

## What Now? Hope From A Hebrew Prophet

Thanks for joining us on today. If you don't have a bible close by, now is your chance to get your bible and another cup of coffee as we look at the word of God. Turn to the short Old Testament book of the prophet Habakkuk. Go to the end of the Old Testament and then turn back a few pages and you'll find it. While you are looking let me say, we love you and miss seeing all of you. I appreciate all the creative ways people are endeavoring to stay in touch. We are the family of God so I encourage you to keep looking out for each other and caring for one another!

Thanks for making the effort to find us on live stream, on Facebook, on Instagram throughout the week. Keep watching on social media. The other pastors are on throughout the week so keep watching children, youth, new community, homecoming, Sunday School. Thanks for making the effort to watch. Thanks for making the effort to give. Thanks for making the extra effort to stay connected during a challenging time.

It is a challenging time. I keep saying it is unsettling because things change by the hour, by the day, and none of us can accurately predict or forecast the future. After the tornado in 1999 that destroyed our facility, we kept saying "change is here to stay." I would say that is the case once again. Things have changed and will continue to change, but we aren't left without hope. That's what I found as I searched for answers and direction for this message. That search led me to the book of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk was a Hebrew prophet. He was perhaps a different kind of prophet. We don't really have an indication that he went out telling everyone what God was saying. It seems to be a conversation between God and Habakkuk concerning the southern kingdom of Judah and their future. Habakkuk was writing this around 600 BCE. The northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed years earlier by the Assyrians and now the southern kingdom of Judah was facing a new enemy, the Babylonians. Habakkuk is seeing signs of coming judgment. The people of Judah were engaged in sinful lifestyles, ignoring God and the Babylonians were gaining strength and taking new territories. They were heading south and within a few years they would destroy Jerusalem and carry the Hebrew people into exile in Babylon.

Habakkuk sees the sin and the threat of the invasion by the Babylonians. He begins asking questions. **"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."** Habakkuk 1:2. Habakkuk is asking the kind of

questions we want to ask any time bad things happen to good people like all of us. “How can God let this happen? How long are you going to allow the bad guys to win?” Habakkuk was facing an invasion of soldiers, we are facing an invasion by a virus. Innocent lives are lost and we ask, “How long Lord? How long are you going to let a pandemic spread? Why haven’t you done something about this to stop all this?”

We always want to focus on the why questions don’t we? It seems throughout Scripture God chooses not to answer those questions. Job asked when his world fell apart. His friends offered all kinds of theories as to why Job was facing his problems but God chose not to answer the “why” question. Jesus refused to answer as well when disciples asked those kind of questions. “Who sinned that this man was born blind? What’s the source of this trouble? Whose fault? Who’s to blame?” We are always looking backward to find the cause and ask why. The bible seems to always be looking forward. What lessons can we learn? What good can come from this? Where and how is God acting redemptively in all this? What should we do now? That was the question Habakkuk answered in part for me. What now? So let me share some lessons I learned for this present crisis from a Hebrew prophet. The first lesson for us:

**Silence yourself.** We want to know what does all this mean? What is going to happen? How long is this pandemic and all the shut down going to last? How many will die? How will we recover? How long will the recovery last? Is this a sign from God? Is this God’s judgment? Every pundit and blogger has an opinion, a theory, a conspiracy. You’ll find preachers telling you what they think it means as well. “Here’s where we are in Biblical prophecy.”

I get that this makes us recognize the credibility of the biblical account regarding end time scenarios and the coming of the Lord. Some of us are suddenly thinking “Oh, so that’s how that could happen. Yikes!” But here’s what I think we need to do. This is what I sensed the Holy Spirit speaking to my heart from the old prophet. “**...the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.**” **Habakkuk 2:20** For a moment we need to just be silent before the Lord. Think about it.

The world has in some sense been silenced by the pandemic. For many of us, personal activity has slowed or stopped. Airplanes aren’t flying much. No ball games, dance recitals, end of school activities, no NBA, MLB, Olympic games, Indy 500, Kentucky Derby. Businesses shut down. With all this, take a moment to silence your heart before the Lord and recognize a couple of things.

Silence your heart and mind before him and recognize how vulnerable and fragile we are. We rush through life thinking how strong and powerful we are and then a tiny microscopic cold virus has the ability to enflame our lungs to the point we die and has the power to paralyze the world's economy. We aren't as powerful and strong as we thought we are. Silence yourself and recognize your dependence on the Lord.

