

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

My Holy One

Introduction

Last week, we heard Habakkuk cry out to God about how the good law that we heard about this morning doesn't seem to be doing any good. Here Habakkuk is among a people who have the law, and yet the nation of Judah is full of violence and sin and wrong and destruction and strife and contention and wickedness. And Habakkuk has been praying for God to fix this situation. He's been praying for a very long time.

And last week we heard God's answers:

- (1) to marvel at what amazing works of God *are already* visible
- (2) to admit that we couldn't understand or believe all that God is doing even if we were told
- (3) to be prepared for things to become even a lot worse, before they get any better
- (4) to accept that our God works out His good purposes even through wicked people

If we put the focus where it belongs we see that God is calling Habakkuk's mind and eyes to God's own character and work as the solution to Habakkuk's circumstances and seemingly futile efforts. And that's a message that we need to hear this evening: that rather than be dismayed and depressed by inexplicable circumstances and our own futile efforts, we must turn our eyes outward and consider God's character and work.

In this evening's text, Habakkuk does just that. He starts with who God is. v12 is really the foundation of the entire text. We will also see in vv13-17 that Habakkuk cries out to God in faith and in 2:1 that Habakkuk waits upon God in humility. But these other two rest upon the first. We cry out to God in faith because of who God is. And we wait upon God in humility because of who God is.

We Start With Who He Is

- (1) God is far beyond us
- (2) God is right beside us
- (3) God is faithfully buffeting us

1. *God is far beyond us.* "Are you not from everlasting?" Habakkuk gets it. Habakkuk gets that he is but a breath. Habakkuk gets that nations are but a breath. God has just shown him the end of Assyria, who was born in the morning, peaked at noon, withered at evening, and gone in a day. So are all nations. So was Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome, and so will be the United States. But GOD. God is from everlasting. He has real staying power, not like these so called world "super" powers. God is far beyond us.

2. *God is right beside us.* And Habakkuk takes comfort from this, because God is also right beside us. He doesn't just have a gloriously BIG view of God; Habakkuk also has a comfortingly PERSONAL view of God. The theological terms are "transcendent" and "imminent." And God is both BIG and PERSONAL. If you don't get your idea of God from His revelation in the Bible, you're bound to lose one of these.

When man stresses the bigness of God, God ends up being so far away, so high and mighty, that He can be of small comfort to us wee ones here on earth, and wicked wee ones at that! When man stresses how personal God is, God ends up being so small and wimpy that He doesn't mind sin that much and doesn't do anything about unrighteousness.

But the God of the Bible is both transcendent and imminent, both unimaginably big and inseparably close to His people. And we see that in the next phrase of v12: "O Yahweh, MY God, MY Holy One." This is very personal for Habakkuk. This God who is from everlasting is also the God who has revealed Himself in covenant, and given His people His covenant name, Yahweh. And so Habakkuk says, "O Yahweh."

But this isn't a nearness that is only for God's people in general. It is a nearness for Habakkuk, specifically. God isn't just His church's God, or Harvest's God, or our God in general. Look at those wonderful first person, singulars: MY God. MY Holy One. He is the personal God of every individual who hopes in Him.

That last one is a wonderful phrase: He is the "Holy One." He is the One who is separate from, other than, above and beyond all created beings, so that everything He does is always exactly right. In fact, rightness is measured by analogy to Him. He is the Holy One, the untouchable, the unapproachable. The word "my" is the most unlikely word in the English language to modify the phrase "Holy One." It's preposterous to consider the idea of a single individual possessing defining interest in the Holy One Himself!

But that's just what God's gracious covenant relationship to His people enables. Dear children, this is for you too. You know how you look at one man, and you say, "my daddy—I belong to him and he belongs to me." And you look at one woman, and you say, "my mommy—I belong to her and she belongs to me." Well, if you are one of God's people through Jesus, you must look at the living God Himself, the One above all others, the Holy One, and you must say, "my Holy One!"

It's no wonder that Habakkuk can immediately follow with, "we shall not die." There has been no change in his circumstances. There has been no prospect of the speeding up of the answer he wanted in v2. Simply by remembering that God is both far beyond us and right beside us, Habakkuk is enabled to say, "we shall not die!"

3. In the third place in v12, we see Habakkuk understanding that God is faithfully buffeting. Buffeting means to strike—perhaps in your house you use the word spank or swat. Faithful parents discipline their children. They withhold not the rod. And Habakkuk's faithful God is doing just that in the second half of v12. He's withholding not the rod. He's buffeting for the sake of buffing—disciplining in order to polish—afflicting in order to purify.

