

Living with Pride

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[0 : 00] Well, hello all and welcome. Let me add my welcome to the others you've received this morning. If I've not met you before, my name is Steve Jeffrey. I'm the senior pastor here at St. Paul's and I'm so glad you tuned in for us today. As you have just seen, we're up to Habakkuk chapter 2.

If you haven't got a Bible there, if you'd like to open it up, grab it, iPad, whatever it might be. Also, if you go to St. Paul's app, you will also find the outline for today's sermon there.

We're up to Habakkuk chapter 2. Now, if some of you may be aware of this, Malcolm Naden was the most wanted person in New South Wales up until his capture and arrest a little over about eight years ago now. He was on the run from June 2005 until March 2012 when he was finally captured in the middle of the night in this little cabin, remote cabin west of the little town of Gloucester.

He was, in fact, a source of embarrassment to law enforcement agencies in our state as he eluded them and escaped capture for about seven years. So imagine after their frustration of trying to catch him and not being able to catch him, they decided that the best way to finally deal with their biggest issue of securing the capture of Malcolm Naden and bringing him to justice was instead to call in the military and to issue nuclear strikes everywhere from Newcastle to Armidale and, you know, 500 kilometers and I just wipe out the whole section of the state in the attempt to get him.

Now, that particular strategy has its strengths. You finally get the guy who's eluded you on so many occasions. You get rid of a whole bunch of feral animals and potentially a few illegal crops in there hiding away in the bush. Of course, the major negative which virtually the whole world would have a problem with is that you wipe out everyone and everything in that space as well. Now, as we launch into the book of Habakkuk, and if you've been with us in the last couple of weeks, you probably would have seen this already. It appears on the surface that that is God's solution to the evil and the carnage and the sin in this little book of the Bible called Habakkuk. If you've just joined us, we're partway through it already, and it's a pretty straightforward book. It's actually pretty interesting and highly practical, even if a little confusing at times. It is about how to face times, times of evil and difficulty. They might be evil times, difficult times on an international scale or a national scale, or they might even be deeply personal times of evil and hardship, when everything in life comes crashing down for us. This little book prepares us for the times when it comes, as it did for the man Habakkuk. Now, Habakkuk states his main issue with God's solution to the evil of his own people Israel by sending in the schoolyard bullies of that time, the Babylonian empire. And he says this in chapter 1 verse 13,

[3 : 43] Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

See, Habakkuk's question is this, God, how can you possibly use the more wicked Babylonians to deal with the less wicked Israelites? How can you do that? And his question is, what about the Babylonians?

Are they just going to get away with their evil? I mean, you're going to deal with Israel's evil. What about the Babylonians evil? Will they get punished as well? That's where we were left at the end of last week. And so what we're launching into now is God's answer to Habakkuk's second and big complaint.

So if you've got the St. Paul's app open, you'll see that I've got three main points there. And God judges all sin and evil, the source of all sin and evil, and thirdly, God's solution to our sin and evil.

So firstly, Habakkuk chapter 2, God judges all sin and evil. Now, as you launch into Habakkuk chapter 2, which was just read out to us, you will notice that Babylon is mocked there in five separate statements of woes. You can see it as you read through five separate woes.

Even though Babylon at in that time looked invincible to Habakkuk and to everyone who could see they looked invincible. Even Babylon was brought down. Even Babylon was brought to an end in

539 BC.

[5 : 30] And so each of these five woes, or you know, you might want to call them curses, it details the crimes perpetrated by Babylon and God's response to those. And those crimes of Babylon just have such, they resonate with much of what we see still around this world.

The first woe is in verses 6 to 8 of chapter 2. And it's directed towards those who acquire goods dishonestly. What happens to those who are acquiring their goods dishonestly? The Bible turns the table on them. The victims become the victors. So notice verse 8 particularly. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. So what God does here is he relates to Habakkuk the basic principle of justice. The basic principle of justice. And it is the punishment should fit the crime. The punishment should fit the crime. And you see the same pattern right through these five woes.

Verses 9 to 11. We have the plotter who exploits for personal gain or national or family or even family dynasty glory. This is about the pursuit of glory. What's the punishment for those who do everything in order to advance their glory, to make their name great, that people would praise them?

