

The cup of the Lord

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[0 : 00] So our reading this morning comes from Habakkuk, chapter 2, and starting at verse 4. Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol, like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples. Shall not all these take up their taunt against him with scoffing and riddles for him and say, Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own, for how long, and loads himself with pledges.

Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnants of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm. You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples.

[1 : 31] You have forfeited your life. For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond. Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity.

Behold, it is not for the Lord of hosts that people labour merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Woe to him who makes his neighbours drink. You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.

Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come round to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory.

The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrify them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

[2 : 49] What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols.

Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake! To a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.

But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. The second reading is Hebrews chapter 10, 10 verses 32 to chapter 11 verse 1, and you can find that on page 1210 of the Church Bibles.

That's Hebrews chapter 10, 32 to 11, 1. But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated.

For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property. Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one, therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

[4 : 37] For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what is promised. For yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay.

But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Well, good morning.

Please do turn back to Habakkuk chapter 2, page 949, and there's an outline on the back of your service sheet to follow as we go. So, the issue of suffering and evil in the world is a big one, for both Christians and for those looking into the Christian faith.

I've given talks at youth groups, school Christian unions, summer camps, spoken to teenagers and others who have been through a great deal of suffering, and the answer the Bible gives, that God will sort it out, be patient, often feels weak, doesn't it?

[6 : 10] Have you ever felt that's a weak answer, when somebody's spoken to you about evil and suffering? Just wait. Just wait and trust God. It seems so weak, so irrational, in the face of everything that's going on.

Well, if you've been with us over the past couple of weeks, we've been studying the book of Habakkuk, and we've heard the prophet Habakkuk's cry to God, that evil is everywhere, that injustice is rife amongst God's people, and those who are not God's people, in both palace and the pulpit.

And Habakkuk is crying out to God, saying, God, why aren't you doing something about this? But then God answers, and says, I will do something about it. I'm going to send the barbaric Babylonians to conquer ye.

Now, Habakkuk, a bit taken back by this, and he cries out again, well, Babylon are wicked. They're arrogant. They're merciless conquerors.

God, what are you going to do about them? And God's answer to Habakkuk, about the evil of Babylon, and the impending invasion, wickedness all around, started in verse 2, that we saw last week.

[7 : 27] And in verse 3, God says, wait for it. Wait for it. It will not lie. And then in verse 4, the first verse of our reading, the righteous shall live by his faith.

In the face of what Habakkuk sees, all around him, God's answer boils down to, wait for it. It will come. Have faith.

Doesn't that seem so weak? It feels like a cop-out, doesn't it? Does that really deal with the issue? It seems irrational, and unreasonable of God, to say this to Habakkuk.

Well, in the rest of chapter 2, God tells us Habakkuk, God tells Habakkuk, what will happen to Babylon. And he tells us, what will happen in the future, to those who share, this attitude of the Babylon.

And living by faith, is not just a rational response, but it's the right response, to what God has said. So I've broken up the passage, in three sections.

[8 : 38] It's on your handout. Firstly, God's answer to Habakkuk, live by faith. Live by faith. Have a look down at verse 4.

Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man, who is never at rest.

His greed is as wide as Sheol. Like death, he never has enough. He gathers for himself all nations, and collects, as his own, all peoples. Well, here, we're given two attitudes, of how to live, aren't we? And the first attitude, is seen there in verse 4. The puffed up one. The arrogant one. The restless. In verse 5. Now God, primarily has in view here, the Babylonians.

And what are they like? Well, verse 5, they are arrogant. They are restless. They are greedy. They are ruthless achievers. They never have enough.

[9 : 47] Always seeking more nations, to conquer, more spoils. They laugh in the face of rulers. They scoff at kings. Their might is their God, we found out in chapter 1.

This is the self-confident Babylon, trusting in themselves. The self-reliant Babylon. Well, more broadly, this is a picture, of the world around us, isn't it?

The way of living, marked by proud self-confidence, and self-reliance. Always wanting more, never having enough. Restless. Aren't these, all the qualities, that are admired in this society?

The qualities, Lord Sugar looks for, in his next apprentice. Restless. Always achieving. Always wanting more. Getting out there. We might call it, being driven.

Being an achiever. But God calls it, restless. And this is the attitude, of the person, who rejects God. The attitude, that I can get my own way, through this life, and through death.

[10 : 54] I don't need, anyone else thanks. This is the Babylonian attitude. And this is the attitude, of the world around us today. But sandwiched, in between, these verses, is the other attitude, of how to live.

Verse four again, the righteous, shall live by his faith. Now, tucked away, in Habakkuk chapter two, is one of the Bible's, great theological statements.

