

Habakkuk 2

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[0 : 00] The book of the Oracle of Habakkuk, the prophet, our focus has been on the idea of faith, and we've looked at it twice, focusing on two different aspects of this idea that faith is of the utmost importance, is centrally important if we're going to make following God the priority of our lives.

Faith. And religion is essentially a matter of faith, not so much of what you believe as in whom you believe, where you put your faith.

And among the historical religions of the world, Christianity is the only one that said, rather than put your faith in yourself, as if you've got what it takes to get right with God and get back to God, put your faith in God.

In God himself, to do what you can't. You see, if you're a Muslim, that's not what you're doing.

When you say you believe in Allah, what you're saying is that my stake is with Islam, and the picture it paints of this world, but in a world like that, my faith is ultimately in myself and my ability to appease the demands of a God, I can never know if I've satisfied.

I believe in Allah, but I believe ultimately in myself. And the problem with that is you never know if you've made it. And there's this inkling buried deep within that always reminds you that you never, you're never good enough. You're never good enough. You've never made it.

[1 : 48] You're always just shy of assurance. And you'll find that with even a suicide bomber running into a building that they still don't know whether they've done enough. So now you even get them blowing up their own mosque in an attempt to please an otherwise unpleasable God. Faith in a God like that is ultimately faith in oneself.

And it's no different with Hinduism or Buddhism or Judaism, at least what it became, which is why Jesus could even rebuke his own people saying, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you were not willing. You were depending on yourself. You put your faith in something else.

Ultimately not in God, but in what you can do, which in the end is not only about trusting yourself, but serving yourself, because getting back to God has become nothing more than an attempt to get God to do what you want.

That's the faith pitched by every other religion. Every religion on earth deteriorates into some warped kind of functional solipsism. I believe in myself, because even when I believe in something outside of myself, it is only what I do that matters. And when I do what I do, it's only so that the God I serve might serve me in return.

Christianity and its roots in the Jewish religion as it was established by God itself, not what it became, but as it was established by God, God is the only religion and the religion that sets all other religions spinning that calls creatures to faith in their creator. We do not only believe, we not only believe in a God who created the world, but in a God who is himself the only one who can recreate it again and recreate us as we were meant to be from the very beginning. That's the heart of Christianity. There is nothing we can do to redeem our past, nothing we can do to restore our present, nothing we can do to secure our future.

[4 : 29] We must put our faith in the only one who can. And what I want to do tonight is return for one more look at this idea of faith.

Not just what we believe, but who we believe in. And I want to ask the question, what does it look like? What does it look like when someone has turned from believing in themselves or believing in something else because it somehow serves them to believing in God and waiting on him and trusting in him and entrusting themselves into his hands?

What does it look like? And maybe today as we listen to Habakkuk's prayer, what does it sound like? And this is what I want to say. Faith is the patient expectation of salvation.

Amidst the patient endurance of suffering. Did you catch it? Faith is the patient expectation of salvation.

Amidst the patient endurance of suffering. It's the patient anticipation for paradise. In the midst of the patient experience of pain.

[5 : 53] And remember where we've been. What we've looked at before this in the first two chapters of this book. Habakkuk starts with a man who is overwhelmed with questions.

He sees the brokenness of the world. He's living in it as a prophet of a people who are supposed to be God's people. And it's a brokenness not only experienced by God's people, but in a lot of ways propagated by them.

And he asks why? How long? How can it be? And to add insult to injury, God's solution he sees coming down the pike is that God is about to deal with the offense of his people by punishing them by the hand of a people more godless than they are.

What? What? That's what he says. What? You are a holy God. If anybody is supposed to be above this, it's you.

How can you use the godless to discipline the ones who are supposed to be godly? Doesn't that in some sense make you responsible for the evil?

[7 : 07] Doesn't that make you culpable? That's not a good enough solution, he says. That solves nothing. My problem's only gotten bigger. I only have more questions.

And that's right. Because the problem of pain and suffering that drives so many people to reject God is actually so much more complicated than people actually make it out to be.

