

# Five woes

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[0:00] He is everlasting and they are not.! He is God and they are not God, though they might think they are gods.! He is the Holy One and they are evil.

And the Lord Almighty, the Holy One, cannot tolerate sin. It has to be judged. He ordains nations to rise and fall and they do not.

He is unchanging and a faithful rock for his people and they are not. And so in the passage that we're going to look at, verses 6 to 20, God says, Whoa! He says it several times.

We're going to look at them in a moment. What does God mean by saying, Whoa? Well, I've been looking at that and it's something that's said at a funeral.

Whoa! I.e. how terrible it is. How terrible it is that someone's died. It is funeral language. But these woes, they come to the living.

[1:15] And God is saying how terrible it is that they are like this. And God is talking about his enemies. He's talking about the Babylonians particularly.

That are this ruthless and terrible people who are coming in. In judgment to the Lord's people. And Habakkuk couldn't work out.

Why God? If you are good, why would you allow evil? We're going to see in this passage. Well, God sees it. He sees the evil. And he's going to do something about it.

Oh, I want you guys to do some work this evening. So you should have a sheet. If you don't, there are some available over there. Be great in groups.

Maybe four-ish groups around the room. Just to chat with the people around you about those two questions on them. I don't have one.

[2:15] That's terrible. They say, how many woes do you spot? And how would you summarize them in one sentence? As each of the woes that you see.

Have a go. See how you get on. And we'll come back together and have a chat. There in verses 6 to 8. They want as much as they can get from people, don't they?

People are piling up their stolen goods. And they're making themselves wealthy by extortion.

Stolen goods and luxuries being enjoyed. Which should really be enjoyed with a sense of guilt, I think. When you read verse 8.

You've got this because you've plundered many nations. The people who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood. You've destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

[3:23] To get the stolen goods. To get the money by extortion. It's left people's lives turned upside down.

I wonder if you remember Wonga. And other such payday loan companies.

Many of them. This one particularly. Wonga was found to have been charging extortionate rates of money. Extortionate rates of interest for people to borrow.

And they really targeted, didn't they? The vulnerable. Those who didn't have much money at the end of each month. People on low incomes. And they were taken in by this idea of payday loans.

And this company, Wonga. In 2014, the Financial Conduct Authority ordered them to pay 2.6 million pounds in compensation over misleading advertising.

[4:26] And in 2018, they went into administration because of an overwhelming number of customer complaints. They gained by extortionate means.

The Babylonians here, they gained by extortionate means. They've lended money to you and raised the interest of it.

Oh, that's woe to you. Raised the interest of it sky high. And even the Lord says, how long must this go on for?

Joining the cry of Habakkuk who says, how long? But of course, the Lord does know how long this will go on for. Verse 7, the Lord says, will not your creditors suddenly arise?

Will they not wake up and make you tremble? And then you will become their prey. They will suddenly arise against them.

[5:32] Suddenly they'll demand their stolen goods and money back, please. There'll be an overwhelming number of complaints against the Babylonians that could bring them down.

In other words, in verse 8, their actions are going to come back and bite them. You have shed human blood.

You have destroyed lands and cities and every one of them. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. Their actions are going to come back and bite them.

Justice will be done. I think at the end of these ways, it's good for us just to pause and just think about ourselves for a moment.

Is there any way we ourselves have been greedy for gain? Maybe are we taking from people in some way?

[6:38] Is the Lord prodding us of some sort of sin that we need to confess to him? Woe number two is building selfishly.

That's how I've put it. Building selfishly. They build their houses, but in order to build them, they ruin other people's lives.

And verse 9, woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin.

They build their nests up high away from the predators. Insecurity. Building high, wonderful houses in order to escape ruin.

But the irony that is verse 10, they have done that whilst plotting the ruin of many peoples.

[7:43] Shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. They've gained riches and money to build their houses by exploiting others, ruining others.

They lift themselves up high. A king of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 4 verse 30.

In fact, Phil read these verses this morning. King Nebuchadnezzar said this. Is not this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power for the glory of my majesty?

It was a mighty city. He had a mighty kingdom. It was great what was being built in Babylon.

And many of the people thought they were on top of the world. Thought they were number one. As we see in the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar actually is humbled and ends up praising the Lord Almighty.

[8:52] But that's not where he was at once upon a time. The Babylonians are building selfishly.

Number one themselves is most important. And self being number one is not much different to how life is today.

Even how we are. I was interested to watch some MPs give their final speeches in Parliament before they step down.

