

Wrestling with God - How long O Lord?

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[0 : 00] Amen. I don't know about you. I think God's already speaking. I think He's already speaking.

! If you're confused about what's happened to Revelation, that's my fault.

Revelation will be coming back in three weeks' time. It's been a delayed release, the last portion, because I read the rotor wrong. So it's my fault if you're enjoying Revelation and you're thinking, what are you going to Habakkuk for?

It's my fault. So Habakkuk 1, verse 1 to 11. The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received, Habakkuk's complaint, How long, Lord, must I call for help?

But you do not listen. Or cry out to you, violence, but you do not save. Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?

[1 : 15] Destruction and violence are before me. There's strife and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralysed and justice never prevails.

Because the wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. And then comes the Lord's answer. Look at the nations and watch.

And be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days. That you would not believe, even if you were told.

I'm raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people who sweep across the whole earth to sea dwellings not their own. They're feared and dreaded people. They're a law to themselves and promote their own honor.

Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong. Their horsemen come from afar.

[2 : 19] They fly like an eagle swooping to devour. They all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.

They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities. By building earthen ramps, they capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on.

Guilty people whose own strength is their God. Not sure if our Abacook had want that answer, but there you go.

So, we have a next slide, Josh, please. So, over this next two Sundays, we're going to be looking at Abacook.

Very succinctly, as John put it on the rotor that I can't read. Wrestling with God, waiting on God, and wanting more of God.

[3 : 20] So, it's a sort of www.com. Yeah, so make sure you come. Yeah, do you get that? I thought that was quite good myself, but there you go. Abacook, what does it mean?

It means one who embraces. Which is really appropriate as we see Abacook having to cling on to his faith as he wrestles with God.

Firstly, with his apparent lack of action. And then, with the way God responds and does things. A bit like us, really. A lot of ways, don't you think? To give us some context, Abacook is known as a minor prophet, like the other 11 from, in your Old Testament, Hosea, through to Malachi, in your Old Testament Christian Bible.

They're called minor, and I think this is very important, not because their records or the things that they teach us aren't important or are somehow trivial, but because their accounts are relatively short in length.

About 14 chapters or less, I think the biggest one is, something like that. In the Old Hebrew Bible, known as the Tanakh, 12 prophets were included in the one book, just the one book.

[4 : 33] And it was known as the 12. Abacook was the eighth part of those 12. Next slide, Josh. So, who was Abacook then? Well, we learn very little about him, really, from what's written in the book.

He's described as a prophet in the very first verse, and from the fact that he seems to need no real introduction at the start, it could be assumed that he was a well-known prophet in his day.

Certainly, a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zephaniah. From cross-referencing with other historical accounts, the mention of the Babylonians, or Chaldeans, as they're also known, suggests a date for this book around the late 7th century BC, maybe a short time after the godly king, Josiah's death in 609 BC.

It's all very wordy, isn't it, so far? But I think it's good to have a bit of context, don't you? I find quite interesting, actually. Josiah had earlier discovered the book of the law in the temple and instituted significant spiritual reforms in turning the people back to God in Judah.

So you can read about that in 2 Kings 22-23, but we're not going to go over it today. Basically, though, abolishing many of the idolatrous practices of both his father, Ammon, in 2 Kings 21, verse 20-22, and his grandfather before him in 2 Kings 21, verses 11-13.

[6 : 05] After Josiah's death, his godly reforms, if you see 2 Kings 23 for that, were quickly overturned by his successor, Jehoiakim, in Jeremiah 22, verse 13-19.

And from there on in, it seems it didn't take long for this to have a dramatic effect on that region. So going back to the passage then, what we're going to learn specifically from these first 11 verses.

Well, the first thing that I want to talk to you about, next slide, Josh, is it's not about us. It's about our relationship with him. It's not about us.

It wasn't about Habakkuk particularly. It's about our relationship with him. So that's what struck me really. It doesn't focus.

This book doesn't really focus on Habakkuk. It doesn't focus on his lineage, his qualifications for holiness, or any of that. It's described as a prophet, yes.

[7 : 10] But the focus of the book, and a lesson to learn from it, is it's not about who he is, or you are, or whoever.

It's about the communication between him and God. And that communication, if you read through it, comes through, is heartfelt. It's angry.

It's despairing. At least in these early verses. If you take the new King James Version of the Bible, each time we see these sort of prophecies coming out, or several times, in verse 1, instead of prophecy, it says, burden.

