

Habakkuk 2

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[0 : 00] In a lecture given some time before the dawn of his popularity, the Oxford scientist Richard Dawkins said this, Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence.

Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence. And tonight I want to pick up on this notion of faith and ask the question, what's faith got to do with life and living? And why is faith at the center of what it means to follow Jesus? And why is faith the only appropriate response for those of us wandering around on this planet, trying to make sense of where we came from and where we're going and why we're here?

For us whose lives are filled with questions, why is faith not the great excuse, but what the experience of life demands?

And tonight we're going to do this by looking at the lessons that can be learned from the faithless. Four lessons on where faithlessness leads and their foils, their undoing, which are only provided for us through the eyes of faith.

[1 : 29] Four lessons, but we're going to start by retracing our steps in the story of Habakkuk a little. Okay? Four lessons and we'll get to them. If you were here when we looked at chapter one of this book, we ended by saying that life's all about the questions we ask.

Habakkuk was a guy who, in the shift of empires, couldn't understand how his God, who was supposed to be the God of history, was still on the throne when an evil nation rose to power, and when this nation sent his people, both the good and the bad, into exile.

He couldn't understand. And for Habakkuk, this raised all sorts of questions. And life really is all about the questions we ask. But life's also about where our questions come from.

And if we're going to be like Habakkuk, the place our questions should be coming from is that unique point of tension between what God says about himself and what you see, what we experience in the world around us.

Those questions. Those questions. The questions that arise between revelation and our experience of reality. Life's quest ought to be about finding answers to those questions.

[2 : 47] The big questions of life. If you're not asking the big questions of life, you're not asking the right questions. But it's also not just about the questions we ask or where our questions come from.

It's what we do with the questions that we ask. And that's where we pick up in chapter 2 where we hear Habakkuk not using his questions to dismiss God or heaping them up to condemn God but taking his questions to God.

Habakkuk says in verse 1, I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts. I will look to see what he, what God will say to me and what answer I am to give to this complaint because I have to give an answer.

Because I'm a prophet and the people need answers to the questions I voice on their behalf. So I will wait. I will wait. I will wait. I will wait.

I will wait on God for the answer he will give me. And he finally hears God answer. Write down the revelation, the Lord says.

[4 : 02] Put pen to paper and write the vision and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. Make it permanent and public, he says.

For the revelation awaits in a point in time. It speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it lingers, wait for it. It will certainly come and will not delay.

You will not be disappointed. It is utterly reliable because I am utterly reliable. And I have envisioned it like this, says the Lord.

And it will not disappoint. See, he is puffed up. Babylon, the one coming at my beck and call to carry my people into exile.

A people Habakkuk watched wander away from God. See, Babylon, the one I'm going to use, is puffed up. His desires are not upright. And I know it.

[5 : 01] I know it. I may be using him. I may have written his role into the script. But I know who he is. And I know those who follow me.

You see, Habakkuk is picking up on a story where another prophet named Nahum left off. And Nahum had said that God is the sovereign over history. But Habakkuk doesn't understand when he looks around him.

He says, you, this, this is what history looks like when you are on your throne. If you are so sovereign, why does my world look like you're not? And God says to Habakkuk, even though it doesn't look like it, it's true what Nahum said.

I am good. I am a stronghold in the day of trouble. I do know those who take refuge in me. And I, with an overflowing flood, I will make a complete end of my adversaries.

I know that Babylon is puffed up. And I know his desires are not upright. But the righteous will live by faith.

[6 : 06] But the righteous, the righteous will live by faith. Trust me. And entrust yourselves to me. Believe in me, even if you don't understand what I'm doing.

And if you have a Bible, you might have a footnote that the word that's translated faith in verse 4 could be read faith or faithfulness.

And there's a distinction to be made between the two. But the point is that faith and faithfulness were so intimately connected in the mind of the author and were intended to be understood as so intimately connected that the same word was used to refer to both.

And a lot of times it's hard to tell which one an author means or if he isn't just playing on the ambiguity of the word and making the point that it takes the two together.

