

Waiting for Justice: Part 2

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Habakkuk 2:15-20

Good morning! Let me invite you to turn in your Bibles to Habakkuk 2:15-20. As Kelley said in the welcome, we are right in the middle of the “Five Woes” of Habakkuk. These are five prophecies of judgment, five oracles of doom if you will that answer the question “What does God do about greed? How does God feel about it? How will he respond to greedy people?” Last week, we looked at the first three Woes of this prophecy, and we saw that each Woe shows a different expression of greed. They kind of escalate, as they go along. If you remember the first Woe showed white collar crime (where we bend the rules to take stuff from people) and the second Woe was more regular crime (where we just go ahead and break the rules) and then the third Woe was straight up violence (where we hurt people to get what we want).

So we saw the escalation. As we looked at those three Woes, we also saw that in each Woe God pointed out a consequence of greed. In the first Woe, the consequence was human vengeance. God said those we plunder just might decide to plunder us back! In the second Woe, it was divine judgment. God working out justice through the circumstances of our lives, and in the third Woe, it was eternal irrelevance, finding that everything our greed has caused us to acquire everything we worked for disappears in eternity. So as we looked at those consequences, we began to answer that question: What does God do about Greed?

Now, what I want to do today is continue our discussion of these five Woes. Today we will look at the last two of Habakkuk’s five Woes and see two more consequences of greed. But before we jump into our sermon today, I just want us to make sure that as we look at this passage we’re asking the right question. When we ask “What does God do about Greed?,” we might be tempted to think that the real question is “What does God do about other people’s greed?” What does God do about greedy people’s greed, Babylonian greed, Bernie Madoff type greed, if you remember last week’s sermon. It’s easy to think that’s the only question we should concern ourselves with.

But it’s really not, because we’ve seen, as we’ve gone through these Woes, that we all tend to participate in this cycle of greed in some ways in our own lives. It’s not just other people. We also can bend the rules, or break the rules, or mistreat others to get what we want. So we should not just be asking ourselves what God does about other people’s greed, we should also be asking ourselves “What does God do about our greed? How does He feel when we participate in greed?”

What does God do about our greed? That’s the question I want us to be thinking about as we look at Habakkuk’s fourth and fifth Woes today, as we talk about what God does about Greed. So today we are going to look at these fourth and fifth Woes that show us two more consequences of greedy gain. Then we’re going to talk about how this prophecy of the Five Woes applies to us. We’ll finish answering that question “What does God do about Greed?,”

other people's greed and our greed. So let's read Habakkuk 2:15-20. Habakkuk has already given his first three Woes when he writes these words:

"Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The Cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

"What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

- Habakkuk 2:15-20

So today as we look at these last two Woes, we are going to look at them, as we did last week, in terms of consequences, consequences of greedy gain. We've already talked about three consequences of greed: 1) Human vengeance, 2) Divine judgment, and 3) Eternal irrelevance. Now as we look at the fourth Woe, the fourth consequence of greedy gain is this:

THE WRATH OF GOD

So this is different from Consequence #2, the Judgment of God. The judgment of God was more about God's judgment in the here and now. This one is more serious than that. We're going to take a deep dive into this one, but we'll see that in this Fourth Woe, God uses a word-picture that relates to his eternal wrath against all sin. Let me show you what I mean. Look at:

"Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The Cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

- Habakkuk 2:15-20

So that's God's Fourth Woe on those who pursue Greed. Now notice here that the crimes continue to escalate In the last three Woes. The greedy person went from bending the rules, to breaking the rules, to violence. But now we have a new level, and the crime is what I would call "exploitation," just out and out exploitation - abuse, corruption, mistreatment. Exploitation.

Notice there is alcohol involved in this Woe. Habakkuk says "Woe to him to make his neighbor drink." The idea is that the greedy person goads them on, he coerces them, he pressures them to participate in this drunkenness. Notice that, as is sometimes the case where there is pressure

to be intoxicated, there is sexual mistreatment. He doesn't just expose their nakedness. He gazes at it. He dwells on it. By the way, it would be well within the Hebrew here to imply that there's more going on than just gazing. The Hebrew could easily imply that there is physical, sexual abuse. So there's sexual exposure.

But notice this isn't just some drinking party that's gotten out of control. This isn't just friends over-doing it. Verse 15 says you "Pour out your wrath and make them drunk." This is about "wrath." It's a deliberate attempt to expose and dominate. There is malicious intent in the way this person treats their neighbor. This is evil, objectifying a person, using their exposure to make yourself feel powerful. That's not all that this person has done. He's also exploited Creation. Look at verse 17 again. Habakkuk says:

The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them.

