

“BY FAITH”

Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4

Little is known of Habakkuk’s life. He was a prophet of God, and may also have been a priest or Levite at the temple in Jerusalem. Levites were responsible for temple worship services, including hymn-singing, psalm-chanting, and music-composing. When writing the final chapter of his brief book, Habakkuk instructed that his words were to be set to music. **“For the director of music,”** he wrote in 3:19. **“On my stringed instruments.”**

More is known about when and why Habakkuk prophesied. Like his contemporaries, the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah, Habakkuk was sent to the southern kingdom of Judah. His **“oracle”** or message from God—the Hebrew word means a burden or heavy load, indicating the seriousness of the message and the difficulty of proclaiming and hearing it—was to warn the wayward inhabitants of Judah to repent and return to God or suffer impending judgment.

Habakkuk likely prophesied under King Jehoiakim, who reigned in Judah from 608 to 597 B.C. At this time, conditions in Judah were deplorable and increasingly wicked. Habakkuk described these conditions in the opening verses of his book: **“Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted,”** 1:3b-4.

However, God assured Habakkuk that judgment was coming; that wrongs would be righted, but in a way that would stun and surprise the prophet. God said: **“For I am about to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are feared and dreaded people,”** 1:5-7a. Indeed, one of the most endearing aspects of the Book of Habakkuk is the personal dialogues between the perplexed prophet and his compassionate God. Habakkuk asks. God answers.

To summarize the first dialogue: Habakkuk asks, “God, why do You allow such bad things to happen in the world and in my life; yet do nothing to prevent or solve them?” Haven’t you and I asked similar questions? “Where are you, God? Why did this happen God—this illness, this loss, this marital trouble, this death of a loved one? Why aren’t you helping, God?” And God answers Habakkuk, “I am solving these problems, but in a way you do not expect.” Again, I wonder: How many times has God not said the same to us through His word or through circumstances? “I am solving your problem,

but in My own time and way.” Did we hear Him? Not if we were too busy fretting and worrying and wrapped up in our own complaints. At least Habakkuk had the good sense amid his complaints to stand on a rampart and wait for God to answer. **“I will stand at my watch,”** he said in 2:1, **“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.”** Habakkuk expected God to answer. So should we.

In a second dialogue Habakkuk asks, “But God, why would You use the wicked, godless Babylonians to solve this problem and correct these injustices?” And God answers Habakkuk, “It is not for you to question My methods but to trust them. When the Babylonians have served My purpose, I will punish them for their cruelty and iniquity.” Couldn’t God say something similar to us? How often have we questioned His methods, only to later realize that what He chose for us was infinitely better than any solution we could have chosen for ourselves? This is what Paul meant when he wrote in Ephesians 3:20, **“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.”**

And in the middle of these dialogues, at the center of the small Book of Habakkuk, lies one of the greatest, most important verses in the Bible; a verse spoken by none other than God Himself; a verse quoted in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews; a verse that comprises the very essence of the Gospel: **“But the righteous will live by his faith,”** 2:4. Life that comes through faith. Life that is characterized by faith.

Ultimately, everything about the Christian life—from conversion to conclusion; from forgiveness to salvation; from daily to bread to eternal life; from obstacles to accomplishments; from marriage to ministry—is a matter of trusting God. By faith. By faith. By faith. These are not my words; they are God’s words. And God’s word is the foundation of the Christian faith.

And faith at its simplest is taking God at His word. Faith is saying, “God, I believe what You say in Your word. I trust what You tell me about sin, salvation, creation, redemption, sanctification; about heaven, hell, and eternal life; about marriage, ministry, capital punishment, and immorality; about the Trinity; about the true deity and true humanity of Jesus Christ; about Jesus Christ being the only Savior and the only way to be saved. You say all this, God, in Your inerrant, inspired word. Therefore I trust You regardless of what anyone else says, does, teaches; no matter how strenuously they object; no matter how impossible the circumstances of my life. I live by faith.” Or to quote Paul: **“The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,”** Galatians 2:20.

And faith, that is, clinging to God—this in fact is the meaning of Habakkuk’s

name; literally, to embrace or cling—is what brings us true life: eternal life, spiritual life, and a daily life worth living. Abraham is often called the “father of believers”. But what made his faith so great? His personal strength or superior wisdom or holiness of living? None of these things. Abraham’s great faith lay in this one reality: He trusted God. He believed that God would keep His promises despite the impossibility of Abraham’s circumstances.

And so the apostle Paul wrote of Abraham in Romans 4: **“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet, he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised,”** Romans 4:18-21.

Amid all the turmoil and complexities of Habakkuk’s world, nation, life, and calling, he brought his questions to God in prayer. And God answered. And the essence of God’s answer lay in the words: **“The righteous will live by his faith.”** Trust Me, Habakkuk.