That faith is the fount from which all faithfulness flows. And so to see the flow presumes the fount or to have the fount assumes that faithfulness will follow.

[7 : 12] Faith and faithfulness. The righteous will live by faith. Faithfulness to the true and living God. And I want to pick up on this idea that those like Dawkins find so unacceptable.

And I want to ask the question why following Jesus, unlike any other religion, is essentially and fundamentally and inextricably a journey that begins with and endures through and will be consummated by faith.

That if you want in on this story, if you're listening and want to be a part of it, that you want this story to be your story, what it takes is putting your trust not in yourself but in someone bigger than you.

And if you want to grow in this life, to find real and lasting and significant meaning and purpose and maturity, what it takes is growing in that trust and growing in the idea that this story is not ultimately about you.

And if you're finally going to reach the end of being welcomed back into God's presence like you were intended to be from the very beginning, it's not going to be because you've done it, but precisely because you've recognized that you can't do it.

[8 : 38] You can't win it. You can't achieve it. You can't secure it for yourself, but must place your trust in, must put your faith in, must believe in the only one who can, Jesus Christ.

I want to talk tonight about how that's an incredibly vulnerable place to be, putting your faith in something other than yourself, but how that's the only place you can be if you want any semblance of assurance at the end of the day, some sense of certainty that you stand with God and not against Him or Him against you.

And how faith is the foil, the undoing of life's biggest problem because our biggest problem is that each of us wants to see ourselves as the center of our own little world.

And we kill for that and we hurt the ones we love for that and ultimately we hurt ourselves for that because we're not the center. It's a mistake. It's a misjudgment.

And faith is the only thing that breaks us out of that cycle of selfishness and allows us to lay down our arms, to die to ourselves because we know someone else ultimately has to die for us.

[10 : 01] Faith. The way we're going to do this is by looking at the vision God has Habakkuk write down. And these four lessons about where faithlessness leads are going to come from the woes pronounced over Babylon by the very ones that it has oppressed.

So they are a picture of what it means to live outside of faith. Babylon becomes a picture of what it means to live outside of faith, to live trusting only in oneself, to live as the center of our own stories for nothing bigger than ourselves.

Four lessons on where faithlessness leads and how faith provides the foil. So here's the vision. See, he is puffed up.

His desires are not upright. But the righteous will live by faith, will live by faithfulness. Indeed, wine betrays him. It betrays Babylon because wine is a traitor.

He is arrogant and never at rest. Wine is arrogant and is never at rest. And this isn't about whether drinking is right or... This isn't about drinking in any sense.

[11 : 22] He's not talking about that. He's talking about the engine of war. He's talking about the cup of wrath that so many in our world have poured out to get their own way.

And the picture is of a drink that loosens humanity from its senses. It frees us from the natural barriers that hem us in and check us from feeding the darkness of our own hearts.

And you can see this today on a smaller scale. Back in the States, Catherine and I have friends and really their lives are falling apart at the seams.

And for them, the husband of this family, we knew him, we loved him, we never saw it before. But when life started to fall apart, he turned to drinking.

He turned to drinking. So in some way, I guess it's related. He turned to drinking. And it was then that he began coming home at night after he was loosened from his senses.

[12 : 26] To beat his wife. To abuse her. To abuse their children. But wine is a traitor.

When we loosen our senses, whether by wine, whether by alcohol, or whatever it is, it could be anything. It's a traitor. When we try to loosen ourselves from the barriers of life that check us.

That keep us in check. He says, wine is a traitor because he is as greedy, the wine of wrath is as greedy as the grave, and like death is never satisfied.

He gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples. And Babylon's done this. And there are so many in our world who do this.

But wine is a traitor. Wrath is an uncontrollable ally. This is the vision. In my world, God says, the oppressors will not stand because they've become bedfellows with an ally that they cannot control.

[13 : 42] An ally that they cannot satisfy who won't be satisfied until it betrays them. Listen to this.

Lesson one. Faithlessness leads to a ruthlessly unbridled selfishness. To a dog-eat-dog survival of the fittest where we think we can feed on the weak and we'll never be fed on ourselves.