I think Habakkuk was right about that. When you see the pain of the world, the question is so much bigger than you think at first. But when God speaks and finally addresses Habakkuk in chapter 2, not just putting words in his mouth, but when God speaks, we find out that the answer to our deepest questions is not what God's doing or how God's doing it, but faith.

The belief that he knows what he's doing even when we don't. God doesn't explain himself. He says, the righteous live by faith.

Do you trust me? And even when it looks like he doesn't know what he's doing, do you trust him?

Because he does. The question isn't, how can you, God, how could you?

[8 : 34] It's will you trust that he can do it? That he is doing. Can you trust in the God who holds the world in his hands? Can you trust him and entrust yourself to him?

That the story isn't done and the wicked might run rampant in the moment, but God still reigns and even uses the wicked for his purposes. Will you trust him?

Faith. Faith is the answer to our deepest questions. Not because it solves the problems, but because it leans on the only one who can solve them.

Because if you're going to condemn God for allowing his enemies to punish his people and using them to do it, if you're going to use the state of the world to condemn God, you're no different from his enemies.

God's enemies have taken their lives into their own hands. They disregard God and go their own way. How are you any different if you decide to play the judge over God?

[9 : 40] Faith is the answer to our deepest questions. Not the solution. But it's what we're called to.

Write the vision, God said. Make it plain, for it awaits its appointed time. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay.

Behold, his soul is puffed up. The soul of my enemy is puffed up. I know it. It is not right within him. But the righteous shall live by faith.

Believe in me. Trust in me. Because I'm not done and I'm the only one who can do it in the end. faith is the answer to our deepest questions.

Faith is the foil to our greatest problem. If our greatest problem is that we serve our own ends, play our own gods, and do that by either making our own might our God like Babylon did, or condemning God as if we've got the moral high ground on him, faith is what breaks us from misplacing ourselves in the story, from hijacking the story and wrapping it around us, from thinking too highly of ourselves and disregarding God, or playing God ourselves, or playing God's judge.

[11 : 11] faith gives us eyes to see that one day all will be repaid. Faith gives us eyes to see that there's more to life than meets the eye.

Faith shows us that God must be reckoned with and gives us eyes to see that he's the only one who can save in the end. That's chapter 2.

And faith is the foil to our greatest problem because it is the anticipation of our highest hope. Faith is the answer to our deepest questions.

It is the foil to our greatest problem, and it is the anticipation of our highest hope. And that's where we get to in chapter 3.

That no matter what I see around me, the story isn't done. So God says, the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him.

[12 : 14] And the one who sits before God will wait in patient expectation of salvation amidst the patient endurance of suffering.

Let me draw these two sides of faith out a little from when Habakkuk turns to pray. First, faith is the patient expectation of salvation.

Listen to what he says in verse 2 of this last chapter. He says this, O Lord, I have heard the report of you and your work, O Lord, do I fear.

It puts me on edge. You are an untamed God, utterly free, and that frightens me because I can't control you, Habakkuk says.

Religion tells me that I should be able to control you. That's what religion is. But I can't. And that scares me. I have heard and I am in awe of what you have done in the past.

[13 : 24] And listen to this, in the midst of the years, he says, revive it. Do it again. In the midst of the years, make it known. In my days, make it public.

Take the past and make it present so that it's not just a memory that we're struggling to remember, but make it a reality. Do it again.

The story is told of a young violinist rising to fame in the world of classical music and he showed a tremendous amount of potential in his growth as a musician, as an artist.

And it came to one particular performance at a great music hall that this young man stepped onto the stage and before a crowd of onlookers played a piece that at once, at a single moment, simultaneously, broke the hearts of those listening and seemed to mend them.

That's how it was described. That violinist walked off the stage saying that before this, everything was merely for practice and after this, all will be a faint memory if I pick up the violin again.

[14 : 51] But for those who were listening, all they could say was do it again. Do it again.

I've heard what you've done, Habakkuk says. It makes me fear, but do it again. Do it again.

again. And because we've seen what God has done and know the God we serve, faith becomes the patient expectation of salvation of everything.

