

## NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 4th February 2024 am

**TITLE: "Trust in a trustworthy God. TEXT: Habakkuk 2 verses 1-20**

**Series: Lament and Faith in the Sovereign God part 3**

### Scripture references from the ESV

**Habakkuk Ch 2** 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.

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.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Moreover, wine<sup>[b]</sup> is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

<sup>6</sup> Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long? — and loads himself with pledges!"

<sup>7</sup> Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them.

<sup>8</sup> Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

<sup>9</sup> "Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm!

<sup>10</sup> You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life.

<sup>11</sup> For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.

<sup>12</sup> "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!

<sup>13</sup> Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labour merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing?

<sup>14</sup> For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

<sup>15</sup> "Woe to him who makes his neighbours drink— you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness!

<sup>16</sup> You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your

uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory!

<sup>17</sup> The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

<sup>18</sup> "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!

<sup>19</sup> Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.

<sup>20</sup> But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

When Fred West, the serial killer, hung himself and Jimmy Savile died before it came to light that he had been a prolific paedophile, some people were just glad they were dead, but others were outraged that they would never stand trial and believed that they had escaped justice. More recently, the unfolding tale of the falsely accused postmasters and postmistresses shows us that the failure to bring culprits to justice still happens. These are extreme cases where the guilty appear to have escaped justice, but every day smaller injustices take place in all of our lives. We might have had our reputation ruined by lies, or have had money stolen from us or property damaged without the culprits ever confessing or being caught. We wish justice could be done.

### **Where do we turn when we feel we have been unjustly treated?**

From Habakkuk we will see that, for those whose confidence is in the Lord,

**we can rest in the assurance that ultimately justice will be done**

**because God is a just God who we must put our trust in to judge justly.**

We are looking at the big question that Habakkuk was asking – a question that is still asked today:

**How can a good God allow evil and suffering to continue in the world that he governs?**

Habakkuk can see the evil amongst his own people, and it seems to him that God is not doing anything about it. Even worse, when he talks to God about it, he learns that God is going to use the evil Chaldeans to punish his own people,

Israel. This does not make sense to him and now Habakkuk has another question:

**How can a good God use evil to justly deal with evil?**

So far, we have seen the foundational truth on which we can lean as we seek the answer.

## God is sovereign and God is good

We have been shown the language of lament through which we can cry out to God in our struggle but

### We also need to trust God.

There seems to be no hope of the righteous ever receiving justice, in Habakkuk's view. **So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.** (1:4). However, God's response is to tell him that this is not so. Rather, the righteous will live by faith (2:4 above) and in the process they will flourish, because God is sovereign, good and just. **Chapter 2** (above) contains five statements, all starting with 'Woe', about the wickedness of the Chaldeans that show us the knowledge, justice and power of God.

1. **The knowledge of God.** Habakkuk accuses God of turning a blind eye to the sin of his people (**Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?** 1:3) and the sin of the Chaldeans (**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?** 1:13). The 'woe' statements show that God is **not** turning a blind eye to sin.

**God sees everything that takes place in his world, the world that he governs.**

**He does have knowledge of the evil that is happening.**

In fact, God describes this evil to Habakkuk, beginning by speaking about the sin of pride and discontent (v5 above). He describes a man who is intoxicated by wine and by his own success, priding himself in his own achievements. Yet that man is never satisfied, but must always have more. The larger his empire becomes, the bigger he wants it to be and so he must endlessly conquer more nations. This heart of pride that is never satisfied leads to the sins that are condemned:

- Selfish ambition (vv6-8)
- Covetousness (vv9-11)
- Exploitation of people (vv12-14)
- Drunkenness and violence (vv15-17)
- Idolatry (vv18-20)

Who does this describe? It might be either the Babylonians, or the unrighteous Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar's pride was certainly his downfall, but the text suggests that Habakkuk is also concerned about the evil in his own nation. God is not specific about who will be judged (**vv4-5**) when he responds to Habakkuk.

**God means us to apply this to all evil people.**

It is not just the Babylonians and the unrighteous Israelites but also those living today, including Christians, who behave like this. Pride, selfish ambition, people who are never satisfied, covetousness, exploitation of the weak, drunkenness and violence, idolatry – all these accurately describe our culture today. It is true that we no longer make images and then bow down to them. However, we make idols of celebrities, our homes, cars and money. An idol is whatever has your heart – whatever you spend the most time thinking about. This applies to the church, as well as the secular world.

These verses tell us what God sees as he looks down on this earth right now. They tell us that:

**God is never unaware of the evil that is taking place in the world that he governs.**

**Nothing is hidden from God, not even our thoughts**

**2. The justice of God.** We may well ask with Habakkuk: why does God appear to be doing nothing about it?

However, for every sin listed here there is a recompense that is equal to the crime.

