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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Living by Faith When the World is Falling Apart

Habakkuk 2:2-8

I. Luther and Habakkuk: A Word to the Terrified

- A. Terrified Monk, Awaiting Personal Judgment
- B. Terrified Prophet, Awaiting National Judgment
- C. Same Word of Promise to Both

“The righteous will live by faith.”

- D. Timeless questions:
 - 1. What do Habakkuk’s and Luther’s plights have in common?
 - 2. What does the promise mean: “The righteous will live by faith?”
 - 3. What does this have to do with us today?

II. Habakkuk’s Anguished Wait Rewarded

- A. The First Problem: Wicked Oppressors of Judah (1:2-4)

“Why does God not respond to the wrong and injustice of the wicked in Judah?”

Problem: God’s supposed silence and inactivity

- 1. Sinners in Judah breaking the covenant
 - a. idolatrous religion: pride
 - b. idolatrous (materialistic) desires: greed
 - c. oppressive actions: wicked conquest (seizing property, dominating in court, etc.)
 - d. luxurious lifestyles (on the backs of the poor)

2. God seems to be silent, powerless, unconcerned
3. Habakkuk cries out in prayer

“Why are you silent about evil, O God?”

B. God’s First Answer: The Babylonians Are Coming!! (1:5-11)

God is about to respond by hurling the Babylonians at Judah as a judgment

Habakkuk 1:6 I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.

1. Powerful, swift, ferocious, dreaded
2. They are coming to conquer, kill, destroy Judah completely
3. They are godless, arrogant, trusting in their own military power

Within this description should have been enough for Habakkuk... because a holy God cannot tolerate evil ultimately

C. The Prophet Questions God the Second Time:

Why Will You Use the Godless to Discipline Your People?

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

1. Habakkuk anguished over this answer
2. “Out of the frying pan, into the fire!”
3. Babylonians are worse than sinning Judeans
4. There doesn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason to what God is doing

vs. 14 You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.

D. The Prophet’s Anguished Watch Rewarded

Habakkuk 2:1 I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

1. Determined to Wait on God

2. Not Arrogant, Just Insistent

3. Trusting God to Reply

III. Living by Faith

A. Faith Starts with the Word

vs. 2-3 *Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. ³ For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.*

1. "God is there, and He is not silent"

a. Habakkuk's first problem is God's silence... that is dealt with here

b. God speaks first through the prophet

c. God's motive: His own glory, protection for the believer

2. God's Command: Write it down!!

a. written word for Habakkuk's generation

God commands the writing before the events take place

This proves God's foreknowledge and is a great comfort to His children

John 13:19 *"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He."*

b. written word for future generations

Isaiah 30:8 *Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness.*

Daniel 8:26 *"The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future."*

God wanted Habakkuk to write it down for us as well... the message is eternal

c. "Make it plain" = make it clear what I am going to do

The true prophet and the true pastor have the same task: make God's word clear and plain

Nehemiah 8:7-8 The Levites... instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.

- d. God's word meant to be understood
- 3. God's Word is the Basis of Faith
 - a. in a moment: "the righteous will live by faith"
 - b. BUT where does this faith come from??

Romans 10:17 "Faith comes from hearing the word..."

The start of personal salvation: what you do with God's word

B. Faith Transforms the Heart

- 1. Faith Alone Justifies

Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

- 2. Faith Gives Perspective

vs. 4 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith."

- a. "See" = "Behold", see the true situation, not that which outwardly appears
- b. faith gives true insight
- c. wicked oppressors may prosper for a time
- d. Judah's leaders may succeed plundering the poor, and adding house to house... for a time
- e. BUT the Babylonians are coming to judge them
- f. the Babylonians may succeed in conquering the world and stealing other's property for a time
- g. BUT other nations are coming to judge them!!

Thus faith gives true perspective... wicked foes may succeed for a time; but none can escape the sovereign justice of God!!

3. Faith makes us humble

- a. no one truly righteous at all
- b. faith begins to realize the real issue: sinners in the hands of a holy God

Hebrews 10:31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- c. faith makes one look inward humbly... "What about my sin?", says a godly Jew
- d. faith produces repentance

4. Faith also makes us obedient to the word

- a. instructions for survival are about to be given
- b. pay attention, and you will live!!

C. Faith Survives the Test

vs. 3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

Spurgeon: This tarrying of truth becomes a testing of the people, because that gospel, which we are to tell, does not bring forth all its fruit at once to those who hear us. What then? Why, this is the winnowing-fan, this is the sieve, this is the way by which God discerns between the righteous and the wicked. As for the wicked, man, he says, "I do not see any present good coming out of religion. Look at that poor, miserable, sighing, groaning, poverty-stricken Christian over there; what good. has it ever done to him? I do not believe in it." [And so he arrogantly judges the word, rather than stands under it!]