Which, bearing in mind what we've been praying this morning, I think really fits in. There's a burden to it. And the prophet saw. Yes, he did.

Maybe there is a little bit of conjecture about how he saw. Whether it was a visual thing, or whatever. But I don't think that's the big issue here. I think the big issue is the burden.

[8 : 20] And if you look up that word, it basically means a weighty, heavy, oracle of judgment. This term is often used to describe God's wrath against sin in proclamation.

So if you look at Isaiah 13, 1, it's the burden against Babylon. In 15, 1, in Isaiah. The burden against Moab.

17, 1. Against Egypt. The burden against Egypt. Egypt. Nahum. Against Nineveh. And so on. There are more encouraging aspects.

If you look in Zechariah 9, 1, about God declaring. But nevertheless, they still carry the full weight and authority of God behind them. Although here, Abacuc is seeing, more importantly, he's feeling the weight of this burden of sin and potential judgment on the people.

In verse 2 to 4. And that conversation with God is not easy. It's not an easy, off-the-cuff conversation. Oh God, are you doing God alright?

[9 : 33] Yeah? I'm alright, yeah? Thank you Lord. How long, Lord, must I call for help? How long do you want me to call for help?

But you don't listen. Or cry out to you, violence. But you do not save. Why do you make me look at injustice?

Why do you tolerate this wrongdoing? These are real questions in our hearts. Or should be real questions in our hearts. For today. Don't you think?

Destruction and violence are before me. Think about the world. Therefore, the law is paralyzed. And justice never prevails.

When the righteous try to stand up, the wicked hem in the righteous. So that justice is perverted. Next slide, Josh. So exactly what was Habakkuk seeing at this time?

[10:38] And I do apologize. My font is a little bit small again. I will learn one day to use the right size. But there we go. Habakkuk was seeing violence, iniquity, sin and sadness, it says in the Living Bible.

Trouble. Plundering. Oppression. Bribery. People who love to argue and to fight. Strife and contention, it says in the New King James Version.

The law is not enforced. It's powerless. And there's no justice given in the courts for the wicked. Far outnumber the righteous. Bribes and trickery prevail.

Habakkuk is feeling the burden of sin. Of, but also for, the people. And the world around him. He knew Judah's sin.

He knew there'd been a breach of the covenant. He knew what God required. And he thought, it's time for justice here. It's time for God to step in and quickly, probably, sort things out.

[11:51] If we look in Deuteronomy 28, there's a stark difference between living according to God's law, in verses 1 to 14, and not in 15 to 68.

And I've got to say, that's heavy reading, that 15 to 68. It's stark. And Habakkuk is really feeling, not only the pain of those around him, as he sees injustice, he's calling for help, he's crying out to God, in verse 2.

There's a real sense of desperation, and more than a little frustration, and impatience, and anger. But where does he direct that? Where does he direct it?

He directs it at God. That's the safest place. I'll tell you, if you're feeling angry about a situation, if you are struggling with a situation, this morning, take it to God.

Take it there. Now, you might think, be a little bit uncomfortable with that, but I'll try and explain a little bit what I mean by that. It's not that we disrespect God, but we know he's our Father.

[13:12] Better shut up, as I'm going to miss half the talk here. Many of Habakkuk's words, this is the next slide, or a lament, similar to the lamentations in the book of Psalms, where the poet lodges a complaint with God to draw attention to the suffering and injustice in the world, but then goes on to demand that God do something about it.

How long, Lord? And this phrase of impatience, of desperation, of being a bit perplexed with God, it's echoed, it's used in Psalm 13, 1, and that says, how long, Lord, will you forget me forever?

We'll be singing a song later on, actually, with this sort of phrase in it. How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts, and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

How long will my enemy triumph over me? And in Psalm 62, verse 3, how long will you assault me? And even in Jesus' own words on the cross in Matthew 27, which, verse 46, which John's already mentioned, strangely, well, not strangely at all, really. About three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, and this is Jesus talking to his father, remember?

[14:46] Eli, Eli, Lema sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That's Jesus talking. How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen.

Or cry out to violence. In the message version, how long should I cry, help, murder, but you do not save. Why do you make me look at injustice?

Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? In verse 4, the MacArthur Study Bible puts it, the law is chilled, it's numbed. It had no respect, was given no authority, as hands rendered useless, by cold.