- Habakkuk 2:15-20

Now when I first read that, I thought "What does Lebanon have to do with this? I thought this was all about Babylon and Judah. Why is he talking about Lebanon?" Well, he's talking about Lebanon because Lebanon was known throughout the Ancient Near East as a natural paradise. Saying "Lebanon" was like saying "Yosemite" or "Yellowstone." It was a place where trees, and wildlife and natural resources thrived. You may have even heard of the "Cedars of Lebanon."

Lebanon was well-managed for quite some time. If you read the Old Testament, the king of that area sent cedars, and carpenters, and stonemasons to King David to help build his palace. The forest was managed and seen as a sustainable resource. But when the Babylonians invaded, they did to the forest of Lebanon what they did to their neighbors. They stripped it bare. They exploited it. They saw the natural resources, the trees and the animals, not as something to be managed and taken care of and used wisely. They saw it as something to exploit to use up. Something that was there for the sole purpose of enriching them. To make them feel more powerful. It was exploitation. And you know, God hates exploitation! There are people who exploit the earth. They don't care about it. They don't take care of it. They don't seem to have any concept of our place as humans in the larger scheme of things.

They don't seem to understand that this earth does not belong to us. It belongs to God. He's going to live here on earth with us for eternity. We are to be stewards, managers of his earth. He made this wonderful planet to share w us with incredible natural resources. We were just in the North Carolina mountains for a few days earlier this week, and it was beautiful, incredible flowers, beautiful waterfalls, streams that make your heart sing, and all kinds of amazing animals colorful fish even beautiful butterflies! All these things for us to discover and enjoy. God made that to share w us! He told us to rule over it wisely. But some people don't get that. They see this earth as nothing more than a resource to exploit for their personal gain. Something to make them rich, for what? A few decades? They've lost their way.

It's not just them. It's not just those people out there. We all participate in this exploitation too, don't we? Maybe we're not ivory poachers or something like that, but have you ever thought about the way people like you and me treat this planet? Ever think about all the garbage we generate? Ever look at all the throw away packaging for the products we purchase or the food we buy? Ever think about the clothes we wear, or furniture we use, for a couple of seasons, and then get rid of it because it's not the latest style? Ever think about all the food we just waste?

There are some people who exploit the earth wantonly, unrepentantly, and that is what is most directly addressed in this passage, but we've all participated in this on some level. This passage shows us God hates it. He hates it when we exploit creation. God especially hates it when we exploit the pinnacle of his creation: men and women and children that are made in the image of God. God loves people. He loves the orphan, the widow, the poor, the immigrant, the vulnerable. One look at Jesus and you can see that, right? He loved people! So God hates it when we exploit people. He hates it when we use people sexually or financially or for personal advancement. He hates it when we treat people like commodities to be used and discarded.

I recently read a true story called "Proof of Life" where a guy went into the war zone in Syria to find someone who had gone missing. While he was searching in Syria, he met a guy named Annas, who embodies all the greed and exploitation portrayed in this passage. Annas is literally the worst modern human being I've ever read about. He wore a \$100,000 shirt that was encrusted with diamonds. He was a drug dealer, and he sold human beings for various purposes. When you read about a guy like that, it just makes your blood boil. It's heartbreaking and infuriating and I found myself constantly shaking my head and saying to myself "How dare someone do that?" It made me so angry.

Well, this passage tells us that's the way God feels about the exploitation of people and of his creation. It makes him angry. He hates this. Because God hates exploitation, he promises two judgments for people who do the kinds of things described in this Fourth Woe. These judgments, like the other judgments in these Five Woes, are ironic. There are two things God does. First, God promises to expose them, because they have stripped people and creation bare and exposed them. God says he's going to do the same thing to the greedy person. In verse 16, God says he's going to expose their uncircumcision for all to see.

So God is going to expose them, but there's a much deeper consequence that God will impose. Because they have forced others to drink, they will drink the Cup of God's Wrath. This is important for us to understand. Look at what the Lord says in verse 16

*You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision!
The Cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will
come upon your glory!*
- Habakkuk 2:16

So Habakkuk talks about this Cup of God's wrath. Now the Cup of God's wrath is one of those metaphors (like the Garden or the Sacrificial Lamb or the Divine Feast) that just runs

throughout the entire Bible. It's first mentioned in the book of Job, one of the earliest books in the Bible. It's mentioned multiple times in the Psalms, but it's in the Prophets that this image really takes off. All the major prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and many other prophetic books - talk about this foaming Cup of Wrath that God is going to force the nations to drink from his strong right hand. They talk about how it will make people stagger and fall, but that God will force them to drink it down to its very dregs. It's a powerful image. The prophets are very clear that people from every nation going to have to drink from this Cup. They specifically mention Judah and Israel. They mention by name all the peoples around Israel (Edom, Moab, Philistia), and they say that, last of all, Babylon will be forced to drink God's Wrath. So there's this powerful image of God's Punishment.

