

Series: Corona...Corona (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "life or LIFE?"

Text: Habakkuk 2:4

RGJR/FBCCS/7-19-20 UNEDITED

- Good morning! Good Afternoon! Good Evening!
- Again, this morning we have the privilege of sharing in the interaction of the prophet Habakkuk with God.
- The actual conversation took place centuries ago—millennia ago—but it remains as relevant today as it was when it was written down on tablets to preserve it plainly and accurately for God’s people to read and apply in ages to come.
- The fact that words spoken so long ago are still alive and active today is a clue that God’s perfectly righteous, eternal plan is already a reality.
- From our time-bound, human perspective we often seize on a few infinitesimally small chunks of that plan we can observe in our limited days and pass judgment without having anywhere near the whole story.
- We also, limited in our perspective—bound by time and place—we also can err by picturing who God is from the very, very limited pieces of evidence gained from our very, very limited experience of Him.
- I tried to emphasize last week God’s command for the prophet to write down this revelation so it could be preserved and passed on with accuracy as God’s broader Word for His people.
- Why? Because you and I *have* never, and *will* never actually face the unrighteous Babylonian hoards in our limited time and space. (“Back to the Future” aside).
- But, God can tell us accurately and faithfully in His own Word what God is like in relation to Babylonian-ward-ish type peoples and their unrighteousness.
- In His own Words, God can tell us accurately, and faithfully, how he is indeed working in absolutely perfect righteousness even when a

chunk of His work may seem unrighteous, unjust, uncaring or wrong-footed to us from our limited perspective.

- I probably cannot say strongly enough how this study and realization makes me sing more frequently, "***The B-I-B-L-E yes that's the book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God, the B-I-B-L-E!***"
- If that makes you think I am a ***bibliolater***, so be it! I will take what God's Word has said about Himself and His plan any day over my own feelings and my own desires for who I think God should be.
- When you have questions, fears, doubts and confusion, please be in God's Word. This is not because you will necessarily find the exact answer to your dilemma magically in the text. It is because you will find who God says he really is and how he really works rather than making up your own god to fit your own perceived needs.
- So far, in *Habakkuk*, we have learned...
- The prophet asks, "***Why aren't you doing anything about the horrible unrighteousness I see all around me, O righteous God?***"
- God replies: "***I am but you will not be able to comprehend my eternally righteous plan from your limited temporal perspective.***"
- Then, when God gives the prophet just a tiny taste of that plan, by revealing He will use the *unrighteous* Babylonians to judge His own people, the prophet's response proves God's first answer true. "***But O righteous God, you shouldn't do it that way!***"
- The prophet questions, dialogues, and then, thankfully, he waits for God to help him understand as God chooses to do that.
- The help to understand doesn't come in the form of a detailed chart of God's eternal plan so Habakkuk can see how all the details fit together in a righteous way.
- The help comes in a description of two ***distinct*** ways people can exist in life limited, as they are, by time and space.

- It might surprise you which of those two ways about which God has the most to say. One way, gets just one phrase of 8 words in the English translation. The other, ultimately takes up all of the rest of chapter two.
- God introduces the help he gives to the confused prophet with the most important contrast—the most fundamental contrast among humans. This is not a contrast of black or white skin—rich or poor circumstances—educated or uneducated standing.
- Understood correctly, it is not even a contrast between good and bad humans.
- *The most foundational contrast for all humans of all types for all time is: **either trusting trustworthy God or trusting oneself.***
- Let's start reading at verse 1 of chapter 2. We have already looked at verses 1-3 but they give the context to verse 4. That verse is our small goal to cover this morning.
- **READ Habakkuk 2:1-4**
- Perhaps surprisingly, as I said, the contrast in verse 4 begins with the person who trusts himself rather than God. Then, from verse 5 on God describes the woe-filled life of those autonomous "self-trusters."
- But, here in verse 4, in the English translation, THE foundational contrast of life is revealed with, precise, stark clarity.
- "Revealed may not be the precise word because Habakkuk already knows this truth. It permeates all of the Scripture of his people. However, like all humans limited in our scope to take in God's overall plan, Habakkuk looks at the pieces and forgets this central truth.
- In a smaller context it looks like unrighteousness triumphs over righteousness and those who are trusting themselves instead of

trusting the trustworthy God of Israel are better off—more wealth—more power—more comfort—more success.

