

Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense

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[0 : 00] And I wonder whether you've ever faced injustice in your life yourself. You know, when someone's done something bad to you and they seem to have got away with it.

I always felt that when we had to do group assignments at university. There was always that one person, you know what I'm talking about, that one person who never pulled their weight and yet they got the same mark as you.

That's a gross act of injustice. Or perhaps more seriously, you've been the victim of bullying. There's people at school or something like that and they put stuff on social media and they seem to get away with it.

I saw some just yesterday through my daughter's class actually. In fact, speaking of my youngest daughter, when she was in grade four at school, there was actually a food thief in her class. Someone was stealing the recess out of their bags outside the classroom. And this for a grade four, a year four kid, this was a gross act of injustice. You go to get your chips that you've been looking forward to.

[1 : 02] You've endured maths and English. And finally, they're gone. And so my daughter Megan decided with her friends to take turns to spy out the window to see if they could locate this culprit.

You know, could kind of patrol the bags and so on. Megan actually suggested that they booby trap one of the bags. I don't know how they do that flower or something or other. I think she even suggested putting an animal that bites when they put the hand in.

You don't cross my daughter. Actually, I was speaking with someone from our nine o'clock congregation and I was telling them about this event and they said the same thing happened at their school once. In a different class, food was being stolen, except when they found the culprit, it was the teacher.

Well, that's bad. Anyway, this wasn't me in my daughter's classroom. This was a different one. But the teacher did say to my daughter in the end, she reassured my daughter and said, look, don't try and take things into your own hands.

Don't try and get revenge. I'll put things right. I'll sort it out myself. She effectively said, trust me, I will put things right. Of course, the injustice that we face today can be much more serious than stolen food.

[2 : 13] And when we turn on the news and see it in our world and people that seem to get away with it, we can wonder whether God will ever do something about it.

This is the issue for Habakkuk this week. And so for those who weren't here last week and just by way of reminder, last week Habakkuk's first complaint was because he saw such violence and injustice amongst his own people of Judah.

And that such that the law was being ignored and the wicked were hemming in the righteous. They were giving them no way out and no way to appeal for justice.

And so Habakkuk last week cried out to God, how long, oh Lord, until you judge Judah's wickedness and save Judah's righteous? In other words, how long until you bring justice amongst your own people?

And God's answer was rather amazing. And I tried to be amazing with that magic trick, which, you know, anyway, but amazing and actually surprising and shocking way, you might remember.

[3 : 17] For God was raising up the evil Babylonians, allowing them to rise up at the right time and then directing them, using them to judge Judah's sin and save Judah's righteous remnant.

And so we learned that God is not responsible for evil, but he is completely sovereign over evil and will even use evil, but only for good.

However, for Habakkuk, using such evil was still a surprising answer. And the thing with surprising answers is they often lead to more questions, don't they? Or in this case, more complaints. Before he gets to his complaint, he wants to check that he's heard God correctly from last week. It's kind of what we do when we hear surprising things. We want to double check we've heard rightly. And so Habakkuk is basically saying, let me see if I've got this right, God. You, the Holy One, are going to appoint those evil ones to judge.

[4 : 38] Have I heard that right? Now, remember, Habakkuk's issue is not that God is going to bring judgment on Judah. That's what he prayed for, that the wicked will be judged, that there be justice amongst his people.

Rather, the issue is that God is going to use such evil Babylonians to do it. It seems to go against his holiness, his very holy character, which is what leads Habakkuk to his second complaints in verse 13.

He says, your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrongdoing because God is holy. So why then do you tolerate the treacherous?

Why are you silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? You see what he's saying? How long, O holy God, will you tolerate these evil Babylonians?

Why are you again silent when they swallow up people more righteous than themselves? People who are not perfect, but they're better than them. In other words, you're going to judge Judah's violence and injustice, sure.

[5 : 51] That's what I pray for. But when are you going to judge them and bring justice to our world? Because they are terrible. Verse 14 and 15.

You have made people in the nations like fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler. And so that the wicked Babylonians, the foes, just pull all of them up with hooks.

