

Waiting on God

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Habakkuk 1:14-2:5

This is Hachiko. He's a good boy! Hachiko was a 90 pound Japanese Akita dog, who was born in 1923. He was one of only 30 Akitas in existence at the time. But that's not why Hachiko is famous. Hachiko is famous for waiting. Hachiko's owner, Eizaburo Ueno, was a professor at Imperial University in Tokyo. In early 1924, he took Hachiko to Tokyo to live with him. Hachiko and his owner became inseparable. Every morning Hachiko would walk his owner to the train station to drop him off, and every evening Hachiko would be waiting at the train station when his owner returned. This happened every single day for two years. But there came a day in 1925 when Hachiko's owner did not return. Hachiko obviously could not know this, but his owner had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage at work and had died.

That night Hachiko waited at the train station for hours. Finally, he went home. But the next morning, he was there again faithfully waiting for his owner. Hachiko waited the next morning and evening and the next morning and evening and the next and the next. Eventually Hachiko moved in with the family gardener. But he never stopped waiting for his owner's train. He was there every day for the rest of his life. For nine people years (that's 63 dog years), Hachiko faithfully waited for his owner. During that time, he became a national hero in Japan and a symbol of faithfulness. When Hachiko died, they placed a statue of him at the Tokyo train station where he used to wait. At the University of Tokyo where his owner worked, they placed a statue of Hachiko and his owner finally reunited.

Well, doesn't that story tug at your heart? I can hardly think about that story without crying, because we all know what it is to wait! We all admire those who wait faithfully, who wait when they don't understand, who wait even when things don't make sense. We admire those who wait when others give up.

Part of what it means to be a Christian is to wait, to wait for things to come right, to wait for God to move, to wait for answers to prayer that don't fit our timetable at all. To be a Christian is to know that things aren't the way they should be and to wait.

So let me ask you a question this morning: What are you waiting for? Where are you praying and asking God to move and having to wait? What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for justice? Are you in a situation where good seems to be punished or where evil seems to be rewarded? Is justice what you're waiting for? Are you waiting for provision? For God to give you what you believe you need to thrive in your work or in your family? Are you waiting for healing? Healing from sickness from suffering from grief healing from struggles with mental health? Is that what you're waiting for? Are you waiting for reconciliation of a damaged relationship? Are you waiting for God's guidance about what you should do? What are you waiting for today?

Today as we continue our study of Habakkuk, we are going to look at a passage about waiting. Turn in your bibles to Habakkuk 1:12-2:5. Habakkuk is about three-fourths of the way through your Bible, if you're desperately thumbing through trying to find it. It's right between Nahum and Zephaniah, because that clears it up! Today we're going to look at a passage where 1) things don't make sense, 2) Habakkuk waits for God to explain, and 3) God answers in a bigger way and better way than Habakkuk ever expected. That's what we're going to look at today. We're going to talk about how that relates to you and me and the things we wait for from God.

Let's read Habakkuk 1:12-2:5. Just to remind you where we're at: In last week's passage, Habakkuk made a complaint. He complained that God wasn't doing anything about the sin and violence around him in the nation of Judah. God responded by saying he was doing something. He was sending the more sinful and more violent Babylonians to invade Judah. As today's passage starts, Habakkuk responds to God, and this is what he says:

Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? You shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. You, who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he? You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich. Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

- Habakkuk 1:14-2:5

Let's Pray. Take a moment to ask God what you are waiting for.

Habakkuk started his prophecy with a complaint. Really, it was a rebuke of God for all the sin Habakkuk saw around him. Habakkuk saw sin and injustice and violence all around him in the nation of Judah. He had seen sin go from being tolerated to being nurtured to being protected, even in the courts. So Habakkuk asked God "Why aren't you doing something about all this sin, and injustice, and violence among your people?"

