

**Believe Even When You Can't See**  
**Habakkuk**  
**Sunday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023**  
**By Ryan Perry**

**Scripture:**

Habakkuk 3:17–19

*[17] Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
[18] yet I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.  
[19] GOD, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer's;  
he makes me tread on my high places.*

**Pray**

**Introduction**

As a young man preparing to go to China, the famous missionary Hudson Taylor determined to learn to live by faith. Now at that time he worked for a doctor and was paid quarterly. When the time came for him to receive his salary, Taylor was frustrated that his employer said nothing about it. Because Taylor only had a half of a crown piece (about 20 cents) to his name. But he determined not to break his resolution to live by faith, so he didn't say anything about it.

Then, while visiting the home of a needy family, Taylor felt led by God to give his last coin to them. The very next day he received an anonymous gift through the mail that equaled four times what he had given to the poor!

Then, the following Saturday, the doctor finished up his work and said, "Taylor, isn't your salary due again?" Taylor told him that it was and became disappointed when he learned that the doctor had forgotten about the salary due and sent all his funds to the bank! But again, he prayed about the matter and left it with the Lord.

Finally, that evening, the doctor visited him and said that one of his patients had come over after hours to pay his bill, so he was able to pay Hudson his salary. **So even though Hudson Taylor was frustrated, disappointed, and poor, he chose to live by faith and as a result God abundantly met his needs.**

**This morning, we are going to meet another frustrated and disappointed man by the name of Habakkuk. But we will see how God wondrously and abundantly gives him exactly what he needs.**

Habakkuk is the main character in the book which bears his name and because God commands him to “write the vision” in chapter 2 and we have his prayer in chapter 3 we can be fairly confident that he is the main author.

Now, even though we don’t know a lot about who he was, we do know that he was a prophet because the opening verse says “an oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.”

We also know, from the internal evidence of this oracle it more than likely came about in the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.), which means that Habakkuk came after Nahum and Zephaniah, but was probably prophesying around the same time as Jeremiah and Ezekial.

But unlike a traditional prophecy this oracle or vision takes a little bit of a different form. Here is what it looks like:

### **Structural Overview of Habakkuk**

**Habakkuk complains and questions God (1:2-4)**

**God’s first response (1:5-11)**

**Habakkuk complains and questions God again (1:12-2:1)**

**God’s second response (2:2-20)**

**Habakkuk’s prayer (3:1-19)**

But why? Why is the book of Habakkuk structured this way? Well, if you remember what I said, Habakkuk was a frustrated and disappointed man.

He was frustrated with God because he didn’t seem to be doing anything about the evil that he was seeing and experiencing in Judah. To Habakkuk, God seemed indifferent and aloof which caused him to complain to God and question his ability to deal with evil.

So then God responds and gives him an answer.

Only, it isn’t the kind of answer that Habakkuk is looking for. In fact, it is so far outside of his ability to understand that he complains again, and in the process he even questions God character.

But instead of destroying Habakkuk for calling his character into question, God lovingly and patiently answers Habakkuk one more time, and in so doing, helps him to see the reality of what is actually going on. **In essence, God helps him to see the method behind the (perceived) madness.**

And in response, Habakkuk prays, worships, and declares his hope and trust in God. So this morning, we are going to dive into this back and forth between Habakkuk and God.

We will not only learn more about why Habakkuk is so frustrated and why he would dare to question God, but we are also going to learn about God and how his ways are not always our ways. And how maybe, just maybe we don't always understand and see the big picture. **And finally, we will be confronted with our main point for this morning which is this:**

**“We are called to be a people who live by faith and not by sight.”**

With that in mind, I have three points for you this morning. And the first one comes from Habakkuk's first complaint and God's first response, and it is this:

**1. Just because we can't see it doesn't mean God isn't working (1:2-11)**

**Habakkuk 1:2-4**

*[2] O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,  
and you will not hear?*

*Or cry to you “Violence!”  
and you will not save?*

*[3] Why do you make me see iniquity,  
and why do you idly look at wrong?*

*Destruction and violence are before me;  
strife and contention arise.*

*[4] So the law is paralyzed,  
and justice never goes forth.*

*For the wicked surround the righteous;  
so justice goes forth perverted.*

Right away we see how frustrated and angry the prophet is as he cries out *“how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?”*

Now this isn't necessarily a bad thing that Habakkuk is doing. In fact, the expression “how long” is a very common form of complaint in scripture, especially in the psalms.

Look at David's cry in Psalm 13:1:

*[1] How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?*

Or in Psalm 89:46 it says:

*[46] How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?  
How long will your wrath burn like fire?*

This is a normal way that people in scripture would cry out to God, so God isn't mad that Habakkuk is doing this.