Used three times, in the New Testament, twice by Paul, and once, by the writer, to the Hebrews. And the righteous, are those who are, in a right relationship, with God. And they are to live, by faith. But what does that mean? What does it mean, to live, by faith? Well, there's a lot of confusion, about what faith is, and what it means. If you were to look, in the Oxford English Dictionary, it defines faith, as a firm belief, especially without, logical proof.

The popular definition, of faith, boils down to, believing in the unbelievable. Maybe, you're here today, and that's what you think. Maybe that's how, your colleagues, view your faith.

[12:12] And so, to live by faith, in the world's eyes, is to live your life, based on something, with no proof. Now, that is a stupid way, to live. That is ridiculous. But that's not, how the Bible, talks about, living by faith, or having faith.

Turn to Hebrews, chapter 10, and keep a finger, and have a cook. We had this passage, read last week, and we're, reading it again, because it picks up, on this language.

And just to remember, the context, from last week, these are, Christians, who are suffering, persecution, and affliction. Their stuff's, being plundered. And they are tempted, to turn back, or turn away, from Jesus.

And we're going to, pick it up, in verse 36, Hebrews 10. For you have, need of endurance, so that when you have, done the will of God, you may receive, what is promised.

For yet a little while, and the coming one, will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one, shall live by faith. If he shrinks back, my soul, has no pleasure in him.

[13:21] But we are not those, of those, who shrink back, and are destroyed. But of those, who have faith, and preserve their souls. Now faith, is the assurance, of things hoped for, for the conviction, of things not seen.

In the face, of suffering, and persecution, the writer, urges these Christians, to endure, and live by faith. Look forward, to the one, who is coming. And what does it mean?

What does faith mean? Well verse one, it is the assurance, of things hoped for, the conviction, of things not seen. Trusting in the promises, of God, and living in the light, of them.

Now I don't know, what rules you have, in your house, about when children, are allowed to start talking, about birthdays. In our house growing up, it was one month beforehand, 30 days, then you could, start talking about it.

So August the 6th, I'll be starting, my birthday plans, they'll be fine. And in our house, it was one month, and you can make decisions, where to go, what to do, who to invite, what food to eat.

[14:23] For me, it was normally, a football party. I was captain, a striker, man of the match, and top goal scorer. And my dad was the referee, so I could ensure that.

And afterwards, it was over to McDonald's, for a happy meal, in that ship. Anyone remember the ship, that you sit in? That was a party. That was a party. I knew that my birthday, would surely come, and even though I couldn't see it yet, I made decisions, in light of that certainty.

Well, it's an overly, simplified illustration, but living by faith, is similar. It means not trusting in ourselves, but trusting in the promises, of God, that are certain, that will happen, even though we cannot see them, and will not see them, until they happen in the future.

And making decisions now, in light of them. We'll turn back to Habakkuk. What did living by faith, mean for Habakkuk?

Well, like the Hebrews, he is to trust God's promises, in a time of evil, and suffering, and injustice prevailing. That God will not abandon his people, he will keep his promises, and preserve them.

[15:43] Like a lighthouse, that is unmoved, and unshaken, when all the waves, crash around it, Habakkuk is to have, this unshakable, trusting God, not in himself, to get through, what is coming. Even though, his circumstances, screamed, otherwise.

Well, what about for us today? Well, trusting in something you cannot see, is madness, to the outside world.

Having faith, that something, that you cannot see, will happen, when everything around you, screams otherwise, seems so weak, and irrational. And so, the Babylonian attitude, of self-reliance, I am my own God, is appealing to us.

Because, we like to be in control, and we like to see things, put our trust in things, we can see. But Habakkuk here, calls us to a continuing trust in God, and clinging to his promises, not ourselves, even in the darkest days.

Promises we cannot see now, but know to be true, and I'm failing. Trusting in ourselves, brings death. But trusting in God, brings life.

[16:59] That is what it means, to be righteous, and live by faith. And so, God's answer to Habakkuk, when he's told about, this impending invasion, is to trust what you know, to be true about me.

Even though you cannot see, see it. And then it's spelled out to Habakkuk, what will happen to Babylon? And that's the second point this morning. God's justice will come.

It will come. And verse 6, describes the funeral, of the Babylonian empire. And the older nations are there, they've gathered, and the only tears, are the tears of joy.

Because God pronounces, five woes on Babylon. And it's very clear, that Babylon will not get away with it. They will reap, what they have sowed, the tables will be turned, it will rebound, the punishment, will fit the crime.

But just as with Babylon, God's justice will fall, on the whole world, and everyone in it. This self-reliant, self-confident, world.

