



## “Are You Not My Holy One?”

Habakkuk 1:12-2:4

January 19, 2020

This morning we are going to be in Habakkuk Chapter 1 and Verses 12 through Chapter 2 and Verse 4. We are taking several weeks here in the prophecy of Habakkuk, where we will be encouraged from this brother in the Lord. Habakkuk was a man who was living at wits’ end. He had some serious questions for the Lord. What we find as we study this book is that the Lord had some direct answers for Habakkuk in return.

As I was praying and preparing for this series in the book of Habakkuk, there is a question that I began turning over in my mind. The question that I was thinking about was this: which place is worse? Would it be worse to be at wits’ end or ropes end?

Would it be worse to be at the end of your wits, where it feels like you are at the end of your ability to cope with the struggles and the injustices and the frustrations of life because they are so acute and/or prolonged, being at the end of your ability to deal with those things, or would it be worse to be at the end of your rope, where you feel you are barely hanging on; you are at the end of your lifeline and if you let go, you are going to fall to a certain death and life just feels like it will be over.

Which would be the worst place to be? I was turning this over in my mind, and I am not sure which would be the worst place to be. But sometimes we can feel like we are in both of those places, wits’ end, robes end, because we live in a fallen world and sometimes life in this world is very difficult and frustrating and it is a challenge.

I’m not sure which place is further gone, but as we dig into the book of Habakkuk this morning, it may very well be that Habakkuk went from one place to the other. If you were here with us last week when we opened this series with the first portion of Chapter 1, you will remember that we saw how Habakkuk opened up with some velocity.

Habakkuk did not waste any time. He cried out to the Lord with a series of words to describe southern Israel and the state of the people around him. He said, *Lord, here in this so-called City of Peace, here in Jerusalem, there is violence and iniquity and wrong and destruction and contention and strife and perversion of justice. It seems as though the law is paralyzed and You are doing nothing to restrain these things at all.*

He was frustrated and he cried out to the Lord. We saw how Habakkuk cried out with two questions that a great number of people who have lived at wits’ end have cried out to God as well. Those two questions were: How long and why?

This is the way Habakkuk formed those questions in the opening portion of this book, how long will I pray? How long will I cry out to you? How long will I bring this burden to you and you will not answer? He felt like he was calling on the Lord and the Lord was not hearing him.

Then he asked why. The way he framed the question why was this: Why are you making me so sensitive to this? Why do my eyes see the injustices of what is happening—the unfairness of all that is happening? Why do I see it so clearly, yet, Lord, you seem indifferent.

In the opening text, Habakkuk even said, *Lord, you are idly watching. You are like a bystander. You have the ability to get involved but you are not!* He was frustrated with what was going on. He said, *Lord, you have the power to intervene. I am asking you to intervene. I want you to intervene, but you are standing back like an onlooker. When will you answer my prayers. When will you bring judgement. When will you bring justice.*

Habakkuk was at his wits' end. We too can be taken to that place when we are dealing with problems that are so much bigger than our feeble resources allow us handle. So we don't go to wits' end when the love is flowing, but we go to wits' end when the conflict is surging.

We don't go to wits' end when the funds are plenty but when the bank account is empty; not when the marriage is thriving, but when the foundations are cracking; not when the body is healthy, but when the diagnosis is devastating; not when the pain is passing, but when it is chronic and ongoing.

With Habakkuk, this prophet, we don't come to that place called wits' end when the peace and the goodness is prevailing, but when the sin is spreading and is becoming characteristic of the people that we live in the midst of. Sometimes we too come to the end of ourselves and we say, *Lord long and why is all this happening?*

We saw Habakkuk's opening complaint last time. Then we saw the Lord's answer. The Lord's first answer to Habakkuk was, *I see the sin that is filling Jerusalem and something is going to be done about it. Behold, I am bringing the Chaldeans. I am bringing the Babylonians of Chaldea. Look and be astounded. Wonder about this. Let your imagination run wild. I am gathering that bitter, hasty, dreaded, fearsome army to come and bring judgment upon the wickedness that you see filling the land of southern Israel.*

Then the Lord gave Habakkuk a description of this army that seemed super human in its strength. The Lord gave Habakkuk this word of reply to which we now see Habakkuk's next response.

