

Living By Faith

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[0 : 00] My name is James Barnett, and it is good to be with you today. This has been a season to learn patience.

I'm not very patient, and many times I can look for quick fixes, particularly with language learning. Instead of trying to do the hard and consistent work, I'm always looking for a new quick fix, a new app or a new solution to help me learn the language quicker.

But in this season of COVID, it's shown the value of patience. But there are still people trying to find quick fixes, even encouraging people to inject themselves with disinfectant.

We are only now starting to come out of severe isolation because we, as a country, have had patience. We have valued other people more than ourselves by staying at home.

And right now, we have showed the value of other people's lives by avoiding people, by staying at home, by not going to work, so that we can see lives saved and so that the country can reopen.

[1 : 15] Patience has been a great asset. And yet, it has also been a time of great impatience. For those with kids, impatient for school to return, impatient to hang out with friends, impatient to have the freedom to drive wherever we like, impatient to go and hang out with a friend or to go to the pub, impatient to go to the beach.

But this has also been a season where we can be impatient with God. God, where are you? Why haven't you fixed this problem yet?

And the question for us today is, does this season lead us closer to God or is our impatience driving us away from Him?

Today, we are continuing in our series looking at the Old Testament minor prophet Habakkuk and his short book for us.

Last week, we looked at the first chapter with Steve and we saw Habakkuk crying out because of the violence and injustice that God's people were doing to each other.

[2 : 26] And God had some radical words for Habakkuk. I am going to send Babylon and they are going to bring violence and injustice and oppression against Judah.

And Habakkuk cried out in response, how could you do that? How can you use those evil people to judge your people, God? They're even worse.

And Habakkuk is trying to understand how a pure and holy God can allow a sinful people to come and attack God's people. And this is where we find Habakkuk today.

He has cried out to God. God has answered him and Habakkuk was not satisfied. He has called out to God again. And now we see Habakkuk waiting for a response.

And today we're going to see what patience actually looks like. We're going to see the value of gaining perspective so that we can have patience.

[3 : 30] And we're going to see what Christ-centered patience looks like. So as we look at Habakkuk chapter 2, please pray with me. Heavenly Father, thank you for your goodness to us that in this time you continue to speak to us in your word.

Help us be like Habakkuk today, to be patient and to wait for your words to us. Amen. Please have your Bibles open. Have the St. Paul's app open.

There are notes in there that you can be following. We're in Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 1. Habakkuk has said his piece.

He's expressed his concern about the coming Babylonian army. And now he is going to wait. He takes his concern to God and now he shows his patience.

Habakkuk paints this picture of patience before God like a century on a watchtower. Imagine you've got a walled city which has towers and you have centuries, the watchmen, on these towers.

[4 : 52] And they're watching out for attacks. They're watching out for visitors. And you have to stay there your whole shift. And if the watchman takes his eye off the area he's supposed to be looking at, he could miss an invading force.

He could miss people. And they could not be prepared to defend the city. Being a century on a watchtower requires immense patience.

And this is a choice. It is an act of the will to be patient. I think patience is mostly misunderstood in our time.

We can speak about patience as being we're either patient or we're not patient. So we say things like, Ah, I'm not patient but my wife, she's incredibly patient.

But I wonder if we talk about it like we talk about who we are. So, you know, I'm Australian. I'm redheaded. This is just how it is.

[5 : 53] This does not change. It was an attribute I was either born with or I was born without. Patience, we don't think of it as something we can gain necessarily.

But patience is a choice. It is an act of the will that we have to choose to be patient. And what a day to be dwelling on patience.

Today is Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day to all you who are mothers. Those who have trained us in patience. They were trained in patience from the very beginning of pregnancy to wait for children. And then when they have children to require immense amounts of patience to raise their children. What a wonderful day to be dwelling on patience. And I think of my own children.

My youngest son, his name is Micah. He is three. And I need plenty of patience with him. He is at this wonderful age where he is learning how to dress himself.

[6 : 56] And he thinks he can do it. And so he'll say, you know, Dad, let me put my shoes on. And I can often respond, oh look, just let me.

It'll be faster. I'll get them on the right feet most of the time. And I do do it faster. But in that moment, I am choosing my time over my son.

Over Micah learning how to do this important skill to dress himself. I'm choosing what is more important to me, my time, which is just selfishness.

Patience is an act of the will to say, Micah, you are so important to me, my little son. That, you know what, you put your shoes in.

I will sit here and I will help you. And if it takes minutes, if it takes hours, that is more worthwhile than me being selfish. Patience is an act.

[7 : 59] It is not just who we are. Habakkuk puts on patience. It is an act of the will. He wants to know God's answer right away. But he is putting God's timing before his own.

This is what Habakkuk is doing. He's waiting. He is watching with persistence. He has full confidence that God is going to answer his prayer. It's just a matter of having patience and waiting on God.

