

A PRAYERFUL COMPLAINT OF INJUSTICE

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Habakkuk was a prophet that lived in the final decades of Israel's Southern kingdom somewhere around 640 to 609 BC. He has witnessed the destruction and chaos not only in his own city but is aware of rumblings beyond as well. The Babylonians have marched on the land – defeating the Egyptians and now, moving south and under the command of King Nebuchadnezzar, guess who their sights are on? Judah.

But there is more going on than just the threat of the Babylonians – because that's this “outside of Judah” understanding that God wants Habakkuk to see, that God will reveal to Judah more in the next chapter...but the people IN Judah are simply not good people - and THAT is Habakkuk's worldview. His self and his people...and nothing beyond. Which is right. He sees the bad in his society and wants God to stop it, change it, deal with it. And so what we get is Habakkuk's viewing of HIS world (inside Judah) and his complaint. Well, that's what our Bibles call it, a “complaint” but really it's a prayer. A prayer to God to listen, respond, move, and restore.

READ TEXT: Habakkuk 1:1-11

As you can see what we have is a prayer of complaint and then the answer from God – and ironically the Lord's answer is nearly 3x longer than the prayer! I'm not saying be careful what you pray for...but be ready to receive whatever God responds with! If you're not ready to hear what God says...well...(you should still pray)

There are two complaints that Habakkuk has, and their legitimate complaints. First, he wants to know how long God is going to be silent to his calls for help and, secondly he wants to know why God sits back and simply allows bad things to happen. It's to the point that Habakkuk feels like he's being ignored by God and God is indifferent to the ways of this city. And it's not even being indifferent – it appears, to him, that he simply tolerates it. He allows it to take place, to occur without any interference. There is no “law” because there is so much violence and the wicked contain the righteous so much so that there simply is now no justice. And the justice that IS there is “perverted.” And this word “perverted”, in Hebrew, means confused or crazy. And so you get this image of justice wanting to do good but not doing good because it's simply all over the place and scattered. Maybe a little good here...and a lot of bad here...then back to good, and so forth.

And there is no sense of justice being centered on that which is right. So the IDEA of justice and goodness and righteousness is there...but it's so infested with evil that it's pointless. Nobody wants to live in a place of constant turmoil. Nobody wants to walk down the street and see crime happening and everyone looking the other way.

This is yours and mine, *THEIR*, worst nightmare.

We see bad people thriving – and we cry out “Not fair!” We see good people dying at the hands of violence, we see people driven from their homes, we see evil – the Taliban and ISIS – thriving and taking over cities WITH violence and forcing people to become slaves and kill less they be killed themselves...and we wonder where God is. *“Why aren't you moving God? Why aren't you acting? Why aren't you saving, restoring, stopping, pushing back – and putting an end to all of it? Because we know you can! We know you will!”*

God, why do you sit there and watch?”

What's difficult for us is that most of those kind of things happen far away from us. Granted some of it doesn't...but most of it is seen in the news, read in the papers, followed on the internet and observed from the comforts of our own homes, offices, and places that are NOT that place. None of us are looking down from our homes and seeing the chaos. Most of us have no idea what true violence and destruction looks like. We see injustice...we see those who go against God thrive, we see conflict...but nothing to the point of where we fear death. Nothing like what is going on in other countries like South Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, CAR (Central African Republic), Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, North Korea, Russia, and Nigeria. Where there is violence, kidnapping, death, murder, political corruption, war, starvation.

Why God? Why do you allow these things to happen? Why does it seem like you are ignoring our pleas?

And these are great questions! As people of God we declare that he is loving, kind, and full of grace and mercy and that he redeems the lost and that he simply does not put up with evil, hatred, sin, and even death! So why does God allow these things to happen?

I'm pretty sure Habakkuk was not ready for the response he gets.

God tells Habakkuk to watch! *“You think I don’t do anything? Look beyond you...look beyond your understandings of this world and see what I am doing.”*

And God’s answer is full of similes that would have struck fear into Habakkuk. The worst people you could imagine, the Babylonians, are going to sweep across the whole earth – and it is something I, YOUR GOD, am doing. These fearless and ruthless people that have horses swifter than leopards and fiercer than wolves at feeding times...will fall upon you. You cannot, and will not, be able to hide for they are even like the eagles that soar high above and can swoop down and devour you as you try to scamper away! They have violence on their mind and as they move, as they devour like locusts on a field, they gather all the people they attack and take them as prisoners.

You think you can run? You think you can hide in your cities? They destroy cities and laugh at their kings. Just like the wind blows and funnels into windows and doorways – so too will this Babylonian army...that I SEND to you.

This is God’s response to a man’s prayer. From the sounds of it God is simply going to wipe them all out. And next week we’ll see Habakkuk’s response to God’s answer...but right now – we’re sitting with how God responds to not only Habakkuk but the violence amongst his own people.

