

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST June 16, 19, 20, 2004
St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

WE LIVE BY FAITH Habakkuk 2:2-4

Why? That is a question that often crosses our lips and minds. If God is such a good and loving God why does he allow evil in this world? If God is so wonderful and kind then why does he allow one of his followers to suffer from cancer and then take her from this world at the age of 49? This is a question that believers have wrestled with for ages and you and I are not alone in asking the same question. King David expresses it very well when he asks God, "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and everyday have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? (Psalm 13:1-2) That is the question that the prophet Habakkuk addresses in his short prophecy and God gives him an answer that you and I need to hear regularly and often.

As we continue our three-week study of three of the Minor Prophets, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, today we focus our attention on the prophecy of Habakkuk. We don't know much about Habakkuk. It appears that he lived in Judah about the late 600's BC. It was a time when the Babylonians were coming to power. They had defeated the Assyrians and in 605 BC would defeat the Egyptians and gain control of much of the Middle East. The Babylonians today are part of the country of Iraq. It would be the Babylonians that God would then use to punish the people of Judah, the southern kingdom, because of their wickedness and turning away from him. As Habakkuk wrestles with the weighty question of why evil was seeming to triumph and the wicked prospered while the believers suffered, God does not allow Habakkuk's question to go unanswered. Let's listen and learn for ourselves that **WE LIVE BY FAITH**. We have all experienced this and know this to be a fact that **I) Things In Life Often Don't Make Sense and They Are Not Fair**. However, we can be assured of one thing **II) The Promises Of God Are Certain**.

THINGS IN LIFE DON'T MAKE SENSE AND THEY ARE NOT FAIR

Has anyone ever told you or led to believe that life is fair and everything makes sense? Well, life isn't fair and things often don't make any sense to us. Habakkuk wrestled with this. As he looked around him in Judah things were a mess. In 609 BC the godly king of Judah, Josiah, had died. His son Jehoiakim had become king of Judah and he was not friendly to God's prophets or to God's Word. Habakkuk complains, "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. Therefore the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted." (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

Sound familiar? Watch the evening news. An eight-year-old girl is shot in the jaw from a stray bullet as she sits in her own home watching TV. Rapists and murderers are slapped on their hands for their crimes and then released so that they can go back out into society and commit the same crimes again. Many in our country are living in continual fear of being attacked, raped or murdered. The situation in Judah in the late 600's BC is not much different from the situation we find in the United States of America in 2004. But that should not surprise us for the Bible tells us that there is nothing new under the sun. "Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before." (Ecclesiastes 3:15)

As God answers Habakkuk's question and complaint, he tells the prophet that he is going to use the Babylonians who still have not risen to be a world power, to come and punish his people. Listen to what the Lord tells Habakkuk. "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth, to seize dwelling places not their own." (Habakkuk 1:6) When Habakkuk hears that he wonders why God would use such a wicked and terrible people to punish his children. That just didn't make

sense to Habakkuk. Listen to what Habakkuk says to God, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why then are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Habakkuk 1:13) Habakkuk says to God, “you know what those Babylonians are like. They are proud and arrogant. They are pagans and you are going to use them to punish and destroy your chosen people? That just doesn’t make sense.

Just like many things in our lives don’t make sense. Why do believers suffer? Why does a faithful Christian suffer terrible disease and pain? This is the same thing that you and I grapple with regularly. It is also the question we often get from those who don’t believe in the Lord. We hear them say, “If your God is so loving, forgiving and kind, then why is there so much evil and trouble in this world? Why does your God allow all these things to happen?

God does give Habakkuk and us an answer to that troubling question.

GOD’S PROMISES ARE CERTAIN

God says to Habakkuk, “Write down the revelation and carve it on stone tablets so that a runner may read it aloud.” (v. 2) God is telling Habakkuk put it on a billboard so that someone running by can read it and know what I have to say. God wants his answer to be seen and known by all. He doesn’t say write it in small letters and put it in a book that may be set aside. God wants it out there in front of people so that they know what he has to say.

Now here is God’s answer. “For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and it will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay.” (v. 3) God’s promises are certain. When God promises you that something will happen, it will happen. But it will happen in God’s appointed time. We are a people who want to see things done now. We have very little patience. I see that over and over again. People have some problem that has developed in their life over 20 years. They come in for counseling and help and they expect that in 60 minutes what has happened over 20 years can all be solved. Get real! It will take years to change and correct attitudes and ways of responding and reacting. It does not happen over night.

