

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

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Last week we saw how Habakkuk questioned God in complaining about the wickedness of the nation. Habakkuk knew that something was not right. How could a holy God maintain His justice when His covenant people were living as if God did not even exist? Why did God allow this to continue? How long would God remain silent and inactive? All of this flowed from the false conclusions he drew from the truths he observed. Habakkuk cried out to God, questioned God, complained to God about his situation as a prophet. We noted that Habakkuk went to the right Person with the wrong attitude.

God then answered Habakkuk, though not in the way Habakkuk had scripted it in his mind. Habakkuk had prescribed God's actions for Him, and God reminds him that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. Habakkuk's observations were correct – the nation was living in wickedness. However, God had a plan. The Babylonians would serve as a means of God's judgment on the people. God was still on the throne, and everything was going according to schedule.

What we see in our text tonight is the beginning of Habakkuk's recovery. Habakkuk backs up and reconsiders his initial complaint in light of God's response. We learn a valuable lesson from Habakkuk: *when God acts in ways contrary to our preconceptions, then we should return to what we know to be true.* Habakkuk could make no sense out of God's approach. He could have become disillusioned and fallen into despair. Some believe that that is in fact what Habakkuk did, interpreting this section as a second complaint. But I think we see Habakkuk stop and consider his thoughts in light of God's response. He chose a wiser way. He returned to what He knew to be true about God.

I. Habakkuk's Contemplation (1:12-13a)

Habakkuk here again reflects on the nature and character of God – but from God's perspective, not his own. That is what got him off on the wrong foot in the first place. We could almost say, given this new information from God, that Habakkuk starts over again and approaches the right Person with the right attitude.

1. God is eternal (v. 12a)

Habakkuk still asks questions, but his spirit is different. He asks, "**Are You not from everlasting, O LORD?**" Habakkuk seems to forget his immediate problem, the problem of the wickedness of God's people, and begins to contemplate what he knew to be sure about God. He began with God's eternity. He is not a created idol. He is not like the gods that other men worship. Even before there was a thought, God existed and was sovereign over all that will ever be. He is not like the God of the 'openness of God' theologians that state that the future is not known perfectly by God. He is not surprised by anything, not even the wickedness of the people in Habakkuk's day. He is God from eternity to eternity, the everlasting God.

This is what Habakkuk began to contemplate. Rather than allowing the situation to control him, he runs back to the security of the eternal God. Martyn Lloyd-Jones draws our attention to the wonderful security one can have in God's eternity in the midst of their anxiety:

There is nothing more consoling or reassuring when oppressed by the problems of history, and when wondering what is to happen in the world, than to remember that the God whom we worship is outside the flux of history. He has preceded history; He has created history. His throne is above the world and outside time. He reigns in eternity, the everlasting God.¹

Do you see the change in Habakkuk's approach? He began by taking a few of God's attributes and sort of reminding God who He is. God's response made Habakkuk stop and think, "Perhaps I have forgotten something. I only thought that perhaps something had escaped God's attention."

2. God is holy (v. 12b)

Habakkuk had referred to God's holiness in his initial questions, though in a way that challenged God's holiness rather than affirm it. Here, he approaches God's holiness and contemplates what it means that He is holy. His holiness means that whatever He does is always just, always right. Stated negatively, His holiness means that He is incapable of doing anything unrighteous. His holiness is described by the apostle John in his announcement in 1 John 1:5, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." Habakkuk did not have John's writing, but he knew the truth he set forth. He also knew what Paul proclaimed, that the god of this world leads to darkness, to ungodliness. Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 4:4-6 – The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

While Habakkuk would not have understood the depth of Paul's proclamation of the riches found in Christ alone, "in the face of Christ," when he contemplated God's holiness he began to understand his situation from God's perspective. Yes, there was darkness in the land. Yes, the people chased after other gods and lived in wickedness. But the darkness was a reflection of their character – not God's. They desired darkness, not Light. They denied the truth of God, the promises of God, the covenant of God. Again, we are reminded of John's epistle, 1 John 1:6, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." That is what Habakkuk was beginning to recognize. The darkness was their own fault, not God's, because God is absolutely holy. And it is unthinkable that God can do anything against His character.

3. God is mighty (v. 12c)

Habakkuk's next proposition, "**You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.**" Habakkuk is consoled by the truth that God is a mighty God. Habakkuk's hope is furthered when he understood God's word about the Babylonians' destruction, "**You have appointed them to execute judgment... You have ordained them to correct.**" He is now willing to face the truth of the consequences of Judah's sin. His hope was built on the solid "**Rock,**" the unshakable and immovable God, the God who

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 29.

created the whole world out of nothing, *ex nihilo*, the God who said, “Let there be light” when there was no light, and there was light. His power is absolute, not a corruptible power like that of the Babylonians, but power in accordance with His nature. Habakkuk found peace in this unchangeable truth. We can almost hear Habakkuk’s reasoning, “Since God is so powerful as to speak the world into existence out of nothing, then surely He is powerful enough to bring His purposes to pass concerning His people.” Habakkuk was saying, “God is almighty, and He will not be stopped from accomplishing His purposes, purposes which I failed to recognize in the midst of my pity party.” He is **“the Rock.”**

The psalmist captured this truth well in Psalm 95:1, “O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.” The psalmist understood, as Habakkuk was beginning to realize, that the only hope of deliverance, the only hope of rescue from God’s wrath and judgment, was in **“the Rock.”**

