

Series: "Corona...Corona"

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe, Woe"

Text Habakkuk 2:5-14

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- I don't know if the richest man in the world these days knows the Lord or not. Most of the folks who talked about him this week didn't care too much about his spiritual condition—at least not according to what they said or wrote.
- All that seemed to matter was that the richest man in the world became \$13 billion richer in just one day. That made some people happy and others sad but majority seemed to assume it was a reasonable indicator of "success" in life.
- Most who commented also mentioned that the richest man's **ex-wife** became \$4 billion richer that same day from her stock acquired in their divorce. No one I read or watched said anything about why the *marriage* of the richest man in the world and the now 13<sup>th</sup> richest woman fell apart and what that might mean about the normal measures of "success."
- The prophet Habakkuk looked around and saw the unrighteous, according to God's standards, *prospering* and the righteous being trampled under their feet as worthless.
- Now God has shocked him with the knowledge that the highly unrighteous Babylonian pagans, with their bloodthirsty false gods, will be the instrument of judgement on God's people.
- This is, to the prophet, the height of inconsistency for a righteous God. God should change his plan so people can't claim unrighteousness pays better than righteousness.
- God explains that this is a shortsighted view of reality. It is not a view coming from faith in the eternal righteous God of Israel. God's plan, in all its details, is already perfectly righteous from the eternal perspective.

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- Sometimes, when one looks at just a sliver of the plan, limited by their human perspective in time and space, that sliver can appear unrighteous. Ultimately, this will prove to be a mistaken impression.
- However, meanwhile, those looking at life from this erroneous, just-a-small-sliver-perspective may make wrong conclusions about how life works. They may even conclude, for example, that it doesn't "pay" to trust God and live righteously.
- Of course, God can't explain all the details of His eternal plan to the prophet. That would *explode* his human head.
- Instead, God attacks the underlying mistake to think that "success" can be determined by the slim circumstances of what happens in this world in a human's lifetime.
- Righteousness pays but not in the world's terms which are so limited and nearly meaningless. In Habakkuk 2:4, God begins with a clear basic contrast between what righteousness and unrighteousness actually "pay."
- If you want a New Testament echo of this true contrast, consider the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 6:23 **"For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."** I picked this slide because someone attributed this quote to "anonymous." Isn't that special!
- Unrighteousness pays a human in currency of death. That deadly currency comes in many denominations other than simply physical death.
- Righteousness doesn't *pay* what one deserves. We would all still deserve death. Righteousness gives more than we deserve in terms of a give of LIFE. That is everlasting life.
- And, here is the kicker that we sometimes miss because we look so narrowly at circumstances—righteousness gifts a human TRUE LIFE

**right now** not just someday when they go to be in the presence of Jesus.

- Let's read again Habakkuk's words beginning with 2:1 that lead up to the foundational contrast of all human lives. **READ Habakkuk 2:1-4**
- As we talked about last week, the fundamental contrast in humans is not anything we sometimes tend to make it but it is either trusting the trustworthy God or exercising self-trust for getting real life.
- The righteous human gets life by faith—by trusting the trustworthy God. The unrighteous human tries to get life by trusting their own ways and means but ends up like a balloon filled with nothing but hot air all "puffed-up" by their false opinion of themselves.
- They can only live a "not-upright" life—a *crooked* life because they must deceive others and themselves that they have it all under control. They must look and act successful to maintain the thin veneer of living successfully—of getting life without God.
- As I said, I don't know if the richest man in the world is a believer or not. However, I do know that many people look at his wealth and see that as a successful attempt at getting life. It may easily be nothing but a thin veneer. It can be nothing but smoke that is here for a moment and then gone—poof—meaningless in the real scheme of LIFE.
- Fame, relationships, pleasure, acceptance, comfort, validation, power—and all such things humans chase for life, are also nothing but fleeting *smoke* gained apart from trusting God in the process of living.
- One can read *Ecclesiastes* and hear the tale of a man who chased most everything and found that apart from trusting God; it is all meaningless—empty—vanity.

