

Live by Faith in the God who'll bring Justice

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[0 : 00] Father, we do thank you again that you speak to us by your word. And so, Father, help us, we pray, to truly grasp what you are saying, that we might be encouraged to keep living by faith in you.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, our youngest daughter, Megan, has a food thief in her class.

Yes, it's the talk of the school. For the last week or so, I remember a number of the children in her class, including Megan herself, have had their chips or biscuits, you know, their recessed treats, stolen from their bags.

And when Megan told us about it, she was so indignant, because this was a gross injustice. How dare they? Of course, the teacher is looking into it and assured the students that they will find out what's going on and put things right.

The teacher effectively said, trust me, I will sort it out. I said this this morning at 7.45, and one of the members came after me and said, we had a situation like this when I was teaching in another class, and the culprit was the teacher.

[1 : 18] I don't think so in this case. Megan's teacher, though, said, trust me, I will sort it out. Not because it's me, but because you'll get to the bottom of it. Now, this is easier said than done, isn't it?

To trust someone else to bring justice. And so Megan and a few friends have found it too hard and decided to take turns patrolling the bags before school and jumping up and spying out the window during class.

I think one of them even wanted to booby trap her bag. I don't know how, but they were keen to catch the culprit. But as I said, the point is it's hard to wait and trust someone else to bring justice.

And it's even harder when the injustice or the suffering is serious, as it was for Habakkuk. You see, last week we saw that Habakkuk cried out to God.

So if you've got your Bibles there, chapter 1, verse 2, and just a brief recap if you weren't here. Chapter 1, verse 2, Habakkuk cries out, How long, Lord, will there be injustice in Judah?

[2 : 16] How long before you put things right and save your people? And before God gave Habakkuk an answer, he warned Habakkuk in chapter 1, verse 5, that it was going to be utterly amazing to remember.

An utterly surprising answer. And that surprising answer was verse 6. God was raising up the evil Babylonians to bring justice to Judah and to save his people.

And for Habakkuk, that's utterly amazing that God would use such an utterly evil people to do this. But that was God's first answer. And so the big lesson for us last week was that God is sovereign even over evil.

He will use and direct evil, but always for good. And so we had to trust our sometimes surprising, but always sovereign and good God.

The problem, however, with amazing things or surprising answers is that it leads to more questions, doesn't it? I mean, when I did my amazing magic trick for you last week, I was amazed it actually worked.

[3 : 24] But no doubt some of you were asking yourselves, how did he do that until I showed you? Or more seriously, when I asked my parents how they were and they answered, oh, the doctor thinks your father might have cancer, that was surprising for me.

And it led me to ask more questions like, can you say that again? When did this happen? How serious is it? And so on. By the way, thank you to those who've been praying and asking after him.

At the moment, we're still waiting for the results. But the point is, God's surprising answer to Habakkuk leads to more questions. Another question, at least.

Which brings us to Habakkuk's second question or complaint. Point one, verse 12. He says, Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. Or literally, we will never die.

You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment. You, my rock, have ordained them to punish. Here, Habakkuk starts off by making sure that he's heard God rightly.

[4 : 23] It's what we do when we hear surprising things, isn't it? It's as though Habakkuk is saying, look, let me see if we've got this right, God. You, the Holy One, have appointed those Babylonians, the evil ones, to bring judgment to Judah?

You're going to use them to punish? Have I got that right? Now, remember at this point, Habakkuk's issue is not that God is going to bring judgment on Judah. After all, that's what Habakkuk wanted.

That's what he was crying out for. Rather, the issue, as we saw last week, is that God was going to use evil Babylonians to do it. And for Habakkuk, this seems to go against God's holiness.

I mean, how can a holy and just God tolerate wrongdoing? How can a pure God even look upon evil, let alone use it for his purposes?

And so it prompts Habakkuk to ask his second question, which really comes up in the rest of chapter one. So have a look there at chapter one, verse 13. He says, It seems like you have made people to be like the fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.

[5 : 48] The wicked Babylonians, the foe, pulls all of them up with hooks and catches them in his net. He gathers them up in his dragnet. And so he rejoices and is glad.

Therefore, he sacrifices or worships his net, his strength, and burns incense to his dragnet. For by his net, he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest foods.

Is he, the Babylonians, to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? I will stand at my watch and 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. See what Habakkuk is saying? He's saying the Babylonians are conquering all these nations with such ease, and God is letting them.

Verse 13, God seems silent. Or verse 14, God seems to have made the people like the fish of the sea, only to be caught, verse 15, by the hooks and nets of the Babylonians.

