

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 41
When God Seems Indifferent. The Book of Habakkuk
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church – April 20, 2008

Upon hearing the news, or reading the newspaper, have you ever just wondered, “*What’s this world coming to?*” Or, “*Why doesn’t God do something about this world?*” I know I have. It’s hard not to sometimes, but we are not the first to ask such questions. Many others have done the same, including a man named Habakkuk. He was a prophet that lived a little over 600 years before Christ, at the same time as Jeremiah, in the days just before Babylon came and took Judah away into captivity.

Now, you might think that someone who lived so long ago would not have much to say to us today, but as Habakkuk looked at his times and people, he saw many of the same things we see. And just like us, he too was confused by it all. But he took his confusion to God and as a result, we find his faith going through three stages. Please open your Bibles with me to the book of Habakkuk. You will find it just a few books from the end of the Old Testament.

I. Habakkuk’s Faith in Turmoil

As this book begins, we discover that Habakkuk’s faith is in turmoil. As he looked at his world, his heart became heavily burdened. Now, on the surface, one might wonder why, because during his time, Judah was in the midst of religious reform. As far as many were concerned, they were experiencing a genuine revival. Josiah was the king. Perhaps one of the best Judah ever had. He experienced personal conversion at the age of 16 (2 Chronicles 34:3). At 20, he began to clean Judah of idolatry. He had the Temple repaired, restored the Temple services, and called for a renewed commitment from the people of the land to their covenant with God.

Many people were excited about the good things going on in the land, but not Habakkuk. He saw differently than most, and realized it was all superficial, and had not really penetrated people’s hearts. There was a difference between what people were saying and what was actually happening. Sin, violence, injustice, still most defined his time, and it deeply troubled him, so he cried out to God much the same way you and I do when we see such things around us.

As a result, Habakkuk spent a great deal of time wondering about the person of God. In chapter one, he questions, complains, and argues with God,

“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?”
“God, aren’t You listening, don’t You care?”
“Our nation’s a mess, and Your not doing anything about it!”

Well, God answered his complaints by telling Habakkuk in verse 5, *“I’m doing something so wonderful you will have a hard time believing it.”* And He gave the details of how He would use Babylon as His hand of punishment. But that didn’t exactly please Habakkuk. In fact, it troubled him even more because Babylon was an even more corrupt nation than Judah! And so, beginning in verse 12, Habakkuk replies to God... (12-13)

In essence, he was saying,

“Your not being consistent. Your not being fair!”
“You’re a holy God, how can You use sinful people to punish Your people?”

There are a couple of things here that would help our own understanding and response when we look at our own times and wonder about the person of God, as Habakkuk did.

First, God does not tell us everything.

I used to get frustrated with a former employer. I’d ask him something and he would often respond, *“Some things you need to know but you don’t need to know everything.”* I felt like he was purposefully withholding information from me. But God isn’t just withholding information. Quite often, we simply don’t have the ability to understand. His ways are not our ways, and His thinking is *far beyond* our thinking, so that, what seems unfair and inconsistent is not at all.

Second, we look at things from our point of view.

We see, based on what we want or what we think is right, and therefore we misinterpret what God is doing. We’re not able to see from His point of view.

And third, we don't really want to know what God is doing.

Like Habakkuk, we're not always going to like what God does. Instead, what we really want to hear is what we want to happen. I've seen it many times in counseling. People will come to me for answers but often what they are really looking for is for me to tell them they are right. Quite often, that's the way we approach God as well. We want Him to confirm what we've already decided. That has nothing to do with God's will, it is all about our will.

And so, in chapter one, the faith of Habakkuk is in turmoil, and we can understand why, because we too have found ourselves in the same situation, wondering what God is doing.

II. Habakkuk's Faith in Training

However, in chapter 2, Habakkuk's faith goes into training. In verse 1, he says, *"I'm going to stand here and see how You respond!"* Habakkuk was going to wait on God.

In most cases, that would be admirable. Psalm 37:7 says, *"Rest in the Lord, wait patiently on Him"*. Isaiah 40:31 says those that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. But I don't believe Habakkuk was waiting in that frame of mind. I think he was ready to argue. He knew how things were supposed to be, and rather than listen to what God had to say, he really intended to prepare his next argument. You know how that works don't you? We're in an argument with someone and while their talking we don't hear a thing their saying because we are planning what to say next!

