

Scripture Reading: Habakkuk 2:20 – 3:19

“2:20 “But Jehovah is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him.

3:1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth. 2 O Jehovah, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O Jehovah, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy. 3 God came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. 4 His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, And there His power was hidden. 5 Before Him went pestilence, and fever followed at His feet. 6 He stood and measured the earth; He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered, The perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; The curtains of the land of Midian trembled. 8 O Jehovah, were You displeased with the rivers, Was Your anger against the rivers, Was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation? 9 Your bow was made quite ready; Oaths were sworn over Your arrows. Selah You divided the earth with rivers. 10 The mountains saw You and trembled; The overflowing of the water passed by. The deep uttered its voice, And lifted its hands on high. 11 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; At the light of Your arrows they went, At the shining of Your glittering spear. 12 You marched through the land in indignation; You trampled the nations in anger. 13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For salvation with Your Anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked, By laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah 14 You thrust through with his own arrows The head of his villages. They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me; Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret. 15 You walked through the sea with Your horses, Through the heap of great waters. 16 When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops. 17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls— 18 Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 19 Jehovah God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills. To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.”

''Jehovah God is My Strength''

This will be my final message on the Book of Habakkuk with this short series taking us from Epiphany Sunday to this Sunday where we bring our own complaint before God about the horrific sin of abortion in our nation. I have argued that Habakkuk can easily be seen as America's prophet and I have also argued that we must see this as a book of hope: Hope we will see if we remember Mike's lessons on what real Biblical hope is.

➤ This is especially important as we lift up our honest imprecatory prayers on this day.

We have learned that it is a good thing to have honest conversations with our God and Savior; provided we do so with a heart of humility and an attitude of respect. We have also learned that we must be ready for God to give us His perfect answer, even if it is not what we want or even find it quite troubling.

We saw how our prophet lived in a time not unlike our own, where a nation that was in covenant with God had fallen into grievous sin: The idolatry brought forth by King Manasseh led to the sacrifice of the very children God blessed them with! This would be the sin that God remembered when He sent His people off into the Babylonian captivity.

The Prophet Habakkuk is troubled by all of this sin and cries out to God:

How long?

God's answer is quite shocking and the honest conversation continues with the Prophet respectfully pointing out that while Israel had their problems, the Babylonians were SO bad that God could not even look at them. The Lord goes on to give our prophet a very sobering description of the Babylonians and assures him that they will indeed be God's instrument to judge His nation and assures him that they too will, in time, be judged for their sins. Chapter two ended with the proclamation that Jehovah is in His temple and for all the earth to keep silence. Chapter three is a very emotional prayer that is lifted up by Habakkuk and intended to be put to music and used to bring comfort to God's people *[don't think it has made it into any of our hymnals, so there is a challenge for our young musicians!]*

BUT to properly understand this prayer and to see how this is a book of hope, we need to remember another lesson that you hear often here at Church of the King.

- We need to know our Bibles well!

In this case it means remembering our Old Testament history which gives us some insight to the Prophet's prayer and in doing so it will help us to understand the language that is often used in the New Testament as well. I am not going to do a verse by verse review this morning, but will hit just a few of the highlights to give you an idea of what the Prophet is doing. Habakkuk begins with the proper fear that we should have when we know that God is about to act... Fear that all of us feel in God's presence as we see with any Saint brought into the presence of God like Isaiah or the Apostle John. And certainly the fear that should be present when we know God is about to judge, as we saw with King David in Psalm 51 or our prophet here today...

2 O Jehovah, I have heard your speech and was afraid;"

- **BUT** just as we saw with King David, Habakkuk quickly remembers God's grace...

"O Jehovah, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy."

The prophet then uses what we would call apocalyptic language to recount God's faithfulness in the history of Israel... A very familiar history that had been full of failures and times where God's people wandered far from their God. The prophet does not recount their sins, but the hearers would certainly have remembered the brothers who sold Joseph into slavery, how the people made and worshipped the golden calf at the very foot of God's mountain, how the early spies caused the 40 year journey into the wilderness and of course then you have the book of Judges and all the Kings of Israel and Judah. It is not as if God's people being unfaithful was anything new and so Habakkuk does what we often see in the Scriptures: He remembers how faithful God has been to them!

3 "God came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah [God's people were brought forth from the south... In Egypt] "His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. 4 His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, And there His power was hidden. 5 Before Him went pestilence, and fever followed at His feet."