Now we will get into this morning's text and see Habakkuk's second complaint. He said, *Lord, that is even a bigger problem than the first problem. According to my estimation, the Babylonians are at least even worse than the Judeans. What gives? I know that you are sovereign and holy, but what is up with this?*

So Habakkuk continued with his struggle before the Lord. Here as we dig into the text of Habakkuk this morning, we are going to see his second burden at the end of Chapter 1. Then we are going to see the beginning of the Lord's second response which fills all of Chapter 12.

Habakkuk had these questions circulating in his heart and mind. He was feeling spun, now he took his second complaint to the Lord. Let's see how it reads, beginning with Habakkuk Chapter 1 and Verses 12 and 13:

12     **Are you not from everlasting,  
          O LORD my God, my Holy One?  
          We shall not die.  
          O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgement,  
          and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.**  
13     **You who are of purer eyes than to see evil  
          and cannot look at wrong,  
          why do you idly look at traitors  
          and remain silent when the wicked swallows up  
          the man more righteous than he?**

Habakkuk was telling the Lord that he knew he was holy and sovereign, but extended his question to why. Why will the one who is more wicked swallow up the one who is less wicked? That was the basic question he had in response to God's opening vision of the coming of Babylon.

Just about a month ago in the days leading up to Christmas, Kristy and I went out to do some Christmas shopping but were hungry, so we went to a restaurant first. We wanted to spend some time talking and planning our Christmas lists. We went to a restaurant we have been wanting to go to for a while.

We went in and the place was jamb-packed. We finally got seated, and noticed a lot of remnant from the previous customers. There were crumbs and spilled beverages. The table was not exactly clean. It took our waiter forever to get to us, so we finally flagged down the host who sat us there.

We asked him to look at the table, explaining it did not get properly cleaned up. He went and got a rag, and came back and took everything off the table. He took his rag and wiped down the table and put everything back on it. Kristy and I actually smelled the rag he was using! That rag was nasty. Didn't that boy's mom teach him that when you clean a table, you get a fresh paper towel and some cleaning solution to clean with, so the table is actually clean?

You don't get some rag that has been sitting there for who knows how long, so that you spread more germs and microbes onto the place you are seeking to clean. At that point, I took my napkin and dipped in the water, assuming the water I was drinking was clean, and I scrubbed the table down. Then I took a dry napkin and cleaned and dried the table off. Kristy and I then did our best not to allow our forearms or our hands to actually touch the table.

The table needed to be cleaned up, but the product that was being used to clean the table with was worse than the table was before. Do you catch my point? See how illustrations work? Habakkuk was like, *Yes, the streets of Jerusalem need to be cleansed, but the Babylonians are even worse. Are you are going to stand by and watch while the wicked absorbs that which is more righteous than he? At least the southern Israelites, the people of Judea, have some semblance of righteousness left. At least there is a remnant.*

Habakkuk continued his question—why, how can this be? How many of you followers of Christ, you have been studying Scripture and you have come to know that in fact the Lord uses hardship and painful things to refine us, and to get us closer to Him?

God uses trials and difficulties to help us to be refined and to get closer to Christ and become more like Christ. That is a biblical reality. Nobody who has read their New Testament can dismiss that. That is a biblical fact.

However, how many of you have been in hard times brought on by particularly hard people, and you say, *Lord, I know that You use trials to help me to be more and more like Christ, but do You really need to be using that particular person? Lord, can you just make them disappear, so they can go away and be a trial for somebody else?*

Wits' end or ropes end? The Babylonians were like cranking the volume of evil. Habakkuk did not get that. He was struggling with it. He was processing it, because in what we just read in Verse 13, he was affirming the sovereignty of God, saying, *Yes, I know. I have read the prophets and I have read the psalms that you do preside over the nations. You do move them like chess pieces.*

In Verse 12, Habakkuk was affirming the sovereignty of God, then in Verse 13 he was saying, *Why. I don't get this. I am struggling with it. Are you just going to watch while this happens?* What we see in this text is that though Habakkuk was a man who was struggling to wrap his heart and mind around the ways that God sometimes works in this world, he was also a man who knew, loved, and honored the Lord.