Let's not continue to say that we are either people who have patience or don't have patience. But let us be people who choose to put on patience. When we put on and do patience, then we will become people who are patient.

Using our time to love others and love God waiting on him. Because patience is the opposite of pride. Ecclesiastes 7 says, The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Patience comes from a place of humility. Where we put ourselves under someone else. Patience with God is actively saying, God, you are God.

[9 : 15] You are sovereign. And things happen in your time and not mine. So let me encourage you to ask yourself, how do you need to be patient today?

What area do you need to choose to put on patience? Is it with your family? Is it with your kids? Is it trying to get them out of the door when we were allowed to get out of the door?

Is it with co-workers? Is it being patient in this online frustrating world where we have Zoom meetings? And we need to require on people.

And we can't just ask them for things and everything takes longer. How do you need to be patient with God? Is it to choose his timing over yours?

We don't know how long Habakkuk was waiting for God to respond. But he did receive a response. Have a look again with me at Habakkuk chapter 2 from verse 2.

[10 : 20] 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 will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it. It will certainly come and will not delay. The Lord responds and it's a special one.

Habakkuk, get something to write it down. You might not remember it. You need to write it down. Write it down on a tablet so that it could be taken and someone could run with it.

And it's durable and it's not going to break. Write it down because this will take some time for it to come about.

Though it linger, wait for it. Habakkuk, you've waited for my response. But continue to wait.

Continue to have patience. Because God is working at his will.

[11:16] Verse 3. The revelation awaits an appointed time. It speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it.

Wait for it. It will certainly come and will not delay. Habakkuk had to wait for an answer from God. And God has answered. And now God says, have patience.

I am working. Continue to wait. And this emphasis on different timings reminds us of the gulf between our perspective of the world and God's perspective of the world.

Habakkuk, just like us today, wants God to act immediately. Act right now. Fix this problem. But God is God and we are not. And his timings are his own.

And having God's perspective is really key to learning patience. The metaphor of climbing that watchtower is actually quite helpful for us.

[12:17] Climbing up high so that we can survey the scene around us from all angles. When we don't have patience, in our situation, it's really easy to lose patience.

When we don't have perspective, it can be easy to lose patience. I see my kids do this. Most days. It's like there's a dinner bell that goes off about half an hour before dinner.

And they all of a sudden start coming into the kitchen looking for whatever scrap of food they can find. Diving their hand under the chopping knife as dinner's being prepared.

Because as they say every day, half an hour before dinner, I am starving. There will never be any more food. I need food right now. I wonder if that's like you.

I wonder if that's like your kids or you know someone that's like that. They are convinced that there will never be food again unless they eat right now. And they're not happy being told, dinner's half an hour away.

[13:17] Just go and wait. But to hear that perspective, something delicious is being prepared. Don't spoil your dinner by having chips or whatever it is.

Don't spoil it. Don't ruin it now because something good is coming. They need to get that patience. They need to get that perspective so they can have patience.

It takes hard work, just like climbing that watchtower would have been, to stop and get perspective. You know, I'll be hungry for half an hour.

That's a long time for a child. I need to get that perspective so that I can grow in patience. But it is incredibly rewarding when we do. How much more is there to gain when we have the perspective of God himself?

God was working in Habakkuk's time even though Habakkuk couldn't yet see it. And when we do this, it is actively trusting in God.

[14:18] Because in this moment of impatience with God, the only thing that can sink us is sin. Disbelieving that God is working.

Because life is hard. But the only thing that destroys us is sin. And sin has been defeated by Jesus on the cross. We have a God who has been incredibly patient with us.

And he has patiently guided us to this very moment. To see that although this world is passing away, God has something far better in store for us. Just like Jesus was raised, he promises that we too will be raised.

And for us today, we might need to stop. We might need to go and climb that watchtower.

Metaphorically, if not literally, go and climb a watchtower. To get perspective on what God is doing in our lives in this season.

We need God's perspective on our lives in this season. Steve talked about this last week. That the violence used here by the Babylonians against Judah.

[15:27] It spread God's people. And God used that years later. So that when Jesus died and rose. The people who had been following God were dispersed.

And so when the message of Jesus' resurrection went out. There were people ready and primed to hear and to believe. There is no way that Habakkuk could have seen all of this.

But trying to climb that watchtower. Trying to gain God's perspective. Grows our trust in God. And that he is the one who has good plans for us.

I'm sure that there have been many unintended benefits of this season of isolation. For me personally, I'm getting to know my neighbours.

But another unintended benefit of this season has been that there are hundreds of people tuning in to our church's live stream through YouTube. This might be you yourself.

[16:28] You might be joining us as a church for the first time. And if that's you, it is great to have you with us. We would love to connect with you. Fill out that form that is on our website.