Silence yourself and recognize for a moment how connected we are. Even though we are practicing physical social distancing, this pandemic reminds us we are all alike. The poorest and the richest can both be effected, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Moslem, Jew, Non-believer, we are all just people on this planet hurling through space, dependent on each other and dependent upon God's mercy, whether we recognize it or believe it or not. Be silent before God. A little humility if you please!

I know for some social distancing or being self quarantined is difficult, painful. Let the loneliness turn into solitude, into an awareness of presence. God's presence. You're shut in with God!

The prophet says, "The Lord is in his holy temple," referring to the temple in Jerusalem. The Lord is not far off in heaven somewhere, disconnected from us, but here with us, in this moment. His name is Immanuel which means God with us. He is here so still your heart and your mind. Silence everything for a moment, all the other voices and recognize the Lord with us. Don't try to figure it all out, the why's and whens, just take a moment to recognize him and his power and glory. He is everything we need.

Habakkuk said of the Lord, **"His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps. He stood and shook the earth, he looked and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal."** Habakkuk 3:3-6 Don't try to figure out who or what is to blame, just stop and consider what the prophet is saying about the vastness and the might and power of our God. He is like no other. He shakes the earth, the nations tremble. That's why we stop and silence our heart before him. Get that in your heart and mind of who he is before we tackle anything else. Then here is the second lesson from the prophet.

**Station yourself.** Now that you've silenced your heart before the Lord and recognized his magnitude and power, station yourself. Put yourself in a place, a position, where you can see

and hear what God wants to say and do. The prophet said, **“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.” Habakkuk 2:1**

The prophet is on the walls of Jerusalem, the ramparts, waiting to hear from God. You probably shouldn't climb up on to your roof or anything that dramatic, but get in a position to hear from the Lord. How? Through worship, prayer, through reading and studying the bible.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John was in quarantine, exiled onto the tiny island of Patmos out in the Aegean Sea. Alone, I believe he did what we are talking about. He silenced his heart and positioned himself. He said it this way, “On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.” He turned around and saw the Lord standing before him. It was at that time Jesus gave the message to the churches that we studied last fall, the message to John concerning the end of things. Position yourself, get in the Spirit like John did on Patmos, worshiping, listening and watching.

I was spending time saying “Lord, show me something. Tell me something. Why? What's this all about?” And I realized first I needed to silence myself before the Lord. Gain some perspective about life and who is in charge and recall God's sovereignty in and over my life and this universe and all that's going on. Then I can position myself to listen, to look, to wait and see what God needs us to see and know.

After Habakkuk quieted his heart and got in a position to hear, the Lord spoke to him. **“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.’” Habakkuk 2:2-3**

We understand the prophet was speaking about events that would happen in 586 BCE, but the Spirit of the Lord can take this word and speak it to our hearts to give us hope and direction in 2020, in the face of our own crisis.

There is a time for silence and waiting. But there is a time when God says, “Here is what you need to know and this is what you need to do.” He will make it plain to you. You will emerge from this pandemic, from this crisis, and God is going to lead you and show you how to live and act and walk in whatever that new normal is going to be. It may be a new idea for business that God may show you if after this your job is lost. It may be a new direction as God

shows you how to recover, to rebuild, to re-emerge from this crisis. It may be new insights about how you are going to order the priorities of your life for yourself, for your family. There are lessons we will all learn as we look to the Lord. There is a refining that is going on. And let me add, while business doors are closing right now, doors of opportunity for the gospel are opening like never before. The gospel is being preached as the church moves beyond our walls and doors and looks for creative ways to minister. A time of pandemic can be the church's finest hour as we meet needs and share the gospel.

God told the prophet to wait for it. Don't panic if it takes longer than you expected, but keep listening and watching and waiting on God because he will speak. God said the revelation awaits an appointed time, but it will happen. It will come to pass at just the right time. Silence yourself. Station yourself and then, in the meantime,

**Live in faith.** The prophet says what the New Testament echoes for us, **“But the righteous will live by his faith.” Habakkuk 2:4.** We are people of faith. We've placed our faith, our trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord and the giver of eternal life. My faith, our faith, is not in the government's response to covid19, it's not faith in an economic recovery, it's not faith in the federal reserve or the check we all may be getting or even in the scientist and doctors that are working bravely and courageously to find a cure for this virus. God help them, but my faith is in the Lord, the God of heaven and earth. I already quoted from Habakkuk 3. He is the one that stands above and beyond all the earth and his ways are eternal. We walk by faith and not by sight! Keep looking to him. Let faith arise in your heart that you can rely upon him.