And Babylon, he catches them in his net. He gathers them up in his dragnet. And so he rejoices and is glad. Now, this fishing imagery with hooks and so on is deliberate.

Apparently, instead of using ropes to kind of bind the hands of their prisoners, the Babylonians would actually put hooks through their cheeks or lips and lead them away like that.

And this is the kind of people we're talking about. Though Habakkuk seems to extend the fishing imagery to include nets. Because, again, Babylon seems to conquer nations with such ease.

[6 : 56] He says the people of the nations are like fish. And Babylon, like they've got a net. And they just kind of go, that's how easy it seems to be for them. And what's more, this plundering of nations has made them rich and puffed up in arrogance, such that they worship and not just idols and statues, but their own strength, their own nets.

Verse 16 and 17. Therefore, he sacrifices, he Babylon again, sacrifices to his net, his strength, and burns incense to his dragnet.

For by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest foods from the plunder of the nations. And verse 17. And so you see what Habakkuk's again complaining about in verse 17.

You know, they're plundering nations, getting rich, they're worshipping their strength, their nets that have been able to do this with such ease. And he's saying, how long, God, until you judge them? Are they to go on and keep doing it?

In fact, verse 17 is literally, is he, Babylon, to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? You see the point?

[8 : 13] When are you going to stop them, God? When are you going to judge? How long until you bring justice to our world? Because at the moment, they are getting away with murder.

Literally. And again, it's a question we can relate to, isn't it? I remember a few years ago hearing about Russia planning to invade Ukraine.

And my first thought was, no way. It's never going to happen. The world won't let them. And yet we're now, what? Is it two years or something like that now? It's been going on for?

And just last week, we heard on the news that President Putin has lowered the threshold to make it easier to use nuclear weapons on Ukraine. And someone told me this morning they heard on the news that some Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Norway are now actually handing out literature to their citizens about what to do during a war.

Because they're not sure. They think it might actually come. I mean, can you believe this? I know it's complicated. And there's lots of considerations.

[9 : 20] But here is injustice. And Putin is still getting away with it. And so how long, Lord, until you judge and bring justice to our world? And it's not just injustice towards nations.

It's towards fellow Christians. And so as I mentioned last week, there's Fulani militants who are attacking Christians in Nigeria at the moment, forcing them to flee their homes if they survive. Here is an act of evil and injustice. Here is an act of evil and injustice. And yet these militants are still getting away with it. Take a look at a video that I said I'd show you this week.

It was from open doors this year. Here we are. A bit more volume. Millions of Christians are displaced. Here in Nigeria.

Millions of Christians are displaced in the whole Africa. News. Don't carry it. Nobody talks about it. We are remaining in the darkness.

[10 : 25] I see we are being rejected. This is where we live.

In IGP camp. For four years. Getting to five years now. Each and every one you are seeing here. We are all Christians.

And we are displaced because of violence. We believe that they are against Christians. When they come to attack us, they call us Capri. That we don't have any religion. So that makes us understand that they are purely attacking Christians. I was in the farm with my brother and my late brother's wife.

We are walking. When we had a rapid shooting, gun, sounds. We could not know what was happening. It's from there we began to ask what is happening.

[11 : 36] They say we should run, we should run. It was during this time that my brother was being shot and killed by the militant. And my brother's wife was also shot and being macheted and killed by the militant who attacked us.

Why is this? Why is that now doing something like pain? Now that is the first time. People should relate to yourself.

prises that we are spending on our politicians. In this camp here many people are affected. Many are injured. Many are killed. The loved ones are killed. He talked about, Wanted you to endure. I know what needs, or what needs, Because I was homeless.

We're homeless and poor who, That means I'm homeless. When you're hungry, you lose your confidence from God.

When you're sick, you lose your confidence from God. Their mind has been discouraged from God. And being as a pastor in the camp, me too, I'm displaced. I don't have anything to give them.

[12 : 41] It's not right, is it? To see that kind of injustice in our world. We'll come back to it later. But it's not just out there in our world.