When God promised a rescuer in the Garden of Eden for the human race, Adam and Eve assumed that their first child was that promised Savior. Listen to what Eve said when Cain was born, “I have the man, the Lord.” (Genesis 4:1c) But God took almost 3,000 years to fulfill that promise. Did he keep it? He certainly did, but in his appointed time. Had God lied to our first parents? No. God does not lie. Every promise that he makes to you and me he keeps in his appointed time. When Jesus ascended he promised us that he would return again to judge the entire human race. It’s been over 1974 years since Jesus left and that hasn’t happened. Will it happen? It certainly will. As God told Habakkuk, he also says to you and me, ““though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay.” (V 3c)

This is hard for every one of us to do. We see the problems, we experience the pain, the illnesses and troubles and we want immediate solutions and healings rather than just trusting God’s promise and saying, “God knows what he is doing and this is all going to work for my good.” We have trouble trusting God’s promises. Something new? No. Think of Abraham. God told him that he and his wife were going to be the ancestors of the Savior of the world. They would produce an offspring who would one day rescue the human race. Nothing happened. They were getting older and so Sarah gave her maid to Abraham to have a child by her so that they could get on with this promise. Was this the right thing to do? No. They were taking matters into their hands and were going to help God out. We know that when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, they had the child that God had promised them. Our God is faithful.

That is why you and I live by faith. As God concludes his remarks to Habakkuk, he says, “See, he is puffed up, his desires are not upright – but the righteous will live by his faith.” (v. 4) Who is the **he** that God is talking

about? It is the Babylonians, the pagan nation that God is going to use to punish the people of Judah for their wickedness and sin. God says that the Babylonians are proud and haughty. They are patting themselves on the back for how powerful they have become and how great they are. The day would come when they would be brought their knees by the Medes and the Persians, modern day Iran. God then compares those who put their trust in themselves to the righteous. He says the righteous live by faith.

You and I are righteous before God through faith in Jesus. We don't put a lot of stock in our abilities and works because we recognize that we are basically evil and corrupt and were born that way. However, Jesus Christ is truly righteous and holy. He is a perfect person. He removed our sins and imperfection from us by his death on the cross and took our sins away. And God has credited Jesus righteousness to us. As the Bible says, "God made him (that is, Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) We are saints. We have been declared holy and righteous by our God because of the work of his Son Jesus.

We also live by faith. We trust the promises of our God. We believe that all that happens in our life has a reason and purpose and God will work it all for our good, even the sins that we commit. We believe that we are not alone in this world and never will be. We know that our Savior Jesus is always by our side guiding and directing our lives. We believe that our God is faithful and will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear.

Now back to the question that started this sermon – why? Why does God allow evil and wickedness to at times seem to triumph. He has a reason and purpose and he will in the end punish eternally those who reject him. We don't understand God's ways, but we trust his promises to us. We know that God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

When I have questions of why? I realize that I don't always know. But I always believe that my Lord and Savior knows what he is doing and he is in charge here. We are not and we shouldn't try to be. Because we walk by faith not by sight. Trusting in our Lord and his marvelous promises to us. That is why you and I can say with the Apostle, "If God is for us, who can be against us. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all thing?" (Romans 8:31b-32)

Amen.

We Live By Faith

- I. Things in life don't make sense & they are not fair**
 - A. The situation in Judah at the time of Habakkuk
 - B. Our situation in US in 2004
 - C. How God is going to handle it with the Babylonians
 - D. The questions we grapple with & hear from unbelievers
- II. God's Promises are Certain**
 - A. God wants his answer known v.2
 - B. God's promises are reliable v. 3
 1. They come in the appointed time – eg of Adam & Eve
 2. It is hard for us to linger & wait – think of Abraham & Sarah
 - C. We live by faith (v. 4)
 1. We are righteous through faith in Jesus
 2. We live by faith in God's promises to us
 - D. Why?

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and everyday have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

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. Therefore the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted." (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before."

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

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

Write down the revelation and carve it on stone tablets so that a runner may read it aloud."

I have the man, the Lord

"God made him (that is, Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God.

If God is for us, who can be against us. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?"