

## **A Great Prayer in Despair (Habakkuk 1:12-2:1**

**Reading:** Psalm 73

Habakkuk is a insightful book that probes deeply into the mysteries of God. It raises questions about the workings of God in history.

Why God does what he does;

Why he does it in the way he does;

And why he sometimes does nothing.

It is insightful too because of the answers God gives.

For the last couple of weeks we have been looking together at Habakkuk's prayer diary.

We've seen him grapple with an issue that any Christian faces when they see something go wrong: how can there be evil in God's world?

Last time, we looked at God's shocking response to Habakkuk's complaint about the injustice and evil he sees amongst God's people.

God knows and he's going to deal with it by sending Babylonians to destroy the land and carry its people into exile.

Here was God taking responsibility for raising up this ruthless and impetuous people for the purpose of punishing the people of Judah.

And as difficult as it is for us to understand how a holy and good God can use evil people and actions to bring about good, we remembered that this is actually very good news...because it shows us that God really is in control.

And we were reminded that God has used human sin and evil to punish human sin and evil elsewhere...

he did it at the Cross, where He planned for His innocent Son to be wrongfully put to death by wicked men as a way to pay for human sin.

Sometimes God's ways just doesn't make sense

There's bad stuff going on in the world.

But...God knows it. And God's still in control.

And today, we're going to see a change in Habakkuk...

As he comes to God again with his deep concerns.

Through his prayer he is shaped, strengthened in his faith.

*Let's read our text.*

It is interesting to note that the NIV Bible, which tends to title different sections, has given the title 'Habakkuk's Second Complaint'.

The title is a little misleading because it means you approach what you read a certain way.

As we read these verses I want you to hear it differently.

Hear it not as a complaint, but as a prayer in despair.

That's why I've called the sermon 'A great prayer in despair'.

### ***READ HABAKKUK 1:12-2:1***

Imagine crying out to God about the state of the visible church in Australia and hearing that God is going to destroy it by an Islamic invasion.

We would think...well the church might be in a bad way...  
but it surely not as bad as all of that.

Even if it is that bad...it does not seem right to destroy it by using a godless nation.

Imagine this on a personal level too.

Suppose you lose your job because a person has it in for you, misrepresenting something you have done.

Why did God allow this bad person to succeed?

Suppose your doctor gives a misdiagnosis to your illness and things get worse.

Why has this happened?

Suppose you experience some great disappointment...

The death of a child or spouse; the breakup of a marriage; a failure to get the right marks in an exam.

Doesn't God care?

You are not perfect...

but why should someone who is not a Christian have it good while you miss out?

This was the pain of the psalmist in Ps73.

It's what Habakkuk's wrestling with.

See, he complained about the sins of his people.

He saw the Jews oppressing each other and disobeying God, and asked God to deal with it.

And so God's doing that.

But instead of raising up a good king to punish the wicked, God is fighting fire with fire.

Sin will punish sin. Evil will destroy evil.

What is God doing?

Notice that Habakkuk is not saying that the Jews didn't deserve being punished.

Look at verse 12.

Habakkuk accepts the punishment...

“you have appointed them to execute judgement...you have ordained them to punish’.  
“Yes, God. You answered my prayer. Judah’s sins will be punished. They deserve what they get.”

But his concern now is this: sin’s being punished by more sin.

It’s not good defeating evil – it’s evil defeating evil.

When we face questions like this we need a proper procedure on how to deal this sort of dilemma.

When things go wrong, some people tend to withdraw.

They drop out of Christian activities, stop going to church and hide.

Some say there is something wrong with God and renounce all belief in him.

It’s fascinating to look at how Habakkuk acts here.

He’s facing a really tough problem. God is still making very little sense.

The problem he thought he was facing has been replaced by an even bigger one.

How does he respond?

Let me ask you this.

How do we grow? How do we build a skill, or develop a muscle, or gain wisdom?

We are exposed to bigger challenges.

We are faced with more and more difficult problems.

