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**Trust and Obey**

**By Pastor Chris Cleary**

**Habakkuk Chapter 2 verse 20 and Chapter 1 verses 1 - 11**

1. **Introduction**

Very little is known about **Habakkuk** except that he probably lived in the **Kingdom of Judah,** the southern of the two kingdoms, in the late 7th Century BC. **(A couple of decades before the Babylonian exile)**

Many scholars believe that as well as a prophet, he was a singer in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The **Book of Habakkuk** is set in a time of great turmoil and injustice, and the prophet is questioning God about the suffering of the righteous and the fact that the wicked seem to be getting away with - **well, being wicked!**

In response, God reveals to Habakkukthat he will bring judgement and justice, and that the righteous will live by their faith.

**Sounds simple doesn’t it – but it’s a lot more complex than that!**

1. **The Message of Habakkuk**

**God’s ways are always higher than man’s ways, yet, most of the time, man fails to understand God’s ways in human life.**

Let’s take a look again at the verses from our reading.

**Habakkuk’s Complaint**

***2”How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? 3Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. 4Therefore the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.”***

**The Lord’s Answer**

***5“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. 6I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own. 7They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honour.”***

***8”Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour; 9they all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. 10They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; by building earthen ramps they capture them. 11Then they sweep past like the wind and go on - guilty people, whose own strength is their god.”***

***Well – thanks for that!***

**From these verses is it difficult to understand how God’s ways are perfect and the best for man?**

You see, we **it’s not that unusual for us to not understand** God’s way of dealing with a situation; it **may be confusing or strange**; it may be that we simply **do not like** what He says as to us as it **may not appear very pleasant** or it **may not satisfy our desires.**

Yet even so, **we must learn to trust in God and obey Him,** despite all of our initial reservations or concerns!

And, as we look more deeply at **The Book of** **Habakkuk** and its message for **Us**, it speaks loudly of the need **for us to trust in God and obey!**

1. **So, What is Going on in Habakkuk?**

When I read the Old Testament, it seems there were always problems in the life of the Israelites. There were certainly problems in the mind of Habakkuk, as are set out in this book.

What is that old saying – **‘*Life is never a bed of roses.’***

**Well, that is**p**articularly true of the Christian life – it’s abundant, but not always easy.** Even though we live the life of faith, there are, at times, some tricky moments in the Christian’s life. **Many of us find problems emerging in our lives that we cannot understand. We may face sorrows that we just cannot seem to cope with.**

One of the big questions, from many people in today’s world, is: **“Why is the world in such a mess?**

People say, **“I don’t understand why God allows the world to suffer.”**

Even believers often ask, **“How can God allow troubles in my life when I am following Him? I don’t understand God’s ways.”**

**Habakkuk 1:2-4**

Habakkuk is an illustration of this situation. He says, **“God, I can’t figure out why things are going so bad in Israel and why the people are suffering?”**

He’spraying, **“We are in a mess. Please do something about it, Lord. How long shall I cry and You will not hear?”**

There was lawlessness, there was sin, immorality and so forth. Habakkukwas praying to the Lord as to why God allows this. **Well, the situation in Habakkuk’s day was that Israel had backslidden. Israel had turned from God and gone into idolatry.**

We stand today in the 21st century and we can come before God with almost the same thought in our minds and say, **“God, why is it like it is? Why is it that we constantly cry out about life, yet nothing seems to change? In fact, sometimes they only seem to get worse.”**

In **verses 5 to 11,** Habakkuk **gets probably the most unusual answer to prayer that anybody ever got.** If you think God’s **inactivity** was perplexing, just notice his **activity!**

If Habakkuk was perplexed in **verses 2 and 4** **it must have been nothing compared to what’s going on in his mind after he heard God’s answer.**

He’s been crying out, “**O God, deliver us, deliver us”** And God says, “**Not only will I not deliver you; it’s going to get worse than it is now.”** God intends to raise up an utterly pagan godless people, the Babylonians, to come in and destroy Israel!

1. **The Mysterious!**

To Habakkuk, **God’s ways are mysterious.** Let’s take a look at 4 aspects of this.

1. **God’s *Providences* (Care and Guardianship) Are Mysterious**

God sometimes gives very unexpected answers to our prayers. Sometimes God doesn’t seem to answer. And then all of a sudden God answers - and here it was even more mysterious than before.

Habakkuk thought he knew just what Israel needed. **Lord, here’s what Israel needs: They just need to be punished a little bit and then they need a revival. Then they’ll turn to You and everything will be great.** But, you see, God had other plans for Israel.

I suppose the best illustration of that is athletic practice. There is glory for an Olympic medal but do you know the suffering during the years of training and preparation for the big events?

No person ever becomes a well-trained musician who performs well at the big moment unless they are disciplined and have sacrificed throughout the hours and hours that the audience never saw.

Today God may do the opposite of what you expect. **It might look like the backside of a Persian rug to you but on the other side, the side that God sees, it’s beautiful, glorious.**

**It was needful for Christ to suffer before He could be glorified. And sometimes it may be for us.**

**And so, sometimes though we think we know how God ought to answer, He doesn’t answer the way we think He should.**

1. **God’s *Instruments* Are Mysterious**

When He talks about the Babylonians, that must have really been a problem for Habakkuk because the Babylonians were very, very despised. They were absolutely pagan and godless.