And I just want to say as a side note that God isn't upset at us when we bring frustration and hurt to him. He can handle all of our emotions and he calls us to cry out to him. As it says in Psalm 34:6:

*[6] This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him  
and saved him out of all his troubles.*

For Habakkuk, he is crying out to God in frustration because he has been asking God to do something about the evil that exist within Judah.

Now we don't exactly know all the details of what was happening, but if this is happening during the reign of Jehoiakim then we do know this from 2 Kings 23:37.

*[37] And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.*

And according to Habakkuk in 1:2-4 this evil included violence, destruction, and the persecution of the righteous by those who are wicked.

But even though he is crying out to God for help it doesn't feel like he is doing anything.

Either he is just sitting idly by and watching these evils happen according to verse 3 or worse yet, the law is paralyzed according to verse 4. **Which means that God's very words and law can't do anything because all that Habakkuk sees is that justice never comes like it's supposed to.**

We can really feel Habakkuk's anger, frustration, angst, and hopelessness in these opening verses, can't we? He has looked at his land and his kinsman and all that is happening, and he has basically said, there is no hope, and nothing is going to change, because God isn't doing anything.

### **Application**

Have you ever said that? Have you ever felt that deep within your soul?

You have been dealing with the same sin issue for years and you feel like you will never overcome it. There are problems in your marriage that have persisted for so many years that you begin to believe that it is beyond repair.

For whatever reason you are someone who has to bear the burden of living with chronic health issues that make you wonder at times, like Job, why you were ever born?

Maybe you are like me and you have to battle consistent and nagging bouts of anxiety, or for others of you it might be depression, and you sit and ask God, is this what it really means to be fearfully and wonderfully made?

Or simply, as we have brought up in previous weeks, you watch the news, you read the articles on the internet, you see what's trending on Google or Twitter, and are confronted by story after story of immorality, murder, violence, drug overdoses, and death which leave you feeling hollow, scared, and hopeless as you ask the question "**where is God in all this?**"

If any of these descriptions fit you and where you are at right now, I want to encourage you, **don't lose hope.**

Because even though we can't feel it and even though we don't see it, God is doing a work in our situation and in our world that is far greater than we could ever imagine.

As God says in his response to the prophet in Habakkuk 1:5-6:

*[5] "Look among the nations, and see;  
wonder and be astounded.  
For I am doing a work in your days  
that you would not believe if told.  
[6] For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
that bitter and hasty nation,  
who march through the breadth of the earth,  
to seize dwellings not their own.*

This is God's way of saying to Habakkuk, "I know your frustrated, I know that it looks like evil is running rampant in Judah, and I know you feel hopeless. **But stop! Look outside of Judah! Because I have heard your cries for help, and I am about to do something that is going to blow your mind.**"

And that's exactly what he does. Because God's gives him an answer that Habakkuk never would have thought possible. God is going to deal with the wickedness of Judah, but he is going to do it by bringing the evil Chaldeans (better known as Babylonians) to Judge and overthrow Judah.

Now there are a lot of questions here about why God decided to do it this way, and we will deal with that a little bit in the next point.

**But the important point here is that just because Habakkuk couldn't see God moving doesn't mean he wasn't working.** For God already had an astounding and unbelievable plan that he was bringing about so that the wicked amongst his people would be dealt with.

And I want to encourage each one of us in this room this morning. Don't lose hope. Just because you can't see God moving does not mean that he doesn't have a plan. **Instead, believe that he is working something, in his timing, that is for your good and is beyond your wildest imagination.**

As it says in Jeremiah 29:11:

*[11] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

## **2. Just because we don't understand doesn't mean that God has failed (1:12-2:20)**

**Habakkuk 1:12-13**

*[12] Are you not from everlasting,  
O LORD my God, my Holy One?  
We shall not die.*

*O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment,  
and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.*

*[13] You who are of purer eyes than to see evil  
and cannot look at wrong,  
why do you idly look at traitors  
and remain silent when the wicked swallows up  
the man more righteous than he?*

It would be easy to assume at this point, that Habakkuk should be happy. He wanted God to do something about the evil in Judah, and God responded and said, "hey, I've got it, I'm going to take care of it. Those evil people will be judged and destroyed."

But instead, these verses make it clear that God's answer didn't help. In fact, it made Habakkuk's frustration and anger with God so much worse that it causes him to question if God is even God or if he is even good.

You see Habakkuk for sure wanted God to deal with the evil in Judah. And he got that. But what he isn't happy about, and what he can't comprehend is how God has decided to do it.

**God's great, wonderful, and awe-inspiring plan is to bring the Babylonians (by far the most evil nation at the time) into Judah to judge and destroy his people.**

Can you imagine how deflated, confused, and at a loss Habakkuk was at this moment?

