



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

“How Long will My Faith be Challenged?”

Habakkuk 1:1-6

August 7, 2005

Dr. Matthew J. Hook

When I was a youth minister, I had a dad complain to me: “I don’t understand my kid—he never listens to me!”...let that soak in. Do you hear how brainless that sounds? Today we take a look at a prophet who listened long, and complained too! Let’s see what we can understand by listening to God’s Word...

Then: The government of Judah was corrupt. Violence was a “normal” part of life, poor people in Judah were being oppressed, and God seemed silent. The Torah, the Law was ignored, literally paralyzed, and justice was never upheld. Now: Corrupt governments make it difficult to know who to send the aid money to. Violence, killing, and terrorism are a normal part of our lives through the news, if not in person. The disparity of wealth between rich and poor is huge, and many people argue God seems silent. The year was just before 605B.C....or was that year just after 2005A.D.? Habakkuk brings these issues to the fore: How long will my faith be challenged?

The Book of Habakkuk is unique in the Bible: It is nothing more than a written prayer—a dialogue between God and this man. Let’s look at the opening 6 verses...*1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. 2 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? 3 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. 4 Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted. 5 "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. 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.*

When I read Habakkuk, the first thing that strikes me this morning is that he had eyes that wept over injustice and a heart willing to break over it. We have so many of these same issues, but we live in a time when billions of dollars have been spent researching how to get our attention away from real life. We’ve been trained to be consuming, spectators-only, self-absorbed individuals who have to think beyond God, beyond right and wrong, and ultimately beyond meaning and purpose. So, one difference between Habakkuk and us is that we can try to tune the whole situation out. I ask you this morning: do your eyes weep? Does your heart break? Do you turn to God in prayer, like Habakkuk?

Habakkuk lived in the 600s BC, after the nation of Israel had split into two nations—Israel in the north and Judah in the south, after the northern nation of Israel had been captured and dispersed by the Assyrians. (Remember last week? Nahum was prophesying against Nineveh, and how it would be destroyed by the Babylonians?) Now the southern nation of Judah was not only facing the threat of the Assyrians surrounding them, they were themselves filled with corruption, violence, hatred, and evil.

Now, Habakkuk was a man of God, so he took his problem to God, praying over and over again. But he hadn't gotten an answer, until at last he cries out "Lord! How long do I have to keep this up, crying out to you like this, when nothing happens? I'm praying for revival, I'm praying for life transformation! How long?"

And God answers Habakkuk. God basically says "I haven't been silent. I have been answering your prayer; you just don't recognize it. You won't believe it—I'm raising up the Babylonians. They haven't stopped with the destruction of Nineveh. They're coming for youuu!"

Oops. No wonder Habakkuk didn't recognize God's answer to prayer! It's the same thing that bothers many people as they look at what is happening in the world. Why does God allow things to happen the way they do? Why do such terrible things occur in human history? In a college survey, the number one question students were asking was "How can a just and loving God allow people to suffer? Why would God create us and then allow disease and starvation and all those other terrible things?"

Many people who ask that question today find their faith is actually faltering because of this. You may be asking "How long, Lord?" Some people are quick to answer: God exists. Bad things exist. I see no evidence of God. Therefore, God must not exist. God is whittled down to more of a concept than a person. After all, He doesn't fit the facts. And when we throw God overboard, we inevitably rush in to take God's place ourselves.

We Christians must admit that the "apparent inactivity" of God is mysterious. The ways of God are mysterious to us. We have to recognize that there are times when we just cannot understand how God is moving. As Christ-followers, have you noticed how outside the box God usually is? How anti-establishment He is? God is so unorthodox! He is always doing things the wrong way, picking up the wrong people and operating in the realm of the unexpected. I think God is moving in our midst today in unexpected ways: not because He likes to puzzle us, but because He is so vast, so infinite, so powerful, that the variety of options available to Him are endless, and our human brains cannot grasp them. That was Habakkuk's problem. And God shows us how to approach this challenge to our faith:

First, stop and think. Don't panic, and don't go all emotional over it. Think. (About what?) Second, restate to yourself the basic things you know about God. Don't go for the problem. Back away and begin with God. After all, God is the center of the universe. Review His character and His love as it has been revealed to you in His Word and by experience. Third, take what you know about the character of God and bring it to bear on the problem. That's what Habakkuk did.

God showed him in his prayer that God was "raising up the Babylonians." What a devastating statement! Because of Judah's disobedience, the evil, fierce, destructive Babylonians were able to be used by God against God's own people. Habakkuk's second prayer was basically this: He reminds God of who God is: "*O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, O Rock, Your eyes are too pure to look on evil*". And then after Habakkuk reviews God's character, he says, "Do you have to use the Babylonians? I mean, I know I was praying to you about our people's problems, but come on: we're not as bad as they are!" And he closes his prayer pledging to wait, watch, and listen, leaving his problem in God's hands.

And God answers him again. God says "It isn't going to happen right away, but what I give you will surely come. And God gives a truth to Habakkuk that is quoted 3 times in the New Testament and forms the basis for one of the greatest movements in human history: Hab. 2:4 "*See, as for the proud one, he is puffed up. His soul and his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by faith*". These words are found in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. "The righteous will live by faith" was the phrase that lit a fire in the heart

of Martin Luther in the 1500s. The righteous will live by faith, not by circumstances, or observations, or reasoning, but by faith in what God has said will happen.

Here's a powerful underlying truth: Basically there are two ways to live, two outlooks on life. Only two attitudes we can have as we face challenges to our faith. Either we trust God, or we don't. Either we face life depending on God, or we face it in unbelief depending on our own ability to reason out everything. There are only two: Either you fully rely on God, or you don't. Either God is faithful, or He isn't. I hate labels, but this is one I might consider. Every human being can be put in one of these two categories. Either they are trusting in human resources (which is easy to do, as we have been so blessed), or we trust in God's divine resources. Either God's the center of the universe, or He isn't. Now there is a lot in our lives that tries to get us to buy in to other options, but in the Christian worldview, they just don't exist. The whole reason we call Jesus "the Lord and King" is because Lord was the highest title there was when the Hebrew and Greek Bible was translated into English.

God continues His reply to Habakkuk. God tells him that that Babylonians will be judged by God Himself. There are 5 "woes" against them: for taking what is not theirs, for investing in earthly things and not eternal things, for those who trust in violence to achieve what they want, for those who take advantage of others through fear, and for those who trust in a false God to fulfill their lives and give their lives meaning.

Finally, in chapter 3, the prophet concludes his dialogue with a beautiful prayer song to God. God is the God of history, and God is moving. God is in control, and when we see problems we need to look deeper than the immediate problem to the eternal aspect. These problems can be solved only by the relationship of humanity to God. Habakkuk says in 2:20 "*The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.*"

Habakkuk begins this book saying "Lord, why don't you do something!" Now, he closes saying "Lord, be careful. Don't do too much. *"Lord, I have heard of your fame. In wrath, remember mercy."*

Habakkuk reminds us that we have a response to the challenges we face in life. We can live by faith in this broken world. God is God. We are not. (GIGWAN). When our faith is challenged, the prophet tells us:

1. Weep and mourn. Our hearts should be broken when we see the results of living in a broken relationship with God. Pain and suffering and sin result when God is not glorified or made famous on earth.
2. Remember God's character: soak yourself in it. Learn more about our great God and bring God's character to your situation, even if you can't know exactly *how* God will bring it about.
3. Pray through difficulty. Listen. Live by faith, meaning put your belief into ACTION. Living by faith means claim God's future for your present situation and you live it out: at work, at home, at school, or wherever God has placed you.