

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

Sermon: "Living LIFE in Ambiguity"

Text: Habakkuk 3:19

RGJR/FBCCS/8-30-20 UNEDITED

- What does ice hockey have to do with an Old Testament prophet named "Habakkuk?" Pay attention or you will miss it. Actually, it won't matter much for the sermon if you do miss it!
- When I started playing hockey, the sticks were still made of wood and all of their blades were straight. Then someone discovered if you could curve the blade the shot coming off it was spinning and moving in ways that made goalies go crazy. So, everyone started using curved sticks.
- No longer were both sides of the stick the same. Now you had to choose which side the open curve would be on—left or right.
- I tried both and clearly was better using a hockey stick marked "left." Leave it to those Canadians to mix up all of us. In every other area of life, I was absolutely "right-handed" but in hockey, I shot "left-handed."
- BTW: nearly all right-handed people shoot left-handed in hockey. This won't matter to you or the sermon but that is why good right-handed shooting defensemen are in relatively short supply—because they are actually left-handed in REAL LIFE.
- Now you need to pay a little more attention. When I discovered I was a left-hand shooting hockey player I had the thought that maybe I could do other things left-handed as well. Maybe I would do them better. My right-handed, cursive handwriting, at the time, was so atrocious, the teacher used to make me skip gym class to sit alone at a desk and practice. I tried to convince my teacher, Miss Penn, that the problem was I was actually left-handed.
- Now, here is what begins to really matter for this shorter sermon this morning. That was when I learned the word "*ambidextrous*." She was so impressed that I had learned the word she let me try

writing left-handed for a time. That experiment didn't last for long.

- "Ambidextrous," put simply, means "both-handed" or "multi-handed" but I only have two hands so "multi-" in that case is "both."
- How about some other words that have that Latin prefix "ambi?"
- Here is one that shows how the pronunciation changes a bit, depending on where "ambi" is attached.
- For example: "ambivalent." Does not properly mean having "no feelings" but rather multiple feelings—often conflicting feelings at the same time.
- And now we have reached our target and ice hockey's connection with Habakkuk the prophet and the Old Testament book named "Habakkuk."
- One of my new, favorite words is the "ambi" word "ambiguity." Simply put, this word means "more than one understanding." When something is "ambiguous" (that's the adjective form), it means it is unclear because it has multiple, possible meanings and leaves us with UNCERTAINTY.
- Jim, studying "Genesis," left the phrase "ambitious autonomy" stuck in many of our heads. The story of the beginning of humans, our purpose, our failures and the solutions is riddle with examples of not simply humans trying to live without God—autonomy—but even more so humans *ambitiously* striving to be autonomous from.
- The foundational human mistake—that is sin—shows up early in the cutest little humans when they ambitiously declare, "No, let me do it by myself to mommy or daddy!" That same spirit of ambitious autonomy is either fed and grows as we grow up or it is

seen for what it is and replaced by trust in God the only source of LIFE.

- I wonder if "ambitious" as in "ambitious autonomy" is another one of those Latin "ambi-words"??
- As we have studied *Genesis* together, some folks have questioned whether they have ever struggled with "ambitious autonomy" as Jim and I have used that idea. They feel that they have never been motivated in any way like Nimrod, the mighty warrior whose ambitious autonomy made him build a kingdom that would tell God to get lost. With fist shaking toward the heavens, "I don't need you God. I can do this all by myself without you!"
- Ah, but I think I have one more lesson for us out of the book of "Habakkuk" that teaches us there are different motivations to autonomy from God instead of faith in God. Not all of them involve brazenly making an angry gesture to the heavens and declaring openly that God is unnecessary.
- Habakkuk saved this lesson for the last verse, *Habakkuk 3:19*. So, I saved it for the last sermon.
- Let's review quickly in case anyone has missed where we have been. A prophet of Israel's God angrily questions God because God is allowing unrighteousness to go unchecked among his people and the nations. He has encountered what? **AMBIGUITY** in the circumstances of life around him. A lack of clarity has encompassed him. There is confusion in his understanding because he can't understand the details.
- How does God answer? Well, he doesn't clear up the confusion about the **AMBIGUOUS** details vexing the prophet. Instead, he adds to it with another ambiguous detail. The unrighteous

Babylonians will be God's instrument to deal with the unrighteousness of his own people.

- God demonstrates that Habakkuk can't contain all the details that God controls—Habakkuk can never eliminate ambiguity in every aspect of his life.
- Therefore, he can keep trying. Or, what is the only other option? He can trust that God who has shown himself to be trustworthy in the past will be trustworthy in the present and in the future and in spite of all the **ambiguity** Habakkuk feels.
- Habakkuk's approach to autonomy from God was different from a rebellious and angry Nimrod's fist shaking "get lost God!"
- Habakkuk's was more subtle but just as ambitious. It was modeled directly on the autonomy that Eve displayed. All Eve wanted was the autonomy to know everything apart from God. That is also ambitious isn't it?
- Certainly it is! When you step back and recognize the need to know everything apart from God, in Eve's case, by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you are doing this, as she did, to be in CONTROL of life.
- Wanting to be in control of your life is ultimately wanting to be GOD! That is as ambitious an autonomy seeking as any found in *Genesis*.
- "Well, Raleigh, I don't want to be in control of my life! I trust God to be in control!" Truly? Honestly? I submit to you and to me when we cannot live in ambiguity but need and even subtly demand from God to clear up all circumstances that confuse us, we are desiring just what Eve desired when she ate from that tree.