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- One can listen to Jesus when he tells the men he loves that **"...apart from me, you can do nothing."** This is what he means about abiding in him rather than being apart from him—trusting Him—God—rather than living a life of *self-trust*. One bears abundant, eternal fruit. The other produces **NOTHING** that matters or has value!
- As I told you last week, God knew that Habakkuk, for some reason, needed to hear the negative side of this basic human contrast rather than more about the positive side.
- So, in verse 5, God continues his lesson on what the real wages of unrighteousness are contrary to some appearances. He breaks the description of the puffed-up crooked life of self-trusters into five "woes" because the results are just that bad. They are so bad, after just 3 of the 5 woes, He interjects a break in the negative description to remind us of the contrasting positive reality of trusting the trustworthy God.
- Let me read you the first of the two sections of "woes" from verse 5 of chapter 2 on. God is now describing the reality of the life of the puffed up, crooked—self-truster. These words may be directed especially at the bloated, hot-air bag, crooked living king of the Babylonians but they also serve to describe the reality of insides of the life of a self-truster like him : **READ Habakkuk 2:5-14**
- The *self-trusting* Babylonians are addicts. Physically they are addicted to wine. They need something artificial to deal with some craving they feel and cannot deny.
- It remains interesting to me that many politicians and government bureaucrats wanting to control my life right now think it is imperative to keep the supply of alcohol and marijuana flowing but want to limit the supply of what they call religion. Booze and drugs seem to cover the pain and emptiness of self-trusting lives. Religion

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points out the need to trust someone else. I get where they are coming from. Feeding addictions can cover the pain for a moment—religion is a pain in itself to them.

- All human addictions are nothing but temporary painkillers. All of them.
- Addiction to alcohol—to wine—reveals something of the inner life of these Babylonian self-trusters. They have not yet found anything that truly satisfies—anything that kills the pain of emptiness inside beyond hiding it for a moment.
- Addiction to wine is a picture of their addiction to "*arrogant power*." This addiction never goes away no matter how much they feed it. It never allows them to just "*rest*."
- The self-trusting Babylonian king and the rest of his self-trusting hoards are as "*greedy as death*" in their need for power. Just as death can never take a day off, they cannot take a day off from feeding this addiction to fill their emptiness and pain.
- The craving to make life real and meaningful on their own is, like death "*never satisfied*" no matter how much they feed it.
- So, they war through all the nations of the world to fulfill this addiction to power to fill the emptiness that self-trust leaves in their hearts.
- Every time I read this I think of a question that I've had that seems to me has ever been fully answered for me in terms I understand or that satisfy.
- Through the years, because of where God put us, I have known a few of the leaders of some of the largest corporations in the world. I mean, some of them are true personal friends. They are good enough friends for me to ask them my question.

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- *"Why do corporations seem to have always to grow bigger and bigger and bigger, often at the expense and destruction of other corporations and of people?"*
- I have truly wanted to know if the reality is that big corporations cannot succeed and stay alive unless they are always taking in more and more revenue. Are they like sharks that, I'm told, must continually be moving forward to pass water through their gills to survive?
- I've had some interesting answers through the years, but the reality is, most have to admit corporations do this because this became the measure of success to stockholders and, as leaders, they get personal significance from this *"success."*
- Don't consider this too deeply or you'll wonder what the implications might be when the economist Adam Smith concluded that capitalism works because, *"the best economic benefit for all can usually be accomplished when individuals act in their self-interest."*
- I agree it seems to work. But, I will also ask how we are going to define *"self-interest?"* What if in self-trusting, a leader's self-interest is never resting—to feed a never-satisfied addiction feeding an addiction to a painkiller called *"success?"*
- I am appalled by the violence and wanton destruction clearly visible if one wants to see in many of our American cities these days. Murder of both participants and innocents, looting, arson, and just displays of angry malicious destruction are not evidences of *"peaceful protests."*
- They are evidence instead of the pain of craving for power—and control—being addicted to power and control and not being able to feed that addiction.

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- They are evidence, not of thoughtful truths, but the futility of emptiness of heart—of trying to make real life through self-trust and no longer being able to fake it.
- Listen to the language—look at the graffiti—hear the vulgarities and meanness watch the antagonistic actions and it is clear these are destroyers of whatever feels to be in their way of fulfillment rather than builders of something like LIFE.
- I am convinced that the out-of-control hatred exhibited in politics and the media today—especially focused on the President of the United States and anyone who might agree with any part of what he says or does—I am convinced that this venomous anger is but another symptom of self-trusters not getting the power they need to feed their addiction and live their fake life with empty hearts.
- I am aware I am talking to more watches of Fox than CNN or MSNBC so let me make it clear why I stated this section of my sermon by talking about leaders of corporations.
- Whether it is a member of ANTIFA or a CEO of a Fortune 500 corporation, self-trust for life versus trusting a faithful God results in destructive behavior to feed an addiction. The need will show no limits—no stopping point. It will never rest no matter whom it hurts because an empty heart is too painful a disease to live with without some drug to cover that pain.
- We are living through a real-life demonstration of what filling the emptiness in human hearts can lead to. We are watching the destruction of human culture that addiction to power to fill that emptiness can result in and ultimately always does.
- It might be some comfort to be told we will make it through this, all will then be well again, and we can go back to our "normal" lives. But, this human response, born out of self-trust rather than trusting

