

Series: "Corona...Corona...Habakkuk"

Sermon: "Habakkuk, You're Not Going to Believe This!" (Part 2)

Text: Habakkuk 1: 5-11

RGJR/FBCCS/6-28-20 UNEDITED

- *[Good morning, good afternoon, good evening! Whenever and wherever you are hearing or reading or even watching this.]*
- *Just a word of explanation...This sermon is available in many different ways on the fbccs.org site. I think it was already there both in oral and written form yesterday. It may even be there in video form today or tomorrow. We are also working to attach the PowerPoint that goes with it. Although, when I wrote this, I was still working to coordinate the timing of the slides with the words. You may still have to guess which slides go where if you are listening later but that could be fun!*
- I am not up-to-date on my yard maintenance equipment. Some of my tools are still not battery powered and require a long extension cord. Two things are certain to be true when I do my lawn. Number 1: there will be just enough line left in the string trimmer to almost finish but not quite. And, number 2: my long, orange extension cord will get tangled if it isn't already tangled.
- It's similar to the law of gravity or the law that requires one sock from each load of wash to go missing when you are mating them at the end. These are just things God designed into the universe to keep humans humble. We fall down rather than up. We lose socks into the sock black hole. And we must always pause to untangle cords especially when we are in a hurry to finish.
- BTW: Christmas lights are subject to the same law of inevitable tangling even when they are left alone for 11 months in a sealed box in a dark closet in the basement
- I could really identify with the picture I found to serve as the title page for this short series of messages from Habakkuk the prophet. A man pulling on a very tangled mess of rope—maybe it's actually an

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orange extension cord! He is trying to hold on tightly to something, pull as hard as he can and untangle what looks like a hopeless impossible mess.

- At first I didn't like that he was dressed in modern clothes—a business suit. That grew on me because it reminded me that even as we believe we have progressed in our knowledge and our ability to "untangle" the knotted circumstances of this world and life, we really only wear different cloths than the OT prophet wore as he was attempting to do the same thing.
- We may look or act smarter and dress differently but we are no more able to untangle some things than he was!
- We can be as confused about the circumstances of life as he was. We can be as clueless to how God could even *possibly* be working His plan in these circumstances as was Habakkuk the OT prophet.
- Remember, Habakkuk looked around and saw unrighteousness winning the day over righteousness. He saw the bad guys triumphing over the good guys. He saw sinful "ambitious autonomy" working better than God-trusting faith. At least in the moment—in his days—this appeared to be the reality.
- This was true not only for those who didn't even know about the God of Israel. This was true among God's own people. This betrayal by God's covenant people was "super-confusing" to a man trying to trust God and his promises about life.
- So, in his confusion he asked God a pointed and desperate question: "*God, how long are you going to let this tangled mess of confusion go on?*" The implications were possibly that God didn't see it or couldn't do anything about it, or maybe even just didn't care.
- As we just barely touched on last week, God answered Habakkuk's question. We will find God's answer didn't explain it for Habakkuk. It

didn't untangle all the mess of circumstances that confused him. In fact, God's answer only tangled things more in the understanding of the prophet.

- Let's read God's answer to Habakkuk's first question in ***Habakkuk 1:5-11***. **READ *Habakkuk 1:5-11***
- God said he would tell Habakkuk at least part of his plan for righteousness to prevail but that Habakkuk wouldn't be able to understand even that part of the plan. God knew even this bit of reality revealed would further confuse the prophet. It wouldn't make sense to him. God was right!
- When we are confused, we sometimes believe if God would just tell us the details of what he is doing—how he is working things out as he promised—we would no longer feel confused. Not so says God to Habakkuk—but *"OK, I'll tell you a bit of my plan and you'll see that knowing more details—asking me to explain myself—really won't help much!"*
- We might as well stop and admit we are not simply confused for lack of details—for lack of information. We are also confused because we sin. If I could just be "perfect" and not sin maybe I could understand how all of this works.
- We are confused by apparent contradictions. *Bad* things happen to *good* people. Young people, even those we think of as "innocents", die when it seems like that shouldn't be.
- There is much suffering in the world that seems "undeserved" to us and sometimes, confusingly, it is piled one tragedy upon another.
- We see injustice all around and even those we have chosen to help bring justice either can't do it or are involved in fomenting that injustice.

