

# Hope in God

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are seated. If you have your Bibles, just keep them at Habakkuk 2, because we'll continue in our study of the book of Habakkuk.

And last week, we considered the first chapter where Habakkuk began his complaint against the Lord. As he asked the question, how long?

You know, how long? You see, all around him in Israel, you had injustice. You know, unrighteousness taking place with fellow Israelites for sinning against one another, taking advantage of the needy, worshipping the Baals, the pagan gods.

And in the midst of all of this, with the king and the people, were out persecuting and even killing the righteous, those who had followed the Lord.

Habakkuk cries out to God and receives this unexpected answer. You see, the injustice of the Israelites will be dealt with with the injustice of the Babylonians.

[ 1 : 08 ] But how, Habakkuk says, can a people that is worse than Israel come to judge them, to be used as an instrument of judgment? Surely, this cannot be right.

And after Habakkuk's complaint to God, we come to the first verse here in Habakkuk 2. Where he says that he will stand and he will wait to hear the Lord's response.

Habakkuk has said what he once said and now he will wait to see what the Lord has to say to him.

And before we get into the sermon, if you would, please pray with me.

Father, your servants are listening. So we pray this evening that you may speak to us by your Spirit.

In the name of Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. So dark days are before Habakkuk. As we saw in chapter 1, he is already surrounded by injustice.

[ 2 : 20 ] But things are about to get worse. And as Habakkuk finds himself surrounded by the consequences of sin in a fallen world, what is God's message for him?

And what is indeed God's message for us this evening? What's to hope in God? To hope in God.

And why?

Well, to hope in God because God has spoken. We see first that God has spoken. And then second, that God will act. God will act.

We see thirdly, that we shall live by faith. You know, we shall live by faith. And then fourthly, that the wicked will perish.

So first then, we'll consider to hope in God because God has spoken. If you would look at verse 2 with me. We see that the very first thing that the Lord has to say in his reply to Habakkuk's complaint to the challenge that Habakkuk had laid forward of the way that God had planned things, of how he was doing things, as he was allowing the Babylonians to come to roam the earth, to kill the nation, to torture them.

[ 3 : 44 ] If you see that the very first thing that the Lord responds with is not a word of judgment. It's not a word of condemnation. And is that not what we should expect?

You know, if we stood up to God, you know, if we told Him that the way He was doing things was wrong, you know, what if we as children, you know, stood up to our parents, complained to them, said, no, you're doing it wrong, I know better.

What should we expect? But the response here from the Lord is not one of condemnation. No, rather He responds with grace.

He responds with mercy and with love. See, dark days are ahead as God has shown and as Habakkuk has recounted to Him. And for these dark days, what is needed more than anything else is the Word of God.

It's the Word of God. So God tells Habakkuk to write down this vision, to write down this message, that we may have it. See, the Word of God is meant to be heard by the people in Habakkuk's day, but it's also meant for future generations, for those that are to come.

[ 5 : 07 ] And as I mentioned last week, within only a couple of years, the Babylonians would come. They would take people, certain ones, into captivity. Within a couple of decades, Jerusalem itself would fall and be no more.

And most of the people will find themselves in a land that is not their own. Among a people that is not their own. And the promise that was given to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob, the promise of a land, the promise of a people, it seems to be no more.

You know what happened to this great promise when they are no longer a land to call their own. They're exiles. They're sojourners.

They have been, it seems in their own eyes, abandoned by God, left by Him. And in that moment, when they find themselves without hope, they will need a message from God, a prophecy to explain the why question.

Why did this happen? Do they need hope? That they may know that this is not the end. That they have not been forsaken by the Lord.

[ 6 : 27 ] And for that reason, God tells them, write down this prophecy. But this vision here is not only for the people in Habakkuk's day, or for their generation to come that will be, you know, exiled, that will be sojourners in Babylon.

But this vision here is also for us today. Because we find ourselves in a time where the predominant view is that God does not exist.

That God has not ever spoken. That even if there was a God, He doesn't have anything to do with us. We cannot know anything about Him, so why even try?

And when terrible things happen, the only hope there is, is your own strength, is your own self-sufficiency. See, you must be strong.

You must be able to get through this. Life is hard. Well, don't worry. You know, be happy. Look the other way. Just focus on the positives.

[ 7 : 34 ] Cut off people from your life that bring negativity into it. Don't put yourself in a position where your hope is in an invisible being that you can never know who cannot do anything to change your lot.

But we are to not listen to the spirit of the age which says these things. In opposition to the lies of the non-existence or the absence of God or the silence of God, is the fundamental Christian belief in Deus Dixit.

The Lord has spoken. You know, God has spoken. All of Christianity rests on this belief. As my favorite theologian, Herman Bovink, you know, says it when asked, why do we believe?

