

# You Call This Justice, Lord

Expositions of Habakkuk

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**Bible Text:** Habakkuk 1:12-2:5  
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Habakkuk chapter one beginning with verse 12. We will read through the fifth verse of chapter two. Hear God's Word.

Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct. Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they? Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, Like creeping things without a ruler over them? The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, Drag them away with their net, And gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net And burn incense to their fishing net; Because through these things their catch is large, And their food is plentiful. Will they therefore empty their net And continually slay nations without sparing?

I will stand on my guard post And station myself on the rampart; And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, And how I may reply when I am reproved.

Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay. Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith. Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, So that he does not stay at home. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, And he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all nations And collects to himself all peoples."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Habakkuk 1:12-2:5.

May God be pleased to bless to us the reading of his Word.

Let's pray together.

*Father, your Word is good. It is all together good because you are the good God and you have been pleased to give this good Word to us through the inspiration of your Spirit. We thank you that you used human instruments. We thank you that you used human instruments like the prophet Habakkuk. And as we take time once again this morning to look into your Word through this prophet, we pray that you will enlighten our minds, give us good understanding, and help us to understand the truth. Father, we do not find true justice and full justice in this world, in this life. That justice, perfect, justice can only come from above. It only comes from you. It only comes from you through Jesus Christ your Son. So help us grasp this, Father. And help us in our understanding of our lives in this world we pray in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

In order to play basketball you have to have a court with boundary lines. And, of course you have to have those hoops at either end and two teams that play in opposition to one another. But you also have to have rules, rules for the game. And you have to have referees to enforce the rules, at least this is what they are supposed to do.

You do chuckle at this because often times you are ready throw a shoe at the television set because you don't like the call that was made. All right. Why do you do that? Because you are indignant. Justice is not shown on the basketball court. And it is only natural that you should do this. The human soul longs for justice. And those referees try to do a good job on the basketball court but they do not always succeed. Why? There is not perfect justice in this world. And they are not omniscient. They can't see every angle of a play and therefore make the call as you have seen it from your vantage point. And so you call for justice. And often the crowd will boo.

But this is another indication that true justice is not found in this life. It comes from above. And we all have to recognize that this is the case. You will not find true justice in this life. You will only find it in God through Jesus Christ. And if you seek justice in this life alone, you will die. On the other hand, if you seek the God of justice through Christ you will live.

This is the lesson that comes to us from Habakkuk today, that you do not see true justice in the world. If you seek justice in this world alone you will die; if you seek the God of justice in Jesus Christ you will live.

Let's review where we have been with Habakkuk. Habakkuk has been lamenting the situation in Judea, the sins of the people. As he laments the sins of the people in Judea God tells Habakkuk that he is going to send the Babylonians as his instrument of justice.

Let's read the first part of chapter one.

The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.<sup>2</sup>

Here is Habakkuk’s lament as he looks at his own culture and looks at his own society. And, as you recall, we may look at our culture and our society in a similar way.

Then God answers.

Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, That fierce and impetuous people Who march throughout the earth To seize dwelling places which are not theirs. They are dreaded and feared; Their justice and authority originate with themselves.<sup>3</sup>

You see here in verse seven, there is the note of justice again.

Now in our text this morning, Habakkuk objects that the Chaldeans are being sent against the Judean populace as the hand of God’s justice. Do they know anything about justice?

Their justice and authority originate with themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards And keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, Their horsemen come from afar; They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings And rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress And heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, They whose strength is their god.<sup>4</sup>

This is Habakkuk’s first complaint or first lament and God’s first response. Habakkuk laments Judah’s sin. God responds. He will send the the Chaldeans.

Now when you look at Habakkuk and read his little book, you discover that Habakkuk is no dummy. He is a man of faith. He does understand God. And he relates this understanding of God. Look at verse 12, the beginning of our text this morning. Note Habakkuk’s faith. “Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One?”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Habakkuk 1:1-4.

<sup>3</sup> Habakkuk 1:5-7.

<sup>4</sup> Habakkuk 1:7-11.

<sup>5</sup> Habakkuk 1:12.