Teresa May said this. I worry that too many politicians believe it is about them and their ambitions and their careers and not about the people they serve.

Many people are building selfishly. Building their way up selfishly about them. They think life is.

[9:59] And the Babylonians are no different. And verse 11 says the stones of the wall will cry out. And the beams of the woodwork will echo it.

All those people's houses they've destroyed in order that they themselves might live in luxury. The stones will cry out. The woodwork will echo it.

The Lord sees. The Lord knows. How they got there. How those stones got there.

How that woodwork got there. It's crying out to him. With ruins of people's lives.

It kind of reminds me of the story of Cain and Abel. Where the Lord came to speak to Cain. And after the murder of his brother.

[10:54] And said to him that the Lord said, What have you done? Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. That the Lord sees injustice.

He sees selfish living. He is the one who is high and lifted up. They think, these Babylonians, they think they are secure in their homes.

Paid for by blood and destruction. But the Lord sees the evil and he says, Whoa. How terrible it is that they've done that. They've shamed their own house and forfeited their own life.

What have I done? What does Jesus say?

Jesus says, What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world? Yet forfeit their soul. Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

[11:59] Those houses that they've built up. What good is it? If they're forfeiting their own soul. Jesus said, didn't he? Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves.

Not live selfishly. And take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me will find it.

So maybe we should just pause again. And maybe the Lord is prodding us about our own selfishness. Where are we trying to put us as number one rather than the Lord as number one? Maybe we ourselves are even trying to build ourselves up. Our careers, our position in some way. But whilst trying to bring other people down. Because we're number one. We're most important. The Lord goes further with the next woe.

[13:08] We're number three. Building by destruction. And so as we've noted. He goes on from building your own houses to building towns and cities.

Verse 12. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed. And establishes a town by injustice. You've slaughtered people without thinking. Also that you can build your name for yourself. Build your great cities. Your great towns. All that is fuel for the fire. The Lord Almighty says. Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire? That the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? That their labor is fruitless.

[14:08] It's fuel for the fire. Fuel for the judgment that burns against them. If they don't turn to the Lord Almighty. They're trying to build a name for themselves.

Trying to build these great cities and towns. Do you know what the Lord is doing? Verse 14 tells us. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

As the waters cover the sea. See only one city. Only one kingdom will stand. That will outlast all the kingdoms of the world.

And that is the Lord's kingdom. And the big thing God is doing. It is filling the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

As the waters cover the sea. Be good to discuss again in your groups. Where is God's glory revealed?

[15:08] Or where is it being revealed in the world? Maybe there's some scriptures that you may have in mind. And maybe you have other thoughts to share with one another. But just to help one another as we continue to think about these things.

And then we'll come back and hear from one another in a few minutes. We'll give this maybe about five minutes. Woe number four. Taking advantage.

Taking advantage of people is how I've put this one. So verse 15. Quite a shocking verse. We should find it shocking I think.

Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours. Pouring it from the wineskin till they're drunk. So that he can gaze on their naked bodies. I'm not sure we necessarily have to take this as literal.

That they were literally doing this. But their behaviour is definitely like someone. Who gets another person drunk. In order to gain advantage of them in some way.

[16:15] But the Lord says justice is going to be done. And he's going to sort of reverse that. Verse 16. Now it is your turn.

Drink and let your nakedness be exposed. The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming round to you. And disgrace will cover your glory.

The Lord is going to do that back to them. They're going to drink the cup of God's wrath. God's anger. God's anger. I think this is probably the most helpful place to do this.

In the book of Revelation. Babylon is used. As a picture of all the cities. Of all the kingdoms. Nations that are against the Lord. And in the book of Revelation. Revelation. Revelation. We read this.

[17:21] In chapter 18. 1 to 3. 1 to 3. Fallen. Fallen is Babylon the great. She has become a dwelling for demons.

And a haunt for every impure spirit. A haunt for every unclean bird. A haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. For all the nations have drunk.

the maddening wine of her adulteries. They've taken advantage of people. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries. Babylon that we're thinking about in the book of Habakkuk, a picture of all the nations, all the kingdoms, all the systems that are against the Lord Almighty. Coming back there to verse 17 of Habakkuk 2, the Lord continues that woe and says, the violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you and your destruction of animals will terrify you.

You have shed human blood. You have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. Verse 17, part of verse 17 is a repetition of part of verse 18, verse 8 even, earlier on.

[18:54] You have shed human blood. You have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. See, the Lord sees that. He sees that evil. He knows.

