

Anglican Church Noosa

Habakkuk 1:12 – 2:20

When God Seems UnFair – Does God Care?

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Have you ever thought it would be good if God would just come down from heaven and get rid of all the violence, all the injustice, all the evil, all the pain?

Habakkuk wants God to come quickly and deal with the evil of his day.

Last week in Chapter 1 we heard his complaint. Why do you make me look at injustice?

Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me.

And all that in v3

God's answer is that he is sending the Babylonians to sort out God's people, the nation of Judah. They will be the instruments of God's judgement on his people for all their injustice and wrongdoing.

In today's reading starting at Ch1:12, Habakkuk brings a second complaint. He is astounded that the pagan Babylonians would be used to judge God's chosen people.

It is summed up well in the second part of v13,

"Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

Basically he's saying, well Judah might be bad, and I'm concerned about that, but at least they're more righteous than the Babylonians! The Babylonians are 10 times worse than God's people, so how can it be right for them to swallow up Judah.

He then in v's 14 – 17 remonstrates with God just how bad the Babylonians are.

People are like fish in the sea, and in v15 the wicked foe, which is Babylon, pulls them up with hooks, gathers them up in his dragnet.

This image is very vivid to me because just last week I was watching a David Attenborough Documentary on the oceans and he showed the effects of seabed dragnet fishing. The net actually has a heavy chain on the bottom which drags along the sea floor picking up everything in it. The fishing boats keep the fish they're looking for and then push everything else back into the sea, most of which has died.

But the worst part was the floor of the sea was left desolate, lifeless.

And I think that's the image here, God's people are going to be left desolate. Just as Babylon had conquered many other nations and subjugated them, so also now Judah.

What is worse, in v16, "Babylon sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet."

In other words Babylon worships it's power, it worships the violence, it worships it's own glory!

V16 continues, *"By his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food."*

Habakkuk is basically saying, 'Babylon stinks! how can you possibly let them do this to Judah?'

I think it's not going too far to describe this second complaint as a bit of a rant. I hope you picked up in last week's message from Brad that having a bit of a rant with God is not necessarily a bad thing. However, it can become a problem. When is it a problem?

It is when it crosses over into unbelief. Does Habakkuk's complaining ever cross over into unbelief?

I think the answer is a clear no. There is a lot of evidence here that Habakkuk is still recognising God as the supreme one whose wisdom is far beyond his own.

Look at how he starts his complaint in v12. *"Lord are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy one you will never die."* And in the next sentence he refers to God as "my Rock".

He is upset but he hasn't given up on God. He begins by recognising the character of God as holy, immortal, the one who is solid when everything else is quicksand. God is his rock.

He also recognises that in God there is no evil, no malice, no wrongdoing. That's why he says in v13, *"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrongdoing."*

You see Habakkuk's complaint is not born out of selfish motivation. 'Why God don't you give me what I want?' His complaint is born out of his understanding of the character of God. What God is proposing seems so out of character, so he challenges God about it. God you are holy, immortal, too pure to look on evil. So how come you are going to let all these horrible things happen to your people? And use a rogue nation like Babylon to do it!

If and when you complain to God, is it because you didn't get the Christmas present you were hoping for? Or is it because of issues of violence and injustice in our world you can't square with the character of God in the Scriptures?

For Habakkuk it is because his heart is so much for God that he complains. It is not for his own personal convenience.

So he starts his complaint at v12 with a recognition of the qualities of God, he then delivers the complaint v's 13b to 17.

Following the complaint he withdraws. Look at the start of Ch2. *"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."*

The image here is of the watchman, a common theme in the Old Testament. The Watchman was such an important role. He had to stand at the watchtower on the city wall and look out for the enemy. If he failed in his duty, and let the enemy get close without warning the people, the city could fall to the enemy. Being on the night Watch was particularly hard. It was about staying awake, it was about being patient and waiting.

When God doesn't make sense, that is what we are called to do. Waiting is a fundamental ingredient of faith in God. There is the famous verse in Isaiah 40:31, *"Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength."*

In Chaim Potok's novel 'The Chosen', Danny Sanders says to his friend Reuven, *"You can listen to the silence, Reuven. I've begun to realise that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own. It talks to me sometimes. I feel myself*

alive to it. It talks. And I can hear it. It has strange, beautiful texture. It doesn't always talk. Sometimes - sometimes it cries, and you can hear the pain of the world in it."