And if you remember, the Lord gave Habakkuk a shocking answer. He said "Oh, but I am doing something! I'm raising up the Babylonians who are more sinful and more unjust and more violent. And they're coming to Judah!" God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint, was that he was going to use sinful people to deal with sin. That brings us to our first point today, which is this:

SOMETIMES, GOD'S ACTIONS DON'T SEEM TO MAKE SENSE

Sometimes God acts in ways that go beyond just not giving us what we want. Sometimes He acts in ways that seem downright contradictory. Sometimes God acts in ways that seem contrary to his character. That's how Habakkuk feels about God sending the Babylonians. He points it out to God in the first part of our passage. Look at verse 12. Habakkuk begins by acknowledging the goodness of God's character:

Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? You shall not die. (Your translation may have "We shall not die." The Hebrew says "You shall not die"). *O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.*

- Habakkuk 1:12

So what is Habakkuk saying? Well, he's acknowledging the goodness of God's character. He's saying "Lord, you are absolutely holy. You are pure and against sin. You're holy. You've been that way from eternity past and you're never going to die, so you'll be that way for eternity future. You are eternally holy." Habakkuk says "I see that," and Habakkuk says "I also get that we deserve this. You have ordained the Babylonians for judgment and established them for reproof." It's just. He says "All that fits with your character. You're punishing sin. That makes sense." But then Habakkuk starts to push back. Look at verse 13. He says:

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

- Habakkuk 1:13

Habakkuk says "OK, here's what doesn't make sense. If you're so against evil, how can you use someone with more sin to punish someone with less sin? How does that work?" Remember what we said last week? Judah had a little bit of violence. The Babylonians overthrew entire societies! Judah had a little disorder in the court. The Babylonians don't even have a court! They were a law unto themselves! Judah has a little bit of idolatry. These guys worshipped themselves. Their God was their own strength! Habakkuk says "You're punishing sin (I get that) but you are rewarding greater sin. How does that fit with your holiness?" Habakkuk goes on to point something else out. He says "This is going to increase idolatry!" Look at"

You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. He (the Babylonian) brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad.

- Habakkuk 1:14-15

Habakkuk is saying "Listen, the Babylonians live off other nations. You've set this up, so that it's like we're all the sardines, and they are the fishermen! They take whatever they want from whoever they want to take it from!" By the way, that was completely true. The Babylonians settled in a desolate area in modern day Iraq, in a place with very few natural resources. There wasn't a lot to farm, or grow, or harvest. So they pretty much made their living by taking what

they wanted from everyone around them. They were the bullies in the Ancient Near East lunch line. They were they bad guys. But them being bad guys is not Habakkuk's only point here. Look at:

Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich. Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

- Habakkuk 1:16-17

Habakkuk says "They're like an idolatrous fishermen who has great success with his net. Does it cause him to worship God? No. He's an idolater. So he worships his net. He worships what he sees as the source of his wealth. For a fisherman it would be his net. For a Babylonian, it was their war machine. God said in the last passage "Their strength is their God," and Habakkuk is saying "This is only going to increase their idolatry."

Now all this doesn't add up for Habakkuk. He thinks about God's character, His holiness, and His justice. He thinks about the Babylonians, their injustice and unholiness. And he thinks about what God clearly said in the last passage: That he knows how sinful they are and that HE (God) is raising them up. He can't make these things add up in his heart. They don't make sense.

There are times when God just doesn't seem to make sense. There are times when his actions don't seem to add up, times when He does things or when He allows things that seem contrary to his character. There are times in our world when evil doesn't just seem to be tolerated. It actually seems to be rewarded. There are times when cheaters do prosper. There are times when it seems like God is allowing evil to pay off.

Sometimes we also see the converse. Sometimes it seems like good people, really good people, suffer unjustly, and we wonder why. We try to align it with what we know of God's character, and it doesn't fit. We think "I thought God was good. I thought He was against sin. I thought He was in control of everything, so why is this happening on his watch?" God doesn't seem to make sense.

