

The Just Shall Live By Faith

Habakkuk 2:4

“Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

In last week’s message, we began with a simple question, posed by a CBS News correspondent: “*How do you kill an idea?*” Margaret Brennan asked this question in the wake of the slaughter in Nice, France. With other news correspondents, she pointed to the ideas and the ideologies that are driving many recent, violent tragedies. Yet again this week, we had yet another reminder. In Munich, Germany, an eighteen year old terrorist hacked into a social media account in order to offer everyone free food at an event in a local McDonald’s. In the meantime, he carefully filed the serial number off of a Glock 17, semi-automatic handgun. According to Munich police, he “was ‘obsessed’ with shooting rampages and plotted his atrocity in great detail . . .”ⁱ As the young man began shooting inside the restaurant, a Muslim woman reported that she heard him should repeatedly, “Allahu Akbar” meaning “Allah is great.”ⁱⁱ His shooting rampage killed 9 and injured 16 more. Most were children. The Munich police have been able to discover no ties whatsoever to Islamic militant groups. In the meantime, a suicide bomber loyal to ISIS detonated a bomb next to a group of protestors near the zoo in Kabul, Afghanistan. This terrorist killed sixty and wounded more than two hundred. And perhaps the worst of it is that you and I feel that there will be many, many more incidents such as these. So, the question is still fresh in our minds: “*How do you kill an idea?*” What are we to think when we hear of such tragedies? How are we supposed to process all this? Can we use our faith in the Word of God to filter through these horrible episodes?

Take a Close Look (“Behold”)

- In Habakkuk 1:3, the prophet complained that the Lord caused him to behold the wickedness of his people in Judah.

- In Habakkuk 1:5, God commanded all of the faithful remnant to behold what He would do to Judah by the hands of the cruel Chaldeans.
- Here in Habakkuk 2:4, God commands us to behold the story behind the story.

Behold the Proud One

Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him

Have you ever been in a discussion where someone correctly identified the real problem you were facing? We sometimes say, “She put her finger on the problem,” meaning she stated the central problem. So in the midst of all our concerns about a violent wickedness, strife and contention (Habakkuk 1:3), God “puts His finger on the problem.”

So, let’s add one word to Margaret Brennan’s question which will help bring Habakkuk 2:4 into sharp focus: “How do you kill a proud idea?” Now to ask it that way is a leading question. But note the words in verse 4, “**His soul is lifted up.**” And again in verse 5, “**He is a proud man.**” So look below the surface in your own society. Political speakers proudly proclaim what God calls an abomination, and for it they receive standing ovations! Turn over with me to Proverbs 6:16-19. Earlier in the message, I raised the question: “Can we use our faith in the Word of God to filter through these horrible episodes?” Now as you read the news, or think through current events in this country, does this list sound familiar?

These six *things* doth the LORD hate: Yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness *that* speaks lies, and he that sows discord among brethren.

So, to insert the word “proud” into the question gets to the heart of the problem. God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5). Both James and Peter were quoting Proverbs 3:34 where we learn that **“God scorns the scorners, but gives grace unto the lowly.”** The fact that God’s Spirit included these words 3 times in the Scriptures is important.

So this season of proud, pompous, political proclamations should give us pause. One recent nominee said, “I am your voice,” and I’m sure the others will say the same. That seems only natural for candidates in a representative government. But the terrifying thing is that they are right: they are the voice of our society. Those proud, pompous, political proclamations really are a reflection of who we are, and therein lies the central problem. God hates **“the proud look.” “God resists the proud.”**

Owen Strachan wrote, “America feels like one big twisted reality-TV show. We are increasingly led by scoundrels. Our colleges and universities are in many cases lost (especially at the elite level), and now teach an intellectualized, intolerant paganism. Our common cultural life is fractured, and our entertainment is shockingly coarse. The family has suffered major reconstructive surgery; countless children grow up in riven homes, a father nowhere to be found.”ⁱⁱⁱ

You and I know that this is not the first time in human history that things have been this way. Even the Book of Judges records the corrupt abominations of ancient Israel. This is what happens every time that the following is true: **“Every man did that which is right in his own eyes”** (Judges 21:25). So it is today.

Habakkuk 2:4 reminds us that the proud man is not upright. In his own eyes, he may appear to be so. But in God’s sight, the proud one is not upright. But our text gives us hope that a man

can be upright once again: **“but the just shall live by his faith.”** The question, *“How do you kill a proud idea?”* implies that the answer is humility. But how can the haughty human heart ever be humbled? Dearly beloved, this is the power of the Gospel!

The Just Shall Live By His Faith

If this were one of a thousand other Old Testament passages, you and I should pay close attention. After all, this is God’s Word. Without further mention in the Scriptures, you and I would rightly conclude that this passage is an indictment against haughty Judeans and haughty Chaldeans. These would be additional illustrations of the truth that **“God resists the proud.”** But this glorious passage is much more than that. The fact that, Proverbs 3:34 is quoted twice more in the New Testament elevates its importance. The other proverbs around it are important; that proverb deserves even more attention. So what if we could search our Old Testament to find a verse of greater importance?