You are the everlasting God. You are the one who knows the end from the beginning. You are omniscient and omnipotent. You are the great God of all and you are my God. Habakkuk knows he is in covenant with God. He calls him, “my God” and “my holy One.”<sup>6</sup> You see Habakkuk’s faith here. Habakkuk also recognizes the Lord above as the great God who is separate from all evil. He is the holy one of all. In addition, Habakkuk understands God’s purpose in sending the Babylonians. “You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.”<sup>7</sup>

And then, also, at verse one in chapter two. “I will stand on my guard post And station myself on the rampart; And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, And how I may reply when I am reproved.”<sup>8</sup> Habakkuk knows that he is but a creature and that if he dares to lift his voice up against God and to question God, that he is subject to reproof from God. He understands his station in life as God’s creature and he knows that God himself is his only hope.

He is like many of us who are here today. You understand, I hope you do, at least, that God through Jesus Christ is your only hope. You know that you are but a creature and God is the Creator. You understand you are not to worship yourself, the creature, rather than the Creator. You are to worship the holy God of all.

But then, when you look at the situation around you in the world, you have questions with regard to the justice of God. “Why are you silent, Lord?” And when God in his providence brings an answer, you may also question his answer just like Habakkuk is now questioning his answer. God is going to bring the Chaldeans as the hand of his judgment against Judea.

I didn’t mention this last week, but when we talked a little bit about the rise of Islam and the growth of the Muslim population in the world and the fact that in Europe by 2015 the Muslim population in Europe could double, this is going to have a tremendous impact on Europe. It is going to have a tremendous impact on the rest of the world. What if God in his providence was willing to use Muslims as the hand of his judgment against the sins of America? What if God were to do that?

Now, I don’t know that that is what he is up to, but God is pleased to use nations as the hand of judgment against other nations. And there is a lot of blood on American hands. All you have to do is think about the sin of abortion and the millions of babies that have been slaughtered. There is a lot of blood. And if God were to do this, I am sure we would have questions, would we not, about God’s justice.

You see, this is where Habakkuk is in our text. Let’s go on. Habakkuk argues that it is really not just for God to send a nation who is less righteous—that is, the Babylonians—against Judea as the hand of judgment. Look, if you would, at verses 13 through 17 in

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Habakkuk 2:1.

chapter one. “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously?”<sup>9</sup>

Habakkuk is turning his attention to the Babylonians, those people who are so vicious and violent. “Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?”<sup>10</sup> You see, there is the basic argument. Habbakuk questions God. You are sending these pagan Babylonians against us in Judea? You are sending those against us who are less righteous?

Now you might have a question here with regard to sin itself. The catechism does talk about the fact that some sins are more heinous than others. The catechism says, “Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.”<sup>11</sup> The proof text for this answer in the Shorter Catechism is the sin of Judas in betraying the Savior. That was a very grievous sin. It was a sin against the very Son of God. And because of the ripple effect of that sin, how it could spread and affect so many, it is also a more heinous sin. We do recognize the fact that some sins may be more heinous than others. But on the other hand, we often take the position that all sins are equal. Sin is after all sin. And “the wages of sin is death.”<sup>12</sup>

But we do have to remember, here, that some sins are more heinous than others. And so Habakkuk is arguing along this line. He continues in verse 13. “Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they? Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, Like creeping things without a ruler over them?”<sup>13</sup> You are sending the Babylonians against us and you are treating us like insects crawling out from under rocks having neither king nor ruler nor Lord. Is that actually what we are? There is an irony here. In their sin, the people of Judea descend to the level of beasts and vermin. They repudiated the Lordship of Christ. They rejected him as their King. This is the intent behind the words, “You made men like the fish of the sea, Like creeping things without a ruler over them?”<sup>14</sup>

Habakkuk also compares the warfare of the Babylonians to fishing.

The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, Drag them away with their net, And gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net And burn incense to their fishing net; Because through these things their catch is large, And their food is plentiful.<sup>15</sup>

Grasp the imagery. Habakkuk likens the hordes of the Babylonians coming in war to the casting out a net over the Judean populace and dragging in the net with a great catch.

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<sup>9</sup> Habakkuk 1:13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer 83.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 6:23.