But faith gives us the eyes to see that one day all will be repaid. Listen.

God says, will not all of them, will not the oppressed, taunt him and ridicule and scorn? Shall not the oppressed say to the oppressor, woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion?

And you can hear the agony of the prophet. How long must this go on? But it's as if every life the oppressor takes, every moment he is on the rampage of oppression, he is racking up an IOU that will one day be required back.

[14 : 57] Life for life. Eye for eye. Tooth for tooth. This is the riddle. This is how the oppressed ridicule the oppressor. The one who pours out the cup of wrath thinks he's heaping up goods for himself that will never be repaid.

And all he's heaping up is a stack of bills that will one day be brought to account. Will not your debtors suddenly arise, it says.

Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim because wine is a traitor. Loosening ourselves from the constraints of the conscience solves nothing.

Life out from under the reign of God is no life at all. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you.

For you have shed man's blood. You have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. There is nowhere to hide. This is why empires fall.

[16 : 03] Because we at our worst are unable to control the drink that we pour out. We think survival of the fittest means that if we are fit, we will survive.

But it doesn't. It doesn't. What it means is that we are simply waiting for one who will be more fit than us to come and wipe us out.

That's what survival of the fittest is. You cannot be the fittest. You cannot take that place. You will ultimately be undone.

A few weeks ago, we watched a movie called *The Railway Man* about the Japanese attempt to build a railway line from Bangkok to Burma on the backs of POWs, prisoners of war, allied prisoners of war.

And the film is about the retribution of war. The mighty fall, the tyrants decay, what is once strong eventually weakens. And there's a point in the movie when one of the Japanese officers who's facing justice for his war crimes, he breaks down and all he can say is this, lies.

[17:17] It was all lies. They told us we would rule the world. They told us we would not lose. We could not lose. That we were right.

And it was all lies. Write this vision down. Because this, this is trustworthy. The wine of wrath, it cannot be trusted.

It is a traitor. Write this down. It is trustworthy. That's why death from the very beginning of history, when dethroning God received its punishment, is at its heart both consequence and kindness. Both punishment and grace. Because the Hitlers of this world can't live forever. There is no fountain of youth. There is no holy grail.

There is no antidote to death apart from the author of life. The oppressors cannot, will not, will never stand. And that's a grace because otherwise our unbridled wrath would spell an end for the human race.

[18:25] But wine is a traitor to those who trust in it. the cup of wrath must be drunk by all who pour it out.

But all will one day be repaid. And faith gives you the eyes to see that. the vision goes on in verse 9.

Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin. You have plotted ruin for many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life, thinking you were saving yourself from harm.

You've actually made a pact with death. You've forfeited your life. The stones of the wall will cry out. The very stones will stand as witness against you and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. And do you think they will protect you in that day? You will be judged by your own deception, God says. It makes sense in a world where all there is is what you see.

[19:40] To build your towers, to protect yourself at the expense of everyone else. But what if the one you should be most concerned with will not be kept out by the thickness of your walls or the height of your fortifications?

What if the God that you can't see is the God you, and the God you don't believe in is the God who you'll someday stand before? What about that?

God says, woe to you and I will hear the cries of the very stones that you used to fortify yourself on the backs of others.

You see, it's the arrogant and the greedy who build their towers on the backs of the weak. Because when they look around, all they see is that if they're going to get theirs, they've got to go out and get it for themselves.

The righteous, the righteous though, they live by faith. By faithfulness. Faithfulness is by definition, faithlessness is by definition a deficiency of sight.

[20:56] It leads to a short-sightedness that all there is is all we see. It leads to, and this is the second lesson to learn, it leads to mistaken security.

As if our biggest problem is how big our walls are or how big our towers are. Faith gives us eyes to see that there's more to life than meets the eye.

There's bigger problems. There's bigger problems that the one I have to someday stand before isn't going to be deterred by the size of my towers.

Lesson two. It goes on. Woe to him, it says, who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime.

