

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

Sermon: "The Trustworthy God"

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-15

RGJR/FBCCS/8-9-20 UNEDITED

- Picture yourself living in the year 1441 BC. You and your family have been slaves in Egypt for multiple generations over 4 centuries of time. There is a tradition among some of your people that claims the God of your people promised your patriarch Abraham, a wonderful land in which you would flourish as you lived life honoring Him.
- That promise is difficult to believe--the God who made that is difficult even to believe in much less to trust as you are enslaved and relegated to the lowly job of making bricks for your master day in and day out.
- What a wonderful flourishing life??!! Sure!! Your house is a mud hovel that melts in the monsoons and bakes you in the normal heat. You have watched as some of your children have died for lack of good food and your inability to escape horrible living conditions.
- But what is new?! Your parents and their parents and their parents before them died young without anyway to change that cycle produced by extreme deprivation of the necessities of life. You will die the same way and so will your kids and then their kids after them.
- "Promises! Sure! Our God! Sure!" It now makes you angry when you hear those few fools who seem to cling to those empty promises made by a powerless God after countless years have passed without the promises coming true.
- Every time you see one of the Egyptian bosses, the guys who have more authority than the Egyptian taskmasters who push you and shove you like a dog each day—every time you see one of those higher "mukity mucks" ride up on their horse or in a chariot dressed in clean, cool clothes, clearly living well with regard to the food and water you have for a bare existence—every time now you are tempted to conclude, "Their gods must be more powerful or better

than this God that is supposed to be my God. Their Gods care for them. My so-called God of Israel just makes empty promises!

- Forty years ago, back in the year 1400, when you were just a kid, you heard the adults talking about some guy who had been raised an Egyptian but was actually "one of us." You heard a bit of hope in their voices that maybe now you would have a deliverer. But that was forty years ago and no one has heard from him since. The rumor is he murdered an Egyptian and had to run away and hide in the desert. All those folks who had hope in that deliverer have now grown old and died just as all the generations before them. Just as you will someday die and rot away in this desert prison as will you children and their children.
- It is the year 1440 BC now. Just one year later. Nothing else has changed for the better. In fact things are now worse in the brickyard.
- The "failed-deliverer" has returned. He is now 80 years old and claiming God has sent him to set his people, YOU, free so YOU can receive the promises made centuries before to the Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- If he couldn't beat the Egyptians at 40 years old, how will he do it at 80? He claims God will do it! Ha! What God? The God who makes promises he never keeps?! He says it is the God who is *Israel's* God who can only, for now, be described as the "**I AM.**" He says the "I AM" will deliver us. He says he is just an instrument, a spokesman for that "I Am." It won't be his power. It will be the "I AM's" power and he will demonstrate that to Pharaoh and all his mucky-mucks.
- He says this is what God had promised and intended in his plan all along. "Sure! Tell that to my dad who just died and my youngest daughter who died last year in childbirth from the filthy conditions. Tell that to the millions who have passed away waiting over the

centuries for the promises of this "I AM" to be fulfilled. Ask the "I AM", "How does that work?" How is that just and good?"

- What will His answer be? Only tell them "I AM!"
- Can you see how the prophet Habakkuk certainly would not have been the first of God's people to look around at personal circumstances and wonder about God's promises—wonder about God Himself? Can you see how Habakkuk would not have been the last to do this?
- Humans stuck in their circumstances by being subject to time and space limitations will always face this issue. It can make or break FAITH in God especially for people who think and don't want to fake as if they have all the easy answers. Habakkuk was no faker! WE have seen that from his questions and interaction with God.
- Yet, in the midst of his circumstances with no answers to his questions that he personally liked, Habakkuk heard from God a reminder of the contrast in realities of life lived by self-trust and life lived by trusting the trustworthy God.
- There are no other options for humans. God is real and he is comfortably dwelling in his temple in control of his plan. Trusting in any reality less than that will require humans to invent their own gods, idols. Idols may look good with their gold and silver facades but they are nothing! They are dead valueless objects we foolishly make ourselves and then trick ourselves into thinking they can do something about life and its circumstances. What foolishness!
- In the days of Habakkuk idols were made from stone and wood. Today, our idols are most often made of non-material substance. They are most often ideas—certainties we trust that are not certain but we self-deceive.

