

“The Righteous Will Live by His Faith!”

‡ How long must I call? (1:1-3)

‡ Wait on the LORD’s faithfulness. (2:1-4)

In the name of Jesus, our Righteousness from God, dear faithful Christians:

Ever hear someone say, “I can’t believe this is happening to me”? People need to escape. Ask producer Jerry Bruckheimer, “What do you want on your tombstone?” His answer would be: “He really entertained audiences; he made them feel better for a couple of hours.” (*The Costco Connection*, October 2010, p. 30.) How far can you escape with *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *National Treasure*, or *Blackhawk Down*?

What about troubles we cannot turn off? Toils that don’t fade with the final credits? Pain that won’t turn the channel, especially for someone you love? For Habakkuk there was no remote to reverse the Assyrian atrocities up north in Israel. No fast forward could keep the Babylonians from trashing tiny Judah in the south. There was no pause for the pain. And when God is the Director and Producer of your life, yet heartache follows misery in spite of all your prayers, you can’t help asking with Habakkuk...

‡ How long must I call? (1:1-3)

“How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.”

Habakkuk had no use for action adventure; he needed a vacation from reality. What hurt him most was that God seemed to be grabbing him by the ears to make him look at corrupt judges condemning the victims. The Almighty Judge seemed to respect terrorists stirring up trouble to kill and maim the innocent while enriching the guilty. Enemies and citizens were making real-life movies of murder and mayhem. And theirs was not some male actor in a girl’s pink outfit trying to sell you more care insurance.

Can you hear echoes of other believers? What was Job’s complaint in the oldest book of the Bible? “Why me, LORD? Why these troubles that you yourself say I do not deserve?” What about David in Psalm 37 where evil men kept attacking the poor and needy? Why did Asaph in Psalm 73 almost lose his faith? Wicked with healthy bodies and a carefree lifestyle seem so unfair when God’s people hurt.

Who else got such a shocking answer as Habakkuk to his complaint. The LORD replied: ***“Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.”*** (1:5f NIV)

Did your Dad ever try that when you hurt your finger? “See if I grab your leg like this, you don’t feel your finger anymore, right?” “Dad! It hurts!” Now the feared and dreaded Babylonians with the latest technology and their unstoppable war machine! How did that answer Habakkuk’s complaint?

Here is where human reason always fails to fear, love and trust in God above all things. When God tells us something we don’t want to hear, we rebel like the Israelites at the edge of the Promised Land. Instead of believing the minority report of Joshua and Caleb consistent with God’s powerful promises, the people sided with the ten spies who called for them to go back to Egypt. Then when the LORD grew angry enough to destroy them in the desert, they decided to go ahead and attack the Canaanites anyway. Pride and presumption are twin sisters. And every time we want to hire them for our Amazon army, we lose. **How long must I call?** can be a cry of despair as unbelief slides into hell. But Habakkuk went the other way. By faith he climbed the mountain of God’s promises to...

† Wait on the LORD's faithfulness. (2:1-4)

Remarkably, Habakkuk's second complaint turned from prayer to praise! *"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. 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?"* (1:12fNIV) Habakkuk keeps climbing higher: *"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."*

Maybe these were not just his questions. As a prophet of the LORD, Habakkuk was supposed to pray for God's people too. He needed answers not only for his own soul, but for those in his care. And God's answers show us qualities of God's Holy Word which we don't ever want to forget.

Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. 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."

Heralds still run tirelessly to tell this far and wide. God's justice seemed so slow in coming, but in its day, at *the appointed time*, it burst across the pages of history as God wrote His-story. Justice for all crimes of all time came crashing down on the innocent head of that Man hanging on the middle cross of Calvary. And every hurting heart longing for consolation can find it here. The Lord inspired His Apostle Paul: *"This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."* (2 Timothy 1:9f Second Lesson) God's revelation may seem to *"linger,"* but *"wait for it,"* because in its time *"it will certainly come and will not delay."* One of the great defenders of the Christian faith, C.S. Lewis put it this way: "The mills of the Lord grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine." They ground down fine on Jesus to set us free.

Habakkuk, your eyes won't solve this problem. Sighing can't take it away. God knows the wicked. *"See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright."* God does not need you to explain how bad things really are. You see only surface evil. God sees sin deep in the souls of all people everywhere. They cannot catch life and happiness by their own pursuit. *"Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?"* (2:13)

Habakkuk, *"The righteous by his faith..."*, that's what God calls you when you come into His courtroom. The debt of guilt you could never repay, God paid for you as Jesus died in your place. Trembling, you see no wrath in the Almighty Judge. He smiles with a kind hearted joy that melts your heart and warms your soul. "You're free!" He says. "See what my Son did for you? *'The righteous by his faith will live!'*" Jesus came that you might *'have life and have it to the full.'* (John 10:10) I want you to enjoy all my blessings now on earth and ever after in heaven. Many fight against my free gift of everlasting love, but *faith* takes hold of the *righteousness* I give. Some want to pound out the sureness of salvation in Christ alone, but *faith* will always run with the Gospel of forgiveness to all the world."

*Last eve I paused beside a blacksmith's door, And heard the anvil sing the vesper chime;
Then, looking in, I saw upon the floor Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.*

*"How many anvils have you had," said I, "To wear and batter all those hammers so?"
"Just one," he said, then, with a twinkling eye, "The anvil wears the hammer out, you know."*

*And so, I thought, the anvil of God's Word For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard, The anvil is unharmed – the hammers gone.*¹

¹ Dr. John Clifford, quoted in Rein, R.C. *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: NPH, 1983, § 141.
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Let sorrow and tears be gone. Let truth and love prevail for Jesus' sake. Amen.