

## Our Attitude Before God

Habakkuk 2:15-20

August 8, 2010

This morning we are in the last of three weeks during which we have looked at God's response to Habakkuk's second complaint. So far, God has reminded Habakkuk that He always keeps His promises and what He says will happen will surely come to pass. We have also seen God comment on Babylon's arrogance and condemn them for it. This condemnation of Babylon's arrogance includes five woes, the first three of which we looked at last week. This week we pick up with the fourth woe.

*"Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors."* (v.15) Now, our culture looks at it as a good thing to buy a round at the local bar. Here is condemnation of one who would give drink to his neighbors. The issue is one of intent and attitude. This is not a condemnation of someone who buys drinks for others because he likes them and wants to see them happy. It is a condemnation of someone who gets others drunk so he can take advantage of them.

Of course, it also isn't really about getting drunk. The Old Testament in general, and Proverbs in particular, is full of the problems alcohol can cause when drunk in excess. Proverbs 20:1 says, *"Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise."* Alcohol in the Bible is associated with loss of self control, strife, poverty, and injustice. In this morning's text it is about how Babylon spread all of these. Their neighbors were afraid of them. They went around violently taking what they wanted for themselves

leaving the people around them with nothing. Having your home broken into and your possessions taken is an invasion of privacy and can leave a person feeling exposed, as if they are naked. It is the mocking and brawling actions of the Babylonians that drew God's **anger**.

God's response is that it will be turned on them. They will be filled with the shame of the people they have conquered instead of the glory that they seek. They will be exposed, just as they have exposed the people around them. The violence they have brought upon their neighbors will be theirs, and this will be at the hands of God. The Babylonians had shed blood, both animal and human. They didn't care. Their thirst for violence seemed to have no limit. So God would overwhelm them with violence.

In our Bible study Wednesday night, as we looked at the prophet Hosea's message, we were reminded that we reap what we sow. Hosea wrote that the people were sowing to the wind, so they would reap the whirlwind. Whatever we put out there into the community is what we get back, and usually a lot more of it. The attitude we take toward those around us goes a long way in determining how we will be treated. If we are polite, generous, thoughtful, fair, and helpful, we will find that people around us are willing to go out of their way when we are in need. If we are rude, selfish, careless, unjust, and demanding, then when we need help there will be none to be found. What we sow, we shall **reap**. How we treat others is how we can expect to be treated. The Babylonians brought fear, pain, and bloodshed, and they

could expect God to bring more of the same on them. The same principle applies to us.

God's people are called to love our enemies and do good to those who mistreat us. We are called to sow love in the midst of hate, justice in the midst of injustice. The example Jesus set for us is one of sacrificial giving. Of course, this is because of the principle that we reap what we sow. We are to love our enemies and treat them well because in doing so we may win them as friends, or at the very least heap burning coals on their heads. Our kindness can make their anger with us burn hotter when they see that it is out of place. There may also be a greater punishment in the next life for people who would seek harm for those who treated them well.

The last woe is different in that it is introduced with a question. God asks, "*Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it?*" (v.18) The answer comes, as a work of art it might be quite valuable, but as an object of worship it is less than worthless. By sitting and carving wood or stone, or by melting and molding metal, we may add beauty to them, but we cannot add life or spiritual value to them. They are still nothing more than wood, stone, or metal. It makes no sense to worship them. Even if we accept that they represent spiritual forces and are only there to remind us of them and give us a focus for our worship, we find that they are worse than worthless, because they point to the worship of the wrong things.

From the beginning we have worshiped a God who has shown us His **heart**, not His face. We know what God is like, but we do not know what He looks like. This is very intentional on His part. He wants to be

known by us, but seeing Him will have to wait until we are no longer in this world affected by sin. His holiness is too pure to be seen with sin-stained eyes. It blinds and causes pain, even to those He loves. We worship the God who said, "*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.*" (Exodus 20:4,5) This prohibition includes making images of God, but it goes beyond that. We are not to make an image of anything with the intention of worshiping it. To do so is to fill it with lies.

One of the main reasons God has a problem with idolatry is that it ritualizes our tendency to put our faith in the things we make. Humans are arrogant and foolish enough to think that we can do things on our own without God's help. We like to believe we are self-sufficient and powerful, even though we are not. In our modern world, instead of making idols of wood, stone, and metal, we make idols of money, power, or even our own abilities. We worship science and human potential instead of God. Money is worshiped by those who have it and those who don't. Science is worshiped by those who understand it and those who don't. Instead of trusting God to keep His promises to keep, protect, and preserve us, we depend on our own money, strength and intelligence. God wants us to depend on **Him**.

