

Habakkuk Ch1v1-Ch2v5 - Faith Amidst Fear And Destruction

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[0 : 00] Habakkuk, Habakkuk, whatever way you say it. I think they say Habakkuk in America. I think we say Habakkuk in Ireland, but I won't get into an argument with anyone over it. Habakkuk, chapter 1. That's on page 940, and you're going to need a page number this morning for that, 940. It's a small book, just three chapters, and we're going to take the next three weeks together to study what God has to say to us through it.

So we're going to read from chapter 1, verse 1, up until chapter 2, and verse 4 today. Before we start, let's pray. Let's commit this time to the Lord.

Lord, what we're about to read isn't all easy. We need your help. Or we find it hard to understand your ways and to trust you. God, give us grace now to hear what your word has to say to us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Do you ever get overwhelmed by the injustice and suffering in the world around you? Do you ever pray about it and wonder why God continues to allow it to happen?

A few months ago, you would have heard in the news that an army officer walked free from a Limerick courtroom after knocking a woman unconscious on the streets of Limerick and bragging about it to his friends.

[2 : 04] Elsewhere on our city streets, drug dealers exploit vulnerable young people to sell drugs while they themselves get off scot-free, living lives of luxury.

Further afield, in Ukraine, you may have heard this in the news, tens of thousands of children have been forcibly deported to Russia with no promise of ever being returned.

In the Israel-Hamas war, approximately 30,000 civilians have been killed. And over a hundred hostages remain in captivity.

All of this and more. It makes us cry out with Habakkuk. In verse 2, read with me. How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, violence, but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

[3 : 25] Destruction and violence are before me. There is strife and conflict abounds. Therefore, the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted.

Habakkuk has the honesty to say out loud what we're all thinking. When we see justice being perverted time and time again.

And what follows is this gripping dialogue between this weary, doubting man and his God, which we really need to hear today.

This text is going to show us how to talk to God about the ugly realities of injustice and suffering. What to do when God seems deaf to our cries.

Or when his answers are too difficult to accept. And finally, we're going to learn how God calls us to live by faith as we struggle with all of these things.

[4 : 31] And we're going to walk through this text in the structure that it gives us. Habakkuk speaks. God responds. Then Habakkuk responds to God.

And God has his final word. So let's start with Habakkuk's questions, which we just read there. And I wonder, did those questions make you feel just a little bit uncomfortable?

I mean, is it okay to express frustration and doubt like that to God? I mean, look at verse 2. He asks, how long, Lord, must I call for help?

But you do not listen. Now, Habakkuk is a prophet of God. He knows the scriptures back to front.

He obviously knows that God listens to our cries. But he's living in Judah at this moment in time. And this nation is spiraling out of control and wickedness.

[5 : 34] He is frustrated and he's wearied from the rampant injustice he sees around him. And right now in this moment, he honestly feels like God isn't listening to his prayers.

That's real life, isn't it? There's no glossing over the truth. We get tired. We get tired of praying the same prayers over and over and not seeing any change.

We say, what's the point in praying about this anymore? Why is God just letting it happen? And yes, deep down in our hearts, we know that God does hear every cry of ours.

We know Romans 8.28. He works everything for good. But some days we just don't feel it. Is that okay?

Well, I think the first thing that we learn from Habakkuk here is that God can take our honest questions. He can handle our doubts. Tomorrow, I might have total faith that he's listening and he's working everything out for good.

[6 : 44] But Habakkuk shows us that it's okay to be honest with God if we don't feel it today. God can handle our honest questions. He wants us to come to him with our doubts, not to pull away.

But what's also really important to note here is how Habakkuk asks his honest questions. And it's a humble asking.

This is no arrogant, I know better than you, rant, with one foot already out the door to leave. No, Habakkuk isn't giving up on God here.

That's clear. Neither is this a kind of superficial glossing over the situation or the pain he feels, pretending it doesn't exist.

No, both those are wrong. No, this is a humble asking. Where Habakkuk asks his honest questions about his pain.

[7 : 51] And even if he has to wait to get an answer, he's staying. And we can follow Habakkuk's example here as we bring our questions to God about the pain and injustice that we can't understand.

Even the very asking of those questions is an act of faith in and of itself. So first, we bring our honest questions to God and we ask humbly, waiting for his answer.

Now, I know what you're thinking. That's all well and good, Sam. But what about when God's answer isn't what I asked for? What if nothing changes for months or years?