He had been intimate with the Lord. Did you notice the use of the possessive personal pronoun? Lord, you are the everlasting one. You are *my* God. You are *my* holy one. Not only did he know that the Living God is the rock of Israel, but here was man who had experienced God as his rock as well, his own foundation. Yet, he was struggling with the way that God was working in that particular situation.

Something I glean from that is this: there are people who do, in fact, know the Lord, they have been converted in Christ, they have come under the power of God's grace, they have faith, yet they will enter into seasons of life that are hard and challenging. They will come to the Lord and say, *I don't get what you are doing here, Lord, and it is bringing me to an end of myself. I need some help understanding.*

We as the people of God need to learn to pray in this way that is so pervasively portrayed for us in the pages of Scripture. We talked about it last week. It is the lament, where we reverently go

to the Lord. We don't go hurling accusations at Him. We don't go blaspheming Him, but we pour out the honest content of our hearts, saying, *Lord, I'm struggling here and I need you to prop me and to see me through and to hold on to me and help me to understand.*

We need to be people who call upon the Lord in this way. Guess what? News flash! It is not going to surprise God. When you go the Lord and say, *Lord, I'm filled with anxiety. I am stressed and freaked out. This thing is troubling me and I am losing sleep. I am getting worked up over by this. Lord, I need help.* That is not going to surprise God. Don't you think that He knows already?

You might surprise some of the people around you. I'll be honest with you: Some of you have surprised me because you do a good job of covering things over, saying life is great. Then we will talk and I will hear about how hard things really are. I'm like, Man! Thanks for sharing with me. Fellowship shares those kinds of burdens.

But the Lord knows the turmoil of the heart and this kind of prayer is a release valve unto the Lord. We are to cast our anxieties upon Him. We see this man, Habakkuk, doing this. Why? Why? Why? We will face trials and we need to call upon the Lord in this kind of way.

We continue, Habakkuk provided us this example, and the complaint that he brought to the Lord was not over yet. To model what it is to bring your burdens to the Lord, he presented God with a vision of how he, Habakkuk, saw the human race as being totally vulnerable and powerless under the human powers that be in this world.

Now comes a fishing illustration in Verses 14 through 17. Look at what's there.

14     **You make mankind like the fish of the sea,  
          like crawling things that have no ruler.**  
15     **He brings all of them up with a hook;  
          he drags them out with his net;  
          he gathers them in his dragnet;  
          so he rejoices and is glad.**  
16     **Therefore he sacrifices to his net  
          and makes offerings to his dragnet;  
          for by them he lives in luxury,  
          and his food is rich.**  
17     **Is he then to keep on emptying his net  
          and mercilessly killing nations forever?**

There is yet another question mark here from this Spirit-led prophet, writing Scripture in His very personal prophetic journal. He was asking God what was happening.

We have this vision of the joyful fisherman that should not be joyful. I read this and I wonder if we have good old King Nebuchadnezzar making something of an uncredited cameo appearance here in the prophecy of Habakkuk. Nebuchadnezzar was the one who was ultimately in charge of Babylon when they came and brought in their armies into Jerusalem.

With this vision of the net, he is the exact opposite of Christ who came as the great fisher of men for their good and eternal salvation; to bring His elect of the nations into His net and into His everlasting care.

Here you have Nebuchadnezzar, or whatever ruler he had in mind, a fisher of men for his own gain, enslaving them to resource his opulent lifestyle. He was so skillful in the use of his net, gathering all these people to himself, that he was living a life of luxury because of it. He was worshipping the net of his, offering animal sacrifices to it, and burning incense to it. It is a scary picture that we see here.

I think this picture of the net is an illustration as to how we too can feel at the level of society, even society here in North America. Think about the powers that be, the men and women who are in higher education, people in the entertainment industry, people in politics. Think about how they are influencing things morally, politically, and even spiritually.