Well, the Christian answer is because God has spoken. And when you are surrounded by be it inner or outer darkness, why may you yet have hope?

Because God has spoken. See, He is the one who when we walk through the valley of shadow of death is there. You know, it's His rod and it is His staff that is there to comfort us as He is with us.

[ 8 : 59 ] When the clouds of depression are so dark that we seem unable to peer through it to even get a glimpse of light, the possibility of hope comes from the promises that God has spoken.

This is what we see of the prayer in Psalm 42 as we sing this evening. You know, why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me?

Hope in God. For I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God. Now, in the case of clinical depression, medication indeed may be necessary to aid in this great battle, as will therapy, but no amount of medication or therapy will relieve that restlessness of our heart of which Augustine spoke when he said, you know, you have made us for yourselves and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

So, may we, with the psalmist, you know, speak to our souls to call ourselves to hope in God because God has spoken.

And second, we are to hope in God because God will act. You can look at verse 3 with me. We see how God, having told Habakkuk to write down this vision, you know, that the people may have hope, he goes on to clarify the vision.

[ 10 : 40 ] You see, this vision will not be fulfilled tomorrow. Of course, the part of the prophecy that says the Babylonians will destroy Israel is not really something to long for.

But it is the second half of this chapter, of chapter 2, that the people will wonder whether it will come or not. The destruction of their Babylonian captors.

You see, Israel, the Israelites will be in Babylon in a place that is not their own, surrounded by a people not their own, and they will have this vision.

This vision here that God has spoken which speaks of the destruction of Babylon. But the thing is, it will take a while. You know, I mentioned last week that Jeremiah prophesies around the same time as Habakkuk.

And we see the prophecy in Jeremiah 25 where God says that the land of Israel shall become a waste. And Israel will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years.

[ 11 : 45 ] 70 years! You know, can you imagine that length of time, 70 years of being away from your land, away from your home, in Babylon as captives?

How are you to hope in God when decades have passed and nothing has changed? You may hope in God because God will act.

See, He has promised that He will act. and if He seems slow, He says, wait for it. It will surely come. Do not, it will not delay.

So the Israelites are to live with this expectancy, waiting for the return of the Lord. Now, have you ever told a toddler that you will do something?

You know, we have a three-year-old at home and I quickly learn to be careful of when I say we're going to do something before we're actually ready to do it. So, for example, sitting at breakfast and I happen to mention that we're going to go to the playground.

[ 12 : 49 ] Well, suddenly, she doesn't want to eat the breakfast anymore because she's ready to go because she loves going to the playground. And now, I find myself in quiet the conundrum because she needs to eat her breakfast and we're not ready.

You know, I say, no, we will go after breakfast but it's too late. You know, she is ready but the thing is we are way off from being ready to go to the playground.

And the time that it takes between me mentioning the playground and actually being able to leave for the playground seems far too long for her. It seems like an eternity.

We will go, I promise. You know, we are not ready just now. I think in a similar manner the Israelites, they will hear this vision but they'll wonder when it will actually be fulfilled.

See, God said he will destroy Babylon and we are ready for it. We are ready right now. But years will pass. Decades even yet nothing will seem different.

[ 13 : 57 ] Can you relate? You know, for aren't we waiting as well? Aren't we waiting for the return of Jesus? For him to take us home?

Peter says there will be those who come who say where is this promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. See, these people appeared in the first century and they're for sure around today. how can you say that Jesus is coming? It's been 2,000 years.

Are you sure he's really coming? What do we answer to that? What do we say? We see Peter, he goes on to say, do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

[ 15 : 10 ] See, God will act. See, he has spoken and he has said that he will come. He is not slow, but he is patient. See, the family of God increases each and every day, including people of every tribe, tongue, and nation.

And that's a picture that we get in the book of Revelation. As John said, and after this I looked, and a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

This is the most wonderful picture of the people that we will spend eternity with, forever with. So, dear believer, hold on to this truth today.

For as John goes on to say, he who testifies to these things says, surely, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. So, hope in God, because God has spoken, and because God will act. And then thirdly, hope in God, because we shall live by faith.

[16:40] So, look at verse 4 with me. In the first line here, we see God speaking about the Babylonians.

Probably emphasizing the king, Nebuchadnezzar, his soul is puffed up, meaning he's full of pride and ego. He thinks himself self-sufficient and without need of anything or anyone.

And in contrast to this, God says the righteous shall live by faith. First of all, as we consider righteous, we must point out that it doesn't mean perfect.

It doesn't mean someone who is sinless when that is used in the Old Testament. We see the same word used in Genesis 6, for example. When God comes down and calls Noah, he calls him a righteous man, it doesn't mean that he is perfect or sinless.