It's also in here, in our lives, in justice. And so two months ago, just under two months ago, a family of our church, 1030 Church, the mother and daughter were in a car driving down Mitchum Road. Another driver ran a red light and T-boned them. And if that wasn't bad enough, they're okay. Thankfully, if that wasn't bad enough, when the police arrived, the driver who ran the red light said, no, it wasn't me, it was her.

And the police couldn't do anything because it was just one word against another. Here is another act of injustice. And it seemed like the driver would get away with it.

Or perhaps less seriously, to lighten the mood a little bit, I parked my car at Tunstall Square earlier this year. And I like to park it right in the white lines to make sure, you know, plenty of space for other cars around me so that my cars looked after.

[13 : 44] But then I popped into a shop, came back out, and someone had whacked my car, took heaps of paint off the side and then disappeared. No, no, no nothing.

And I was really upset. I'm still not quite over it. But here is an act of injustice. And they got away with it. And when these things happen, and especially when they happen to you, it makes you angry, doesn't it?

And when someone bullies you or doesn't do their work in a uni assignment, it's upsetting. It makes us angry. And rightly so, because it is wrong. Part of being made in God's image means we're being wired for justice.

And so injustice rightly makes us angry. And not anger, all anger is wrong. Some anger is right. And I wonder if that's the tone in chapter 2, verse 1, where Habakkuk concludes his complaint.

He says in chapter 2, verse 1, I will stand at my watch. I will station myself on the ramparts. I will look to see what God will say to me and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

[14 : 53] It's hard to tell, but I wonder if Habakkuk feels a bit angry here. Or perhaps angry at the injustice he sees. And so he kind of finishes his complaint with a bit of a mic drop moment.

On a stand here, now God, answer me. And so what answer does God give him, point two? Well, like last week, God firstly prepares Habakkuk for his answer.

In chapter 2, verse 2 to 3. Have a look there in your Bibles. 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 it will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it. It will certainly come and will not delay.

Last week, Habakkuk was prepared by being told that the answer is going to be so amazing. He wouldn't believe it. In other words, you better be sitting down for this. This week, God prepares Habakkuk by saying, You need to write this down.

[15 : 53] Because my answer, my revelation, needs to be remembered. Why? Why does it need to be written down? Well, two reasons. End of verse 2. Do you see the end of verse 2? So that a herald may run with it.

They need to write down this revelation so a herald may proclaim it. Because everyone needs to hear it. And be encouraged by it. But the second reason he's to write it down is there in verse 3. Because it waits an appointed time. It's not going to happen yet. They're going to have to wait for it. The fulfillment of God's answer will linger for a while. But it will certainly come at the end of verse 3. It won't prove false. It won't be delayed one second past its appointed time. It reminds me of the old Pantene ads.

Do you still remember these Pantene? I'm showing my age now. I think. Not that I use Pantene. But anyway. It's these old Pantene ads. It says, It won't happen overnight. But it will happen. Do you remember this?

[16 : 55] No? Okay. Well, it's kind of like God's word here. It won't happen overnight. It will... Actually, let's put it into God's word. Though it linger, it won't happen overnight.

Wait for it because it will certainly come. It will happen. That's what God is saying here. And so until it does, God's people are to keep living by faith that it will happen.

Even though the Babylonians will continue to get away with it. Verse 4 and 5. He goes on to say, See the enemy, the Babylonians, or Babylon is puffed up.

His desires are not upright. But the righteous person will live by his faithfulness or by faith. And then verse 5. He goes on to talk about Babylon again.

Indeed, wine betrays him. He is arrogant and never at rest because he is as greedy as the grave. And like death is never satisfied. So Babylon gathers to himself all the nations and takes captives of all the people.

[18 : 00] And so do you see what Habakkuk is saying here? He's saying that the righteous one is to keep living by faith.

Keep living by faith in the fact that God will keep his word. That this judgment will come one day. Even while Babylon will continue to live arrogantly.

In other words, the righteous Jews are to live faithfully while the unrighteous Babylonians live arrogantly. But what is God's answer?

What will happen at the appointed time? What are they waiting for? Well, the fact that God will judge. He will bring justice to Babylon and to the world.