Sometimes it can feel like there is a net gathering around the righteous remnant of God. It is seeking to contain us. Their influence is closing in and wants to trap us and all the fish in the net have no way of getting out. It is not a good place to be.

Meanwhile, the powers that be in this world of ours are living the high life in their mansions, behind their gates, burning incense to their nets. There can be the sense that the world is closing in on the people of God.

This is what Habakkuk was feeling like when he came to understand what was going to happen when Babylon came for Jerusalem. Habakkuk was frustrated that the twisted and crooked and wicked people of the world gain power that they should not have.

This was frustrating Habakkuk so he asked questions. He had given his second complaint to the Lord. Then he did something very, very, very important when we look at Chapter 2 and Verse 1. He said his peace. He had released his burden. Now we see that he took something of a retreat.

Chapter 2 and Verse 1:

<sup>1</sup> **I will take my stand at my watchpost  
and station myself on the tower,  
and look out to see what he will say to me,  
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.**

Maybe he had read the book of Job and how Job lifted up a complaint to the Lord and the Lord said, *Okay, stabilize yourself. Brace yourself like a man, because I am going to answer you.* Maybe Habakkuk said, *What is the Lord going to say now that I have lifted this up, and what am I going to say back to Him after He has responded to me.*

What we see here is that Habakkuk went to a place of retreat. He had released the burden of his heart and his soul, and now he was waiting to hear from the Lord at the watchpost, at the tower, at his place of separation.

Now we go into the Lord's second response to Habakkuk. We will read Verses 2 through 4 and that will be enough for us today. Habakkuk Chapter 2 and Verse 2 through 4:

<sup>2</sup> **And the Lord answered me:  
“Write the vision;  
make it plain on tablets,  
so he may run who reads it.**

<sup>3</sup> **For still the vision awaits its appointed time;  
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.  
If it seems slow, wait for it;  
it will surely come; it will not delay.**

<sup>4</sup> **”Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,  
but the righteous shall live by his faith.**

Understand that what we just read is only the beginning of God's answer. There is a second vision that is about to be revealed to Habakkuk. That second vision is revealed and recorded in the remainder of Habakkuk Chapter 2. It goes all the way to Verse 20. We will be digging into the rest of it next week. For the moment I just want to give you the essence of God's reply to Habakkuk here in this second response, especially as we look at what it says in Verse 4.

The Lord was saying, *Habakkuk, yes, I see Babylon. I see their evil and wickedness. Babylon personified, I know his soul is puffed up. It is not upright. He is proud and arrogant. He is unrighteous and understand, judgement is going to fall upon his head too. The boomerang that he throws is going to circle back and strike him right between the eyes. I will see it done. Habakkuk, Babylon is not going to get away with their iniquity. I am Your Holy One. I am Your God. I am Your rock. I see what is happening.*

When you look at the details of what is ahead in Habakkuk Chapter 2, it becomes very amazing, because it is comprised of this extended taunt. And the humble ones that had been overcome and harassed by the power of Babylon, the time was coming when they, in turn, would be singing a song of victory over Babylon.

They were going to cry out the woes of the Lord upon Babylon. We see the word *woe* in Verses 6, 9, 12, 15, and in Verse 19. That is the vision of things that were to come when God in His righteousness balanced the scales on the planet earth.

*In the meantime, before that vision is fulfilled, between now and then, here in the gap, while I am using them as a scalpel to cleanse Judah's cancer of rebellion, the righteous is going to live by faith. The righteous is going to spiritually thrive still by trusting Me, by placing confidence in Me, by taking shelter in Me, by knowing that in the end, I am the Living God who does what is right. And the righteous, the upright one, the one who is made right with Me shall live by his faith.*

Habakkuk Chapter 2 and Verse 4 is clearly the theme of this book. The righteous shall live by faith. It is one of the most important verse in the Bible. The authors of the New Testament recognize this as they were carried by the Holy Spirit.