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

Sermon: "The Trustworthy God"

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-15

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-9-20 UNEDITED

- They are made of power, comfort, control, possessing, relationships, fame, fortune, human significance and the list goes on.
- The stone idols of Habakkuk's days were simply physical representations of the same idol-hopes we have. We are just sophisticated enough to hold those idol-hopes in our heads as ideas most of the time.
- Habakkuk listens to God describe the woeful reality of a life of self-trust. It is ultimately a thirst that is never slaked—a hunger that always pangs. It is a whole in the heart that is never filled as designed. It is a fake, crooked life that blows away like smoke in reality.
- It doesn't always look that way to us, to an Israelite slave, or to Habakkuk. The façade of success, comfort and control can deceive us that self-trusters have real life but they do NOT! God says they do NOT! Whom will we believe? Eternal God, through His Word or the limited eyes of our deceptive flesh?
- In this choice, Habakkuk goes with the Word of God!
- He reveals his decision in a prayer—kept short with regard to petitions. The prayer, and its long validation are then recorded as a psalm for Israel and for us to read—even better to remember because we have sung it over and over to each other, together in worship.
- In verse 3:1 you'll see the English for a transliterated, Hebrew word, "**shigionoth**." If your Bible notes are honest, they will say something like, "We don't have the slightest idea what this means but it seems to be related to poetic or musical presentation of these truths.
- You'll also see the more familiar "**Selah**" which we think means something like "rest," again in a musical or poetic setting. Maybe it

means "rest" in the sense of slow down and sing or say this aloud strongly so you reinforce it for each other in your worship.

- Lord willing, I would like to come back to these terms in a practical way, not a definitive way, when we reach the end of *Habakkuk*.
- Today, we will cover the prophet's short section of petitions and his longer section of validation for being able to ask God these requests.
- The, just two, petitions are in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3.
- **READ Habakkuk 3:1-2**
- Habakkuk starts his prayer with a clear statement that is in some ways an admission to God that he should have factored a reality into his thinking. When he wondered about the power and righteousness of God because of the mess of his circumstances, he was forgetting to factor in all he has known about God from God's past action and revelations of Himself.
- Habakkuk has "**heard of these.**" Dare I emphasize again, especially because of the historical actions and revelations the prophet cites as examples, that he has heard of them because they had been written down in Scripture.
- Habakkuk's prophetic writing here is probably just a little over 10, maybe 15 years after King Josiah finding the "*Book of the Law*" that had been buried under the hoarded trash in the Temple.
- Habakkuk writes at a time following a short-lived revival of God's people because they read God's Word again and it revealed God and his ways to them.
- Habakkuk admits that when he remembers what God has passed on about his deeds and thus his character, he is in state of "**awe.**" The recall of the reality of God's past works moves the prophet from a state of questioning to a state of reverence. The reality is not the

façade of self-trusting success. The reality is the God of Israel—the LORD—who is, and always has been, the "**I AM!**"

- In this new frame of mind, a realistic frame of mind, Habakkuk makes his first petition—his first prayer request. *"God what you did back then to keep you promises please do it again when and where I can see it for myself."*
- By the end of the prayer, in a section we will look at next week, Lord willing, Habakkuk will relent. He will recognize that he, limited by time and space, might not see God work when he answers this prayer.
- I need to say a couple of things about this first request. **First:** I do think it is OK to ask God to work as he has worked in the past—as he has shown himself to be in the past. But, we must always do that with a caveat—*"God, please act, if it is your will to act now—if it is in the pursuit of your NAME not mine—your eternal, perfect plan not my limited access machinations."*
- Much very attractive theology and teaching today holds that what we pray, even from our limited position to see and know the plan of God's details—what we pray, the individual, personal desires of our heart will happen. God is like the Genie who must grant three wishes when we pray. That theology is attractive to folks who want to believe they know all the answers and should be in control, but it is now how God reveals Himself working in His Word.
- **Second:** Because time is a fluid matter here, that is, because, like Habakkuk, we don't know when God will answer this prayer, some of the illustrations of how God has worked that we will read in a moment may actually be illustrations of how God will work someday later—even someday later than our time.