That's not what this life was for. Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire and the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? There is no hope in that direction.

[22:03] There are two ways to live. Life under God and life under judgment. That's it. And if you, if you're okay with that, think about what you're saying.

If you're okay, say, I'm okay with judgment. You hear this. People have the audacity to say that. I'm okay with judgment. Think about what you're saying, though. We live in a created world, created by

a creator for himself.

And as the creatures our greatest good is life under the creator. Eden, our little daughter, is at the point where she's now mobile and Catherine and I are always making these little places, these little worlds for her to play in where she's safe and secure and all she ever wants to do is escape.

But there's no hope. There's no hope for her. There's no hope for her in this world full of stairs and electric sockets. There's no hope.

All she wants to do is escape. And how much more for us in a world where anarchy has given way to violence and evil. You want to live out from under the care of God?

[23 : 18] You think you can do that? You should think a little harder. You see, God made this world. And the question is, do you really want all that comes with wandering away from him?

Because you can't have it both ways. You can't live in between. If you wander away, that's it. You want to be the master of your fate, the captain of your soul, the savior of your little world?

Pull the trigger because there's no hope apart from God. There's no holy grail. There's no fountain of youth. There is one end for which this world is destined.

And faith shows you that. Faithlessness leads to misguided self-sufficiency. Lesson three. Faith gives us eyes to see that God must be reckoned with.

It goes on. Woe to him, it says, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

[24 : 27] Woe to him. Tremble. Be afraid. Because there is a time that is coming when the end for which the world was created will find its fulfillment. And God's glory will be seen both in the salvation of those who have lived by faith and in the destruction of those who didn't.

And God will have every right on that day to bring to judgment those who have said they're willing to take it. Robert Frost, the American poet, reflected once on the end of the world in a poem that's titled Fire and Ice.

Fire and Ice. And it's really a poem about life left to ourselves. And he compares the elemental forces of fire and ice with the forces of desire and hate that work within us.

And he says this, Some say the world will end in fire. Some say ice. From what I've tasted of desire I hold to those who favor fire. But if it had to perish twice I think I know enough of hate to say that for destruction ice is also great and would suffice.

Left to ourselves, to our hate and desire will spell our end. Left to ourselves but we will not be left to ourselves.

[25 : 53] Woe to him. Tremble for the day is coming when the glory of the Lord will be seen and faith gives us eyes to see the salvation that's available only in him.

woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk so that he can gaze on their naked body.

That's all you're after. But you will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn. Drink and be exposed. The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming round to you and disgrace will cover your glory.

Wrath will cover wrath. You who've made the nations drink will yourselves drink because wine is a traitor and you can't control what you've unleashed.

And there's a cup that's been reserved for you and the cup is poured by God himself. The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you and the destruction of animals that you've caused will terrify you for you have shed man's blood.

[27 : 07] You have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them and here's the crux of the matter of what value is an idol since a man has carved it or an image that teaches lies for he who makes it trust in his own creation.

He makes idols that cannot speak. They don't talk. They teach lies and they don't even talk. And idols can come in all shapes and sizes because we worship whatever benefits us.

And people put their trust in the weapons of war and torture and the cups that they pour out on those around them and it doesn't matter if anyone else recognizes it as an idol.

What makes it an idol is that they worship it. What makes it an idol is if you worship it. that you put your trust in it.

That you put your faith in it. It's a difference between those who put their faith where it belongs in God and those who put it ultimately in themselves because we don't serve anything that doesn't serve us.

[28 : 20] Faithlessness leads to unfounded self-worship serving the gods we've made because we ultimately serve ourselves. faith is what gives us the eyes to see that only God can save.

Only God is worth worshiping. That's where that word comes from. Worthy ship. He is the only one worthy of worship.

If you don't have faith you will not see that. If your eyes are not open that there's more than meets the eye you will not see that.

What does it profit a man to put his faith in his own creation and some idol that he's come up with? This is the problem. Wine is a traitor.

