

“How To Live Until Then”
Text: Habakkuk 2:2-4
Series: Book of Habakkuk [#4]
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Theme: **The Righteous Live By Faith.**

Introduction

Do you sometimes look around and become distressed, depressed as you see and think about...

- the financial crises racing across the world?
- The self-centered and selfish attitudes of people?
- The wheels of justice grinding all too slowly and even, at least at times, unfairly?
- The conflicts and wars in many parts of the world?

If so, you may identify with the phrase, “*Stop the world! I want to get off!*”

Habakkuk faced the same situation. He was troubled by the wickedness in Judah, in the people who were *God’s chosen people*. He was perplexed that God would use the wicked Chaldeans to punish them. He was troubled at the unbelievably painful road ahead for him and the people of Judah.

Yes, God would also punish the Chaldeans. Yes, God would restore His people. “*But, what do I do now? How do I Live Until Then?*”

As God begins to give Habakkuk some details, He also gives Him the answer to this question.

- The truth Habakkuk needed and would rely on.
- The truth that centuries later underpinned the Reformation.
- The truth that we need, that will sustain us.
- The truth that *The Righteous Live By Faith*.
- The truth God gave the prophet as He told him...

The Judgment Of The Wicked Is Coming.

God told Habakkuk this before in 1:11, “They will be held guilty.” But now God speaks in a very clear, somewhat more detailed, and a powerful way.

This message of judgment is a certain message to all—to everyone everywhere, to everyone in every generation. Verse 2,

“Then the LORD answered me and said, ‘Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run.’”

The message is certain because it came from God. It was not the idea of the best and brightest minds of that day, nor the logical conclusions of sincere, serious people of faith studying the Scriptures. No. It was a message directly from God to Habakkuk through a vision. It was God who is truth, God who cannot tell a lie who was speaking.

People frequently raise questions about the details here. What kind of *tablets*? What is this about *reading* and *running*? Let’s start with the tablets. Some suggest they were large stone tablets that would be set in a prominent place so anyone walking or running by could easily read them. Others think they were small clay tablets. The facts are that the kind or material and size are not stated. Study of the words and practices in Judah at that time don’t clarify it either. The main and important point is that this message was to be written down, sent out to others, and be kept for future generations.

Then there is the reading and running. The point is that this is an important message and, so, those who read it are to be eager, to even rush to tell it to others. So this is an important message from God, a certain message to Habakkuk, and to all.

The message will come to pass. It is certain. The fulfillment, this judgment, touches and effects everyone. Verse 3,

“For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay.”

The writer of Hebrews cites this verse in chapter 10. His general emphasis is similar to that in Habakkuk. The writer reminds the first readers of Hebrews that they had “endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated” (32-33). Now looking at the present and future, he tells them not to “throw away [their] confidence,” and that they “have need of endurance” (35-36).

Then, as the reason, the certainty, he picks up Habakkuk 2:3 as he writes in verse 37, “For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay.” He is talking not about just the judgment to come, but the Judge to come, Jesus Christ. Christ will return as Judge to judge all. God’s word through the writer of Hebrews was more specific in that it speaks of Christ, whereas Habakkuk speaks of a certain judgment of the wicked. But the emphasis, the direction is the same.

The message of judgment in God’s vision to Habakkuk will be fulfilled, it will touch everyone. It may look like it will never happen, that things will keep going on as they have been; or, that it is far in the future. But its time is appointed by God and it is on schedule,

His schedule. The apostle Peter wrote,

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:8-9)

God told Habakkuk, He tells us, “The judgment of the wicked *is* coming.” So, how do people live *until then*? How should we live *until then*? Verse 4 gives a brief yet expansive answer as it points out...

The Two Options For Life Until Then.

The two options presented here are the only options. Each one of us here this morning is living by one of them. Everyone everywhere is living by one of these two options. Yes, some say that it is not quite that simple, that there are other options. The consistent testimony of the Bible, from the opening chapters of Genesis to the closing chapters of The Revelation is that these are the only options.

The first option is to live with faith in yourself. Verse four opens with this option, “Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him;”

Let’s unpack this statement a bit, starting with the first part, “the proud one.” The original wording may be “the soul of him is swollen,” and so, “proud,” proud at the core of who he is. Pride can be a slippery concept at times because ...

- much of our use of the term today is positive: we talk about pride of accomplishments, family, country, church;
- also because, while the vast majority of Biblical references are negative, we find some positive uses of the terms, *e.g.*, in Galatians 6 Paul wrote, “For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for *boasting* in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another” and,
- then it is slippery because of our diverse uses, which are reflected in dictionaries:
 - a deep desire or satisfaction gained from achievements, qualities or possessions;
 - self respect;
 - an excessively high opinion of oneself.

God’s meaning in verse 4 is found in the word used. This word, and similar Old Testament words, have the idea of being lifted or raised up; high, tall or exalted; swollen or puffed up. And so they picture a distorted attitude and personal character. Specifically,

having a higher view of oneself than one ought to.

We can say that pride is in the basic essence or root of sin. Think about it. Sin originated with Lucifer, or Satan. He was created by God as “the anointed cherub” guarding the throne of God. He had “the seal of perfection” (Ezekiel 28:14, 12). But, Isaiah 14 tells us,

“How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit.” (14:12-15)

Then Satan used the same idea to tempt Eve. Genesis 3.

