

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe!"

Text: Habakkuk 2:15-20

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- Thursday, I was on my way home from my barber's shop connected to her home just outside of the Garden of the God's Park. I often enjoy passing *peacefully* through the park among those beautiful formations, on my way, home after a haircut.
- I am usually *peaceful* at those times because cutting my grass and getting a haircut are two things that give me a very slight, *false confidence* that I might have just a tiny sliver of control over the chaos of the world.
- For some reason, Thursday, I chose to skip the rock formations and come back via Centennial. One reason I don't do that as often is because get very sad when I pass the Planned Parenthood abortion mill.
- As I passed it this time and praying, I was also engaged in thinking about Habakkuk and how God taugh his discouraged, questioning prophet.
- This time while passing the place of baby-killing, I was especially struck that it is next to a Rehab facility in which I have visited people from FBC as they are being nursed and exercised back to healthy life after accidents, sicknesses or surgeries.
- Contrasting and comparing these two facilities sent me deeply into theological and principled thoughts of how it is possible that my God allows the killing of innocent babies to continue.
- I was in a very "*Habakk-ian*" state of mind. Thinking about abortion in the United States, and the dishonest, abstract arguments used to cover *murder*, so pragmatically, always sends me there in contrast to what I know is the truth. "*God, why?*" Then it becomes, "*God when?*"
- If you are still in school or can still, at least, vaguely remember school, I suspect you can recall assignments and test questions that started with the phrase "*Compare and contrast...*" the went on with

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

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Text: Habakkuk 2:15-20

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

things such as "Newtonian Physics with Quantum Mechanics" or the "pre-Civil War Southern Culture with Northern Culture."

- If you are a teacher, you probably know that "*compare and contrast*" assignments or questions are a concrete step to engage students in a higher-order of thinking. Compare and contrast assignments can help students engage with *abstract* ideas and principles they might otherwise not identify.
- That is what happened to me as I compared and contrasted the presence of two brick-and-mortar objects built next to each other with very different purposes and abstract reasons.
- The compare and contrast method of teaching big ideas was not invented by an ancient philosopher or a modern educator. God used it long before any of these folks did.
- We have seen that He uses it extensively to teach the prophet Habakkuk and to teach us, by extension. The lesson God is teaching concerns a concept that is very big and abstract for we who are limited by time.
- The lesson is that God's eternal plan is indeed truly eternal in nature and that evaluating it at any point along the way while we are limited by time and human capacity can produce the wrong conclusions about God's righteousness and faithfulness to his promises.
- We might conclude it is unrighteous of God to use the Babylonians to judge God's people. Or, it is unrighteous to allow abortion factories to in the United States to continue killing innocent babies. We might even incorrectly conclude that, from this evidence, God is unrighteous.
- We have talked about that matter now for a number of weeks so I won't do that again this morning. Instead, today we find ourselves in

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

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RGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

the middle of chapter 2 of the book of *Habakkuk*. Here we reach the 4<sup>th</sup> and then the 5<sup>th</sup> in a list of "woe" statements.

- These statements are a major part God's lesson taught by comparing and contrasting the realities of the only two types of human beings that need to be distinguished from each other.
- Some humans are "self-trusters" trying to produce what they think of us life that turns out to be only momentary, disappearing smoke that has no real, eternal value.
- The other category of humans is those who choose to trust the trustworthy Creator God—the LORD God of Israel as the Bible reveals God.
- Last week, the first 3 woes, made it clear that "self-trusters" would never find satisfying life because the "life" they can produce without God is fake life compared to the LIFE God intended for humans. This leaves self-trusters living a life forever addicted to finding significance through power, comfort, wealth, relationships and so on. Their hunger is never satisfied because what they try to assuage it with is emptiness.
- We see rich people, laughing people, lucky people and so on who don't trust God and then we can sometimes, as did Habakkuk, conclude they really are experiencing good life by their self-trust. The Word of God clearly says they are not. The evidence in limited time and space terms can suggest the Bible is wrong. Which will we choose to believe? One conclusion relies on flesh-eyes the other on eyes of faith.
- In contrast, as God compares the two lives for us, a life of self-trust versus a life of trusting Him, the LIFE of trust in a trustworthy God is rewarded with eternal outcomes that will never blow away like the

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe!"

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RGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

smoke produced by self-trust. These outcomes by faith are as absolutely secure as God Himself is eternally secure.

