

HABAKKUK Waiting On God

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Date: 10 June 2018

Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] waiting for food at a restaurant, waiting to cross at the lights. I've been living here in Chatswood for almost two months, and I'm sick of waiting in traffic, waiting for a husband or wife to get ready, no elbowing, waiting for kids to do anything.

Waiting makes us impatient, makes us angry. We've been conditioned through fast food and the instant gratification of the internet to get what we want and get it now.

And if we don't get it, well, we should complain. What do you mean I have to wait? You know, don't you know who I am? I don't care that these three people paid before I ordered.

I want my coffee right now. It's not just a personal shift, but it's also a cultural one too. We as a society have lost the ability to wait.

You only have to go back a generation, and people would do things like send letters to each other and then wait to get a letter. Does anybody remember that? I remember waiting for letters.

[1 : 10] It's a little bit less exciting, you know, checking the mail these days. It's just bills and packages. You would wait in line at the bank to get cash out, and you would listen to the radio or to the wireless in the hopes of hearing your favorite song.

I do remember back in the day having a cassette tape and waiting to hear my favorite song, and then I'd hit record on it. Some young people would have no idea what that looks like. But what is the impact of our impatience on our relationship with God?

Do we expect that God should just jump at our prayers and deliver what we want in 30 minutes or less, or we get a refund? We don't want to endure a pain or hardship.

We cry out, God, why am I suffering? Why am I enduring loss? Why have I lost this family member? Why am I waiting to get a job?

Why don't I have children yet? Why aren't you providing for me? Why are there still problems and struggles in my life? I think one thing we can do is we can get caught up just remembering part of who our God is.

[2 : 22] We remember that our God is loving and merciful, and we think that He should just obey our every command. And we can forget that our God is massive and powerful and sovereign, and He works at His good pleasure.

The truth is, waiting is hard. Waiting on God is one of the hardest parts of Christianity, and yet it's also one of the most important parts of Christianity.

Today we're continuing our series, Reasonable Faith in Unreasonable Times, and we're looking at the book of Habakkuk. Last week we looked at chapter 1, and we saw that Habakkuk was crying out because of all the injustice that he saw in Judah.

Habakkuk cried out asking God, why aren't you doing anything? And God replied, I am. I am going to bring justice. I'm going to bring the biggest superpower, Babylon, and they're going to judge Judah.

And Habakkuk cried out, what? How can you bring those evil people to judge Judah? They're so much worse. And Habakkuk is trying to understand how a good and pure God could allow a sinful army to come and attack God's people.

[3 : 40] And this is where we find Habakkuk today. He has cried out to God, God has answered him, and Habakkuk wasn't satisfied with that response, so Habakkuk's gone back with another question, and now we find him waiting on God.

Waiting for God. It is such a strange phrase. Just wait for God. Have you ever had someone say to you, just wait for God, just wait? Well, what does it mean for Habakkuk to wait for God?

And what does it mean for us as we cry out and wait for God? We need to come to our God in prayer for this, asking that he would teach our hearts, so I'm going to pray now.

Heavenly Father, as we look at your word this evening and we learn how to wait just like Habakkuk had to. Teach our hearts to have patience before you, Lord.

Amen. So please have a look at me, with me at Habakkuk chapter one. It will be on the screen as we look at these four short verses. from chapter two, verse one.

[4 : 50] I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts. I will look to see what he will say to me and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Habakkuk has said his peace, he's questioned God, he has expressed his concern, and now he is going to wait.

He takes his concern to God and he waits. And what does waiting look like? Well, it's active. It's not passive. He's actively looking for God's response and he's going to persist as he waits.

And Habakkuk paints this picture of waiting on God persistently like a century in a watchtower. Imagine you've got a city, it's walled in, and you've got towers where you can watch over where the enemy comes.

That's what the ramparts are, the towers where the centuries would stand. And the job of the century is to be on the lookout, be watching persistently. You have to stay there your whole shift.

It's not a job you can say, I'm a little bit bored. Maybe I'll have a nap. Maybe I'll duck down to the castle cafe for a skim milk latte. It's not that kind of job.

[6 : 01] If he takes his eyes off the target, even for a minute, he could miss seeing the approach of an enemy and the defenses might not be ready in time.

