

Text: Habakkuk 1-3 (Pew Bible pg.929)

Title: "What to Do with Your Doubts"

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – Do you ever pick up the newspaper or your favorite online news source and look at it and wonder “Lord, where are You in all of this? Why do You let these kinds of things go on? What are You going to do about this? What am I supposed to do about this?” If you have ever struggled like this you have an advantage as you begin to read prophets like Habakkuk. Habakkuk didn’t have a newspaper; but he knew enough to know that things were in a mess all around him.

Open your Bibles to the book of Habakkuk. We’re making our way through the last books of the OT, books containing the message of some of the prophets. Hopefully we’re “Profiting from the Prophets.”

As I said, things are in a real mess, domestically and internationally. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is no more ... destroyed by the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom of Judah is on the same track. The remaining Jews have turned their back on God. On the horizon is a new world power ... the Babylonians. Habakkuk as well as Zephaniah (the prophet we studied last week) and Jeremiah (whom we will study next week), are the prophets God has raised up to speak during these dreadful years. They are the last prophets to speak before the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem and carry the Jews into exile.

Habakkuk 1:1 - The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.

We know next to nothing about Habakkuk except that he received an oracle. Note: Most of us have learned to pronounce his name Habakkuk, but the literal pronunciation is like “haba-kook.” He is a man with a burden. You may remember that we talked about this word “oracle” (v.1) in a previous message on the prophets. The word means “burden,” and that’s what Habakkuk has ... a real burden. Some commentators call him the “doubting Thomas of the Old Testament.” He’s a man filled with many confusing, conflicting thoughts about God and the situation around him. You see questions marks punctuating much of Habakkuk’s prophecy.

I want to talk to you today about what to do with your doubts. Habakkuk had plenty of doubts, and we can learn from him what do when we doubt.

1. HONESTLY PRAY ABOUT YOUR DOUBTS (1:2-3).

The book opens with a prayer and closes with a prayer. And in this opening prayer Habakkuk expresses two honest questions in his prayer:

- Why does it seem that God is insensitive to the prayers of His people (1:2)?

Habakkuk 1:2 - 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?

- Why does it seem that God is indifferent to evil (1:3)?

Habakkuk 1:3 - 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.

So in the first few verses Habakkuk complains, “Lord why don’t you do something?” And in v.5 God answers Habakkuk. Now we don’t know how long it was between Habakkuk’s *asking* and God’s *answering*, but God did answer him. God doesn’t ignore us like a distracted parent who doesn’t listen to their child.

Habakkuk prays, “God, why don’t you do something?” And in 1:5 the Lord says, “I am going to do something.”

Habakkuk 1:5 - “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.

Sometimes God does the unbelievable. Let’s not put God in a box and say, “God you have to do your work the same way every time.” God is sometimes unpredictable. His ways aren’t our ways and His thoughts aren’t our thoughts.

After all, only a few people saw the unbelievable way that God was going to deal with our sin problem by His Son’s death on the Cross. Isaiah said, “Who has believed our report?” Who would have thought that the Messiah would come like He did?

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

You see, one of Habakkuk’s big questions is, “God why are you letting your own people get away with compromise, injustice and immorality? How can you let this go on? Why don’t you do something?” And the Lord says, “I am going to do something. I’m raising up the Babylonians to discipline my people.” Now Habakkuk is even more confused and frustrated. It may be that he says the equivalent of “Permission to speak freely, sir.” The Babylonians? Why would you use the evil Babylonians? You said you would make things *right*; will You do it through someone as *wrong* as the Babylonians?”

A few verses later Habakkuk struggles with this:

Habakkuk 1:12 - 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.

Habakkuk 1:13 - 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?

I'm impressed with the *fact* of Habakkuk's praying. He knew that the first thing a believer does with his doubts is that he should pray ... talk to God. Many people do just the opposite. When they have doubts about God they just quit talking to Him. They quit going to church. They quit reading their Bibles. We talk to ourselves about our doubts rather than talking to God about them. Talking to ourselves just leads to more anxiety and frustration. You know that. You have a problem, and it just spins around in your head as you recite it to yourself over and over.

But it's only until we talk to God about it that clarity and answers, and ultimately peace begin to come.

I'm impressed with the *fact* of Habakkuk's praying, but I'm also impressed with the *depths* of Habakkuk's praying ... with the scope of things that burden His heart.

ILLUSTRATION – As part of my preparation to preach each week I will often pray through the text. In this case I prayed through the book of Habakkuk. As I started praying in and through these verses I found myself convicted that my praying seldom looks like Habakkuk's praying. Habakkuk was concerned about the things that concerned God. God is concerned about His holiness, and Habakkuk reflects that in His praying. God is concerned about things like violence, arrogance, and indifference to the needs of people, and Habakkuk reflects that in His praying. A good question to ask ourselves is this: "How much of God's heart does He hear in our praying?"

So the first thing to do with your doubts is to pray about them. Next...

2. PATIENTLY WAIT FOR GOD'S ANSWER (2:1-3).

Habakkuk 2:1 - 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.

OT prophets are sometimes called watchmen. Watchmen stationed themselves in towers to stand guard. They watched for approaching danger; then they alerted the townspeople. So like a watchman Habakkuk stationed himself to see and hear what God had to say. And God did have something to say.