Colin and Kath are watching little Isaac grow, seeing changes in him.

Having 4 children I have watched them grow...

and in each stage of their growth there are new challenges, new things to learn.

When they were babies...it was learning to roll over, sit up, walk, to talk etc.

As they grew it was toilet training, feeding themselves, dressing themselves.

With schooling comes learning to read and write; maths

On it goes through to VCE, always learning and growing.

There’s always another step. Always another hill to climb.

When you’ve stopped growing, you’ve stopped living.

That applies to faith, too.

We all face challenges to our faith.

We all struggle to be sure that God has our best interests at heart,

or to understand why God does the things He does,

or to be able to trust Him more fully.

As we face new challenges, new questions and overcome them...

Then our faith is growing.

Habakkuk was facing a big challenge to his faith.

Look how he's facing trouble...and let's learn from it.

### **Remember Who God Is**

What is the first thing Habakkuk says in response to God's answer?

The first thing Habakkuk does... and the first thing we must do...is this:

he remembers who God is. He reminds himself of who God is.

*Verse 12:* "O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die."

In those opening verses he talks about God being eternal, holy, almighty and faithful!  
WOW!

*"Are you not from everlasting?"*

God always is, always has been, and always will be.

He's timeless.

He stands outside the ebb and flow of history.

He knows what has happened and why;

he knows what will happen and how.

We have a God who knows all things and sees all things.

A God who has always been there, and who will always be there, no matter what.

Don't forget that God is everlasting.

*"O LORD my God."*

Where our Bibles say "LORD" the Hebrew is Yahweh.

That's God's personal name, which He uses with His special people.

When Habakkuk says Yahweh, he is reminding himself and God of the special relationship.

It means closeness and intimacy.

God cares about Habakkuk personally.

God cares about each of us personally, as we are joined to Him by faith.

Remember that God loves us personally.

*"My Holy One."*

God is holy – pure and perfect.

Totally set apart and spotless from any hint of wrongdoing or evil.

Habakkuk reminds himself – and we as Christians need to remind ourselves!

that God is perfect, and so He expects perfection.

The reason God saves a person is so that they can be made perfect like Christ.

We need to remember that...to remember that God is holy.

That's all just the first sentence.

Habakkuk then expresses trust in God... “*we will not die.*”

Habakkuk knows that the nation will be destroyed...

but he also remembers God’s promises.

Promises to Abraham: that his descendants would be like the number of the stars.

Promises to David: that a king from his line would reign forever on the throne of Israel.

And so Habakkuk remembers, and we must remember, that God is faithful.

God keeps his promises.

God will not annihilate Judah...he will make sure that a few are left over to start again.

God always keeps a faithful few through times of evil and judgment.

Remember – God keeps His promises.

With all his troubles and problems the first thing Habakkuk does is remind himself of who God is.

We would do well to do this too.

### **Give The Problem To God – And Leave It!**

Now look at our passage as a whole.

What is Habakkuk doing?

He’s pouring his heart out to God.

He has a problem, and he’s taking it to the Lord.

That’s the second thing he does.

That’s something all of us can do.

Habakkuk gives his problems to God in prayer.

And – he leaves them with God, in faith and in trust.

He is open and honest with the Lord.

He is struggling to understand God’s ways.

He is horrified by the evil that he sees the Babylonians will do.

But he doesn’t take all this and brood over it.

He doesn’t allow it to sink in and bring on depression and anxiety.

Some of us have a tendency to cope with problems by bottling them up and mulling over them.

That can weigh a person down, and it is sinful.

We are not to be anxious about anything, Jesus told us, because our Father in heaven cares for us.

We are to give our cares to God!

Habakkuk trusts God, even though he doesn’t fully understand Him.

He shares his problems with God and leaves them with him.

He says it and then he leaves the ball in God's court.

Are problems weighing you down?

Take them to the Lord in prayer.

Speak to God and tell Him where you stand, and what you need.