The impact and effectiveness of the law was paralyzed by the corruption of Judah's leaders. All this brings to mind some questions that I'm asking myself currently.

[16:02] next slide, John. Am I willing to cry out to God and get passionate for answers?

Am I willing to do that? Where do I go when I look at the news and find the world is so far away from where I think God wants it to be?

what's my response? Do I just turn it off? Turn away from the situation and go and do something nice and distracting?

An episode of Frasier perhaps? Or the Gilded Age? Tell what our current binge watching is, can't you? But do we do that?

When we're met with all this that's going on before us? What's my response? Do I just turn it off? Or turn away from the situation and go and do something nice and distracting?

[17:15] Or do I just pass my own judgment on the people? Oh, isn't it terrible? Yes, it is. It's terrible what those people are up to. They're wicked people. Yes, they are. Backed up by the echoes of those around us just agreeing with us.

Next slide, Josh. More questions than answers of Johnny Nash when he's saying. What do I do when situations I'm crying out to God for don't seem to be changing?

What do I say? Oh, well, maybe God isn't that powerful after all. Or maybe he's indifferent to my needs. Or do I keep bringing these situations back to God?

Do I allow the situation to define who God is? And say, well, God can't be very good because all these things are happening, all these problems around the church are happening, so if God doesn't even look after those, then do I allow the situations to define God?

Or do I allow by praying, wrestling with God, say, God, I want you to define this situation. I want you to define this situation.

[18:38] You see, Habakkuk wasn't in any doubt about what God could do. That's not the issue. It wasn't, you know, just like us, we all say, don't we? Yeah, we believe God can heal people and stuff like that.

He was just perplexed as to why God wasn't doing it. He was like, come on, God, what are you waiting for here? You can see this, I can see it, you can see it, why are we not moving on this? I really think we need to be more like Habakkuk. Brave thing to say, perhaps, in that we allow ourselves to become more invested in what is happening around us.

Not so that we can just say to one another, isn't that terrible, isn't he or she shocking or what they've done or whatever, but be so invested that we continually, continually bring it to God and wrestle with God over it, not letting it go, not letting him go until he's blessed us.

We'll come back to that in a moment. We're the ones with the light, amen? We're the ones with the light.

[19:54] We can see things in society, in situations, in problems that this world is facing, what we're facing individually, we can see things that others on the outside can't see by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

in Ephesians 6 verse 12 and we know it well, for our struggle, and I'm going to say this to anybody who's struggling this morning, it's not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

If we don't bring it to God, who will? Who will? if we don't bring it to God, who will? And please, my heart is, I'm saying that to myself.

And it's not just about getting passionate about things, but asking God for wisdom in how to deal with those things. And that means a wrestle. It means getting involved with God.

getting older, God, and sort of really wrestling in the spiritual realm and praying continually, without ceasing, as Paul says. It means being honest and bringing our unflowery feelings of our hearts and sharing them fearlessly with a Father who loves us.

[21:34] do you what I'm saying? Bringing what is really in here, all the insecurity, not playing spiritual games and saying, Father, I know you're above all things, so I give this to you.

Yeah? Not just that, I'm talking about really getting older, God, I don't like this, it's horrible. What are you trying to do here?

What are you trying to do? What's going on? It's about bringing those unflowery feelings, as I said. Sometimes angry feelings. Nothing wrong with that. It lets us share our confusion and even our anger about the things that are bothering us, that are troubling us.

And then he, when the time is right, could be this side of glory or it may be the other side of glory, to be perfectly honest with you. Will reveal to us what he's going to do or what he's already done or won't do.

[22:47] He'll tell us. He'll show us. He'll bring revelation. My prayer is, I want God to make me more passionate for him, for his people.

To give me a higher expectation that he wants to move in the situations of this world. And to wrestle with him over the things I don't understand.

To be honest. How many times has a Christian, has somebody come up to you and said, I've got this problem. Why does God allow this to happen? And you go, well it says in Deuteronomy verse 28 and blah, blah, blah.

Let's be honest. Sometimes we don't know. We don't know. And we have to say, actually, and it's a bit embarrassing, I don't know. But I do know God will put it right one day.

I do know he will put it right one day. Next slide, Josh. So should we really wrestle with God? It seems a bit disrespectful, doesn't it, in some ways.