You can go to stpauls.org.au. There is a website so we can connect with you. We would love to get to know you. There has been an unintended benefit of many people hearing God's word.

And we could not have planned for that. But gaining God's perspective. Maybe, I wonder, is God using this season to spread his word?

To see many people come to know and love him? Is it possible that God is using this season to grow our patience and our trust in him?

That even though we can't see what his plan is right now, that we need to stop and gain God's perspective. And remember that God is working in our lives.

[17:32] So when we are in a season of difficulty and pain, when patience is really hard, let me encourage you to do everything you can to gain perspective.

Ask God, God, what are you doing in this time? How are you intending to grow me? Ask a friend, friend, what is God doing in your life?

What do you think God could be doing in my life in this difficult season? We come to the final verse of this short passage for us today. Verse 4.

Here God is comparing two types of people.

The one who is upright before God and the one who is puffed up like an enemy aggressor. I really love this term puffed up. It's this picture of someone whose view of themselves is inflated.

[18:40] It's like we say, you know, they're full of hot air. It's like they're a balloon that is filled up too high and they're ready for the slightest prick to burst. They are swollen with pride and self-arrogance.

On view here is the Babylonian army who is self-righteous, seeking their own ends, leading to pride and sinful acts and ultimately their death.

But it's not stated, but it's implied that the righteous will live, but the puffed up they will not. On view here is at least the Babylonian army, but also anyone who is puffed up and thinks too highly of themselves and their own opinion before God.

God is holding out to Judah that they can have life even though there is an army coming towards them. God will vindicate his people by giving them life, life to those who have faith, who are trusting in God.

The righteous don't think of themselves arrogantly, but instead they look to God. They place their faith in God. Patience with God is our faith in action.

[20:05] It is saying, God, your timing is better than mine. It shows humility. The person admits that they need help and they need what God can offer and can't do it on their own.

And the view of faith here is waiting in humility. Waiting on God is faith. This is what faith does. It takes someone at their word.

And God has made promises to Habakkuk that he will come. And Habakkuk is to respond with patience. Now the second part of verse 4 may have sounded familiar.

The righteous will live by faith. It is one of the most important verses for Paul in his writing. He uses it in his letter to the Galatians and to the Romans.

And in Romans 1 he says, For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith. From first to last, just as it is written, The righteous will live by faith.

[21:14] We live by faith. Faith is that God has made promises to us. And faith is patiently waiting on God's promises. Pastor John Piper sums this up really nicely in a quote that you'll see on the screen.

It reads, The strength of patience hangs on our capacity to believe that God is up to something good for us.

In all our delays and detours. What a season of delay and detour that we are in right now. Delayed work.

Delayed schooling. Delayed holidays and gatherings. Birthday parties and anniversaries. Even Mother's Day is not quite as we would hope it to be.

But patience now is faith in God. It says, God, you are in control. Help me to have your perspective on this season.

[22 : 26] To know what you are doing in the world for your glory. In Chatswood. And in my life. God, give me the perspective to remember that you have done all that is necessary for me in Jesus.

That he has died and he has been raised and he has taken my guilt and my shame. And you have promised that just as you raised him, you will raise me as well.

And that right now we wait for him to come back. Help me to choose patience that you are working out something good for me every day. Have patience to love people and that I would give them my time.

To love you more than myself. That I would wait on your timing. Patience with others makes us better friends.

It makes us better siblings. It makes us better children and parents. It is a chance to value people. And not just what they do. God has shown his immense patience with us.

[23 : 34] That even though we continue to sin. He continues to show us his mercy and his love. And that all of our sin has been paid for by Jesus on the cross.

Showing how much he values us. When we act with patience. We act with God's perspective. Knowing all that God has done in Christ.

And that he will continue to act for the good of those who love him. When we act with patience. Not only does it grow our patience with others. But we get to understand more of the heart of God himself.

I saw this morning that the isolation rules are going to be extended a little bit more on Friday. We'll be able to meet with more people in our homes.

And many of us are champing at the bit like a race horse to bolt out of isolation. But don't miss this chance to grow in patience with God.

[24 : 39] To stop and climb the tower of perspective on your life and on God's kingdom. To exercise your faith in God's promises. May we all be people who grow in patience and live by faith.

Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, thank you for your immense love for us shown in your patience. That you have acted.

That you have acted to show your patience. That you continually allow us to sin. And you don't wipe us out where we stand.

But that you have paid for our sin. In the death and resurrection of your son. Father, help us to be like you. To choose to love you and to love other people by putting on patience.

Lord, help us to grow in perspective of all you are doing in your world. Lord, we are so short-sighted.

[25 : 46] And it is easy for us to get caught up in our day-to-day issues. But Lord, help us to stop. And to consider what you are doing in this season. So that we would grow in patience.

And love for you. Centered on what you have done. Through your son for us. Amen. Amen.