Verse 10. Shame instead of glory. The person who lives to make their name great, their name will become less. Nothing. Verses 12 and 13. We have the promoter of violence. The foundation of Babylon society was in fact bloodshed, the blood of their enemies. And their punishment is in verse 13. Has not the Lord almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire? They were burning, sorry, they were building an empire that would be merely fuel for the fire of God's judgment.

James 5. James 5. James chapter 5 verse 5 in the New Testament speaks of rich oppressors who have fattened themselves for the day of slaughter. That's all they've achieved, their own demise.

[8 : 28] verse 15. Verse 15. We have the immoral. They glorified themselves by shaming their enemies. And what it says is that they will receive shame instead of glory. The last woe is in verses 18 to 20 and it refers to the idolater.

Idolatry in the Bible is when we worship something less than ourselves and something that is far less than God.

That's idolatry. Worshipping something that is less than ourselves and far less than God. It is speechless. It is powerless. It is therefore useless.

And these Babylonians created idols to give them wisdom and guidance. Their punishment is silence and no help at all. So what we see in these five woes is that the punishment fits the crime. And it's by this principle that both Israel and Babylon will be judged. That's God's message to Habakkuk.

[9 : 49] God is committed to justice. The wicked will not get away with their evil. God will hold all people accountable for their actions and punish them accordingly. That's the good news because there's something in each one of us that says we want justice to be done.

So secondly, what is the source of all this evil and sin and carnage? What's the core issue here for the Babylonians? What's the source of their evil behavior?

And likewise, the Israelites as well. And you and me. For the Babylonians, it's too easy to read about these guys and just go, oh, they're just such awful people. They are brutal people.

They deserve what they got in 539 BC. I would never do that sort of stuff. We're modern people. We don't believe in that sort of thing. That is until we look at verse 4 and verse 18.

And we touched on it briefly last week. It goes on in verse 5 to say he, this is referring to Babylon, So at the very center of the nation of Babylon, and likewise Israel and you and me, is this pride, arrogance, an arrogant emptiness almost.

[11 : 43] It says here at Babylon, they gather nations to themselves. They conquer and they kill for their own glory in attempt to build themselves up and to puff themselves up.

They are using people to promote their own glory. And in verse 16 it says they seek to clothe themselves in glory. You see, at the heart of the evil Babylonian culture, at the heart of every culture, at the heart of every life, is an arrogance and a pride that leads to a life of pursuing personal glory, personal gain, making the world revolve around me.

Now, many of us don't immediately see ourselves in that. Much easier to identify it in other people. Much easier when we see pride in other people.

A few would, I think, surpass the boxing legend Muhammad Ali in self-promotion and self-glory. You go on YouTube and you can see this everywhere.

And for those who are around long enough to hear him speak, who have been around a while and have heard him speak, would see that clearly. One person said of Muhammad Ali that he thought that the sun came up every morning just to hear him crow.

[13:08] Even the rising of the sun was about him. He roared on and on about how he was the greatest. He bragged about his good looks. He declared that nothing was impossible for him.

Here's just a couple of more of his more memorable quotes, if you like. I'm young. I'm handsome. I'm fast. I cannot possibly be beaten.

He also said, it's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am. And this one, bragging is when a person says something and they can't do it.

I do everything that I say I'm going to do. And this one, top it all off. I'm the most recognized and loved man that ever lived.

Because there was no satellites when Jesus and Moses were around. So people far away in the villages didn't know about them.

[14:16] That's a pretty bold statement. You see, pride is easy to see when you've got that sort of thing on display.

It's not as easy to see our own hearts. And the reason the Babylonians did what they did and why we do what we do, even if it is, frankly, like me today, preaching, us gathering together, singing, moving ahead in our careers, creating artworks, whatever it is, it's because we are to a great degree insecure and trying to cover ourselves with honor and glory, trying to fill that aching void that I need to be something.

Now, I, from a young age, grew up being affirmed for my practical skills. As a child, I would constantly be using my dad's tools and inevitably losing them in some way.

I would pull lawnmowers apart. Wasn't always so skilled in putting them back together, but would certainly pull them apart. I regularly modified and fixed my first car and would probably take a certain sense of pride.

It would be an element of embarrassment for me if I had to take it to a mechanic to get it fixed. I figured I could do it myself. Now, when I was first married a number of years ago, my wife, Natalie, was unaware at my, if you like, my skill set in this particular area.

[15:59] And at one particular point, the very early days of our marriage, we had this old car, little old car, little bomb car, wasn't worth much. But this little car, the clutch went on it, broke on it, and so I needed to replace it.