What if the pain or the injustice simply gets worse? Well, this is actually what happened to Habakkuk. Because after Habakkuk's honest questions, in verse 5, come God's difficult answers. And it's going to feel for all the world like God is failing him. But God's difficult answers are not the end of the story. Not for us. Not for Habakkuk.

[9 : 01] Let's hear God's response in verse 5. He says, Look at the nations and watch, and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not even believe, even if you were told.

And I think the first thing to note here is that God's difficult answers are not as we expect. God reminds Habakkuk and us that his ways are so much higher than ours.

We were hearing that already from what Connor shared from Romans this morning. In fact, we should not expect to understand all of God's actions in our world, should we?

It shouldn't surprise us if we don't get it, or can't see how this situation works for good, because God is the all-knowing, perfectly just creator, who sees everything from beginning to end.

But that's hard to trust, isn't it, in the middle of a crisis? And I think it all boils down to this. Are we willing to trust God with the things that we don't expect and the things that don't make sense?

[10 : 19] Let's continue. In verse 6, with God's difficult, unexpected answer. Here it is, verse 6. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people who will sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.

They are a feared and dreaded people. They are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong. Their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle, swooping to devour. They all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.

They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities. By building earthen ramps, they capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on. Guilty people whose own strength is their God.

Let's be real. This is Habakkuk's worst nightmare. Can you imagine the horror of God telling you directly that your country will be overrun by a ruthless army who will destroy, kill, and take captive? [11 : 36] And for Habakkuk, worse still. God is the one sending them. God says it himself in verse 6.

He says, I am raising up the Babylonians. This text tells us straight out that God raises up evil nations to do evil things within his perfect plan for his people and his world. And this difficult answer plunges Habakkuk and us into a painful struggle. And this is a struggle that God's servants in every age have gone through.

How can God be holy and good and yet sovereign over evil? But before we delve more into this, just notice in verse 12 how Habakkuk addresses God in the middle of this struggle.

He uses words like, my Lord, my God, my Holy One, my Rock. That's the kind of language that says, I'm coming to you, Lord, because I know you're faithful.

[12 : 53] Even if I don't understand what you're doing. Even if I'm confused and angry. You're still my Lord. You're still my Rock.

On which I stand. What a way to approach those painful struggles in our lives. Saying, Lord, you are still my Rock.

Even in the middle of this. To where else can I go? So in that light, let's delve into Habakkuk's struggle to square God's goodness with his sovereignty over evil.

Let's read together from verse 12. Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die.

You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment. You, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. Verse 13, your eyes are too pure to look on evil.

[13 : 56] You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent? While the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves.

And we're all with Habakkuk here, aren't we? I mean, he rightly points out, God, you're holy. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. How can you be sovereign over evil and still good?

Well, as we read on in Habakkuk, actually in chapter 2, we'll see that while God is 100% sovereign over evil, people are also 100% responsible for the evil that they do.

we're going to read in chapter 2 how God pronounces judgment on this nation of Babylon for their wickedness. God speaks of them as having total control over their actions.

They choose the evil that they're going to bring upon Israel. And yet, equally true was that God was totally sovereign over those evil choices to achieve his purposes for his people.

[15 : 08] God is 100% sovereign. People are 100% responsible. Both true at the same time. A profound mystery that God has chosen not to fully explain to us.

And again, we come back to the same question. Are we willing to trust God with the difficult answers he gives, the things that we don't yet understand?

Even when the answer he gives is the thing that we fear the most as for Habakkuk. Will we stay around? Or will we walk out the door on him?

Habakkuk, while completely devastated, he's staying. And in an act of faith, he continues to struggle with God in prayer.

So, from verses 14 on to 16, he compares Babylon to this greedy angler, like a fisherman, who mercilessly just hoards people like fish into his net while living in luxury.

[16 : 21] Let's pick it up in verse 17. Is he, Babylon, to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? 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. Well, what's your painful struggle today?

You prayed for hope and God gave you something you never expected. maybe even the thing you dreaded the most. And like Habakkuk in verse 17, you honestly ask God, will this ever end?

How is God good in this situation? We're all in the same struggle and it feels like we are standing up there on the city walls with Habakkuk.

What an epic scene. and we need answers and we're going to wait for them. We're standing on those city walls as it were.

