

SERMON 26th APRIL 2020 Habakkuk Chapter 2

Friends:

It doesn't take much to realize we are living in trying times!

- Many people unemployed, businesses closed, social distancing rules, wondering what our future holds, over 150,000 Covid "worldwide related deaths", a deep recession looming; BUT beyond the national and international level, what makes most of our lives "most trying" are the personal and private "pains" we carry!
- In a world like this, many of us find ourselves asking:- "How long O Lord?"
- How "long" will I live with this personal pain?
- How "long" will the church doors be closed?
- As I said last week "How long?" is a Biblical "questions" God's people have often asked in "trying times", especially in the Psalms!

Friends:

Into our "fears" and "confusions" at this time, Habakkuk has an amazing "relevant" word to speak!

"The righteous shall live by his faith!" (V4)

- This "little book" of "only 3 chapters" contains this important statement "quoted" at key points in 3 of the most important books in the New Testament:
 - Romans 1:17
 - Galatians 3:11
 - Hebrews 10:38!
- If we can understand this "verse" in its context in Habakkuk we will have a profound "glimpse" into the "very heart of Christianity" – which shines its "brightest" in trying times!
- "Timothy Keller" says: "it is NOT the strength of your faith BUT the "object" of your faith that actually save you!"
- Habakkuk "prophesied" 2,600 years ago in the generation leading up to the 3 Babylonian "invasions" of Judah: the southern Kingdom of God's people!
- But "before" these invasions come, God reveals ahead of time to Habakkuk what He is going to do: and the revelation comes not when Habakkuk is minding his own business, "But" when he is complaining to God about the wickedness he see around him in his own nation.
- Verse 1 ends Habakkuk's complaint with a "renewed statement" of his confidence in God!
- "I will look out to see what God will say to me!"

Friends:

God is always good and sovereign “over” all things in our world and universe! Nothing takes God by surprise!

- What is God “saying” to “us” through this “pandemic”?
- Habakkuk also reports his “intention” to assume the role of “watchman”! **(V1)**
- Habakkuk mans his “post” atop the walls to look for the approach of danger or a messenger, or to keep watch over current events, or to be “prophetic watchman” looking for the Lord’s reply”!

Friends:

As we pray according to God’s will, we must then watch and wait patiently for God’s answer!

- Waiting for God’s answer to an exercise in trusting God and letting go of your attempt to control things!
- *Ephesians 3:20 is a favorite verse of mine:*

“Now to God who is able to do immeasurably “more” than all we ask or ‘imagine’!”

Verse 2 – “Then the Lord replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may “run” with it!”

- This “message” is of lasting “importance”!
- God’s word is eternal!
- Habakkuk’s “message” has lasting importance!
- The Lord wants His Word to be helpful to others as well!
- The message people “need” during this pandemic is “God’s Message”!

Yes we “need” to “hear” our government’s “plan” of action; yes we need to “hear” what the “Chief Medical Officers” are advising; yes we need a “solution” to our “economic” wasteland, BUT ultimately we need to “hear” the message of the “gospel”

- What is a “greater problem” than “coronavirus”?
- “Sin” and “separation from God”: that’s the “greater” “problem”!
- And “thankfully” God has done something about that in and through His Son!
- Christ’s sacrifice opens up the door to Heaven!
- Make “sure” you are relying solely on Jesus and his perfect righteousness as you walk before God!

- As the people receive this message they are to read it as they run for their lives!
- There is an “urgency” about this message from God!
- And “like wise” for all of us “listening” this morning!
- Jesus’ words must be ‘taken on board’:

Mark 13

“But about that day (the 2nd coming) or hour “no one knows”, only the Father, Be on your guard, be alert! If the Son comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping!”

Friends:

If the “coronavirus” leads us “back to God” then that will “be a good thing!”

- **(V3)** For the revelation awaits an appointed time!
- The Lord tells Habakkuk that he has grasped the central point when he expressed his question in terms of “time”; “How long?”
- The Lord “explains” that:
Answers will be “revealed” at the “appointed time”, that is; God “decides” when!
- The “answers” may seem long delayed; though answers will certainly ‘come’; so Habakkuk must be “patient”!

Friends:

At this time we must live by “faith”; “not by sight”! Our Church building is closed; all ministries in the hibernation; things are so different but God is “still working”!

