

Wrestling with God...Rising in faith

Habakkuk 1:12-2:20 - Is God just?

Introduction

We know that the world is not wonderful either by observation or personal experience. This is not a wonderful world...It's not a fair world...it's not a just world.

Last week we looked at how Habakkuk had seen all the wickedness and violence in Judah. He had been wondering if God was indifferent to it all. We saw that God had been listening and had been working and God was most certainly not indifferent. God was moving nations around in response to what He saw. Babylon was to sweep in and destroy Judah.

This is the problem. We now find that after seeing that God is far from Indifferent, he comes back to God and he says, I know that this isn't a wonderful world, it's not just.

Is God Just?

Judah was unrepentant. They deserved God's judgement on their wrong. But, how could God use the Babylonians. He was questioning God's method in judgement.

Was God being fair / just? Habakkuk couldn't handle God's justice so he questions how Just God really was.

The means of Judgement – verses 12 - 17

Habakkuk's complaint. How can God use the Babylonians?

We see three aspects to his complaint.

Firstly, God is Sovereign. He knows this to be true. God is sovereign over Judah and God is sovereign over all nations. We see this in verse 12.

God is sovereign over Israel. God is sovereign over all nations as well. We saw this last week, as God was moving to bring judgement on Judah. So Habakkuk has no doubt that they were on there way.

Habakkuk continues. He is also convinced that God is holy and cannot tolerate sin, wrong, Verse 13.

The bible makes it very clear that God is pure and holy. Not only this but, His eyes are too pure to look on evil. Is God not able to see sin in the world, your sin and mine, and somehow closes His eyes in ignorance?

NO! God sees every sin from every person every day. What Habakkuk is getting at is that God cannot look with any form of acceptance. God has only one reaction to sin, he is horrified.

And as we noticed last week, God could rightly destroy us all in an instant with His right wrath and justice. Yet, God is merciful. He does not give us what we deserve. We have a loving and forgiving God.

God is offended by sin. Are we?

Habakkuk is wrestling with yet more questions. He questions God in verse 13

Habakkuk is also convinced of this; Babylon is wicked and yet Babylon prospers, vv 14-17.

He pictures Babylon as a fisherman and the nations around as fish in the sea. Babylon is there, pulling up the fish in their nets and dragging them away. And they love it. They think it's great. End of verse 15, Babylon rejoices and is glad.

The picture gets worse. We see in verse 16 the picture of "Sacrificing" and "burning incense" to their nets. The implication here is one of false or idolatrous worship.

As we saw last week, it is God orchestrating the events of history. It is God who has given Babylon their power and yet Babylon does not acknowledge God.

Habakkuk knows that God is sovereign. He knows that God is pure and cannot tolerate wrong. He knows Babylon is evil and yet thrives. He can't comprehend the means of God's judgement. And...it doesn't make any sense. It doesn't seem fair. Is God just?

So what does he do? I love verse 1 of chapter 2. After all that he has said, in effect, he says, "I tell you what, God, I'm just going to wait here. I'm going to wait for the answer God."

Again, as last week, it's a good reminder to us. Asking questions of God is not the problem. But in asking the questions, don't let the questions cause you to run from God, but do what Habakkuk did. When you can't make sense of it all, station yourself and turn to God.

The Message of Judgement – verses 2 - 5

And for Habakkuk, we see God's answer. Verses 2 and 3.

So God says, firstly that there is an appointed time for God's judgement.

Habakkuk is to write it down – why? So that all know that there will be a time for judgement. It will be fulfilled, it will happen. He is Just - Judgement will come and it will be in his timing.

But God is not finished there. He continues in verses 4 & 5

Habakkuk has been told that God is Just and God will judge in His time. BUT – what about the fact that the Babylonians are the ones who will be used to Judge Judah?

Well these verses tell us that as far as God is concerned, Babylon's actions are not justified in God's sight - Babylon is puffed up, Babylon is unrighteous, drunken, arrogant, restless and greedy.

This is a clear description of how God views Babylon. In fact chapter 2 continues to outline the sins and subsequent judgements on Babylon, as we'll see shortly.

So Habakkuk is stood at his watch on the ramparts. And this is what God has said. It must have been music to his ears.

But God makes it clear that he is not turning a blind eye or deaf ear to Babylon. God sees exactly what they are and will, in His timing deal with them.

Notice also, God says that "The righteous will live by their faith," there in the second part of verse 4.

For Habakkuk, he should live by faith while he waited for God's right justice and judgement to come to Babylon.