It just means that the reason that God is, you know, when it says righteous, is of someone who believes, someone who trusts in the Lord, who seeks to follow him and obey him.

[17:50] And the righteous one, God says, shall live by his faith. See, unlike the Babylonian, who is filled with pride, the righteous shall live by faith in God.

The righteous one sets his hope not in his own strength, but in God. This verse we see picked up several times in the New Testament, one of which is Galatians 3.

We see Paul saying, now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith. See, Paul is clearly stating that our salvation is not by anything we have done, but only by faith in God.

The author of Hebrews also picks up this verse, as he says, but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

See, here the author of Hebrews emphasizes the need for us to continue in our faith, to remain in faith, to believe, despite whatever afflictions may come upon us.

[19:00] So, with these two, we see emphasize that we shall live by our faith. First, in Paul, we see that we live only by the faith, in that it is by faith that we are saved.

We have moved from darkness to light by our faith in God. And then second, we see in Hebrews that we shall live by faith as long as we remain in the faith, and as we persevere in the midst of trials and tribulations.

Christians. So, what may we take from these two emphases, and how we may think about faith, how we shall live, and how it all connects to having this hope in dark and dreary circumstances. You'll remember that in chapter 1, after hearing that the Babylonians would come to destroy Israel, Habakkuk said, we shall not die. And here, in the Lord's response, in this vision, God says that the righteous indeed will not die.

They shall live. Those who have been justified by faith, as Paul highlights, shall live by their continual faith, by their trust in the Lord, as emphasized in Hebrews.

[20:18] Now, one of the things that is common, at least in the States, I haven't been here long enough to kind of get a sense of it, is the sharing of your testimony.

What is your Christian testimony? What is your story? There's something exciting about testimonies, isn't there? To hear of the marvelous work of how God has worked in someone's life, of taking them a sinner, a rebel, an enemy of God, and making them a saint, a friend, a child of God, to see that change in the life trajectory, that 180 degree change.

But I'm always a little bit disappointed when I hear a testimony that only tells that part of the story, of that specific point of how God worked in that moment, God will tell anything else.

They don't go on saying how God has worked in their life after that. What is your testimony of God's work in your life in the past five, ten, twenty, forty, sixty years?

If anything, that is even more encouraging and praiseworthy. So when we see here that the righteous shall live by faith, the faith here is not merely the faith that saved us, the confession and turning from sin based on none of our works, but only by the work of Christ.

[21:58] The faith here, by which the righteous shall live, is also that continued faith, the daily trust in the Lord. All of the Christian life is repentance, says Martin Luther.

All of it, the entirety of our lives shall be a life of faith. And this is why Habakkuk may have hope, because despite the coming onslaught, it is by faith that he shall live, and by faith we will live also.

So we may hope in God because God has spoken, because God will act, and because we shall live by faith. And then fourthly and finally, we're to hope in God because the wicked, will perish.

And here we're really considering the rest of the chapter. And we won't spend much time here, you know, going verse by verse, but I want to point out the five woes that we find here.

And, you know, an oracle of woe, as it is called, is a prophecy of judgment. And the five that we see are, we see first in verses six and eight, that God says that because the Babylonians plundered the nations, they will be plundered by the nations.

[ 23 : 20 ] And, you see the second one, in nine to eleven, as God says that because of their covetousness, they shall be shamed. And the third, we see in verses 12 to 14, that God says that because of Babylon's violence and their injustice, all their strivings will be for nothing.

And the fourth one, in 15 through 17, God says that because of their drunkenness and perversion and violence, they will become drunk, they will be shamed, and they will be destroyed.

And the fifthly, and finally, the fifth woe hits at the heart of all the sins of Babylon, which is idolatry. The Babylonians worship a thing they made themselves, but in contrast, the Lord is in his temple. He is in his throne. He is ruling and reigning. And this is the part of the vision that Israel cannot wait to be fulfilled.

The destruction of their enemies, all the evils that the Babylonians have committed will return to them an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. They will face a just judgment.

[ 24 : 34 ] But it will take a while. as we've already seen. Seventy years must pass, but judgment is coming. In the book of Revelation, we're given a glimpse of the future, of the second coming of Christ and the restoration of all things, the day when he will bring peace and make all things right.

And at one point during the vision, John says, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

And they cried out with a loud voice, O sovereign one, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

And then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

And here we have the men and the women who have died for the sake of Christ, martyrs for the faith, and as they look to the return of Christ, what do they seek?

[ 25 : 50 ] What is it that they call for but the judgment of God? Patience. That's what God tells them. The day of judgment is coming.