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

Sermon: "The Trustworthy God"

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-15

RGJR/FBCCS/8-9-20 UNEDITED

- In other words, the examples Habakkuk cites may be *eschatological*—end times—pictures of God at work. They may be future-telling prophecy even to us. There are some readers—good reader exegetes—who believe this to be the case.
- I will not argue for or against that still-future-to-us conclusion this morning. I will not even spend much time in trying to sort out all of the details of the historical or possibly eschatological references. I will have a much simpler purpose. We would need a multi-session class to do that.
- BTW: the reason the timeframes of such descriptions of God are sometimes difficult to discern is that God is eternally consistent. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Therefore, when you paint a metaphorical picture of his work and presence it could describe his awesomeness yesterday, today or tomorrow unless you are told what timeframe the author has in mind.
- But before we get to those descriptions, we must pause and consider Habakkuk's 2nd prayer request there in verse 2.
- The first was please do your awesome works now as you have done in the past. The second is but when it comes to your wrath expressed in those acts, ***PLEASE GOD, please be merciful!***
- Be careful what you wish for because you may get it! Go back to that idea that God is not a genie forced to grant three wishes. There is an extended discussion about shaping your three wishes perfectly to get the most out of them on Google's Qoura. Some of the participants apply advanced game theory to try to box the genie in and get the most out of their three wishes. A frequent and important conclusion is, *"You can't know all the unintended consequences of your wishes so the Genie always has the upper hand in the deal."*

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

Sermon: "The Trustworthy God"

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-15

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-9-20 UNEDITED

- Habakkuk knows, God acting now against the Babylonians will also bring judgement on God's own people—Habakkuk's people. If he prays that the Babylonians get the wrath they DESERVE, what if the Israelite's also get the wrath they deserve?!!
- Habakkuk realizes it would be better to entrust all this to God because God has shown it is in His eternal nature to be MERCIFUL!
- There are many people I don't *like* right now. Be assured, none of them is in this room or hearing me say this live or recorded! 😊 There are times when the hypocrisy, lying, cheating, deceiving, arrogant, self-serving folks I don't like make me so angry I wish they would get what they "DESERVE!" Really? Do I really hope God deals with my enemies by giving them what they deserve? How about my friends and family? How about me?
- I prefer God be merciful to those I judge worthy of his mercy because I like them. But God doesn't work that way. That is not how he IS. That is why we are told to "*love our enemies and those who despitefully use us.*" It is because this attitude shows what God is like in His mercy.
- So here is the petition part of the prayer: God, please work powerfully now because that IS what you can do BUT please work mercifully because that is who you can be. That is a long way from the opening complaint to God: "***How long O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen??!!***" Still, keep in mind, the issue of "how long?" remains answered!
- Why does Habakkuk believe he can pray these things now? What validates his faith that God will hear and act? It is because of what God has done in the past to save his people from horrible circumstances.

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

Sermon: "The Trustworthy God"

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-15

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-9-20 UNEDITED

- I stated this morning with the thought exercise of us being Israelite slaves in Egypt and how we might feel about trusting God after generations have passed with God's plan not being fulfilled in time.
- I chose that time, the time around the Exodus from Egypt and the entry into the PROMISED Land because it seems to me that is historically what Habakkuk pictures as he describes His awesome God. The geography is real but given in poetic terms we don't all readily recognize. The appearances of God—the terms of theophany—have historical resonances with stories we know from the Exodus but could fit multiple places in Scripture and maybe even be, as I said, prophetic of the end times.
- I will attempt to read the descriptions in verses 3-15 with proper gusto and then give you a bare, few suggestions as to their referents. I mainly want you to sense that for Habakkuk these acts and appearances of God were awe-inspiring reminders of God's power and character in the past.
- He could now anchor his faith in God's faithfulness because God had indeed proven faithful even when it took generations of time for that faithfulness to be obvious. He could trust the trustworthy God instead of trusting himself for the circumstances of his life.
- Look at 3:3-15. **READ Habakkuk 3:3-15**
- Teman and Mount Peran probably picture God coming to his people at Sinai in the desert after leaving Egypt. The physical descriptions of God's glory, as unable to capture the reality as they were, were still utterly unforgettable to humans who saw them. Like the brightness of the Sun that fills the sky. Like power of the lightning that flashes in the storm.

