Dealing With Tough Times

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 May 2022

Preacher: Campbell Brown

[0:00] Yeah, no, just before I start, the more I do this and the older I get, I kind of understand just more and more both the privilege to be able to stand up and do this, but with it comes both a tremendous responsibility and an urgency as well.

So before we start, let's pray. Oh Lord, we thank you again that we're here. We thank you for the word that you've given us.
Oh Lord, it's perfect, it's wonderful, it's relevant. And we ask, Lord, that we would get to know it and be wiser with it each and every day.
So Lord, help us as we go through this passage. We ask, Lord, that you'd speak to each one of us, maybe Lord, in different ways because of the different needs that we will have at any particular time in our lives.
Oh Lord, that it will speak to our inadequacies because we all have them. It will speak to our concerns and our weak points because we have them too, Lord. It will help us increase our strengths because we all have those too.
[1:20] But Lord, it's relevant in every situation. And we do pray, as we've prayed before, that we would be open to receive what the Bible has to say to us and that we would take it to heart and that we would take it as we leave this building and we would use it each and every day.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen. Now, this evening, I want to raise a few questions that always seem to be in the background.
And there's two ways of asking these two questions. One is the normal way. Why do good things happen to bad people? Or the other way around is why do bad things happen to good people?
And these are by no means new questions. In modern times, there's a very famous book. It was, I think, from the early 80s by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner.
And he faced a horrible situation where his young son was born and he was diagnosed with an illness that meant that that young lad didn't survive beyond his early teens.
[2:30] So he wrote this book, Why do bad things happen to good people? But it's a question that's been there right from the beginning of time.

You can think, for example, you can go back to the start of the Bible in Genesis chapter 4 and the circumstances around the death of Abel. He was the good man and his brother was the bad man. But yet it was Abel that was killed. So it's a recurring theme, I think, in everybody's life and the life of the world that we live in. And while it's a recurring theme, we never quite, I think, get to the answer.
And as a whole, I think what we often do is we just accept that it is what it is. And we just get on with it. We may not like when things go wrong or things go badly.
We moan about it. But ultimately, as I said, and I'm guilty of this in my house, we have this expression which just says deal with it and move on. But the problem is that we don't really deal with things.
[3:39] We vent a lot. But we accept that things are the way that they are. And we leave it there because we think that there's not much that we can do about it. And the world that we live in is kicking up these questions with greater frequency at the moment.

And I don't want to keep reminding people because I know people have different views on this. But we've had two and a half years of pandemic. And we've had over 500 million cases of COVID. We've had six million people died. And the vast majority of those have impacted people who are older, people with medical conditions, or maybe people who are disadvantaged, either from the country that they live in or their economic circumstances.
And, well, in this church, we know we have lost people that are very dear to us. And I'm sure all of us will know other people who have died.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And we ask why. What is the purpose of this? Why did this happen? And what good has come from that? And I don't know the answer. I could point to international relations.
[4:51] We could look at Ukraine that's been invaded by an evil and corrupt power. We look at the devastation caused once beautiful cities have been destroyed.

Millions and millions of people have lost their homes and their livelihoods. We don't know how many people have died, but we know it's a lot. And it seems that the man responsible for it, that we just cannot get near him.
We can't lay a glove on him. We can't hold him accountable. It doesn't matter if it's sanctions, military aid, isolation. They seem to have no impact on him.
And we can look closer to home because we used to be proud of our nation because it was upright. It was good. It did things the right way.
And we can't say that now, whether it's political corruption or incompetence, party gate or the ships that we can't build. Whatever it happens to be, we live in that society too and it grieves us.
[5:51] We also live in an increasingly secular world. And all that does is bring more misery. And we can't understand why. And if we want to take this at a constitutional level, because of the size and profile of our congregation, somebody somewhere in our midst will be having tough times.

And I'm not particularly choosing any personal, but when I look around, there are people who aren't too good. There are people who are dealing with grief.
There are relationships that used to be so good that have been damaged and may be damaged beyond repair. People are struggling with jobs. Maybe people are struggling at the minute with being able to make ends meet, whether it be putting food on the table or turning on the heat or whatever it happens to be.
Maybe it's homesickness. You know, you're in a new city. You're trying to cope with that and maybe struggling.
All of that, there's an understanding that in some of these cases, the situation may not get better. I think we sometimes do is we sit back and we wonder why.
[7:07] And that takes me to where I want to go this evening. Because that was in a similar situation to that. He was living in bad times, but he was old enough to remember when times were good.