It is in v3 of Ch 2 the Lord directly addresses this issue. *"For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay."*

We as Christians have a vision of a magnificent end, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the complete fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. All those beautiful qualities that Jesus taught about in New Testament will be the new standard of human behaviour with Jesus reigning as King in his Kingdom. The government will be on his shoulder, and he will be known as Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God.

It's a magnificent picture, but we have to wait. For the revelation awaits the appointed time. As I said, a fundamental ingredient to faith in God is waiting.

And that's what Habakkuk is doing as he likens himself to the watchman. He is Waiting, with lots of questions and doubts but believing that God is his rock and he will bring an answer at the right time.

God does answer and that is in v's 4-20, the rest of the chapter. The sins of the enemy Babylon are laid bare. Babylon is puffed up with desires that are not right. Babylon is arrogant, greedy as the grave and like death never satisfied. v's 4,5

And then we get **five woes**; five ways in which Babylon has defied the Lord Almighty, but will be called to account and face judgement just as much as Judah.

Let's look at them briefly,

1. V6 is the sin of stealing, storing up piles of stolen goods, getting wealthy by extortion.
2. V9 we can presume is about building a luxurious house in the mountains by unjust gain.
3. V12 talks about cities built with bloodshed, towns established by injustice.
4. V15 talks about sexual sins, getting your neighbour drunk to procure sexual favours.
5. V18 & 19 address the issue of idolatry. People worship their own creation rather than the creator. They make an idol which cannot speak, cannot breathe, it has no life yet they look to it for guidance. Such foolishness. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life.'
V19

We may not make little trinkets that we bow down and worship, but we do make lots of things that we put far more value in than God. It was John Calvin who said that "the human heart is a perpetual factory of idols".

So overall what this chapter shows us is that God hates sin.

- He is going to judge sin in his people Judah.
- He is going to judge sin in the pagan nations such as Babylon.

As the apostle Paul says in Romans 3: 9,10 *“For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one.”*

So we all need to throw ourselves on the mercy of God and that mercy has been amply and wonderfully shown to us in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In terms of our situation today, we live in a violent world just as Judah did in 600 BC.

I was reading in International Intrigue this week. There is a record number of 92 countries involved in conflict beyond their own borders. And a record 120 million people displaced from their homes. We live at a time when authoritarian regimes are spending enormous amounts on armaments and making clear they have territorial ambitions. We live in a violent world.

But it is not just out there on the other side of the world. There is much violence in our own land. I want to now mention a few areas of this violence and it may be you are directly affected, in which case be assured your church wants to offer pastoral support.

Domestic violence continues to be a major plague on our community. Every week in the media we hear stories of women being murdered. There is also coercive control and manipulation. There is a campaign on at the moment to heighten awareness and try and bring an end to this horror.

Youth crime is constantly in the media. I hope you haven't been affected. Especially in Victoria at the moment there is a lot of unruly behaviour, youth out of control and violence.

Then there is violence against the unborn. The law in Queensland continues to say that abortion to full term is OK. That is beyond my comprehension, that we live in a society that accepts this.

This may be a very personal matter for you. Again be assured of the support of your Church and my support to find forgiveness and healing.

These are all difficult matters, as well as many more, so please reach out and ask for help if you need it. We seek to be a healing community.

My friends there are so many examples in our society of not living God's way, hence you see the mess we are in today. It should break our hearts. It broke Habakkuk's heart in his day, and it should break our heart today as well.

Through it all however, Habakkuk did not lose hope. In the middle of the five woes; in v14 the prophet declares, *“For the Earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”*

And remember how Habakkuk started his complaint today by addressing God as “Lord, the everlasting one, my God, my holy one”.

And the prophecy finishes in verse 20 with these words, *“The Lord is in his holy temple; let all be silent before him.”*

For us in the New Covenant, the risen Lord Jesus is that temple, he is the Lord.

He has promised to return one day, and as we say in the Apostles Creed, to judge the living and the dead. Jesus will be the judge and his judgement will be just and true. Hallelujah for that day.

Then we will see the Lord in his holy temple; and all the earth will be silent before him. What a great and magnificent day!