotions ***separate*** you from God's presence. You don't have to have all the answers to stay close to God Himself. In times of doubt ***He*** doesn't abandon ***you***. But you may be tempted to pull away from Him.

Our confusion easily leads to panic, which easily leads to ***rashness*** before the Almighty. Habakkuk resists the natural tendency to ***impulsive judgements***. This was not easy for him to do. Nor is it for us. Yet this simple instruction is found over and over in the Scriptures (see **James 1:19** - ***“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger....”***

See also **Psalms 73:15-17** - ***“If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed the generation of your children. [16] But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, [17] until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.”***

Here's simple rule. Rarely trust your ***first reactions***. The truth is our first reaction is frequently in need of adjustment when we consider our God. In any difficult situation, your greatest enemies are ***inside***, not ***outside***. Refuse to be mastered by ***immediate reflexes***. Let patience have her perfect work.

- b) ***Restate the basic principles - 1:12 - “Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.”***

In times of confusion, always start with what you ***know***, not what you ***don't know***. Feed faith ***before*** you face confusing issues. In the middle of his confusion Habakkuk reminds himself of several truths he knows he must hold on to about God:

First, God is eternal. Habakkuk is laying down a good starting point here. The situations of life will come and go. Problems constantly arise that future generations won't even remember. ***God, however, has a bigger perspective than ours.*** Never judge God's character by isolated events. His is always an ***eternal perspective.*** Learn to never judge God by isolated events - **Romans 8:28** - ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”***

Second, God is holy. Even though Habakkuk can't fully understand Him in his crisis, he knows God does nothing shady or unfair. Habakkuk knows he needs to remind himself of this. He doesn't just assume things. He talks to himself.

Third, God is sovereign and almighty. He will judge sin and reward righteousness. **He can use even the ungodly to accomplish His ends!** The Chaldeans themselves don't recognize this (see 1:16 - **“Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich”**).

Fourth, God is faithful. Notice the phrase **“we shall not die”**(1:12). Habakkuk knew that many would, in fact, die. But they would not **cease** to be objects of God's covenant. The important point here is **Habakkuk remembered God's people had a covenant with Him through Abraham.** In the face of overwhelming odds, Habakkuk holds on to that covenant. He assures himself that God is faithful.

- 4) **HOW TO DEVELOP THIS KIND OF ATTITUDE** - There are several steps that must be carved regularly into our lives:
- a) **Saturate your mind with God's Word.** Only the Bible can train you to think like a Godly person. You need truth to hold on to when the storms of life come. Jesus likened His words to the foundation that can stand whatever comes against the life:

Matthew 7:24-27 - “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. [26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

- b) ***Learn to wait on God.*** This is basic to the renewal of strength - **Isaiah 40:28-31** - “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. [29] He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. [30] Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; [31] but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

Some things just can't be had instantly. They require time before God Himself.

- c) ***Understand the role of trials in life.*** See **James 1:2-4** -
“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

James teaches that God can use the more difficult things in life to actually make us "***perfect***". This may not be our first choice, but it's certainly one way that God knows best when to use.