

Why don't you listen?

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[0:00] Don't be ashamed to use the contents page if you need to, that's absolutely fine.! It's helpful, it's there. It's between the book of Nahum and Zephaniah, if that helps.

! But firstly, by way of introduction to the book of Habakkuk, it's a really helpful book to turn to, I think.

We've just been considering, remembering the life of Maureen. We know that in this world, death is a reality. And Habakkuk is making sense of a world which is broken.

Habakkuk is going to help us when we wonder if God listens to our prayers. He's going to help us as we try and make sense of life in this world.

He's going to help us when it feels like we see a world full of injustice and violence. He's going to help us, in fact, teach us to wait upon the Lord in prayer.

[1:26] And Habakkuk is going to help us still to rejoice in the Lord, even when his ways seem mysterious to us. Even when we have questions and doubts about what the Lord is doing.

He's still going to help us to rejoice in the Lord. There's some wonderful gems in the book of Habakkuk of verses. Maybe we didn't even know they were here in this little book. Chapter 2, verse 4, for example.

The righteous person will live by his faithfulness. Paul quotes that in the book of Romans. The righteous will live by faith. Or chapter 2, verse 14.

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Perhaps a verse we know well. Maybe we didn't realize it was in the book of Habakkuk.

I think it's also in Isaiah as well, actually. And then at the end, chapter 3, verse 17 and 18. Verses I think I know well.

[2:30] Maybe you don't. But they're wonderful verses. Let's read the first four verses of Habakkuk.

The prophecy that Habakkuk, the prophet, received. How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?

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

Destruction and violence are before me. There is strife and conflict about. Therefore, the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails.

The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted. Let's pray. Father God, as we begin to look at this little book of Habakkuk on some of our Sunday evening meetings over these next few months, we pray that you would help us and teach us through your living words.

[4:05] We ask that you would do that even this evening. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Of course, we can ask God many questions in prayer.

But just turn to your neighbor for a moment or maybe think quietly on your own if that's more helpful for you. If you could ask God one question right now, what would it be?

What would it be? Have a chat and we'll feed back in a moment. Thank you. Who's going to win the Premier League?

Great mistake. It is.

Try to think. You think of these things and then your mind goes blank. My mind's on the rest of the set.

[5:16] Why can't I think of a question? That's a question. I'm intrigued.

There is a microphone if anyone wants to share. We'll just hear from three or four people maybe. Don't be shy. Isabel over there. Let's start with her and Mark.

How long, God, would you put up with so much wickedness in this world? How long would you put up with such wickedness? Yeah. Very much on the same page as Habakkuk there.

Mark. Who's going to win the Premier League this season? Big questions of life. Absolutely. Love it. Any others? I'll send my go for it.

When will you save my family? When will you save my family? Yeah. When will the Lord return?

[6:33] When will the Lord return? Yeah. Hi, my name's Will. Hi, Lee.

Thanks for having me. Yeah, what's going on?

What's going on? What's going on in the world? Yeah. Oh. The first verse two. How long, oh Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?

Yeah. Yeah. Understandable questions as we work our way through life. I'm sure we pop it on the chair in front of Ruth.

That seems to be a good home for it. As we think about our journey through life in this broken world, those are big questions.

And this evening, Habakkuk, as we have already read, and as we'll see some more, he asks questions of the Lord, and we're going to get into them in just a moment.

[7:37] The book begins, the prophecy that Habakkuk, the prophet, received. I don't know. I haven't actually checked the old NIVs that some of you guys have got.

Does it say oracle? That's brilliant. Oracle, it means a burden, a weighty, heavy message.

That's the sort of message that Habakkuk gets. This evening, we're considering weighty things.

We've asked some big questions just now as we've shared.

Big, weighty things. We live in a world where we love trivial things, it seems. Perhaps you scroll through social media.

I certainly do, and see all sorts of rubbish videos. Why would I spend 30 seconds watching a cat jump off the table or something? The top watched video on YouTube is the song Baby Shark, which has 13.93 billion views.

[8:51] Just seems ridiculous. It's something like that. This evening, we're not here to be entertained by trivial matters.

We're here to consider words of the living God. Weighty words. Words spoken by God through his prophet Habakkuk.

It's very difficult to work out exactly when Habakkuk was around prophesying, but it seems that it was just before the exile of the southern kingdom of Israel, known as Judah.

It's just before the Babylonians come and sweep away the people into exile. Prophets like the prophet Jeremiah was active around the same time, and probably Micah and Nahum and Zephaniah.

One of the kings who may have been ruling at the time of Habakkuk, King Josiah, all in all a very good king, but struggled as he tried to reform Israel.

[10:06] Kings either side of him were pretty awful. Kings. We don't really know much about the man Habakkuk, but we do know he's a prophet with lots of questions.

The book kind of goes, question, answers from the Lord, questions, answers from the Lord, and then a prayer or singing to the Lord.

Hence why we ask that question. If you could ask God one question, what would it be? And Habakkuk in these verses, as we've read, cries out to the Lord in his rawness.