[17 : 38] We've got no one else to turn to. We're going to God. The scene is set. Everything is out on the table and God is about to give his response.

what will he say? Let's read from verse 2. Then the Lord replied, write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. 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. The revelation is spelled out in the rest of this chapter. And in summary, Babylon will be judged by God. But in the meantime, Habakkuk will have to wait. And sometimes that waiting feels unbearable, doesn't it? But God tells us how it is possible to wait patiently for his justice. [18 : 49] And this is the climax statement. This is what it all comes down to in verse four. Let's read it together. See, the enemy is puffed up. His desires are not upright.

But the righteous person will live by his faithfulness. Or simply put, will live by faith. That's how we can wait patiently in the struggle. God calls us to live by faith. This is the opposite of the ungodly. Did you notice that? They are puffed up. Or they live by their own strength. They don't need God. And in verse five it says they're never satisfied by all the things they accumulate, but not those who live by faith in God.

Hebrews 11.1 kind of helps us to understand what this word faith means. It says this, faith is confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see.

[19 : 58] Everything in the Christian life ultimately boils down to this charge. Live by faith. And it starts with our salvation, doesn't it? How can sinful people be made right with God?

Well, we place our faith in Jesus' perfect obedience for us, and death for our sin. We live by faith in him. What's the key to patient endurance as we wait for God's justice?

Well, we live by faith in God's future judgment. What's the key to not giving up when we don't understand what God's doing? Well, we live by faith in God's perfect wisdom.

Don't you see how our whole life in Christ is lived by faith from start to finish. But as we come to the end, I want to leave you with an encouragement to continue praying in the struggle like Habakkuk did.

And it goes back to his very first question. Do you remember that at the start? God, are you even listening? And in Revelation 5, John sees right into the throne room of heaven.

[21 : 17] And this is what we see. You can read along on the screen. Revelation 5, 8, the four creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb.

Each one had a harp. And they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

This is amazing. Your prayers and mine, they don't float into the abyss. God is never tuned out. The image here is of God collecting every one of your prayers in these golden bowls.

They are a sweet-smelling incense to him. They delight him. He treasures every whisper of yours, every cry of desperation, every plea for justice.

God stores away every one of your prayers, prayed according to his will. And why is he doing this? Well, I think it's worth us turning to Revelation together.

[22 : 29] Revelation chapter 8 verse 3. We're going to see these golden bowls of our prayers reappear here. This is Revelation chapter 8 verse 3.

It's on page 1,239. Revelation 8 verse 3.

I'm going to read down to verse 5. Another angel who had a golden censer came and stood at the altar. This is in the throne room of heaven.

He was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all God's people on the golden altar in front of the throne.

The smoke of the incense together with the prayers of God's people went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and hurled it on the earth.

[23 : 35] And there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. Now there's a lot of vivid imagery for us to take in here, but just notice the prayers of God's people fuel the fire that is hurled onto the earth at the end of time.

And that fire, we believe, represents God's coming judgment on all injustice and his renewal of the earth.

One writer says it like this, you can follow along on the screen. The renewal of the world, heaven and earth, restored as one, begins with God pouring out all the prayers of his children like a purifying fire with one great resounding yes.

I find that so encouraging. I hope you do too. the loved ones you prayed for who never got better, the pain that you prayed against that never went away, the injustice you prayed for that continued, unchecked, the peace you prayed for which never came.

God treasures all of those prayers. And on the last day, God will use every one of those prayers to begin his renewal of all things.

[25 : 01] Death will die, pain will end, injustice and war will cease. The answer will be yes, yes and yes. Your prayers are not wasted breath.

They're not ignored. Both Habakkuk's prayers and ours matter eternally. And God invites us to pray in faith as we patiently wait for God to act.

so bring to him your honest questions and your doubts. Lay them before him. And when his answers just don't make sense to you, stay in the struggle in prayer.

Remember God's charge to you today. Live by faith in the sovereign judge who will right all wrongs and he will make all things new.

Live by faith in the only savior Jesus whose unjust death bought your forgiveness. Live by faith in the wise loving shepherd who leads you through the valley of pain.

[26 : 20] Let's pray to him now. Lord, we so desperately need your help with this because we feel the sting of injustice and pain and we doubt your goodness.

Give us faith to trust you when we can't see you moving. oh Lord, thank you that you treasure every prayer of ours.

Give us the grace to persevere in prayer and to live by faith in your promise just like Habakkuk did. we pray all of these things for your glory and for our good. Amen.

Amen. We're going to sing a song now.