[18:04] And what follows here, is the unmasking, of a proud, self-reliant world. The arrogant, self-righteous, Babylonian attitude. The first woe, have a look down, verse 6.

Woe to him, who heaps up, what is not his own, for how long, and loads himself, with pledges. The plunderers, though, will be plundered.

Greedy Babylon, is hoarding up treasures, from other nations. That's their, long-term, long-term economic plan. But verse 7, their debtors will arise, and those who awake, make you tremble.

You will be spoiled for them. They will be stripped, of their assets. Babylon's wealth, is just alone, and the bailiffs, are knocking at the door. Well, we too, live in a world, not too different, to Babylon, do we?

A world obsessed, with stuff. Just getting stuff, and possessions. We love storage, in our houses. Stuff. Yet, the greed, of our nations, and companies, on a big scale, but also, the greed, on a personal, small scale, will be judged.

[19:22] And living by faith, means, trusting God, will bring justice, to the thoughtless greed, of this world, and ask for forgiveness, for when we, have been greedy. Well, that's the first woe, plunderers will be plundered.

Second woe, the safe will be invaded. Have a look down, verse nine. Woe to him, who gets evil gain, for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe, from reach of harm.

You have devised shame, for your house, by cutting off, many peoples. You have forfeited your life, for the stone, will cry out, from the wall, and the beam, from the woodwork, respond. Like the eagle, build his nest, in inaccessible spots, to be safe, from harm.

The Babylonians, attempted to build a city, that was impregnable. The brick wall, was 300 feet high, 25 feet thick, extended 35 feet, below the ground.

If anyone thought, they were safe as houses, it was Babylon. But they weren't safe. Verse 11, the walls, cried out for vengeance. The stones, that they plundered, serve as a witness, against them.

[20:28] And shame, will come to them. And it did come, in 539 BC, as the Persian troops, rolled into Babylon, and destroyed it. Living by faith, means trusting God, will judge those, who build empires, for the sake, build empires, at the sake of others.

On a big scale, with empires, that seem impregnable, with Syria, and the ongoing battle, with Islamic State. People who think, they're safe from harm.

But also on a small scale, that person at work, or school, who seeks to build an empire, with no regard to others. And faith means, trusting in the promise, of justice to come.

And it also means, asking for forgiveness too, when we seek security, in anything other than God. The third woe, the civilized, empty, verse 12.

Woe to him, who builds a town, with blood, and founds a city, on iniquity. Babylon built their empire, on the blood, of the surrounding nations, and ultimately, it is futile. God does not let, regime succeed forever.

[21:42] As we've already heard, this morning, empires, conquer empires, they rise and fall, and so it's really, for nothing. They labor in vain. They have nothing, left.

Empires don't last. The thousand year, right, lasted 12 years. God doesn't let, empires last. But what does last?

Verse 14. This great promise, that we prayed for earlier. The earth will be filled, with the knowledge, and the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. What a wonderful promise, the glory to come.

As God comes to judge, in the future, he refines, and his glory is clearly seen. Living by faith, means trusting in that promise.

When we see our world, building on values, that are opposed to God, we won't despair, or we won't give in, and go with the flow. We cling to this promise, that glory will be seen, when his judgment comes.

[22 : 47] And also ask, for our own forgiveness, for when we seek our own glory, instead of God's. The fourth woe, shameless shamed, verse 15.

Woe to him, who makes his neighbors drink, you pour out your wrath, and make them drunk, in order to gaze, at their nakedness. Babylon abused other nations, they degraded them, for their own pleasure, but it will rebound on them, they will be shamed.

And living by faith, means for us, when we see, people abusing others, sexually or otherwise, well we know, God will bring justice. The sex traffickers, kidnappers, those who take advantage of others, will not get away with it.

God will bring justice, that's his promise. And yet, don't we too, need to ask for forgiveness, for when we have used others, for our own gain.

Verse 16, is a striking image, isn't it? Have a look down. The cup, in the Lord's right hand, will come round to ye, and utter shame, will come upon your glory.

[23 : 59] The cup here, being God's judgment. And it's an image, Jesus picks up on, in the garden of Gethsemane, the night before his death. He prayed and said, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. As Jesus hung on the cross, he was drinking a cup, of God's judgment, down to the dregs. We all deserve to drink this cup, for our own greed, our selfishness, our pride, our arrogance, our self-reliance, exploiting others, looking for our own glory, instead of God's.

Yet, if we are trusting in Jesus, then, and living by faith, he is, Jesus has drunk that cup, of God's judgment, instead of us. That is what Jesus went through, on the cross.

And so, God's justice will come. This justice did come, in 539 BC, Babylon fell to Persia.