- So important that one of the greatest New Testament books was based on it.
- An Old Testament verse so essential that its implications were carefully explored and explained for both Jews and Gentiles
- A Old Testament verse that appears in another New Testament book at the crucial place as the supreme argument that ends the dispute
- An Old Testament verse that appears yet again in yet another New Testament book as the supreme encouragement for persecuted believers to “keep on keeping on.”

Dear friends, this is the treasure that you are looking upon in Habakkuk 2:4. Is it any wonder that the verse begins with the word, “Behold!”? Habakkuk 2:4 is the central premise of Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians: Romans 1:16-17. Throughout Romans, Paul explored and explained Habakkuk 2:4 to help us understand our salvation and sanctification. Habakkuk 2:4

appears again in Galatians 3:11 to prove that no man is justified by doing good works under the law. Habakkuk 2:4 appears yet again in Hebrews 10:38 as a powerful encouragement to beleaguered believers who faced intense persecution.

In this message and the next message, we need to put this verse under the microscope to learn what God has for us here. As we will see, that last phrase is given special emphasis. Why is it important?

The Just

Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."

Our text today is startling. God tells us of every proud man: "**his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him.**" Then, there is a supremely important word: "**but.**" In language we call that an "adversative." It means that the sentence changes directions at this point. More importantly, God is telling us that haughty humankind changes directions at this point. (That's called "repentance.") You see, this verse holds out the glorious prospect that a man could be just or righteous in God's sight! We must explore this enticing truth.

"How can my soul be justified? Be righteous in God's sight? The deeds I've done? The works I've tried With all my heart and might?"

So, for the rest of today's message, let's turn to the Book of Romans. When the world seems hopeless, we have hope. The world grovels in its lustful abominations, but we can give glory to the Lord above. Why? It's all because of what we find in Habakkuk 2:4. Please turn to Romans chapter 3, and be ready to go back to Romans chapter 1. Note the words of Romans 3:21, "**But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;**" This is what we are looking for. What has been witnessed by the law and the prophets? Turn back to Romans 1:15-17. Here,

the Apostle Paul identifies "the Gospel" – God's Good News for mankind.

"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and *also* to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

These verses are the central theme of the Book of Romans. It is all about the righteousness of God. There is hope for proud people – but only in the righteousness of God. And of all the possible verses that were "**witnessed by the law and the prophets**" which verse serves as the central theme of the entire Book of Romans? ". . . **as it is written, The just shall live by faith**" quoting Habakkuk 2:4. Now turn back over to Romans 3:21-26, because there we will that Habakkuk 2:4 is explored and explained by Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Shall Live by His Faith

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Let's begin with the end in mind. How could a just and righteous God be "the justifier" of haughty, sinful men? If God is just, how can He justify us? In the New Testament, to "justify"

means “to declare righteous.” How can a just God look upon sinful men with any favor whatsoever? The end of that verse says **“of him which believes in Jesus.”** Why does that make a difference in the way God looks upon a man?

This is **“the righteousness of God without the law”** that was **“witnessed by the law and the prophets.”**

It is **“the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.”** This Gospel Good News about the righteousness of God is for everyone – the news is for every human being. But how? **“being justified [declared righteous] freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:”** How was this redemption and justification accomplished? **“whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins.”** Do you see it? It’s the Gospel. This is how you answer the question: “How do you kill a proud idea?” This is how we **“cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”** God humbles humanity by His own meek and lowly means.

It is connections such as this that caused the psalmist to cry out, **“Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”** Who would have believed that the Holy God would use the vicious Chaldeans to punish His people? But even more than that, who would

believe that the Righteous God would send His only Son to the earth as the Substitute to take the punishment of sinful people? Christ’s precious blood was spilled on that horrible crucifix in order to redeem you. He died and rose from that tomb to prove that He **“might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”** What amazing grace! No wonder that the Lord told Habakkuk in chapter 1, verse 5: **“I will work a work in your days, which you will not believe, though it be told you.”**

Yes, God would use the brutality of the Chaldeans to pave the way for the coming of His Son in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4). The psalmist said, **“Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee”** (Psalm 76:10). Yes, there are significant concerns about “the heartland of America.” But today, let’s look where God tells us to look: at our own hearts. What is the standing of your heart before the Holy God? Would He say that is it upright? Dear friend, **“the just shall live by his faith.”**

How can my soul be justified? Be righteous in God’s sight? The deeds I’ve done? The works I’ve tried

With all my heart and might? Through grace alone, by faith alone, In Christ alone I stand, His finished work on Calvary, Fulfilled the law’s demands

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ⁱ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3704524/Come-today-4pm-ll-buy-Did-Munich-maniac-use-FAKE-Facebook-page-teenage-girl-free-food-lure-children-McDonald-s-hours-massacre.html#ixzz4FFXE3n00>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://cpt.mbts.edu/2016/07/21/13-thoughts-on-trump-and-our-confusing-political-moment/>