In **Isaiah 44:28**, you have the prophecy regarding Israel being released from the Babylonian captivity. **Isaiah 44:28** says of the **Babylonian King** **Cyrus,** **‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid.”**

Cyrus was a pagan king and yet God said, **“I’m going to use Cyrus to free Israel from bondage.”** And He carried it even further by saying, **“Cyrus is My shepherd,** **Cyrus is My anointed.”**

**God uses some strange instruments to carry out His judgment.**

1. **God’s *People Sometimes Misunderstand* God’s Ways**

In **Matthew 21** a man had a vineyard. He brought servants in and people would come and kill the servants. And finally, he said, **“I’ll put my own son there, surely they won’t kill my son.”** And what did they do? They killed the son.

Graphic illustration of the fact that no matter who God sent to Israel, they always did the same thing with them, they never believed God. God said judgment, judgment, judgment. The prophets kept crying judgment, judgment, judgement – but nobody ever believed them. **And yet they fancied themselves to be God’s people.**

**There are people like that even today. Nobody wants to believe that there is a judgement coming.**

**Paul** picks this same message in **Acts 13:41** **“Look, you scoffer, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.**”

He stood there and he talked to those Jews in that synagogue and he said, **“You won’t believe this but God’s going to judge you just like He told the Jews in Habakkuk’s day. God’s going to judge you for refusing the gospel. But you’re not going to believe it.”**

Judgment came by way of the Babylonian army, just as Habakkuk promised. Judgment came by way of the Roman army, as Paul promised in **Acts 13,** for in 70 AD, the city of Jerusalem was wiped out. One-hundred thousand Jews were killed. **The judgment of God always comes on sin.**

1. **God’s Ways Are *Misunderstood By The World***

The Babylonians when they conquered Israel, completely failed to realise that they were being used by God. Therefore, they went around patting themselves on the back telling themselves how great they were for having done this. They thought they owed their military success to their own ability and their god.

More often, no matter what a person accomplishes, they always pat themselves on the back. But God was soon to demonstrate to them that it was not so because the God who had lifted them up was about to smash them down.

**Even today people soon forget that position, power, success comes from the Lord.** They applaud themselves for the victories. In the world political level, great powers have come and gone, and conquered and become drunk with their own success – yet, God has cast them down.

**Yes, God’s ways are mysterious to the careless religious people and God’s ways are misunderstood by the world.**

1. **Chapter 2 verse 20 - The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.**

I’d like to finish by looking at **verse 20,** as it is a powerful declaration of the awe-inspiring nature of God. Habakkuk is expressing his understanding of the greatness and holiness of God, and calling on all the earth to respond in humble reverence before him.

In the ancient Jewish tradition, **the temple** **was the dwelling place of God** on earth, and only the high priest was allowed to enter the most sacred chamber. This verse conveys the idea that God's presence demands reverence and awe, and that all the earth should be hushed in acknowledgment of his greatness.

Habakkuk is emphasising the need for humans to recognise their place in the presence of the divine. It is a reminder that in the face of God's holiness, all human boasting and noise should fade away.

**Habakkuk 2:20** is a call to humility and reverence in the presence of the Almighty, and is reminder of the very nature of the divine.

**C.S. Lewis** brings this out marvellously in ***The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe****, where* four children are magically transported to the land of **Narnia,** where **Aslan – a Christ-figure** – rules.

Mr and Mrs Beaver have just told the children that they must meet Aslan. Mr Beaver explains: **“Aslan is a lion - *the* Lion, the *great* Lion.”**

**“Ooh!”** said Susan, **“I thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”**

**“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,”** said Mrs. Beaver, **“if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”**

**“Then he isn’t safe?”** said Lucy.

**“Safe?”** said Mr. Beaver. **“Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”**

**Our God is not safe. Our God is not tame. Our God is not under our control. Our God does things that we cannot comprehend, that we cannot fathom.**

**Yet, our God is good;** He works for the benefit of His people. So, let us acknowledge that He knows infinitely more than us – and let us worship Him.

1. **Conclusion**

God is moving the nations for the ultimate setting up of God’s Kingdom at the end of all history.

* **God’s ways are right.**
* **God’s ways are always righteous.**
* **God is moral.**
* **God can do no wrong.**
* **God has divine control of this world.**

**Romans 13:1** tells us that **‘there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.’**

**God is the Lord of history.**

Listen:

* **God was sovereign in creation.**
* **God was sovereign in when He sent the flood.**
* **God was sovereign over Pharaoh’s army.**
* **Gad was sovereign over the Babylonian army.**
* **God was sovereign over Hitler’s army.**
* **God is sovereign right now and will be forever!**

**Trust the Lord, no matter what.** That is Habakkuk's message for God's people around the world today.

**Believers can, and must, trust in God no matter how tumultuous outward circumstances may become; despite not always understanding God’s ways,**

We **repent** – we **humble** ourselves.

Yet, to be **truly humble** we must **trust the Lord and accept God’s authority** in all things.

**Amen**