Being a century on a tower requires immense persistence. This is what Habakkuk is doing. He is waiting and watching for God's answer with persistence.

Now Habakkuk wasn't really on the walls, but this verse creates the idea that he was determined and persistent, waiting for God's response. And he has full confidence that God would answer his prayer.

He's just going to keep waiting until God answers him. Not only is he watching for God, he is determined not to miss God's response when it does come. And when God does speak, he's not going to be too busy with life.

He's not going to be distracted doing other things. He's not like a person who asks God for something and then forgets that they've asked, so that when God does provide or answer, they miss it.

[7 : 04] He is watching. He is persistent. His eyes are on God. His eyes are on the prize. Waiting can be passive, like you're just in a shop waiting for a coffee.

But here, waiting on God is active. It's persistent waiting for God. So for us, waiting on God means to keep waiting.

And so we shouldn't despair when God doesn't answer as quickly as we would like. It's an encouragement not to throw the towel in when Christianity and our Christian walk isn't as it should be.

I think far too often we can rebel against God's lack of response. Maybe it goes something like this. I've prayed to God and God hasn't answered me as quickly as I like.

And so I feel self-pity. Woe is me. God doesn't talk to me. And so I'm going to stop going to church as much as I used to. Maybe I'll stop reading my Bible, stop praying to Him.

[8 : 06] Because what's the point of listening and talking to God if He's not going to talk to me? And maybe I stop going to Bible study, community group. Maybe we distance ourselves from God.

But also from the way He's going to talk to us through His Word and through people. Now imagine you're that sentry on the tower. You've been sitting on that watchtower for your whole career, 12 hours a day, every day of the week.

And you've never seen anything. And so you finally think, I've had enough. That's it. I'm going to quit. I'm going to go down. And so you climb down the tower.

You go and hide somewhere. It doesn't take too long. Eventually the military comes and drags you out of whatever hole you've been hiding in. And you get court-martialed, dragged before a judge, a military judge.

And the judge says, why did you leave your post? And you respond, well, I just didn't want to wait anymore.

[9 : 06] It was too hard to keep on waiting. Do you think the judge would be okay with that? No, I don't think so either. For us, it's the same with God.

We need to continue to be persistent. Waiting for God is active. And Habakkuk, he is persistent as he looks and waits for God to answer.

He is like that sentry in the watchtower. Waiting for God to respond, we must persist, even when it's hard. Now, we don't know how long it was that Habakkuk was waiting, but we do know that God answered him.

He did receive God's answer. Have a look at 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 will not prove false. Though it lingers, wait for it. It will certainly come and will not delay.

[10 : 14] The Lord's answer is a special one. Habakkuk is to write it down. Habakkuk might not remember it. He might not remember everything, but everyone needs to know this message. It's an important one.

So write it down on tablets. I can't help but think of the, you know, the movies with the Ten Commandments in it, these big stone tablets. It's that kind of idea. Clay tablets. Write it down so a herald could carry it and run out so that you could leave it somewhere and people could see it and read it.

Now, our minds can do funny things with messages and God didn't want to leave Habakkuk any room for error. He wanted this message to be preserved with accuracy.

So write it down. Write it down because there was going to be a period of waiting for God after this. Verse 3, Habakkuk had to wait for God to answer.

And now that God has answered, God says, wait. I am bringing justice and I am working, but you are going to have to wait.

[11 : 32] You must have patience. It is close, but it might seem far off for humans, but it will come without delay.

There's an emphasis here on the different timings and there's a difference in our perception. God perceives time very differently to us. For God, 80 years goes in the blink of an eye, but for us, it is a lifetime.

Habakkuk, just like us, wanted God to act and to act immediately. But God is God and his timings are his own. And so Habakkuk had to wait with persistence and now he waits with patience.

Are you patient? Would the person sitting next to you describe you as patient? You've got 15 seconds. Ask them. No, no, no, don't, don't, don't. I'm just joking. Maybe you say, oh, look, patience, that's not my virtue.

I've got other virtues. I'm not one of those patient people. I don't deal well with that. And you just laugh it off, maybe like you're doing right now. Patience is the opposite of pride.

[12 : 44] From Ecclesiastes 7, it says, the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Patience comes from a place of humility, where we put someone else before ourself.