I didn't read all of the historical context because it just would have taken too long. But he would have been, as a young boy, he would have been around in the times of King Josiah, the boy king. And he was a good king. He got rid of the false gods. He got rid of their temples. He got rid of their priests. He covered the book of the law and he had it read to himself and the people.
And there was revival. So he remembered those days. Josiah died and he was replaced by a series of bad kings. Jehoiachin, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah.
And all of them were bad. And what you see in the first chapter of Habakkuk that we read is a society which had become a society. It was a very sinful and evil society.
[8:11] It was full of trouble. It was very divided as well. There was disputes. There was fallouts. There was general struggle. And it was a society without justice.

They're not being protected. The poor are exploited. And using a modern political term, there's no levelling up going on. The church has declined.
It's not being protected. Or there's no exception being set by the rulers. And what was happening in those was wealth.
Wealth and power were running things to suit themselves. And they didn't care what damage it did to the people, the church. They only thought about themselves.
And even worse, they were warned and warned and warned. And they ignored them all. And Habakkuk did what I think we often do. He cries out to God and he asks, why?
[9:08] Why? Why is this happening? Why? But he also does what I don't think that we do maybe often enough is that when he doesn't get an answer, he keeps on going when God didn't answer his question.

There's no kind of stiff upper lip. There's no passive acceptance that it is what it is kind of attitude. But there's a conversation with God, a righteous questioning, a righteous challenge of God and his ways.
So this book of Habakkuk, it may be thousands of years old, but it seems they're incredibly modern because I could have changed the names. And I could have done different.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

I could have been talking about Scotland today. And maybe many other modern societies as well. So the process that Habakkuk, because these issues are very modern and contemporary, the process that he sets us down to help deal with them is modern and contemporary as well.
And I think it can be applied to everything from international relationships, as I've mentioned, or maybe individual personal problems, national problems, church problems. So a very relevant and helpful book to us today in every way.
[10:30] So what is this template that I've talked about? And I think there's two or three main points. And I think the first one is very short and sweet. I'll not spend long on it because of it.

But we just, I think we just can't passively accept when bad things happen. And maybe it's a cultural thing. We pride ourselves in this nation as having that stiff upper lip.
Maybe it's, maybe it's a Christian thing. And if I exaggerate to make a point, we know from the Bible that if we live our lives as Christians properly, that we can, we can face persecution and we can face difficulties and we can face opposition.
So maybe what we say is, yes, I finally made it as a Christian. Bad times are here. Done it. But that, but that sort of attitude is not the pattern that Habakkuk lays down in this book.
And I will come to the points in more detail. But at no point, even when we get to the start of chapter two, where he takes himself up to his watch post to wait, is he passive?
[11:39] He's, he's, he's telling God his problems over and over again. And when he doesn't get his answer, he asks again. When he gets an answer that he doesn't understand, he doesn't understand it and asks for an explanation.

And as I said, even his act of waiting, it's not sit back and do nothing. So that's the first point. When we face tough times, whether it be personal, church or whatever level, our pattern is not to sit back and do nothing and just say, bring it on, I'll cope.
The second thing we must do, what Habakkuk does is, is we must remember that however bad it is, that God is in control. And Habakkuk, again, he felt that God wasn't listening to him.
If you look at verse, why do you make me see iniquity and why do you oddly look at wrong?
So he was crying to God, he was bringing his problems to him and he felt that God maybe wasn't listening. He felt that maybe God was turning a blind eye, but that wasn't the case.
[12:54] God was in control and God had a plan, and to use a modern military term, his plan was shock and awe. I think that was a George Bush term.

Because he saw what was going on within his own people and he was going to punish his own people for their wickedness. And the way that he was going to punish them was by using an even more fierce and wicked nation, the Chaldeans.
They were godless people. They were wicked people. Military, militarily and politically, they were powerful. They only cared for themselves.
They worshipped their own power. And they just destroyed whatever was in front of them. So what was going to happen was a terrible thing. But it was no accident.
This book tells us it was God's purpose and it was God's plan. And I think as well that this chapter tells us that it's God's timetable. And if you look at verse 5, the second half of verse 5, For I am doing a work in your days.
[14:09] God's timetable. And Habakkuk was going to happen in his lifetime. So it was going to happen soon. The lesson for us, the lesson is, Don't ever doubt that God is in control.