He's being very real and honest, I think, with the Lord here. No particular right or wrong answer to this, but have another little chat for a minute or so.

How do you think Habakkuk is feeling here? How do you think Habakkuk is feeling? Thank you. Thank you.

[12:11] Frustrated, absolutely. Perplexed, yeah. Distressed. Sharing each other's answers, love it. Distraught.

Despair. Depressed, yeah. Feels like he can't escape from it. Yeah, yeah, feels like he can't escape from it, absolutely. Interesting.

Interesting. We're going to see his kind of three questions. Well, I've kind of summarized him into three questions.

First of all, why don't you listen? Why don't you listen? I suspect we all know what it feels like to think, Lord, why don't you seem to be listening?

Your cries out to the Lord to act on a worldwide level. Bring peace. Bring peace where there is war. [13:12] Bring revival to this land. Surely that's praying in line with the will of God, but you just don't see those answers to prayer. Or maybe it's on more practical levels for healing, for a job, for a spouse, for a home.

We cry, how long, Lord? How long must I be crying out to you? Why do you not answer? Abacut cries, how long?

Verse two, how long, Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen. Why don't you listen, Lord? These questions, these requests even of the Lord, they're not new requests for Habakkuk.

He's saying, how long? You don't seem to be listening to my prayers. Nothing new here that Habakkuk is saying to the Lord. Perhaps he's been praying these things for years and he doesn't seem to be hurt.

What do we do when it feels like God is silent? I think we do what Habakkuk is doing and keep looking to him by faith.

[14:30] Habakkuk's cries of how long? A cries of faith. Already mentioned this verse already to you. Matthew chapter two, verse four.

The righteous person will live by his faithfulness or by his faith. His faith, his trust in the Lord was there even as he doubts whether the Lord is listening.

Why don't you listen, Lord? And I think that prayer, that question, how long, is something we need to be learning to pray ourselves.

Though he doesn't know if the Lord is listening, yet he still thinks he is because he's crying out how long. Nonetheless, he does pray even though he doesn't seem to be seeing an answer.

I think we need to learn to pray like that. We need to see injustice and evil and say, how long, Lord? How long before you'll do something? I think maybe for some of us, it can be easy to think, why would I even bother to pray like this?

[15:52] Some of us live very comfortable lives. We quite enjoy our lives here. Our homes are comfortable. We love watching our TV series and we see evil in the world.

But actually, personally, for some of us, not all of us, I know, we feel comfortable. We feel we're okay. We wonder, is there any use in this crying out how long?

Keep praying for peace and justice to be done in Russia, Ukraine and Israel, Gaza, but we don't see an answer. Is there really any point, Daniel, in praying how long?

But by faith, we can say, Lord, see the situation. We know you can do something.

How long before you will? How long before you'll bring down evil rulers? How long before you'll return again and bring us home to heaven?

[17:04] Why don't you listen, Lord? By faith, we know he's listening like Habakkuk does.

Even though maybe it doesn't feel like it. By faith, we cry out how long?

Because God is there. What Habakkuk is learning as he questions God is he's learning to wait upon the Lord.

Chapter 2, verse 1 opens, 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.

He is resolutely standing and saying, I will wait and see what the Lord is going to do. As we'll see next time, the Lord does answer these questions in verses 1 to 4.

[18:16] But verse 5 is the beginning of that answer. Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed. I am going to do something in your days. We'll see they're not particularly things Habakkuk feels comfortable with.

The Lord's answers aren't always what we want them to be. But the Lord is listening. The Lord does answer his people's cries.

So Habakkuk is learning to wait. I don't know what the Lord will say. He is learning. But I know he's going to answer. And so I will stand and wait.

That's the response of faith. And though he is seeking God by faith, though he does not know what the future will hold, he is not blind in his faith.

He knows exactly who his God is. He knows exactly who he is praying to. Verse 12. Lord, are you not from everlasting?

[19:30] He knows that his God is eternal. My God, my Holy One, you will never die. He knows that the Lord is his rock, his unchanging, faithful, dependable God.

And he knows that his God is holy. Verse 13. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Habakkuk knows who he is praying to.

And based on this, based on his confidence in who the Lord is, he can cry out, how long? Why don't you listen?

And so for us, when we see wrongdoing and evil going on, we can cry out to a holy God.

Lord, do something. Lord, bring down the wicked. You're holy. You're too pure to look on evil. When we're suffering in some way, we can cry out, Lord, Lord, we know you are merciful and we know you are good.

[20:38] Please, please bring an end to this. When we're thinking about our unsaved family members and friends, we can pray, Lord, we know you're a God of grace.

Please, please show that grace in their lives, Lord. What is it that Habakkuk is calling out about?

Well, he is particularly concerned with violence. Verse 2. Or cry out to you, violence, but you do not save. Apparently that word violence is literally the word hamas.

We may associate that now with a Palestinian grouping, but that's what this word is here. The word is civil or military oppression, malicious action intended to injure another person or property.