Remember all the plagues in Egypt? God's people were protected! Habakkuk goes on with such vibrant language to speak of how God had determined that the sins of the nations in the Land of Canaan were now full and that it was time for the conquest by His people.

Listen to verse 8: **"O Jehovah, were You displeased with the rivers, Was Your anger against the rivers, Was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation?"**

- **OK** kids, let's see how your Bible history is doing: Can you remember any rivers or seas in the story of the exodus from Egypt and entering the land of Canaan?

God was not displeased with the Red Sea when he parted it or the Jordan when he stopped its waters: They were His instruments of deliverance!

Verse 11 should remind us of one of the battles that Joshua fought...

“The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; At the light of Your arrows they went, At the shining of Your glittering spear. 12 You marched through the land in indignation; You trampled the nations in anger.”

Not only should Joshua’s battle come to mind, but we see again that because the sun and moon are rulers in the sky they represent the nations or rulers of the earth. This type of apocalyptic language is not found only in the Old Testament, but it is used by Jesus, the writers of some of the Epistles and of course it is used very heavily in the Book of Revelation.

- If we don’t remember this, AND know our Bibles well, we will be very confused!

Having brought God’s faithfulness to the nation of Israel to mind, our prophet then remembers WHY God has been faithful to His people AND why He will remain faithful.

13 **“You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For salvation with Your Anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked, By laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah”**

The salvation of God’s people did not come with the calling of Abraham, the great exodus led by Moses, the conquests made by Joshua, the Kingdom established by David nor the Temple built by Solomon... Salvation would come from God’s anointed... The Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 16 he returns to consider the answer that God has given to his complaint...

16 **“When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops.”**

- Yes the Babylonians were coming as God’s instrument of judgment on His people’s unfaithfulness.

Habakkuk knew that this would NOT be the end of God’s people, nor would it mean that God had abandoned His great plan of salvation. Israel would one day be restored to the land and God’s anointed, the Messiah Jesus would be born in tiny Bethlehem to save His people from their sins. But for now, judgment was at the door and the prophet does not sugar coat what is about to happen...

17 **“Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls”**

Now this might not seem so bad to our modern ears and minds and as I pondered it this week, I realized again how difficult it is to paint a similar picture, but let me try... Speaking as a wife who is responsible for running her household, it might read something like this...

- Though my husband has lost his job and has no prospects,
- Though all of our savings are gone,
- Though all of the farm-workers have died and the grocery store shelves are bare,
- Though the power has been shut off and our water is contaminated...

- Do you get the picture?

From a human standpoint, this woman would be facing utter despair, just as God’s people did when the hoards of Babylon descended upon them.

- So how does our prophet conclude this prayer/song that is given to encourage God’s people?
- He brings them hope!

He brings them hope from the only place that real hope can be found...

18 Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 19 Jehovah God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, & He will make me walk on my high hills.”

➤ Was Habakkuk's hope well placed?

I am sure that the Babylonians thought that Israel was finished as they murdered thousands, destroyed the Temple and walls and carried off all the gold and silver of the Temple, along with their brightest young people! However, just as God promised Habakkuk, Babylon was judged for their sins and has been thrown into the dust bin of history while God's anointed one, Jesus now reigns as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As God's plan continues to be worked out in history we continue to see times where God's people become unfaithful and times where the wicked think they have gotten the upper hand on God. Our nation was founded by faithful men and women who desired to spread the light of the Gospel!

We have been brought to the point today where I was able to make the case a few weeks ago that Habakkuk can be looked at as America's prophet. Just as it was then for Israel, today our nation has soaked itself in idolatry and it has born the bitter fruit of sin: We have seen the destruction of marriage through adultery, divorce and homosexuality. We are in the midst of committing financial suicide and we have killed over 55 million of our children at the altar of convenience: Abortion. It is this sin that we confront with special prayers at this time of year where our nation remembers the Roe v. Wade decision that overturned the abortion laws in all fifty states. This is not the only time that we concern ourselves with this sin: We covenant to stand against it and other sins in our member covenant.

The sin of abortion is regularly condemned from this pulpit and our children are taught that children are a blessing from God and made in His image. We support organizations who oppose abortion and those who support women who chose life as a better alternative. We ask our members to do what they can to help in this battle, through prayers, side-walk counseling, speaking out on college campuses or the state capitol... Or just being ready to give an answer for the reason we oppose this sin. And of course, opposition to this sin means that our lives must practice what we believe in our marriages, the faithfulness of our youth and our respect for those made in God's image.

➤ Today we lift up our complaint to God about the condition of our land and specifically the sin of abortion.