Because he is. Nothing will happen in your life. Nothing will happen in the life of this church. Or the life of this nation. Europe. Or the wider world.
Or in the universe. That he is not controlling what happens. How it happens. And when it happens. And what comfort does that give us? Well, because it's God that's in control.
The wonderful thing is that even in the worst of times. Or in the very depths of despair. Or depression. We know that it's God's plan. If you want to look at the book of Romans.
That God's plan is for the ultimate good of his people. And as I've already said. That doesn't give us a license to sit back and do nothing.
[15:11] This chapter shows us the very opposite is true. And if I take it back to the original questions I answered. I don't know the answers to the questions I've raised. I don't know why COVID happened.

For the church. I don't know why Russia is being allowed to get away with what it's doing in Ukraine. I don't know why Scotland has suffered a material spiritual decline.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And the things that come with it. I don't know when I look around the church. And I see some suffering. And personal issues. I don't know why these things are happening.
I can't tell you the answer. But I can tell you that God knows. And Habakkuk knew that God knew. And the comfort that gives.
Even in the worst of time. Because it's God's plan. And God's time. And God is in control. Then the ultimate output will be good for his people.
[16:13] So. And do nothing. We're not passive. We're not in control. Whatever it is. And I think the third thing that Habakkuk teaches is.

That we must work things through. He had a problem. He had lived in good times. He had lived in just and holy times. He had lived in times of revival.
Times that we would all love to live in. Now he was living in a society that was cruel and unjust. And now God was telling him.
That things were going to get even worse. And ungodly, cruel. And even more unjust nation. Was going to be God's punishment. And it was going to be a horrible punishment.
Cruel and destructive in every way. Of what was left of the nation. And what was left of the church. And when you think about Habakkuk. He started off complaining about violence and greed.
[17:09] Sinfulness and injustice. And what God was saying to him was. You know what? There's even more of it coming. And it's going to be worse. Instead of law.

There would be no law at all. Instead of a people who nominally had God as a head. As the person they worshipped. They would be replaced by people who own.
Instead of infighting and disputes within the nation. Where at least they had some control of it themselves. They would be taken away. And that they would be taken to another nation to live.
They would have no control over their own destiny. And he can't understand it. Habakkuk. He questions it. And he challenges it. But the process he uses to work through that.
Is for us. And how to deal with external and internal issues. So the first thing that he did was. He took a step back. To think it through.
[18:08] He didn't jump in. He didn't blurt out his feelings. He didn't lash out against people. Who were harming him. Or hurting him. He didn't flail around.

But he took a step back. And he applied Christian logic. To the problem that he was facing now. The even worse situation. That he would face in the future.
And that down. Helped him to analyse. Helped to concede. The constituencies of his problem. And that is an important thing for us to see. That we.
When we face tough times. Because we all will. And I think some of us are right now. Just jump in. And react quickly. We don't just. While we will be emotional.
But there is unhelpful emotion. And wrong emotion that we can do. And the problem with that. Applying your own logic. And your own ways of working.
[19:06] And your own thinking. And your own solutions. And what you are doing. Is that you are blocking out God. From the problem you face. You are not allowing God into your life. You are not allowing his wisdom.

And his guidance. Into your life. And these things won't kick in. In a very simple way. Because if you are. Jump straight in. What you are not doing. Is giving yourself time.
To get your Bible out. To read it. To understand it. To see what it says. About the situation. And you are not giving yourself time. To get down on your knees. And talk to God.
About what. First point. Take a step back. And allow God in. To help you deal with your problems. As many of you know.
My first love is history. Love history. But my favourite type of history. Is political history. I just. It floats my boat. To this day. And in the early.
[20:07] In the late 80s. And early 90s. In the UK. One of the political parties. Had a. Had a. Had a slogan. And the whole thing. Was back to basics.

And. I think it was. It was a very good. Thing. A very good thing. For. Because it dealt with. Traditional values. Of hard work. Of decency.
Of respect. And kindness. So while it was a good thing. The reason why it didn't work. Is because the people. That were promoting it. Were all talk. And no action. In fact. They were doing.
Exactly the opposite. They weren't. Living what they were talking. But Habakkuk. He did. Go. He did it. The right way. Because.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

By working through. By what he did. Was he looked. And he knew. About God. And he lists them. And he walks them. He knew that God. Was everlasting. And he reminds himself.
[21:03] Of that. He reminds himself. That God. Is holy. And if you look from. Really from verse 5. To the end of verse 17.