Nothing remains today, of Babylon, except some mounds. But it will fully, and finally come in the future. Because when Babylon was invaded, the earth wasn't filled, with the knowledge, of the glory of the Lord.

[25 : 16] But it points forward, to when it will, in the future. As the Hebrews, they're waiting, for that person to come. And then, justice will be seen.

God's glory will be seen, in his fullness. And to live by faith, means clinging to that promise, when it does come. When our circumstances, scream otherwise, to continually trust, in Jesus.

Who drunk, the cup, of God's judgment, on our behalf. So live by faith, God's justice will come. And lastly, idols cannot save.

Idols cannot save. You see, all these judgments, on Babylon, start with woe. Don't they? Have you seen that? Woe, woe, woe. Apart from the last one. Instead, the woe is placed, in the middle, in verse 19.

It's set apart. And it's this last woe, that underpins, all the selfishness, that comes before. Babylon's idolatry. Putting something else, in a place of God.

[26 : 22] And here we see the stupidity, and the futility, of their idols. Verse 18, what are they like? Well, they're speechless. Verse 19, they are silent.

There's no breath in them. They cannot speak. And the only thing they teach, is the lie, that they are safe, that they can provide, that they can deliver, when God comes to judge.

This is the self-reliant Babylon. They had lots of idols. Golden images of Baal, and the golden table, both weighed over 50,000 pounds, of gold.

Yet in 539 BC, and King Cyrus of Persia, rolled into Babylon, where was their might? Where were their idols? What goods were they? Nothing.

They were silent. They could not teach, they could not say, they could not deliver. They taught the lie of security, and they were shown up, for what they were. They could not deliver, when it mattered. In year 8 at school, I made a wooden doorstep.

[27 : 26] Now it was of some quality, and as doorstops go, you know, it worked. It was fine. But imagine if I, bowed down to that doorstep, and relied on it, to speak to me, and teach me.

It would be madness. Absolute madness. You'd think I'm nuts. We can see the stupidity, of bowing down to objects, and treating them as gods. Probably none of us, are in danger of that.

To get out a little, a wooden thing, when facing God's judgment. Yeah, but what about the other things, the world idolizes, and lives for? Possessions, status, power, politicians, and human solutions, money, exam results, are we in danger, of clinging to any of these, in difficult times, instead of God?

Babylon's idols, will be shown up, for what they were. Powerless. Powerless to save. And so, will the idols, around us today. Whatever we look to, to get through, the difficult times, and ultimately, get us through death, and God's judgment, they'll be shown up.

It's foolish, to think that they can deliver. But verse 20, the great contrast, but the Lord, is in his holy temple, let all the earth, keep silence before him.

[28 : 50] He is the one, who is enthroned, and ruling in heaven. He is the one, who deserves all the honor, and reverence, that is given, to worthless idols. And to live by faith, means trusting God, and looking to him, in his dwelling place, who rules, to get us through, the judgment.

The one who can deliver, who can speak, who has spoken, and calls us to trust, his promises. To trust his promise, that all those, who put their trust in Jesus, will live, and not die.

That he will get us, through the judgment. And lovingly, he promises, that he will do that, for all those, who trust in Jesus, who drunk the cup, of God's judgment, instead of us.

And yet God raised him, from the dead, and he will come back, as the Hebrews are waiting for. He will bring that final justice, in the end, and the earth will be filled, with the knowledge, of the glory of the Lord. Do you believe that?

Do you live, and make decisions, in light of that promise, that truth? I had a friend, growing up in youth group, that whenever she would buy, a new book, mainly the Harry Potter books, that she would always read, the last chapter first.

[30 : 19] Her anxious, made her worry, but she read the books, knowing what would happen. So however bleak it looked, for Harry and his gang, well she knew, the end, it would be okay.

And that ending was certain, it wasn't going to change, as you read the book. But it's the same, for us. Living by faith, is hard.

It often looks weak, and feels weak, and irrational, in a face, of so much injustice, and evil, in the world. But God can be trusted. What he has said, is true.

And we know the end, that God's justice, will come. The glory of the Lord, will cover the whole earth. And so we can approach, whatever anxieties, worries, suffering, persecution, and evil, in our lives, and in the world now, knowing what is to come.

The righteous shall live, by his faith. Not wishful thinking, but a constant, persevering trust, in the almighty speaking God, who has sent his son Jesus, so we shall live.

[31 : 34] He will come again, to judge evil, and to save all those, who cling to Jesus, for salvation. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Father God, we thank you for, these great promises, that you will, come to judge, that your justice will be seen, and your glory will be seen. Help us to, live by faith now.

Live in the conviction, of things that are not seen, and live day by day, continually trust in Jesus, to get us through that judgment, and nothing else.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.