

Habakkuk "God Out of the Box"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Yeah, and some of the messaging we had with Will this morning, I think he's coming up with some new ideas of ways to enhance what we do here. And he was talking about the worship service that he went through this morning.

It lasted for four and a half hours. So just be on your guard. I want you to open your Bibles to Habakkuk.

Some of you are going to have to tear the pages apart in this section. If you want to know where it is, it's right after Nahum. Turn to Matthew and make a left and go back five books and you'll find it. There haven't been many books in the Bible that I have repeated through sermons. In fact, I don't think there are any except for Luke going through here, except Habakkuk.

[1 : 20] And this is actually the third time through. Because what I find here in Habakkuk is a very highly relevant message for us.

It's one of those minor prophets that, unfortunately, we don't read very often. But I think he speaks to us in so many wonderful ways.

I don't know if you've ever found yourself in a situation where God shook you down to the foundations of all that you thought and all that you believed about him.

I mean, maybe even we think about that now when you look at things on a societal level, when you see the way our society is going and you see, you know, it seems like evil is running rampant, righteousness is kind of being pushed out of the picture, and everything seems to be out of control. And we wonder, okay, God, what are your promises here? What are you doing? Maybe it's on a personal level, where God did something in your life that was beyond your understanding and your ability to grasp.

[2 : 52] You know, on whatever level that maybe God has ever done this, sometimes he comes and does these things that totally changes everything.

It changes the way that we think about him. It changes the way that we relate to him. It changes how we think about ourselves, about his promises. It just shapes everything.

And God does, has a way of bringing us to that place in undoing so much of what we think.

I think that a lot of us have this view of God that's very tame. It's very manageable.

It's very predictable. It's very orderly. And functions on this basis of a nice set of well-defined rules and categories.

[3 : 52] And we like when God is this way because we like life that's predictable. We like life that is manageable.

And we like it when we can use these nice formulas and everything is predictable. You know, if I do this, if I do this, then I'm going to get this.

If I read the Bible to my kids as they're younger and we do family devotions and then my kids are going to turn out great.

If I give my money when I'm supposed to, then God is going to bless me and make sure that I have everything that I need. God is going to honor what I do for him.

And after all, we've got all these promises in Scripture that tell us those very things. But sometimes we find out that this God that we worship is not that kind of God.

[5 : 04] Sometimes He just will not and refuses to fit into our formulas, our predictable, manageable ideas of what He is supposed to do.

Sometimes those who tithe lose their jobs. Sometimes really good parents have children who are addicts.

And what do we do then? In fact, I would actually go on to say if your picture of God is orderly, predictable, neat, and tidy, you do not know Him very well. He is not a tame God. He is very unpredictable. And He lives outside of our categories in our boxes that we create for Him.

Let me tell you a little bit about how I was faced with this dilemma. And this was as a pastor. Back in the summer of 2009, I was sitting in a courtroom.

[6 : 43] We had returned from Hungary after being there for six years. A year or so before, my oldest daughter had gotten married to a guy that we had questions about.

And now, we were sitting in a courtroom in rural Kansas where he had been falsely accused of a horrific crime. And the jury was about to come back with its verdict.

And I remember that of even praying, we had all these people praying for us, we had all these people, you know, supporting us and behind, you know, just pleading for God to be who He's promised He would be.

A God of justice, a God of mercy. And I also remember that there's one thing that I absolutely felt that I could not stand, I could not handle, was to look into my daughter's eyes and hear the word guilty.

Because my daughter was a new parent, had an infant son, not quite a year old, and this was not the life that I had thought would be for my daughter.

[8 : 07] I couldn't imagine her being a single parent. I couldn't imagine my grandson having a father who was a convicted felon. I couldn't imagine. And to deal with the pain of her face.

And so when the judge pronounced the words guilty, everything I knew about God went out the window. I didn't know how to relate to him anymore.