Habakkuk 2:2 - Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.

Habakkuk 2:3 - 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.

It's hard for us to watch and wait for the Lord to reveal His plan to us, isn't it?

ILLUSTRATION – Can you look back on times in your life where you thought, "I wish I had waited for God to work that out rather than me just rushing in"? I have. There are times when I have run ahead of God thinking, "God you need a little help here. You seem to be having trouble getting this resolved, so I'm going to help you out." Big mistake! Still other times I have had the grace to patiently wait for God to work out something, and He always does what it best and right.

Habakkuk 2:20 - But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”

After you have honestly prayed about your questions and your doubts, ultimately we have to remember this: God is *in* His holy temple. He’s not away from the control center of the universe. He’s in place. And He is in His *holy* temple. From His holy temple God will always do what is holy and right ... always! Patiently wait for Him to unfold things in His perfect time.

3. FAITHFULLY LIVE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS (2:4).

Now go back to Habakkuk 2:4. Now the wicked Judeans and the violent Babylonians have this in common:

Habakkuk 2:4a - “See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright...”

People who have no regard for God are prideful and crooked. It occurs to me that many people whose doubts have pushed God out of their lives are, indeed, puffed up. They think they know better than God, and because God doesn’t answer to them, or doesn’t do things the way they think He should, they write Him off. But that’s not true of the righteous. They do the opposite.

Habakkuk 2:4b - “But the righteous will live by his faith.”

When it says “the righteous will live” it means that they will not just exist ... they will really live. They will enjoy the abundance and the blessings of God. And how do they access this way of life? By faith and by faithfulness. They look to God and trust Him for what they cannot do themselves.

If you’ve read very much in the NT you will likely recognize this phrase. It appears in three different and very important places in the NT where the writers are explaining how people can gain access to eternal life.

Romans 1:17 - For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Galatians 3:11 - Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.”

Hebrews 10:38 - But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”

If you’re one of those “puffed up” individuals who think they can earn salvation by being good, hear this. The eternal life to which God calls us cannot be earned by our own righteousness, but only by His. Jesus Christ died on the Cross of Calvary to satisfy God’s righteous requirements and to justify those who put their faith in Christ. You will miss this if you remain puffed up in your pride thinking, “I don’t need to do it the way the Bible says and completely surrender my life to Jesus Christ. Surely God will take into account that I went to church, gave some money, didn’t cheat on my wife.”

Friend, my prayer is that you will not die in that condition. If you do it will be a terrible awakening for you when you realize you've missed heaven. The righteous will live by faith.

And when you are saved, you don't stop living by faith. Every day we live is day we trust in the salvation of the Lord ... the provision of the Lord ... the protection of the Lord ... the direction of the Lord. The righteous will live by faith and by their faithfulness. You can trust God to do what He says He will do. Faithfully live your life.

4. HUMBLY ADJUST YOUR THINKING (3:2)

Habakkuk 3:1 tells us this is a prayer of Habakkuk, just like the first chapter. But you get into it and you sense that something has changed with Habakkuk's praying. When we are confused and conflicted about something we want God to get on our page ... to start doing things our way. But faith means that we adjust our thinking and get on His page. And that's what Habakkuk does.

Habakkuk 3:2 - 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 has stopped complaining because He sees things that He didn't see before. It's like he says, "Wait a minute. Hasn't God been faithful in the past? Sure He has. Lord, you've intervened in the past ... you've done great things in the past ... Lord, will you do them in our day? And Lord, when you do unleash your wrath, will you also remember to be merciful to us?" Certainly He will!

Listen, as you grow in your knowledge of the Lord, you will find your prayer life changing as you adjust your life to what you know about God. You will go from praying, "Lord, get me out of this mess" to "Lord, work out Your perfect plans in my life. When it's all said and done, be glorified through my life."

What do you do with your doubts? Honestly pray about them, patiently wait for God to move, faithfully live, humbly adjust your thinking, and then finally...

5. JOYFULLY WORSHIP GOD (3:17-19).

Habakkuk 3:17 - 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,

Habakkuk 3:18 - yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Habakkuk 3:19 - The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

"Seriously? God, with everything in a mess and with all these doubts, You want me to worship ... and only top of that *joyfully* worship?"

So many of us think that our worship is right when we feel like everything is going well, and we have all the answers, and we understand great things about God and thus we can sing. Yes, that's true. But the Bible reveals that authentic worship is not just for when you feel that all is right with the world, and God has behaved the way we need and want Him to. No, worship is for the times like Habakkuk knew:

I said earlier that Habakkuk 3 is a beautifully composed prayer. There's indication here that this prayer took the form of a song. Habakkuk is singing. He's worshipping.

Habakkuk is saying, "Lord, everything is a mess. We're about to get cleaned out. Yet I will rejoice in You." That word "Yet" is a word of faith.

In our joyful worshipping we're saying that our happiness, our rejoicing, is not in the car in our garage, not in the clothes in our closet, not in our daughter in a sorority, not in the house in the gated community, not in the food on our plates, or in the money in our retirement fund. No Habakkuk says...

Habakkuk 3:18 - I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Why? Because He is our life.