Now because it's related to Babylon, we might think that this Cup is just about earthly judgments. We might think that when Babylon was conquered in 539 AD, this punishment of the Cup was done, but that's not true. Look at what the Bible says about the end times:

*Another angel, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality." And another angel, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the Cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night
- Revelation 14:8-12*

Wow! That is a very sobering passage. We can see that this is not just about Babylon, the nation. Babylon didn't exist as a nation when John wrote Revelation. Rather, Babylon represents the world system and all who buy into it. John is saying this Cup represents God's eternal wrath for sin and, when it is poured out, it has terrible consequences.

So Habakkuk says one consequence of sin, one consequence of greed and the exploitation of people and of Creation, is the Cup of God's Wrath. This should really cause us to think. Maybe we aren't like Annas (the guy from the book) or maybe we aren't ivory poachers, but how much do we participate in greed, in exploitation? God hates exploitation.

So we've seen four consequences of greed so far: 1) Human Vengeance, 2) Divine judgment, 3) Eternal Irrelevance, and (4) the Wrath of God. Now there's one more consequence of Greed, and it's this

IDOLATRY

Look at what Habakkuk says:

"What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold

and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

- Habakkuk 2:18-20

Now as we look at this Woe, notice that it's different from the others. One way it's different is that there's no punishment listed. Did you notice that? The other Woes all have specific, ironic punishments for them, like human vengeance, or divine judgment, or eternal irrelevance, etc. But in this Woe, there is no punishment listed at all. Why is that? It's because Idolatry is its own punishment. You don't have to punish idolatry. Idolatry is punishment. Those of you who have been around idolatry maybe grew up in a family or culture that prayed to idols. You know that, right? I've known people who actually served idols and made sacrifices to them, and I can tell you that idolatry is the ultimate in futility. It is self-imposed enslavement, and it's all about fear over nothing. This is why it's the last one. It kind of encapsulates greed.

So there's no punishment stated. But there's another thing that's unusual about this Woe, and it's this. This is a passage about greed, right? So why in a passage about greed is Habakkuk suddenly talking about idolatry? How did we go from greed to idolatry? Well, I think the answer is because greed IS idolatry. Did you know that? The Apostle Paul says that straight up:

Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed which is idolatry

- Colossians 3:5

Greed and idolatry are the same thing. That's why this Woe is the last one. It kind of encapsulates the others. Greed is idolatry. Now we may say "Come on, I'm not an idol-worshipper. I mean I like money. I like to have nice things, but that doesn't make me an idolater!" Maybe not. But let me ask you something. Do you find your meaning in money? Do you get your identity from your possessions? Is money your refuge? Is it your source of safety? Is money the thing you would say is the most basic thing in your life? If so, that's kind of what an idol is.

Idols are things we look to for safety, for meaning in life, for salvation. They are the things we live for. That's an idol. But you know, it's not just money or possessions that can be an idol. It's anything we look to to give us what only God can give. We can turn our spouse or our kids into an idol, say "I really only live for them." We can turn our career into an idol and say "That's where I get my meaning." We can turn our reputation or our popularity into an idol and say "I have to have that. That's what keeps me safe. I'm nothing without it." We can turn our hobbies into an idol.

We can do that. But Habakkuk shows us that there's a problem with it, and the problem is this: Idols can't deliver. Right? Think about the point Habakkuk is making. They are relying on wood, and metal and stone to breathe, to arise, to teach, to rescue. But it can't! It was never meant to do that. Wood and metal and stone are great things, right? They can do lots of useful things. They are wonderful gifts God has given us, just like possessions and spouses and kids, and

careers, and hobbies. Wood, and metal and stone are great in their place, but they were never meant to be worshipped. They're not an end in themselves, and they can't deliver the things we should look only to God to give us. Careers can collapse. Family can disappoint. Popularity can go away. Hobbies can stop fulfilling us. Habakkuk wants us to know if our hope is in those things, we will be disappointed. Our life will collapse!