Both names by which Habakkuk calls God in v12 are names reminding of faithfulness. Yahweh, the covenant name for our self-sustaining, ever-unchanging, covenant-faithful Lord, and Rock: a name that conveys sure, secure, absolutely certain, ever-enduring, perfect faithfulness. What does such a faithful One do? He judges and reproveth. Habakkuk gets that God's Babylon is a faithful plan. After all, it is *God's* plan. It is the plan of the far-beyond-us-but-right-beside-us one.

Habakkuk's starting point for the rest of our text is the God who is far beyond us, the God who is right beside us, the God who is faithfully buffeting (or buffing) us.

When you come before God in His word, in prayer, in song, at the Lord's Table... are you considering Him as He is presented in His word? Behold your God, *your* Holy One who makes His own holy.

We Cry Out to God in Faith

So, we who see God this way have comfort and certainty. We look at agonizing circumstances now and worse to come, and we say, "Are you not from everlasting, O Yahweh my God, my Holy One, we shall not die!" But does this mean that we never cry out to God?

Habakkuk has said just this, and Habakkuk has understood the purpose of all the hardship—the purification of God's people. That's what God is doing in all of history, you know, gathering for Himself and purifying for Himself a people. The Assyrias and Babylons and Americas of the world think that history is about them. But the people of the everlasting God, who are destined to be an everlasting people, know better. They know that history is about God, and specifically about God's making for Himself a people.

And yet these very people have to live *through* history, much of which is *painful* history, much of which is *confusing* history. And Habakkuk models for us how people who take this comfort relate to this God as they go through this history: they cry out to God in faith, and they wait upon God in humility.

Look at vv13-17. These verses reflect what we have seen so far: God is faithful to His own holiness and purity, v13. Man is nothing by comparison, v14. And God's word is sure: vv15-17 simply reflect in Habakkuk's words what God has already told him Babylon will be like: mercilessly powerful and idolatrously self-satisfied. So faith is the foundation of this question. Faith is the source of the confusion. For all of Habakkuk's turning his eyes upon Jesus and looking full in His wonderful face, the things of earth are not strangely dim but strangely grim. Habakkuk is sure about the end result; he has comfort; but, He is struggling through here and now.

A Habakkuk 3:17-19 heart doesn't come overnight or in an instant. It didn't for Habakkuk, and that's comfort for us. I'm afraid that many of us, ministers included, especially myself—who know the answers can sometimes imply that it's simply a matter of just hearing and agreeing with the right biblical data, and all should then be better.

But what for those who have the biblical data, and though we are sure of its factuality, yet we struggle in the midst of its working out in our lives? Well, Habakkuk's in exactly that situation, and we do what he does: we cry out to God in faith. We fill our prayers with God's own words and thoughts. We affirm in our prayers what we know about God. And we keep asking the questions that perplex us and telling Him the situations that trouble us.

We ask: is the Chaldean to keep on emptying his net (that is, "enjoying his idol") and mercilessly killing nations forever? God is everlasting, but the Chaldeans aren't. "We're puzzled, Lord—in light of whom we know You to be and the end result that we know You are bringing—by your decision to let Babylon look so big."

We cry out to God, but we do so in faith.

We Wait upon God in Humility

Finally, in 2:1, we wait upon God in humility. This verse is pretty straight forward. Habakkuk is going to wait and see what God will say. In fact, Habakkuk is assuming that he will be reproved, that God has some good

answer for him. The end of 2:1 literally says, “and how I will bring back upon my reproof”—the word at the end being the same basic word for reproof in 1:12.

So Habakkuk knows that he needs correction, and he is waiting for it. There are two wonderful assumptions here. The first is marvelously humble: Habakkuk assumes that there is something amiss in his own heart and mind. The second is that God is faithful to answer, that God is faithful to reprove.

Habakkuk doesn't just cry out to God in faith; he waits upon his reproof from God in humility. Oh that God would grant us such hearts, such assumptions! That we would assume both that we need more help AND that God will provide it! Oh that we would learn to wait and wait and wait upon Him, however long it takes: like a watchman at his station, straining to see, and never giving up, because we know that what we look for is coming.

Conclusion

So, dear people of God, let us keep our eyes upon God, who is far beyond us, crying out, “Are you not from everlasting?”

Let us consider Him as always right beside us, calling Him, “*my Holy One*”

Let us remember that He faithfully disciplines us, that He is a Rock to reprove.

And let us therefore in all our perplexities still cry out to Him, doing so *in faith*. And let us wait for him, humbly assuming BOTH that we need reproof, and that He will provide it.

Prayer

[This sermon originally preached as part of the worship of Harvest Community on 28-Dec-08. The Harvest Community congregation gathers for worship at 10a and 6p each Lord's Day, currently in the basement of Iowa State Bank, but moving soon to our new building across the street from Iowa State Bank: 209 1st St NE, Orange City, IA. Call 712-395-0983 or visit <http://harvestoc.net> for more information.]