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- It is as if maybe there is something like *good* or *bad* "luck." It sometimes, confusingly, feels like there is nothing and no one in control and good and bad things just randomly happen.
- So, even if God gave us more of the intermediate details of how He is working His plan, I think we would still be confused. Habakkuk was. In fact, he was even more confused by God's answer.
- Why? Because God was going to somehow work His righteous plan through the unrighteous people and deeds of the Babylonians. God was going, somehow, to incorporate the very unrighteousness that confused the prophet into his plan to accomplish justice and righteousness. The "*bad*" was going to be turned for "*good*."
- If there is anything that confuses humans who will think below the surface, this is it! How can a truly good God allow and even then use the evil of humans to accomplish his purposes?!!
- Trying to untangle the details of how God is doing this nearly always more confusing than enlightening. AND, we humans very often get it wrong.
- I was reminded in an article I read this week of when Dr. Jerry Falwell, who was a much nicer and even godlier man than history has made him out to be made this mistake. The AIDS epidemic had started and was often passed on by homosexual activity. So Dr. Falwell, trying to untangle things, declared AIDS was a direct, divine judgment of homosexuals. Although he thought he had untangled a bit of the way God was working, reality proved to be even more tangled when innocent babies began contracting and dying from AIDS.
- Was AIDS a judgment on sin? It certainly was a built-in consequence to the broken sinfulness of this creation brought about by human desire to be autonomous from God. Could anyone untangle the

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specifics of how God allowing the evil devastation of AIDS was accomplishing his plan in each specific case of infection and death? Not likely!

- Someday soon, if not already, preachers, authors, philosophers and pundits will tell us they have untangled the *exact way* God has been using the Covid 19 Corona virus to accomplish His plans down to the specific details of which states and populations suffered more deaths.
- Is God using this virus and the complications of living with it? I can say with absolutely certainty He is. But I cannot with absolute certainty untangle all the details to know all the specifics of exactly how he is doing that in every life.
- If I need to be able to do that, I will be in trouble. If I need God to magically reveal all his detailed plans to me in order to live righteously, I am going to either begin doubting God or begin making up stuff and saying God told me to validate it.
- Habakkuk teaches a different response than demanding to know all God's details. We will see that later.
- As I said, God can even use the evil of humans to accomplish his plans and that is confusing. Imagine how confusing it was for Habakkuk when God said the name "Babylonians!" They were a truly an evil people.
- The Babylonians because of their sinful God-rejecting ways, as much as any other people in Scripture, often symbolize the pinnacle of human evil. You'll even see this in the book of *Revelation*. The Babylonians display an absolute, autonomy—a rejection of God like few, if any, others human history.
- Look back at how God himself describes them. He doesn't try to sugar-coat things and act as if he is going to use a semi-good people

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to accomplish his purpose. God doesn't seem to feel a need to be ashamed or to justify using the worst of people, circumstances and events for His purposes. That can be confusing!

- The Babylonians were ruthless and impetuous roaming the earth and taking other peoples' land, freedom and property at a whim.
- They make up their own rules—their own laws. They don't care what any God of Israel is purported to have said even if He claims to be the Creator God.
- They are their own authority so there is no need to be consistent. There is no need to fear acting hypocritically because the rules don't apply to them—even their own rules.
- For some reason, they have been allowed to accumulate power in the form of warriors, horses and weapons. Didn't God see this happening? Didn't God see wickedness gaining this power that would allow them to destroy truth, righteousness and justice—allow evil to triumph over good?!!
- This accumulation of power has made them arrogant. They have no humility because they believe what they want is always the "right" because they can make it happen.
- Finally, God describes to Habakkuk in verse 11 a people "**...whose own strength is their God!**"
- They worship power. Pragmatically, since they seem to have the overwhelming power, they worship themselves.
- They have no values other than glorifying and making a name for themselves and in this fallen world real overwhelming power is one of the best ways to do that. BUT, you have to be ruthless in pursuit of power. Nothing else can matter. Even a hint of truth, justice, mercy, humility—good things like these that reflect the image of

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God—even a hint can begin to erode absolute power, so these are never part of their schemes.