Habakkuk said, if God is good, why would he allow evil? Well, God is saying to Habakkuk, I have seen it. I know about it. And in my time, I will judge.

Justice will be done. Again, in Revelation chapter 18, using the Babylon imagery, chapter 18, verse 21, then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it in the sea and said, with such violence, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The Lord is doing that. He will throw Babylon down here and he will, in the future, throw down all evil systems, evil schemes that stand against him.

He will throw down all evil dictators that stand up against him and hurt innocent people, ruin people's lives. The Lord is a Lord of justice.

[20:27] For our God is holy and sin has to be judged. And God calls his people not to be mixed in with people like that.

In many ways, we are not holy, but he calls us to be holy. But the encouragement that we heard last week from Habakkuk, is 2, verse 4, the righteous person will live by faith.

We stand in the righteousness of Christ. It's important we remind ourselves of that. And because of that, God sees us as holy.

He's given us the humility to cry out to him for forgiveness, full and free. And God, in doing that, is building his kingdom.

God, in doing that, is filling the earth with the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea. And he's doing that and he's doing that not by shedding the blood of innocent and unwilling victims like the Babylonians were doing in building their kingdoms.

[21:51] But the Lord has been doing that through the shedding of the innocent Jesus who willingly gave up his life for us so that we ourselves can find our sins forgiven.

All our acts of violence and deceit and greed for all the times we've taken advantage of others is forgiven by the blood of the innocent and yet willing Lord Jesus.

It's in his blood and righteousness that we stand by faith. But there's one final woe for us to see. Other gods, idolatry. Woe five, that's what it's all about in this verse. Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman or an image that teaches lies for the one who makes it trust in his own creation. He makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says, would come to life. Or to a lifeless stone, wake up. Can it give guidance?

[23:06] It is covered with gold and silver, but there is no breath in it. They know exactly how their idols are made.

Bits of stone or bits of wood covered in gold and silver. They look wonderful, but can it do anything for you? Can it answer you? Can it give you guidance? No, it's just stone.

It's just a piece of wood. If I started speaking to a stone, you'd think I'm mad. Can it do anything for you?

Anything good for you? No. And is idolatry something we need to worry about? Well, yes, I think it is.

John Calvin says that the human heart is a perpetual idol factory. Tim Keller says, what is an idol?

[24:05] It is anything more important to you than God. Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God. Anything you seek to give what only God can seek.

Our hearts chase after many things. They're deceitful. Chase after many things other than the living God who rules from his holy temple. We chase after many things that we think will bring us enjoyment and satisfaction in life.

It could be ourselves, our fantasies, our longings. And they may be good things, but if we're placing them as more important in our lives than God, they are like bowing down to a piece of stone or wood.

And so we need to keep coming back to God, coming back to the cross at Calvary where Jesus died for us and see in him that he is the only one worthy of our worship, our time, and our energy.

Tim Keller got lots to thank him for.

[25:27] He said of even churches that idolatry can function widely inside religious communities when doctrinal truth is elevated to the position of a false god.

their trust in the rightness of their views makes them feel superior. And so I guess for us, where we may be most at danger of creating an idol as a church is just being right, having the right views on certain doctrines.

And there's a place for that, but we mustn't make that God. We must make sure God is God.

And so how should we respond to the Lord, the judge of all the earth? Verse 20, the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him.

But the Lord who sees every sin, every act of violence against someone else, every unjust gain, every impure motive, he sees and he knows.

[26:39] We take encouragement from that, but also we tremble before this Lord. But we have confidence before him. We bow in awe before the one who has given his very self to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we don't need to stand before his throne in fear of condemnation. For no condemnation now we dread. Jesus and all in him is mine.

But rather we stand in awe before the almighty one who rules from his throne in heaven. And though like Habakkuk, we may have many questions and doubts, there is a point where we just need to be silent before him and to trust that he is God.

and he sees and he knows everything that is going on and his purposes are being worked out. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

The Lord is building his kingdom. Our lives are safe in his hands. And we can, like Habakkuk, trust him by faith.

[27:59] Let's sing a song. We'll then respond briefly in prayer. And then there's one more song to sing. This is a song our summer brought to attention a while ago and it's a really helpful song to sing.

A really sobering song to sing in some ways. But the chorus goes, have mercy Lord, forgive us Lord, restore us Lord, revive your church again, let justice flow like rivers and righteousness like a never failing stream.

And Phil's disappeared. So, we'll struggle to sing without you Phil. Don't go. Don't go. Don't go.