You can pick these out. Reminds himself. That God is pure. He see. He reminds himself. And he's. When he's speaking to God. He reminds God. That. Wickedness.
And he's so pure. And righteous. That he can't even look at wickedness. And as I said. He reminds himself. That God. That's where we start. When.
When we're facing. We remind ourselves. About the God. That we have. All his features. And. And we apply them. To the circumstance.
That we face. And. Because we know. That no problem. Is too. For God. No problem. Is too complicated. Or gone. Gone too far. That God can't solve.
[21:57] And. And if you look at. Example. And how he. Applied. These basic principles. That he knew from God. So. So one of. The first thing he did was.

He knew that God. Was everlasting. And. He knew that God. Had always been there. And always would be there. And when he applied it. To. That was in.
He knew that God. Was there. Before the child. And he knew that God. Would be there. Before they had disappeared. From the face. Of this earth. And what that did.
Was he was able to see. That the final word. Would not come from. But the final word. Would come from God himself. God. Would have the final say.
In this situation. And that's the case. For whatever we face. Or you are facing. God. Because he. Will have the final word. You may think.
[22:52] Something is the end of the world. You may. Think. That you don't know. What. How you're going to get. Through tomorrow. But just remember. It's the final. Whatever the answer is.

It will come. At the right time. And. Right answer. He reminds himself. As well. That God is holy. He was.
He could see. And he could see. That it was right. For the. For. For his. People. People. People. People. To be punished. For their. For their. Wickedness. But what he couldn't. Understand. Initially.
Was why he was. He was allowing. Even more. Wickedness. To be the source. Of that punishment. When he thought. About this. Um. Um. He could see.
That in the same way. Uh. That God. Could not tolerate. The wickedness. And evil. Of his own people. That he would not. Be able. To tolerate. The wickedness. And evil. Of the Chaldeans.
[23:48] Either. While the short term. Would be bad. It would be. The ultimate outcome. Would be good. Because God. Would not tolerate.

Their wickedness. He would. Deer them. At some time. And that. Must apply. And we must apply. Together. If we are. Rest. We have God.
Who is pure. And righteous. And lovely. And whatever. That outcome is. That that outcome. Will be pure. Righteous. And lovely. As well. I don't want to repeat myself.
But he also knew. That God was in control. Um. And Habakkuk knew. As he. Conversed with God. That the judgment. That coming. Was.
He knew why the judgment. Was needed. Uh. He just didn't. Understand the method. Um. Because. What Habakkuk wanted. Was another revival. But that wasn't.
[24:45] God's way here. God was bringing. Horrible punishment. Not a nice revival. In this case. And he didn't. Understand that. But what he did know. Is that God. Is in control. It wasn't a random thing.

That was happening. God wasn't losing control. God was in charge. He. And. And God's plan. Addressing. At exactly. The way it should.
And. Exactly. The right time. And. And. Exactly. The right time. And that will be the same. For this world. And that will be the same. For this church. Or you.
As an individual. That. Believer. God has a plan for you. And it's progressing. The way it should. No matter how hard. It might seem. Right now. So take.
Comfort. Um. That God hasn't left you. To your own devices. He hadn't. He hasn't left you. At the wiles. Of other people. But he's in control. As I said.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[25:39] And I'll say again. His purposes. Are pure. And perfect. And the ultimate outcome. When. Will be right. And at the right time. Now.

These. The back to basics. Things. That Habakkuk did. But the common theme. Above all. About all. Is that while they give comfort. And ultimately. We know.
That the outcome. Will be perfect. And good. And come at the right time. It doesn't answer. Your question. Your problem's still there. You know. It's not going to go away.
If you know these things. Um. Uh. And we look at Habakkuk again. Because in his case. He was in that situation too. Um. He struggled with God's method.
And not the outcome. And it may be a different issue. That we are facing. It could be. It could be. A relationship. That's broken. It could be a dispute. And. In the church. Um.
[26:32] It could be something. That you're facing. In work. Um. That you don't. Resolve it. And. And even the question. We started. At the start. About good people suffering.

And bad people prospering. But sometimes. We don't know the answer yet. Or sometimes. We have to wait. What Habakkuk did. And in these circumstances. Habakkuk.
Gives us guidance. On what we do. Um. And sometimes. When I read this chapter. I think it gets better. As you go along. Keeps the. Gives us. But to the end.
Um. Because. You've. You've applied. You've. You've understood. That God is in control.
But yet. You have no answer. What do you do? Well. You take. Your problem to God. And. Him. And. And there's no shame in that. Um.
[27:24] There's. Great strength. In saying. As Habakkuk did. God. Deal with this problem. I can't. Understand. Why this has been. Allowed to happen. In my life.