Of course, even in the church we can find idolatry, and it is of the most insidious kind. Instead of worshiping these other things we too often worship another god of our own making. We change the way we think about God until what we believe about Him bears

little resemblance to what He has revealed to us about Himself. We focus on the parts we want to be true and minimize the things that we don't like. We should be focused on what He has said about Himself and learning why we should like the things that don't seem to make sense to our fallen minds and hearts. Like many people there are things about God that used to appall me, but as I have worked to accept them as not only true, but also good, and as I have worked to understand them, I have come to love God more as a result and I have found I can be more loving to those around me. The more I understand God's heart, the more I can share it. The church must be careful we do not worship a god we have created in our image that cannot speak. We must worship the God who has spoken and believe what He has **said**.

This brings us to the fifth and last woe God pronounces on the wicked through Habakkuk. *“Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’”* (v.19) We cannot expect anything we make to be more powerful than we are. Certainly we can put together a hydraulic press that is capable of lifting a building. People have made some really amazing things over the years, but we have never created life where there was no life before, nor have we ever made anything that can do that. We have made computers to keep and process information, but we do not always make better decisions than we used to. The things we make cannot give us guidance. They can help us get where we are going, but they are useless in showing us where we need to go. The only real guidance that can help us is **God** and the word He has

given us. Only He knows the future, so only He knows what we will need and where we will need to be. We have got to learn to trust that and simply obey Him. If we don't. We will face the same fate as Judah, and the Babylonians God used to conquer them.

As we reach the end of God's response, He demonstrates the difference between Himself and the idols we worship. There is no guidance or life in the things we make, but there is in God. The transcendent God who is over all and above all, the God who stands outside the universe He created and who keeps and preserves it, is also the immanent God who steps into it and joins His creation. There is no life in wooden or stone statues covered with precious metal, *“But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”* (v.20)

We worship the God who is alive and who wants to be known. We worship the God who is powerful, who made all that is and who keeps it by His will. We worship the God who enters His creation and shows us His heart and His will and the way He wants us to live. We worship the God who pays the penalty for the sin that separates us from Him so that we can live in that way. We worship the God who invites us to adopt the right **attitude** about Him and about ourselves and then to come into His presence.

Through Habakkuk, God declares that He is in His temple and our attitude before Him is to be one of reverent silence rather than accusation, self defense, or excuses. Of course, Habakkuk was thinking about the earthly temple that stood in Jerusalem. He was reminding the people that, even though things were bad

and they had rejected their God, God had not left them. Their idols could not talk, but their God already had. God had already brought them into an incredible relationship that no one else in the world had known, and they had walked away. Worse yet, they did not realize how far they had gone, and they even blamed God for not taking good enough care of them.

I mentioned one of my teachers last week who had left a coal mining town and joined the Navy. Many years later he and his wife were driving down the road in their pick-up with a bench seat. They came behind a car that had a couple sitting close together in the front seat (those of you who are old enough will remember you could do that back then). His wife asked him why they didn't do that anymore. He looked at the wheel, then at the pedals, then at the empty seat between them. Then, he said to his wife, "Well, I haven't moved."

This was God's message to the people through Habakkuk. God hadn't moved. He had not rejected them. They had rejected Him. He was still in His temple. They were the ones who had ignored Him, pushed aside His commands, done what He had told them not to do, and trusted in everybody and everything, including stone and wood idols made with their own hands. The only thing they had not trusted in was God. But He was still there waiting for them to return to their senses and return to Him. It brings to mind Jesus' image of the prodigal's father keeping an eye on the road in the hope that his son will come home.

Of course, under the new covenant God has made with His people He has moved. He has moved even closer. He no longer inhabits a building made by hands.

He inhabits the hearts and lives of His people. As Paul said, the **bodies** of those who believe are the temple of God. Especially when we are gathered as the community of the faithful, God is in our midst. If we are in Christ, then we are to treat ourselves as residences of the Most High.

This, then, is to be our attitude before Him: humble submission, reverent **praise**, and joyful thanksgiving. His judgements are just and we have no appeal. His power is overwhelming and great and we know He uses it for His glory and the good of those who He has called to love Him according to His purpose. His mercies are new every morning and so we give thanks. We cannot bring charges against Him. We cannot lay the blame for our fault at His feet. We can only praise Him for who He is and accept what He has for us asking that it fulfill His work in us of transforming us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.