- BUT, we often won't see these aspects of real LIFE until much time has passed. Again, this truth most often calls for faith-eyes to see it. Those without faith-eyes will only sense a foolish naiveté in those who trust what they can't demonstrate or prove to flesh-eyes.
- In contrast to what things might look like, the "successful looking" self-truster is ultimately living a fake life filled with woes.
- Look at verse 15 of *Habakkuk 2* and we'll see some more of these woeful realities before concluding again with a reassuring reality of the eternal God. **READ Habakkuk 2:15-16**
- Remember that the earlier "woe" that the unrighteous Babylonia destroyers would live all of life as unsatisfied addicts to power and even to substances that eased the pain of empty hearts. Alcohol was one of their representative addictions. They loved their wine and its very temporary feeling of relief from emptiness of heart.
- Here they are woeful, empty people who revel in that addiction and even use it to trap others in their sin.
- God said, even in the Old Testament, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" The evil Babylonians self-trust made them love only themselves and to use their *neighbors* for sin. They not only violently attacked other people, in their own emptiness, they dragged other people down in *shame*.
- **Verse 14**, which we considered last week, spoke of the whole earth someday, "being filled with the knowledge of the GLORY of the LORD." Here, the woe, the pain, the sadness is that the false glory these self-trusters think they have made for their own NAME, will actually be shame and not glory.

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

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Text: Habakkuk 2:15-20

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

- The cups of wine they use to involve their neighbors in shame will be a different cup for them. It will be a cup from God filled with the anger of God for what they have done to other humans meant to bear God's image—created to glorify God's Name not the name of the Babylonians.
- The idea of this "cup of wrath coming around" or being "passed around" to these Babylonians reminds us of the earlier thoughts that the very nations they have shamed will one day "pass the cup of shame" to them to suffer through drinking.
- Historically, this has happened over and over in human history. The conquerors who consider themselves invincible are eventually conquered and shamed. Their name, made for themselves by trusting themselves, will not be glorified forever.
- This 4<sup>th</sup> "woe" continues in verse 17. **READ Habakkuk 2:17**
- It is notable that God picks out the *violence* the Babylonians have done to *Lebanon* as a further example. As often as not, when Lebanon is a focus in Scripture there is some connection to the majestic Cedar forests that were precious to them and to builders like Solomon.
- The *forests* are likely the reference here as well given the next line deals with the wanton destruction of *animals*. Then, that line is followed by the violent destruction of *humans* made in God's image and that is followed by the destruction of *civilization* in the form of the *nations* and *cities* the humans have developed.
- The Babylonians are faced with the woe of utter shame because they have shamelessly destroyed the God's creation of forests, animals, people and all the people produce trusting themselves to make a great Name for themselves.

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe!"

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RGGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

- They ought to be woefully ashamed of what their addicted, empty, self-trusting lives have produced but since they are not ashamed, God will most certainly SHAME them in His own time.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> and final "woe" is introduced by the question in verse 18 and follows then in verse 19. **READ Habakkuk 2:17-19**
- This woe gets to the "heart" of the reality once again. Self-trust is not simply a different way to have life. It is a rebellious opposition that seeks to destroy the one way to have true LIFE by trusting God.
- I can't verify this report but I have no reason to doubt it since it comes from a Portland police report. As the violence and destruction continues in the city of Portland, those rioting have started fires in the middle of streets in which they often burn two things. They burn the American flag and Bibles.
- What does this say? Are they seeking to destroy only racism and injustice? Set aside, for this moment, the affront of burning our flag because of misunderstandings they may have been taught by lying teachers and so-called expert thinkers.
- But why the Bibles? What is the shameful, angry language, the wanton violence, the indiscriminate destruction, and the abject hatred really about? It is ultimately about rejecting the authority and truth of God.
- The self-trust brings addictions to deal with the pain. It brings rejection of God to deal with woe of the absence of the God they were made to IMAGE from their lives. All of it is an attempt to deny ultimate reality—to reject TRUTH that hurts.
- What inevitably happens when humans who were created for God's LIFE-giving purposes reject those purposes and strike out to make life on their own? There is a big hole left in their reason for existence—in their ability to realize any true, lasting significance.

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe!"

Text: Habakkuk 2:15-20

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 **UNEDITED**

- Life without God is ultimately purposeless and that is not OK with most of us humans. Unbelieving philosophers and scientists will boast that they can live believing they are only chemicals and electrical charges and accept death peacefully. They will suggest they need no one or nothing to worship but this is a lie—a façade hiding a hole in their hearts.
- That on and off again theologian Bob Dylan absolutely captured this from the depth of his heart that experienced it and wrote the lyrics to his song "*Gotta Serve Somebody*." I'd love to play it with his nasally tones but those from a different musical era might miss the point and I can read them faster.

You may be an ambassador to England or France  
You may like to gamble, you might like to dance  
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world  
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes  
Indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

You might be a rock 'n' roll addict prancing on the stage  
You might have drugs at your command, women in a cage  
You may be a business man or some high-degree thief  
They may call you doctor or they may call you chief

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes you are  
You're gonna have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

You may be a state trooper, you might be a young Turk  
You may be the head of some big TV network  
You may be rich or poor, you may be blind or lame  
You may be living in another country under another name

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes you are  
You're gonna have to serve somebody

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe!"