4. God is faithful

God’s faithfulness is set forth in Habakkuk’s words, **“We will not die.”** Habakkuk has hope in the facing of judgment because of God’s covenant, a covenant that Habakkuk knows God will be faithful to keep. Lloyd-Jones commented:

What is the significance of those words, “We will not die?” He is recalling that God is the God of the Covenant. Though He is independent and absolute, eternal, mighty, righteous and holy, nevertheless He has condescended to make a covenant with men... It was this covenant that entitled Israel to turn to God and say, “My God, mine Holy One.” The prophet remembers that God has said, “I will be their God and they shall be my people... God had given His word and He would never break it.”²

Therefore, Habakkuk was able to conclude that God must be raising up the Babylonians for Israel’s benefit. God was using them to accomplish His good purposes for Judah. While Habakkuk did not fully understand, one thing he knew, they were not going to die. “I can’t see the end of God’s purposes, but since God is faithful, I know this is according to His providential plan for His people.”

II. Habakkuk’s Grappling (1:13-2:1)

Satisfied that God was in control of the adversity still did not satisfy Habakkuk’s problem. There was still the question of God’s apparent tolerance of evil. The problem of evil is one that theologians have questioned throughout history, so this problem is not unique to Habakkuk. But even though the question is still lingering, even though Habakkuk is still grappling with the problem, he returns to the character of God.

1. A holy God hates sin and can do no evil (v. 13-17)

Habakkuk once again reflects upon what he knows to be true of God, **“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor.”** Notice the change in Habakkuk’s tone from his initial questioning of God. He began by suggesting that God somehow approved evil and tolerated wickedness. Now, when he stops to meditate on the character of God, he admits that he had the wrong approach. Whatever else Habakkuk may have been uncertain of, of this he was certain: God cannot look upon evil without hating it. Lloyd-

² Lloyd-Jones, 33.

Jones stated, “God and evil are eternal opposites. Anything unjust or cruel is far removed from the character of God.”³

Given this truth, Habakkuk turned from questioning God to asking God. He admits that while he cannot from his sinful, limited perspective see God at work, he believed that God was at work. So he asks God, again, not questioning God’s character, but wanting to receive God’s knowledge, “**Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?**” And on and on he goes, presenting the adversity *in light of* God’s character. “Since this is true O God, then why, how?”

2. A commitment of the unsolved problem to God in faith (2:1)

The question of God’s holiness in relation to wickedness was difficult for Habakkuk. He still has no clear answer, but is now determined that even though he did not understand it, God did. He has taken the problem to God, and he is leaving it with Him. He says in 2:1, “I will stand back and watch. I will wait on Your answer.” James Boice noted:

Habakkuk has gone as far in his reasoning as he can. Now he needs to know more if he is to make progress. So he waits for that instruction. He says that he is going to wait to see what God will say to him.⁴

Again we see the change in Habakkuk’s attitude. He began impatiently, “How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ yet You do not save” (1:2). Now, patience. Now, Habakkuk had detached himself from the immediate problem and expects God to answer, in His way and in His time. So Habakkuk is resolved to watch and to wait.

That is what we today are called to do as well. We opened last week by admitting that when we look at the turmoil and wickedness around us, we to might approach God the way Habakkuk did, question where God is in the midst of the wickedness. But we must come to the place where Habakkuk does in this text, admitting that from our perspective we do not know all there is to know, we don’t have all the answers, but by faith commit this, and anything else we don’t know, to God. How can we do that?

Conclusion

Lloyd-Jones drew four rules or principles from this text in Habakkuk, what he called “the right method” to approach God.

1. Stop and think

The first rule is to think instead of speaking. We all get into trouble when we fail to do this, don’t we. As I have stated in the past, this is why we so identify with Peter, who often spoke without thinking. But we are reminded of James 1:19-20, “Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” Our problem is that we are quick to speak and slow to think. That was Habakkuk’s problem in the beginning. But after hearing God’s response, Habakkuk knew that he had misspoken. And he stopped and thought, contemplated the nature and character of God more fully. Which leads to the second rule...

³ Lloyd-Jones, 33.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets*, vol. 2, 404.

2. Re-state basic principles

The second rule is that when you start to think you must not begin with your immediate problem. We must first remind ourselves of those things which we are certain, with those things that are beyond dispute. That's what Habakkuk did. He removed himself from the situation and pondered God. And it is clearly seen that the moment he did so, he began to lose his sense of panic.

This principle is seen in the Model Prayer of our Lord. It begins with God, not our need. Yes, we have needs. But when we begin contemplating the wonder and majesty of God, often we either forget our perceived need altogether or we submit to the truth that God has promised to provide for us. We trust that God is in control of the circumstance, the need, or the adversity.

3. Apply the principles to the problem

Put the particular problem in the context of those firm principles that you know. Habakkuk's initial problem is that he started with the problem and missed the context. When we start with the problem and then go to God rather than starting with God and interjecting the problem, we are setting ourselves up for despondency. We risk losing God's perspective and dwell on our perspective.

4. If still in doubt, commit the problem to God in faith

Habakkuk still does not have an answer that satisfies him, but he is now determined to trust God and wait. We will all encounter times that from our perspective are known as the strange dealings of God or the strange providences of God. Take the problem to God, and leave it there.