I have a three-year-old daughter, Tamara, and patience can look like putting her conversation above what I need to say to her. And so she will go on and on and talk about leaves and dolls, probably as Evie would know from Kids Church.

And so patience with my daughter looks like saying, what you have to say is valuable and so I'm going to listen to you. Patience before God is actively saying, God, you are sovereign and things happen in your time and not in my time.

The book of James chapter 1 says, the testing of your faith develops patience. Romans 5 says, suffering produces patience or perseverance.

And patience and perseverance develop character and character hope. When trouble, dark times and suffering hit, they are an opportunity to learn patience.

[13 : 58] They're an opportunity to learn how to wait on God. Imagine you're going out, you're going on holidays. Where would we like to go on holidays?

Does anybody want to pick a place? Somewhere you can drive to preferably. Sorry? Where are we going? I'm thinking Queensland because we're going to New Zealand.

I'm not sure about driving to New Zealand unless we've got some kind of fancy new car. Queensland? Queensland? Has anybody driven to Queensland before? Yes?

Okay. My family likes to go to Queensland. Let's say you've got the car packed. If there's kids in your family, if you are those kids you are packed in, you are looking forward to theme parks, sand and warm weather and you're excited.

The whole family is excited about leaving cold, wet Sydney. Is anybody with me desiring this right now? Yes? Okay. I've got you. Good. And you drive out and you hit traffic.

[14 : 58] Not just a little bit of traffic. This is Chatswood on a Friday afternoon in the middle of a storm with lanes blocked on both sides of the Pacific Highway type traffic. One of two things will happen.

Firstly, maybe you feel yourself starting to get just a little bit cranky. It's like getting hot under the car, just agitated. You start to seethe.

This is taking too long. What turns out, what was just a minor inconvenience all of a sudden builds to four hours in the car. You haven't even left the suburb yet. You're snapping at the kids or your partner in the car.

Everyone needs to go to the toilet but nobody can. The people in the car next to you are there to blame and you get angry and even when you finally get moving, you're so angry that the whole holiday is ruined.

That's option one. Maybe you can imagine that. Option two, a little bit different. You get in traffic. Instead of getting angry, you acknowledge that it's not as it should be.

[16 : 02] And instead of getting angry, you wait patiently. You go through every single game in the car you know. And when you finally get moving, the family's okay.

Maybe just one or two little cries out. That's it. But you've learnt patience and you've grown. What do we do when suffering and bad things and troubles hit?

Do we thrash around? Do we get angry? Do we blame everyone else, including God? Or do we take the God-given opportunity to wait and to learn patience?

When trouble hits, when real difficulties, when strife, when suffering happens, it can either drive us to God to have a closer relationship, to pray and talk more to God, or it can drive us away from God.

Let it not be the latter for us, brothers and sisters. We come to the final verse of this short passage for us today. Verse 4. See, the enemy is puffed up.

[17 : 10] His desires are not upright, but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness. Here, God is comparing two different types of people. You've got the one who is upright before God and the one who is an enemy aggressor that is puffed up.

I really like this term, puffed up. It's this picture of someone who is so full of themselves. They're just inflated. They're like a balloon filled up too far.

These arrogant, puffed up people are ready to burst before God. They're swollen with pride and self-importance. On view here is the Babylonian army.

They are self-righteous. They are pursuing every sinful act. They're seeking their own ends and it just leads to pride and arrogance. And it also leads to death.

Verse 4 said, the righteous will live, but the enemy who is puffed up, well, the implication is that it doesn't lead to life.

[18 : 16] It leads to death. And so on view is the Babylonian army coming, but it's also anyone who is puffed up or arrogant before God. God is holding out his hand to Judah saying that you can have life even though an enemy is coming towards you.

God will vindicate his people. Life comes to those who have faith. The righteous don't think of themselves arrogantly, but instead look to God.

They've placed their faith in God. This is a faith that strips us of our arrogance and leads us bare and needy to God.

This is a, it's a picture of a contrast between those who think they don't need God and those who realize they need everything from God. You see, faith is humility.

It is the person who admits that they need God's help and what he has to offer and that they can't do it on their own. And the view of faith here is waiting in humility.

[19 : 26] Waiting on God is faith. This is what faith is, to take someone else's words, to take someone at their word.