Text: Habakkuk 2:15-20

RGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 **UNEDITED**

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord

But you're gonna have to serve somebody

You may be a construction worker working on a home

You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome

You might own guns and you might even own tanks

You might be somebody's landlord, you might even own banks

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes

You're gonna have to serve somebody

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord

But you're gonna have to serve somebody

You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride

You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side

You may be workin' in a barbershop, you may know how to cut hair

You may be somebody's mistress, may be somebody's heir

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes

You're gonna have to serve somebody

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord

But you're gonna have to serve somebody

Might like to wear cotton, might like to wear silk

Might like to drink whiskey, might like to drink milk

You might like to eat caviar, you might like to eat bread

You may be sleeping on the floor, sleeping in a king-sized bed

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes

Indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord

But you're gonna have to serve somebody

You may call me Terry, you may call me Timmy

You may call me Bobby, you may call me Jimmy

You may call me R.J., you may call me Ray

You may call me anything but no matter what you say

Still, you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes

You're gonna have to serve somebody

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord

But you're gonna have to serve somebody

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Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe!"

Text: Habakkuk 2:15-20

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

- Humans were created to SERVE God's purpose. That is where we get our reason for being—that is where we get our significance. When we are self-trusters—when we reject God—the woe is a hole in our very being—a hole in our hearts that must be filled.
- Humans will even stupidly make gods—idols—with their own hands and ascribe to them value and power over life just to fill this hole—it hurts so badly!!
- God reminds Habakkuk, our human made gods can't speak, can't come alive, can't help guide us, and ultimately have not a breath of life to give. All they are is the work of our own hands hidden under a thin façade of pretty, shining gold and silver to make them appear valuable. They are not. They are disappearing smoke. They are vanity.
- But, humans will not see this reality with flesh-eyes only with faith-eyes. The apostle Paul put it like this to the Roman church in chapter 1 and verse 22 of his truth along these lines: ***"Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles... he goes on to say in verse 25..."They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen."***
- Habakkuk, will you open your faith-eyes and see the reality you have been unable to see with flesh-eyes? Will you see the truth of the horribly woeful emptiness and pain of life without God even for the apparent *conquerors* of the world?
- Will we see the truth of this? Or, are we convinced by our limited sight that self-trust can lead to a pretty good life?

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

Sermon: "Life of Woe, Woe!"

Text: Habakkuk 2:15-20

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

- There is one more contrast for today in verse 20. Just as the first 3 woes were followed with a reminder of the contrast between fake living and real LIFE trusting God—we are reminded again here.
- **READ Habakkuk 2:20**
- There is no real life in idols whether they are made of stone or of expertise, or possessions, or comfort, or of medications to kill the pain of empty purposelessness.
- However in maybe the ultimate contrast, the LORD of Israel—God the Creator is alive and well in His temple. He is the God over all of creation and life including the Babylonians, including viruses, including soon-to-come national elections in our nation.
- Our God is alive and well and, dare I say it this way, *comfortably* ensconced in His temple not being carried away by what seems out-of-control to humans. He is not fretting the righteous outcome of human events. He is not concerned even my choices and yours will wreck His eternal plan.
- What about us? On a Thursday afternoon feeling like I have gained back just a bit of control in my life because someone has cut my thinning hair, I drive by a place of abortion—a place where our nation allows babies to be murdered—and the question of ***why God*** once again can well up inside of me.
- What does the book of *Habakkuk* say to that? Look again at the last have of verse 20. Please don't interpret it to be saying something like "Oh don't worry about that!" or "It won't make any difference no matter what you do" or, "As a person trusting God you are called to live a passive life." We have talked about this and I've suggested it doesn't fit the rest of biblical theology.

Series: "Corona...Corona" (Habakkuk)

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RGJR/FBCCS/8-2-20 UNEDITED

- What does it say? *Be silent! Hush with YOUR answers. You can't see all that needs to be seen.* It says to trust God with eyes of faith instead of your own eyes of flesh.
- Bear with me as I close by citing a short statement that David Prior included in his commentary on *Habakkuk*. The statement he quotes is from John Calvin—quite an activist Christian by the way. He is, I believe speaking about this same passage and addressing the idea of being “silent”:  
***“There is another kind of silence and that is when we willingly submit to God...And we submit to God when we bring not our own inventions and imaginations, but suffer ourselves to be taught by his word. We also submit to him, when we murmur not against the power of his judgments, when we humble ourselves under his powerful hand and do not fiercely resist him.” (Prior p. 261)***
- Prior then comments with a critical truth for all of us better than I would in closing, ***“To hear God speak, we must ourselves stop speaking—an extraordinarily difficult task in a noisy, hurrying, verbose and violent world”—overwhelmed by politicized “news cycles” and relentless Zoom meetings.***
- [You can decide where the quotation stopped and I started again 😊]