

Standing Watch

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

July 18, 2010

Two weeks ago we looked at Habakkuk's first complaint to God, and God's response. We saw that Habakkuk was upset by all the violence and evil he saw in the world around him and the fact that the wicked were running things and the righteous were oppressed. We then saw that God's response was one of destruction of the wicked as the nation would be overrun by the Babylonians. This week we pick up with Habakkuk's second complaint. This one is longer, so God's second response will have to wait until next week.

In God's first response to Habakkuk, God said He was going to raise up the Babylonians to punish His people for their disobedience to Him and their mistreatment of each other. Because the people were violent and wickedness was everywhere, because they worshiped the gods of the people around them rather than God who brought them out of bondage and slavery and gave them the land, because justice was hard to find, God would bring destruction through the Babylonians. We saw the description of the Babylonians and their army. It was a terrible picture, but it was one Habakkuk was commanded to watch. It would amaze everybody.

Habakkuk got God's point. He acknowledged God's power and ability to do anything He wants. Again, we saw two weeks ago that Habakkuk complained about the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity and freedom of the wicked. He only had problems with those things because he understood that

God is powerful and they are against the way He made the world.

That forms the launching point for this morning's text. It is from this statement of God's authority in using the Babylonians that Habakkuk began his next complaint. Look with me at verse 12. "*O LORD, are you not from everlasting?*" Habakkuk asked this question with the expected answer being "yes." In asking this Habakkuk calls on **God's** constancy, on the fact that God is God and He does not change. God existed before the beginning of the universe. He called into being out of nothing everything that is. The world, all that is in it and all that is around it, are the work of His hand. God is eternal and powerful. He is not wrapped up in the limitations and little squabbles that occupy so much of our time. This is not to say that He does not care, but God, by nature, is above it and He calls us to live above it as well.

Habakkuk trusted God to keep His **promises**. This is brought out by the second phrase in verse 12. Habakkuk expressed faith that God's people would not be completely destroyed. "*My God, my Holy One, we will not die.*" Like Moses before him, Habakkuk trusted that God had a future for Judah and that He would keep His promises to bless the world through them. Habakkuk is not questioning the truth of God's statement that judgement is coming through the Babylonians. Habakkuk is expressing his conviction that God may wound His people, but He will not wipe them completely from the face of the earth.

The rest of verse 12 finishes the thought. "*O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment;*

O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.” While God spoke of the great devastation and pain Babylon would bring, Habakkuk recognized that the purpose was to punish the people of Judah for their sin, not to wipe them out entirely. God appointed the Babylonians to execute His **judgement** on His people. God ordained the Babylonians to bring His punishment to bear on those who would be His people but turned away from Him and His ways.

We would do well to remember that God's power is such that even the world's greatest superpower is just a tool in His hand. We are so used to the powers of this world that we too often forget just how much more powerful our God is. This realization gave Habakkuk hope for a future. Habakkuk knew God was in control and that God is **good**. As we will see in a few weeks, nothing could shake that conviction in him.

Still, Habakkuk noted that good does not always prevail in this world. It is the same problem we dealt with two weeks ago. If God is powerful and good, why do good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. The last time Habakkuk asked, God told him God is in control. That is good, but it seems it does not fully answer the question. Habakkuk poses it again. In verse 13 we read, *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”* Things do not always work out the way we believe they should. We are created in the image of God with a desire to see justice.

God is interested in justice too, but we often forget that, if justice were to be the sole determining factor, none of us would be saved. All of us are guilty before God. Everyone stands condemned before Him, deserving of an eternity of torment away from His presence. That is the reality of justice. We desire to see justice when we deal with the sins of others, especially those who have sinned against us. Our desires even run beyond justice to revenge. Yet, when it comes to our own sins and the fact that we have sinned against the Creator of the universe, our Lord, Master, and Maker, we try to minimize our sin and justify it. When it is our sin in question our search for vengeance and justice very quickly becomes a search for **mercy** and pardon.

Perhaps the worst problem for Habakkuk is that the Babylonians were even worse than the people of Judah. At least Judah had the law, there were at least a few who sought to follow it, and the nation paid at least a minimal lip service to it. The Babylonians did none of these things. They were worse than God's people in every way, and yet God would give them victory over people who were more righteous than themselves? God was throwing nations into chaos before them. They were running roughshod over all who stood in their path. There was no power on earth that could stop them, yet they were among the most violent people the world had seen. They even celebrated their victories by making carvings of themselves carrying off their victims in giant nets. The image of catching the enemy like fish was not original with Habakkuk. He borrowed it from the world around him. Just as we saw two weeks ago that people tend to worship their own strength, the same thought is

here only with a different image. This time they are pictured worshiping their nets.

The question remained. Given the Babylonians' wickedness and the fact that they did not acknowledge God, how long would God allow them to continue their rampage through the nations around them? Before, Habakkuk had asked how long God would allow the wickedness in Judah to last. Now the same question is asked about the Babylonians through whom God would judge Judah. How long were they to be allowed to fill and empty their nets?

It is with this question that Habakkuk ends his complaint. Our text ends with his statement of how we will respond to God's first answer. *"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."* (2:1) Now that he has offered to God what was on his mind, and the minds of those around him, he will follow God's command, not only to watch the way in which God will use the Babylonians and be amazed by it, but also to see what will then happen to them. Habakkuk takes his position as a defender of his people, standing watch on the wall ready to sound the alarm and call the people's attention when he sees God move. How will God respond to this challenge? Perhaps more to the point, what was Habakkuk to say to the people around him who were asking the same questions?

We need to always be ready to let the people around us know that **God** is in control. These same questions are asked today. The problem of evil is one of the biggest issues that keep people away from God in

today's world. They see a world full of people in pain, and hear about a good, powerful God, and they stand in judgement over Him. They deny God's existence, or His right to be worshiped, because they find moral failing in Him. It would do us well to follow Peter's command here. *"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."* (1 Peter 3:15) Often His activity does not seem fair to us, but that is because we spend so much of our time trying to justify ourselves instead of accepting the judgement He has made on our sin. The people around us are the same way.

We said that God calls us to live above the limitations and squabbles of this world. That is not something we can do on our own. We are not strong enough. We are wrapped up in this world. It surrounds us. Thanks be to God He lifts our eyes to Him. He can show us this world and our lives from His perspective. He can place His Spirit in us to give us the strength to live in righteousness.

We can also thank God that He is not **fair**. To be fair to Himself and to the world He created would be to allow all of us to suffer the proper punishment for our sin. God is not fair. He took the punishment for our sin and placed it on Jesus so He could forgive us and give us mercy instead of wrath. The mercy and pardon we seek are available. Thank God that He offers them. Thank God that He has the power to fulfill His plan and use anybody, or any nation, to make certain His will is done. Thank God that He has chosen to save at least some, and that you may be counted in that number.