<sup>13</sup> Habakkuk 1:13-14.

<sup>14</sup> Habakkuk 1:14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Habakkuk 1:15-16.

They pat themselves on the back. Then offer sacrifices to their net. This is their power. Go back up to verse 11 in chapter one. “Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, *They whose strength is their god.*”<sup>16</sup>

These Babylonian hordes find their own strength, their own ability, their own prowess, their own intellectual abilities to be their god. They worship themselves. They worship of the creature rather than the Creator.<sup>17</sup> These are the same kind of people Paul weighs in against in Romans chapter one. They are fallen, sinful, pagan people. Why are you doing this, Lord? Is it just on your part to send such a horde against us?

What does God have to say then in response? We have to go to chapter two now. Verse two.

Then the LORD answered me and said, “Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.”<sup>18</sup>

Habakkuk receives this Word from God. “The vision is set. The Chaldeans are coming and they are the hand of my judgment against Judah. Their coming may tarry for a time, but they will come. Wait. Wait, for it will certainly come. It will not delay.” This wasn’t the most happy answer that Habakkuk might have expected to receive.

I go back to Islam once again because these Muslims, these radical terrorists, have been pleased to target the United States. At the same time we must understand, you must understand and I must understand, that nothing happens in this world except by the plan and the purpose of God. What is God’s purpose in these things? Was 9/11/2001 a wake up call for America? Ought it to be understood in this way? Was it a call from God saying, “Repent. Turn to me. Look to me and be saved”?

Now I can’t infallibly tell you that this was the case. But when you look at Habakkuk and you look at how God deals with nations, it seems to me you have to ask the question. And then you have to ask the further question: As there are enemies looming out there, as Americans are going along their merry way, as the Christian population in the United States is declining, what are we to say? Are we to call the Church and are we to call the nation to awaken and to pay attention and to listen to the Word of God?

Many people are saying, “These are troubling times. These are times in the nation where things are changing rapidly.” Is God *calling* us in his providence, in his providential dealings with us. Is this the case?

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<sup>16</sup> Habakkuk 1:11, Emphasis Added.

<sup>17</sup> See Romans 1:25.

<sup>18</sup> Habakkuk 2:2-3.

Well, let's look at another aspect of God's answer. Look at verses four and five in our text. "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him."<sup>19</sup> This immediately brings to mind the words of God, "Pride comes before the fall."<sup>20</sup> "The proud one, His soul is not right within him."<sup>21</sup> The proud one is the one whose strength, whose own strength and ability is his god.

God forbid that we should be numbered among the proud who think in ourselves that our strength and our intellectual capabilities are really our god. Such ought not to be the case.

Verse five. "Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, So that he does not stay at home. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, And he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all nations And collects to himself all peoples."<sup>22</sup>

The intoxicating wine here is the power, the sense of power that the Babylonians have. And this sense of power and authority can be intoxicating. It is very troubling in the halls of government today that individuals who go to Washington are intoxicated by the power that is there. They become consumed with themselves and their own abilities and what they can do. "As for the proud one, His soul is not right within him."<sup>23</sup> And what God is saying through Habakkuk is that his soul is not right with God. This is so because he is looking to himself as the ultimate authority rather than to God as the ultimate authority.

But then God has the second response here. Look at verse four again. "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."<sup>24</sup> Of course, these latter words are quoted by the apostle Paul in Romans, in Galatians, and by the writer to the Hebrews. "The just shall live by faith."<sup>25</sup> The righteous one shall live by faith.

And Paul says:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."<sup>26</sup>

From whence cometh justice? You see the proud man, the proud individual, the individual whose soul is not right with God looks at the world and seeks justice in the world.

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<sup>19</sup> Habakkuk 2:4.

<sup>20</sup> See Proverbs 16:18.

<sup>21</sup> Habakkuk 2:4.

<sup>22</sup> Habakkuk 2:5.

<sup>23</sup> Habakkuk 2:4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

<sup>26</sup> Romans 1:16-17.