[6 : 51] And that's what they did, by the way. Literally. When they were leading captives away in a big long line, they wouldn't use rope. Well, they'd use rope, but they'd use hooks and hook it through their prisoners' lips or cheeks and lead them away like that.

And so Habakkuk is saying, how long will you, the holy God, who cannot tolerate wrongdoing, tolerate them, those evil ones?

See verse 17, are they to keep on emptying their nets and destroying nations forever? When are you going to bring justice? And not just for Judah, but for the nations.

You see, Habakkuk's first complaint was, how long would God let injustice among his own people go unchecked? But Habakkuk's second complaint is, how long is God going to let injustice among the nations go unchecked?

In other words, when are you, God, going to do something about all the evil in the world? And again, this is a question that sounds reasonable to us, doesn't it?

[7 : 56] It's certainly one that we can relate to. I mean, I mentioned last week that our state government seems to be deliberately undermining Christianity. In fact, that's what former Prime Minister John Howard was saying.

And so on the next slide, is a shorter version of what he said, in case you weren't here last week. Mr. Howard said, attempts made by some state governments, especially in Victoria, his words, not mine, to make it almost impossible to have religious instruction in state schools is an offensive anti-religious streak.

Anti-religious. Now, Habakkuk 1 last week reminded us that God can use evil and evil people to bring good. And so who knows how God might use the current moves to make our society less Christian and more secular.

I mean, such persecution might actually grow the church, has before. But if God is holy and just, then at some point, shouldn't he stop using evil and end it?

That's Habakkuk's second complaint. We'll take the evil of suffering and disease in our fallen world, like cancer. We know God uses that kind of evil to grow and refine us as Christians.

[9 : 11] The Bible speaks about that in a number of places. I can see it in my father. But at some point, surely God will stop using such suffering and end it altogether. Won't he? Or take ISIS.

I mentioned last Sunday that Iraqi troops were trying to take back the city of Fallujah in Iraq. Well, during the week, they did take back the outer city and forced ISIS into the center of the city.

And many of the estimated 50,000 trapped residents tried to flee during the fighting. But as they did, ISIS troops started shooting them in the back.

Why? Because they wanted to keep them to use as human shields. And if they couldn't keep them, then they'd kill them out of spite, it seems. Now, Habakkuk 1 reminds us that God can and does use such evil for good, that he brings good out of that evil.

And that good has included hundreds of Muslims turning from Islam to Christianity because of the violence by ISIS done in the name of Islam. And so on the next slide is a picture of an 18-year-old girl called Samar.

[10 : 18] I don't have time. It's actually a video where she speaks for herself. But let me just quickly show you some screenshots. She starts off by thanking God for ISIS. Why? Well, the next slide is because when she heard about ISIS, next slide, it confirmed all her doubts about Islam.

And so it led her to Christ. And so the next slide, she's now convinced that Jesus is the Savior. You see, God has used ISIS, who is evil, to bring good.

But Habakkuk's second question is, how long, oh God, are you going to let such evil continue? Will you stop using evil and just end it?

When will you do that and put things right? Well, God answers that question. And like his first answer, everyone is to hear his second one and Habakkuk is to be prepared for it.

But this time, Habakkuk is to prepare not by bracing himself for a surprise, but by writing God's second answer down because it's going to take some time to happen.

[11 : 26] So point two, chapter two, verse two. Then 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. Here God says, get ready for my answer, my revelation, my message to you. How? By writing it down clearly or plainly.

Why? Well, two reasons. First, at the end of verse two, it says, so that it can be given to a herald who can proclaim it to everyone. But the second reason to write it down is in verse three.

For or because its fulfillment awaits an appointed time. In other words, God's answer or revelation is going to take some time before it happens.

[12 : 28] And so Habakkuk is to write it down clearly so that when people doubt, they can go back and read and remember God's answer. But also notice that while they may have to wait a while, God says it will happen.

It will come true. Verse three says, it won't prove false. It will certainly come and not delay any further beyond the appointed time.

As someone in my Bible study group last week, it's a men's group, and he said, it reminds me of that TV ad. It won't happen overnight, but it will happen. Apparently, it's a women's shampoo ad, though.

I'm not sure why he remembered that. But anyway, but that's effectively what God is saying here. It's not going to happen straight away, but it will happen at the appointed time. And until that time, God says, my people are to live by faith while the wicked live in arrogance.

You see verse four and five? He says, see, the enemy is puffed up, arrogant, and his desires are not upright. He is not righteous. But my righteous person will live by his faith.

[13 : 42] Indeed, wine betrays him. He is arrogant and never at rest because he is greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied. And the wicked or the arrogant Babylonians gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.