If you struggle in your relationship with God, you have to understand that He is trustworthy.

He loves, and He cares, and He is fair and just, and He always keeps His promises.

We can take our problems to Him – and we can leave them with Him!

That's the second thing Habakkuk did.

He trusted God, so he took his problems to God.

We can as well.

### **Expect an Answer**

Finally, Habakkuk says he will take his post and watch for God's answer, and deliver it to the people.

Habakkuk's faith has grown, because he saw God answer the first time.

He saw what God was doing, and that God was dealing with the evil in his nation.

That answer may have left him with more questions.

But Habakkuk has been encouraged, because God answered him.

And so the final thing Habakkuk does here is expect a response.

He watches for God's answer.

God always hears our prayers.

When we cry out, He notices.

He cares.

God will never ignore us.

He will always answer.

Now, that answer will often be a "no."

God knows our needs far better than we do.

And no amount of prayer will convince God to give us something that He knows we don't need or shouldn't have.

God is sovereign – He's the boss.

He can say no.

And sometimes God's answer will be "not yet."

God not only has a plan, He's got a timetable.

He's been working from all eternity to bring this plan about, and he'll be working for all eternity to come as well.

The Bible alone describes at least two to three thousand years of God's activity in the world.

And so when you pray, expect an answer..but don't expect a specific timeframe for it.

You may never see the answer, if God decides not to answer in your time.

That's God's call to make.

And that answer may often be totally different than we expect.

God's answers to prayer can be much different than we think.

They can be virtually unrecognizable.

God may answer, and we simply are unable to see it.

We might get to heaven and only then understand what God was doing.

So, don't restrict your faith to the kinds of things you understand.

When you pray, expect an answer – but don't count on it taking a certain shape.

But these are only guidelines for recognizing the work of God in answering prayer.

God always answers.

And so, like Habakkuk, take your post and watch!

As you go about your daily business,

as you fulfil the responsibilities He gave you,

as you honour and worship Him in daily life,

expect and watch for God's answer.

God often answers us in the arrangement of events.

They are built into the circumstances of life.

Watch how things turn out.

God is shaping all of history and all things that come to pass in a way that conforms to His plan.

And if we have eyes to see Him answer our prayers.

## **Conclusion**

As we read this book together, don't forget this.

Habakkuk was a man just like us.

Yes, he lived in a faraway land, in a faraway time.

He spoke a different language.

But he was a sinner, just like us.

He struggled to understand God, just like us.

He faced problems and was frustrated by life, just like us.

And so when we see him grow in his faith and trust in God, we are seeing something that can happen in our own lives.

We have this wonderful example of Habakkuk who, when still confused about God's answer to his initial prayer, goes back to God again with his problem.

He left the problem with God.

This was not only the prophet's method...

but also the attitude adopted by Jesus when walked this earth.

The problem for him was that of 'being made' sin for our salvation.

He knew that his Father could have delivered him from the hands of the Jews and Romans.

He could have commanded 12 legions of angels and escaped.

But if was to be made sin for us; if sin was to be punished in his body;  
it meant he had to be separated from the Father.

That was the problem.

That was the thing he would shrink back from.

But what did he do?

Exactly what Habakkuk did...he prayed.

He prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not my will, but as you will.' (Matt 26:39)

In effect he is saying, 'I don't understand it, but if this is your way I am going on.'

He took the problem he did not understand to God and he left it there.

He went on, confident that God's will is always right,

and that a holy God would never command anything that was wrong.

Like Habakkuk, like Jesus, there are questions and struggles in life for each of us.

Like Habakkuk, like Jesus, we bring those struggles to God in prayer.

As Habakkuk did pray he had a change in attitude.

This was not the prayer of a drowning man...

But one who, in a close relationship with God could wrestle with God.

And God changed him.

Change that can happen in us too.

Changes happen:

when we remind ourselves constantly who God is.

when we take our problems and give them to God.

when we wait patiently and expectantly for God's response to us.

Let's trust God that He will answer.