Think about this AIG situation and the bonuses. It caused a lot of controversy and individuals are saying, “It is not right for these fellows to get these big bonuses. This is just not right. It is not just.” And so the political people come along saying, “This is not just.” And they say, “Ok, we are going to target the people who get bonuses with special taxes.” Is it just to use the power of the government to levy special taxes against individuals because you don’t like what they have? Is that just? So, you see, here we are in the real world on these questions of justice. And then is it right for some of these executives who have gotten the bonuses to be getting emails threatening their lives? “We would like to see you strung up with piano wire.” Is that just?

All of this is operating on the plane of the world and seeking justice in the world. This is what is happening. As we said last week, it is forgetting the vertical dimension. And part of the lesson that God is giving to Habakkuk is, “Yes, I am going to send the Chaldeans. But you remember this, Habakkuk, true justice is not going to be found in the plane of this world. If you want true justice you have to look to me and you have to look to me alone.” The just man, the righteous man will live by faith. You have to trust God. You have to trust the God of justice.

And, of course there is another side of this picture for you and for me. That if you really want justice in this life on the plane of this world, be careful; God is liable to give it to you. You need to trust the god of justice and you need to trust him through Jesus Christ.

As Paul says:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the *righteousness* of God is revealed.<sup>27</sup>

Here we see the justice of God revealed. Yes, in the gospel the justice of God is revealed. And then Paul quotes from Habakkuk chapter two and verse four, “The righteous [man] shall live by faith.”<sup>28</sup> If you want justice, you have to look to God because justice only comes from above. And when you trust Jesus Christ you realize that Jesus Christ went to the cross, that he died on that cross, and that he took the penalty due to you for your sins. God’s justice was brought to bear on Jesus Christ for you and for me.

Habakkuk understood that this was the case. Habakkuk understood the message from Genesis about the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent and whose heel would be bruised. And, of course, that seed of the woman is Jesus Christ who came after the time of Habakkuk. But Jesus Christ, coming after the time of Habakkuk, was the object of Habakkuk’s faith. And so Habakkuk understood these words, “The righteous will live by faith.”<sup>29</sup> This is why he confessed, “We will not die.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Romans 1:16-17, Emphasis Added.

<sup>28</sup> Habakkuk 2:4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Habakkuk 1:12.



And so the sum and substance of the matter, friends, is this. You cannot be assured that you will find true justice in this world. You have to understand this and I have to understand this. You need to trust the God of justice through Jesus Christ. If you seek justice only on the plane of this world, you will be running down a blind alley and find yourself in a cul de sac. You won't find it. You won't see it. You will die seeking for it. You have to look to Christ. You have to look to the God of justice through Jesus Christ.

In the one case, you see, you will be like the Babylonian of old whose soul is not right with God, whose appetite is like death and Sheol. And this will be your end, the grave and death and hell. But, on the other hand, if you are like Habakkuk and look to the God of justice through Jesus Christ you will have life and life eternal. This is the gospel according to Habakkuk.

So when you throw the shoe at the television set watching the evening news or watching the basketball tournament, remember the lesson of Habakkuk. Remember it in your heart. You are not going to see ultimate true justice in this world. True justice comes from above, from God, through Jesus Christ. And when you realize that this is the case you can say with Habakkuk, "We will live, we will live." If you seek justice in this world alone you will die; if you seek the God of justice in Jesus Christ you will live.

Let's pray together.

*Father, help us to understand your Word. Help us in this matter of justice in the world. We all wrestle with it. We wrestle with it with regard to the news. We wrestle with it in our own lives. We wrestle with it on the job and in the school. And we are prone to grumble. Forgive us, Father. We are prone to grumble and ask, Are you watching? Why are you silent? Why are you allowing these injustices to take place? Help us to be patient and to understand you will in your time bring about the judgment. But also help us to understand that we are not to seek thorough justice in this world. We must look to you above in heaven through Jesus Christ. This is where life is to be found. Thank you, Lord. And I pray for your people that as they struggle with this whole matter of justice and injustice that they will look to you and understand that it is ultimately in you and through Jesus Christ that we see true justice and that the righteous man, the just man, lives by faith in you. Bless us to this end we ask in the name of Jesus Christ who is the Lord. Amen.*