But throughout chapter two, we don't hear Habakkuk speak. Instead, we hear the voice of God And He outlines a coming judgment upon selfish ambition, covetousness, the exploitation of others, drunkenness, and idolatry.

But first, He instructs Habakkuk concerning his response to what God was doing in the world. And that's what I want us to focus on in verses 2-4...

First, Habakkuk was to wait. The right way!

God was going to act when the time was right and not before. Habakkuk's place was not to question, but to wait. Our view of the world and our future

should be the same. God has given us His Word, and He's made it plain to read and to understand. He tells us He's got a plan and just like with Habakkuk, though it tarries, we are to wait for it, because it will surely come. Everything God plans happens in its time!

Second, Habakkuk was to wait by faith.

In verse 4, God presents two ways to deal with life. There's the way of the **proud**, who think they can figure things out on their own. Who think they know what is best, but end up in destruction. And there's the way of the **just**, which, instead of trusting themselves, put all their trust in God.

And that's really the issue isn't it! We can look at our world and the mess we see sometimes, and with troubled heart wonder, "*Why doesn't someone do something about it?*" But God is not so troubled. And it's not because He doesn't care. He does! It's because of what He tells Habakkuk in verse 20...

God was saying, "*I'm in My Temple. I'm on My Throne, and I am in Control.*"

You see, God really is in charge! The whole world is in His hands, including you and me. We can rebel against Him, as the proud. Or, we can trust Him, as the just. The choice is ours. But let's not ever forget, He is in His Temple, and in the end, we all must answer to Him.

Hearing the Word of God, had a much different impact upon his life than Habakkuk thought it would. Remember back at the beginning of chapter 2? He thought he was going to be able to stand on equal terms and argue with God about what was right and wrong. But take a look at 3:2...

The speech that he's talking about is what God had to say in chapter 2. Hearing that speech enabled him to understand just how wrong he was, and instead of arguing with God, Habakkuk was humbled before Him. And he pleads, "*Lord, Revive Your Work!*" He was not asking God to do something new, but instead, to continue that which He was already doing; to keep it alive!

III. Habakkuk's Faith in Triumph

As we move into chapter 3, we discover that Habakkuk's faith began to

triumph. Back in chapter one, he didn't like what he saw, and he didn't like what he heard. He wanted God to act immediately and in a certain way, his way But now, Habakkuk realizes God's way and God's time is what they really needed after-all.

Believe it or not, that's what we still need today, God's way and God's time. We may not like what we see around us, and want God to act now. I'm reminded of how James and John in Luke 9 reacted when a city of Samaria had turned Jesus away. They wanted to immediately call fire down from heaven to consume them. But God had things in control, and had a plan Jesus was following.

We may want God to act in a certain way, right now. But, that's not our decision to make and it's not even ours to worry about. God is in His Temple. He is in control. Our responsibility is to live by faith in Him.

The rest of chapter 3 reassured Habakkuk in his new attitude of worship as he was given a vision of God.

We are not going to study its detail, however, there is a basic theme presented in this vision which God wants us to understand. See 3:3-16...

Far from being indifferent and inactive with regard to our problems, God is moved, God is concerned, and God is in control, waiting for just the right moment to accomplish just the right thing for us. And when we see Him in that way, rather than confusion, it boosts our confidence. Look at verses 17-19...

What a message! A much needed message for us today! No longer was Habakkuk going to try to work out the problems of his life and society, in his own strength. Now, he was going to rely on God's strength, and there he would find victory.

God would enable him to walk in the high places, in the places of victory, instead of down in the valley, in the places of discouragement. Habakkuk's confidence in God was restored because he stopped looking at the problems around him and listening to the thoughts of his own heart. Instead, he started looking to God, and listening to the words of His Voice.

Habakkuk's circumstances did not change, but he changed as he drew closer

to God. And the same opportunity exists for us today. The closer we draw to the Lord, the more we become aware of His strength, and the better we understand His sufficiency for our every need. Remember what the Lord told the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9...

Our circumstances may not change but our perspective will, and so will our lives when we put our trust in Him.

If you're discouraged, if you're frustrated, if you're bitter because of problem's you face in life, then stop looking at your problem's and start looking to the Lord, and He will restore your confidence in Him, so that, you can rest in Him, rely on Him, and rejoice in Him.