As examples:

- The Babylonians ruthlessly plundered many nations, but a day is coming when those who had been plundered will plunder them. (**vv6,8** above).
- Innocent people are put to shame, but the one who shames will be shamed himself (**vv15-16** above)

Historically, these five woes happened to both Israel and Babylon, and have happened to other nations and people. Indeed, they are still happening today. The Bible is very clear:

**God will not allow sin to go unpunished**

- Habakkuk was wrong about God in his lament – God does not idly look at wrong or idly look at traitors. God will judge all evil that is done in his world.

That should both encourage and sober us. Those we think have escaped justice will not ultimately get away with it.

### **One day justice will be done.**

However, bear in mind that God will not allow the sin of his own people to continue either. He does not just judge the Babylonians. He also uses the Babylonians to judge Israel for their sin. God will not allow his people to continue in sinful patterns of behaviour – he will purify us.

Sometimes Christians suffer unjustly, but scripture tells us that, on occasion, God uses evil people to bring his own people to a place of repentance. The Psalmist tells us **Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word (Ps 119:67).**

### **God is just and in justice he deals with ALL sin.**

**3. The power of God.** You may be asking yourself whether all these events could just be the natural laws of cause and effect, but the text tells us otherwise (**v12-14** above). The reference to the Lord of hosts is a reference to God's great power.

It is used when David goes into battle with Goliath. **"You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. (1 Sam 17:45).** David could do this because God was with him and God was his strength.

The Babylonians fought for an empire that was taken from them by the Medes. They wearied themselves for nothing (**v13**). We are meant to see, with Habakkuk (**v14,20** above):

**It is God who is at work to bring down those who act with evil intentions.**

**God is working in mighty power to bring about justice.**

Habakkuk sees that it is the mighty God, the Lord of Hosts, at work in the world who brings everything the Babylonians achieved to nothing.

- It is the power of the Lord of Hosts that raised up the Babylonians to judge Israel for their sin.
- It is the power of the Lord of Hosts that raised up the Medes to judge the Babylonians for their sin.

How are we meant to respond?

**We are to humble ourselves and stop trying to do things in our own strength.**

### **We are to trust in God**

**The righteous shall live by his faith (v4)** speaks of the trustworthiness of God, and we are to trust God in three ways:

**a) We are to trust God to act.** This chapter makes us ask ourselves:

- Will we be self-reliant and fight for ourselves, seeking to get justice in our own strength? **OR**
- Will we trust God, and leave the one who knows all things to act justly on our behalf?

God shows himself to be a God who not only sees every injustice, but who also has the power to deal justly with every injustice.

### **God calls you to trust him to deal with**

**the evil in the world, the evil in the professing church and the evil in your own heart.**

**b) We are to trust God's timing.** We might cry with Habakkuk 'How long?' when evil continues and we do not see God doing anything to avenge us or to deal with the sin we keep falling in to. Just because God has done nothing yet does not mean that he will not do something (v3). It might seem like a delay to us but

### **God is working according to his own divine timetable**

Trusting God to act means trusting him to act in his time with faith that:

**If God has said he will do it, then he will surely do it.**

**c) We are to trust God's gospel.** Habakkuk was to write down what God showed him so that it could be read and understood by others (v2). It was to be given to heralds who would run through the nation to tell people what God was going to do. It was a message that would serve as a warning to those who were unrepentant and as an encouragement to those who were trusting in God to act.

### **Judgement Day is going to come and no one will escape**

God has told us that Jesus is going to return to this earth and will justly judge everyone who has ever lived. Thus, as God's people:

- we are able to leave God to deal with every injustice that has been done against us.

- we are free to forgive those who have sinned against us, and bless those who are unkind to us.

The justice of God means that it is not just the wrong done **against** you that will be judged, it is also the wrong done **by** you. We must accept that, in his justice, he has to deal justly with the sin we have committed against him.

**Since God cannot turn a blind eye to sin, he cannot turn a blind eye to our sin**

The good news of the gospel is that he has dealt justly with our sin on the cross. There, Jesus bore our sin in his body and was condemned in our place as if he was the one who had sinned against God.

God must expose our sin too because he is just and holy, but he brings it all out and nails it to the cross so that we never have to face his judgement again. If you are trusting in Jesus, you can be secure in the knowledge that you will escape, not because you are sinless, but because Jesus died for you.

**It is the very best news ever and it is news that needs to be heralded.**

Just as Habakkuk needed to pass on God's message, we all need to take up this wonderful news and run through the earth telling people that God is just, that he will deal justly with all sin, but there is a way of escape through faith in Jesus who was judged in our place. We all know people who will face God's judgement, unless they turn to Jesus. They need this message – it is not for us to keep to ourselves.

- Take time to think of one person to share the good news of the gospel with this week.
- If you are not yet saved, then it is time to take that step of faith and put your trust in Jesus.
- If you are carrying hurt in your heart because of injustice done to you, it is time to lay that aside and trust God to deal with it.

**Let us trust in a trustworthy God**