This statement—the righteous shall live by faith—is quoted twice by Paul in Romans 1:17 and again in Galatians 3:11 to emphasize that we are sinners, saved by faith in the Messiah. It is also quoted in Hebrews 10:38 and 39 to emphasize that Christians will continue to live by faith in this fallen world. So this is something that is so important for us to take in as the church of the Living God. The righteous will live by faith.

Understand there is the faith that initiates the Christian life—that begins it—the life united with the Lord. There is the faith that then characterizes and guards the Christian life as we live it in the Lord. First and foremost, we are saved by faith.

Brothers and sisters, understand this: we are, in fact, living in a world that is contaminated by sin and each and every one of us is a sinner. To one degree or another, we are just like that server that was going around with his contaminated rag, spreading the bacterial microbes that do harm. We are all sinners. We all have iniquity staining the soul and the heart and that issues forth in the deeds that we do and the things that we say.

At the apex of biblical revelation, what we find is that the Messiah, the Son of God, entered into this world of sin and He was the Perfect Lamb. He lived a life of perfect purity for thirty-three-years. He was nailed to the cross. In that pure body, He was infected by our sin. Our sin was imputed to Him, and He paid the price for our sin.

When a person comes to trust in Him, when they confess that they are a sinner and that God's eyes are too pure and holy to even look upon their life without bringing the judgement it deserves, when they come to understand that Jesus is the answer and that He can wash them white as snow, then they are saved by faith.

Brothers and sisters, that is where it all begins—trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sin after we have confessed that we are sinners before the Lord. But that is just the beginning of what it is to walk by faith. Faith has so many different facets to it.

When a person is born again, it is not like they are instantly swept up into the purity and in the joy of heaven's paradise. They remain here in this world that is cursed by sin, that is filled with injustice, that is so frustrating. In the midst of all the things that are taking place in this world, we are those who walk by faith in the Lord.

We trust in Him. The faith that we are called to live by every day, and especially at wits' end, ropes' end, moneys' end, relationships' end, health's end, body's end and life's end, is the faith that will connect you to God so that we can live and thrive, even in the midst of the hardships that fill this world.

You trust in the Lord. You are connected to the rock of our salvation by faith. This is the kind of faith that trusts in the promises of God before they are all fully realized. It is the kind of faith that continues to walk with God, even when sometimes it seems like it is too dark to see where it is going and how it is going to turn out.

We walk by faith, not because we are exactly sure how this trial is going to end or where it is going, but we walk by faith because we know the character of the One who is leading. We have the holiness of our Creator, the One who did not spare His own Son that His grace and love might be showered out upon us.

We know that He is the Eternal Rock, that He is the Living God, that His love for us is measureless. While we walk with Him through this dark world, we trust in Him to lift us up and to see us through the trials that, in the end, I promise every child of God, you will outlast them. We are to be those who walk by faith. The Lord told Habakkuk to write it down, record the vision, make it known, publicize it. The righteous will live by faith.

Let me finish with just a few applications for life at wits' end, for life when it is a struggle. Once again, the closing applications are going to seem very similar to last week. How do we live by faith at wits' end? How do we stay connected to the Lord. Learning from our brother Habakkuk, who knew what it was to live at wits' end, the first thing we see is to:

### **1. Retreat to hear the Word of God (2:1)**

That was what he was doing in Verse 1 of Chapter 2:

#### **<sup>1</sup> I will take my stand at my watchpost**

He had poured out his heart to the Lord, then he said, *I am going to get myself to the watchpost. I'm going to get myself to the tower. I am going to wait for the Lord to speak to me.*

There are going to be times in this world where you just need to get away from all the things that are crowding in on your life and be quiet in the presence of the Lord. Didn't we even see this exemplified in the life of our Messiah? As Jesus was ministering in Israel, he would often retreat by himself to go and commune with His Father.

We need to be those who do what it takes and find ways to have quiet times with the Lord, where we bear our burdens before Him, where we open Scripture and say, *Lord, I am listening to You. Give me the bread of life that will sustain my soul in the midst of the weariness of this life.*

We need to make a priority of getting alone with the Lord. Don't do this at home. Find a place. Maybe you can find a place in your home, but it seems like when you are home, there is going to be a pile of laundry waiting for you, there is going to be a sink of dishes waiting for you, there is going to be the dog fur beckoning to be vacuumed up. There are going to be gadgets like computers and television sets.