- As Matthew Henry said: “Days of “trouble” must be days of “prayer”!”
- **(V4)** “See the enemy is “puffed up”, his desires are not upright but the righteous person will live by his faith!
- God contrasts someone who is ‘wicked’, whose soul is swollen with pride; with someone who is righteous!
- “Judgment” is inescapable for the “wicked”; but the righteous will “live” by ‘faith’!
- The one who is right with God is the one who will survive, and that will be “because” he ‘continues’ to “trust God”, against all appearances, and through any amount of “delay”!

Friends:

It is said that God always answers prayers with “YES, NO or WAIT”! When you ask God hard questions, how “long” are you prepared to wait? And are you willing to accept the answers when they do come?

- Beginning with **(V5)**, God's answer takes the form of a logical argument: If it is true that the arrogant have ungodly desires, and never come to enjoy the blessings of God; how much more certain is it that the qualities accompanying such a wicked attitude will ultimately betray them? **(V5)**.
- The underlying implication is "clear":-
The Babylonians 'selfishness' and 'success' will be their "undoing"!
- Our Lord clearly said: "Do to others as you would "have" them do to you!"
Luke 6:31 P: 128
- God's reply is in the form of "5 woes" in which He pronounces the Babylonian's "doom"!
- The "1st woe" (VV6-8):
 - They are "greedy"!
 - They will suffer at the hands of the very people they have robbed!
 - They will be like burglars finding out that on the second visit the householder is awake, the alarm is set, and the dogs will bite!
- Aggressive "greed" is the "sin" here! They multiplied wealth at the "expense" of others!"
- The "depth" of the Babylonian's insensitivity towards others is seen in that they add to their riches by "extortion"!
- In the O.T. God gave riches to His people!
- King David said in 1 Chronicles 29:12:
"Wealth and Honour come from God, you are the Rulers of all things!"
- Israel was a chosen people with "earthly" promises and rewards – they were given a land and all the riches it held!
- In the "N.T." there is a different standard! The church was never given a land or the promise of riches!
- Paul says we have "every" "spiritual" blessing in Christ!
Eph 1:3
- Jesus says: "Store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal!"
Matt 6:20

Friends:

During this crisis we're all living in; is "Jesus Christ" your greatest treasure?

(V7) "Will not your creditors suddenly arise!"

- Will they not wake up and make you tremble?
- Then you will become their prey!

- The plundering Babylonians will eventually know the effects of plunder themselves!
- He who so “misused” others – conquering, looting and enslaving many – will himself experience the “same” fate!
- God’s way of “treating others is so different!

“Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you!”

Eph 4:32

- “Do “not” rejoice when your enemy falls, and let “not” your heart be glad when he stumbles!”

Pr 24:17

- The “2nd woe” (VV 9-11)
- The Babylonians are complacent!
- Their security will be undermined!
- The very stones and timbers of the great structures they have built will “rebel” against them!
- The Babylonians will have “no lasting empire”!
- In ruining others: they will eventually ruin themselves!

Friends:

As Christians we are to be content but “not” complacent!

- Yes as believers we should be “content” in any and every situation, Paul says so in *Philippians 4: 11-13*.
- Does Paul mean we should not try to improve our current situation, find a better job, earn more money, or further your education?
- Are we supposed to passively sit back and watch life go by?
- What about Jesus’ command to be salt of the earth and to shine your light?
- The answer is we need to be content with what God gives us without becoming complacent and lazy!
- “Remember” the person in Matthew 25 who was satisfied with what he ‘had’ and he ‘shouldn’t’ have been!
- The person who received “one talent’ didn’t do anything with it, despite the intent of his master!
- When the master returned, he was rebuked for his lack of effort!

Friends:

We all need to be persistent and faithful even in the smallest things, because what we do now matters not just for today but also for all eternity!

- So 'real contentment' like Paul describes in Philippians is "not" being satisfied or complacent, it is working diligently to glorify God, serve the common good, and further the Kingdom of God in everything we do!

Friends:

There was no complacency in Paul's contentment, and neither should there be in ours!

- The "3rd woe" (VV12-14)
- The Babylonians have sought "notoriety!"
- They established cities to perpetuate their name! However, the "chief materials" used in constructing these cities are seen for what they are: bloodshed and injustice!
- Such "conduct" is an "affront" to a holy righteous God!
- The Babylonians are arrogant, presumptuous and "full of themselves"!
- Anyone who makes a "Name for himself" will be "judged"!