This would be like one of your friends coming to you and saying, "Hey I know you have been really stressing out about your money problems, but I have figured out a solution and you are going to love it. I signed you up to have a kidney removed so you can sell it for medical research."

You would freak out, and rightfully so. “You signed me up for what!?”

And when Habakkuk hears what God is going to do his brain short circuits and he begins to unload on God. He in essence says in verse 12-13:

“What are you talking about God, I wanted you to deal with the evil in Judah not destroy your people. These people are truly evil how can you even look upon them? And we are more righteous than these traitors and genocidal maniacs, and yet you will use them to destroy us? How can you even be holy and good if this is true? How can you even be God?”

### **Application**

Can you relate to that? There are times in our life when we pray and pray and pray only to get an answer that we feel is unfair or unjust. Or we feel like we have been doing all the right things and things still end up going badly.

We pray for our kids salvation and we feel like we have raised them in the way they should go and they walk away from the Lord. Or we trust God and continually ask him to watch over our families and a spouse or child die in a tragic accident or from a terrible disease.

We work our whole lives believing we have been faithful to God and that he will take care of us in retirement only to find out that we don't have enough.

Thinking about what I mentioned earlier, you pray for God to work a miracle in your marriage only to learn that your spouse has been unfaithful. You ask God to heal you of your physical issues but the only options will cost thousands and thousands of dollars that you don't have.

And what about this past Monday. People were praying and praying for decades for God to wake up our nation so that they would see their need for him. And then 22 years ago, this past Monday, on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, thousands of Americans lost their lives as terrorists crashed planes in to the twin towers in New York.

Like Habakkuk we can find ourselves in that place of “freak out” where we say to God, “We don't understand what you are doing. How can you be God if this is what you are allowing to happen?”

**Once again, I want to remind you that if you feel this way, be honest with God. He can and will lovingly and patiently handle your anger and your frustration and confusion.**

Because this is exactly what he does with Habakkuk in 2:2 when it says:

***[2] And the LORD answered me:***

***“Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.***

“I know you’re confused Habakkuk, I know it seems like I have made a mistake or have failed, but I haven’t. And to help you understand that I haven’t, I am giving you a vision.”

It’s a vision that will help Habakkuk makes sense of what God is doing. And it’s a vision that he must write down on stone tablets so that the rest of God’s people will also understand and be ready for what God is about to do.

But instead of just jumping right into the vision God makes a qualifying statement that I believe Habakkuk needed and we need as we deal with confusion in our lives. He says in verse 3:

*[3] For still the vision awaits its appointed time;  
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.  
If it seems slow, wait for it;  
it will surely come; it will not delay.*

Meaning, I want you to know that what I am about to tell you is going to happen. It has an appointed time that is coming. **But I also know you want me to do it right now, and you need to wait.**

Even if you can’t see it right away and even if it feels like I’m being slow, I am coming to do something. **In and through your marriage, health issues, lose of a loved one, physical and mental issues, I will do something, I will move both for my glory as your God and for your good as my people.”**

And in Habakkuk’s situation, as Habakkuk was confused and struggling with the reality of this evil nation coming and his people being destroyed, God showed him that he was going to do the same thing. As it says in Habakkuk 2:4-8, 14

*[4] “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,  
but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

*[5] “Moreover, wine is a traitor,  
an arrogant man who is never at rest.  
His greed is as wide as Sheol;  
like death he has never enough.  
He gathers for himself all nations  
and collects as his own all peoples.”*

*[6] Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say,*

*“Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—  
for how long?—  
and loads himself with pledges!”*



*[7] Will not your debtors suddenly arise,  
and those awake who will make you tremble?  
Then you will be spoil for them.*

*[8] Because you have plundered many nations,  
all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,  
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,  
to cities and all who dwell in them.*

*[14] For the earth will be filled  
with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.*

To sum these verses up, God is moving in Habakkuk's time yes, to judge the wickedness in Judah, but he will also judge the wickedness in Babylon. All that these Babylonians trust in, their greed, possessions, and their ability take over nations will turn on them and they will be plundered and destroyed.

But for God's people, those who are righteous in his sight and have trusted him, like Habakkuk, according to verse 4, *"they will live by faith."*

And to make sure Habakkuk understood that God would fulfill this vision, he makes it clear that he is doing all of this as part of his great plan, as it says in verse 14, to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory.