- God cuts to the core of the existence of “self-trusters” in this introductory contrast. He describes them with two vivid characteristics. They are “**puffed up**” and “**not upright**” or, more literally translated, “**not straight.**”
- The “he” in verse 4 might refer to a known Babylonian conqueror but, even if so, this Babylonian serves to represent an entire class of humans.
- The self-trusting human is “filled with hot air” as we might say or at least used to say. This human is a “gas-bag” There is an appearance of weightiness but, as an untied balloon let go, he will sputter away being, in reality, nothing but a “puffed-up” empty casing.
- When you read further revelation about this self-trusting man in Scripture you see that what gets inflated is the man’s own opinion of himself and his ability to direct and control life. It’s all a deceptive lie that began in the garden.
- Even sadder, like a balloon that can grow larger and larger, filled with nothing more substantial than my hot breath, the self-trusting human will continue to grow more and more puffed-up by nothing real.
- Let me take the time to read to you the graphic description of this process, allowed by God since the garden, that the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Rome. His description of *self-trusters* is found in **Romans 1 beginning at verse 18...**

***18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the***

***creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.***

***21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.***

***24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.***

***26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.***

***28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they***

***not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.***

- You can see the clear evidence of self-trusting humans in our world today as their emptiness has degraded their behavior and taken culture and society down with it.
- In Paul's description you can hear evidence of deception—even self-deception by self-trusters. This is what it means when Habakkuk records they are not only puffed up with emptiness but also that they live crooked lives—un-straight lives of deception.
- Every single self-truster must live a lie. They must act as if they are something they are not. Whether they recognize it or not, they are pretending to be God. After doing this for a time, it becomes natural and they themselves cannot any longer discern the truth that they are NOT God.
- For self-trusters, accruing power is an absolute necessity and there are many ways they do that. Power is important to keep up the façade that they have it all under control and they will not fail in making life what they want it to be.
- When Jesus stood against the self-trusting Pharisees in his day, it was clear that they couldn't stand truth—cannot accept and learn from reality. Why? They must maintain the lie at all costs or the air goes out of their balloon.
- This is true of self-trusters even when, in the smaller context humans can take in, they appear to be successful, winning, and happy. They are still, in reality puffed-up, empty bags of nothing that matters running on the non-stop treadmill of maintain a lie.
- In his small-sightedness, that all of us humans experience, Habakkuk has forgotten that this is the reality of the empty lives of the

unrighteous. I bet we forget that sometimes too when life feels like it isn't working for us.

- And what is this puffed-up, crooked life of a self-truster in contrast to? Perhaps the most foundational principle for living real LIFE as God's people. In its 8 English words in the NIV it says, "**—But the righteous will live by his faith—**"
- This is the key to the book of *Habakkuk* that I have been prodding you to consider since we started. This is the line from the revelation cited three times in the New Testament—twice as explicit quotations and perhaps a third time when it is no less than a close paraphrase.
- No pithy central truth of the Bible could go for long without being dissected and interpreted and explained over and over again. This is true of Habakkuk 2:4
- Often this dissection and hairsplitting exegetical work with absolute certainty in one's conclusions can make for noise around the main force of the simple principle. This is also true of Habakkuk 2:4.
- The study of the word for "faith" has yielded good arguments that we should really translate it "faithfulness." Rather than being about belief or even trust this would suggest this is about consistency.
- The text reads "**his** faith." Well, maybe that suggests the faithfulness we are reading about is the faithfulness of God so that the righteous live by the faithfulness of God would be the emphasis.
- The New Testament citations seem to me to provide evidence for both understandings—the righteous live by faith in God and the righteous live by the faithfulness of God. Which is it?
- I have my opinion but I'll let you choose because either ends up in the same place with the emphasis on a contrast with self-trusters.
- Righteous people, in either nuance, are **trusting their trustworthy God instead of trusting themselves for life.**