- Perhaps if God were speaking these words today, the Babylonians would not be the ultimate symbolic example of this self-worship through accumulating power without any values. Perhaps it might even be the "*Washitonians*" rather than the "Babylonians."
- Yes, I know they wear modern business suits instead of OT prophetic garb. If we can't see the similarities, I think we are not paying attention and thinking below the surface.
- So, some of us are confused! Please understand I am saying this is true on both sides of our political aisle! That seems even more confusing to those who may have thought God was going to "fix" this *unrighteous* situation with some *righteous* politicking.
- Some of us are confused and so we ask God the same question—maybe not out loud—maybe not written down in Scripture as when Habakkuk asked it—but still, we ask it. "***How long, O LORD???!!!***"
- And God answers, not out loud and not magically but by teaching us the lesson of truth from His Word on how he operates in situations that evoke such questions. God answers, "***Be amazed, Raleigh! You think this mess means I am not working? I in fact am working through this very mess—through these very people you see as unrighteous and godless.***"
- But God, I'm confused! How could this possibly be? How could you actually work your plan using this unrighteousness of humans? God replies: "***I told you would be amazed and not believe it possible!***"
- God, I can't untangle this confusing mess. It seems unusable, undiscernible—impossible! God, I can't figure this out!
- ***Oh, really, says God! I wonder why you can't. Do you think maybe it has something to do with who you are and who I am?***

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- Have you looked yet for a theme truth of Habakkuk that I told you to look for as it is cited as truth again in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38? Take a look if you haven't yet done so.
- You know the answer to living in this situation of confusing evil but those verses, along with Habakkuk will reinforce that answer.
- Way back near the time of the Flood, in 1981, Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book called When Bad Things Happen to Good people. Kushner lost his son to a horrible disease at the young age of 14. He struggled with why his God would let this happen. His book was his conclusion and it "let the cat out of the bag." It said in print what many "modern" religious people believed but wouldn't yet say out loud. "God can't be who we think he is and be in control if bad things happen to good people." God cannot be omnipotent and the world work as it does. This is too confusing to be possible!
- Let me quote just a bit of Kushner's conclusion: *"I believe in God. But I do not believe the same things about Him that I did years ago, when I was growing up or when I was a theological student. I recognize His limitations. He is limited in what He can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom."... "Let me suggest that the bad things that happen to us in our lives do not have a meaning when they happen to us. . . . But we can redeem these tragedies from senselessness by imposing meaning on them. . . . A better question would be, 'Now that this has happened to me, what am I going to do about it?'"*
- When, as many "thinkers" considered our smartest today conclude, "There is no God so there can be no plan." There is no design so there is no purpose. Evil triumphs just because it does and no one can do anything about it or will ever make any real sense of *why* it happens as it does and when it does.

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- If you don't think many people believe this at a deep level today, even as they mouth religious words at times for their own power purposes, ask yourself why liquor and marijuana stores were deemed "*essential*" during the Corona virus lockdown but "churches" were not?
- I understand the complicated arguments you can make about this decision but, ask yourself if it wasn't a little bit easier to say we don't really need what churches do because what they really do is "*make believe.*" And, if God perchance *is* real, he can't help anyway. He is overwhelmed by evil. However, at least helping people to get drunk or stoned could ease the anxiety for a time.
- Imagine trying to explain to the "*smart people*" of our world God's direct and unadorned answer to Habakkuk. ***God is able to use even the most unrighteous evil of our fallen world and most sinful humans to accomplish His purposes and do it righteously.*** I don't think most people will understand or certainly they won't accept that idea. I'm not sure how many Christians do!
- God told Habakkuk it would be difficult to believe in his situation.
- Will we believe it? Is it *naïve* of us to believe it? Do we accept it *pragmatically* only because we want to hold on to the idea of God's control—his *omnipotence*—and it is too confusing to untangle otherwise?
- Ultimately, even though like everyone else I often try to untangle things and can't do that—I accept it because Scripture tells me God said it and I take that as truth even if I can't untangle all the knots in the tangled, orange power-cord of life.