

Wait For It

Habakkuk 2:2-5

July 25, 2010

We have looked at Habakkuk's first complaint and God's response. Last week we saw Habakkuk's second complaint. The first complaint was that there was evil all around him in Judah and it seemed that, not only were the wicked not punished, they did better than the righteous and oppressed them. God's response was that He was going to use the Babylonians to punish the sins of Judah. Habakkuk's second complaint was that the Babylonians were worse than the people in Judah, so using them to execute God's judgement hardly seemed fair. God would be handing victory to the enemies of His people even though they never acknowledged Him. Having made this point, Habakkuk said he would stand watch on the walls to hear God's reply and what he should say to those who, like him, were bothered by the injustice.

Over the next three weeks we will look at God's response to this second complaint. In His response, God seeks to change Habakkuk's thinking. It's not so much that Habakkuk's thinking about justice is wrong. Evil and wickedness do need to be punished. It is more that Habakkuk's focus and emphasis are in the wrong place. Since we so often join Habakkuk in his complaints, asking why bad things happen to good people while the wicked so often enjoy comfortable lives and power, it is a shift that needs to happen in our focus as well. Let's begin to look together as God's second response to Habakkuk.

“Then the LORD replied: ‘Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.’” (v.2) The first thing we note is that God wanted Habakkuk to **write** His answer down. God's promises are sure. This wasn't to be just a verbal answer or agreement. God wanted it in writing. There is nothing unsure about what God says. He cannot lie and He always keeps His promises. There is no question that what He says will come to pass and what He wills will happen. Still, God wanted Habakkuk to write down what He was saying. It was to be clearly marked on tablets as a record that God had predicted what He would bring about.

Not only was it to be written as a record, but it was to be copied onto tablets so runners could take it and spread the message far and wide. God may have been answering Habakkuk's complaint, but the answer was meant for **everyone**. As we have seen in the past, God wants us to know what He is going to do. Through prophecy He lays out before us His plan and where He wants to take us. The details may often be murky and there may be some parts of it we don't understand, but the general outline is written out and made plain to us. As with Habakkuk we may not like it or understand it, but God has placed it before us nonetheless. He has made plain what He wants us to do and how He wants us to live. He has made plain the extent to which he will go to provide salvation and restore His people to Himself. This plain message was to be delivered to everyone.

In verse three God says, *“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.” What God has said is **sure**. His word is true. His timing is right. God has everything laid out in His plan. The working out of His glory and the redemption of His people have been carefully set by Him from the very beginning. God keeps His promises when the time comes to keep them. We often get impatient. We don’t like to wait, especially when something is wrong. Yet God’s timing is perfect. He does things when they work out the best for His purposes.

Habakkuk was complaining that the wicked were running Judah and God seemed absent. We know through the prophet Jeremiah that God was waiting to give the nation ample time to turn back to Him, and failing that, to complete their sin and finish turning from Him. Since they chose the latter, they had to admit any rejection or punishment by God was just and deserved. God waited until the fulness of their rebellion and sin was complete. The things He told Habakkuk He would do had to wait until then. That did not mean they were not coming.

Often we interpret God’s patience as **licence**. This is a dire mistake. Just because God does not punish something right away does not mean He is okay with it. This is why our experience and consciences are not sufficient to know what we ought to do and how we ought to live. It is why we need God’s guidance through His word. God blessed the nation of Judah for many years as they moved farther and farther from His commands. He sent prophets to call them back, and sometimes they responded, but generally they continued in their sin. Eventually they made the mistake of

believing that since God had not punished them yet, no punishment was coming—that God either was not as powerful as the other gods they worshiped or He did not care what they did. The more they believed this, the louder the voices of the prophets got. Eventually, God began to remove His blessing and the punishment began. Of course the people, having ignored the prophets, believed they were suffering because they were not worshiping the other gods enough. It was then that the things God was revealing to Habakkuk came to be and the nation of Judah fell to the Babylonians, just as God had said.

God may linger. He does this to give us more than enough time to get on board with what He is doing or to make sure we have no excuse in rejecting it. Peter expressed this same thought when he wrote, *“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”* (2 Peter 3:8,9) Like Habakkuk we are to wait for God. What He says He will do will surely come and it will not be late.