You see, the righteous Jews are to live faithfully while the unrighteous Babylonians live arrogantly. And there's a sense in which the Jews are not to be surprised at how the Babylonians will keep living.

So verse four, the Babylonians are puffed up or arrogant. That is, they trust in themselves and worship their success. So verse 16, they make sacrifices to their nets, you know, their own success and so on.

They are not upright or righteous. Verse five, they are never content or at rest. They think that wine and riches might satisfy them, but chapter two, verse five, says wine betrays them.

That is, it does not satisfy as they might think. And so they are never at rest and never satisfied, never content. Instead, they're always greedy for more.

[14 : 51] Now, while the Babylonians were an evil people, they sound alarmingly like our world, don't they? I mean, in our society, people look to be satisfied by wine or good times or materialism and it never satisfies for long, does it, if people put their trust in those things.

Have you ever noticed how people think they'll be happy if they only get this or have that? But when they get this or have that, the satisfaction doesn't seem to last all that long, does it?

They have to get more or have more. And so this description of the Babylonians, in part at least, is alarmingly like our world. But this is what the unrighteous are like, you see.

And so we shouldn't really be surprised by it when we see it in our world. Instead, we should live in complete contrast to it. Instead of arrogance, which trusts in our own strength as the world does, we are to keep trusting in God as our strength.

And we are to trust that He knows what He's doing, even if we don't. And instead of being greedy, we are to be content. Content in both what God gives us and in His timing to fulfill His promises.

[16 : 04] That's what it means to keep living by faith. But what is God's answer? We haven't got to that yet, have we? What is God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint here? What will God do about the injustice in the world?

What will happen at this appointed time? Well, God will judge and bring justice to the nations. He will put things right.

And just so they get the point, God gives the Babylonians not just one woe of judgment, but five woes of judgment. See verse 6? Will not all of them taunt him, that is not all, will not all those who have been persecuted by the Babylonians taught the Babylonians with ridicule and scorn, saying, woe to him 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 wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their prey. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you.

For you have shed human blood and have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. Verse 9, woe to you, and it keeps going. Verse 12, woe to him. And then over the page, verse 15, woe to him.

[17 : 21] And again, verse 19, woe to him. Five woes of judgment to the Babylonians. You see, God's answer is he will judge.

He will bring justice and put things right. Now, we don't have time to look at all those woes, but I do want to point out a couple of things we see in them. At first, God's judgment will be fair.

Let's have a look at verse 15 and 16. And notice how the punishment fits the crime. He says, woe to him, the Babylon, who gives drink to his neighbors, pointing, sorry, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.

You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn. Drink and let your nakedness be exposed. The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you and disgrace will cover your glory.

Do you see what he's saying here? Just as they force their captives to drink until drunk and shame them by stripping them naked, so God will make the Babylonians drink not wine but the cup of his wrath.

[18 : 36] And he will expose not their literal nakedness but their moral nakedness. He will expose the secrets of their hearts and show them to be the utterly evil people that they are.

And so just as they shame their captives so God will cover their glory with shame. You see what they did will come back to them. The punishment will fit the crime.

It is just and fair you see. Or turn back with me to verse 8 and we see it even more clearly there. Verse 8 Because you have plundered many nations the peoples who are left will plunder you.

It's pretty simple isn't it? What you did will happen to you. the punishment will fit the crime. You see God's judgment will be fair. It will be just. And this did happen in history.

About 65 years later a King Cyrus of the Persians conquered Babylon. The Persians who had once been plundered by the Babylonians now plundered them.

[19 : 39] But the second thing to notice with these woes is that this judgment will not just be for the Babylonians. So have a look down the bottom of the page to verse 13 and 14.

Sorry we're skipping around a bit. Bottom page 13 and 14. He starts off by saying woe to him in verse 12 but then look at verse 13. He says has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labour is only fuel for the fire that the nations plural exhaust themselves for nothing.

You see it seems to move from Babylon in verse 12 to the nations in verse 13. And then he says in verse 14 for the earth the whole earth will one day be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

You see God is saying this judgment is not just for Babylon it's going to be for everyone the nations plural. Everyone's unjust labour will be all fuel for the fire of God's judgment.

And verse 14 there will be a day says God when the whole earth will know his glory. It says the knowledge of his glory will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. Habakkuk complained back in chapter 1 verse 14 that God made the people of the world like fish of the sea without a ruler.

[21 : 07] But God has always been ruling. It's just that not everyone knows it or believes it. But in chapter 2 verse 14 then there will be a day when everyone will know it.