I wanted to take the time to go through this minor prophet briefly so we would better understand the importance and the seriousness of what we do.

Among those who oppose abortion you will find several ways in which they think we can solve the problem.

Some look to human wisdom, believing that we can, with the right education, teach people the value of human life and convince them to reject abortion.

Others look to the political world as the means to solve the problem: A Human Life Amendment to the US Constitution is what is needed.

Both in my humble opinion are fool's errands. Everyone today knows that smoking is dangerous for your health and that a practicing homosexual reduces his life-span by some twenty years, but neither has gone away.

On the political front with have a two-party system where one party is the cheerleader for planned parenthood and the other is scared of the issue.

While there certainly is a place for good education and proper political action, by themselves they are NOT the solution. Our salvation comes from the same place that Habakkuk appealed to:

➤ God as He sits on His throne!

Our cry or complaint must be taken to the throne of Heaven AND we must be sincere is asking for God's help and READY for the answer He gives. We must pray with Habakkuk, "O Father, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O Jesus, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy."

- **That is the honesty with which we should lift up our prayers this day.**

As we do, we too should remember all of the faithfulness that we see in the Scriptures as God brought forth His salvation in history.

Today, we also have the history of the church where we again see the continuing faithfulness of our God in the midst of many failures and disappointments on the part of men.

How will God answer our prayers?

I gave a few examples two weeks ago, but if we look to the history of Israel at the time that Habakkuk lifted up his complaint we see that it could come in many ways.

It is fascinating to see that even in the life of King Manasseh, whose sins God would remember at the point of exile, we find repentance. He is taken off to Babylon and returns a broken man who takes down many of the idols he put in place.

Would it not be glorious to see our prayers answered with some crisis in the president's life that brings him to repentance... Such repentance that he makes as big an effort to shut down Planned Parenthood as he has made trying to take away guns these past few weeks!

- **Do we have the faith to believe our God can still do such things?**

This history also reminds us that we will have future disappointments... Even with the change in Manasseh, his son Ammon soon returns to those idols. However, God again shows mercy with his son Josiah who leads perhaps the greatest revival in Israel's history.

- **That is certainly something I have prayed for our nation over the years.**

And yet, in the end Israel did face judgment for the sin of killing their children and that is a chilling thought for our nation.

We have holocaust museums designed to remind people of the evil that man is capable of, showing how some ten million people died in concentration camps.

We denounce communism which led to the deaths of tens of millions of people.

- **And yet as the death toll from abortion in America approaches sixty million children, we simple ignore it.**

As Matt Drudge tweeted last week, "There will be over 3,500 killed in the USA today from abortion: No flags lowered; no presidents crying; no media hyperventilation... Normal day!"

Well, these deaths can be ignored by all the media and liberals in our nation and there may even be many, many days that go by where we don't give it a thought, but I can assure you that God knows, and YES He cares!

Our covenant God who even after the revival of Josiah said in II Kings 23:

"26 Nevertheless Jehovah did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. 27 And Jehovah said, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.'"

So I trust you can see that lifting up the prayers that we are praying today are very serious: We should feel the dread that came upon Habakkuk and cry out to God, “in wrath remember mercy.”

We must also remember that God is always faithful to His covenant people and that in the end He will bring ALL the nations of the earth under the righteous rule of King Jesus!

We will respond this morning with the singing of a song that has become one of our favorites here at Church of the King and it is very appropriate for this day...

We are bringing our complaint before God and we in many ways should fear to hear God’s answer: And yet we know that He moves in mysterious ways and even if we see His judgment, those dark clouds will in the end bring blessings on your head!

As Pastor Doug Hayes has said of this instructive book, “[Habakkuk came to know] that Jehovah was executing His justice in the world. The result would be the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and the salvation of the righteous. The Lord is the strength of all those who trust in Him, even if they suffer during His judgments.

Because Jehovah is a just God who is building a house/kingdom that will endure forever, the faithful will rise up with strength and walk on the high hills. The faithful will wait joyfully for the Lord to establish justice and righteousness on the earth.”

And in the end, as our hymn writer added, ‘He will make it plain.’

Communion Meditation: Psalm 27

“1 A Psalm of David. Jehovah is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? Jehovah is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell.

3 Though an army may encamp against me, My heart shall not fear; Though war should rise against me, In this I will be confident.

4 One thing I have desired of Jehovah, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of Jehovah, And to inquire in His temple. 5 For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock. 6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me; Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to Jehovah.”