Faith is to take someone else at their word. Now, is anyone engaged here? your daughter got engaged yesterday. Tom's engaged.

I actually, I think you're sitting in the same spot Rad's was this morning. So, Tom's engaged. Okay, let's use Tom as an example. Is that all right, Tom?

Wonderful, thank you. It's just a very short illustration. So, okay. So, Tom has made a promise to someone else. He's made a promise that he is going to wait for marriage.

When are you getting married? July. Very soon. Congratulations. He's made a promise that he's going to get married to Rad's in July. Now, while he has made that promise, he is waiting for that to come.

[20 : 23] While he's waiting, he doesn't go and marry someone else. Don't, don't go and marry someone else. You, he's made these promises and so Rad's can have faith in his promise that he won't go and marry someone else and that they'll get married in July.

Faith in practice looks like waiting and someone waiting means that they have faith. God has made promises to Habakkuk that he will come and Habakkuk is to respond by waiting.

Now, the second part of verse 4 may have sounded familiar. The righteous will live by faith. The righteous person will live by his faithfulness. Now, this is one of the most important verses in the New Testament.

It's one of Paul's most important phrases. He quotes this in Galatians and in the book of Romans. Let me read from Romans 1. It 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. We live by faith.

[21 : 41] God has made promises to us and faith is waiting on those promises. Just a couple of God's promises. God has promised that there is only life in Jesus.

God has promised that he will raise us from the dead and God has promised that the only way to God is through Jesus. He's the only way to God. So having faith means waiting on these promises.

We don't go running somewhere else to find our satisfaction in life. We can only get that in God. There's no need to try and extend our life as long as possible or even to fear death.

Because we will have life in the resurrection and we eagerly want to wait for our life with the Lord. That's what waiting on God's promises looks like.

Faith in God is characterized by waiting. And we've seen from these four verses that waiting is not passive, it's active. It's a waiting that is persistent, it's patient, and it is done with humility.

[22 : 50] As I've been writing and preparing this, I haven't been able to help but think of pregnancy. Is anyone pregnant here? No, no, no, tell me later, it's fine. What does a pregnant woman do as she waits for the baby?

You know, after the first 12 or so, maybe after the first trimester of vomiting and all those kinds of fun things, there's fun things to do like pick a name.

Is it going to be Harry or Megan? You have to sort out the baby's room, what colour is it going to be? There's so many decisions. Do we find out the gender of the baby? What cot do we get?

Do we get a pram with three wheels or four wheels? Who are going to be the godparents? We have to go to prenatal classes to figure out how to hold this baby. And then there's the labour itself.

And from what I've seen, that can be a long active waiting. Sometimes people cry, get this thing out of me. But sometimes it can take a long time.

[23 : 54] It's a long wait. So for us, our three children have made us wait a long time. Isaac was five days late. Tamara was three days late. And Micah, well, he was having a great time, so he was seven days late.

So Alyssa and I would do all kinds of things, like eat chilli, go for long walks, bounce on one of those fit balls to try and bring on labour. None of them worked. But waiting for a baby is an active exercise.

It takes patience and persistence. And as a father, plenty of humility because it's not about the father at all. The father's job is to support someone else. Can you imagine if someone found out that they were pregnant and they just decided, I'm going to wait for this baby.

And then they just, you know, put their feet up and they didn't do anything for, I don't know, 35 weeks. People would ask, you know, what clothes is this baby going to wear when it comes out? Oh, I don't know. What are you going to name it?

We'll figure it out later. Waiting on God does not mean that we just sit back and do nothing until he jumps out and speaks to us. Waiting on God is an active exercise.

[25 : 08] Waiting on God looks like persistence. It looks like patience and it looks like humility in trusting God's promises. We keep waiting even when it's hard because we have a God who is faithful.

When times are difficult and when we struggle, we take the opportunity to learn patience because patience is humility with God. And when we wait on God, we grow in our faith in him.

Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the opportunity and challenge it is to be reminded to wait on you.

Thank you for Habakkuk's encouragement. Help us to be persistent like him, to watch you like a century in a tower. Help us to be patient as we wait, as we put your timing before our own timing.

And Lord, we ask that we would remember your promises and we would keep our eyes fixed on those as we wait for the return of your Son.

[26 : 21] This we ask in his name. Amen.