In this society that is just so busy, I wonder how many of us have lost the ability to get away and be quiet before the Lord, where we pray and listen to Him. This is something that Habakkuk was doing.

In the midst of the hard times that I have worked through in my Christian life, I have found it so refreshing to find a way in the middle of the burdens and anxieties to go to a place of retreat, to have my Bible and my journal, to read how God has been faithful in days past in the Bible and in my life, and to record what I am going through then, so that someday I will look back and see how God was working in that time.

I think Habakkuk is an example of what it is to get away. Faith also:

## 2. Waits for the timing of God (2:3)

In Verse 3, speaking of the vision of justice that is going to be carried out on the earth, God said:

<sup>3</sup> **For still the vision awaits its appointed time;  
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.  
If it seems slow, wait for it;**

If it seem slow wait for it. If it seem slow wait for it. If it seem slow wait for it! How many of you think sometimes God is too slow? Wait a minute, Lord, I have prayed about this. Shouldn't this thing be solved right now?

We have this sense that God ought to work in terms of hours or days. Maybe we can tolerate weeks, when God will often work in months and in years and in decades. We need to be those who wait upon the Lord.

How many of you want to share in God's creative power *Ex Nihilo*—whatever God speaks, it immediately comes to pass if it is His will. How would you like to speak forth your prayer in frustration and be, behold, what you speak immediately happens?

That is what we desire, yet all the way through the pages of the Old and New Testaments, we are told to wait on the Lord and His timing. He sees the big picture. He knows details that we do not know. He is working on other parallel roads in ways that we do not know. We wait upon the Lord.

In the midst of the waiting, remember that our God is a relational God and sometimes we will cling to Him by faith in the midst of hard times that we don't do when we are walking on easy street. Sometimes it is when we are in the midst of hard times in the world that we are, in fact, closest to the Lord, who wants us to dwell in His presence. So we wait on the Lord. This is a biblical reality.

Finally, living by faith at wits' end, faith:

### 3. Focuses on the attributes of God (1:12-13)

We see this as Habakkuk was opening up his second complaint. What we see is that in the strain of his situation, God was the gravitational pull of Habakkuk's heart. Understand, here was a man who had studied some theology.

When a person has been reflecting on the attributes and characteristics of God prior to a trial, the Spirit is going to bring those things to heart while in the middle of the trial. Here Habakkuk was in the middle of his trial and he was speaking back to God what he knew to be true of God.

He was speaking back to the Lord in middle of all that was happening, *I know you are the holy One. I know you are holy. I know that you are my God. You are the rock. You are the foundation. You are the support of this nation's life and my life. That is who you are.*

Those things were still in place in his heart, even while he was struggling. What encouraged me as Habakkuk was praying to the Lord is that he began with the eternal nature of God; that God is everlasting.

For the child of God who has entered into the Kingdom of God through faith in the Messiah, when we visit wits' end, we need to keep in mind that our God is the Everlasting King. The people and the nations and the rulers and the kings of this earth, they will come and they will go, but the Kingdom of our God is forever.

It says in Psalm 103:17:

**<sup>17</sup>But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him...**

We are going to bask in the love of God for all eternity. God's paradise outlasts wits' end. In the end, wits' end is going to feel like a speck of sand compared to how long eternity is.

I was listening to a sermon a while back, and I wrote down something that was said in that sermon. It encouraged my heart. Maybe it will encourage your heart as well.

**You will get through this. It won't be painless and it won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good. Don't be foolish or naïve, but do not despair. With God's help you will get through this.**

Not only will we get through it, but when life in this fallen world has ended, we proceed into a kingdom that is going to be filled with perfection and joy and love untarnished. There are great number of happy dances to come, even though we feel like singing a dirge sometimes now. The Lord is the Everlasting God and He will see you through.

Let's pray.