Violence. I cry out to you, violence, Lord, but you do not save. So the second question is, why don't you save, Lord? Why do you not save the victims of violence?

[21:53] Why don't you bring an end to violence? Remember, Habakkuk is speaking about the Lord's people, Israel.

This is violence among God's covenant people. The church today, we are the Lord's people. It's sort of the equivalent of what's going on, it seems.

It would be quite different if Habakkuk was describing the nations around him who do not know the Lord, but know it's his nation, it's God's people.

So verse 3. Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Why is this going on amongst your people, Lord? Just to get a flavor of what's going on, I turn to 2 Kings 21. 2 Kings 21. And we see a king, two kings actually, who may well have been around at the time of Habakkuk or just before.

[23:10] 2 Kings 21. Verse 6. This is King Manasseh, first of all.

He sacrificed his own son in the fire. Habakkuk calls out violence. That's what one of the kings of the Lord's people was doing.

He sacrificed his son in the fire. He practiced divination. He sought omens and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger.

Verse 16. Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end. Violence. Violence.

And then there's his son Amon who follows. Verse 21. He followed completely the ways of his father, worshipping the idols of his father that his father had worshipped and bowing down to them.

[24:20] He forsook the Lord, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in obedience to him. Violence. Violence. Amongst the leader, the king of God's people.

See, take God out of the picture. In fact, take God's word out of the picture. Verse 4. Therefore, the law is paralyzed. The law is almost as good as dead, really.

Take God and his word out of the picture. Stop listening to him. And violence abounds. There's violence even in the city that we live in.

I was watching just this afternoon a documentary on Channel 4 called Night Coppers. It's based in Brighton. It's streets that we know and recognize, and there's violence.

There's violence. There's homes in this area, and there's violence. On our doorstep. Take God's word out of the picture.

[25:35] Stop listening to him, and violence abounds. And even among the church, God's people. Remember, Habakkuk is speaking about God's people.

Even among the church today, there are situations that we hear all too often of leaders of God's people who are not living as the Lord would want them to, who are violent, who are wicked, who are unjust.

And so we can cry with Habakkuk. When we look at these things, we can cry with him, how long? How long will you put up with this? Why do you not do anything about this, Lord?

How long must this go on for? How long before we'll be home with you and your people? The final question is this in verse 3.

Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Verse 3. Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me.

[26:54] There is strife and conflict abounds. Violence abounds. There is no justice in the courts. No priests sharing God's word.

Kings of the Lord's people are wicked and violent. They're not following the Lord. Why do you put up with this, God? Why? As I've said, Habakkuk is going to get answers from the Lord.

And Habakkuk will get answers from the Lord because God doesn't tolerate wrongdoing. God does hear our cries. God does act.

He is just. He is just. the answer that Habakkuk gets at first will make him go, scratch his head and go, hang on, Lord, this is not what I was thinking.

Don't do this, Lord, that's surely worse. But God's judgments are good and right. A Habakkuk is going to help us to see that.

[28:07] And if we're in doubt about whether or not God tolerates wrongdoing, well, the good news is the Bible doesn't end at the book of Habakkuk.

The Bible goes on to show us that God's answer to violence and injustice in our world, well, it's found in him. Maybe we look at our world and wonder what's going on.

Well, be assured that God has done something about it. He himself has stepped down into our world in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has himself experienced violence and injustice at the cross.

Here again, verse 2, and think of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Jesus on the cross cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[29:25] He felt abandoned by the Father. Jesus on the cross endured such awful wickedness and violence and injustice.

Hear again the rest of these verses and picture the Lord Jesus on the cross. Jesus on the cross. Or cry out to you, violence, but you do not save.

Jesus was put to death at the hands of wicked, violent men. Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

Why do you say, 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.

[30:19] Jesus on the cross endured such awful injustice and violence. Some familiar words from Isaiah.

Surely he took up our pain and he bore our suffering. And yet we considered him punished by God. Stricken by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him.

And by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

That was unjust. No way did the Lord Jesus deserve to die in our place. He was perfectly good and yet he was there.

[31:28] And he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that he went through has brought us peace.

So we don't have to face that punishment. That is death and the righteous anger of God on sin. The Lord Jesus was willing to go through injustice and violence for us.

And so when we cry out, how long, Lord? How long will this suffering go on for? How long until you put an end to violence and injustice?

Where we can look back to the cross. Where the Son of God has experienced that for us. Where justice has been done for the sins that you and I have committed.

Where the punishment that our sins deserve has been paid in full by the Lord Jesus, the man of sorrows. Our sins have been laid on him and by his wounds we are healed.

[32:45] So do, in your prayers, cry out to God, how long? It's a cry of faith.

In your prayers, as you pray for violent situations and injustices, know that he himself has been witness and victim of awful injustice and violence.

And join with Habakkuk. And trust God. And wait upon him. And know that he does hear and answer our prayers.

We're going to sing two songs in response. One potentially unfamiliar song. And one potentially pinephrine.