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden”?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.”’ The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”

(Genesis 3:1-6)

Pride and sin entered humanity when she fell for Satan’s line, “... in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and *you will be like God*...” All of us have inherited that character, or nature. We are born with a *swollen*, inflated, distorted view ourselves. We do not allow God to be God over us. Even while acknowledging our limitations and insecurities, we think that we can decide what is best and right as we pursue being happy and fulfilled. We all were born and have lived with ourselves on the throne of our life.

That is pride. So our character is not as it should be. We were created to know, serve and glorify God. Pride places me on the throne of my life instead of God. And so, God told Habakkuk and tells us, “as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him.” To be sure, we may never come close to being as calculating and cruel as the Chaldeans but, as we noted last week, God’s view of sin is not comparative. And we may do many good and noble things. But pride is at the core of our character.

This is the first option, the one which all of us naturally pursue. It is part of our sinful nature. And so we search and seek, but are never satisfied (cf. v. 5). It is, as verse 13

pictures, like “toil[ing] for fire... grow[ing] weary for nothing.” There is no profit, no value in gods, religions which we have made (cf. 18-19). Everyone who follows this option “will be held guilty” (1:11), just as the cruel Chaldeans and rebellious Judeans were.

We were born on this path and if we die still on it, we will forever be separated from God our Creator and all the wonders of being in His presence; we will forever bear the penalty of our guilt. There is no second chance. As Hebrews 9:27 tells us, “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.”

The good news is that there is another option. Rather than living with faith in ourselves, the best we and others can do, we have the option of living with faith in God. Go to the middle of verse 4, “*But the righteous will live by his faith.*”

Let’s think about *the righteous*. Just as God’s view of sin is not comparative, so His view of righteousness is not comparative. Yes, some people are *better* than others—they think, say and do more good things and fewer bad things than others. But that does not make them *righteous* before God.

And so we need to look at this word *righteous*, at what God means by it. The word here has the basic idea of measuring up to a standard. In the Bible that clearly means measuring up to God’s standards. He is *The Righteous One*. He is always, perfectly consistent. He is holy, truth, love. He always measures up to His perfect standards. Psalm 145:17 tells us “The LORD is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds.”

We are created in God’s image and are to reflect it. Indeed, it is commanded, it is required in order to be accepted by Him. Leviticus 19 opens,

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”’”

It is here that we run into a problem, a huge problem. We have inherited pride and sin from our first parents which defines our nature, what we are. It is part of our spiritual DNA. So, how can we change that? How can we become righteous? To borrow the prophet Jeremiah’s words, *How can the leopard change his spots?* (13:23)

The most common approach is to

- work at it with sincere dedication and discipline;
- to carefully follow God’s law;
- to be truthful, loving, pure;
- to try and try to do more and more;
- to try and try to do better and better.

But God tells us through the apostle Paul, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Romans 3:20). It’s mission impossible. We cannot change our spots. We

cannot change our spiritual DNA.

The answer to this dilemma is found as we finish this phrase, “*But the righteous will live by his faith.*” This word for *faith* has the ideas firmness and certainty at its foundation. It had a wide range of uses, from describing firm, steady hands to being faithful to God.

One part of the meaning here is that we gain true life, we become people who are righteous before God by faith. Paul’s two citations of this verse underscore this,

- Romans 1:16-17, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘*But the righteous man shall live by faith.*’”
- Galatians 3:11, “Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘the righteous man shall live by faith.’”

Not faith in faith, but faith in Jesus Christ. As He has told us, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

The second part of the meaning is how the righteous person lives here and now surrounded by sin and wickedness. This is the emphasis in Hebrews 10:38. As we noted earlier, those believers were living in a time of persecution (32-33). The writer encouraged them not to throw away their confidence but to endure because, as God tells us through Habakkuk, “*My righteous one shall live by faith.*”

Surrounded by wickedness and perversion, criticism and persecution, loss and grief, we can cry out with the hymn writer “O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight.” But *until then*, we live by faith—by a firm reliance in God who *is* sovereign, who *is* aware, who *is* active, who *will* judge all people and things, who *will* set all things right.

Conclusion.

Which option have you chosen? Which path are you on? Are you living with faith in yourself or with faith in God? The first option never brings true peace and always leads to just judgment. The second always brings God’s peace and leads to everlasting life.

If you are still living out the first option, isn’t it time to make the choice to come to God on His terms, to be made righteous in Christ, to have life forever with Him? Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He is the only way to having your sins forgiven and standing before God as righteous and accepted. As the apostle John wrote,

“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you

may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:11-13)

The Righteous Live By Faith. If you have chosen faith in Christ, know Him, His righteousness, peace and life, are you living by faith right now as the good times roll, or the bad times flood in? Stuart Hamblin wrote the song “Until Then.”

My heart can sing when I pause to remember a heartache here is but a stepping stone along a trail that’s winding always upward—this troubled world is not my final home.

The things of earth will dim and lose their value if we recall they’re borrowed for a while; and things of earth that cause the heart to tremble, remembered there, will only bring a smile.

This weary world with all its toil and struggle may take its toll of misery and strife; the soul of man is like a waiting falcon— when it’s released, it’s destined for the skies.

But until then my heart will go on singing, *until then* with joy I’ll carry on—until the day my eyes behold the city, *until* the day God calls me home.

In the next quiet moments, come to God. If you have not chosen to place your faith in Jesus, do that now. If you have questions, talk with me or someone else about them before you leave here today.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus,

- Thank Him again for His grace;
- Thank Him again that He is the mighty fortress of strength and protection for all that you face;
- Determine that having been made righteous in Christ by God’s grace through faith, you *will* live by faith...right now...throughout the rest of this day and all its circumstances...in every day and all their circumstances.

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