I've mentioned this before. Early in my ministry, I worked with youth. I remember one of the dads in our youth division named "Rob" was driving home one day from his factory job, driving in his mini-van, giving a co-worker a ride. A kid from a gang called "The Second Streeters" saw a kid across the street from the Crips and he shot at him. The bullet hit the doorframe of the mini-van and went right down into Rob's heart. I remember waiting with the family in that hospital for hours and having to tell those kids their dad had died. I thought "What is going on?" It didn't have a story-book ending. Those kids really struggled without their dad there. We see moments like that in our world, and it doesn't make sense.

Maybe today as I'm speaking, you're going through something in your life right now and, to be honest, maybe God doesn't seem to make sense. If that's you, I want you to notice that Habakkuk does an incredible job of showing us how to approach that situation. Notice what

Habakkuk does. Notice he goes to God. He doesn't run from God. He doesn't talk about God. He goes straight to God to talk it through. If we could just learn to do that when we're confused, when we're tempted, when we sin, when things don't make sense, just go straight to God. Notice also that he starts with God's character, right? Before he unloads his accusation on God, he takes a moment to think about God's character, his eternity, and holiness, and justice. That frames the issue so much better. The problem isn't just that something unjust is happening. The problem is that God is not a God of injustice, so Habakkuk wants to know how this good God is allowing this bad thing. That changes the grounds on which he has his discussion with God. And lastly, notice that he pours his heart out to God after he's gone to God after he's thought about God's character. He explains to God how this doesn't add up. He just pours his heart out to God. That's how we should start our response when God doesn't seem to make sense. We should go to God and think about his character and pour our hearts out to him.

So the first thing we see in the passage is that sometimes God's actions don't seem to make sense. Now the second thing we see in the passage is this:

WHEN THAT HAPPENS, WE OFTEN HAVE TO WAIT

Sometimes when God's actions don't make sense, you can talk it out with God and that settles it. Sometimes that fixes the situation. You pray and God answers. The problem goes away. Or sometimes as you pray and you can see God's perspective, and it all makes sense, and you realize your circumstances really were for the best. It all gets resolved in your mind.

But many times when we're in a situation where God's actions don't make sense, it doesn't get resolved. What we have to do is wait. Wait on God. Wait for God to move. Wait for God's answer. And again, Habakkuk gives us a beautiful picture of this in verse 17. Look at what he says there:

I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

- Habakkuk 1:17

In other words, Habakkuk is saying "I'm going to settle in and wait." He uses this image of a watchman taking his position on a wall, waiting for messenger to bring news from a battle or some other important event. Habakkuk says "I've heard what God is doing. I've gone to him with my concerns. I've looked at his character. I've poured out my heart to him, and now I'm going to wait." "I'm going to stand expectant, as long as it takes. Waiting to see what God will do."

Sometimes that's all we can do is wait. Just wait for God to show up. There are times of waiting in the Christian life. Some of us are in that spot. I say "us," because I'm there regarding some things in my life. We are waiting. We've talked to God. We've poured our hearts out to him. We've made our case, maybe we've prayed about it for weeks or months or years. Maybe we've tried other things, like being really good or throwing a temper tantrum at God. But we've

finally punched ourselves out, and we're that spot where all we can do is wait. Habakkuk says "I'm going to wait."

Now notice with me what waiting IS NOT. Waiting is not pretending that everything is OK. Habakkuk still has a problem. Waiting is not giving simple, cliché answers to complex problems. Habakkuk is not saying "Well, I know 'God works all things together for good,' so I can't feel bad." That's not what waiting is. Notice also waiting is not raging at God. Habakkuk is not storming around making demands of God and threatening God that he's not going to believe in Him if God doesn't do what he wants. He's not doing that. The raging is over. He's just waiting, and waiting is not losing your faith. Habakkuk is confused. He is insistent that what he sees does not line up with what he knows about God's character. But he's still following God. God is still the one he's waiting for. Waiting isn't any of those things. It's just waiting. Sometimes it's OK to just wait. Sometimes that's all we can do.

