

A Holy Impatience with God – *Habakkuk 1:1-4*

Introduction – It is true that God sovereignly decrees and governs all things that come to pass (Eph 1:4,11). It is also true that, from our perspective, His ways are messy and inscrutable. And God places us smack dab in the middle of those wise but inscrutable ways for His own purposes. One of those central purposes involves God changing and maturing us through the process of making us wait. What are you waiting on God to do? What are you crying out to Him for? And in our culture wars, what is the Church waiting, pleading, and impatient for the Lord to do?

Habakkuk (v1) – We are not told the specific time of Habakkuk's ministry, but he must have been a prophet during the later years of the southern kingdom (Judah) during the reigns of rebellious kings and idolatrous priests. On behalf of a faithful remnant, Habakkuk presents his "*burden*" before the LORD. As we read the entirety of the book, we join in the maturing process Habakkuk (and the faithful) experience as they plead before the LORD, receive answers that are not to their liking, and grow in their own faith in a faithful and good God.

The book is structured in a 7-part chiasm, and it is helpful to keep that in your mind as we go through the book part by part

- A - Our First Complaint – How long must we wait for God to deal with iniquities and troubles? (1:2-4)
- B - The LORD's Answer – The armies of Babylon will come to judge the corruptions of Judah (1:5-11)
- C - Our Second Complaint – But Babylon is far more wicked than Judah (1:12-2:1)
- D - The just shall live by faith in the midst of the mess (2:2-4)
- C' - The LORD's Answer – Woes declared upon wicked Babylon (2:5-20)
- B' - The LORD's Final Answer – His own army and might will come (3:1-15)
- A' - Resolution of the First Complaint – I will wait for God's help with rejoicing (3:16-19)

The Burden of Habakkuk (vv2-4) – Habakkuk complains to Yahweh, "How long shall I cry?" It is as if God isn't listening, even when the faithful are under great "Violence." God will not save. Why? Why show us such iniquity and trouble, plundering and violence, strife and contention, and do nothing about it? It doesn't matter what laws we may have, what You have required of us, if no one is following the law and You are doing nothing about it. The wicked have the righteous surrounded; they control it all, and therefore perverse judgments come forth. "How long shall I cry?"

How Long? – What are we to learn from such a complaint, right there, spoken by a righteous prophet, and spoken with words that are inspired by the Holy Spirit? In this broken world that God is remaking over time, we are summoned to complain to Him, but in a certain way.

There are instances of complaining that are severely judged, such as when the Israelites complained over Moses' leadership, when they complained about the manna, or not having enough water (Num 11, 12, Exod 17). But there is another kind of complaining that the Lord loves and even provokes in us. He gives us situations so that we learn to pray that way (Psalm 10:1, 13:1-2). Sometimes this is when there is an obvious judgment upon us that He will not lift. Sometimes this occurs when wickedness and worldliness saturate the land and the majority think everything is fine ("*the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds*").

Is God Listening? – "*And you will not hear?*" (v2). In 1 Sam 8, recall that the people demanded a king "*like all the nations*" (8:5). They wanted a government according to their own terms and in their own timing and in so doing they rejected God as king (v7). And so God promised to give them a king who would be a tyrant (8:10-17) even to taxing them a tenth of their income. God said then they would cry out to Him but He would not hear (v18). That is where Habakkuk and the nation found themselves. A people who trust in themselves and trust in their own definitions of righteousness and truth, who want a government to be their god, will find themselves one day where it appears that God will not hear their prayers. (Side note: husbands are also warned that if they do not live with their wives with understanding and honor, they will find their prayers hindered – 1 Pet 3:7). But of course, in all of this, repentance, turning away from idols, confessing your sins, and turning rightly to King Jesus, is the way out. Maybe our government is not working because its not supposed to work – not like our idolatrous and envy-ridden hearts want it to.

Faithful Waiting that Still Complains – As Jesus hung on the cross, He spoke the words of Psalm 22, “My God, my God, *why have You forsaken Me?*” Jesus fully knew why He was on that cross, He had not lost faith in His Father (still “My” God), and He knew where that Psalm went – “*But when He cried to Him, He heard*” (22:24, see vv24-28). But He was not just going through the motions – these were His holy impatient cries for God’s deliverance. Time and again, from Abraham with the knife over His son about to kill him, from the crossing of the Red Sea, from the destruction of the Assyrian armies at the gates of Jerusalem, from a night spent in a den of lions, God loves a cliffhanger. And He always has His purposes in them. For Jesus – the salvation of the world (Acts 4:27-28). For us – our own sanctification unto a hope that does not disappoint (Rom 5:1-5).

Prayers to Practice – Do not take this sermon as primarily a message of theology. This is a sermon to teach us to pray and how to pray. This is not simply to be believed. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1:22). But this takes practice and so you must really practice. You think you can’t pray this way because your faith isn’t strong enough. But that is the point. This kind of praying strengthens and matures your faith. So, don’t pray to God with your pious-sounding, doctrinally correct platitudes. Don’t pray with a complaint that sounds like you deserve better on your own merit either; humble yourself before the mighty hand of God (James 4:10). But pour your heart out with honest, holy irritation. What are your concerns? What are your burdens? Begin to grow in a holy impatience with the Lord that takes you from 1:2-4 to 3:17-19, that makes you complain in that direction, pray with that kind of honesty, and live with that kind of faith.

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