[23 : 56] Some people might struggle with the idea of fronting up to God. Come on, God. It's not like that really, is it? For a wrestle. But it's not without precedent in Scripture, is it?

If you look at Colossians 4 verse 12, it mentions this guy, Epaphras. Who is one of you, it says, and a servant of Jesus. And he sends his greetings.

That's nice. But he's always wrestling in prayer for you. That you may stand firm in all the will of God.

Mature and fully assured. He's doing it for you. And we should be doing it for other people. Yeah? And other people should be doing it for us. And that's the wonderful interlinking of the body of Christ, isn't it?

We've all got each other's backs covered. Because we're all praying for one another. And there's all these lovely links that bind us together with cords that cannot be broken, as the song says. Isn't that wonderful?

[24 : 52] It's a wonderful thing. And even Jacob himself wrestled with God, didn't he? You probably remember the story in verse 24 of Genesis 32. Jacob's terrified and is making preparations to meet Esau.

The brother who he cheated out of his birthright and has prayed to God to be saved from the hand of Esau. And he's really quite grovelly, really, if you read it. Verse 11. He then wrestles with an unknown man who turns out to be a little bit more than a normal man.

But they wrestle all night until daybreak. That's some marathon session if you're a wrestler.

Normally it's like three three-minute rounds, isn't it?

Something like that. I don't know. They wrestle all night. And this man could not shake Jacob off. He couldn't overcome him. Until he touched his hip.

Wrenched his hip, it says. And then Jacob says, I will not. Even then, Jacob says, I will not let you go unless you bless me. To which the man gave his blessing by renaming Jacob Israel.

[25 : 59] Which probably means he struggles with God. Do we struggle with God? No, do we really struggle with God?

When we struggle with God, do we struggle with God? Do you understand what I'm saying? Are we honest? Do we go back to him? Do we struggle with him? Do we wrestle him?

Do you know, I believe as his children and joint heirs of his kingdom with Christ, he wants us to. He wants us to inquire of him. To express when we don't understand him.

And when we're frustrated and angry to bring him the issues in our lives and the lives of others that don't appear as yet to be subject to him and his will. That's part of our kingdom responsibility.

It's part of our growing into the heirs and into the image of Jesus. There's a danger that doing so, by the way, will leave you with a limp.

[27 : 03] From time to time. But God met Jacob as a man. This is what we can encourage. God met Jacob as a man. Just as God became man in Jesus.

And met a perishing world. And saved it. God's desire when you come to him is not to overwhelm you. As we wrestle with him.

But to teach us. To make us stronger. To build us up in our resilience. And our spiritual disciplines. And to trust most of all in him.

To build our faith. To build our faith so it strengthens. That's why you keep going back to the Father. Because you need to keep looking at him to have faith. You need to keep communing with him.

To believe that there's something beyond what we see. That's faith. Faith is being sure of what we hope for. And certain of what we cannot or do not see.

[28 : 07] If you're praying for faith. Then expect the lights to go off a little bit. Yeah.

Expect the lights to go off. Because there are times when it goes dark. And that's when we say. Father. How long? How long?

You know as you go to God to wrestle with him. He will meet you in the same way. As you're totally honest.

And seek to wrestle with him. Unwittingly. We play a part in his kingdom coming. As we seek his will. And our prayers fall into line with that will. Habakkuk thought God indifferent.

So he was perplexed. He was questioning his wisdom. At the lack of action. To bring things back. Into line. And God needed reminding of what was happening.

[29 : 09] He thought. That was his language. It was quite scathing. But honest. Let me tell you that.

Those people in the struggle today. Next slide Josh. God was not. And. Is not. Indifferent.

He does have a plan. He will bring this to pass. In his way. In his time. It will come.

Though the vision. The vision await its time. Wait for it. It will surely come. That comes later on. So sorry Sandy.

Or whoever I've messed up. Impose myself on your bit. So in Habakkuk's mind. He would probably be thinking.

[30 : 08] That the way forward. Was much simpler. Than it actually was. Put a new king in charge. Like Josiah. Get some godly reforms. Back in place.

That would stop the idolatrous behavior. And provide a platform. For renewal. And revival. We all want to see revival. But he couldn't imagine.

What was ahead. Ahead. But God. Instead speaks. And here's the Lord's answer. Look at the nations.

And watch. And be utterly amazed. For I'm going to do something. In your days. That you would not believe. Even if you were told.