So, Habakkuk is saying one consequence of greed is that it is a form of idolatry. Like all idolatry, greed and the things we've gathered through our greed can't deliver. Created things are great, but we can't get safety, or meaning, or salvation from them. Those things only come from the living God who is in his holy temple. We have to be careful because greed is idolatry, and idolatry is its own punishment.

So these are the Five Woes, the five consequences of greedy gain:

- 1) Human vengeance
- 2) Divine judgment
- 3) Eternal irrelevance
- 4) The Wrath of God
- 5) Idolatry

Now big picture, what are we supposed to do with all this information? Let me suggest two things. The first thing is this:

TWO RESPONSES TO THESE "WOES"

Recognize God's Sovereignty

Recognize his control, his authority, his power. That's the first response we should have to this passage. Habakkuk closes this section of the book in an unusual way. He doesn't close it with a big challenge or a list of behaviors we should exhibit. Rather, he closes with a simple statement:

But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.
- Habakkuk 2: 20

What is Habakkuk saying? Well, this is kind of our response to other people's greed. What Habakkuk is saying is this: "God is still on his throne." When we go through difficult times, confusing times, unjust times, times when greedy people seemed to be getting away with it, we need to remember one thing: God is still on his throne.

This passage is a reminder that the troubled times Habakkuk was going through, the troubled times that we are going through right now, haven't caught God by surprise. One of the most basic things in this chapter taught Habakkuk is that God is actually not worried about the Babylonians. They haven't caught God by surprise. God isn't up there wringing his hands, going "Oh no! What on earth am I going to do about those greedy Babylonians?" God was the one

who gave rise to the Babylonians. We may not like that. We may not understand it, but Habakkuk is saying "That is actually the case." God's not worried about the Babylonians.

God is not worried about justice. God said "The just shall live by faith." There's eternal life, so God's got the just people covered. As for the unjust people, God has just listed five different ways of dealing with their greed. What he's saying is "Don't worry. They're going to get theirs!"

God is still on his throne. He's there. He's sovereign, and He's at work in our lives in the calm times and the crazy times. God has his eye on Babylonians. He has his eye on Judah, and He has his eye on you. Because of that, we can stop their clamoring and be silent before Him. We can trust Him. We need to recognize the sovereignty of God.

That's the first application we should draw from this passage. That relates primarily to the way we view the greed of other people. That's what God does about their greed. But what about our greed? What about the ways that we have bent the rules, and broken the rules, and exploited people, and engaged in idolatry? What does God do about that? What does he do about our greed? Well, the second application I want us to draw from the passage is this:

Drink from the right Cup

Let's go back to the Cup that God said he was going to force Babylon to drink. Remember I said this Cup represents God's wrath toward all sin, and that's true. This Cup is given to every nation and to all who have participated in Babylon in the system of this world. And to varying degrees, that's us. We have all participated in the system the greed of this world. This is God's wrath toward all sin.

And remember, I also said this Cup is found all through Scripture. It really is. Its amazing. It's mentioned in Job, in the Psalms, in the Prophets, in Revelation. This Cup is mentioned somewhere else. It's mentioned in the gospels. It's mentioned by Jesus the night before his crucifixion when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was praying to the Father. If you've ever heard the story, he said "Father, let this CUP pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." What was Jesus talking about? What Cup was he about to drink from? It was this Cup, the Cup of God's wrath. Jesus knew that on the cross he was about to drink the Cup of God's wrath, so that you and I (who deserve to drink it who have participated in the system of this world) wouldn't have to. Jesus took the Cup of God's wrath for us.

Jesus did more than just take the Cup. He transformed the Cup. In the Lord's Table, in this rite of Christianity that we celebrate together again and again, Jesus transformed the Cup for us. He gave us a New Cup. He said "This Cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." He transformed the Cup of Wrath by making a New Covenant. Look at what has become of that Cup for God's people. Look at what the Apostle Paul calls the Cup in

The Cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?

- 1 Corinthians 10:16

Jesus transformed the Cup of God's wrath into the Cup of God's blessing. He drank from that Cup, the Cup of wrath, so that he could offer us this Cup, the Cup of blessing. That's what God has done about our greed. He drank the Cup of his wrath for us, so that in this Cup he can offer us forgiveness and life and blessing.

Here's my question for you today: Are you drinking from the right Cup? Have you trusted in Jesus? Have you given your life to him? Have you said to God "I want to drink from this Cup, so I don't have to drink from the Cup of your wrath"? Have you said "I know I don't deserve your forgiveness, your life, your blessing," but you've promised it through Jesus. You have said that the one who is just by faith will live, want to drink his Cup, to the very dregs. Are you drinking from the right Cup?