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- We want control of life and we can't feel in control when we have ambiguity—uncertainty around us and in us.
- So, we tell God we will really love him and trust him if he will just do this or that to provide us with certainty.
- Or we make up rational plans that we submit to God and require he agree with because they will work and that will give us clarity.
- Or we go to the other end of the spectrum from rationalism forcing God's hand to mysticism. We make our desires into dreams and visions that God must bless so we can know what to do next.
- Oh yes, *Habakkuk 3:19*, what does it say? **READ Habakkuk 3:19**
- It says, I am not the SOVEREIGN LORD who must know everything un-ambiguously because I am not in control
- AND it says, The LORD who is the SOVEREIGN GOD of the universe and does know all will keep me from falling to destruction even from the highest precipices of life, if I will trust him as Habakkuk has learned, once again to do.
- Verses like 3:19 and the others that sound similar are used often to suggest that God promises he will remove all **ambiguity**—all unknowns that scare me or cause me to feel out of control-- from my life. Is that what the verses say?
- They are metaphorical every time. They speak in terms of life as path upon which he will direct me or as here, a mountainside he will help me stay on no matter how high and steep.
- Some conclude the metaphor is always about God promising to give me detailed plans so I will have no ambiguity and (wink wink) be able to feel in control through certainty that I have it all exactly right either by my great rational plans or my stirring mystical feelings.

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- I think the metaphors only promise that, living in AMBIGUITY-- if I will trust God is in control instead of needing certainty so I can feel in control God will not let me fall!
- That's why we will hear, LORD willing, in a few weeks God ask Abram to trust Him in *ambiguity* by following the command to, **"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."**
- That's why when Peter the Apostle had denied Christ as Jesus told him he would his restoration to the mission of God recorded in the last chapter of John's Gospel was so important for the mission he was on to continue. That is why it is so important to understand for the mission you are on **actually** for the mission **WE** are on as a church going forward as FBC version 3.0
- The three Petrine denials are paralleled and erased, as it were by three calls to rejoin the feeding and caring for Jesus' sheep mission to which the bombastic leader had been called for life.
- Ok, whew, Peter is restored but hold it! Peter is left with ambiguity about that mission. Peter was ambitiously autonomous as any of us. He looks over at John and asks Jesus, "*What about him?*" "*Jesus, I need the details (Wink Wink) in order to be **in control**—in order to be sovereign again—in order to be God again. I can't trust you to live in this ambiguity.*"
- Jesus' response? Remember it? **"What is that to you? You just follow me, Peter!"** Why do you need to know that Peter?
- Why do you need to know that Habakkuk? Why do you need to know that Raleigh? Why do you need to know that elders? Why do you **need** to know that ministry leaders? What is that to you?

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- Most often, we feel we **NEED** to know things because that is our form of ambitious autonomy creeping in as we seek control. AS we—I can't say it any less forcefully—as we **need** to be God.
- Will God tell us stuff? He has told us many absolutely trustworthy things about living our lives together in his Word. There are more things in here than I have been able to learn in 60 years of working at it.
- Will he tell us stuff in other ways? Maybe. I would say probably not—or at least not very often or certainly not every time we demand it.
- I think more often than not he says: **"What is that to you? You trying to get rid of ambiguity so you can feel in control again and play God?"**
- *"How about you just follow me like I told Peter and Abram and the Children of Israel in the wilderness—follow me with your ambiguity because you trust me rather than trust your own control!"*
- *"But God we won't know where to step—at least not for sure! We think we know—we feel we know—but what if we make a mistake? TRUST ME! When you do, believe me! I will not let your foot slip. I will not let you fall of the steep cliff upon which you find yourself.*
- *But don't ask me to alleviate your ambiguity! Most often, when you ask that you just want control so you can be God instead of me!*
- I bid a fond farewell to Habakkuk through whom, in his wisdom of painting fractals of truth throughout human existence and recording them in His Word, I believe **God** painted for times of Covid 19 in the year 2020.

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- As I wave goodbye I notice those strange words we have passed: in verse 1 of chapter 3 the prayer is marked with "**on shigionoth.**"
- Then there are scattered "**selah's**" in the margin along the way.
- Finally, there is this line at the end, "**For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.**"
- All of these odd instructions are translated in various ways because we are not absolutely sure how to translate them exactly. There is ambiguity even in this presentation or communication aspect of the book of *Habakkuk*!
- However, we do know they are somehow meant to be instructions for presenting or sharing the truth of the book to God's people.
- I don't think I am stretching things too far to suggest that Old Testament truth about God a, his sovereignty, His people, their faith and ambiguity applies to his New testament people as well—that is to you—to me—and to US as FBC.
- AS the title page for this sermon series, we have been looking for weeks at this poor guy trying to untangle an ambiguous mess. He has made what seems like little progress.
- However, out of the tangled, ambiguous mess he has pulled one string. Let's hope that string is the truth that we can trust the trustworthy God instead of trying to be God by knowing all the answers and being in control even when we are looking at an ambiguous, tangled mess in life.
- Now we leave Habakkuk know in some way we are to sing or speak or poetically recite that truth to people around us—to one another. "**Trust our trustworthy God even when you are living in ambiguity.**"