Now this aspect of living by faith also links with what has gone before - Chapter 1 and verse 12. There we saw that Habakkuk remembered that the nation have a covenant, or promise from God. He says "we will not die". This is not because of being right with God, righteous in God's sight. That is impossible for us to achieve on our own.

No. After all, judgement is coming on the nation because of their sin. Rather, they would live because of their faith in God who has committed Himself to His people Israel.

This is not because of any works, actions, deeds that they could do. It is because of their faith.

Now the full picture of living by faith is seen in Jesus Christ and we'll see shortly what "living by faith" means for us here and now, but for now, we see that Habakkuk was wrestling with questions.

Is God Just? God says yes. All will be judged, including Babylon.

The Misery of Judgement – verses 6 – 20

So what about that judgement? What does God see and what are the implications? Well, verses 6 to 20 give us a clear picture as we see the misery of judgement.

We see five "woes" in these verses and all five draw out an aspect of sin...and judgement on sin.

The first woe deals with the sin of theft – verses 6 - 8

Stealing from others in order to gain for yourself. For Babylon that involved marauding through many nations.

But, Is God just? What is God's judgement?

He says in verses 7 and 8 that you will, in effect, lose all that you have taken. Debtors arising...making you tremble...you'll be their victim...you will be plundered. In other words, it will all come full circle on you, Babylon.

Now for the second “woe”. We find this in verses 9 to 11. This deals with injustice.

The picture here is setting your own nest on high, feathering your own nest, nice and high and secure.

Babylon, they conquered cities, took all their wealth etc...to make Babylon and her cities great.

Security is something we all long for. And we too may sometimes treat others unfairly in order to strengthen our position, our nest.

But, is God just? Is their judgement?

Well, in verses 10 and 11 we see that you will forfeit your life. The walls and beams you have been building for security will testify against you.

Thirdly, we see the “woe” of violence in verses 12 to 14.

Here, it's about harming others in order to gain power for yourself. This is Babylon. Last week, we saw in the first part of chapter one, the description of their invasion. It's not pleasant reading.

We may not be looking to conquer other nations but we too, here in Leeds can hurt other people in order to gain for ourselves. What about gossip – pulling someone else down in order to look good ourselves. At school, this is called bullying. It can also happen in the workplace. It can happen within the home.

Well, again, what about God's judgement? Is God just?

What is God's judgement on those who try to gain power through violence? Well verses 13 and 14 tell us that it will all be for nothing.

Woe number 4. Verses 15 to 17. We see the “woe” of exploitation. Verse 15 speaks of exploiting others, taking advantage of them. Why? In order to gain pleasure for yourself.

So, what is God's judgement on this? Is God just?

Verses 16 and 17 show us that you will be filled with shame and disgrace. .

Finally, we see in verses 18 to 20 the “woe” of idolatry.

The issue is trusting in something other than God

We see this don't we. What about horoscopes. Trusting in some mumbo jumbo about the position of stars rather than trusting the One who made and put the stars in place.

And what does God have to say?

You will be deceived. You will be disappointed. It's of no value, verse 18. The idol cannot speak.

And verse 20 provides an amazing contrast to those who rely on theft, injustice, violence, exploitations and idolatry. They are to be silent before a holy God.

Conclusion

So, Habakkuk, has questioned God once again. Is God just? It doesn't seem fair that Babylon is being used in this way to bring judgement on Judah.

And God shows that He is just.

Now you may well be thinking, O well, this is all interesting BUT, I'm not seeking world domination. I can't quite see how all this about Babylon relates to me.

But we all, to a greater or lesser extent
steal to get more,
hurt others to gain security,
cruel to gain power,
take advantage to gain pleasure,
rely on things other than God.

We may see ourselves as better than Babylon and yet in God's eyes we are all sinful people. We all fall below God's perfection. After all, we've seen that God cannot tolerate wrong.

And know this – certain judgement will fall upon you and me for our sin. So where do you stand with God?

We've seen that God is sovereign, God is Holy and pure. We've seen that God is just and so we all deserve judgement, and yet, in spite of all this, God has made a way for us to escape His condemnation. His just, fair judgement.

God has made a way through Jesus Christ. Made a way for us to be right with Him. For when Jesus died on the cross, He took on himself your judgement and mine for all our wrong.

Habakkuk wondered if God would judge the Babylonian's for their wickedness. He wondered, "is God just?" God shared with Habakkuk the truth that certain judgement would come.

Do you want to be right with God? We can only be right with God; we can only be righteous when we live by faith. Faith in God's way. Faith in Jesus who has died on the cross and taken your judgement and mine.

So put your faith in Him, you can be saved. Trust in Jesus Christ now and live by faith.

"The righteous will live by faith."