Genesis 11:4

- **(V13)** "the Nations exhaust themselves for nothing?"
- They are "doomed" to be 'forgotten'; and a day is coming when "fame" of God's Name "only" will fill the world!
- **(V14)** *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea!*
- What a "marvelous" verse! Habakkuk is a book that gives us much "hope" for the future!
- Though things looked "bad" in his time, yet God promised better things to come!
- The nations that were then in "power" would "not succeed" in their evil intentions!
- God would "win in the end", His cause would prevail!
- The Kingdom of Satan is not going to win.
- Satan and all his forces cannot stop the Kingdom of God!
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) believes this verse is referring to "this age" and the victory of the gospel in this world in which we live: the good news of Jesus will cover the whole planet!
- Early pioneer 'missionaries' such as "William Carey" and "David Livingstone" believed wholeheartedly in Habakkuk 2:14!

- They proclaimed a gospel that would convert whole nations and whole continents to “Christ”!
- After laboring in India for 5 ½ years, Carey and his colleagues finally had “one convert” in 1800. They said, “He was only one, but a continent was coming behind him!”

Friends:

At times God’s work in people’s lives seems so slow, one step forward, 2 steps back, it’s easy to be “discouraged”; but like Habakkuk we need to remember the “earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord”: “that is enough”!

Friends:

- Let’s “continue” in “faith and love and hope”; because the All Powerful One will one day fulfill He’s promise!
- Let’s “not” believe that the church’s days are “numbered” here on earth: we all need to “wake up” and get on with the mission Jesus “gave us” “for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”!
- What are you “doing”, even during “isolation”, to help spread the aroma of Christ?
- The “4th woe” (VV15-17)
- They are crude and heartless and care nothing about putting others in “shameful” situations!
- So they in turn will be “shamed and scorned”!
- The Babylonians will drink the cup of God’s judgment!
- The “reason is in (V17): the Babylonians disregarded the value of the natural world, the animal kingdom, and civilized humanity!

Friends:

The natural and animal worlds are often made unwilling participants in mankind’s sin and greed!

- It’s a crime that has increasingly plague human society!
- Proverbs 12:10 says:- “the righteous care for the needs of their animals!”
- God tells us in Psalm 50 that all creatures, including our pets, belong to God for He made them!
- We are “stewards” of what God’s “given” to us!
- Neglecting what God’s given to us, whether property or animals, is not pleasing to God and what God has given, He has every right to take away!

Job 1:21

- The Babylonians “thoughtless conduct” indicates again their “godless arrogance” and “selfish presumption” for which “punishment” must come!
- The “5th woe”: (VV18-20)
- They are “idolatrous”!
- All other kinds of gods take the “place” of the true God in their lives!
- The Babylonians idolatrous “polytheism” is seen to be worthless!
- They ask a piece of “wood” to wake up; or a dumb stone to get up: “idols” are useless; since they are “mankind’s” creation!
- ‘Since’ the Babylonians worship gods of their “own creation” rather than the “Creator, Controller and Consummator” of history, their condemnation is “certain”! **(V9)**
- So “5 times” over God promises Habakkuk that He will “not” turn a “blind eye” to the wickedness of the Babylonians!
- “Not only” will He punish them, but He will repeatedly make the punishment “fit the crime”!
- Here is a great “mystery” in Biblical theology!
- The “harsh treatment” the Babylonian’s have in store for Judah is “both” ‘ordained by God’ as a just punishment for Judah’s “sin”; and at the same time deliberate wickedness on the Babylonian’s part, for which they themselves will be punished!
- Yes it’s an example of the “sovereignty of God” “versus” “man’s responsibility”!
- The Belgic Confession (1561) says: We believe that God, after He created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or change, BUT that He rules and governs them according to His holy will; so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment: “nevertheless”, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are “committed”.

Friends:

The Bible asserts “both” truths, “side by side”:

Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are “friends”; they work together!

- As we study God, we are all forced to remember and reflect upon the “limitations” of our own nature! We are finite beings trying to “understand” an infinite God!
- I think **(V20)** is an apt ending:

“The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth be “silent” before Him!

- Judah was sinful, Babylon was sinful, you and I are sinful!
- The perfect righteousness that we are unable to attain, God “freely” gives us in Christ!
- Knowing that God Rules over all, allows us to trust in His promises!
- No pandemic can happen outside God’s good plan for our lives.

Rom 8:28

- Mysterious? YES; Incomprehensible? YES; Wonderful? In every way!
- **LIVE FOR JESUS THIS WEEK!!**