God does so much good in the waiting. He builds so much character as we wait for him to move. Waiting is not where God does his most obvious work. It's not where he does his most enjoyable work, but waiting is where God does his deepest work. Waiting requires faith, and waiting builds our faith. My dad always said "Faith is like a muscle. When it meets resistance, not only do you find out how strong it really is but it actually gets stronger." Waiting strengthens our faith. As we wait, not pretending there's no problem, not giving cliché answers, not raging at God, not losing our faith, God transforms us. He works in the waiting.

And here's the thing: God tells Habakkuk He is going to do a lot of work, because Habakkuk is going to have to wait a long, long time! Let me show you what I mean. God finally answers Habakkuk, and He tells Habakkuk to get ready to wait some more. Look at:

And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.

- Habakkuk 2:2

So God tells Habakkuk He's going to give him a message or vision. He tells him "I want you to write it (or actually the Hebrew word can mean "to engrave") write it or engrave it on tablets." Now what does that remind you of? The Ten Commandments, right? God says "I want you to record this thing. Put it down on tablets like the Ten Commandments." Don't write it on papyrus or leather or wax tablets. This isn't an Etch-A-Sketch vision. It's more like a stone tablet vision. You're going to need this for a while.

Then He says "Write it clearly or big enough so that the 'running one' can see it," like something you can read on the move, like a giant Ten Commandment billboard or like a Habakkuk 2:4 Mount Rushmore or something. He says "Write this down clearly, and boldly, and permanently." Then look at what He says:

For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

- Habakkuk 2:3

See what God says there? In this one verse, He tells Habakkuk in six different ways that this is going to take a while, but that he should not give up. He says "For still the vision awaits its appointed time." In other words, this has to happen at a specific time, but I assure you it's going to happen. It hastens to the end. Literally, he says "It's panting." You may not see it, but it's running hard to get there on time. I assure you it's going to happen. It will not lie. In other words, "I assure you it's going to happen." It will surely come. In other words, "I assure you it's going to happen." And finally, He says "It will not delay" which means God tells Habakkuk six different ways that he is going to have to wait, but that what God is predicting will surely happen. He tells him to write it down word for word in stone. Write it down so you can think about what it means. Write it down so you don't forget it. Write it down so you can share it with others, other Israelites, other generations, other people who are waiting in times when God's actions don't seem to fit his character.

So 1) there are times when God's actions don't seem to make sense, and 2) when that happens, we often have to wait. Now there's one more thing we learn from this passage, and it's this:

WHILE WE WAIT, WE KEEP OUR EYES ON THE GOSPEL

So what is this great vision? What is it that's so important that Habakkuk needs to engrave it on a giant Ten Commandments billboard? Well, it's really a simple message found in verse 4. Some people feel that verse 5 is included in the vision, but I think verse 5 is a transition to the next passage. So, just one verse and this is it:

"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith."

- Habakkuk 2:4

Let me read that again. This verse has a very simple message that is delivered in two parts:

- 1) The proud will not stand in God's presence, but
- 2) Those who are righteous by faith shall live.

First, it tells us the proud will not stand in God's presence. Habakkuk says "His soul is puffed up (proud). It is not upright within him." The implication, and this is discussed in detail in the rest of this chapter, is that the proud will be judged by God and destroyed. They will not stand. The Bible says "God hates a proud look." It says "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The Bible says "Pride goes before destruction." The clear implication is that those who are proud like Babylon will not stand in God's sight. They will be judged.

And secondly, this verse tells us those who are righteous by faith will live. Those who trust God. Those who trust in Him, not those who pretend, not those who give cliché answers, not those who rage against God, not those who lose their faith, those who trust in God will live. Those who reach out to Him in their confusion, those who, like Habakkuk, say "This doesn't add up. I

don't like this. I don't get it. I don't even understand how a good, and holy, and eternally powerful God could be involved in this at all. But I'm going to trust. And I'm going to wait." "I'm going to stand here in confused belief and trust God to the best of my ability, and I'm going to do what He tells me to do." This verse says those are the ones who will make it through to the end. The just shall live by faith. That's the message that God gives to Habakkuk. That's the vision.