For us today, that verse should resonate in our hearts. Because, as NT Christians, we know the end of the story that Habakkuk couldn't see. **That God, through Christ is coming back, and the earth will be renewed, and we will worship him as heirs of a joy-filled and eternal inheritance. As it says in Revelation 7:9–10:**

*[9] After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10] and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*

So even though you may feel confused, and may not understand what God is doing in your life at this moment. **Take heart, God hasn't failed you.**

But instead, even if it takes time and even if it looks different than you expected, God is doing something in your circumstances that is for your good, and is a part for his grand and amazing plan that will culminate when Christ returns, and all creation, including you and I, worships him.

So then, if that is true? How do we respond now? How do we endure when things feel so hard, and we are waiting on God for what can be days or months or even years? And the answer from the book of Habakkuk is this:

### 3. We must live by faith in the past, present, and future faithfulness of God (3:2-19)

#### Habakkuk 3:2

*[2] O LORD, I have heard the report of you,  
and your work, O LORD, do I fear.  
In the midst of the years revive it;  
in the midst of the years make it known;  
in wrath remember mercy.*

So the prophet finally has his answer. “Even though it isn’t going to be easy, God is going to deal with the wickedness in Judah by bringing the Babylonians. But don’t worry, they also will be destroyed. **However, my people, my remnant, the righteous, will live by faith.**”

And in response Habakkuk writes this beautiful song prayer that I believe is very instructive for us as we think about how to live by faith in this fallen world.

It begins with Habakkuk telling God that he has heard a report about him. And the report that he has heard becomes the content of verses 3-15 where Habakkuk in very brief form recounts all of the mighty things that God has done in the past.

His appearing on Sinai (3-4), The Exodus from Egypt (5) , the red sea (14-15), his defeat of Cush and Midian (7), God’s control of nature (6, 8, 10), and God making the sun stand still for Joshua in Joshua 10 (11).

And in response to God’s past faithfulness Habakkuk asks that God would revive that work today. Meaning that he sees how God has worked and been faithful to his people in the past and therefore, in faith, he asks God to work and be faithful to his people in the present.

I don’t know about you, but that is helpful to me. There are so many ways that God has been faithful to me in the past and yet I so quickly forget them when things get hard.

Just the mere fact that I am standing here today, and that God did a work in my life to open my eyes to the truth of Christ is astonishing considering the fact that I should have died from a heart defect at 9 years old. But I so easily forget.

And yet, God through Habakkuk, is calling us to remember them. Remember his past faithfulness to his people in scripture, but also remember his past faithfulness to each one of us throughout our lives.

A faithfulness that isn't built on our goodness or our being worthy of it, but it's a faithfulness that is built on the promise that you and I are his beloved children through the precious blood of Christ.

As it says in John 1:12-13:

***[12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

Then in 1 Corinthians 1:9:

***[9] God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

So we can trust that the same God who called us his children, and has been wholly faithful to us in the past, is the same God who is and will be faithful to us today.

But Habakkuk doesn't stop there. Because he also remembers two things that God said to him. And we read these verses in point two.

**Habakkuk 2:4b, 14**

***"...but the righteous shall live (be kept alive) by his faith."***

***[14] For the earth will be filled  
with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.***

God is not only going to sustain his people today, but he is going to sustain them, protect them and keep them into the future. How long into the future? Until that great day when his kingdom has fully and wholly invaded and renewed his creation. That glorious day when Christ returns.

Now, as a side note, this doesn't necessarily mean physical life, because we know that we die physically. But we have the same hope that Habakkuk had, but only had a glimpse of. The hope that God will work for our good, and sustain us in faith until that day when we are with him forever and fully receive the life and inheritance that he has promised. As Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:3-5:

***[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.***

And even though Habakkuk could only faintly understand these promises, he now confidently is able to praise God and says in Habakkuk 3:17-19

*[17] Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
[18] yet I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.  
[19] GOD, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer's;  
he makes me tread on my high places.*

I know it's going to be hard God, I know that our land is going to be destroyed, but I understand that you are doing something that is greater than what I can see right now. I also know that you have promised that you will sustain me and work for my good and the good of your people as you work out your glorious and cosmic plan. **So I will trust you and rejoice in you even though I can't see it right now.**

I cannot fully understand what each person in this room is going through this morning. I can't comprehend the reality of your hurt and frustration or how long you feel like you have been walking in darkness.

But what I do know is that we serve a God who can handle our hurts. **And though he may feel far off, If you are his child this morning through the precious blood of Christ, he is working.**

You may not see it yet, and you may not fully understand it, but he is working for your present and eternal good. And he promises that he will be with you and sustain you until the day that your faith will be sight, and you receive the imperishable inheritance and riches of an everlasting life with Christ.

So until that day, I am asking you and implore you, like Habakkuk and like Hudson Taylor, live by faith and not by sight.

Believe even when you can't see, as you stand on the promise that the God who has been faithful in the past, will also be faithful in your present, and until the end of your days.

**Let's pray**