

How Should We Then Wait

Habakkuk 2:1-4, 2:20

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Good morning CPC. At this time, I invite you to open your Bibles to Habakkuk chapter 2. The focus of my meditation today will be verses 1-4 and verse 20. That's Habakkuk chapter 2. And it reads,

I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith."

"But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."
[ESV]

This is the word of the Lord.

In the previous meditation, Habakkuk was frustrated. King Josiah had died, and the culture in Judah was in a downward spiral. To borrow from David Well's definition of worldliness, sin was made to look normal, and righteousness appeared odd and out of place in Judah. The law was being perverted to the point where it seemed like the righteous were always outnumbered and surrounded by the wicked. And to make matters worse, God didn't seem to be doing anything. Habakkuk's prayers appeared to be continually attended with loud cries, but nothing changed. How long? Why aren't you doing anything? Such was his lament.

And right there at the heart of the prophet's agonizing thoughts, there's this suggestion right under the surface of his prayers. It's a suggestion that indicates or at least seems to communicate to us that the matters of holiness and purity were of more importance to the prophet than it was to God. At least, that was the prophet's perspective.

Well, contrary to the prophet's complaint, the Lord did care. But His divine plan to resolve the issue of evil in the covenant community was more than Habakkuk could take. You see, Habakkuk had a different mental model as to how to fix the issues in Judah. Habakkuk, when he was coming to God in prayer praying how long, had sort of a clenched fist perspective concerning prayer. He was praying, how long? Why aren't you doing anything? And as he was offering his prayers to God, his clenched fist around his prayers represented how he wanted God to act. Habakkuk wasn't taking his burdens to the Lord and leaving them there, but He was taking His burdens to the Lord and saying, God, I'll be back. I'm expecting you to do it how I have them here in my hand.

But after we look at God's response in chapter 1 verses 5 through 11, we see the prophet meeting that response with a completely different tone. The prophet seems to be chilled and trembling as he considers how God is going to resolve the issue. Surely, God is not going to send a nation that is unrighteous to act as a rod of correction for a people more righteous than they. The very thought of it caused the prophet to tremble.

And so as we see the prophet responding to God's answer to his prayer, his tone sounds something like, O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds your hands have made. I see the stars. I hear the rolling thunder. Thy power throughout the universe displayed. He went into hymnology. He said something like that.

In fact, as Habakkuk was looking to grapple with and consider God's response, he begins to shift his focus away from his complaint and on the attributes of God considering the eternity of God, His self-existence, the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, the faithfulness of God. And in that moment, a larger reality began to take center stage, higher than the mountains that he faced and stronger than any problem that could plague his culture. He realized that God was so much bigger, so much greater. And the realization came to Habakkuk's mind that how God chooses to do what He does, and even when He chose to do it, the Lord's timing was well above the prophet's pay grade.

And so, here, we see the prophet learning something of a lesson on waiting. And he takes us on something of a guided tour through this lesson as he seeks to answer for us our question, how should we then wait? In the midst of a pandemic, in the midst of social unrest, in the midst of our personal struggles, pains, and doubts, and grief that we're already going through in our house, in our lives, how should we then wait?

Habakkuk takes us through this under the following three heads. In verse 1, we see we wait in a positioned perspective, or positioned posture. In verses 2 through 4, we wait purposed. And in verse 20, we wait postured.

In verse 1 as Habakkuk comes to us showing us that we are waiting positioned-wise, Habakkuk is showing us this from the perspective of a sentry or a watchman on a tower. By figuratively taking up the position of a watchman, he begins to answer that question for us, how we should then wait. In fact, as James Montgomery Boice considered this, he says the prophet is teaching us something about waiting and watching, he says the following. And I quote, "He," the prophet, "is saying, I have been down in the valley with my problem and have not been able to solve it. Now, I'm going to draw apart for a while and leave it to God. I'm going to detach myself from the difficulty." D. Martin Lloyd-Jones makes a similar observation as he says, "Once we have taken a problem to God, we should cease to concern ourselves with it. We should turn our backs upon it and center our gaze upon God." It sounds easy, but the execution of it is not easy.

And make no mistake about it, as we step through this lesson that both James Montgomery Boice has given us and Martin Lloyd-Jones has given us, or the Lord is giving us through the prophet Habakkuk, this is not a lesson on escapism. This is not three steps toward how to be delusional in the midst of suffering. This is instead a lesson on seeing the larger reality.

The psalmist takes us through this in Psalm 23. In Psalm 23, the psalmist reminds us that though he walks through the valley of death, he shall fear no evil. And why is that? Because the Lord is with him. The Lord is his help and his comfort. He doesn't tell us that our dangers, our toils, our snares, our problems, and our pains are a figment of our imagination. He merely says, yes, it hurts. Yes, it's hard. But God is so much bigger. He's so much stronger. He's the one who leads. He's the one who restores. He's the one who protects.