And so what follows are five woes. God begins in verse 6 to say, Will not all of them, that is all of the righteous people or those who have been plundered, taunt him Babylon with ridicule and saying these things.

[19 : 05] And so it's actually other people pronouncing woe on Babylon because God's judgment has come on them. We don't have time to look at all five woes.

But let's have a look at this first one in the rest of verse 6 to 8. Woe to him, Babylon, who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion.

How long must this go on? Well, will not your creditors suddenly arise? Will they not? So will they not wake up and make you tremble?

Then you'll become they will become your prey. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood.

You have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. And notice here, I've highlighted it for you in yellow. God's punishment fits the crime.

[20 : 00] It's just, it's fair. They plundered peoples and so peoples will plunder them. And it happened in history. And 65 years later, King Cyrus of the Persians conquered the Babylonians.

The Persians had once been plundered by them. And now the tables turn and the Persians plundered them. And so this appointed time was fulfilled.

But only partially. Because Cyrus just kind of walked into Babylon and took over. There wasn't much of a battle. And so not all these woes of judgment were fulfilled.

But then some 85 years later, that is 20 years again, the Babylonians led a rebellion against Persia. And the new king Darius did squash them without mercy.

And so much more of these woes were fulfilled. But even then, it was only partial fulfillment.

Because this judgment will include more than Babylon.

[21 : 03] It will actually include everyone. And so because of time, we'll skip down to the fifth woe. Verse 18 to 20, which is over the page in your Bibles.

And this woe is a bit different to all the other woes. So verse 18. Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman or an image that teaches lies?

For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation. He makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him, to Babylon, who says to wood, come to life or to lifeless stone.

Wake up. Can it really give guidance? I mean, it's covered with gold and silver. There's no breath in it. But the Lord, well, the Lord is in his holy temple ruling.

Let all the earth be silent before him. Here we see that they've not just worshipped their own nets and strength, but they also worshipped statues instead of worshipping the true God.

[22 : 04] The true God who hold them accountable. And that's what it means to be held silent before him. It's kind of like when you have to go to the principal's office and you stand there and you actually have to be silent and just listen to the punishment that's coming your way.

Don't you? That's how it works. At least I've been told that. I've never experienced that myself. To be held silent is to be held without excuse, about to be punished. But this woe is different to the others.

It's not about how they've treated other nations. It's about how they've mistreated God. And it comes last because it's the worst. We often think how we treat others matters more than how we treat God.

But no, it's not. How we treat God matters more because he is God. And also because if we mistreat God, it often leads to mistreating others anyway.

You see, the cause of all Babylon's evil and injustice was worshipping false gods like themselves and idols instead of the true God. And when people replace the true God with our modern day idols of what are they?

[23 : 13] Money, marks, power, sex, self, all those things. That's what people worship today. And when people pursue those things, it often leads to mistreating others.

I want to pursue sex, so I'll sleep with as many people as I like. And it doesn't matter if I hurt others. I want to pursue a career, so it doesn't matter if I climb over others at work, because as long as I get the promotion and get more money.

You replace the true God and it leads to mistreating others, you see. But the thing is, we've all replaced God with idols at times.

We've all lived for things other than God at times. And so in verse 20, it's not just Babylon who's held silent and accountable, is it? It's all the earth, isn't it?

And guess who lives in the earth? Us. We will be held accountable to. And yet we have not seen this. We haven't all appeared before God's judgment seat yet, have we?

[24 : 26] And so we're still waiting for this appointed time in chapter 2 to be fully fulfilled. It was partially fulfilled in history, but it will only be fully fulfilled in the future.

And so what are the lessons for us, our final point? Well, first, God is holy. And so he must judge fully.

Habakkuk was right. God is holy. And so he's unable to tolerate wickedness forever. He said he must judge. And so secondly, God has set a day when he will send Jesus to judge.

As we just said in our creed, Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. And on that day, the appointed time in Habakkuk that we heard about will be fulfilled fully.

On that day, all the earth will be held silent. And all those who seemingly got away with injustice from the big things to the little things in life will be brought to justice.

