

Quiet Confident Faith

Turn on the news. Scroll through social media. Try to buy a tank of gas East of the Mississippi. You don't have to live long on planet earth to see that things are not at peak operating conditions. Part of this world are inefficient or irrational, but other parts are downright wrong. These are the things we call "evil" or "unjust". And it's this evil and injustice in the world that we're going to talk about today. We all suffer daily from the effects of human corruption and forces of evil, but no one was aware of it quite like Habakkuk.

Things were bad in Jerusalem. There was violence in the streets, injustice in the courthouse, and the wicked openly scorned the righteous. We've seen this sort of thing in Israel's history before. Surely, it would only be a matter of time until God visited his people and set things right. Then, the wicked would be judged and the righteous will be vindicated! So, Habakkuk the prophet in Jerusalem, waited on the Lord. And he waited. And waited some more. Then finally he cries out, "How long O Lord? How long will you allow the wicked to prosper in your holy city?!"

Lo, and behold, God appears. And he assures Habakkuk that he has everything under control. He's sent for the Babylonians; they'll teach Israel a lesson.

But Habakkuk doesn't understand. The Babylonians?! They're even worse than the Israelites! This isn't solving a problem this is creating another. The Babylonians were the biggest baddest nation in the middle east. Their horsemen swept across the region leaving death and destruction in their wake. They bulldozed cities and gathered up captives like grains of sand.

They were fierce, they were wicked, and they were not the sort of help that Habakkuk was interested in. But God didn't send them to help. He sent them as judgment.

If Habakkuk was confused before (what's taking God so long?), now he's outraged. How could God justify using the wicked Babylonians as judgement on the straying Israelites? Sure, the Israelites needed correction, but the Babylonians were as evil as it gets. Habakkuk announces that he will take a stand at the watch post and wait for God to explain himself.

God appears yet again. He assures Habakkuk that he's judging his people but he's not abandoning them. Injustice and evil overwhelm, but the righteous shall live by faith. The righteous will trust that God will fulfill his promises even when things look bleak. The day is coming for Babylon and all other human governments. Governments that inevitably oppress the poor, tilt the scales of justice, and worship the idols of wealth, power, and national security. All these will be brought before the Holy God, and if this day seems slow in coming, wait for it in faith.

As you're seeing, the book of Habakkuk is a discourse between God and his prophet. Habakkuk complains about the Israelites. God tells him he's bringing the Babylonians. Habakkuk complains about the Babylonians. God assures Habakkuk he is in control and tells him to wait in faith. This leads to the final discourse of the book. The humbled Habakkuk composes a prayer.

He begs God to act now and correct the evils and injustice that he sees. He looks back and remembers God's work for his people. How he freed his people from the evil and unjust slavery in Egypt, and he looks forward to a second Exodus, when God would rescue his people from this evil world.

Habakkuk pleads for God to act but he makes no demands. The prophet, who in the beginning of this story, felt abandoned, abused, and afraid, concludes with a quiet confidence: Though the fig trees be bare, the fields yield no food, and the barns be empty; yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength. A transformation has taken place in Habakkuk and it leads to this beautiful expression of faith in the face of horrifying circumstances.

And what was God's reaction to Habakkuk's faith? The Babylonians came in, they wiped out Jerusalem, and carried off most of the Israelites. Habakkuk either died in the battle, died as a captive in a foreign land, or died living in the ruins of the city of God. Still, evil and injustice reigned, and still the righteous would live by faith and not by sight.

The Babylonian empire eventually fell as God said it would, but another replaced it. The Israelites returned home but their own evil and idolatry remained. And this is the world of evil and injustice that God sent his Son into. Even Jesus, especially Jesus, knows the pain and suffering that evil and injustice can cause.

For just as God used the Babylonians for his own purpose in judging Israel. So too, he used the Jewish leaders and Pontius Pilates for his own purpose as well. God gave his Son into their hands and their hands brought death, but his death meant life. Life for Jesus, the righteous one who walked by faith, and life for all of you, life for everyone who believes in his name.

After Jesus rose from the dead his disciples asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" In other words, "Will you bring about Habakkuk's vision of a second Exodus? Will you rescue your people? Will you set your kingdom over all earthly

kingdoms and put an end to evil and injustice?" But to their disappointment, the answer was "no". The Day of God's salvation will come, but it was not yet the time.

And so even today, sin, evil, and injustice plague us in our daily lives. Example are all around us. There are national stories that tell us all about the injustices suffered "out there" but we're all well acquainted with evil and injustice in our own lives as well.

It's because of this common experience of suffering that the story of Habakkuk is so important for us today as we wait for the return of Christ. This story is a beautiful and terrible story of faith in God amid horrifying circumstances. A beautiful and terrible picture of quiet, confident faith in God.

This story is beautiful for many reasons. Habakkuk is transformed from angry and incredulous to steadfast and reliant on God. He has faith that stands even against a mountain of evil and injustice. Even if he is the last Israelite to remain faithful, he will not look to another God or another nation for security. This is a beautiful, strong faith.

But Habakkuk is not some Spartan warrior who knows no fear. Rather, even after he has written of the God's glorious salvation for his people, he thinks of the Babylonians and writes, "my body trembles...my lips quiver...and my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us." Perhaps you've felt this way before or you know someone who clung in faith despite suffering from without and fear from within. This is a beautiful, quiet, confident faith that endures hardship and it can give us strength and something to look to amid our own sufferings.

Habakkuk's is a beautiful story but also a terrible one. It's terrible because, well, this could happen to us. This could happen to you, to me. Just consider Habakkuk's life: He spends

his whole life calling God's people to repent but they never do. He suffers evil and injustice the entire way, then either died in foreign lands or in the wreckage of his homeland. A life of suffering evil and injustice, then death. On the surface it's a terrible story and terrifying that it might be ours. But Habakkuk's story, and ours, is not finished yet, not even at death.

God's promise was not that the disaster would be averted, but that in the end justice will be done, God's people will be saved. This is salvation is the sort that makes Paul write in Romans, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us." Paul, like Habakkuk, knew suffering. He was no stranger to evil and injustice. But even so he writes that all the suffering of this life will not compare to the glory, joy, beauty, and splendor that will be revealed at the coming Christ and entrance into his kingdom. This does not diminish or lighten the evil and injustice that we suffer today but assures us that God's kingdom is just that good.

God is faithful, he will keep his promises to Habakkuk, to Paul, and to each and every one of you. But that day is not yet come. Still, we wait for the return of our king. Still, we toil in a world filled with evil and injustice, sin and suffering.

As we wait, let us take up the quiet confident faith of Habakkuk. And let us confess with him in modern words:

Though pandemic and cyber-attack bring our lives to a halt,
 Though war and unrest continue unending,
Though the church shrinks and is ridiculed,
 Though evil and injustice rage on,
Yet, we will rejoice in the Lord;
We will take joy in the God of our salvation,
God, the Lord, is our strength.