I didn't know how to pray to him anymore. I didn't know what to expect from him anymore. I was dealing with a God I did not know.

And at the moment, I wasn't sure I liked it. He did not answer my prayers the way I thought he should have. Instead, he brought to me some of the deepest pain I have ever felt.

And how am I supposed to relate to a God who is like that? Well see, really, this is the story of Habakkuk.

[9 : 37] Habakkuk is a prophecy that is very different from all the other prophecies. It's a dialogue. So many of the other prophecies, you have a prophet coming with these words of judgment and calls to repentance for the nation of Israel so they could come back to the God that they were supposed to be worshiping.

But Habakkuk is really a conversation between two very intimate friends. And it is a declaration in a sense of what it means to walk in faith with our creator and our redeemer.

So for those of us who struggle with what God is doing in our lives and maybe struggling in our world, Habakkuk, I think, is a great place for us to learn how to relate to him in faith.

How to relate in faith to a God who will not fit in our box. So what I want to do, I want us just to go through this dialogue in the first chapter up through verse 1 of chapter 2 and let's see how this all conversation sets up.

Let me read verses 1 through 4. You can see it there on the screen. It's the oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

[11 : 28] How long, O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear or cry to you violence and you will not save?

Why do you make me see iniquity and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me, strife and contention arise so the law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth for the wicked surround the righteous so justice goes forth perverted.

Habakkuk comes to God opens up this dialogue with a complaint and he's confused. He knows who God is, he knows what God has promised, he knows what he has taught but what he sees before his face is not what he thinks should be because he thinks what he's saying here is that God what it seems here is that you have put me in a place with all these wicked people and these are your people they are perverting justice righteousness is basically being pushed out of society and you're making me see this but all the while it appears like you're blind that you don't see it because if you did see it you would be doing something but you're not doing anything that I can see and why in fact it's gotten so bad in Habakkuk's mind that he said that the wicked surround the righteous they're hemmed in they seem to be more numerous than the good folks and there's no justice but notice

too how he begins this whole dialogue he says how long do I cry to you for help this is not the first time

Habakkuk has prayed this he has been going to God over and over and over again in this prayer he feels like is falling on deaf ears and so he's confused he's and he's going to God and wrestling with him and saying okay what's going on here this is not right well then we get to verse five and God comes and answers look what he says he says look among the nations and see wonder and be astonished for I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told for behold I am raising up the Chaldeans that bitter and hasty nation who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own they are dreaded and fearsome their justice and dignity go forth from themselves their horses are swifter than leopards more fierce than the evening wolves their horsemen press proudly on their horsemen come from afar they fly like an eagle swift to devour they all come for violence all their faces forward they gather captives like sand at kings they scoff and at rulers they laugh and they laugh at every fortress for they pile up earth and take it then they sweep by like the winds and go on guilty men whose

God whose own might is their God wow God answers Habakkuk and basically says oh you think I'm not doing anything oh I am I'm doing something beyond wonderful I am right now at work raising up the Chaldeans Nebuchadnezzar all the Babylonians and they're going to come and they're going to bring justice God is bringing justice on Israel and all the wickedness that was there but what was surprising to Habakkuk now is that he's using the Babylonians to do it to do his work this arrogant godless extremely violent people are going to flood into

[16:40] Israel and take care of business wow what do you think Habakkuk thought of that well we look at verse 12 through 17 and we see are you not from everlasting oh lord my god my holy one we will not die oh lord you have ordained them as a judgment and you oh rock have established them for reproof you who are of pure eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong why do you idly look at nations and are silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he you have made mankind like the fish of the sea like crawling things that have no ruler he brings all of them up with a hook he drags them out with his net he gathers them in his dragnet so he rejoices his dragnet for by them he lives in luxury and his food is rich is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercifully killing nations forever