Um. I. I don't understand. Your plan here. Or your timing. So. Please help me. Please take me through this. Please take this problem. Away from me. And. With it for me.
Uh. Because sometimes. That's the. Um. And. Look at. Look at Habakkuk's. Imagery here. At the start of chapter two.
I will stand. On my watch post. And station. Myself. On the tower. Um. This imagery. Is very helpful. He took himself. On the tower.
And what. What he's doing here. Is. He's taking himself. Away from the problem. He's separating. Himself. He's on his own. In his case.
[28:21] He's taking himself. Away from this. Corrupt and evil. Society. That he lived in. And for the worst. Punishment. Uh. That was to come. And he left. The problem to God.

And that's a wonderfully. Gracious thing. Uh. That. That when it gets too much. Uh. That we can. That we can give our problems. To God. In the.
In the. Um. He will. Take them from us. He. In our load. And. He will. Not let us down.
Or fail us. In any way. So. But still. There's more. Um. Because as I've said.
The problem. The problem. That you face. So the problem. This world. Or the church. Or whoever faces. It's not gone away. It's. Um. And right back. At the start.
[29:13] I said. That even. His waiting. Is active. Um. And this. Is an example. He had. He had. He applied. The basic principles. Uh.

He had handed over. The problem. To God. Because there's nothing else. He can do. But he was still. Actively doing something. Um. It wasn't a case of. Right. I've handed over to God.
Jobs done. To the next thing. Because what. Habakkuk. Was doing. Was that he was. Um. He gives us. The answer. He was actively.
Waiting. For an answer. Um. And look at the second. Part of. Verse two. Of chapter. Or second. Of. Verse one. Of chapter two. And look out.
To see. What he will say. To me. And what. I will answer. Concerning. My complaint. Uh. And the imagery. He's in his high tower. And.
[30:09] He's used that. As an imagery. To take himself. Away from the problem. But the other thing. That he's doing. Is. He's in his high tower. Looking out. For an answer. Um. Because that's the best place.

To see it coming. If he's up high. He can see it coming. From a long distance. And. Coming. Means he'll be ready. For it. When it comes. And. For the next action.
Because it won't. Take him by surprise. And practical terms. I think. Can mean a lot of things. But it means. What I said before. Is.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Reading your bible. It means. Praying for an answer. It means. Being open. To guidance. Um. From whatever source. It comes. And whatever way. It comes. And when we don't.
Get the. Then we don't stop. Actively waiting. We keep on. Actively watching. For this answer. And we go on. And on. With our active.
[31:02] And expected. Waiting. And one day. That answer will come. And maybe it will come. In business. Maybe like Habakkuk. You got a full answer. In dribs and drabs.

Over a period of time. Just maybe. You won't. Get a full answer. In this life. For the things. That you face. I believe. Um. That you.
That God. Will give you enough. To get you through. The things that you face. God. Will give you. The help that you need. At the time. That you need it. So to finish Habakkuk.
It's. It's an ancient book. But it's a contemporary book. It's relevant today. As I said before. As the day. It was written. I hate this expression. But I couldn't think of a better one. It's a sort of spiritual. We. We live. In these difficult times. Whether they be corporately. Or individually. But I think. Fundamentally as well. It's a very. Evangelistic book.
[31:58] Because the reason. That this process works. Because Habakkuk's faith. Never wavered. Even in the horrible. He was facing. From his own people.

From the child. His faith. Did not waver. And that. If anything. Is the point. It works. Because. The foundation. Of his process.
Was his faith. In God. He knew. That God. Will not let him down. So I'll finish up. I'll leave. I'll leave the last word. To the Bible.
Sometimes. When I was. We used to have to. To memorize verses. And I think. We got out of the way. Of that. And I would love. As a church. That we get into that habit. As elders. As young people. But.
But if you want. The last word. Let's look. And says. From verse 17. In chapter 3. Though the. Flossom. Nor fruit.
[32:55] Beyond the vine. The produce. Off that olive. Fail. And the field. No food. The flock. Be cut off. From the field. And be. No herd. In the stalls.

Yet. I will. Rejoice. The Lord. I will. Take joy. In the God. Of my salvation. God the Lord. Is my strength. He makes my feet. Like. He makes me tread.
In high places. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host