- And, although the prophecy doesn't elaborate on it here, LIFE from trusting the trustworthy God is real LIFE in contrast to the empty—hot air, fake life of all self-trusters.
- If Habakkuk needed a reminder, he could have turned to page one of the Israelite Hymnal and sung **Psalm 1:**

***<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the man***

***who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of mockers.***

***<sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.***

***<sup>3</sup>He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.***

***Whatever he does prospers.***

***<sup>4</sup>Not so the wicked!***

***They are like chaff  
that the wind blows away.***

***<sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.***

***<sup>6</sup>For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.***

- Habakkuk would be reminded as he sang that real **prosperity**—God's eternal prosperity—would finally come in season to the one trusting God instead of trusting himself.
- Habakkuk would be reminded that the LORD is working out all the details of His eternal plan and is watching over the true **prosperity** of the one who trusts him so that everything from that righteous

person of faith's life bears, heavy eternal fruit rather than lightweight blow-away chaff.

- This almost sounds like Paul's, **Romans 8: 28**...<sup>28</sup> ***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*** <sup>29</sup> ***For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*** <sup>30</sup> ***And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.***
- Again, from our limited perspective in time with our short span of life, we will not always see this eternal fruit of faith. My guess is we never really see it in its fullness, limited as we are now, in a way we can fully understand and appreciate it.
- I have a habit sometimes of speaking in false dichotomies—in terms of yes or no—on or off black or white and no gray. Larry Dearing doesn't know it but by asking me about it he taught me to think about that before I do it automatically just for the sake of making a clearer argument.
- Here in Habakkuk there is no false dichotomy for the sake of a more powerful contrast. The reality is when we trust the trustworthy God we get real LIFE. When we are *self-trusters*, we get puffed-up, empty, fake life that we must lie about to others and ourselves if we want to maintain the illusion. This is a binary choice—yes/no—on/off—black/white—true/false—every single time.
- HOWEVER, I do not think I have met a saint who choose faith in the faithful God—trust in the trustworthy God every single time there is a choice.
- One potential interpretation of these eight words is that LIFE comes only to those humans who are ***always faithful*** to God. I don't find

that consistent with other texts and I have never yet seen a human like that in all my life around God's people.

- Will I always do all I do in faith—trusting the trustworthy God? So far, the answer to that question is no. But as I understand the words here and what they teach, God even knows how to deal with my lapses into being a self-truster.
- What Habakkuk needed and we need to know is that the absolute immutable reality is, we get real life when we trust the trustworthy God and false life when we don't.
- We won't always see that fruit of LIFE in our limited capacity to see but we can believe God is indeed giving us true LIFE.
- Now, here may be the most difficult implication. To what sort of circumstances does this apply in my life? Just big ones like a conquering army is about to devastate a nation? How about smaller issues—more personal confusions? Am I supposed to do nothing? Live complacently and never make a choice to act? Just wait for God to answer or for Him to do something?
- I hesitate to use a human as a perfect example but I think Habakkuk's process teaches me something. In any confusion—in any problem big or small when I have reached the confusing point of not knowing what to do—how to act—or not act—It is critical that I know from God's Word who he says he is and how he says he acts even when I am confused. It is good to talk with God about it honestly. It is OK to admit confusion and indecision and frustration about it to God—to cry out honestly—nothing I have done—even what I think is righteous, has worked God!
- Then, here is the difficult part after we have tried every righteous thing we know to do—wait in FAITH in our FAITHFUL God.

Series: Corona...Corona (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "life or LIFE?"

Text: Habakkuk 2:4

RGJR/FBCCS/7-19-20 UNEDITED

- And, here is the most difficult part, trust that the trustworthy God is bringing LIFE even if the fruit will never be visible in my short lifetime.
- God is not teaching us in the book of *Habakkuk* to make us be passive people. That would be contrary to much of Scripture in which he calls us to be his active agents of his Name in all the earth.
- God is teaching us that even when we have done all—and done it in his name for his glory the best we know how—we will often have still to trust his trustworthiness to bring LIFE—to bring the prosperity as Psalm 1 put it—that is real and full and eternal and not a puffed up fake life that always results from self-trust.”
- We will not always see the results!
- Having faith in the faithful God always—always—always produces LIFE even when we can't see that life in our lifetime. Will I believe that? Will you?