Whatever it is, whatever drink you choose, it is a traitor because the worship of the things that we create is ultimately the worship of ourselves and in the end we cannot do the job for us.

[29 : 29] We cannot save ourselves because there's a cup that's been reserved on our behalf. Woe to him who trusts in himself.

Bacchus says in verse 19, to him who says to wood come to life or to lifeless stone wake up, can it give guidance?

Can this help you in the end? It is covered with gold and silver. There is no breath in it, but the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him, but the Lord is in his holy temple.

The only one who has the answers, the only one who is himself the answer is in his temple. Let all the earth be silent, no more crying, no more complaining, no more crying out to idols we've made with our own hands.

Be silent before the God who has spoken. You see, faith changes everything. It gives us eyes to see beyond the mere appearance of our world, to peer into the day of retribution, to see the unseen at work around us and in us, to understand the destiny for which we are aimed in the judgment seat of God, and to hope in a God who will repay all that is done against him and answer all who have cried out to him.

[31 : 04] Faith is the foil to our self-centeredness, and it loosens our grip on the throne that we have no right to. It is not the great excuse, but the response that our experience of this world demands, and the righteous will live by it.

Faith. See, faith is the antithesis of life apart from God. You want to see what life apart from God looks like, look at the Babylonians.

Look at the machine of war, never satisfied, always after more, filling its belly with the fat of the nations, protecting itself by preying on others, building its cities on the backs of the weak, and ultimately doing it for nothing more than to see their nakedness, because he worships himself. For him and those like him, a cup has been reserved. Faith is living with something bigger at the center of life than myself. Faith is trusting that there's more to life than meets the eye.

Faith is faithfully living before a God who is on the throne, who will judge and vindicate, who will save those who trust in him and stay the hand of those who don't.

[32 : 29] Trusting even when we look around us and what we see causes us to question. There's two things I want you to leave here tonight with. first, I want you to leave knowing this.

When you look out at the world and see the hate and the oppression and the abuse of power and the pendulum of tyranny, don't dismiss it as if it isn't as bad as it seems.

It's probably worse. It's actually worse. But don't be discouraged by it either. because the end of the story has not yet been heard.

It's been written. It's certain and sure, but it has not yet been played out on the stage of history. But beyond that, beyond allowing faith to change your perspective on the world, to admit that the end has not yet come, that's kind of easy.

Especially when you recognize I can't save myself. I didn't bring myself into this world. I can't bring myself out. At least not the way I want to go. Ultimately, I've got to trust in somebody else.

[33 : 49] That's not that hard to admit, actually, at the end of the day, once you get past the self-worship. What's really hard to see, though, is that the cup that's been reserved for somebody like Babylon is actually a very similar cup that's been reserved for you.

And there's no denying that. Because each of us, in our own little ways, in our own little worlds, has played the part of Hitler, has played the part of ruining our homes and hurting those we love most and ultimately ultimately hurting ourselves.

And the idea is that there's a cup that's been reserved for you. And the question at the end of the day is not whether the cup has been reserved, but who will drink it.

It's interesting that Habakkuk sort of loses track of this theme other than just picking up on the theme of faith. But it's picked up later at a very particular point with a rather significant meaning behind it.

In one of the Gospels telling the story of Jesus, it gets to the night before he's going to the cross and he kneels down in a garden and calls out to his father and says, Father, take this cup from my hand, but if there is no other way, I will drink it.

[35 : 22] Your will be done. And the cup that he's talking about is the cup that Habakkuk talked about. The cup that's been reserved. You not only have to admit your need of someone else to save you from the tyranny of the world, you need to at the end of the day admit your need for somebody to save you from the tyranny of yourself.

And until you can do that, you do not have faith. You do not have eyes to see beyond the world as it appears to the world that as it actually is, as it's been created and sought after by not only our God who made it, but our Redeemer.

we're going to close by singing a song about Jesus.

This is a great song called Jesus Paid It All. And while we sing about Jesus paying it all, I want you to think about Jesus drinking it all and drinking what you should have and ask the question if you have the eyes of faith to see it, would you stand and sing?
vendo? .