

Subject: *Clinging to God in a Crisis*

Scripture: *Habakkuk 1:1-13*

We often ask the question “Why?” Parents ask their children “why” and the answer is “I don’t know.” Children ask their parents “why” and the answer is “Because I said so.” In this book the prophet Habakkuk questions God, and then God gives him an answer. But that causes him to have another question, and God was gracious to give him another answer. It’s important to understand that his questions didn’t come from a heart refusing to believe; his questions came from a heart trying to believe.

During this pandemic people have a lot of questions: Why did this happen? Who is really responsible? How long will it last? How many more people will die? Will things ever get back to normal? When will we ever feel safe again? Will the economy ever recover?

The name Habakkuk means “one who embraces or clings.” This was an appropriate name for a prophet who kept clinging to God and even found joy in the midst of a crisis. The corona virus came on this world suddenly and it soon became the corona crisis. Habakkuk is one of the “minor prophets.” The last 12 books of the Old Testament are called “minor prophets” because these books are shorter in length than the books of the major prophets (Isaiah through Daniel). But don’t let the name minor prophet fool you, because there is nothing minor about Habakkuk’s message.

We don’t know anything about the prophet Habakkuk except what we find in the book. This may imply that he was so well known in his day that he needed no introduction, or it may imply that the focus was not to be on him, but only on his message of how we can cling to God in a crisis.

1. THE PROPHET’S CIRCUMSTANCES

Habakkuk prophesied in a time of upheaval and change for the world. It was during the final days of the Assyrian Empire and the beginning of the Babylonian Empire. It was also a time of change for God’s people in Judah. King Josiah had just been killed after leading people to a spiritual reformation. Soon after his death the nation overturned his godly reforms and reverted back to its evil ways. Habakkuk served the Lord at the same time as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zephaniah, but it was Habakkuk that had the assignment of being the last prophet in Judah before the Babylonians destroyed it. This was a difficult time of crisis.

2. THE PROPHET’S CONCERN

Habakkuk’s circumstances led to his concern. This book is unusual in that the prophet’s message came from a back and forth dialog between him and God. It almost reads like a diary that came from the prophet’s questions and God’s answers. He looked at the spiritual condition of the nation and it caused him to question God’s silence and why He didn’t punish the people for their sins. Many people wrestle with the same question: if God is aware of evil, and if God hates evil, and if He is able to stop even, then why doesn’t He do so?

Notice that the book is introduced in 1:1 as “the burden” because it was a message of God’s judgment. The prophet observed what was going on among his own people. Justice was virtually non-existent. Violence and wickedness were prevalent. The

prophet had been concerned for a long time (“how long”) and he called out for God’s intervention.

3. THE PROPHET’S CONFUSION

In verses 5-11, God gave the prophet an answer. God is not ignorant, indifferent, or unable to judge evil. He will in fact punish evil, and He will use the Babylonians to do it. Habakkuk was stunned (vs. 12-13). He couldn’t understand how God could use a people as wicked as the Babylonians to punish His own people. The cure of Babylonian judgment seemed worse than the disease of Jewish rebellion. How could the holy God use such a wicked people to fulfill His purpose? It didn’t seem right to the prophet.

4. THE PROPHET’S CONFIDENCE

In 2:1-4, the prophet stood upon the watchtower in anticipation of what the Lord will show him. In part (vs. 4) the Lord reminded him of the consequences of the proud and the reward of the righteous. The last part of verse 4 is a profound statement that is quoted three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Habakkuk has been called the “forefather of the Reformation” because of his focus on faith and that God’s people (the just) live by faith. The truth of Habakkuk was echoed by Paul and then by Luther and Calvin. Our journey begins with faith, continues in faith, and ends with faith. The just (those who are right with God) shall live (now and always) by faith (trusting God even when we can’t see how things will turn out).

The bottom line is that God’s people trust Him. On the other hand, the Babylonians were like all other people of the ancient world. They put their faith in false gods and made images of their gods. Look at 2:18-20. Notice the sharp contrast between the silent idols (vs. 19) and the living God before whom all people must keep silence. How foolish for people to make and worship their false gods, when they should be in submission and silence before the one true God. ***Psalms 46:10** Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.*

5. THE PROPHET’S CONTENTMENT

By chapter 3, Habakkuk’s heart has moved from frustration to faith, from questioning to certainty, and from worry to worship. He concludes with a prayer for God’s mercy (3:1-2) and his personal testimony of contentment in the Lord (3:17-19). If the economy is completely wiped out (vs. 17), Habakkuk will rejoice in the Lord, the God of his salvation (vs. 18). He will draw his strength from the Lord (vs. 19) and he will be stable and secure like a deer walking on a steep mountain. Regardless of our circumstances, we have true satisfaction, strength, and stability in the Lord. Remember what Paul wrote when he was in jail: “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). This short book of Habakkuk teaches us many great lessons:

- Bring your questions to the Lord (it’s alright to ask God “why?”)
- Realize that God may work in unexpected ways
- Be willing to wait on God for more guidance and assurance
- Rest in God’s sovereign will and plan (“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, even as it is in heaven”)
- Remember that God will punish sin in His own way and in His own time
- Depend on God for joy, strength, and stability in the midst of hard times
- Always trust in the Lord because He is all you need