Today, God is saying the same to each one of us: “Trust Me.” Amid all the turmoil and complexities of our own lives, we too should dialogue with God in prayer. We too should ask God questions. We too should take our place on the ramparts, listening carefully to God’s answers in His word—the word that tells us who God is, what God is like, and what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. BY FAITH. Consider briefly the importance of these two words.

First, consider the importance of “by faith” to our eternal salvation. You and I ask important questions every day: What time is it? How long will you be gone? How much gas is in the tank? Did you remember to stop at the grocery store? Is your seatbelt fasted? Is dinner ready? Do you love me?

But dear friends, the most important question we will ever ask is: **“How am I saved?”** And if this seems like a trivial or unimportant question, try asking it on your deathbed. Try answering it apart from the word of God. Try finding the certainty of salvation in your own merit or good deeds or human accomplishments; the money in your bank account; the awards on your shelves. It can’t be done.

How can I be certain of my eternal salvation, knowing the deeds I’ve done, the thoughts I’ve thought; the moments of self-interest and self-gratification; the temptations to which I not only surrendered but doggedly pursued; the repeated worry,

the anger and resentment, the refusals to forgive. Yes, some days we feel wonderful, skipping along with joy in our hearts and *Amazing Grace* on our lips. But other days we feel like the worst of sinners; like the tax collector who said, **“God, have mercy on me, the sinner,”** Luke 18:13; or like the apostle who said, **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst,”** 1 Timothy 1:15. And if you have never experienced the crushing weight of sin and guilt, you likely will.

And when you do have this crushing experience, what do you want to hear from God? “I’m so sorry. I’m all out of forgiveness today. Try Me again tomorrow.” Or, “Don’t be silly. I can give you no assurance of salvation. At the end of your life, which could be tonight by the way, I will see how close you came to perfection, and decide your eternal fate then—though, honestly, I wouldn’t get my hopes of if I were you. In the meantime, say fifty “Hail Mary’s” and a hundred “Our Father’s.” Is this what you would like to hear from God?

If human works were the way to salvation, the only certainty we could have would be the certainty of being eternally lost and condemned. As the psalmist wrote: **“If You, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared,”** Psalm 130:3-4.

Instead, the word of God tells us that salvation comes by believing, not by doing; by trusting in Jesus Christ and His righteousness, not our own. **“But the righteous will live by faith,”** God told Habakkuk. And to this the entire Bible bears witness. For example, Mark 16:16, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”**

Romans 1:17, **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”** Romans 4:5, **“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”** Romans 5:1, **“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

How many Bible passages do we need? God gives us these passages and many others to teach us that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ; and to give us the absolute certainty that through faith in Jesus, despite our sins and apart from our works, we possess eternal salvation. Indeed, what a blessed assurance we have today of our

salvation in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, hearing Jesus say: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

There may be Sundays when we come to church, open the bulletin, read the sermon title, and think, "I wish we could hear something other than the same old Gospel; something other than sin and grace; something other than salvation by faith in Christ." Yet, dear friends, instead of expressing frustration, we should be on our knees expressing praise to God that His Gospel never changes—that whether life or death, ups or downs, riches or poverty, sickness or health; what we have done in the past or will do in the future; when we have Jesus Christ by faith, we have all that we need for time and eternity.

Second, consider the importance of "by faith" to our daily life. Habakkuk wrote his book more than 2,600 years ago. Yet, his opening words have a modern ring: **"Destruction and violence are before me, there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted."**

While Habakkuk was writing about the Kingdom of Judah, he could have just as easily been writing about the United States of America. Destruction and violence. Strife and conflicts. Senseless crimes and corrupt politicians. Paralyzed justice. The wicked hemming in the righteous with government legislation. At times, each of us has moaned with Habakkuk: **"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? Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrong?"** 1:2. We think, "The world is out of control. No one is in charge." And when we think this way, we are complete wrong.

Someone is in charge. And His name is the Lord Jesus Christ. And He has all power in heaven and on earth. What is happening in the world around us is by His design or His allowance. We may not see this with our eyes; but we do see this clearly by faith—faith which holds firmly to this description of Christ in Colossians 1: **"For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy."**

"The righteous will live by his faith." Today, are you worried about a serious health problem? The answer to your worry is BY FAITH. Are you desperately trying to forgive another person? The answer is BY FAITH. Are you struggling with finances,

wondering if God will provide for you? The answer is BY FAITH. Are you overwhelmed with personal responsibilities? The answer is BY FAITH. Are you battling with addictions? The answer is BY FAITH. Are you wondering how to make a marriage work? The answer is BY FAITH. Are you aching at the loss of a loved one? The answer is BY FAITH. Not faith in yourself. Not faith in random chance or blind fate. Not faith in human wisdom or human strength. But faith in the One True God, who made us and redeemed us and loved us enough to sacrifice His only Son for our sins. That God. That faith.

Because faith in this God and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior comes with a God-given, iron-clad guarantee: **“For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame,’”** 1 Peter 2:6. Never.