[But] a Christian man, a holy man, a just man, a justified man, talks thus: "Yes, if God has spoken anything, it is true. If God has said that, it will be fulfilled. I will wait. Troubles may multiply; cares may come like a deluge; but I will wait. I am sure that God is true, and I will wait and watch for the unfolding of his purposes. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; I will never give up reliance upon him."

1. The Revelation is True... But Future

Seventy years would pass after Babylon had conquered Jerusalem before these words would be fulfilled... the "appointed time"

The Medo-Persian army would stop up the Euphrates river, crawl under the mighty wall of Babylon, and slaughter the drunken and slumbering Babylonians

And Babylon, mighty Babylon would fall!!

2. The Word is Unbreakable... But NOT YET

it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay

The end will come with absolute certainty, and not a moment later than God has sovereignly ordained

Faith believes and waits... no matter how powerful Babylon looks during that time span

3. The Intervening Time is a Test of Faith

a. belief in the word CONTRARY to current events

The wicked will, for a time, seem to have every single advantage

In the end, however, God will judge them all!!

In the meantime, God is testing our faith

b. belief in the word no matter what happens to you personally

4. Habakkuk models this perfectly for us at the end

Habakkuk 3:16-18 I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. ¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

No matter what evidence I see with my eyes, YET I WILL TRUST GOD'S WORD, and I WILL TRUST GOD'S CHARACTER! I will rejoice in God no matter what!!!

D. Faith Survives the Judgment

1. Babylonians Coming to Judge

Habakkuk 1:12 O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.

a. destruction will be TOTAL

2 Chronicles 36:17-19 He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁸ He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. ¹⁹ They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

b. people will be slaughtered wholesale without mercy

Jeremiah 16:4 "They will die of deadly diseases. They will not be mourned or buried but will be like refuse lying on the ground. They will perish by sword and famine, and their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth."

Ezekiel 6:11-12 " `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out "Alas!" because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel, for they will fall by the sword, famine and plague. ¹² He that is far away will die of the plague, and he that is near will fall by the sword, and he that survives and is spared will die of famine. So will I spend my wrath upon them.

2. Absolutely no escape possible

Amos 9:1-4 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and he said: "Strike the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds shake. Bring them down on the heads of all the people; those who are left I will kill with the sword. Not one will get away, none will escape. ² Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. ³ Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, there I will hunt them down and seize them. Though they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent to bite them. ⁴ Though they are driven into exile by their enemies, there I will command the sword to slay them. I will fix my eyes upon them for evil and not for good."

3. Who, then, will survive?

Abraham's anguished question over Sodom and Gomorrah:

Genesis 18:23 Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

God's answer here in Habakkuk 2:4: NEVER...

vs. 4 "The righteous will live by his faith."

- a. OT Hebrew: "faith" means "covenant faithfulness"
- b. NT: trust in God's promise resulting in obedient life
- c. people like this are "righteous" by grace... like Abraham
- d. they will survive every judgment

4. The Remnant chosen by grace

Romans 11:5-6 *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*

Remnant: a small group of Israelites who would survive the judgment

- a. Isaiah spoke of the remnant

Isaiah 10:20-23 *In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. ²¹ A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. ²² Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. ²³ The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.*

- b. Ezekiel spoke of the remnant

Ezekiel 6:8 *" `But I will spare some, for some of you will escape the sword when you are scattered among the lands and nations.*

- c. Daniel was part of the remnant

Daniel 1 [Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah... Shadrach, Meshach & Abednege... among the remnant saved by grace]

- d. Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe was spared as well

Jeremiah 45:4-5 *The LORD said, "Say this to him: `This is what the LORD says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the land. ⁵ Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. For I will bring*

disaster on all people, declares the LORD, but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life.' "

e. Ebed-Melech, the Cushite, who spoke up for Jeremiah and saved him

Jeremiah 39:15-18 *While Jeremiah had been confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him: ¹⁶ "Go and tell Ebed-Melech the Cushite, 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city through disaster, not prosperity. At that time they will be fulfilled before your eyes. ¹⁷ But I will rescue you on that day, declares the LORD; you will not be handed over to those you fear. ¹⁸ I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD.'* "

f. the Poor in the Land... so oppressed by wicked Judah's leaders

Jeremiah 39:10 *But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poor people, who owned nothing; and at that time he gave them vineyards and fields.*

g. suffering prophet Jeremiah himself

Jeremiah 39:11-12 *Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given these orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard: ¹² "Take him and look after him; don't harm him but do for him whatever he asks."*

All these lived by their obedient faith in God, hearing and obeying God's word

5. Remnant restricted by disobedience to the word

Faith produces obedience to word... remember I told you there would be instructions in how to survive the Babylonians:

a. Jeremiah to all the people

Jeremiah 38:2 *"This is what the LORD says: 'Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. He will escape with his life; he will live.'*

b. Jeremiah to King Zedekiah

Jeremiah 38:17-18 *Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your*

family will live. ¹⁸ But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands.' "

BUT faithless Jerusalem refused to listen to the gracious command to flee and live... instead they attacked the messenger and put him in shackles and into a deep muddy cistern

Pride also says, "Make the wall stronger... we can beat the Babylonians!!" Faith humbles itself under God's will

Pride makes deals to try to get out of the situation... Faith accepts God's decree and submits to it

Pride organizes the soldiers and stores up food and water for a long siege... Faith listens to God's messengers and obeys their instructions

God gave them a message of escape...