And I decided that I was going to do it myself. I'd done this sort of thing on a number of occasions in the past, thought it was pretty straightforward. And I was under the car, preparing to pull the clutch out of the car, all jacked up, ready to go.

And my dear wife appeared in the door of the garage and said to me, do you know what you're doing? Oh, I mean, talk about a knife to the ego at that point.

The challenge there to my ego, my sense of worth, my sense of manhood, my pride, my glory. I was very unhappy about it being questioned, even if it was innocently questioned in that moment.

And so I got out from under the car, walked inside and proceeded to tell her, and needed to tell her, in fact, how good I was at this sort of thing. I was doing it to save money and just simply because I can and let me show you.

[17:12] And before the end of the day, this car is going to be working, going to be driving again, and we'll show you how good I am at this sort of thing. So I packed up my bruised ego, went back under the car to prove to her that I knew exactly what I was doing, and she needed to recognise that in me.

I envisaged taking her for a drive later in the day to demonstrate properly what a working clutch looks like and my mechanical prowess at the same time. But in my distraction and frustration in that moment, I made the mistake of undoing the wrong set of bolts.

And when I pulled the clutch out, what I did was I, in fact, dropped all the ball bearings out of the whole entire gearbox, which come dropping on me and all over the floor.

Now, as skilled as I thought that I was, that's something I can't fix. I do not have the know-how to fix that. It would require a gearbox specialist to put that entire thing back together.

And it would cost me more than the value of the car. And so by the end of the day, instead of taking my wife for a drive, showing her how good I was as a mechanic, instead the car was being put on the back of a wrecker truck taken to the wreckers.

[18 : 31] The core issue in that moment was my pride. That pride that resulted in sinful, evil behaviour, that resulted in me not treating my wife in the way that I should treat her.

And pride is a refusal for me as a human being, this is the core issue, for me as a human being not allowing God to be God.

It's a grab at God's status for his glory and trying to keep it for myself. It's independence from him. It's a reliance upon myself and my own resources. And according to the Bible, this is the cosmic, delusional fantasy of all fantasies.

And it leaves us restless. It leaves us empty at our centres. We live lives of fear and anxiety and bluff.

[19 : 41] We look everywhere for people to puff up our shaky egos. It's the foundation of sin, the source of all evil in the world.

And so I have to ask you, wherever you are right now, can you see that in yourself at all? If you don't, can I just keep tuning in, keep coming to church, read the Gospels.

So what we have here is we have pride is at one end of the passage. And interestingly enough, at the end of the passage, we have idolatry in verse 18.

When you live independently of God, there is never a vacuum. Something else is worshipped instead.

Something else is put in God's place to give you a sense of identity and worth. Every culture and life that is not based on the glory of God is based on an idol of some description, an inordinate desire, a replacement.

[21 : 01] And it will take something good and it will raise it to the ultimate. That's what idolatry is. It takes a good gift from God and raises it to the status in our lives where it becomes the ultimate thing.

And we do it because of pride. For instance, if you enjoy running and running fast is the way that you feel about yourself and it's the way that you pick up your fragile ego, then running becomes the ultimate for you.

But it will never satisfy. It'll run your body into the ground. Every one of us takes a good thing and makes it an ultimate thing.

And we look to that thing to be God for us, to give us what only God can give us. It creates a seed of destruction that will never be satisfied.

There is never any rest. Pride is in the heart of every human being and it's the source of every evil. And so we're no different than the Babylonians.

[22 : 16] Our outcomes and our practices might be different, but at the core we're the same and therefore we deserve God's punishment just as they did.

So what's God's solution then? Is it just a nuclear strike? What's his solution to our sin and our evil? Habakkuk knew that everybody in the world was a sinner.

Everyone had pride at the heart. He also knew that the holiness of God, the perfection of God, meant that he cannot ignore it.

He can't just turn a blind eye to it. In the same way, we don't turn a blind eye to it. Habakkuk 2, verse 4 teaches that the only thing that can save us is faith.

So faith in what? Faith in God's mercy. And that's in fact what he prays in chapter 3, which is for next week.

[23 : 18] We won't jump into that right now. And yet, Habakkuk could not see ahead far enough to how God is going to do that.

He could not see into the future of how God was going to preserve both his holy hatred for sin and his justice, as well as his mercy and his forgiveness for the sinner.