Having pointed Habakkuk’s attention to God’s timing rather than his own, God then turned to the revelation. Speaking of the wicked in general—both the Babylonians and the wicked in Judah, but especially the Babylonians—God began to describe them and what their future would hold.

The first thing God pointed to about the wicked is his arrogance. This was true especially of the

Babylonians as they ransacked the earth and no one could stand in their way. The wicked operate by their own power. What they have they believe they have as a result of their own strength and cunning. It leads them to puff themselves up as if they are better than the people around them. They even will imagine that they have gotten something past God.

Pride is wanting to put ourselves in **God's** place, and some have suggested it is at the root of all sin. Certainly all sin comes from believing that the way we want to go is better than the way God has set before us. We think we know better than God what we need to do. We act in ways we think will make us happy instead of ways that make God happy. All of this is pride, and we are all guilty of it to one degree or another.

The second thing God pointed out is that the desires of the wicked are **twisted**. They do not want the things God wants. They do not want peace. They do not want what is good for their neighbors. They want what they think is for their own benefit and they are willing to hurt others to get it. Most of all, they want the glory that belongs to God to go to them.

Already God throws in a contrast, and it is an incredibly important one. As opposed to the wicked whose desires are not upright God says, "*but the righteous will live by his faith.*" (v.4) I have said many times that from the very beginning salvation has been by faith. God did not say here that the righteous will live by obedience to His commands. He said that the righteous will live by faith. Again, I cannot say this too loudly or too often, the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. The focus is a bit

different in that the Old Covenant was given to demonstrate that we cannot live up to God's commands and faith is the only way to God. The New Covenant is God's demonstration of love to us in that He fulfills the Old Covenant Himself and applies its forgiveness to all who have faith in Him. Either way, faith, and only faith, is the way to **God**. Jesus did not teach some radical new way as much as He pointed out where the people had gone wrong and sought to return them to what God had wanted all along. Nobody can keep the law. God wants faith.

It's also true in both covenants that having faith in God will change your **behavior**. The Old Covenant focused on that behavior, but the New Covenant still demands it. Jesus defined love for Him in terms of obedience to Him. All the letters, while talking about salvation coming through faith in God's forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection, also talk about the changes in our behavior that must accompany that faith. We must understand that we can do nothing to be saved or to add to our salvation. Once we are saved our hearts change and our behavior will follow.

One of the desires of the wicked is for wine, but it fails them. I thank God that I have been spared ever getting drunk. I have spoken with enough people over the years, and been around drunk people enough, to see that the drink that promises so much delivers so little. I am not against drinking totally. You will not hear me say that drinking an alcoholic beverage is a sin, though I do understand why many in the church have long said it is better to just stay away from it. The Bible never condemns alcohol, but it never says anything good about

drunkenness. Drunkenness, not alcohol, is condemned in no uncertain terms. Considering the ways in which alcohol leads people to behave and the mistakes we make while under its influence it is easy to see why.

It's not just wine, however. The image here is of someone wanting what we might call "the good life." It is the desire for power, prestige, wealth, and leisure, even if these come at the expense of others. When God says the wicked is never at rest God is not talking about work, but about devising new ways to do evil. This is a materialistic mind set that is given over to coveting all that the eye see and desiring the collection of things over the building of relationships. This will fail a person every time because it is only through our relationships that we can have a lasting impact. It is only in loving and being loved, especially by God, that we can ever be truly **satisfied**.

Along with this desire, arrogance and greed drive the wicked. They never have enough. Like death, they are never satisfied. That is an interesting image, borrowed from Proverbs 30:16. The grave gets everybody at some point. There is no escaping it. It is always right before us as we face our own mortality, or that of our family or friends. Those who seek power and control over others want to have the same kind of impact. Babylon wanted to capture everyone and put them all under the rule of the Babylonian emperor. Everyone would pay taxes to them. Everyone would work to build great cities in their name. Their arrogance knew no limit. Their power would not be limited until God stepped in and limited it. More on that in the coming weeks.

We begin to see the shift in focus we talked about at the beginning of this message. God will develop it further in the passages we will look at over the next two weeks. God called Habakkuk to have faith and wait for God to make things right. We, too, are called to **wait** for God's plan to be fulfilled. Even when it seems God is distant or not involved, we need to wait patiently, faithfully doing what He has called us to do because we know He keeps His promises and His justice and power will win in the end.