"The righteous will live by his faith"

If you hear and obey, you will live

So it is today, with the Gospel of Christ... as I will make clear in a moment

IV. Dying by Pride

A Vivid Contrast: Living by Faith or Dying by Pride

vs. 4-5 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright--but the righteous will live by his faith-- ⁵ indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.

A. Pride Starts with Self

"His soul is lifted up within him"

Just like King of Babylon and Satan in Isaiah 14:

Isaiah 14:13-14 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. ¹⁴ I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

1. God's two great commands

Matthew 22:37-39 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

2. Sin's two great rejections

- 1) Reject the true God by making a god out of your own imagination; in the end you worship yourself
- 2) Reject your neighbor by stripping him of everything of value and killing him when you are done; in the end, your neighbor exists to serve you

Both flow from arrogance and pride... from SELF

True of Jewish oppressors... True of Babylonian invaders

True of American pagans as well; building their own empires at the expense of service to God and neighbor

B. Pride Hardens the Heart

"His desires are not upright"

1. Hebrew: lit. "not righteous"
2. His desires reflect his character... he yearns, he wants, he hungers for what is not rightfully his
3. He has AMBITIONS!!! He does not love God or neighbor... he loves himself and whatever glory he can gain for himself
4. This is precisely why he will be judged... He does not conquer at the command of God and for the glory of God

C. Pride Builds an Empire

vs. 5 indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.

1. Pride is NEVER satisfied with what one has
2. Pride MUST move out, riding forth conquering and to conquer

3. GREEDY = hungry for what does not belong to him
 - a. neighbor's houses, lands, animals, possession
 - b. God's glory
4. Restless and relentless... never satisfied

Does a fire ever say "That's enough wood... I'm satisfied today!""??

Does the grave ever say, "You know, I've consumed my share of people this year... let's wait till next year before more people can die!!""??

NO!! The grave never says "Enough!!" Neither does an arrogant empire-builder

Illus. Alexander the Great wept when he realized there were no more worlds to conquer

5. Scope is WORLD-WIDE domination

he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples

D. Pride Provokes the Judgment

1. Christ's Clear Teaching About Empires Built by Conquest

Matthew 26:52 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.

Live by the Sword, Die by the Sword!!

2. Ruthless conquerors eventually all get conquered ruthlessly

vs. 7-8 Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.

3. Five-fold WOE!!!

vs. 6 "Woe!" vs. 9 "Woe!" vs. 12 "Woe!" vs. 15 "Woe!" vs. 19 "Woe!"

Woe is Bible's word for "Judgment is coming soon!! Beware!!"

Clear answer to Habakkuk: Just as I judged the wicked oppressors of Judah, so I will judge the wicked conquerors from Babylon

Next week, we will see the Rise and Fall of the World... one Human Empire after another... all of them humbled before the glory of God

vs. 12-13 *Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*

V. Application

"The righteous will live by faith"

New Testament Quotes this three times... it applies the concept for us

A. Who is Righteous? Romans 1:17

Romans 1:16-17 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Luther's discovery: NOT righteous by good deeds, but by simple faith in Jesus Christ

B. What is Faith? Hebrews 10:

Hebrews 10:35-39 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷ For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. ³⁸ But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Saving faith is a confident assurance that God will keep all his promises, no matter what happens in this physical world. Saving faith is trusting in God even when the walls of Jerusalem are crumbling around you and you see the first Babylonian soldiers pouring in through the cracks. Faith is trusting the God will keep His promise to all who believe in Christ..

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11: "By faith" we enter a kingdom that cannot be seen and live there forever and ever!!

C. What Does 'Live' Mean?

Galatians 3:11-12 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." ¹² The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

1. Moment by moment trust in God resulting in obedience to God's word
2. Ultimately: survival on Judgment Day
 - a. Living by faith means not trusting in your own righteousness
 - b. Living by faith means not building an earthly empire
 - c. Living by faith means not setting your heart on things below
 - d. Living by faith means focusing entirely on Jesus Christ, and His gift of righteousness

D. The World WILL Fall Apart... Will YOU Survive by Faith??

Hebrews 12:26-27 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷ The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

Judgment Day will be far worse than the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians... on that day everything will be shaken

Just as God's word of judgment hung over the Jews of old, it hangs over all of us today as well... God's righteous punishment of sin awaits us all apart from Christ

BUT...

"The righteous will live by faith"

Through simple faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will survive judgment day