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in a trustworthy God, never ceases. It is never filled-up and satisfied. It all becomes cyclical and repeats itself with self-trusting actions from the other direction pushing back.

- Look again at the first "woe" proclaimed by God on self-trusting Babylonians in verses 6, 7 and 8. Sure, the powerful can win and pile up power and riches for a time to feed their emptiness. But, can they do this forever?
- No, says God! Those who have been abused to fulfill the addiction for power will eventually say "no more!" Then the powerful abusers and destroyers of people feeding their addictions—in this case the Babylonians—will face the wrath of the abused.
- Where there is "blood guilt"—that is where the actions of the powerful have cost lives—the powerful will pay with blood at the hands of the abused.
- Because the powerful have plundered and destroyed, they will be plundered and their monuments to their power destroyed. Does any of this sound familiar and possibly even relevant today?
- The second "woe," in verse 9-11 picturesquely points out the inner reality for those who feed their emptiness on power—for those who destroy people for the sake of feeling really alive.
- Powerful people can build protected compounds on high places behind walls to feel safe.
- However, because even those walls were built with the resources gained from wrecking people, places and lives, the very materials are tainted and cry out with guilt.
- Every rock in that thick wall of so-called protection is a monument to self-trusting addiction to power. Every Stone is like a flashing LED that reminds the powerful man who has lived by self-feeding his empty heart, "I stole that!" "I killed for that!"

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- And then God provides a 3<sup>rd</sup> "woe" in verses 12-13. Powerful self-trusters will attempt to feed their empty hearts by accomplishments that make them look successful. They will build towers, cities, nations and maybe even empires around themselves and their power.
- But the very people building these monuments to feed the addictions of the powerful will eventually destroy. It's as if the people who are forced to feed the addictions of the powerful are fire accelerants dangerously close to setting ablaze what they have been forced to build.
- The fire they feed will be so fast and so devastating in its destruction that all the monuments built to feed the addictions of the powerful will amount to a waste of time. They will have been built at great cost for absolutely nothing that mattered. They will be gone like the fleeting smoke I talked about earlier.
- Whoa! On the "woes," please God!
- These five "woes" are not curses by God. They are God's revelation of the reality of the outcome of self-trust trying to get life.
- If anyone appears to have life, it is the powerful, the victor, the rich, and the national leader. God is saying, stop and look Habakkuk. All that they do in life —these self-trusters—is unceasingly run on an endless treadmill to feed an addiction to power in order to cover the pain of an empty heart that has no real LIFE.
- That was true for the king of Babylon. It is true for people on all sides of the political issues today.
- Anyone who is a self-truster for life will end up as nothing but a puffed up bag of meaningless hot air. Their life will be a waste. They will experience the hatred and destruction of those they have hurt or destroyed in order to feed that addiction.

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- They will have no peace and no real LIFE because their ill-gotten possessions and the people that are forced to serve them will be lasting monuments crying out to the reality of their unrighteous, empty hearts.
- But what about those who choose the contrast—choose to trust the trustworthy God for LIFE?
- Someday—waiting for that day is the hard part for Habakkuk and us—someday **verse 14** will be true. **"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."**
- Why will all the work of the self-trusters amount to nothing? Because the work of God will once again fill this earth for His glory.
- The truth of the reality of God's glory will be "massively" everywhere like we think of the massive presence of the oceans.
- All that the self-truster lived for hoping to find life will be gone making it clear that life was an empty, fake life.
- All that the one who trusted in the trustworthy God lived for, even when it looked, in the moment, as if the unrighteous guy was "winning the success race" without faith in God, will remain forever!
- Listen to this...The most important human contrast between the richest man in the world and the poorest mistreated slave on earth is not what most make it to be and many fight to fix by feeding their own addictions.
- The most important contrast is who chooses to live a fleeting, empty life of *self-trust* and who chooses to live a life built on *trusting the trustworthy God*?
- That is true for every single human being.