The hope that better days are ahead. And the virtuoso who did it once is exactly the one we must look to if it's ever going to be seen once more.

Do it again because you can. And because that's who you are and we need it. Do it again. And I don't know what your week's been like or what your week will be like in the coming days.

[15 : 57] And I know the heartache and the pain and the angst of life. But I also know that there's no hope outside of God. God and the whole world and everything inside of you is going to tell you to trust in yourself.

And the wounds of life are going to cauterize you to seal you off from trusting anybody but yourself. And if you ever find yourself trusting in someone else or something greater than you, the temptation is going to be to trust in them merely as a means, to your own ends.

And I do this all the time. I'm constantly playing God in my life. I'm constantly, I'm so certain that if everybody simply invests me with all the power and lets me have all the control and allows me to put everybody where they're supposed to be, then everything will turn out right.

Everything will be okay. And even if God would just leave me to it and just not interfere, it would be alright. And you know the problem with that?

The problem is I can't. The problem is I can't do it and I don't do it, even when I'm given the opportunity. And you can't and you want.

[17 : 27] When I'm in control, there's always that point where I'm skimming a bit off the top, twisting things, manipulating things for my own benefit.

It always happens without fail. Seeing what God has done in the past in creation, in redemption, in Jesus, he's the only one who we can trust with this world because he's done it before.

And faith, faith is saying, do it again. faith is the patient expectation of salvation, the patient anticipation of paradise regained.

It's the heart of following God because he wants to be followed. He wants to be followed. Not followed like you follow a dog of some sort, on a leash.

That's not following. Following like you follow a warrior into battle. Follow like you follow a daddy in the dark. Like you follow a shepherd through valleys of shadows.

[18 : 37] That's how he wants to be followed. I love when my kids are excited about me. I love it.

I love when my kids are excited about me. When they're particularly fond of something that I've done or I'm able to do or have done in the past. And when we're playing and they're constantly saying, Daddy, do it again.

Daddy, do it again. And even more when something goes wrong and they're all still saying, do it again. Fix it, Daddy. Fix it. I love that.

I love that. There's a lot of things in our world that have gone terribly wrong. Faith is the patient expectation that God will make all things right when what he's done before, when he does it again. Faith is the patient expectation of salvation, but it is the patient expectation of salvation amidst the patient endurance of suffering. But one of the hard truths of life amidst all that's gone wrong in this world and all the brokenness we live with is that part of the problem of the world, part of what needs fixing, is us.

[20 : 02] We're part of the issue, part of the problem. And so the suffering we endure as we wait the day God will make all things right is both from the brokenness of the world and in part from the process God's already started of remaking it.

When God gets about the business of fixing things, and I believe he's already in that process now, when God gets about the business of fixing things, there's a terrible awareness that the very act of repairing the world is going to be painful.

Do you see that? I think Habakkuk saw that. And he saw in some sense that God's recreation of the world comes through painting.

when he's sitting there crying out for God to do it again, he knows that with that God's answer is going to be uncomfortable because we're part of the problem.

And we said that when we looked at chapter 2 that each of us had in some sense stored up for ourselves a cup of wrath that is ours to drink because we have manipulated the world.

[21 : 19] We've poured out wrath ourselves and it is a cup that turns on us. It is a traitor. Wine is a traitor. That cup is a traitor. And we have stored it up for ourselves.

It is ours to drink. And the beautiful thing about Jesus is that he's drunk that for us. But in the end, if we're going to be remade, pain is the instrument God is going to use.

in one of C.S. Lewis' books in the Chronicles of Narnia, there's a fantastic picture of this.

A boy on an adventure finds himself turned by greed into a dragon on an island all alone. His friends are nowhere in sight. And he's told that the only way to return to being a boy is if he sheds his skin.

Sheds his dragon skin. And he tries to shed it. He tries to scrape it off. And after trying and trying and trying, he can't do it.

[22 : 31] And the only one who can fix the problem says to him at that moment, if you want boyhood, again, you will have to let me undress you. This is what he felt.

He says the very first tear that he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I have ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peeled off.

Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off, just as I thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only when I did it, they hadn't hurt.