Habakkuk's response if he wasn't confused before he is now because he goes to God he says God what's going on and God says I've got a plan but if I tell you you won't believe me and Habakkuk basically says tell me and God tells him and Habakkuk says I don't believe you God tells him and what he seems to be doing is totally the opposite of what Habakkuk has known and he is more than troubled in fact his response here is quite brutally honest and very strong we can't even say that Habakkuk is ticked off and he cannot understand how

God could do such a thing how could you take these arrogant violent pagan people and use them to judge those who are more righteous than they are that you would use them to come and destroy us and his confusion gets the best of him and he just goes to God and pours out his anguish in a flood and then we have the conclusion we see verse one of chapter two where he says I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and I will look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint

Habakkuk doesn't know what God is going to say but he's already building a defense to argue his case I love this dialogue especially because God has shown himself so far outside the categories that I had for him but it also and because of that it shows us a pathway of dealing with God in faith and Habakkuk's response his dealing with God is very much in faith but we have to see how that looks so first what is faith's response to confusion how do you respond in such a situation where God is so confusing right now you know what do you do when God throws you for a loop what do you do when you get confused how do you respond when you are in pain or when you are perplexed with all that God is bringing into your life all this stuff at the hands of God how do you relate to him how do you respond to him well there's a couple of ways a lot of us just run but we run in a couple of different ways sometimes we just flat run

God you don't make any sense Christianity is confusing it's not what it should be I'm out of here forget it God if this is what you do and you don't fit into this box the way I think well forget it I'm gone in our frustration we just run and leave we'll go find another religion we'll go find another philosophy we'll go find something else some other system to help us grapple with this hard reality of life we just run because this God that we thought that was so great and loving is now hard we don't want

anything to do with him and so in our hardship we just leave but there's another way we run and that is we run straight into our religion straight into our

[23 : 39] Christian practice and that what that looks like is okay you know we we stick to what we know to the doctrines that we have and we may vocalize them we may say yeah I know God is sovereign and we continue to put the smiles on our faces we continue to act in all of our religious niceties that God is nowhere to be found he is not anywhere close we have basically shielded ourselves from this God by our religious practice to avoid that confusion and perplexity and pain that comes when we really get to know him but we're not getting to know him we're hiding in a system that we think will make sense of things but unfortunately it will leave us empty so whether we are running off to some other philosophy or we're running back deeper in our religion we're still running we're running away you know some of us again we're we're running this is not how

Habakkuk deals with the situation even from the very beginning when Habakkuk was perplexed he ran but he didn't run away where does he go with his complaint he goes to God and when it gets worse what does he do he keeps going to God it's like he's entering into this this wrestling match with God because he wants to know and that's where he goes he prays he doesn't just shut down but he prays his prayer in some ways on the surface is disrespectful it is harsh it's in your face but it is the prayer of faith because here he's demonstrating that it was God was the one he trusted and that's where he was going he didn't understand anything he didn't know what he was doing but he knew who he trusted and he was going there

I actually think this is the way prayer should be it's not very common we don't pray like this very often I think we're afraid to to go before the holy God and just pour out your anger and your confusion and tell him this is God you're not being fair here to really be honest with him I don't one thing in my relationship with my wife the last thing that she wants is me to shut down and not say anything that's the last thing because she has no idea well she's got a pretty good idea what's going on I'm ticked off but in a relationship it does not help anything in fact it says something very terrible about the state of that relationship when

I get to a place of maybe anger and confusion and I just suck it up and I don't talk and that's not what she wants because that means I have run away she wants to engage she wants me to trust her enough to give her my heart let me tell you something God is no different yes he is the holy one yes he is our king he is your father he is a father that says look you don't understand come here let's talk about this trust me with it and that is the prayer of faith and let me tell you something whatever you say

God can take it he already knows it's there what he wants is us to engage our hearts in our relationship and not just our actions or our heads engage your heart pour out your heart he wants your heart and he can deal with it trust him enough to wrestle with him to get to know him that is the response of faith and to that prayer of faith God shows his grace to Habakkuk instead of just smashing Habakkuk for his insolence because he's so brash and irreverent God chooses to enter into the wrestling match with him he comes down to