But beyond this posture of detachment, there's something else that's taught to us here. For the prophet doesn't leave his urgency or his intensity as he is communicating his stand or his position here. As we look at verse 1 of chapter 2 and he says, "I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see," he is using synonyms, and he is repetitively doing so. And with this reduplication, he's communicating intensity. It's his way of saying that as I have now prayed to God, I will fix my gaze on God. I will fix my gaze on Him with a sense of anticipation and a posture of expectancy.

And even when we look at Habakkuk taking this position and having a sense of anticipation, he goes a step beyond what we tend to do at times. There are times when we pray, and we pray with the attitude of, I'm just going to go ahead and put this out here. I don't expect to hear anything.

I vividly recall recently having a conversation with my wife about prayer, and we were musing over the fact that God does things at times differently from how we would want Him to do it. We may pray a particular way, and God answers the prayer in His timing. And it's often different from how we

prayed it. And then as I thought about that and she was speaking, I immediately started thinking about the James passage that speaks about how we pray but we don't receive because we pray wrongly or we pray amiss, as it says in the King James. And immediately, frustrated with how I was processing pain in the moment, I remarked, "Yeah, there are times where we pray dumb." And when I said, "We pray dumb," I was immediately thinking of me. But my wife heard she prays dumb, and someone said, oh no. So I had to retract that a bit.

And that's how I feel that we pray sometimes. We pray, and we don't see change because we pray amiss. We pray dumb. And the Lord has an appointed time when He's going to do what He has planned to do, and we expect Him to do nothing. And repeatedly, as we come back to the scriptures whether we're going through James or we're going through Habakkuk or we're going through Isaiah or any passage of scripture, over and over again, we are to approach our worship of prayer, preaching, or our engagement with God as if something is going to happen. The Lord is not indifferent. The Lord does not take up a posture of not caring. But the Lord is inviting us in His timing to set the center of our gaze on Him, to set our focus on Him, to be watchmen on a tower taking our stand and waiting on Him.

This sort of focus is what Isaiah refers to as the means of what brings us into perfect peace. Isaiah 26:3-4, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you." Habakkuk expects to hear from God. He has this urgency to hear from God. It reminds me of another passage that we find in Psalms where it says, "Give ear to my words, O Lord. Consider my meditation, my groanings. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray. O Lord, in the morning, you hear my voice. In the morning, I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch." He's saying, "In the morning, you hear my voice," so as to say that I pray and then I come back with immediacy in the morning each morning, every morning. This is my process that I go through because I expect to hear from you. As I am coming to pray to you, I expect to hear from you.

And I wonder, with all of the foolishness that's going on, do we really expect to hear? That's our lesson on waiting. We pray positioned expecting to hear. We pray with a sense of urgency expecting to hear. We pray with our gaze set on God expecting to hear. And we pray with our hand open expecting God to surprise us with His wisdom and His graciousness.

I think Habakkuk is even teaching us here in this passage that we pray with our hand open. That is to say we pray expecting to hear from God. When you come down below the reduplication of terms here, you see, "I look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint." And this has been translated a couple of different ways. It's been interpreted so as to say that Habakkuk was the go-between with God and the people of God, and he was expecting to get perhaps an answer that was a bit complicated, so he had to maybe come back and say, God, could you rephrase that? Could you give that to me again? Because as I receive it from you, I need to give it back to the people. And I say, well, that is a perspective.

But I think what we find here is not Habakkuk saying what I will answer concerning my complaint, but I think he's saying what I will answer concerning my reproach, my rebuke. When I pray and I stand flat-footed before God after lifting up this prayer that we see in verses 12 through 17, as I have maybe taken this different tone and this different approach to God, being a bit more respectful in my approach, I expect to have some sort of dealing, some sanctified dealings with the Lord where He is correcting me. He is reprimanding me, and I am prepared for that. The same word is used that way in Psalm 73:14, Proverbs 1:23, verse 25, and verse 30. And I think it's being used in that same manner here.

Habakkuk's coming to the Lord in prayer and expecting to hear from Him, but he is not expecting to hear from Him necessarily according to his own mental model. But now the tone of his prayer is have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way.

He takes us from this waiting positioned to being purposed in our waiting in verses 2 through 4. We see Habakkuk has the Lord answer his prayer in verses 2 through 4. And as the Lord offers up an answer to the prophet's prayer, He doesn't come with a word of comfort. He doesn't come back to the

prophet and say, I understand that all of this is extremely difficult for you. And He doesn't respond to him in a way that He responded to Elijah. He doesn't say, look, you need a snack. Maybe you need a Snickers and you need to lay down and take a nap because you know how you get.

But instead of responding to him like that, the Lord comes back with a command. In the face of your whining, in the face of your toned-down approach to me, the Lord is now saying, write the vision. Make it plain.