And there it was lying on the grass, only ever so much thicker, ever so much darker, ever so much more knobbly looking than the others had been when I had done it myself.

[23 : 46] Faith is the patient expectation of salvation amidst the patient endurance of suffering, even that which comes at the cost of the salvation itself.

And Habakkuk knows it. That's why he says, do it again, but in wrath, remember mercy. In wrath, remember mercy, that side of God's love that hates evil.

In wrath, remember mercy. listen to what he sees. The patient endurance of suffering.

God came from Taman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. And when God shows up, all you can do is hold your breath. He says, Selah. He gasps.

His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise raised flash from his hand where his power was hidden. And nobody knows.

[24 : 59] Nobody knows what he was seeing. Some of it looks like the past creation at the very beginning. Some of it looks like redemption when God moved before and on behalf of his people.

And some of it seems a direct answer to Habakkuk's cry, something that will happen in the future. But all of it awaits the day that is still to come. They don't know. What are we looking at here? What did you see, Habakkuk? He's wrapping up the entirety of all the imagery in the Bible. Everything that he knew from creation through to the exodus through to now he is in the prophetic stream waiting for another day.

He said, Plague went before him. Pestilence followed his steps. He stood and shook the earth. He looked and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled. Literally, it says, the eternal mountains crumbled.

And the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal. He was here before the beginning. We look around in awe at the creation that stood before human history.

[26 : 14] We look at it as if it has been forever. How much more the one who created it. I saw the tents of Cushon in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

Were you angry with the rivers, O Lord? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? Was creation what you were after when you turned chaos into order?

You uncovered your bow. You called for many arrows. You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by.

The deep roared and lifted its waves on high. Sun and moon stood still. The heavens and the glint of your flying arrow stood still.

At the lightning of your flashing spear. We talked this morning about the armor of God. And here it is. Here it is. When we're fitted with God's armor, we are equipped to do God's work, which is making creation what it was meant for.

[27 : 30] And it is an armor that God himself has worn. in wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations.

Past, present, future, the work of God is accomplished violently. Controlled power unleashed on an untamed creation, an undone creation.

He is the great physician. He is the almighty warrior and his work of redemption at every point is wrought through with pain.

He cuts deep. strips the earth. And he does it to us if we will let him.

And if we don't, he will do it anyway. Someday, when our knees will bow no matter what. You came out to deliver your people to save your anointed one.

[28 : 39] You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness. you stripped him from head to foot. With his own spear, you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding.

You trampled the sea who could stand before you. You trampled it with your horses churning the great waters. God will have his way and all will be made right.

Faith is the patient expectation of salvation amidst the patient endurance of suffering. Even the patient endurance of suffering while God is already doing what he does, while he's already making the world what it's supposed to be.

Faith. Faith is the answer to our deepest questions. It's not the solution, it is the answer to what we're called to.

Faith is the foil, the undoing of our greatest problem. And faith is the anticipation of our highest hope, even when we face our darkest days.

[30 : 06] Habakkuk was waiting for a day that God would show up, and we've seen that day. It was dark then, but we've seen Jesus.

Yet in many ways, it is darker today while we await his coming again. It was the English theologian Thomas Fuller who said this, it is always darkest just before the day dawneth.

but while it is darker, we have seen a greater light and have greater reason to beg God to do it again and to trust that he will.

And before we sing, before we sing, I want to pray this prayer, which is one of the greatest that we have in our Bibles. Having seen God and what it means for him to work, past, present, and future, Habakkuk says, I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound, decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled.

Yet. Isn't that a great word? Yet. I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us, to come on the enemy.

[31 : 40] And this will be our prayer. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, though the economy fails, and nations reel, and hunger pervades, and pain persists, and brokenness remains, and cancer strikes, darkness, and darkness rests, and death is still a part of our reality.

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior. Savior, will you today choose amidst the darkness of the world to yet put your faith in God as you patiently expect the day of salvation to come, even as you continue to patiently endure the suffering of this present moment.

We're going to close by singing the words of Habakkuk 3.■