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

Sermon: "The Trustworthy God"

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-15

RGGJR/FBCCS/8-9-20 UNEDITED

- God controlled plagues, shook mountains, both literal and metaphorical. God defeated peoples who never should have been beaten in battle by the underdog freed slaves.
- When God's power showed in rivers and seas was he working his might and his wrath on them? Was that what this was about? Or was it about his promises. God had literally parted seas and shaken mountains to keep his promises.
- God held the sun and moon and was the mighty warrior that made it possible for his people to be victorious. He came to deliver or to save his people he had chosen and no nation on earth could stand against him when it was time to do that.
- Even the mightiest man on earth was crushed by the waters at God's command. In all his wickedness—with all his self-trusting power—He was no match for God. This was true of Pharaoh. It will be true of the Babylonia rulers from Habakkuk's perspective. It will be true of the Anti-Christ from an eschatological perspective. It will be true of Satan himself.
- There is no opponent that ever even barely matches up to God. God's plan will absolutely and devastatingly crush all opposition in His time and way. Like Habakkuk, we may not see this happening. It may not happen in our lifetime or the lifetimes of our children or even their children. BUT, this doesn't mean it will not happen!!! It will!
- That is the point of Habakkuk's chosen examples. God keeps his promises in his time and his way even after generations of slavery in Egypt for his people. God is indeed a trust-WORTHY God.
- So, there we have it. We all recall God coming from Teman and Mount Paran. We'll never forget the way the light of his glory

blinded us and how the quaking of the earth scared us of his power.
Right? Nope!

- Well maybe then I have to get *my* reassurance of the trustworthiness of God from that ***experience*** that one time passing through lonely the dessert in Mexico when the Pemex station where we always got gas to make it through was unexpectedly closed and there was no way that we had enough gas to make it but we did. I could swear angels pushed our Chevy station wagon. But then that other time I ran out of gas on the way to Toluca and almost walked off a cliff and was nearly robbed at knifepoint stumbling along the pitch black highway late in the Mexican night trying to get help.
- Can I trust God to protect me from running out of gas or not??? Well then how do I know I can trust God if my EXPERIENCES vary?
- Same way Habakkuk concluded God is the trustworthy God even if he doesn't do what we think he should do or what we want—what has God recorded about what he has done and who he is for us in His Word? That is what makes him trustworthy!
- We actually have a better, even more powerful touch point to go to than Habakkuk had with the Exodus. We have the ***resurrection*** of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead just as God promised. The reason Paul gets so upset that some of the Corinthians doubt the resurrection of Jesus is not because the story isn't as good without it. The reason is that this tells them they can trust the trustworthy God who keeps his promises rather than live lives of self-trust.
- If I am struggling with doubts about God because of life's circumstances, I may find some solace in experiences in my life that suggest God was good to me. But if we want the turnaround Habakkuk experienced we need to go to God's Word. In it are the facts God wanted us to know about how he works and who he is that

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

Sermon: "The Trustworthy God"

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-15

RGJR/FBCCS/8-9-20 UNEDITED

prove he is indeed the trustworthy God who can give us the real LIFE we need and crave even as circumstances swirl seemingly out of control around us.

- Will we believe God's Word or the eyes of our flesh as we walk around in the up and down circumstances of this world?
- That is ultimately the real question that determines that great divide of all humans between self-trusters and trusters of the trustworthy God.
- It is not a matter of liking God, feeling religious, having spiritual experiences, being sweet people or not. It is a matter of believing—of trusting—what God has told us is trustworthy about Him through his word.