Habakkuk wanted to know why God allowed the violence and conflict and injustice that was going on in his own city and his own surroundings. And yet, even with that care of his own city of Judah – how much did he really care? He complains of all that is happening and yet it’s the very covenantal people of God that are doing it! For all his complaints about God’s indifference – where was the outcry of God’s own people living in sin, exploiting the poor, committing all the violence and very atrocities he was angry with seeing? Where was the holding of *themselves* accountable? Why aren’t they stopping the very things they are seeing? When do their words take action? Because as the covenantal people of God there is the reality that God will hold to his covenant...but you will hold to his standards and covenant as well! And guess what Judah...you are not holding to God’s standards of what it means to be the children of God.

You know how this game works, how this system is carried out...and yet you aren’t doing it, you aren’t being the children of God towards each other. In this text, the Lord’s Answer to Habakkuk’s prayer of complaint is a reminder that when we do not act as the

children of God we will be dealt with. Just because you know God's name does not give you a free pass to hate, be violent, kill, and even tolerate wrong doing ourselves.

I've said it lots of times – but people have never changed. We live in a world that, for the most part, understands right and wrong, good and bad, evil and goodness. We, as Christians, live in a world where we know that this is not what God created, not what will end up being, and yet called to live today as stewards, outspoken care-takers, lovers, and givers unto others. We, as Christians, proclaim that God's stamp of "mine" is on every nook and cranny, leaf and blade, rock and mountain, sea, pond, puddle, lake, and ocean. From the tops of the mountains to the depths of the seas – and all spaces in-between: it is all God's. He is the creator, sustainer, and holder of all seen and unseen. And sometimes, often times, it's really hard to reconcile why God allows some things to take place and others not to. It's really hard to comprehend the workings of God and why he would simply bring a destruction or respond with such extremes to my prayer – but that *there* is MY problem...and not his. God works in *his* ways for *his* glory. God works and allows things to happen because his picture and understanding is much bigger than ours. **Isaiah 55:8-9** reads "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.*" *This is the Lord's declaration. "For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* So simply because we see famine, earthquakes, the slaughtering of innocent people – simply because those things happen in this lifetime does NOT give us permission to say that God doesn't listen, or that he doesn't save, or that he tolerates wrongdoing, destruction, and violence or simply doesn't get it. If that were the case then God would have stopped at seeing Adam and Eve in the garden, shook his head and whipped his hands clean of them saying, "*You're on your own kiddos!*" If God had an intolerance and indifference to the happenings of this world than he wouldn't have planned, all along, to send his one and only Son to redeem the broken, gather in the lost, and redeem his chosen people. If God was indifferent there would be no birth of Christ, atoning of sins, raising to life nor promise to return again to put an end to all that sin and violence that we see about, hear about, and commit ourselves. If God was indifferent, silent, and uncaring then he would never had sent his Spirit down to bring comfort to a people in distress, to bring peace upon the souls of people at war. Encouraging love, encouraging sacrifice, standing up and "doing something" while in the midst of death and destruction. Acting, saving, responding...that's his thing! Not only as the Father, not only as the Son, but by his Spirit as well.

Yes, part of this is that you and I need to turn to him in complaintive prayers when we don't like things happening. Ask God, "Why!?" Ask God, "Where are you?" Those are honest and good questions that we are able to have with him! And Habakkuk does a great job there – we need to take a page from his honest prayer to God! But know that God says, "Go here, serve there, be with those people over there and help bring hope to the hopeless, love to the broken, peace to the turmoiled at heart." God's response is a reminder that you and I are ALSO held accountable to live as covenantal people, redeemed men and women, adopted sons and daughters of God and so love, serve, live, and be heirs of his kingdom to come...today. Be the hands and feet of Christ in a world that want's nothing to do with it. This is the beautiful challenge of these first couple of verses and God's response – that even in this prayerful complaint, God's response is that you should be doing something WHILE YOU PRAY FOR ME TO ACT. We should:

- Stop violence when you see it.
- Speak into injustice when you hear about it – don't just shake your head.
- Do not tolerate ANY wrongdoing. On any level. From your own household, to your neighbors, to your church, community, state, country, and world.
- Do not allow injustice to pervert the law and paralyze it from being that which it should.
- Cry out to God in prayer and petition for him to do something – but know that his doing something, today, includes you and me!

God didn't create us to be people to sit idly by. He says be my children. Act like Christ to all! We have the power of the Holy Spirit within us...let's use him!

But above all of this know that while we don't get it...that doesn't mean God doesn't and won't allow it to stand. He is doing something about it – in *his* time and in *his* way. The return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, means that God is not only in control but that he will not let it have the last say.

I think Habakkuk is one of the most relatable books of the Bible that we have. A book that opens up our eyes to the injustices of this world, through the time of Habakkuk, that also challenges us to go before God and trust him. Even when we can't comprehend or see what God is doing – our trust is that his love for you and me and his fallen world will not stay fallen, will not stay broken, and will in fact be redeemed by the very One we so often find ourselves wondering where he is.