

October 6, 2013
Pentecost 20

"The Righteous Will Live by Faith"

HABAKKUK 1:1-3, 2:1-4

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. ² How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? ³ Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Habakkuk ^{2:1} 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. ² Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. ³ 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. ⁴ "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith—

It was a heart-rending scene. A young father in Iraq holds his five year old son in his arms wrapped in a white shroud and ready for burial. A terrorist had exploded a bomb in a crowded marketplace. Violence had claimed another child.

The prophet Habakkuk saw terrible violence in his day. The streets of Jerusalem were just as bad as the worst streets in Chicago. Habakkuk laments, "Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds." Why didn't the Lord do more to stop the violence and change his people? The Lord had chosen these people to be his special people. The Savior of the world was to be born from these people. Where was the Lord who breaks the bow and shatters the spear and burns the shields with fire?

A young medical doctor wonders why the Lord allows some of the nicest patients to get cancer. Job wonders why the Lord allows his life to be so terribly violated. At first he is able to proclaim, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised." Then he breaks down. He cries out in anger against God, "God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me."

Questions will come to us as the end draws near. Why doesn't the Lord step in and stop the violence? Why did he take my son from me when he was only a few days from coming home from the war? Why doesn't he do more to keep his holy and precious Word from being violated? God's Word has an answer to all the questions that might pop up in your life and mine. He says to us this morning, "The Righteous Will Live by Faith."

Violence is real

Violence is so real, especially when it hits close to home. It was so real for Habakkuk as he complains, "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but do you 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 wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and conflict abounds."

A few years ago in Stockton, California a lady was driving down the street when she was met by a car that did not have its light on. She flashed her lights to kindly let them know their lights were not on. She did not realize they were gang members. They went around the block and opened fire and killed her. That's the way it was before the great world flood. It says in Genesis 6, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence."

So it was on the crowded streets of Jerusalem as God's chosen people fought with each other and cheated each other and lived more like the heathen than God's dear people. In the morning the prophet saw them in the temple offering sacrifices to the Lord and praising his name with words from the psalms such as "O give thanks unto the Lord." In the evening the prophet saw them gather in the Valley of Hinnom. You could hear them chanting "O Baal hear us! O Baal hear us." With your own ears you heard the unforgettable screams of children being offered in the fire to these false gods. There was no genuine repentance. It was all a sham.

"How long must I call for help, but you do not listen!" When you call 911 you do not expect to be put on hold. You do not expect the firemen to finish their dinner before jumping into the fire truck and coming to your burning house. The prophet Habakkuk calls on help from the Lord. He dials 911 because the holy land, the place of God's glory, is being dismantled and destroyed by unbridled wickedness and idolatry. He does not expect to be put on hold or be told by the Lord to wait awhile.

The prophet pleads with the Lord to pick up the phone and give him an answer. "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?" How many more children will die when they are offered as sacrifices to Baal? How long do we have to hear the Valley of Hinnom resonate with the chants, "O Baal hear us?"

Much more is at stake for the prophet Habakkuk. He is concerned about the death of a nation, God's chosen people. He is concerned about losing the true worship in the temple that pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world the only hope of salvation. The Lord had delivered his people from Egyptians by dividing the waters of the Red Sea. If the Lord controls the destinies of nations where is he when the very plan of salvation is in danger of being lost and replaced with the worship of false gods such as Baal?

And what is God's solution to the evil that existed in Jerusalem? He says later in this chapter, "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the earth." The Babylonians would sweep into Jerusalem and destroy the city, knock down its walls and even destroy the temple of the Lord built by King Solomon. The best of the people would be taken into captivity in Babylon where they would live for 70 years. Habakkuk cannot believe the Lord will use these heathen people to punish Jerusalem and lead the people to repentance. He challenges the Lord's wisdom and integrity with the words, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong."

We look at how God runs the world in which we live and questions come to us. We see over a billion people living under the false teaching of Islam. We see people believing in a about false god named Allah. It was all started by a prophet named Mohammed. Why

did the Lord allow this man to live? Why did he not die as a child as other children died at this time and still do today? All of this is so very real to us. How true are the words of Isaiah 45 that tell us about the Lord's way of carrying out his plans: "Surely you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel."

I am holding in my hand a picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. It is done in needlepoint. If you were to peel back the covering on the back of this framed needlepoint, you would see nothing but a jumble of knots. At times we experience what Habakkuk experienced. Nothing seems to make sense. We pray and nothing seems to happen because we don't see what God sees. We don't see his overall plan for us and the world in which we live. That's why these words are so important to us, "The righteous live by faith." As Paul said, "We walk by faith and not by sight."

Faith is more real

You see, dear Christian, the faith you have in Jesus and the promises of his Word are more real to you than the troubles you see in this world or even your personal life. Habakkuk is patiently waiting for an answer from the Lord. "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." He is standing on the wall and stationing himself on the ramparts. He is not looking for evidence to criticize the Lord and accuse him of doing wrong. I can still hear a Jewish man dying of cancer saying to me, "God has done me dirt!" Such is not our prophet Habakkuk.

So we wait on the Lord for answers. We wait with the words of Psalm 27 whispering to us softly and yet so firmly, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." We wait listening to the still small voice of the Lord tell us, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

The Lord says, "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it." Write it plain. Write it with big letters. Hold it up for all to see. Let the herald carry the message. Put it on the internet. Send it with your cell phone. Broadcast it on the radio.

"The revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and it will not prove false." There is a season and time for every purpose under heaven. The Lord promised a time when the woman's seed would crush the devil's power. He predicted the coming of a Servant who would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. My time and my appointments and my calendars are filled with days that fall short of God's glory and destine me to an eternity in hell. God has his appointed time when he will have his Son born into this world. Jesus will carefully fill out and complete all the appointments planned for him. He will delight in carrying out your salvation with great specificity. We need this carefully fulfilled appointments because we have sinned with great specificity.

The great Babylonians are puffed up in their pride. Their desires are not upright. The puffed up balloon easily bursts when it is pricked with a small pin. "The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our Refuge." He breaks the bow and shatters the spear and burns the shields with fire. He is in control of the destiny of nations so that we can sit here this

morning and believe his word that tells us "But the righteous will live by their faith."

With my eyes I see sin in my life. It's everyone. With the eyes of faith I see the blood of Jesus pouring down from cross and cleansing me from all sin. When we look inside we see dirty rags of unrighteousness. We see ourselves as unclean before God. With the eyes of faith we see Jesus wrapping us in his robe of righteousness. This amazing faith given by the Holy Spirit grasps the reality I am saved entirely by Christ alone. Faith believes that our God is in control even when everything seems to be spinning out of control. "The righteous will live by faith." Amen.