But what's interesting about that is this is not actually an answer to Habakkuk's question. Habakkuk asked questions in last week's passage and this week's, but this is not an answer to those questions. What it is is the gospel. This little verse "the just shall live by faith" is the gospel.

The Bible recognizes this. Did you know this little phrase "The just shall live by faith" is repeated three different times in the New Testament, and it's always about the gospel. Paul uses it twice to refer to the message of the gospel, and what Jesus revealed in his first coming. In Romans 1, Paul says "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.'" So Paul connects it to the first coming. The writer of Hebrews uses this verse to talk about Jesus' 2nd coming and the gospel. He writes:

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But the righteous will live by faith.

- Hebrews 10:36-38

The point is this is the gospel: waiting by faith, receiving righteousness by faith.

This isn't a direct answer to Habakkuk's question. Habakkuk wants to know "when?" "How long?" He's looking at his present circumstances and the Babylonians. This isn't a direct answer to Habakkuk's question, but it's a much better answer! This message, the gospel, is the real solution. It's not just for Habakkuk and 7th Century BC Judah. It's for everyone! That's why God had him write it down in a permanent way, so he could share it! This is the real solution.

See, the problems, the troubles of this life, are going to come and go. Babylon was really just a flash in the pan. Their regional dominance only lasted 66 years. They were destroyed in 539 BC by the Medes. God could have answered Habakkuk's question directly and said "OK, 66 years and the Babylonians will be destroyed. That's how long. That's why this is fair." God could have said that.

But here's the thing: After Babylon came the Persians, and after the Persians came the Greeks, and after the Greeks came the Romans. The problems of this life are going to keep coming and going. In this life, God's people will always have to wait for one thing or another. So solving the problems of this life, solving the problems that are really only temporary, as big as they may

seem, is no real solution at all. I'm not saying we shouldn't grieve for the sufferings of this present world and work on them. We should. But that's not going to fix the real problem.

The real solution is the gospel. The real solution is the Second Coming that the writer of Hebrews talks about. That's when it's going to be fixed. We say "What are you going to do, God, about my unfair job, about my out of control kid, about my anxiety, my grief, my sickness, my sinful culture, the war in Ukraine, climate change? What are you going to do?" We want God to say "Well, you'll get a new job in a month and your kids will straighten out next year and the war will end next June." But that's not what God says. What he says is "I'm going to make all things new. I'm going to wipe every tear from my people's eyes. Death will be no more. Grief will be no more. Crying will be no more. Pain will be no more. For the old order has passed away." He says "Write it down. Engrave it, so it will last. Make it big and clear, so people can see. The just shall live by faith." That's the real solution. That's what we wait for.

Habakkuk received this prophecy "The just shall live by faith," and it gave him hope. But here's the thing, Christian: We have so much more hope! We know so much more about the Second Coming. We know so much more about the time when the just will truly live because of their faith. We know it because of the First Coming.

Jesus came and he did things no ordinary human can do. He spoke profound truth. He healed the sick. He calmed the storms. He welcomed the broken. He died for our sins on the cross, and He rose from the dead. He said "God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life." He gave us a taste of His Kingdom. He promised His Kingdom to all who put their trust in Him. So Habakkuk's message is much clearer to us than it was even to him. We know, because of Jesus, that the just shall truly live by faith. That's why we wait the way we wait.

Problems are going to come and go. There will always be another problem, another struggle, another situation that we don't understand. God's people are always going to have to wait. But God invites us to wait the way he invited Habakkuk to wait. He invites us to wait with our eyes on the gospel.

Let's Pray. What are you waiting for?