See, throughout scripture, there is no peace or justice without the execution of judgment. For there to be justice, injustice has to be dealt with.

Now, how can we hope in God if the wicked will continue in their evil forever? And this is one of the parts of the Christian faith, that the modern person has one of the toughest times with.

They say, if God is loving, then how can he judge people? Of course, at the same time, if pressed, they would say that some people are worthy of judgment.

Hitler, Stalin, so on, the really bad ones. Now, the Christian claim goes even further than this, saying that there's none righteous.

[ 26 : 56 ] There's not even one who is righteous. Each one of us is bad and stand guilty before the Lord, justly deserving his judgment. You know, we may read the description that we've seen here of the Babylonians and agree that saying, yes, these Babylonians, they're terrible.

They deserve judgment. But I don't. I'm not that bad. But when we consider who God is, the perfectly holy and blameless and pure and perfect God, the one who made the heavens and the earth, and when we, on the other hand, see the true heinousness and vileness of our sin, we cannot but admit that, yes, we justly deserve his judgment.

We see Paul in Ephesians 2 spelling out the states that we were in. As he says, you are dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

See, if you are here this evening, and you do not believe, and you do not rest on Jesus Christ alone for salvation, this here is true of you.

That you are dead, you are separated from God, you are a rebel, an enemy of God, and nothing but judgment awaits. But there's good news.

[ 28 : 57 ] No, there's amazing news, for God did not leave us in our sins. He did not leave us to be His enemies. No, but He sought us out.

He came after us. That's the entire story of the Old Testament, that it's showing us God seeking after His people, even when they don't want Him.

Even here in Habakkuk, what we see is God seeking after His people. Israel have turned from Him, worshipping the pagan God, becoming thieves, adulterers, murderers, and liars, yet God still seeks after them, because He wants them and He wants you.

Do you believe that truth this evening? That God desires you. See, so Paul goes on to say that yes, you are dead in your sins, but God, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and made us alive together with Christ, by grace you've been saved and raised up with Him.

See, even when dead in our sins, God took the initiative. We did not want Him, but He came for us anyway. The coming of the Son of God, of Jesus, the Christ, in that we have the clearest picture of the seriousness of our sin on the one hand, and the depth of the love of God on the other.

[ 30 : 46 ] Because the sin of humanity is so vile and so terrible that it took the death of the Son of God Himself, the One who existed for all eternity, in perfect union with Father and Holy Spirit, the Alpha and the Omega, in order for sin to be dealt with, and for us to be reconciled to God.

So hope in God, because God has spoken, God will act, we shall live by faith, and the wicked will perish.

Now, dear Christian, do you hope in God this evening? Do you take hope in the fact that God has spoken? He could have remained far off, but instead He has spoken, He has given us His Word.

Do you in the dark days when your soul is cast down, the psalmist was describing, do you turn to God's Word? Do you hear His words, His promises?

And do you take hope because God will act? God has said that He will come, but do you believe it? I know especially on the days when the clouds of our soul are dark that it is difficult to believe.

[ 32 : 11 ] Even asking, can it really be true that God loves a wretch like me? We may even find ourselves agreeing with the scoffers.

Things have been the same for so long. Can it really be that God is coming? Well, you may take hope and the promises we have looked at this evening, for He is coming.

He will surely come. And do you take hope? Because you shall live by faith. Good doctrine and good theology, it will not save you.

Good works are of no use without faith in the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. that alone is what will save you.

And is that your hope this evening? Do you take hope because even though you as sinner deserve judgment, God has shown you mercy?

[ 33 : 18 ] Habakkuk said, are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. And this is true. The everlasting One, Jesus Christ, has taken your place on that cross.

He died so that you may live. He died an innocent and a righteous man that you, a guilty, unrighteous sinner, may live.

So that you no longer shall be called sinner. I shall be called saint. No longer wretch, but beloved.

No longer estranged, but child of God. May this be the source of our hope.

May this be the source of our comfort this evening and all the days to come until Christ returns or he takes us away.

[ 34 : 29 ] Let us pray. Amen. Father God, during our days on this earth, there are days, many even, that it is difficult to believe, that it is difficult to hope.

Oh, Lord, help us in our unbelief. Fill us not with the lies of Satan, Lord, no, but with the words of your promise.

Fill us, Lord, with indeed, with the first fruits that we experience even now of heaven that is to come.

The first fruits that we experience by seeing a glimpse of the Lord Jesus through the reading and the preaching of your words, through the fellowship of fellow believers, through many, many more things of which you bless us while here on earth.

Lord, may we see Jesus. Yes, Lord, may we see him. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, if you would, please stand as we will sing our concluding hymn, Be Still, My Soul.

[ 36 : 15 ] Be Still, My Soul.