Everyone will see it and everyone will submit to it. Then there will be justice in the whole world. You see God's answer about judgment for Babylon includes an appointed time when there will be judgment for everyone.

In fact that's how God ends his answer in verse 20. Last flick of the page look at verse 20. He ends chapter 2 by saying the Lord is in his holy temple let all the earth be silent before him.

You see there is a fixed day and appointed time when the whole earth will be brought before God and held accountable. That's what it means to be silent here to be without excuse.

We've got nothing to say that we can say for ourselves. We're going to be held accountable to God. That's how it ends. So what are the lessons for us then?

[22 : 12] Point three. Well firstly God is holy. Habakkuk was right. He said God was holy and so that God was unable to tolerate wrongdoing forever and God agrees because God is holy he must at some stage judge all evil.

I mean to let injustice and suffering go on forever it goes against his very character just like Habakkuk said and yet God has poured out his judgment in part already on Christ.

Christ drank the cup of God's wrath. Do you remember what Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane? Father if it is possible may this cup be taken from me God's judgment yet not what I will but your will be done and it was God's will that Jesus would take that cup why?

Because God's holiness means that justice for sin must be done I mean do you not think that if God could have spared his only son from dying on a cross and just let us off the hook don't worry about justice don't you think he would have done that of course he would have but his holiness means he cares about justice and so someone had to pay for sin someone had to take the judgment it's just that God didn't want us to have to and so Jesus willingly took it in our place and then God raised Jesus from the dead signaling that there will be a judgment day so on the next slide in Acts chapter 17 we read this God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed he has given proof of this to all people by raising Jesus from the dead you see by raising Jesus from the dead God has proved that Jesus is the one whom God has appointed as judge and God has proved that he can raise people from the dead to be judged so there will be a time when everyone's secrets will be exposed and everyone will give an account and everything will be put right as Paul says on the next slide from Romans every mouth at one stage will be silenced and the whole world held accountable to

God same idea at the end of Habakkuk and this will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ as my gospel declares days coming when God will judge everyone's secrets and give to everyone what they deserve what is fair and yet because Jesus died and took God's judgment in our place we can live we can live free from this judgment and so on the next slide Paul quotes from Habakkuk as well in Romans 1 he says in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed a way to be right with God that is by faith from first to last just as written in Habakkuk the righteous will live by faith in other words God makes us right with him so that we can live without suffering judgment we deserve but only if we have faith trust belief in Jesus as Paul says at the bottom of the slide this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe so the first question for us this morning is are we ready for this day that is to come are we ready for that appointed time when

[25 : 39] God will judge the world everyone in other words have you put your trust in Jesus do you believe in him because if you don't then you won't be ready for that day God is holy and so he must judge he must bring justice to the world at that appointed time and we need to be ready for it by trusting in Jesus but the second lesson for us is for us who already have that trust in Jesus and that is we need to keep living by faith keep trusting in Jesus while we wait for that appointed time here we come to our second reading from Hebrews so turn there in your Bibles it's page 1212 keep the blood circulating your fingers keep warm page 1212 1212 Hebrews chapter 10 we'll pick it up at verse 36 left hand column there here the writer writes to a group of people who are experiencing injustice themselves and the writer quotes

Habakkuk twice to encourage his readers to keep going to keep persevering in faith so verse 36 he says you need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God you will receive what he has promised for in just a little while he who is coming will come and will not delay Habakkuk and but my righteous one will live by faith Habakkuk and I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back but we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed but to those who have faith and are saved you see the writer here quotes from Habakkuk saying that the end will come and not delay God will not delay his appointed time I mean we make appointments often don't we whether at the doctors or at banks or or wherever it is and so often those appointment times are delayed or they're changed aren't they sometimes we change them and sometimes they change the appointment times but

God is saying he's not going to change his appointment time he will not delay in sending Jesus back beyond that time he will come and the end will come but until that time we are to persevere and keep living in faith we are to be content in God's timing trusting he knows what he's doing even if we don't we are to keep living by faith until the day when the knowledge of God's glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea so when it comes to the persecution of Christians by our state government here in Victoria or the evil of ISIS or the suffering of cancer the message of Habakkuk 1 is that God can use that evil to bring good but the message of Habakkuk 2 today is that God is holy so he will not let that evil continue forever I don't know how exactly you're feeling today whether you're down about where society seems to be heading or whether you or your family or friends are facing some sort of injustice at work or whether suffering in life but God can and use it to bring good

Habakkuk 1 but God is also holy and so he will not let it last forever Habakkuk 2 instead he will bring justice he will put everything right and he will richly reward those who keep living by faith so in the words of Megan's teacher trust me I will sort it out says God