[30 : 07] Habakkuk he reveals himself in a very gentle and a very gracious way we might think it wasn't so gentle but oh it was but it is a wrestling match I don't know if you remember the story of Jacob go back and read Genesis 32 and in the story Jacob is perplexed he is coming back to Canaan coming back from living with Laban his brother-in-law being abused living this life of really deception and so forth he is about to be confronted with Esau who is coming to him with a big horde of people thinking that Esau is all ticked off at him and Jacob doesn't know where to turn but he meets this angel of the Lord in the wilderness and with that angel Jacob wrestled all night long because he wanted one thing he says

I am not going to let you go until you bless me and the amazing thing about that is is that that was God himself a pre incarnate appearance of God who allowed this man to wrestle with him all night long I mean that one should have been over quick but it wasn't God invited Jacob to engage and when you wrestle you have to get really close and so finally at the end you know he could have just done away with Jacob but he didn't and Jacob said you know I will not let go until you bless me and the

Lord touched his hip touched the socket of it something happened to it it wouldn't function anymore and God blessed him God met with Jacob wrestled with him and blessed him Jacob limped from there on out but he had wrestled with God and had come to know him in a way he had never known him before and Jacob was a whole new man in a sense after that in so many ways God is we have

to know this about God and why he brings about these situations he is in pursuit of our hearts he is not content just with the performance of religion he is not content with just right doctrine he is not content with these boxes that we live in that we create that hides him more than reveals him he says no you're going to get to know me and so he comes and tears our boxes apart in pursuit of our hearts he is more willing to answer prayers than we are willing to pray them he is more willing to engage with us than we are with him but when we do we will never be the same we will come to know this

God and the wonders of what he does in a whole new level that looking back on all of the pain all of the struggle we would not trade for the world the last thing I would want to do is to go through that whole scenario again in that Kansas courtroom but I wouldn't trade it because now there is this God who is so much bigger so much more passionate about me and relationship being in relationship with me I wouldn't give up for the world but there is something else we need to see about God's grace in this text look at verse 13 in chapter 1 where he says you who are of pure eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong why do you idly look at traitors and are silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he see to

Habakkuk this was scandalous that God would do that but Habakkuk had no idea how far God would go with that he had no idea because in some years in the future that verse was going to be lived out in a whole new way that would have totally amazed and astonished Habakkuk in Acts 2 22 and 23 we hear these words men of Israel hear these words Jesus of Nazareth a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst as you yourselves know this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men see God didn't just work that way with the Chaldeans he didn't just bring judgment on Israel he went a lot farther he used wicked men and put his own son the holy one of Israel to a cruel death his son was unjustly tried and convicted of no crime and then was condemned to die when he was righteous and this is how far

[37 : 29] God will go in pursuit of your heart he doesn't just put us through the ringer to get our attention he put himself through the ringer to not just get our attention but to buy us as his own he crushed evil so that we can now relate to him we can now approach him we can now honestly wrestle with him and find in his face not the scowl of an angry judge but the smile of a beloved father God is in pursuit of your hearts

I don't know what he's doing I don't know how he's doing it I do know he is doing it but I also know this your place of hope is not to run away but it is to engage and let him expand your knowledge of all that he is in all that he has done in Christ you may limp a little bit but you also find joy unlike you've never known before so run to him run to him let's pray father we want to know you we need to know you and we don't and maybe you're in the process of showing us that but father I pray would you pursue us would you come and draw us deeper into the knowledge of all that you are so that our rejoicing would be made so much fuller and the glory that we declare about you would be so much more convincing father come make yourself known and then enable us to trust you in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org for more information visit us online at southwood.org on 50 10 up as with of these are these spider the fields are in where it has