Now, of course, as He is communicating to the prophet to transmit or transcribe or publish the vision that is coming down from heaven, this is not saying as a point of application that we should expect divine revelation from God, not unless you're opening your Bible. And so our point of application for this is maybe we don't receive a fresh divine revelation, a voice from God, or a dream from God upon us in the supernatural fashion that the prophet is receiving it now, but the Lord still does speak to us. The Lord still speaks to us through His works of providence. The Lord still speaks to us through His word both preached and read and meditated upon. And as the Lord speaks to you and communicates His revealed will, it's as if the Lord is saying this is where you get your talking points from concerning cultural issues.

This is where you get your talking points from concerning the problems and the suffering in your life. It's not from what Randy called the cesspool of social media. He said that a few sermons ago, and I laughed. And I even posted something on social media about it.

But in seriousness, the prophet is taking the position that we are to take, the position of trusting in the revealed will of God and publishing that forward, making plain what the scriptures say. As we are entering into debates concerning our fellow image bearers, as we are getting into debates concerning COVID-19, or as some folks may term the conspiracy of COVID-19, we're not looking to find our guidance from Twitter. We're not looking to find our guidance from politics. But our guidance comes from that which is quick, powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword that speaks on the affairs of men, speaks on social issues, and gives us our talking points.

And here's another thing about this waiting. As we are maybe in the midst of waiting for something that we've prayed about, and at times in the midst of our waiting we feel like there's no plan in place, and things are in disarray, and nothing is changing, in verse 3, we see that the Lord who is giving this vision and giving this guidance has an appointed time for it and even uses a language of personification to speak to how this vision is eager to come about as He says the vision "hastens to the end." Lord, I don't see you doing anything. Well, the vision doesn't lie. It is coming. Lord, it's taking a long time. Well, the response to that, if it seems slow, if from your perspective it has the very appearance of being slow, wait for it. Wait for it.

The Lord says this is how the covenant community waits. The covenant community waits with this gaze centered on God. The covenant community waits understanding that waiting in the Christian life is a spiritual discipline. The covenant community waits understanding that God is just as eager to bless us as we are eager to be blessed. The covenant community waits not like the world, which is what we see in verse 4.

Verse 4 shows us a comparison or contrast of two groups. One is the soul that's puffed up, that's trusting in its own doing. That's the soul that's not upright, that's not trusting in the purpose and plan of God at all. But then you have us who have not trusted in our own righteousness, not trusted in anything that we can do to merit God's favor but instead have received what the book of Philippians referred to as an alien righteousness, the righteousness of Christ. This group has looked to longingly and lovingly consider or see the law of God as not a list of do's and don'ts but as a railway to keep us on track. The righteous live by faith. The righteous live understanding that God has appointed a time and has purposed their life. And they look to live in the context of that purpose.

Of course, the Lord responds again showing us a collection of woes. But after bringing us down the path of hearing from the Lord and seeing how He had purposed to answer, we're brought now to

hearing another way that we wait. And that's postured. That's waiting with a different perspective. That's waiting as a worshipper.

Habakkuk 2:20 says, "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." This is not the terrestrial temple. This is God in His heavenly temple on high. This is a picture of God in transcendent majesty from His very throne room where He surveys all of creation simultaneously scrutinizing every minute detail. It's the place where Psalm 11:4 places Him as it says, "The Lord is in his holy temple. The Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man." It's the place where the Lord sees those who stand in our position to His purpose and plan, and He just laughs because they don't frustrate the transcendent God who possesses unrivaled holiness and underived holiness.

This is the one who oversees and governs the affairs of creation. And He's calling us as worshippers to live in the light of the fact that He is in control, and He is actively governing things, and He's going to do everything in His appointed time. It's easy for us to say, I know that. I know that. I've been reading the book *Good Confession* that PD gave out. I've been studying the *Westminster Confession* in catechism. I know He's sovereign. And the scriptures are telling us that it is easy to have that truth as your creed, but it is infinitely more difficult to align your behavior with your creed and live in light of the fact that God is in control, to see that He is in His heavenly and holy temple, to see that He exalts and He brings down, that He orders the steps of man and all of the surrounding circumstances, that He sits in unrivaled authority and holds all the rulers in His hand, and He controls even COVID-19.

God is in control. And from that position of control, He is simply saying to us, be still. Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted; the Lord is saying. Whether it's in the midst of your unbelief or your belief, the Lord will be exalted. But He's inviting us, He's inviting you and me, to take up the posture of a worshipper, that in the midst of our pain, in the midst of times that when it hurts and it's hard that we lay there on our face before the Lord seeing Him in His holy temple, knowing that He is in control of all things, and coming to Him with our petitions and an open hand, and saying, Lord, surprise me. Have your own way.

Heavenly Father, I pray, Lord, that as we have considered how we should wait, how we should wait in the midst of suffering, in the midst of our anxiety, in the midst of our depression, I pray, Lord, that you've given us, your people, a greater sense of how that's done. I pray, Lord, that you would take this truth that directs us to set our gaze centered on you. I'm praying, Lord, that you would take it and you would seal it to our hearts, that it may not just be a creed that we repeat, but it would be behavior that we demonstrate. This I ask in the matchless name of your Son Jesus. Amen.