[25 : 37] They will face God's just woe of wrath. But again, this includes us. Since we have replaced God with idols, then from time to time, then we too will be held silent before him.

But of course, the great news of the gospel, the good news of Jesus is that he took God's woe of wrath for us in our place, didn't he? So that whoever believes in Jesus can be saved or safe on that day.

If we believe, as I said. Our last song in our service tonight is We Belong to the Day. And it's got a line where it says, Jesus is our refuge in the coming wrath.

But again, only for those who believe. And so do you. You believe in Jesus. Are you safe on that day? And for us who do believe in Jesus.

Then the third application is to keep living by faith until that day. Like we saw in our second reading where the Hebrew Christians were suffering injustice themselves.

[26 : 52] And the writer quotes Habakkuk. He says, to start with, you need to persevere. And then you'll receive what God has promised us, which is an inheritance. Life to the full in the world to come.

And then he says, for in just a little while, he, Jesus, who is coming. And here's the quote from Habakkuk. Will come and will not delay. That is, God has set a day when Jesus will return. And that day will not be delayed one second longer. But until that day, the next quote is, my righteous one will live by faith.

We're to keep living by faith. Trusting that God will keep his promises. In fact, we're to do more than that. Living by faith means, for example, sharing the gospel while we can.

I mean, if we believe that Jesus is going to return to judge the living and the dead, then that's it. People don't have any more time to be saved, do they? And so we need to do what we can to share the gospel while we can, before Jesus returns.

[28 : 06] Living by faith in that day means sharing the gospel while we can. But it also means praying and pursuing justice when we can. Justice is a good thing.

God has placed authorities over us to uphold justice. And so we can pray that the authorities will do their job. We can even pursue justice through those authorities illegally.

And so like that family who was hit by that driver who ran the red light down in Mitchum. I remember praying with a dad the next day who was rightly upset by it. It wasn't just the fact that his wife and daughter were in the car when they got hit.

It was the fact that this guy lied about it. It was the injustice that actually upset him more. We prayed about it. And the next week, a witness came forward and said, yeah, I saw what happened. And they made an affidavit, a statement to the police station.

And the police then charged that driver. There was justice. But it doesn't always happen like that, does it? And so the third and final way to live by faith is to keep trusting God that he will judge justly when we can't get justice in this world.

[29 : 17] You see, despite our efforts, we won't always see it in this life. And so we're to keep trusting in God who will bring it on the final day. And this helps us to find comfort rather than seeking revenge.

As Romans 12 said, you know, don't take revenge, but leave room for God's wrath. It is mine to avenge, says the Lord. I will repay, not you. I will on that last day.

I never discovered who hit my car. And while I sometimes feel the injustice of it, I know on the last day they won't get away with it. But we held accountable for it.

And so I don't need to lose sleep over it, plotting my revenge, maybe booby-trapping my car like my daughter was going to do with her school bag. I'm not sure how I'd do that anyway. Or more seriously, when we see the injustice of Ukraine, we can know on the last day Putin won't get away with it.

He'll be held accountable for it. And so we don't have to try, as some people have suggested, trying to assassinate him or something like that. And for those in Nigeria suffering injustice now, they know on the last day those militants won't get away with it.

[30 : 28] But they will be held accountable for it, which helps them to find comfort rather than seeking revenge. In their words, they've put their hope and confidence in God for justice.

In fact, let's hear their words. We only pray together and share the word of God together. So far, our eyes are on him. So far, our hope is on him.

We put our confidence on him. We believe he's great. Isn't that brilliant? Despite their injustice, they continue to put their hope and confidence in God, who will bring it on that last day.

In fact, they're acting just like Jesus, aren't they? Who himself faced injustice. And yet, despite his injustice, Jesus entrusted himself to God, who judges justly.

In the end, Habakkuk's message for us tonight is something like Megan's teacher at the start, who said, trust me, I will put all things right.

[31 : 30] Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder, particularly given all the injustice we see in our world. And it's not always easy when we see it in our world, and especially when we face it in our lives.

So help us, we pray, to keep living by faith, trusting that you, through Christ, will one day put all things right. We ask it in his name.

Amen.