How is God going to hold both of those things together? You see, sin, like a debt, requires a penalty to be paid, either by you or by me.

You come along and steal my iPhone, either you have to pay me back for that, or I have to absorb the cost of that.

Someone has to pay a debt. Someone has to carry the responsibility of cost. And sin, like a debt, always requires a penalty to be paid.

[24 : 19] There's always a cost that needs to be paid. And the only way for God, the only way that he can pardon us and not judge us is by him absorbing the payment.

This is how the New Testament puts it. Hebrews chapter 9, verse 26 says this. This is talking about Jesus. He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Just as people are destined to die once because of their sin and after that to face judgment because of their sin, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sin of many.

Jesus, the innocent one, the only innocent one, does away with our sin by willingly taking it upon himself.

Only an innocent one can suffer for the sake of others. Jesus turns God's anger away from us by allowing it to fall on him.

[25 : 49] Our destiny is to face the judgment of God to get from him what we deserve. Instead, what we see the second half of verse 28 in Hebrews chapter 9 is he will appear a second time.

Talking about Jesus. Not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. The future is salvation instead of judgment.

There are those who are waiting for Jesus by faith and by implication there are those who are not. The destiny of the proud and the idolatrous like the Babylonians here in Habakkuk 2 is spelled out for us in the very next chapter of Hebrews.

Hebrews chapter 10 verse 26 if we deliberately keep on sinning after we receive the knowledge of truth no sacrifice for sins is left but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God the work of Jesus underfoot who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them and who has insulted the Spirit of grace.

[27 : 23] For we know him who said it is mine to avenge I will repay and again the Lord will judge his people it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

On that day it will appear clearly to all how utterly naive utterly naive it was for billions of people millions billions of people potentially to live their lives as if the God who made this world for his glory would never hold them or call them to account for how little he has meant for them as they have pursued glory for themselves.

This squares with all the message of the Bible and also deep down in our hearts where we have a desire for justice to be done.

And so I urge you urge you for everyone who's listening to me on this I urge you are you ready to take your stand in the divine courtroom and hear the judge pass an internal sentence on you?

Are you ready for that? There will only be two verdicts in that day and one or the other of them will be passed on every single person who has ever walked the face of this earth either condemned or justified made right in God's eyes through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

[29 : 14] For those who are by faith waiting for Jesus there is hope in these verses that shape our waiting. If you understand these two hopes even in the darkness you can face absolutely anything this world throws at you.

The hope of verse 20 is that in all the dark times God is sovereign. It says the Lord is in his holy temple let all the earth be silent before him.

This God is not done. He is not lifeless. He is not a lifeless idol. He does not make false promises that leave us empty.

This God rules. He is saying that no matter how bad things get this God is in control.

He is not gone. Even when we totally screw up our lives he can turn that around. Bad things will happen but God is in it.

[30 : 21] He's controlling it. Bringing it about for his good purposes and he never leaves his throne. Even in seasons like this where this world is getting a sense at the moment that it is not out of control that should be sending signals deep into our hearts to each one of us to realize we are not in control but he is.

The second part of the verse in verse 20 is a call for the Babylonians for Judah for us to submit ourselves to this God and his goodness not just in the good times but in the times that we don't understand and to wait upon him.

The ultimate hope is in verse 14 for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

The day will come when all evil is removed. All the carnage will come to an end. Sin gone for and only God's kingdom will remain.

All rival kingdoms such as the Babylonians in their day will be done away with. This will be finally be fulfilled when Jesus returns.

[31 : 54] His is the only glory that will last forever. This verse tells us that someday we will soak in it because of Jesus.

His glory will become ours as he glorifies us those who trust in him. Jesus took our shame so that when we put our trust in him God clothes us with glory and honor.

No more shame. We seek our own honor and therefore we deserve shame. and Jesus took our shame so that we could receive his glory and honor.

And it's the only glory it's the only honor that can ultimately satisfy the longings of our hearts.

Something a glory and honor that is stable that is secure that is unchangeable in a changing world.

You see the answer of Christianity is it's the beauty and the magnificence of God that matters the most.

[33 : 09] The honor of God the applause of God the love of God the applause and the love of the praise worthy is what fills up our hearts.

The glory of God the applause of God the honor of God it's the only glory and honor that lasts forever and gives us rest for our souls in a turbulent world.

And so next week we will see how Habakkuk's humbling trust in God shapes him for the onslaught of a difficult world.

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