Habakkuk said, **“Lord I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.” Habakkuk 3:1** I've got faith in Jesus. I've heard of his fame. I've heard of his deeds. I've heard what he can do in a time of trouble. I've read of his faithfulness and I've seen it over and over again in my life and in your life. They are not just the works of old, but God's works for today - in the midst of this health and economic crisis. In faith we say with the prophet, “Renew them in our day, in our time make your miraculous deeds known again. In this time of trouble, show us your mercy. Show us your power. Show us your hand of deliverance. Let your fame be spread around the world that God is the deliverer of all who trust in him!

Habakkuk spoke of woe to those who have put their faith in what they can do with their own hands and their own cunning and ability. V6 “Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and

makes himself wealthy by extortion.” (Relying on riches and wealth instead of relying on the Lord.) V9 “Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin”. (Thinking you can outsmart God, or hide your sin and ill-gotten gain high enough that God nor disaster can reach them.)

In verse 13 he says “the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire...the nations exhaust themselves for nothing.” If your faith is in what you can produce, think again. It can all be gone in a moment. Faith in yourself, your money, your job, your company, it’s not enough. The prophet speaks of idols the people had made in v18-19. Can what you’ve made come to life and give you guidance for what to do in the midst of the crisis? No, “But the Lord is in his holy temple.” He is with us. Trust him. Put your faith in him. Live in faith. The writer of Hebrews says “Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” Look to him. Trust Him. Put your faith in Him. Silence yourself, station yourself, live in faith and

**Live in hope!** Live in hope that someday, we will come through all this. Not just the pandemic, not just the economic trouble we are in as a result, not just the hardship of isolation and all the losses, no someday the prophet says, “**The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.**” **Habakkuk 2:14** Someday all the crisis will be past, all the tears will be forever wiped away by God himself. Someday all the injustice and all the wrongs will be made right. Someday he will establish his kingdom and authority here and we will never know pain or sorrow or parting or death again. Someday it won’t just be pockets of blessing but the glory of the Lord and the knowledge and blessing of the Lord will cover the people and the planet. We live in hope that someday everything will be made new. Let Hope Rise in your heart today.

Silence yourself. Station yourself. Live in faith. Live in hope and one last thing. **Live in gratitude.** The bible says, “**Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**” **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

But how can we give thanks with all of this trouble going on? Because he is still God. He is still on the throne. He is still worthy of our praise. He is still working in redemptive ways, to turn this around, to cause things to work for our good. He isn’t finished yet!

Habakkuk said, “I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound, decay crept into my bones and my legs trembled.” He was frightened at all he saw just like we may be as we watch this crisis unfold. Things were shaking around him, but look what he says.

**“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, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” Habakkuk 3:17-18.**

The prophet already had charted a course for how he was going to get through the crisis. He was going to silence his heart before the Lord and then station himself, position himself to hear from the Lord. He had decided he was going to live by faith and not by sight. Regardless of what happened he wasn't going to abandon hope but would keep trusting in the Lord. And what would the outcome of all this be? The prophet tells us: **“The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”**

### **Habakkuk 3:19**

The end result is he will bring us through this and he will strengthen us and enable us to climb to new heights. He will equip us with what we need, feet that won't slip, so we can get out of this and climb above it. Don't start climbing yet. Now is the time to be silent and to position yourself to hear from heaven, but don't give up hope. There are new heights ahead. And wow, what a view when he lifts us up and leads us up above it all!

God has something better in store for you. Trust him and let the Sovereign Lord be your strength during this time and for all time.

I want to pray for you. If Jesus is not the Savior and Lord of your life and you are facing this crisis without that personal relationship with Jesus, I encourage you to open your heart to Jesus today. Ask him to forgive you of your sin and to come into your heart. Ask him to be the Savior and Lord of your life. Trust your life to him.

Lord, help us to silence our hearts and minds, to station and position ourselves to be able to hear what you are saying to us individually, as a family, as a church family. Grant us the knowledge and direction we need for this day and for all that is to come. Help us as we look to you and as we live in faith, and in hope of better things tomorrow. Equip us with what we need to climb to those greater heights, and help us to remain grateful for your abiding presence, your mercy, your provision and your all sufficient grace!

Thanks for joining us. We love you. We are praying for you. Please be safe.