By the way. God is speaking here. In the plural. It's not just speaking to Habakkuk. It's speaking to the nation. The wider community. Of Jerusalem and Judah. Were to listen to this.

[31 : 04] And here it is. I'm raising up the Babylonians. That ruthless. And impetuous people. Who sweep across the whole earth. To seize dwellings.

Not their own. They're feared and dreaded people. Allure unto themselves. They promote their own honor. Their horses are swifter than leopards. Fiercer than wolves at dusk.

Fiercer than wolves. That have not been fed all day. All day. The cavalry gallops. A headlong. The horsemen come from afar.

They fly like an eagle. Swooping to devour. Intent on violence. Advance like a desert wind. And gather prisoners like sand. They mock kings.

And scoff at rumors. They laugh at all fortified cities. By building earthen ramps. They capture them. And sweep past them. Like the wind. And go on. But they're not great people.

[32 : 02] They're guilty people. Whose own strength is in their God. Next slide Josh. Just be aware that when you cry out to God.

There is a possibility. That things will get worse. Before they get better in your mind. That God is not in the business of quick fixers with anybody. He's not subject to a time limit like us.

We've got to get that done by Tuesday. Because on Wednesday I'm doing this, that or the other.

He's not like that. His timing is perfect. And this situation.

It wasn't exactly what Habakkuk had in mind. The Babylonians and Chaldeans it says were God's instruments of judgment. Their self-sufficiency and self-adulation were to plant the seeds of their own destruction.

As we learn over the next couple of weeks. In Habakkuk 2 and 2 to 20. As they stood guilty of idolatry and blasphemy before God.

[33 : 17] And if we look at those. Hashtag. This wasn't what I expected. And that's life. Sometimes when you live with God.

When you trust Him. When life situations become difficult. Just have a look at those things.

That might experience. If you like. First hand. Or you might see other people go through. But the good news is.

Take it to Father. Take it to Father. Whatever's happening. Whatever's wrong. Let's take it to Father. Don't let the situation define who God is.

You know your Father loves you. You know your Heavenly Father. If you don't. Can I just invite you. It's wonderful to have an anchor like it said earlier on. In the storms of life.

[34 : 16] It's wonderful to be able to take all my fears for the future. All the difficulties I experience in life. And we are not immune. And nobody will tell me.

You know. That we are. We don't have to put up with all these things. It's wonderful to be able to go to a Father who we know.

Who we can communicate. Who we can wrestle. On the rug in front of the fire. I've got a picture of a young boy actually. Wrestling. With his father on the rug.

And his father is like. You know. He's allowing him to wrestle. And yeah. The father ends up on his back. He says. No. Stop. I can't manage it anymore. And you know what. God's a bit like that with us. He allows us to wrestle him.

He allows us. Really. To think we've overpowered him. You know. In Jacob's case. He just touched his hip. Wrenched his hip out. And said. That's enough now. It's like.

[35 : 12] You know. And when God's ready to move. He will say. Right. That's enough. That's enough. That's enough wrestling now. Time for action. Time for action. And he will.

So that's as far as I'm going this week. Can you just throw the last slide up Josh please. It's a summary. I just want us to. Just come before the Lord now.

Because you know. We've had to wrestle this morning already. But I feel it's something God is going to take this church through to do. A lot more of. We're going to all have to do a lot more wrestling.

We're going to have to build up our spiritual muscles. And wrestle our father as we go forward. You know. Wrestle with him. And bring our problems to him. It's not about us.

It's about our relationship with him. Am I willing to cry out. To God. And get passionate for answers. Should we really wrestle God.

[36 : 18] Yeah. I think we should. I think we should. God. Was not. And is not.

Indifferent. That's his nature. He never rests. From watching over us. He's not indifferent. He's not. Nothing's flown past him.

I just want to assure you of that. And I ain't saying. Please. Please. Please. Please. I'm not saying these things aren't painful. I'm not saying they're not painful. I'm saying.

I'm saying. Cling to that. Cling to your father. He has a plan. And will bring his will.

To pass. His way. In his time. God can. And will use. The unexpected. And the unsanctified.

[37 : 16] To bring about his plans. In this situation. So hold on. Hold on. Hold on. Rob. Hold on. Hold on.

Hold on. I can see lots of other people. But I don't mention anybody else's name. In case. They get upset. But hold on. Yeah. Hold on. Hold to God.

Hold to your father. Amen. Amen.